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# **Education Reform Discourses in Kazakhstan since the 2000s**

Between the Promotion of National Identity and  
the Desire for Internationalization

- CEERES Master's Thesis -

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*Elodie LAFONT, 27/08/2023*

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this research is to analyse official discourses regarding education reforms in Kazakhstan. This research focuses on two ideologies underlying education reforms: the desire for internationalization and the willingness to consolidate a fragile national identity. The two main education reforms in primary and secondary education in Kazakhstan since the 2000s, the Trilingual policy and the Twelve-year compulsory education, are taken as case studies. Official documents from the national authorities of Kazakhstan regarding these education reforms are analysed alongside international organizations' documents to understand the broader international context. This study reveals the complex interactions between national identity and internationalization discourses in education in Kazakhstan. It aims to understand how national education reform discourses are influenced by the international context but also how these national discourses reappropriate the international context to serve national identity interests.

**KEYWORDS:** education reform, internationalization, national identity, discourse analysis, Kazakhstan

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## **List of abbreviations**

ADB: Asian Development Bank

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

EU: European Union

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency

IMF: International Monetary Fund

ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education

MoES : Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NIS: Nazarbayev International School

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centre

PIAAC: Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

RoK: Republic of Kazakhstan

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNT: Unified National Testing

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WB: World Bank

## Introduction

Education reforms are crucial as they are strongly linked to social and economic changes at national and international levels. Kazakhstan is a relatively young country which declared its independence in 1991. Since that time, the country is shared between a desire of modernization and a desire of strengthening its national identity (Bridges 2014) while keeping good relations with its powerful neighbour, Russia. These political aims are reflected in the education policies implemented in the country after the end of the USSR when the newly independent Kazakhstan had to introduce numerous education reforms in order to create a new education system. The study of education reforms in Kazakhstan enables us to understand some political decisions taken in the education field such as the reasons why a country that has absolutely no historical links with the English language decides to impose it as the language of instruction for every child in the country. Kazakhstan, like the rest of Central Asia, can be considered as a country at the “margins” of globalization (Silova 2019) with a strong desire to strengthen its integration on the international stage. At the same time during these last decades since 1991, Kazakhstan is also trying to consolidate its fragile national identity as a young independent country which makes it an interesting case study.

This study aims to understand the articulation between two concepts which seem antinomic, internationalization and national identity in primary and secondary education reforms in Kazakhstan since the 2000s and to explore the interactions between local and global dynamics in education discourses. To address this topic, the following set of research questions was used:

- (1) *To what extent the Kazakh/ Kazakhstani identities are used to justify these education reforms and how these are represented?*,
- (2) *How the international environment is mobilized and articulated with the Kazakh/ Kazakhstani identities to justify these education reforms ? and*
- (3) *Are there differences in the justifications of reforms that are “homemade” contrary to the ones which are “imported”?*.

The research is divided into the following chapters. The introduction presents the evolution of the Kazakhstani<sup>1</sup> education system since the Soviet times and its internationalization. The first

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<sup>1</sup> I decided to use systematically the word “Kazakhstani” for the citizenship instead of “Kazakh”. The aim was to avoid possible confusion, given that in the discourses analyzed “Kazakh” referred to the ethnicity and “Kazakhstani” referred to the citizenship.

chapter discusses the literature review and the conceptual framework, and the second chapter details the methodological approach. The third and the fourth chapter present the results of the empirical analysis: the third chapter explains the national identity argument in education reforms and the fourth chapter details the internationalization argument.

### *The evolution of the Kazakhstani education system since the Soviet times*

The Soviet period made a large contribution to some aspects of the development of education in Kazakhstan with very high levels of literacy almost reaching 100%, and an eight-year compulsory education system at the end of the Soviet period (Mynbayeva and Pogosyan 2014; Tabaeva and al. 2021). The Soviet system also managed to have equal gender enrolment at all levels of education (Shagdar 2007, 515). Kazakhstan was the most developed country in Central Asia regarding education (Kissane 2009). During Soviet times, the education system promoted the Communist ideology which aimed to raise citizens loyal to the regime especially in the social sciences and humanities discouraging any critical thinking. The Soviet education system produced too many narrow specialists with their numbers determined by central planning rather than demand (Shagdar 2007, 515; Chapman and al. 2005, 515). From the 1930s, learning Russian was mandatory for all students in secondary schools which played an important tool in the Russification policy. From the 1950s, the number of Kazakh language schools dropped dramatically as most parents, especially in urban areas, were sending their children to Russian language schools which were more reputed (Karabassova 2020). Russian immigration also strengthened the Russian language and higher education was in Russian which contributed to the development of the Russian language in secondary education (Tlemissov 2020).

After its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan had to build a totally new independent education system from scratch. The economic crisis had an impact on the financing of education with a large decrease of public spending and of the share of the state budget dedicated to education (Mynbayeva and Pogosyan 2014; Chapman and al. 2005, 516). Between 1990 and 1995, GDP fell steadily from \$26.9 billion to \$20.3 billion<sup>2</sup>. In 1990, education expenditures represented 24.5 % of the state budget, compared with 14% in 2000 (State Statistical Agency RoK in Kissane 2007, 212-213). This led to decreasing achievement rates and growing corruption in the education system (Cornell and Engval 2017). Even if the 1990s were marked by a profound

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files. 'GDP (Current US\$) - Kazakhstan'. *World Bank*.

economic and social crisis in Kazakhstan, reforms were introduced to establish a new legislative framework of the education system and revising educational content (Silova 2005). These reforms were supposed to reflect the principles of democratization and decentralization of education governance. Due to the free-market economy and to diversify the education sector, private educational institutions also emerged (Mynbayeva and Pogosyan 2014, Silova 2005). Despite these reforms, the goal was also to preserve the relatively positive education achievements of the Soviet system considered as very efficient by some Kazakhstani policy makers and experts who regretted it (Tabaeva and al. 2021; Silova 2005).

From the 2000s, the education system stabilized. This was an era of preparation for large scale reforms with the most important changes regarding higher education which then led to the transformation of school education. With the rapid economic growth (the GDP grew by 9-10% annually between 2000 and 2007<sup>3</sup>), education became a priority as there was a skill gap with an insufficient supply of qualified people (Mynbayeva and Pogosyan 2014). The enrolment rates declined in the post-independence period but nowadays, nearly 100 percent of adolescents access secondary education (Tabaeva and al. 2021).

The Kazakhstani education system is currently divided between pre-primary education, school education (which will be analysed in this thesis) and tertiary education. Most of the children enter primary school at the age of 5 or 6 and end secondary school at the age of 16 or 17 (Kakisheva 2022, 10). Primary education lasts for four years. Secondary education is divided between lower secondary education lasting five years followed by two years in upper secondary education or in vocational education. Thus, the school curriculum in Kazakhstan currently lasts 11 years. The general upper secondary school studies end with the Unified National Testing (UNT) which is at the same time a diploma of secondary studies and an exam to enter in universities<sup>4</sup>.

The Kazakh language which occupied a minor importance during the Soviet times became the national and official language of the country (Anh and Smagulova 2022) and after independence in 1991, there was a shift from Russian to Kazakh language as a medium of

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data. 'GDP Growth (Annual %) - Kazakhstan'. *World Bank*.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MoES). 2022. *State Compulsory Standards for Pre-School Education and Training, Primary, Basic Secondary and General Secondary Technical and Vocational, Post-Secondary* [Об утверждении государственных общеобязательных стандартов дошкольного воспитания и обучения, начального, основного среднего и общего среднего, технического и профессионального, послесреднего образования].

instruction in schools (Fierman 2006 in Karabassova 2020). However, most Kazakh language schools are rather located in rural areas whereas Russian language schools are still dominating in cities (Smagulova 2008 in Karabossova 2020). Even if the Kazakhstani Government was wishing to discourage middle class parents from sending their children to Russian schools (Peyrouse 2008 , 160), this would be difficult to achieve as the prestige of Kazakh schools is still considered lower than Russian ones (Laruelle 2014, 6).

### *The internationalization of the Kazakhstani education system*

After the end of the USSR, Kazakhstan opened up to foreign influence especially in the education field. International institutions have played an important role in education reforms in Kazakhstan. This happened across the entire post-Socialist region in which the whole international community tried to support the post-socialist transformation process. International financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) or the Asian Development Bank (ADB) were especially involved as well as multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN) or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi 2008). These education reforms undertaken with international organisations focused upon the revisions of curricula, teaching materials, assessment systems, school management, teacher education, governance, and the introduction of languages (Tabaeva and al. 2021). It was often necessary to enact these educational reforms in order to receive economic help and consequently these reforms might be perceived to a certain extent as being imposed by foreign authorities. For instance, a policy of school rationalization was introduced by the ADB in the middle of the 1990s, the goal was to reduce the expenses in enlarging classes and liquidating what was considered as “cost-ineffective” educational institutions in a context of economic crisis (ADB 2002 in Kalikova and Silova 2008, 139). International NGOs and private foundations played a role in reforming education in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan along with Georgia received the highest education expenditures from the Soros Foundation (nowadays Open Society Foundations)<sup>5</sup> among Central Asia and Caucasus between 1995 and 2006 (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> The Open Society Foundations is a network of Foundations founded by the Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros in 1979. The Foundations support initiatives to advance democracy and human rights around the world. At the end of the USSR, the organization became particularly involved in democratic transition and civil society initiatives in the former socialist bloc.

Various regional actors have exerted and still exert an influence on the educational space in Kazakhstan nowadays. Through bilateral cooperation, foreign governments through development agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have supported education reforms in Kazakhstan (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi 2008, 5). Foreign experts from various countries have also brought a significant contribution to education reforms in Kazakhstan (Bridges 2014). Russia maintains an influence on education policies regarding Russian language in Kazakhstan as Russian authorities could perceive a change of policies in the field of education as discriminations against the Russian minority. The country remains the first destination for many Central Asian students although a growing number of students especially those mastering English language choose to study in Western Europe or North America (Silova 2011). The war in Ukraine had an impact on student mobility to Russia as Russia decided to quit the Bologna process<sup>6</sup> which make more complicated for students from Kazakhstan to study or work in EU countries after studying in Russia.

Another regional actor, the European Union (EU) exercises some indirect influence on education in Central Asia. In 1994, Kazakhstan joined the TEMPUS programme<sup>7</sup> which encouraged cooperation in higher education between EU member states and partner countries (Cornell and Engvall 2017) and in 2007, the EU-Central Asia Education Initiative was launched (Jones 2011 in Silova 2011). In Central Asia, only Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process since 2010 (Cornell and Engvall 2017, 24) which requires it to align its higher education system with European systems for instance in transitioning to a model of three cycles (Bachelor, Master, PhD), implementing double degrees or adopting the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). The Bologna process encourages student mobility between Kazakhstan and the other countries member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>8</sup>.

Turkey also played an important role in education in Kazakhstan through the Gulen schools. The Gulenist network was rather well welcomed in Central Asia during the 1990s at a time in

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<sup>6</sup> The Bologna process was launched in 1999 with the signature of the Bologna Declaration. It aims to bring more coherence to higher education systems around Europe and established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to facilitate student and staff mobility through for instance the recognition of diploma. It includes 48 European countries among which all the EU member states but also various countries outside the EU. Among the post-Soviet space, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Ukraine are part of the Bologna process. The participation of Russia and Belarus was suspended after the invasion of Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> TEMPUS is an EU programme which supports the modernization of higher education in partner countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region. It promotes the convergence of the partner country higher education systems with the EU to contribute to the cooperation in the field of higher education. The programme provides support to consortia of institutions composed mainly of universities for instance in funding joint projects.

<sup>8</sup> Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA). 'The Bologna Process in Kazakhstan'.

which national education systems were devastated. These schools are multilingual with diverse languages of instruction such as English, Turkish, Russian, and Kazakh (Balci 2014) contributing to the training of elites (Balci 2017). They have widely contributed to the diffusion of the Turkish language and culture in Central Asia spreading a Turkic identity matching Western educational standards (Balci 2014; Yanik 2004, 294). China is playing an increasing role in the education field in Kazakhstan expanding its network of Confucius Institutes (Bahry 2020, 194) to teach the Chinese language and is a popular destination for Kazakhstani students regarding higher education.

To sum up, the education system in Kazakhstan had to reform completely after the end of the USSR as the former education system had been built to respond to the ideological and economic needs of the Soviet regime. The reconstruction of a new education system was difficult in reason of the disastrous economic situation and a certain Soviet nostalgia. Various international players have been and still are involved in the field of education in Kazakhstan, including international organisations, NGOs and foreign governments with different geopolitical objectives. From the 2000s, due to the economic growth, important education reforms were launched. Two education reforms launched at this time, the Trilingual policy and the 12-year curriculum are specifically discussed in this thesis in the chapters two, three and four to understand how the concepts of internationalization and national identity are used as justifications for education reforms. The following chapter presents the literature review and the concepts of education reform, internationalization and national identity.

# **Chapter 1. Literature review and conceptual framework**

This thesis aims to understand the relations between national identity and internationalization in education reforms in Kazakhstan. The literature review looks at the concepts of internationalization and national identity in the context of education reforms and the interactions between them. The main theoretical framework is the constructivist theory, according to which ideas and perceptions of the world shape reality. In this theoretical framework, there are competing discourses in states about national identity and the role that the state should play on the international stage.

## **1.1 Education reform discourses**

Education reforms are the product of conflictual interactions between different actors and reflect the consensus established between these actors (Gaziel 2010). The constructivist approach will be used to understand what motivates policy reforms and to show the importance of the ideational factors in these changes. Thus, educational reforms are motivated by the perception of the world of the authorities which produce them.

Education struggles between two missions, to conserve the society, its traditions, institutions, and structures but also to transform the society shaping its future (Chankselliani and Silova 2018; Amsler 2009). Education reforms respond to this second purpose implying an idea of change and of transformation of the education system to shape the future of the society. This is the idea of making the education system better “to correct a deficiency in the current educational system” and education reforms reflect what is considered as a “common good” for a nation being part of a broader social context (Horn 2002, 3). Thus, the crisis narrative is constructed in a way that legitimizes one approach, a given reform, as the solution, which allows the proponents of the reform to bind divergent interest groups around this reform (Takayama 2007).

Many studies focus on the history of educational reform in the post-Soviet space especially since their independence (Gounko and Smale 2007; Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013; Kissane 2009) and in Kazakhstan in particular (Cornell and Engvall 2017; McLaughlin and al. 2021; Mynbayeva and Pogolian 2014; Yessenova and al. 2021). Comparative studies on education reforms in the post-Soviet space show similarities in the countries’ reform paths noting the

emergence of a neoliberal rhetoric ( Chankselliani and Silova 2018; Amsler 2009, Kissane 2009; Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013) and the implementation of a “post-socialist education reform package” leading to similar education reforms across the region (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013, Silova 2010). Most of the countries of the former Soviet Union also have similarities in their institutions with a highly centralised, top-down educational policy systems where the autonomy of educational institutions just started to emerge (Goodman and Karabassova 2018). In the whole post-Soviet space, after the independence, there was a crisis of education and science due to the economic collapse and the decline of social expenditure (Amsler 2009; Cornell and Engvall 2017). These disastrous conditions have given impetus to reforms, with the hope that this crisis might open a space for a new kind of education (Amsler 2009) and the willingness to move away from Soviet times (Kissane 2009). Struggles over the idea of education emerge particularly clearly in political discourses during social crisis and periods of transformation (Amsler 2009) as it has been the case for the Central Asian countries. In his article about higher education in Kyrgyzstan, Amsler (2009) explains that education reforms reflect dominant social and economic changes happening in the society and can be a tool for achieving these changes while post-Soviet governments, like the previous Soviet regime, share the belief of education as an instrument for change (Kissane 2009). The studies which focus on education reforms in Kazakhstan are mostly about language policy reforms and their implementation (McLaughlin and al. 2021; Goodman and Karabassova 2018) as well as about History curricula reforms which aim to strengthen the national identity (Kissane 2005). Some studies underline the continuity of education reforms in Kazakhstan under Nazarbayev’s rule (Anh and Smagulova 2022; Karabassova 2020) with changes which could happen under Tokayev’s rule (Karabassova 2020).

There are studies on education reform discourses in different countries outside the post-Soviet space such as the US (Staton and Peeples 2000), Egypt (Farag 2012), Turkey (Kasa and Ersöz 2016), Israel (Gaziel 2010) or Japan (Takayama 2007). Other studies regarding education reform discourses focus on the post-Soviet space and on Kazakhstan in particular (Fimyar 2010, Fimyar 2014, Silova 2005). These studies show that, under the pressure of globalization, education reform discourses are often in line with the neo-liberal ideology regarding school management, competition between schools and standards assessments as well as country’s competitiveness on the international stage.

## **1.2 The concept of “Internationalization”**

The concept of internationalization is strongly linked to the ideas of modernization and globalization. The idea of globalization can be defined as interdependence between different parts of the world with a flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas travelling across borders and having different effects on countries due to nation’s history, priorities and culture (Nye 2005, Blum 2007). The concept of internationalization is a concept created by Knight (2015) firstly to explain the effects of globalization on higher education, but which has been used by other authors about other levels of education such as Bridges (2014) in the case of Kazakhstan.

### *The influence of international actors on education in the post-Soviet space*

The globalized economy and the international context (international organizations, NGOs, and the other countries) influence education systems in different ways creating a need to build a “knowledge economy” to increase their economic competitiveness (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002, 6), to respond to international standards (Zadja 2018) and to implement international dimensions in the education systems (Knight 2015). More radically, some policies can be transferred or imported directly from one national context to another which is called “policy borrowing” (Silova 2005) as this is the case for the extension of compulsory education to twelve years happening in several countries including Kazakhstan (Yakavets and Dzhadrina 2014).

As Central Asian countries had no prior experience of running an independent educational system, they had to learn from the experience of other countries and to rely on donor organizations to gain confidence in running an independent educational system (Shamshidinova and al. 2014). After the fall of the USSR, foreign governments, international organizations and philanthropists have invested lots of resources to promote particular forms of education (Amsler 2009; Gounko and Smale 2007) with the idea of an unavoidable global convergence based on Western norms of rationality (Silova 2010). These education discourses stress the failures of Soviet schools and universities and emphasises the need to reform them with further economic goals (Amsler 2009; Deyoung 2006; Zajda 2018). These education narratives value the market economy, individual choice, accountability, quality assurance and other neoliberal reforms (Chankseliani and Silova 2018). They also promote civil society and liberal democracy. Initiatives in the former Soviet bloc have ranged from large-scale programmes developed by international financial institutions (World Bank, ADB, IMF) and multilateral organizations

(UN, EU, OSCE) to smaller projects launched by international NGOs and private foundations (Kalikova and Silova 2008).

Education reforms were introduced by international organizations in the framework of structural adjustments but sometimes also voluntarily borrowed by local policy makers (Silova 2019) who accepted the idea that Western ideas were supposedly more efficient than local ones (Zajda 2018; Gounko and Smale 2007). However, for some authors, policy borrowing aims at normalizing global dependencies between developed and developing countries in a post-colonial perspective (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013). Contrary to imposed conditions, discursive interventions are more difficult to detect as they are presented as based on common sense and usually taken for granted. Indeed, developing countries do not possess the resources and expertise necessary to manage large-scale education modernizations and require informed policy advice to implement reforms. As a result, international organizations export their ideas and influence the educational policymaking of the nation-states (Gounko and Smale 2007, 546) making diagnosis, prescribing, and evaluating progresses towards what they had prescribed in a “closed circuit” (Steiner-Khamsi 2016, 575).

The academic literature on international influence on education reforms is most readily available in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. These countries have continued to allow various international agencies to work during the transition period whereas Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan allowed fewer outsiders and have been less keen to undertake internationally inspired reform projects. Regarding Tajikistan, the education system was deeply impacted by the civil war in the 1990s (Deyoung 2006). The importance of international agencies in the development of education systems is gradually decreasing in the case of Kazakhstan, especially due to the increasing prices of oil which allowed the government to fund the social sector. The government uses its own resources for education reform being one of the most donor free countries in Central Asia and Caucasus (Yakavets 2014) and Kazakhstan has developed its own agenda for change deciding to engage with international practices and policies (Bridges 2014). Behind this apparent voluntary borrowing, there is the fear of “falling behind internationally” (Steiner Khamsi and Stolpe 2006 in Silova 2019, 3). Damro and Friedman (2018) also show that the EU influences the education sector of non-member states through the Bologna process by providing fundings or introducing the ECTS system, as in the case of Kazakhstan explained in the introduction. Participation in international rankings creates pressure to reform education policies in order to improve academic results and the country's position in the rankings (Zajda

2018). Sarmurzin and al. (2021) explain that the poor results of Kazakhstan to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>9</sup> rankings in 2009 have accelerated some education reforms.

Global standards have the effect of harmonizing educational systems in different parts of the world even if a range of cultural traits, political beliefs and value orientations lead to differentiation of learning content and objectives (Pingel 2017). For some authors, the convergence towards accepted models of modernity has resulted in a convergence of administrative structures and practices regarding education policies (Blum 2007). However, global policies are not only adopted but often ignored, resisted, and openly rejected (Deyoung 2006): local traditions and conditions modify global strategies making them more effective or trying to restrict their impact on local systems (Steiner Khamsi 2002). Global education policies and practices are recontextualized when they are implemented in different local contexts (Steiner Khamsi 2002). Which of these changes are introduced and how they are introduced depends on local conditions that mediate the implementation of responses to global pressures for reform (Carnoy et Rhoten 2002; Philips and Ochs 2004). Thus, educational changes in response to globalization share some parameters but vary greatly geographically (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002) and may be very different from Western expectations (Goodman and Karabassova 2018).

Even if the international context creates pressures for reforms, this one can also be used by the policymakers to legitimize their policies (Steiner-Khamsi 2002; Takayama 2007). Central Asian policy makers exhibit agency in reshaping what globalization offers, and in some cases, have re-interpreted globalization ideas and practices as their own (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013), creating divergences between global norms and local meanings (Steiner Khamsi 2002; Silova 2005). Local elites use these travelling policies for their own personal and institutional interests (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013). Takayama (2007) in her essay about policy borrowing in education discourse in Japan explains that educational systems perpetuate themselves through internal references but in times of change, these ones cannot be mobilised being associated with a situation from which policy makers try to break away and the final source of authority becomes references from abroad pointed as models. Policy borrowing can

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<sup>9</sup> PISA is an OECD programme for student assessment which evaluates 15-year-olds' reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills in various countries. The 38 countries member of the OECD systematically participate to PISA while non-member countries such as Kazakhstan can also participate under certain requirements.

also be used to legitimize already existing practices (Silova 2008) so education practices sometimes do not substantially change despite political discourses (Silova 2005; Steiner-Khamsi 2002). The act of borrowing has thus a salutary effect at home and is also a precondition to admission to international community using international education reforms to signal a progressive shift (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013; Kissane 2009).

### *The case of the English language in education reforms*

A largely studied example of internationalization in education in Kazakhstan is the introduction of English language as a language of instruction. This has also been studied in other contexts such as Indonesia in which the reform has failed due to the lack of proficiency of teachers in English as well as the lack of teachers' support for the reform (Fitriati and Rata 2021). National education reforms around the world general generally reinforce the learning of English language but the most radical ones as in Kazakhstan or Indonesia try to introduce English as a language of instruction (Fitriati and Rata 2021).

This reform can be perceived as a reaction of the government of Kazakhstan to globalization processes. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the country which has promoted the most English language, and the only one to introduce English as a language of instruction (Anh and Smagulova 2022). It can be explained by the country's economic aspirations to become one of the 30 most global economies in the world and to achieve a stronger integration in the global economy than its neighbours partly due to the financial windfall of the oil production (Anh and Smagulova 2022; Kissane 2007; Laruelle 2014). Kazakhstan is also trying to diversify its economy by increasing investments in higher education institutions and in advanced scientific fields (Anh and Smagulova 2022; Laruelle 2014) where the knowledge of English is often required.

English language knowledge is not only presented as beneficial for the nation-state increasing its competitiveness but also for individuals who have access to more opportunities beyond the state with the idea that English speakers can achieve anything they want being able to fully realize their potential on the global stage (Anh and Smagulova 2022; Goodman and Karabassova 2018). English language can also provide an alternative for those who may not have access to the titular language, Kazakh to advance in terms of careers and life (Anh and Smagulova 2022).

Kazakhstani policy makers nowadays are constrained by direct or indirect international pressure as in the case of the English language. The rhetoric of internationalization is also linked to internal power goals and to state's and nation's consolidation.

### **1.3 The concept of “National Identity”**

National identity is the feeling of a community of individuals to share a common identity relying among else on a common history, language, values, and traditions. National identity is apprehended here from a post-structural perspective as something which is not fixed but more as a process as individuals do not have a unique identity but multiple ones. Political leaders can create or strengthen an already pre-existing national identity to unite the citizens of the state which is called “nation-building” (Brubaker 1996). In Central Asia, communist ideas have often been replaced by nationalism which challenge the Western rhetoric of deideologization and depolitization (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013).

We should distinguish national and civic identities especially in the case of Kazakhstan. Many works focus on the tension with the Russian minority in a multicultural Kazakhstan and the influence of the Soviet policies on the current contradictions between the state's promotion of national and civic identities (Aitymbetov, Toktarov, and Ormakhanova 2015; Laruelle 2014; Ancheschi 2014; Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015). The Soviet Union repressed nationalism trying to create a supra-national identity but at the same time institutionalized ethnic nationalities (Brubaker 1996) and we can observe a continuity of the Soviet approach in contemporary Kazakhstan (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015). There is a tension between the Kazakh identity which has an ethnic significance and the Kazakhstani identity in which Kazakhstani people are perceived as a collection of various ethnic groups united by common citizenship and values. More theoretically, there is the same tension between an ethnic nation state based on the larger group's identity and a civic nation based on an undifferentiated supra-ethnic identity (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015). This paradox comes from the Soviet ideology in which the Russian nation was presented as connecting all the national identities to each other and there is nowadays the idea that the Kazakh identity and its values should become the consensual basis of the whole society (Laruelle 2014).

Kazakhstan can be considered as a “nationalizing state” (Brubaker 1996) as its elites try to create a nation-state through a process of “kazakhization” which could be a response to the

process of russification which happened during the Soviet times (Aitymbetov and al. 2015). Anceschi (2014) in his article about regime building and identity making in Kazakhstan draws a parallel between the consolidation of the Kazakhstan's authoritarian governance at the end of the 1990s and a legitimization framework related to the nation, history and culture (Matveeva 2009). To ensure its legitimacy, the Kazakhstani leadership must both satisfy nationalist groups and to calm the fears of the Russian speaking populations. To overcome the polarization of the ethnic cleavages, a neo-Eurasianist identity's discourse which emphasises connections with both Europe and Asia (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015, Anceschi 2014) was presented as a key for the future prosperity of Kazakhstan and for Kazakhstan's ethnic balance (Anceschi 2014, Cummings 2003).

As Blum (2007) explains, the prospects for successful nation-building depend on the participation of young people and education is thus an important instrument for nation-building. Education reforms can strengthen national identity as studied in the case of Taiwan (Law 2002). The policy of promoting Kazakh language in schools is a means of consolidating the Kazakh national identity (Anh and Smagulova 2022) as language is a main element of nation building in Kazakhstan (Aitymbetov, Toktarov, and Ormakhanova 2015). Alongside the language policy, the government also tries to reinforce a sense of solidarity and to promote a sense of patriotism as a component of a civic national identity through numerous programmes for young people (Sharipova 2020).

Even if Kazakh language is officially promoted, Russian is still perceived as the language of wider communication especially in the former Soviet Union countries as more people in Kazakhstan understand spoken Russian than spoken Kazakh<sup>10</sup> (Anh and Smagulova 2022). Thus, regarding the language policy, there is a gap between state's official rhetoric and its actions to support Kazakh language with the call to learn Kazakh, counter-balanced by the demand to learn three languages including Russian. The lack of clear language and identity policies comes from the regime's aim to prevent confrontation along ethnic lines by ensuring Kazakh hegemony while allowing national minority representation (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015). This is also a sign of the regime's pragmatism and of the instrumental character of these ideologies (Laruelle 2014). Moreover, the state's capacity to carry out public programmes

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<sup>10</sup> In 2020, 83% of the population of Kazakhstan could speak or understand spoken Kazakh language while 94% of the population could understand spoken Russian language (Anh and Smagulova 2022, 12).

including language policy remains quite low (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015) and there is a gap between state leaders' aspirations and the practices observed in society.

#### **1.4 The articulation between National Identity and Internationalization**

Political purposes of education in most of the countries serve the interests of nation-(re)building and international legitimacy (Blum 2007). The question is how to articulate these two components which seem contradictory. The effects of globalization on national identity are disputed: some regard globalization as undermining national identity while others argue that it works in the opposite direction, possibly even reinforcing national feelings (Ariely 2021; Blum 2007). The effects of globalization on national curricula and education discourses have been studied by Ishii and al. (2005) for the music curriculum in Japan and by de Oliveira and al. (2015) regarding student mobility in Finland who find out divergent effects. Ishii and al. (2005) conclude that globalization encourages the affirmation of specific national features in national curricula in order to be a respectable member of the global community while for de Oliveira and al. (2015), the Finnish national identity is challenged by globalization. However, both these authors underline that globalization leads to a hybridization of national and globalized values transmitted in national curricula.

Theories of hybridization present a balanced approach considering that national identities sometimes absorb or sometimes reject parts of the globalized culture (Blum 2007) as in the case of international practices mentioned above. Blum (2007) explores youth cultures in former Soviet states noticing that these countries are a laboratory for studying interactions between globalization and national identity as they have been impregnated by foreign influence but had at the same time to tackle state and nation-building. The post-Soviet states analysed (Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan) present a high degree of agreement on a collective national identity but also nearly unrivalled discourses of neoliberalism. The practice of constructing national identity under globalization needs a cultural match for the uptake of foreign ideas (Blum 2007) and when this cultural match does not exist, it must be constructed to make international norms resonate with prior beliefs and identities. Thus, in their educational reforms, policy makers in Central Asia are striving to maintain Soviet traditions, revive pre-Soviet traditions and move closer to the West (Silova 2005). Post socialist states are also split between the ideals of liberal democracy that encourage critical thinking, pluralistic views,

global citizenship, on the one hand and identity construction based on patriotism and monolithic views of identity, on the other (Bain 2010).

This logic of internationalization is linked to regime's legitimacy based on soft authoritarianism. Strengthening the international prestige of Kazakhstan is supposed to strengthen political legitimacy at home. Thus, state narratives about Kazakhstan as a transnationalized state do not go against the ideas of nationhood but are an integral part of it as analysed by Laruelle (2014) in her article about discourses on state identity in Kazakhstan. The former President Nazarbayev carried the idea that he created a new nation state but that at the same time he brought an old people into modernity (Laruelle 2014). Kazakhstani elites made the choice to frame the state legitimacy as being linked to their engagement with the international community. Economic prosperity brought by globalization has also been fundamental in Nazarbayev's search for legitimacy. Restrictions on political freedom were legitimized in return by the economic growth and a future promised prosperity (Matveeva 2009). This leads to the question of the potential redefinition of the link between internationalization and statehood or nationhood during the term of the President Tokayev.

To summarize, the influence of international actors on the post-Soviet education systems has been widely studied as well as policies to internationalize the Kazakhstani education system especially through the development of the English language. Nation building through education is also a commonly studied area in the post-Soviet space. An interesting area of research is the articulation between internationalization and national identity in education reform discourses in Kazakhstan which is the main research question of this thesis. The following chapter focuses on the selection of the case studies and the methodology used to analyse the interactions of these discourses.

## Chapter 2. Research design and methodology

This thesis aims to understand how national identity and internationalization ideologies are used as justifications and articulated in education reform discourses in Kazakhstan since the 2000s until nowadays. Having established the theoretical framework, this chapter aims to explain the case studies and the methodological approach for data processing and selection.

The case of Kazakhstan in the context of educational reform is interesting for several reasons. First, numerous reforms have been planned since the beginning of the 2000s as the country had an important economic growth with the largest GDP per capita in Central Asia<sup>11</sup>, and has largely increased its educational spending<sup>12</sup> (Bridges 2014). Secondly, since the beginning of the 2000s, the country is donor-free in the field of education which is not the case for lots of other developing countries (Bridges 2014) meaning that decisions taken by national policymakers are not taken under the constraint of the international organizations but for other reasons. Thus, the initiative of reforms mainly comes from the national actors. Thirdly, contrary to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is in the Bologna process and has participated frequently to international evaluations which submit the country to other types of international pressure and shows a desire to learn from international experiences. Fourthly, this is a multi-ethnic state with an important Russian minority, the most important in Central Asia (Peyrouse 2008, 151) thus the question of national identity is even more relevant than in other contexts.

### 2.1 Case studies

Two main education reforms regarding primary and secondary education are analysed, one widespread in numerous countries around the world and the other one specific to the national context of Kazakhstan. Vocational and technical education has been excluded from the analysis as the curricula is very different from the general one. These two reforms have a deep impact on the whole education system and are still under progressive implementation. They have also

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<sup>11</sup> According to World Bank data, in 2022, the GDP per capita of Kazakhstan was around \$11,250 while in the other Central Asian countries, it ranged between \$7,300 in Turkmenistan and \$1,050 in Tajikistan.

<sup>12</sup> According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, public spending on education doubled in terms of both share of public spending and share of GDP between 2004 and 2020. In 2020, education expenditures represented 4.4% of the GDP of Kazakhstan and 20% of the public spendings of the government which is similar to the other Central Asian countries. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report explains that developing countries with large cohorts of children spend less on education as a share of the GDP but more as a share of total government spending which is the opposite in the case of Europe and Northern America.

been the object of numerous debates in the country in mass media, among parents, teachers, and education experts (Gaipov and al. 2013). These reforms have already been implemented in the elitist Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS).

The first reform launched in 2001 is the passage from eleven years of schooling to twelve years which is an example of “policy borrowing” as it has especially been implemented in the post-Soviet space and promoted by international donors (Silova 2008). The second reform launched in 2011 is the introduction of a trilingual policy in schools in Kazakh, Russian and English which is a reform specific to the national context of Kazakhstan.

The differences of nature between these two reforms, one “imported” and the second one more “homemade” make them relevant to analyse discourses on international influence and national identity in two very different cases. Moreover, the reform about the extension of studies seems more technical, less directly connected to identity issues whereas the second one is directly linked to the national identity issue in Kazakhstan.

#### *The 12 years of schooling reform*

The first case study is the 12 years of schooling reform. In 2001, Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Education initiated the extension of the duration of compulsory primary and secondary education to 12 years (Silova 2005). The reform was first planned to start in 2007 and to be completed in 2010 but its implementation was unsuccessful (Mynbayeva and Pogolian 2014). Then, the beginning of the transition was scheduled for 2015-2016 and supposed to be completed in 2020. The deadline to implement the reform was postponed several times and the reform is still under implementation.

Most schools still offer an 11-year curriculum and only a small number of experimental schools offer a 12-year curriculum<sup>13</sup>. This new model of 12-year education will be based on the three stages of compulsory education with primary school lasting four years, lower secondary education lasting six years (adding one more year to the current education system) and upper secondary education lasting two years (Mynbayeva and Pogolian 2014).

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<sup>13</sup> *Education System Kazakhstan Described and Compared with the Dutch System*. 2018. Nuffic.

Contrary to other post-Socialist countries, the transition to a model of 12-years of schooling was initiated locally in a context of decreasing influence of international donors (WB, ADB...) in education reforms (Kalikova and Silova 2008, 144). Thus, the extension of basic and secondary education to a 12-year model education did not immediately involve major revisions of the curriculum inherited from the Soviet times as many officials were unwilling to admit its weaknesses sharing the view that the Soviet model was already very successful (Semikina 2001 in Kalikova and Silova 2008, 144). The Soros Foundation, an international NGO which was involved in the reform between 2001 and 2003, built local capacity in curricula reforms ensuring the local ownership of the reform and with the support of the Foundation, the curriculum extension became a broad revision of the curriculum content (Kalikova and Silova 2008, 144-145). This demonstrates that international NGOs continued to be active players in education reforms in Kazakhstan by new ways of influencing local education policies (Kalikova and Silova 2008, 152). The Unified National Testing (UNT) which occurs at the end of general upper secondary school education is also under revision to adapt to the new curriculum and to the Trilingual reform<sup>14</sup>.

### *The Trilingual reform*

The second case study is the Trilingual reform. Trilingual teaching in schools in Kazakh, Russian and English was launched officially in 2011 and is a reform specific to the national context of Kazakhstan. This reform has been largely studied by different authors, much more frequently than the 12-year school system reform. This is a major educational reform which embraces all levels of education from pre-school to university but mostly impacts primary and secondary education (Karabassova 2020, 44). This reform must be positioned in a more general context of promotion of the Kazakh language in the Kazakhstani society.

This reform involves the three languages being studied as subjects but also envisages the teaching of subjects in the three languages. This reform could have been inspired by Soviet practices as there was a long-standing separation of academic curriculum by language of instruction in the USSR. Under the Trilingual reform, Kazakh culture, history, literature, and language should be taught in Kazakh, World History and Russian literature should be taught in Russian, and, in high school, science subjects should be taught in English (Karabassova 2020, 44). Russian language is taught in Kazakh schools from grade 3 to grade 11 and Kazakh

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<sup>14</sup> World Bank. 2017. *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Loan of US\$67 Million to the Republic of Kazakhstan for an Education Modernization Project.*

language is taught in Russian schools from grade 1 to grade 11 while English is supposed to be taught from the first year of primary school (Mynbayeva and Pogosian 2014, 167).

Schools' capacities to implement this reform differ immensely (Tabaeva and al. 2021) due to the low level of English language knowledge and inefficiently educated teachers which created issues regarding the implementation of this reform (Tlemissov and al. 2020). English in Kazakhstan remains substantively accessible to a relatively small group of affluent middle-class people (Ahn and Smagulova 2022). Few countries in the world have successfully implemented a bilingual education system (Tlemissov and al. 2020). Similar bilingual education systems have been implemented in countries such as Canada or Estonia (Shamshidinova and al. 2014) which Kazakhstani officials have tried to emulate. Other successful examples are South Korea and Taiwan (Tlemissov and al. 2020) and a successful example of trilingual education is Luxembourg, but the society is already trilingual (Bridges 2014).

The two reforms studied are ambitious, long lasting and have important repercussions on the whole system. Due to their very large scale and their lack of funding (Cornell and Engvall 2017, 25), they are also complicated to implement. The population suffers from reform tiredness due to the length of the reforms, the fact that it has constantly been postponed and the multiple changes brought to them. Moreover, the frequent changes of ministers of Education do not help to preserve the continuity in the reforms. The Trilingual reform is especially criticized as being difficult to implement and the usefulness of teaching several languages at the same time from a very young age is debated (Chankseliani and Silova 2018). There are also concerns among Kazakhstani educators that the academic knowledge of academic subjects may suffer when the language of instruction is the central priority (Chankseliani and Silova 2018, 17). The 12-year education reform would potentially involve additional expenses for families and require the extension of classrooms, additional teacher training whereas there is a lack of teachers and school facilities in a context of a growing population (Yakavets 2014). Amsler (2009, 10) notices that in Central Asia “the hope that education promises brighter individual and societal futures often coexists awkwardly with educators and students' lived experiences” underlining the contrast between the government's ambitious plans and the often-disastrous reality of the schooling conditions especially outside the privileged city centres.

The two reforms analysed, the 12-year schooling and the Trilingual reform have been launched since the 2000s which have been an important area of change in the Kazakhstani education

system. Due to their very ambitious objectives, these reforms have yet to be generalized in Kazakhstani schools and are only being implemented in a very limited number of schools, mainly the most privileged ones. To analyse the discourses regarding these education reforms, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used for the methodological approach.

## **2.2 Methodology**

This research focuses on the analysis of discourses to understand the ideologies underlying the official educational discourses in Kazakhstan's recent education reforms. As mentioned in the literature review, the links between national identity and globalization have been widely studied in quantitative (Ariely 2019) or qualitative (Fitriati and Rata 2021, Ishii and al. 2005, de Oliveira and al. 2015) research, also in the case of Kazakhstan (Bridges 2014, Blum 2007). However, education discourses have rarely been used to analyse the links between globalization national identity and education reforms in Kazakhstan have not been studied under this conceptual framework, at least in the English academic literature. The two main education reforms happening in Kazakhstan since the 2000s which are used in the empirical analysis have not been studied comparatively in the English literature.

Critical Discourse Analysis, especially in education studies, observes the relations between discursive practices and texts with the wider social and cultural structures and processes. The goal is to understand how discourses construct representations of the world legitimizing certain ideologies but also how discourses are ideologically shaped by power relations (Rogers and al. 2016; Taylor 2004; Hyatt 2013, 836). Critical Discourse Analysis has especially been used in education literature to understand the legitimization of global and local ideologies. In this perspective, written data sources such as curriculum documents or policy documents are frequently used by scholars in education policy (Rogers and al. 2016). Indeed, the authors of these documents represent and construct the social world, values, institutions, and identities (Rogers and al. 2016; Codd 1988). Most of the time, official documents are produced to legitimize state's action and the analysis of the policy content examines the values, assumptions and ideologies underpinning the policy process (Rogers and al. 2016; Codd 1988). Critical Discourse Analysis investigates how texts are shaped by relations of power and the context of their production. Policy making is an area of struggle and the policy texts are the outcomes of these struggles. In this process, some ways of talking about certain perspectives become normal or natural whereas others become deviant or marginal. The goal of Critical Discourse Analysis

is to try to uncover the process of naturalization in the discourses and to show how these discourses are socially constructed (McKenzie 1992 in Hyatt 2013).

This thesis focuses on the ideologies behind education reforms. Even if education reforms are often considered as instrumental tools for elites to accomplish certain political objectives, it should not be forgotten that ideologies behind these reforms also contain some forms of emotional attachment and value systems (Amsler 2009) and that official justifications can sometimes not reflect the real motives behind the implementation of these policies (Hyatt 2013). Moreover, there are often more pragmatic purposes behind reforms such as saving crumbling educational infrastructure, providing textbooks or retaining teachers (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013). This seems important to understand the logic, the “policy rationalities” behind these policy discourses which is a concept used by Fimyar (2010) in the context of educational reform in Ukraine. Policy rationalities constrain what is said and thought in a specific area in a given period of time constituting a context under which discourses are established as true or false (Fimyar 2010).

There is no unitary theory or set of methods for Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk 2007 in Mullet 2018, 2). CDA often targets common linguistic concepts such as time, tense, modality, actors and argumentation (Wodak and Meyer 2009 in Mullet 2018), coherence, topic choices (Van Dijk 2003 in Mullet 2018), active and passive voices and choice of words (Hyatt 2013). There are different meanings, contradictions and omissions in the discourses which produce different effects on the readers (Codd 1988). CDA involves exploring the social and historical backgrounds of the texts as well as understanding the intended audience, the intended purpose of the text and the author’s characteristics (Mullet 2018). The author often gives viewpoints about the propositions s/he are discussing. This can be with the use of a specific lexical item overtly displaying the judgement of the text producer. This can also be more insidious relying on the promotion of an idea of a “common sense” appearing as universal descriptive statements, but which are judgements reflecting value positions (Hyatt 2013). What is included and what is ignored or excluded is also crucial to consider in Critical Discourse Analysis (Gasper and Aphorpe 1996, 6). Interdiscursivity refers to the diverse ways in which discourses interpenetrate each other and involves borrowings from other texts which can be used to support and legitimize the argument of the writer (Hyatt 2013, 841). Moreover, discourses should be compared by the researcher to other similar discourses to observe differences and similarities between them (Mullet 2018).

The empirical analysis relies on official reports, official texts, or official public declarations mainly from the Ministry of Education and Sciences but also from other national bodies when relevant<sup>15</sup>. The main source is 37 official documents from national authorities which are official governmental texts, official speeches or declarations and national reports. Additionally, 6 newspaper articles involving public declarations or giving some contextual background regarding education debates in Kazakhstan are analysed. We can distinguish documents which provide long term, medium-term and short-term strategies<sup>16</sup>. The “*Strategy Kazakhstan-2050*” announced in a speech of the President Nazarbayev in 2012<sup>17</sup> as well as the Concepts regarding education<sup>18</sup> provide a long-term vision for the next decades regarding education. Regarding the medium-term strategy, the State Programmes for education<sup>19</sup>, the National Action Plans<sup>20</sup> and the Roadmaps<sup>21</sup> provide planning for education for the next five years. For the short-term strategy, annual addresses of the President to the nation are an opportunity to launch new initiatives. The other documents analysed do not define the education strategy but address the current situation in monitoring the education system, making recommendations to educational institutions, or setting up standards in education. National reports on the state of the education system are drafted by Kazakhstani authorities every year in the three languages (Russian, Kazakh and English). Their versions in English and Russian languages are part of the analysis<sup>22</sup>. Education standards<sup>23</sup> are set up regularly to define the expectations in the field of education

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<sup>15</sup> The detailed list of the documents analyzed is in the Bibliography in the section regarding the empirical analysis.

<sup>16</sup> Pons, Anna et al. 2015. *OECD Review of School Resources Kazakhstan*. OECD/ World Bank.

<sup>17</sup> Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state”. 2012. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>18</sup> MoES. 2004. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan by 2015* [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан До 2015 Года]. Astana. MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan* [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан].

<sup>19</sup> MoES. 2004. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010* [Государственная Программа Развития Образования в Республике Казахстан На 2005-2010 Годы]. MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*. Astana. MoES. 2019. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025* [Государственная Программа Развития Образования и Науки Республики Казахстан На 2020 - 2025 Годы].

<sup>20</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016* [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы].

<sup>21</sup> MoES, and Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015. *Roadmap for the Development of Trilingual Education for the Years 2015-2020* [Дорожная Карта Развития Трехязычного Образования На 2015-2020 Годы].

<sup>22</sup> For the full description of the reports, see in the Bibliography, the part on the official reports.

<sup>23</sup> MoES. 2018. *State Compulsory Standards of Education at All Levels of Education* [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Образования Всех Уровней Образования]. MoES. 2022. *State Compulsory Standards for Pre-School Education and Training, Primary, Basic Secondary and General Secondary Technical and Vocational, Post-Secondary* [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Дошкольного Воспитания и Обучения, Начального, Основного Среднего и Общего Среднего, Технического и Профессионального, Послесреднего Образования]. MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana. MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages (draft)* [Единый Языковой Стандарт Обучения Трех Языкам (проект)]. Astana.

and are part of the analysis. Various advice and recommendations are provided to school staffs<sup>24</sup> which is part of the empirical analysis. Documents regarding the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools<sup>25</sup> which are a governmental initiative supposed to be at the forefront of education and official declarations regarding education<sup>26</sup> especially in the media are also used. Official Kazakhstani documents are considered as both addressing internal and external audiences. However, documents available in English drafted by Kazakhstani authorities can be more aimed at a foreign audience than documents that have not been translated. 4 reports on the Kazakhstani education system published by international organizations (OECD, UNESCO, WB)<sup>27</sup> are an additional source of information as they are used as points of reference for the internationalization policy by the Kazakhstani authorities. These documents are available online as they are reports, public acts, declarations, or legislations. Regarding the timeline, documents from the beginning of the reforms so mainly the middle of the 2000s to nowadays are considered in the analysis. The large period enables to observe potential changes or contradictions in discourses. The empirical research relies solely on discourse analysis and does not examine the practical effects of these reforms which may be rather limited due to the challenges that face many schools in Kazakhstan to implement the reforms and the numerous debates surrounding them.

The data collected has been categorized with the help of the software Nvivo under categories as “national identity” or “internationalization” and a last category on the articulation of these

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<sup>24</sup> MoES. 2016. *Monitoring the Implementation of the Standard for Continuous State Language Teaching in the Kindergarten-School-College-University System* [Мониторинг Применения Стандарта Непрерывного Уровневого Обучения Государственному Языку в Системе «детский Сад-Школа-Колледж-Вуз»]. Astana. MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Methodological Guidance on the Application of a Unified Language Standard for Teaching Three Languages in the Educational Process of Schools in Kazakhstan* [Методическое Руководство По Применению Единого Языкового Стандарта Обучения Трех Языкам в Учебном Процессе Школ Казахстана]. Astana. MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Methodological Recommendations on the Application of CLIL-Technology in the Study Process of Schools* [Методические Рекомендации По Применению CLIL-Технологии в Учебном Процессе Школ]. Astana. MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana.

<sup>25</sup> 2030 Development Strategy - Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Autonomous Educational Organisation. 2018. Astana. <https://www.nis.edu.kz/en/strategiya>.

<sup>26</sup> Bezkorovainaya Ksenia, ‘Kargu Will Host an International Olympiad for the First Time in Kazakhstan [КапГУ впервые в Казахстане проведет международную олимпиаду]’. 2016. *ekaraganda.kz*. Butenko, Mimi. 2019. ‘Tokayev Instructed the Government on 12-Year Education [Токаев Дал Поручение Правительству По 12-Летнему Образованию]’. *NUR.KZ*. ‘New Approaches to Training and Support for Young Talents - MoES RK on the Development of Domestic Education and Science [Новые Подходы к Обучению и Поддержка Молодых Талантов — МОН РК о Развитии Отечественного Образования и Науки]’. 2021. *Official website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. ‘New Education Minister Answers Controversial Question about Trilingualism [Новый Министр Образования Ответила На Нашумевший Вопрос о Трехязычии]’. 2019. *Sputnik*. ‘President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s State of the Nation Address’. September 2022. *Official website of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. ‘The President Advised NIS Students to Learn Chinese and English [Учить Китайский и Английский Языки Посоветовал Президент Учащимся НИИШ]’. 2018. *Total Kazakhstan*.

<sup>27</sup> For the full list of the documents, see the section on reports from international organizations in the Bibliography.

concepts. Some documents addressed specifically one of the reforms or both. When more general documents were analysed, only the passages regarding these reforms were considered.

In sum, my research design relies on the two main education reforms happening in primary and secondary education, the Trilingual education reform and the 12-year school system analysed using a Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The novelty of my research relies in the comparative use of these two reforms to understand the association between national identity and internationalization in the justification of these reforms. The next chapter is discussing how the concept of national identity is mobilized to justify education reforms in Kazakhstan, trying to answer the first research question.

### **Chapter 3. Empirical analysis – The National Identity argument**

As discussed in the methodology, the empirical analysis looks at official documents published by Kazakhstani authorities and by international organizations since the 2000s. The two main ideological justifications for the 12-years education reform and the Trilingual policy are analysed in two separate chapters, one treating about national identity and the other one about the internationalization argument. This chapter discusses the national identity argument in the two education reforms and answers to the first research question: *“To what extent the Kazakh/Kazakhstani identities are used to justify these education reforms and how these are represented?”*. This chapter also discusses the potential differences in the argumentation of these two reforms answering to the third research question.

The promotion of the Kazakhstani and Kazakh identities are used as justification of these education reforms. The goals of the reforms are national unification and to exhibit a national distinctiveness. The empirical analysis indicates that education reforms have two contradictory purposes: to promote patriotism and national identity among Kazakhstani students but also to foster a multi-ethnic and multilingual civic nation. National identity discourses are much more prevalent in the reform regarding the three-languages policy than for the reform regarding the 12-year education system as the three-language policy addresses many more issues directly related to national identity. Regarding the Trilingual policy, the policy makers insist on the goals of language teaching whereas the 12-year education reform addresses the general purposes and values of the whole educational process.

The main justifications by the Kazakhstani government regarding national identity in education reforms are presented in the Chapter 3. Firstly, education reforms are presented as a driver to foster common national values (3.1). Secondly, education reforms are presented as a means of promoting the Kazakh language in order to foster a common national identity, while preserving the Russian language for pragmatic reasons (3.2).

#### **3.1 Education reforms : a driver to foster common national values**

One of the main policy drivers for these reforms is the promotion of the Kazakhstani and Kazakh identities relying on common values. These common values should unify the students

to create and strengthen a single nation and a single state. The two reforms, the Trilingual policy and the 12-year school reform, emphasize the shared values that Kazakhstani education should promote. In this case, education policies are justified by dominant norms and values. An analysis of official documents has revealed that common national values promoted in education reforms are the love for the Homeland as well as traditional and multicultural values.

### *The love for the Homeland*

The first value indicated is loyalty towards the state and Kazakhstan's nation. The *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2016-2019* (MoES 2016) emphasizes on the need to “consolidate the people of Kazakhstan, instilling patriotic feelings”. In an education decree of 2022, the first goal indicated for the new curriculum in primary and secondary education is “Kazakhstani patriotism and civic responsibility”<sup>28</sup>. A sense of “love and respect for the Motherland” should be transmitted through the development of Kazakh language literature<sup>29</sup> in the Trilingual reform. This “emotional approach to the homeland” with education aiming to instil a sense of pride, respect and love towards the country and thus a sense of patriotism was noticed in education reforms in other countries such as Poland (Mach 2022, 232) or in the National Education Programme of Singapore (Lee 2021). The “homeland” is presented as an important form of socialization for the students in the *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* (MoES 2010) and national identity is presented as a significant element of a student identity as noticed similarly by Mach in the case of Poland. This sense of patriotism which is partly transmitted by school has an influence in the Kazakhstani society: many young people associate being Kazakhstani with being patriotic (Sharipova 2020,11).

The transmission of a sense of patriotism is part of nation building strategies of the Kazakhstani leadership. Indeed, nation building aims to cultivate a “cohesive, loyal and up to a point, homogeneous citizenry” (Guiberneau 2001 in Zajda and Majhanovich 2021, 7). Similarly, the goal of the 12-year reform is to “develop an intellectually, physically, spiritually and

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MoES). 2022. *State Compulsory Standards for Pre-School Education and Training, Primary, Basic Secondary and General Secondary Technical and Vocational, Post-Secondary* [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Дошкольного Воспитания и Обучения, Начального, Основного Среднего и Общего Среднего, Технического и Профессионального, Послесреднего Образования].

<sup>29</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026* [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы].

successfully developed citizenry”<sup>30</sup>. Thus, a future Kazakhstani citizen should be loyal to his/her country but also a “socially active person”<sup>31</sup> “capable of bearing responsibility for his or her homeland”<sup>32</sup> to be “useful to the society”<sup>33</sup> with the idea that a good citizen is not a “passive member of society but rather a member who contributes to society” (Rapoport 2021, 41) which is also noticed by Lee (2021) in the case of Singapore education reforms. Topics and key values such as “Kazakhstan, our common home” or “Kazakhstan, my Motherland” are introduced in the new education standards in the framework of the 12-year school reform<sup>34</sup>. This ambition of creating a loyal and homogenous citizenry can be explained by the relatively recent independence of the country and its multiculturalism making it more difficult to unify the citizens under a single state and a single authority. The sense of patriotism is among the traditional values which are historically transmitted at school.

#### *Traditional values relying on a sense of historical and cultural continuity*

Secondly, these education reforms also promote what can be considered as “traditional values” which rely on a sense of historical continuity. The importance of family for the Kazakhstani society is emphasised and should be transmitted in education. In the *Concept of 12 years General Secondary Education*, family is pointed out as the “basis for the socialisation” of the children alongside with the “homeland and the world” (MoES 2010, 5). Family oversees the transmission of essential values in collaboration with the school in an “holistic pedagogical process of the school and family during all years of schooling” (MoES 2010, 6). The education system must also influence students’ attitudes towards their families as Kazakhstani education should enable them to become “caring family members” (MoES 2010). The importance of the family is noticed in Mach’s (2022, 232) analysis of education reforms in Poland, with the family “being given a significant role in the process of education”. Thus, official Kazakhstani

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<sup>30</sup> MoES. 2016. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019* [Государственная Программа Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2016 - 2019 Годы].

<sup>31</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016* [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы], 26.

<sup>33</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2019. *National Report on the State and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 2018*. Astana, 106.

<sup>34</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]. Astana, 216.

discourses explain that education “is aimed at ensuring the continuity of generations”<sup>35</sup> guaranteeing the sustainability of the Kazakhstani state.

In the *Concept of 12 years General Secondary Education*, Kazakhstani education is described as relying on social values such as “religion, mentality, national holidays, ritual forms, customs and traditions” which are indicated as components of the “spiritual culture of the nation”<sup>36</sup>. Interestingly, religion is included in this list of social values whereas Kazakhstan is officially a secular state and there is no mention of religion in any of the other documents analysed. Rather than religion, spirituality is often mentioned in the documents studied. Orange and Petersson (2017), in their study regarding spirituality and political legitimacy in Kazakhstan notice a general spirituality in the myths around the new Kazakh nation, tradition and culture which is sometimes connected to Islamic practices, but rarely to religious beliefs as such.

For nation-building reasons and to include the diverse ethnic minorities, Kazakhstani authorities have developed a broad understanding of the historical origins of Kazakhstan whereas the country had to create its national heritage from scratch. However, in the reform of the Kazakh language textbooks in the context of the Trilingual reform, the “national interests, values and achievements” should be learnt by the students as well as the national iconic heroes<sup>37</sup>. Friedli and al. (2017) notice that nationalism in the post-Soviet context is often associated to the mobilization of collective memory of the past regarding for instance cultural heroes. The *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* also mentions that the values and goals of education should be defined especially considering the “Kazakhstani mentality” and “national historical and ethnic traditions” (MoES 2010). It is not specified from which ethnicities the traditions should come from underlying the confusion between a Kazakh ethnic identity and a Kazakhstani civic identity. The education system is largely conceived as having to develop a form of morality among students through the transmission of traditional values. Lee (2021) also notices that the purpose of the secondary education curriculum in Singapore is to inculcate values that define the Singaporean society.

The importance of developing a new curriculum adapted to the cultural realities of the country is emphasised. In the framework of the 12-year reform, “The content of the *History of Kazakhstan* is planned to be updated from the perspective of rethinking the history of its people,

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<sup>35</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016* [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы], 26.

<sup>36</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026* [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы].

based on the principle of cultural appropriateness.”<sup>38</sup> This quotation is interesting as “cultural appropriateness” can be used in reference to Western countries but also regarding Russia even if this country is not explicitly mentioned. Indeed, History curricula were designed during the Soviet times and might have not changed much since this period. Various versions of the *Concept of 12-Year General Education* are available online and the notion of “cultural appropriateness” is not mentioned in another version. There are also differences in the two versions of the documents regarding the origins of the Kazakhstani education system: one version mentions the “heritage of outstanding national pedagogues” whereas in another version this is the “heritage of outstanding Russian pedagogues” which has shaped the values of the current education system. The Kazakh and Eastern thinkers as well as their values are taken into reference to justify the importance of native language teaching in the context of the Trilingual reform: “As the eastern wisdom says: “Knowledge of the native language is the key to the heart of the people.”<sup>39</sup> In the same document, the Kazakh writer Magzhan Zhumabaev is also quoted.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Multicultural values*

The values that the education system tries to transmit are Kazakh ones but also the ones from the other ethnicities. Thus, students in Kazakh and Russian literature classes should be able to understand Kazakh “moral ideals” but also “moral ideals” of other peoples in Kazakhstan<sup>41</sup>. These values can be shared but may also diverge as underlined in this passage: students should understand the “nationally determined differences and similarities” between the works of Russian and Kazakh literature<sup>42</sup>. Students in minority languages (Uyghur, Uzbek and Tajik) should “identify the spiritual and moral content of works to correlate it with the values of Kazakh and other nations”<sup>43</sup>. Thus, the goal for the learners is to understand how the values of these nations align with the Kazakh values which is interestingly not required for the Russian language classes. These discourses legitimize ethnic differences among people and the idea that there are different ethnic groups with unique culture, traditions and customs creating potential

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<sup>38</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan* [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан], 11.

<sup>39</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> MoES. 2018. *State Compulsory Standards of Education at All Levels of Education* [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Образования Всех Уровней Образования].

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

processes of othering. The students should thus not only respect and appreciate the “culture of the Kazakh people”, the titular nation but also the ones of the “peoples of Kazakhstan”<sup>44</sup>, the minority groups.

The students studying in minority languages (Uyghur, Uzbek and Tajik), should assess the “originality of the national literature” and the “national values reflected in fiction” in minority language classes <sup>45</sup>. The word “national” can be confusing as it could refer to the Kazakhstani nation but also to these specific ethnic groups which can be considered as “nations”. There is often a confusion between the words “nation” and “state” in the discourses analysed: nation is sometimes used indifferently to designate the Kazakhstani state and sometimes used in a separate meaning to designate the various ethnicities in Kazakhstan. The *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* states that education should shape a citizen of Kazakhstan who appreciates the culture and knows the historical past of his “nation” instead of using the word “state”<sup>46</sup>. This confusion between the nation and the state can be understood as a way for the government to create a nation-state but also to avoid clearly including or excluding specific ethnic groups. There is in the education reforms discourses, a constant tension between civic and national identities. It should be noted that the adjective “Kazakhstani” is systematically used in reference to the citizenship in opposition to the adjective “Kazakh” used in reference to the ethnicity.

Ethnic and civic values are not presented as contradictory but as complementary. In the *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education*, primary schools should develop “national ethnic values” whereas secondary schools should then develop “national state values”<sup>47</sup>. Thus, the primary school focuses more on Kazakh values while the secondary school aims to shape a common Kazakhstani identity and “school is designed to ensure the transmission of national culture and the formation of national identity, the development of the student from his native culture to the common Kazakhstani one”<sup>48</sup>. The goal of the state education is then to transmit the national culture shaping a common civic national identity. What are the “national culture” and the “national ethnic values” transmitted is unclear: are they Kazakhstani or Kazakh ones?

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<sup>44</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>45</sup> MoES. 2018. *State Compulsory Standards of Education at All Levels of Education [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Образования Всех Уровней Образования]*, 104-105.

<sup>46</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан]*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

The need to build social cohesion by appreciating diversity in the society was observed in official education discourses in other multicultural countries such as Singapore (Lee, 2021).

These education reforms aim to promote the multicultural component of the Kazakhstani society which is the basis of the Kazakhstani identity. The diversity of the ethnicities of the students is recognised and presented as an asset for the Kazakhstani society. Thus, the *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages* states that “the cultural, linguistic, and intellectual capital of society will increase significantly if we stopped seeing children's cultural and linguistic differences as a problem to be solved and instead saw and recognized the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources they bring from their homes and communities”<sup>49</sup>. This quotation emphasises the need to overcome cultural differences in society and to take advantage of these differences underlining the multicultural component of the Kazakhstani society. “Tolerance” is also mentioned in the *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (MoES 2010, 5) as an important value which guides the development of education in Kazakhstan. In Kazakh and Russian language and literature classes, students should evaluate the “problems of linguistic and cultural diversity”<sup>50</sup> and more generally the “Language and Literature” subjects should include “notions of unity and diversity of national cultures in Kazakhstan”<sup>51</sup>.

In the draft of the *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*, in a presentation of the “Kazakhstan’s language palette”, it is indicated that alongside Kazakh and Russian languages, “languages of 100 Kazakh ethnic groups” are spoken in Kazakhstan<sup>52</sup>. Another document declares that “The language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan ensures the observance of the language rights of all ethnic groups” providing a free choice of language for education<sup>53</sup>. The Kazakhstani authorities want to demonstrate their willingness to recognise the multicultural component of the Kazakhstani society. Thus “the importance of learning (...) the languages of ethnic groups (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Uighurs, etc.) which make the country's

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<sup>49</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 280.

<sup>50</sup> MoES. 2018. *State Compulsory Standards of Education at All Levels of Education [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Образования Всех Уровней Образования]*.

<sup>51</sup> MoES. 2022. *State Compulsory Standards for Pre-School Education and Training, Primary, Basic Secondary and General Secondary Technical and Vocational, Post-Secondary [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Дошкольного Воспитания и Обучения, Начального, Основного Среднего и Общего Среднего, Технического и Профессионального, Послесреднего Образования]*.

<sup>52</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages (draft) [Единый Языковой Стандарт Обучения Трех Языкам (проект)]*. Astana, 2.

<sup>53</sup> MoES. 2018. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2017*. Astana, 34.

multicultural context”<sup>54</sup> is pointed out. In these schools, instruction is given in minority languages and language and literature classes in the minority languages are added to the curriculum. In areas with important minority groups, Polish, German, Ukrainian, Ingush, Kurdish, Korean or Tatar can be studied as language subjects. Contrary to Kazakh, Russian and English language teaching which are compulsory in the Trilingual reform, local authorities are responsible for deciding if these languages should be studied in areas with dense ethnic minorities. According to Carnoy and Rhoten (2002, 4), the state increasingly pushes the problems of ethnic conflict to the local level which could explain why this decision is left to the local authorities in a country as centralized as Kazakhstan. This is also a Soviet legacy as “during the Soviet Union, the use of minority languages was not restricted but such languages only prevailed in a local context” (Terlikbayeva and Menlibekova 2021, 19). Students in minority languages cannot take the Unified National Testing (UNT) exam which marks the end of the secondary studies in their languages (Syzdykbayeva 2016, 16) and cannot pursue their studies in minority languages in higher education (Duissekova and al. 2017, 35), which disadvantages them. Moreover, students from minority groups seem to have in average lower results to national exams and tests which is not pointed out as an issue by Kazakhstani education authorities contrary to the differences of results between Russian and Kazakh language students.

The diversity of national cultures is a common rhetoric in general Kazakhstani political discourses (Davenel 2012) which is especially noticeable in education discourses. For the domestic audience, this is a way to show that the authorities managed to maintain harmony between very different ethnic groups. For the foreign audience, this is a way to promote the image of Kazakhstan as a peaceful and tolerant multicultural country with the idea that more than 100 ethnic groups live in peace in the country (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015). Thus, this positive discourse about Kazakhstan’s multiculturalism is also emphasised in international discourses as in this OECD report regarding the Kazakhstani education system: “Schools in Kazakhstan reflect the rich diversity existing in the country in terms of ethnicity, religion and language”<sup>55</sup>. To try to overcome this apparent contradiction between Kazakh culture and the other national cultures, Davenel (2013) in Seidikenova and al. (2020, 60) mentioned the Kazakh culture as being the “first culture among equals”.

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<sup>54</sup> MoES and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Pons, Anna et al. 2015. *OECD Review of School Resources Kazakhstan*. OECD/ World Bank, 31.

The education reforms oscillate between the need to create a multi-ethnic inclusive Kazakhstani identity relying on trans-ethnic and universal values and the need to promote a singular Kazakh identity to assert Kazakhstan's sovereignty and independence towards the other countries and especially Russia. This tension between the Kazakh identity which has an ethnic significance and the Kazakhstani identity in which Kazakhstani people are perceived as a collection of various ethnic groups united by a common citizenship has already been analysed by various authors such as Burkhanov and Sharipova (2015). Thus, the education system is a means to insulate forms of national consciousness for the purpose of fostering social harmony. Regarding the values promoted by the education reforms, these ones rely on traditional and universal elements such as family and patriotism to which every Kazakhstani citizen can identify but also on the historical past of the country. As these are rather vague elements to solidify a multi-ethnic nation, language teaching seems to be the main element able to unify the Kazakhstani nation. Indeed, Laruelle (2014) noticed that the "Kazakhness" ideology relying on a Kazakh identity rarely shapes the country's public policies except for the policy of repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs from abroad but also for policies regarding the primacy of Kazakh language.

### **3.2 Education reforms: a driver to foster the Kazakh language for national unification while maintaining the status of the Russian language for pragmatic reasons**

This second sub-chapter analyses how education reforms are at the same time a driver to foster Kazakh language for national unification and a way to maintain the status of the Russian language.

#### *The Kazakh language, a key element for national unification*

Kazakh language teaching is still under development in Kazakhstan despite very ambitious goals set up more than a decade ago. In 2011, in his speech to the nation, Nazarbayev declared that "In ten years, 100 percent of high school graduates will speak the state language"<sup>56</sup> which is still far from being the case. A document written in 2018 explains that "a general system of teaching the Kazakh language in schools with a non-Kazakh language of instruction has not been sufficiently created"<sup>57</sup> which can explain the failure of this ambitious objective. Another

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<sup>56</sup> 'Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to the People of Kazakhstan, January 28, 2011'. 2011. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>57</sup> МоЕС. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026 [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы]*.

issue regarding Kazakh language teaching is the gap in results between students studying in Russian and Kazakh languages: “The results of international comparative studies show a significant gap between state and Russian language learners in favour of the latter”<sup>58</sup>. The same document recognizes that “there has been a reduction of the gap” but concludes by stating that Russian language students still have better academic performances<sup>59</sup>. The fact that students in Kazakh language lag behind students in Russian language schools was also addressed by the OECD<sup>60</sup>. Oppositely, in the *National Report 2020 on the State and Development of the Education System* (MoES and IAC 2021, 38) published in English by Kazakhstani authorities, it is stated that “There is almost no gap in the results of students with the Kazakh and Russian languages of instruction.”. This document in English is rather addressed to a foreign audience and the goal is probably to show that the Kazakhstani education system is well performing and that the three-language policy is working well. The other document in Russian is addressed to a more domestic audience and wants to demonstrate the necessity of strengthening the Kazakh language. This results’ gap is linked to the fact that the prestige of Kazakh schools is since independence lower than the one of Russian schools and that lots of parents among the elites prefer to send their children to Russian-language schools (Laruelle 2014; Terlikbayeva and Menlibekova 2021).

The development of Kazakh language teaching is an important policy driver in these educational reforms, especially the Trilingual reform. Thus, the *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages* claims that the Kazakh language is the “leading factor in the consolidation of Kazakhstan’s nation”<sup>61</sup>. The *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring Multilingual Education* states that the “mother tongue” determines “people’s national belonging” and thus their national identity<sup>62</sup>. The use in the document of the expression “mother tongue” is interesting as for students from ethnic minorities, the Kazakh language is probably not their mother tongue, or the language spoken in their families. As a result, Kazakh language teaching is considered as the “basis of multilingual education”<sup>63</sup> and the Kazakh

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> OECD. 2018. *Education Policy Outlook – Kazakhstan*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 247.

<sup>62</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

language is presented as a language for inter-ethnic and inter-cultural communication<sup>64</sup> which was the role of the Russian language during the Soviet times and is still the case in practice nowadays. The difficulties encountered by the people of Kazakhstan to keep their language and their nationhood are mentioned in a policy document regarding the Trilingual reform. The document regarding explains that people of Kazakhstan went through a “thorny path” to preserve their people and land as well as their language<sup>65</sup>. Thus, the *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring Multilingual Education* state that Kazakhstan’s “sovereignty” and “independence” rely on a “common mother tongue”<sup>66</sup>.

To improve Kazakh language teaching in the education system, the methods of teaching should be improved as well as the quality of textbooks and the training of teachers in Kazakh language and literature<sup>67</sup>. Students should realise themselves through Kazakh language teaching the “prospect of learning the state language” and how they can apply it in their daily lives<sup>68</sup> becoming actors of the diffusion of the Kazakh language. This approach is interesting while education policies including language policies in Kazakhstan are mostly top-down with the Ministry of Education as a key stakeholder (Goodman and Karabassova 2018, 162), there is the hope that the language would then be spread by the learners themselves. Governments can use legislative tools to lower or raise the status of a language or to increase the number of speakers as in the case of Kazakh language teaching, but these planning efforts can be accepted or rejected by the society (Terlikbayeva and Menlibekova 2021). Thus, learning the Kazakh language is presented as an advantage for students from the minority groups. The former President Nazarbayev, in his address to the nation in January 2018, declared that thanks to the development of Kazakh language especially through Kazakh language teaching, “A person of any ethnic group will be able to choose any kind of work, up to the extent of getting elected as the President of the country.”<sup>69</sup> Varennes (1996) in Anh and Smagulova (2022, 14) explains that by imposing language requirements, the knowledge of the state language becomes a

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<sup>64</sup> MoES. 2016. *Monitoring the Implementation of the Standard for Continuous State Language Teaching in the Kindergarten-School-College-University System* [Мониторинг Применения Стандарта Непрерывного Уровневого Обучения Государственному Языку в Системе «детский Сад-Школа-Колледж-Вуз»]. Astana, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana, 3.

<sup>67</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026* [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы].

<sup>68</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan* [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан], 11.

<sup>69</sup> ‘State of the Nation Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, January 10, 2018’. 2018. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

condition for full participation and access to public services and benefits as well as for educational and wider social mobility. Thus, the requirement to learn the state language can also be presented as beneficial for students from minority groups while the knowledge of the Kazakh language is now required for numerous professional positions such as to integrate the civil service (Reagan 2019, 447).

### *The maintenance of the Russian language for pragmatic reasons*

Even if Kazakh language teaching use should be expanded, Nazarbayev in his speech regarding the *Strategy Kazakhstan-2050* (2012) also underlined that the language policy “should not limit any language spoken by Kazakhstan citizens”, a rhetoric probably mainly addressed to the Russian minority. While Tajik or Uzbek languages are directly addressed as the “languages of ethnic groups”<sup>70</sup>, Russian language is never designated as such creating a separation between Russian and the other ethnic minority languages.

The initial intention of the Trilingual reform was to upgrade the status of Kazakh language and to maintain the status of the Russian language (Karabassova 2020) but the exact positioning between the Kazakh and Russian languages in teaching priorities is contested. The “Trinity of languages” reform creates contradictory discourses which show the internal political disputes regarding this topic. In some discourses, Kazakh language is put first in terms of priority. Thus, Ms Kulyash Shamshidinova who was just appointed Education Minister declared in 2019 about the trilingualism in Kazakhstan : ”According to the requirements of our time, our children must, first and foremost, know their native language - Kazakh.”<sup>71</sup> The *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025* (MoES 2018) also indicates the “priority development of the state language”. The *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages* emphasises the different degrees of priority for the three languages. The document indicates that the goals of the Trilingual reform are to “develop the state language, support (...) the Russian language and learn English”<sup>72</sup>. Thus, the state language should have a further importance as it should be developed in an expansionist way whereas the Russian language

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<sup>70</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 3.

<sup>71</sup> ‘New Education Minister Answers Controversial Question about Trilingualism [Новый Министр Образования Ответила На Нашумевший Вопрос о Трёхязычии]’. 2019. *Sputnik*.

<sup>72</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 247.

should just be supported. This also reflects a country's reality: most of the population speaks Russian contrary to the Kazakh language.

In other official documents, the equal status of the two languages is emphasised. In the *Roadmap for the Development of Trilingual Education for 2015-2020* (MoES and Ministry of Culture and Sports 2015, 7), the purpose of language teaching is to facilitate the acquisition by students of “Russian which is used equally with Kazakh as the official language”. In Kazakhstan, there is officially a distinction between the Kazakh language considered as the state language and the Russian language considered as the official language which is reiterated several times in the various official documents studied. The equal role of the Russian language with the Kazakh language is also underlined in this discourse of Nazarbayev in 2012 : “Nowadays we take active measures to create conditions for our children to learn Russian (...) equally as Kazakh language. (...) We should treat Russian language and Cyrillic writing in the same caring way as we do for Kazakh.”<sup>73</sup>

Efforts to promote Russian language teaching are emphasised as in Tokayev's address to the nation in 2021: “Knowledge of the Russian language remains important. Since 2016, in updated curricula, Russian is taught in Kazakh-language schools already from the first grade”<sup>74</sup>. The importance of learning Russian language for geopolitical and historical reasons is explained by Tokayev : “It is clear to us all, that knowing the Russian language provided a historic advantage to our nation. No one can ignore the fact that through Russian language in centuries the Kazakhstan citizens gain additional knowledge, increase their perspective and communications both domestically and abroad.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, the knowledge of the Russian language is beneficial to Kazakhstan's geopolitical position on the international stage but also for the citizens themselves who increase their opportunities while the Kazakh language cannot compete with Russian on an international stage (Sharipova 2020). Karabassova (2020) in her article about the implementation of the Trilingual education reform in Kazakhstan developed the idea that Russian language in Kazakhstan is attached with some international importance as knowledge of Russian is supposed to expand the horizons of the Kazakhstani citizens. Russian language knowledge is also presented as an advantage on the labour market for Kazakhstani citizens as

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<sup>73</sup> Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state”. 2012. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>74</sup> ‘State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’. 2021. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

this is the language “officially used in office work”<sup>76</sup>. Interestingly, Tokayev declared in his address to the nation in 2021 that Kazakh language “is becoming (...) the language of office work”<sup>77</sup> demonstrating that the economic advantage provided by the Russian language could decrease in the future. Indeed, Kazakh language is introduced in spheres where there was previously a dominance of the Russian language (Aitymbetov and al. 2015) which is partly due to the expansion of Kazakh language teaching.

To ensure Russian language teaching is also a way to maintain good relations with Kazakhstan’s powerful neighbour while being aware that a change of policy could trigger a threatening reaction from the Russian authorities. The close relationship with Russia is emphasised: “The planned development of the Kazakh language will not be harmful for the Russian language and it is said just after that the state’s foreign policy priority must be friendly relations with neighbours. Without it the country’s future will be vague.”<sup>78</sup> With the war in Ukraine this issue comes back more urgently as the address to the nation of Tokayev in September 2022 indicates “There are discussions in society around the teaching of Kazakh and Russian languages in schools. Let me be clear: we must educate children to speak fluently both Kazakh and Russian. This is in the interests of the younger generation. The Ministry of Education should be guided by the interests of children, not by populists. The younger generation, in terms of knowledge, including language skills, should stand firmly on both feet.”<sup>79</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusions

This CDA analysis of the Kazakh and Kazakhstan identities in these education policy reforms’ discourses confirm several observations already noticed in the academic literature. Kazakhstanian education reforms aim to shape a common identity based on shared traditional values such as patriotism or the sense of the family and traditions. At the same time, these education reforms foster the sense of a common multi-ethnic identity, but these discourses lack a clear definition of Kazakh and Kazakhstanian identities as well as their respective values. Numerous words are

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<sup>76</sup> MoES and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 3.

<sup>77</sup> ‘State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’. 2021. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan, January 27, 2012’. 2012.

<sup>79</sup> ‘President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s State of the Nation Address’. September 2022. *Official website of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

used in a confusing way having very different possible meanings, probably to avoid some tensions trying to play on all the fronts with a blurred definition between Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities. Along with these shared values, the development of the Kazakh language is also represented as crucial in these education reforms to guarantee the survival of the Kazakh state but also to unify the various ethnic groups fostering at the same time their social mobility. The Russian language has a status apart from the other minority languages, being at the same time part of the Kazakhstani identity construction for historical and geopolitical reasons but also the language of the former colonizer against which the Kazakh identity was built.

These results do not exactly match with the idea that a civic national identity has not emerged in Kazakhstan and that a “primordialist vision of identity” still dominates country’s discourses (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2015, 21). This goes with the idea that Kazakhstani officials showed their commitment to an internationalist rhetoric emphasising solidarity between the ethnic groups living in the country (Burkhanov 2020). The main idea is to preserve the languages of all ethnic groups and to ensure the extensive use of state language to strengthen national unity (Terlikbayeva and Menlibekova 2021) This is explained by the willingness of the leadership in Kazakhstan to avoid taking extreme positions to ensure social stability (Terlikbayeva and Menlibekova 2021) by assuring Kazakh hegemony while allowing national minority representation.

Thus, these education reforms are officially driven and justified by the need to strengthen Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities especially through the promotion of values and languages which reflect both the titular nation and the diverse minorities with a specific attention to the interests of the Russian minority.

After discussing the national identity argument in recent Kazakhstani education reforms, the next chapter analyses the internationalization argument and its articulation with the national identity argument.

## Chapter 4. Empirical analysis – The internationalization argument

This second part of the empirical analysis aims to answer the second research question : “*How the international environment is mobilized and articulated with the Kazakh/ Kazakhstani identities to justify these education reforms ?*” taking into account the potential differences of discourses between the two education reforms analysed, This chapter discusses how the two education reforms, the transition to a twelve-year education model and to a Trilingual education are presented by Kazakhstani authorities as imperatives to respond to the realities of the contemporary globalized world. At the same time, this argumentation is influenced by the international context especially international organizations recommendations and rankings which set up international standards to reach.

### 4.1 Kazakhstan’s education crisis attested by international rankings

The idea of a crisis in the education field is a leitmotiv used by Kazakhstani authorities in these education reforms which they justify by the poor results of Kazakhstan in international education rankings. Thus, the *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025* (MoES 2019) states that “there are a number of pressing issues in the domestic education and science system”. According to the State Programme, the Kazakhstani population obtained very poor results to PIAAC<sup>80</sup> (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies) “lagging behind many countries in the world”. There is a permanent monitoring of the results of Kazakhstan in the education rankings and the official education documents analysed often underline the poor results of the country especially in the most famous education ranking, PISA: “according to results of the international research PISA-2018, Kazakhstan has lowered its position”<sup>81</sup>. The official education reports emphasize the idea that Kazakhstani students should participate in numerous “international education quality surveys”<sup>82</sup> which would enable the Kazakhstan government to measure the progress of students in various subjects and thus understand which improvements need to be made more urgently in the education system.

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<sup>80</sup> PIAAC is an international assessment organized by the OECD which evaluates adult skills in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in over 40 countries.

<sup>81</sup> MoES. 2020. *The National Report 2020 on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Astana, 57.

<sup>82</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 38.

The 12-year education reform is presented as a solution to solve the education crisis. For instance, in the *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025* (MoES 2019), the objective 5 is “to ensure the continuity and sustainability of education and training according to the needs of the economy and regional specificities”. One of the “outcome indicators” to measure the progress required to reach this objective is the “percentage of schools that have switched to the 12-year model”. Thus, the 12-year education reform relies on the accountability warrant, a concept designed by Hyatt (2013) who distinguishes different types of argumentations used by political leaders. The accountability warrant is based on results or outcomes as policy makers claim that a specific reform will improve results or standards (Hyatt 2013): in this case, the 12-year education reform should enable a better education system responding more to the economic and political needs. The accountability warrant can also be used to initiate a discussion on what will happen if the policy is not implemented or the potential negative outcomes of an alternative policy approach (Hyatt 2013). This is the case in this sentence concluding the paragraph regarding the poor results in PIAAC rankings: “If this situation in the education and science system remained unchanged, further deterioration of the quality of national human capital, deprofessionalization of personnel and reduction of the country’s economic potential are inevitable in the future”<sup>83</sup>. Thus, the absence of education reforms would worsen the education system and it would even have further general negative consequences especially on the economy. The Trilingual reform does not rely on the idea of a crisis assessed by international rankings maybe because it is not the direct translation of a “travelling policy” as in the case of the 12-year reform. However, the poor knowledge of the English language is pointed out by the authorities as well as the fact that students in Kazakh language schools are performing less well in international rankings than students in Russian language schools.

In general, the implementation of education reforms is presented as a sign of being a developed country as in this sentence which legitimizes the education reform process happening in Kazakhstan: “The world practice shows, that in countries with developed economy [the] education system is subject to reforms on average every ten years”<sup>84</sup>. The education reforms can be conceived in a negative perspective as a mean to solve the Kazakhstani education crisis

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<sup>83</sup> MoES. 2019. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования и Науки Республики Казахстан На 2020 - 2025 Годы]*.

<sup>84</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Integrated Learning Academic Subjects (Informatics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Science) and English Language Study Guide*. Astana, 207.

but also as a positive way as a mean for the country to join the most developed countries in reaching the international education standards.

#### 4.2 Education reforms: a tool for political integration on the global stage

The education reforms are a way to be reach international standards and to be recognized as being part of the community of most developed countries in the world. These domestic reforms rely on external discourses influential in the education field. To rely on international standards and discourses allows Kazakhstani leaders to legitimize their reforms giving more credibility to these reforms in the eyes of both foreign and domestic audiences. The knowledge of foreign languages such as English is also a strong asset for political integration in a globalized world.

International organisations influential in the education field such as UNESCO, the OECD or the EU set up standards and practices regarding the education systems. The words “taking into account”, “in accordance with”, “in compliance with” are very often used by Kazakhstani authorities demonstrating the need to adapt to international practices. Thus, the *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* (MoES 2010), “has been developed **in accordance with** (...) the Bologna Meeting of European Education Ministers, the UNESCO recommendations”. An education decree of 2022 declares that “In 2015, the republic committed itself to achieving the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals”<sup>85</sup>. The Incheon Declaration signed in 2015 includes education development pillars which are “also priorities for Kazakhstan's education system”<sup>86</sup> in particular to “guarantee the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded education”<sup>87</sup>. This indicates that the Kazakhstani agenda regarding education reforms is aligned with world priorities. Some reforms are underway in Kazakhstan to align with the international standards regarding the organization of studies. Kazakhstani authorities underline that the structure of the education system of Kazakhstan is now in compliance with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)<sup>88</sup>, an UNESCO standard regarding the organisation of the different levels of education to harmonize the national education systems.

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<sup>85</sup> MoES. 2022. *State Compulsory Standards for Pre-School Education and Training, Primary, Basic Secondary and General Secondary Technical and Vocational, Post-Secondary* [Об Утверждении Государственных Общеобязательных Стандартов Дошкольного Воспитания и Обучения, Начального, Основного Среднего и Общего Среднего, Технического и Профессионального, Послесреднего Образования].

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> MoES, and Information Analytic-Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]. Astana, 50.

<sup>88</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 14.

Another national document indicates that the ISCED “recommends a cumulative duration of 12 years of schooling”<sup>89</sup>. Thus, to be fully aligned with UNESCO recommendations, Kazakhstan should implement a 12-year system of study. The argument of “international standards” is also used by Kazakhstani authorities regarding the Trilingual reform: “In accordance with the **international standards** the main goal of trilingual education is to create the necessary conditions (essential prerequisites) for the simultaneous (contemporaneous) acquisition of three target languages by Kazakhstan’s citizens.”<sup>90</sup> However, as international organizations do not position themselves regarding this reform, the “international standards” to reach this target are vague on purpose. The only recommendation from international organizations regarding this reform in the documents analysed is to “implement appropriate language policies and provide mother tongue-based instruction”<sup>91</sup>. Kazakhstani authorities explain that the Trilingual reform should be implemented according to international standards regarding language teaching. The “CEFR system of foreign language proficiency levels used in the European Union”<sup>92</sup> is the only international standard regarding language teaching which is clearly mentioned in the discourses analysed.

International organizations especially through international rankings assess in which areas the “quality of education” should be improved. Kazakhstani education discourses as in many other countries involve a massive rhetoric regarding the “quality of education” (Chankseliani and Silova 2018, 11) which should constantly be monitored especially through international rankings to modernize the education system<sup>93</sup>. To reach high education quality is an elusive target as everyone agrees with the goal, but few have a clear idea of how to achieve it. In the neoliberal context, education quality is mainly defined by knowledge and skill development measured by the levels of achievements of the students easier to measure than the quality of instruction in itself (Chapman and al. 2005, 516; Knodel and al. 2014). However, in the official discourses analysed, education rankings are supposed to reflect the quality of the Kazakhstani education system. The *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* (MoES 2010) declares that the

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<sup>89</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]. Astana, 215.

<sup>90</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 247.

<sup>91</sup> World Bank Group. *Strengthening Kazakhstan’s Education System : An Analysis of PISA 2009 and 2012*.

<sup>92</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2020. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2019)*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]. Astana, 229.

adequacy of the education provided is an indicator of its quality and to measure the adequacy of the education, the country should participate in research on students' educational achievements. The 12-year reform would enable a more adequate education system as this is an international standard encouraged by international organisations. Thus, 12 years of compulsory school education will increase the quality of the education system “which will be confirmed by international indicators”<sup>94</sup>. The presupposed idea is that more time in school will yield higher levels of student learning (Chapman and al. 2005, 522) increasing the quality of education as assessed by international rankings.

Kazakhstan is under indirect pressure to reform its education system as it is a member of certain international organisations, or it wishes to join them. The country joined the “European educational space”<sup>95</sup> and is part of the Bologna process which is presented as an asset for the Kazakhstani education system, but this also creates pressure to harmonise its secondary education with the EU standards and with the 12-year school system. Kazakhstan is an observatory member of the OECD and the country’s leaders wish to become a full member as the Kazakhstani Ministry of Economy stated in 2017<sup>96</sup>, which would be a sign towards the international community of being part of the most developed countries. The *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025* (MoES 2019) indicates that “in 2017, Kazakhstan became a member of two relevant OECD committees, the Committee on Education Policy and the Committee on Science and Technology Policy, which demonstrates international recognition of the achievements of Kazakhstan's education system.” Belonging to these committees indicates that Kazakhstan is progressively reaching international standards leading to the conclusion that to be a member of the organisation, the country needs to go further to fully reach these standards. The *Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science for 2020-2024* (MoES 2020) explains that “to ensure structural integration of the secondary education system of the republic with the education systems of OECD countries”, the Ministry is updating the content of secondary education while the 12-year school system is the most adopted education system in OECD countries. An OECD document regarding secondary education in Kazakhstan takes the example of Chile which successfully reformed its education system regarding the OECD standards cooperating with the organization during the reform process and finally joining the OECD in 2010<sup>97</sup>. A parallel is drawn with the Kazakhstani

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<sup>94</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 53.

<sup>95</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Suleimenov, Timur. 2017. ‘Kazakhstan Is Getting Closer to OECD Membership’. *EURACTIV*.

<sup>97</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 37.

education system as Chile, a country less performing than the average of OECD countries in education rankings is used as a case study.

International cooperation with regional organizations specialized in education strengthens Kazakhstan's integration in the world educational space. NIS schools have adopted the 12-year education model and deliver high school diplomas supposed to be of higher quality than the training provided in ordinary Kazakhstani schools. These NIS diplomas are recognised by some international universities and foreign countries. Thus, "in order for international universities to recognise the NIS Certificate, NIS will be cooperating with the world's leading organisations in the field of qualification comparison and document recognition (NARIC, NUFFIC, ANABIN, etc.)."<sup>98</sup> These organisations specialised in the recognition of qualifications are interestingly European led ones: NARIC is mainly supported by the Council of Europe, Nuffic is a Dutch organisation and ANABIN is a German programme. The same document indicates that the NIS network is a "member of the international communities of the International Baccalaureate, the Council of International Schools, World Association of Lesson Studies, International Association for Educational Assessment, and Association for Educational Assessment – Europe"<sup>99</sup> which are all Western-led education organisations. The memberships of these various international organisations prove that the NIS schools managed to reach certain international standards to be accepted among them. Besides Western led organisations, it is also explained that NIS "remain a member of many associations in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Central Asia, etc."<sup>100</sup> even if this is much more briefly mentioned and the names of the associations are not specified. The Eurasian organisations, the Community of the Independent States (CIS) and the Eurasian Economic Area (EEA) are barely quoted as they have few policies in the field of education.

International organizations do direct recommendations or bring technical assistance to Kazakhstani authorities which influence countries policies and official discourses on education. The UNESCO paper on lifelong learning in Central Asia, mentions that Central Asian countries "offer 11 years of general school education (4+5+2) which is one year shorter than many other countries in the world"<sup>101</sup>. The paper underlines the potential negative consequences of this

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<sup>98</sup> *2030 Development Strategy - Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Autonomous Educational Organisation*. 2018. Astana, 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Carlsen, Arne. 2020. *Ensuring Lifelong Learning for All in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Country Evidence and Policy Recommendations*. Almaty: UNESCO Almaty Office, 18.

education structure: “The duration of free education offered (...) can influence access to higher levels of education as well as cause unequal opportunities in terms of lifelong learning in adulthood”<sup>102</sup> Kazakhstani authorities can themselves require the advice of international organizations regarding the reforms implemented. For instance, the *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan* (OECD 2014) was “requested by the government of Kazakhstan (...) to evaluate the education reform agenda (feasibility and focus)”. The “Education Modernization project” funded by the World Bank in Kazakhstan brings technical assistance to “implement a new curriculum for grade 1–12” and for the use of English as a language of instruction calling it a “bold yet challenging initiative”. Technical assistance is brought by the World Bank regarding the training of university staff and teachers in English<sup>103</sup>. The documents published by international organisations mention the positive aspects of the 12 years education and of English teaching as well as the international support provided but do not position themselves regarding the teaching of Russian and Kazakh languages probably as this is a sensitive domestic topic.

The development of the English language through the Trilingual policy is also a means for Kazakhstan, a rather peripheral state, to strengthen its integration in the globalized world. In the *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education*, the importance of learning English for political and economic reasons is underlined: English is the “official business language of forums, negotiations, diplomatic interactions”<sup>104</sup>. The English language is explicitly presented by the Ministry of Education as a “tool for successful integration into the global community.”<sup>105</sup>

The promotion of English language teaching as part of the Trilingual policy can be interpreted as a global tendency, as a necessity imposed by the globalization but is also part of a national strategy to counterbalance the influence of the Russian language and the Russian soft power in the Kazakhstani society. The knowledge of various languages strengthens the political ties with countries which speak these languages as well. Thus, the Education Minister declared in 2019

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> World Bank. *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Loan of US\$67 Million to the Republic of Kazakhstan for an Education Modernization Project*. 2017, 34.

<sup>104</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 3.

<sup>105</sup> MoES, and Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015. *Roadmap for the Development of Trilingual Education for the Years 2015-2020 [Дорожная Карта Развития Трёхязычного Образования На 2015-2020 Годы]*, 3.

: “to integrate, to work with our neighbouring states, we need to know Russian and English”<sup>106</sup>. Interestingly, English language is not the official language in any of Kazakhstan’s neighbouring country. The *Kazakhstan Mid-Term Assessment for Achievement Goals of Education for All* recalls the guiding principles defined by Nazarbayev in 2012 regarding the development of the whole Kazakhstani society which can be applied to the education system. The key principles include a “coherent and predictable foreign policy” as well as the “promotion of national interests and regional and global security” which are reflected in the education reforms<sup>107</sup>. Thus, in the *Strategy Kazakhstan-2050*, Nazarbayev declared that the Trilingual policy aimed to “create conditions for our children to learn Russian and English equally as Kazakh language”<sup>108</sup> giving to the three languages the same importance. As explained in the previous chapter, this statement is contradictory with other ones establishing that the Kazakh language teaching should be the priority in the education system. The same paradox is addressed regarding the order of priority between learning Russian and English which is a very sensitive topic. This reflects the balanced diplomacy exerted by Kazakhstani authorities who wish to keep good relations with Russia without pushing forward too much the English teaching which could be interpreted as creating a backslide of the Russian language. An education report explains that the Kazakhstan language situation is “characterised by Russian-Kazakh and Kazakh-Russian bilingualism” and that “English is one 'step behind', since Kazakh and Russian are studied in a “natural linguistic setting”<sup>109</sup>. Thus, education officials are perfectly aware that English language acquisition is a harder task than the learning of the two other languages.

The transition from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet for the Kazakh alphabet in the education system is also a way to distance the country from the Russian sphere of influence and to strengthen Kazakhstan’s geopolitical integration. This reform of the alphabet is associated with official Kazakhstani discourses on the Trilingual reform but also surprisingly with speeches on the 12-year reform. The draft of the *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages* indicates that Cyrillic script system has only been used since 1940 in Kazakhstan and that before Arabic script and then Latin script were used to demonstrate that historically Kazakh language

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<sup>106</sup> ‘New Education Minister Answers Controversial Question about Trilingualism [Новый Министр Образования Ответила На Нашумевший Вопрос о Трехязычии]’. 2019. *Sputnik*.

<sup>107</sup> MoES. 2014. *Kazakhstan Mid-Term Assessment for Achievement Goals of Education for All: Country Report*. Astana, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state”. 2012. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>109</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2020. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2019)*, 20.

used other alphabets<sup>110</sup>. The Latin alphabet is much more widespread in the world than the Cyrillic alphabet and the majority of the most economically developed countries use the Latin alphabet. Thus, in his address of January 2018, Nazarbayev declared that the Kazakh language should be “terminologically closer to the international level” and that “the transition to the Latin alphabet will help to resolve this issue.”<sup>111</sup> However, this transition from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet has been slowed down under Tokayev, postponed to 2031 instead of 2023<sup>112</sup>, and the *State Programme for the Implementation of Language Policy for 2020-2025* (MoES 2019) enacted at the beginning of his mandate underlines that this issue should be approached “very carefully and tactfully”.

The trilingual reform reflects the geopolitical choices of the Kazakh authorities, which grant a secondary place, or even none, to other foreign languages. Some languages such as the Arabic language are inexistent in official discourses even if there are some debates about it: for instance, an academician proposed to the Education Ministry to introduce the study of the Arabic language in the school curriculum<sup>113</sup>. The reluctance towards Arabic language teaching can be explained by the fears regarding Islamic radicalization as well as by the rather distant cultural links. Turkish language could be an important language to master for Kazakhstani students. In the draft of the *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*, Turkish language is the only foreign language indicated along with English language<sup>114</sup>. This can be explained by the presence of Turkish language schools and the close cultural links between Kazakhstan and Turkey. However, this is the only mention of the Turkish language in the education documents analysed indicating that the language is far from being as strategic as Russian and English languages. Chinese language is not mentioned in the official texts analysed whereas China is an important political and economic partner for Kazakhstan. This can be explained by the complicated relations between China and Kazakhstan and a mistrust towards China among the Kazakhstani elites and more generally in the Kazakhstani society (Burkhanov and Chen 2016). Chinese language teaching has started to develop in Kazakhstan but mostly through private lessons or in higher education institutions often with the support of the Chinese

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<sup>110</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages (draft)* [Единый Языковой Стандарт Обучения Трех Языкам (проект)]. Astana, 5.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to the People of Kazakhstan, January 28, 2011’. 2011. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>112</sup> Satubaldina, Assel. 2021. ‘Kazakhstan Presents New Latin Alphabet, Plans Gradual Transition Through 2031’. *The Astana Times*.

<sup>113</sup> Dabirov, Abir. 2021. ‘Why Introduce Arabic Language in Schools of Kazakhstan? [Зачем Вводить в Школах Казахстана Арабский Язык?]’. *inbusiness.kz*.

<sup>114</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages (draft)* [Единый Языковой Стандарт Обучения Трех Языкам (проект)]. Astana, 2.

government (Leskina and Sabzalieva 2020). In 2018, Nazarbayev declared that Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) students have started to learn a second foreign language and he underlined the importance of learning the Chinese language for economic and demographic reasons, but he still explained the importance of English spoken by lots of businessmen especially in Japan and China<sup>115</sup>. During Soviet times, other foreign languages were widely taught in Kazakhstan such as German and French. These languages are still taught in higher education and in private schools but are no longer taught in public schools which used to formerly specialize in these languages until they were forced to introduce Kazakh language (Friedli and al.,138).

These education reforms reflect various geopolitical goals especially to increase the role of Kazakhstan on the international stage and to facilitate its access to some international organizations. Through education reforms, Kazakhstani authorities also adopt the rhetoric of these international organizations.

#### **4.3 The adoption of the international rhetoric and content in education reforms**

Kazakhstani authorities adopted international rhetoric regarding the content of the education reforms. Some globalized discourses about education are widespread in Kazakhstani official discourses such as the notion of “lifelong learning”<sup>116 117</sup>. Interestingly, this notion is also used in a UNESCO document entitled *Ensuring lifelong learning for all in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan*<sup>118</sup>. As this document has been published in 2020 so after the previous ones, it cannot be said that Kazakhstani officials took inspiration in this document to elaborate this concept. However, this UNESCO paper shows the importance of this topic in international rhetoric regarding education and more specifically in international recommendations regarding the Kazakhstani education system.

These international concepts are used to legitimize domestic education policies. For instance, one of the aims of the *State Programme for the Development of Education for 2011-2020* is to

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<sup>115</sup> ‘The President Advised NIS Students to Learn Chinese and English [Учить Китайский и Английский Языки Посоветовал Президент Учащимся НИИШ]’. 2018. *Total Kazakhstan*.

<sup>116</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>117</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*.

<sup>118</sup> Carlsen, Arne. 2020. *Ensuring Lifelong Learning for All in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Country Evidence and Policy Recommendations*. Almaty: UNESCO Almaty Office.

ensure “life-long education” and “education for all”<sup>119</sup> which are two widespread concepts in the education field. The document states that in this life-long learning perspective, “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 to acquire the state language”<sup>120</sup>. Thus, this international concept of “life-long learning” is used to legitimize a domestic education reform, the Trilingual education policy. The lifelong learning concept is also used to justify the extension of compulsory school education by one year. A goal of the *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025* is to “ensure the coherence of educational programmes from pre-school to postgraduate education based on the principle of **life-long learning**”. An indicator of this goal is the “percentage of schools that have switched to a 12-year model” which indicates the connection made between the lifelong learning principle and the 12-year reform<sup>121</sup>. Similarly, the concept of “functional literacy” is broadly used by Kazakhstani authorities without being clearly defined. This concept is reappropriated to justify the transition to a 12-year education and to a Latin alphabet which aim to develop “functional literacy of pupils and students”<sup>122</sup>.

The concepts of democratization and decentralization of the education system are also widespread in international discourse and standards in the field of education. One of the main areas of education reform during these last decades have been decentralization (Watson 2001, 6) including in Central Asia (Chapman and al 2005, 523). These concepts are mobilised in the 12-years reform discourse in Kazakhstan : “In order to effectively implement the 12-year education standard and ensure the quality of the system, the **shared responsibility** of the school as an organization, the local community, social partners and government authorities at various levels of this process is necessary.”<sup>123</sup> These concepts are also used regarding the Trilingual policy reform : “No ready-made recipes should be expected for organizing trilingual education. (...) Taking into account regional contexts, capacities and resources, a school which decides to trilingualize will choose the best model for providing trilingual education”.<sup>124</sup> This indicates

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<sup>119</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*. Astana, 50.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> MoES. 2019. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования и Науки Республики Казахстан На 2020 - 2025 Годы]*.

<sup>122</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016 [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы]*, 24.

<sup>123</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общего Образования в Республике Казахстан]*, 21.

<sup>124</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytical Center. 2020. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2019)*, 23.

that the government is aware that the linguistic situations and the capability of the schools to implement the three-language policy largely differ. Parents and students are also supposed to be involved in the Trilingual education reform: “there will be a gradual transition to the study of individual subjects in three languages (...) according to the wishes of students and parents”<sup>125</sup>. The concept of “democratization” even if mentioned in the discourses analysed is much less clearly defined and applied in practice, used as a synonym for decentralization regarding the management of education as in this example associating “democratization and public participation in education management”<sup>126</sup>. These concepts of democratization and decentralization are part of the desire to offer individualized education that is as close as possible to the needs of pupils.

The content of education is changed as well to respond to contemporary challenges in line with widespread education ideologies. The education reforms emphasise the need to develop critical and independent thinking in opposition to the Soviet period which was criticized as trying to erase any critical thinking among citizens. The international organizations point out the Soviet legacy as the cause of the poor education results in Kazakhstan: “Kazakhstan shares a teaching heritage with other countries formerly hidden behind the iron curtain, all of which have disappointing PISA results”<sup>127</sup>. The poor reflexive skills are thus attributed to the Socialist heritage as assessed by the low results of other countries from the Eastern bloc: “Other countries in which the “reflect and evaluate” subscale pulled down overall performance results include the Slovak Republic, Russian Federation, Lithuania, Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Azerbaijan, Poland, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia.”<sup>128</sup> These poor results are explained by the traditional way of teaching inherited from the Soviet Union and shared with other developing countries in the Middle East, a “frontal teaching with relatively little interactivity or work with small groups, and with a focus on theory rather than practice and an emphasis on memorising key texts and facts”<sup>129</sup>. The Soviet heritage is barely mentioned from the side of Kazakhstani official discourses and never in negative ways. The only explicit mention is in this passage claiming that the Kazakhstani education system initially “aimed at

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<sup>125</sup> MoES. 2019. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования и Науки Республики Казахстан На 2020 - 2025 Годы]*.

<sup>126</sup> MoES. 2004. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования в Республике Казахстан На 2005-2010 Годы]*.

<sup>127</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 73.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88

preserving all positive aspects of the Soviet period”<sup>130</sup>. A report published by Kazakhstani authorities explains however that the “interpretation of the notion of 'education standard' in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)<sup>131</sup> is fundamentally different from the one in foreign countries”. According to this report, in CIS countries, education standards are considered as an instrument to rationalize the objectives and content of education for all the students contrary to the international practice, in which education standards are a system of educational goals and outcomes adapted to the different needs of the students<sup>132</sup>, without clearly designating the Soviet legacy or criticizing it.

Even if the Soviet system is not criticized directly by the Kazakhstani authorities, they underline that the Kazakhstani education system relies on an “outdated mythological basis, structure and content”<sup>133</sup>. The weaknesses of the Kazakhstani system are acknowledged in the official documents of Kazakhstani authorities. The education system focuses “on formal outcomes rather than personal development” and there is an “insufficient recognition in the education content of the aim of developing older teenagers personality”<sup>134</sup>. The “knowledge-centered-approach” is criticized by international organizations such as in a study funded by the World Bank in 2020 mentioned in an education report published by the national authorities of Kazakhstan<sup>135</sup>. The Kazakhstani education system focuses only “on the assessment of the knowledge component”<sup>136</sup> and lacks content for “forming motivations for professional self-determination, building life prospects”<sup>137</sup>. The “overload of academic subjects” is pointed out by OECD experts after the PISA results in 2018 of Kazakhstan which is then mentioned by Kazakhstani authorities<sup>138</sup>. Deyoung (2006) explains the general curriculum overload in Central Asia by the introduction of additional hours of teaching regarding local languages and histories.

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<sup>130</sup> MoES. 2014. *Kazakhstan Mid-Term Assessment for Achievement Goals of Education for All: Country Report*. Astana: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 6.

<sup>131</sup> The CIS is an intergovernmental organization made of 9 member states from the post-Soviet space (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan).

<sup>132</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]*. Astana, 208.

<sup>133</sup> MoES. 2004. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования в Республике Казахстан На 2005-2010 Годы]*.

<sup>134</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>135</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2021. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2020 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2020]*. Astana, 180.

<sup>136</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2021. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2020 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2020]*. Astana, 213.

International studies underline that Kazakhstan does not respect the common practices regarding the academic load “that it is the highest among the CIS countries and on average by more than a third higher than in the OECD countries”<sup>139</sup>. Thus, the annual academic load of students should be reduced as it is considerably higher than the average of other countries especially post-Soviet countries which is a further argument to increase the length of study to 12 years to have a better repartition of the academic load between the years.

The two education reforms focus on the individual development of the students in the modern world as the students should gain useful knowledge for the contemporary globalized world. The education should be more personalized and adapted to the various needs of the students. Widespread concepts in global education discourses such as the concepts of “Outcome based education” promoted especially by the OECD (Steiner-Khamsi 2006) and the “student-centred approaches” are used in Kazakhstani education discourses: “The 12-year education will be based on the expected results, which will allow assessing the work of the student and his/her **achievements**. The formulation of expected results will make it possible to objectively assess students' learning achievements, determine the **individual development trajectory of each pupil**, taking into account their **individual abilities**.”<sup>140</sup> Priorities should change in the education system passing from “acquisition of ready knowledge to independent cognitive activity of each learner”<sup>141</sup>. The goal is not so much to gain knowledge but to know how to use it in an efficient way, which is the type of education promoted by international organisations and Western countries. Cognitive capabilities should be developed through the “abilities to solve problems, zeal and creativity”<sup>142</sup> which is essential “to be successful in [a] modern rapidly changing world”<sup>143</sup>. The learning of various languages through the Trilingual policy would also enable students to gain this range of skills as an official document declares that “multilingual children have a greater **flexibility** of thinking and that “language activities in multiple languages contribute to the **development of the cognitive system**”<sup>144</sup>. All these

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<sup>139</sup> Carlsen, Arne. 2020. *Ensuring Lifelong Learning for All in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Country Evidence and Policy Recommendations*. Almaty: UNESCO Almaty Office, 24.

<sup>140</sup> MoES. 2016. *State Programme for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019 [Государственная Программа Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2016 - 2019 Годы]*.

<sup>141</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2015. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2014)* ) [Национальный доклад о состоянии и развитии системы образования по итогам 2014 года], 72.

<sup>142</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 35.

<sup>143</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Centee. 2015. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2014)* ) [Национальный доклад о состоянии и развитии системы образования по итогам 2014 года].

<sup>144</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 279.

education values seem to be the rather different to the way the Kazakhstani education system is depicted above by international organisations and the Kazakhstani authorities.

The goal of the 12-year education reform is to prepare students to “adult life”<sup>145</sup> through the development of their intellectual capabilities but also in fostering their personal development. The new curriculum includes “scientific-based subjects” and “meta-subject competencies, indicators of personality traits and soft skills”<sup>146</sup>. The Kazakhstani education system should encourage the personal and psychological well-being of the children with the purposes of “self-knowledge” and “self-realization”<sup>147</sup>, expressions which are frequently used in the discourses analysed. Students should not only develop their individualities but also learn how to behave regarding the others and gain the “ability to work in team”<sup>148</sup>. In the new 12-year curriculum, a professional component is included in secondary education to better prepare students to the professional life. The reform involves a more specialized and differentiated education. In the last grades of secondary education, a significant proportion of the teaching time is dedicated to elective courses<sup>149</sup> and “students can choose the level, forms and methods of learning and implement individual creative programmes in accordance with their interests, abilities and projected professions”<sup>150</sup> contrary to the tradition of a single curriculum. Similar reforms are under way all around the post-Soviet space and Fimyar (2008, 579) has studied similar education discourses of individualization of education in Ukraine. A reform regarding the introduction of an earlier specialized education in upper secondary schools was also discussed in Ukraine in the 2000s (Fimyar 2008, 586).

Although the poor results in the PISA rankings are broadly mentioned as an argument in favour of a 12-year school system which includes a greatly revised curriculum, the individualization of the content and the extension of the length of studies were already planned in the *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010* (MoES 2004) before Kazakhstan started to participate in PISA evaluations in 2009. Samurzin (2021) notices that international rankings might be used to legitimize changes already in train

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<sup>145</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*, 8

<sup>146</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026 [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы]*, 85.

<sup>147</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 35.

<sup>148</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. ‘National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Short Version for the 30 Years of Independence and 2021’. Astana, 2022, 80.

<sup>149</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

rather than establishing new education models so it can be erroneous to claim that new education reforms are only based on poor international rankings. Moreover, national responses to PISA rankings are diverse: the degree to which PISA surveys informs policymaking is insignificant in some countries to extremely high in others (Volante and al. 2017, 184). Deyoung (2006) explains that already by the late 1980s, educational reformers in Russia called for schools to become more learner-centred but major transformations of the education system were made impossible by the collapse of the USSR. The international Soros Foundation which greatly contributed to the introduction of the Outcome Based Education in the 12-year reform in Kazakhstan (Yakavets 2014, Kalikova and Silova 2008) is surprisingly not mentioned.

This reform of the way of teaching is supposed to benefit the whole society as it trains individuals for “useful participation in the society”<sup>151</sup> through gaining of a whole array of key competences such as critical thinking or creativity. A more specialized education that matches students' abilities and interests also benefits the economy, as individuals are better prepared for the jobs for which they are expected to be most productive. The willingness to develop the creativity and the individuality of the students can be associated to the willingness to develop entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan which is presented as “a leading force of the national economy”<sup>152</sup> whereas during the Soviet times, entrepreneurship was not possible and personal initiative was discouraged. The goal is to educate young people who are rational, risk acceptant and profit oriented as opposed to the Soviet model of education (Blum 2007).

#### **4.4 Education reforms: a means to boost economic competitiveness and social well-being.**

These official discourses claim that education reforms would enable the Kazakhstani Government to boost Kazakhstan’s economic competitiveness. The goal for Kazakhstan is to become one of the thirty most developed countries in the world, and this economic development will be partly assessed by the quality of its education. This is evidenced by the following statement of the Kazakhstan Government: “Kazakhstan will be among the 30 countries with the highest ratings on school education quality assessment indices”<sup>153</sup> As in the case of the passage

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<sup>151</sup> MoES. 2004. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010* [Государственная Программа Развития Образования в Республике Казахстан На 2005-2010 Годы].

<sup>152</sup> MoES. 2014. *Kazakhstan Mid-Term Assessment for Achievement Goals of Education for All: Country Report*. Astana: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 8.

<sup>153</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016* [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы], 44.

to a 12-year curriculum in Turkey, education reforms are often implemented in developing countries to sustain economic growth (Yuksel 2014 in Kasa and Ersöz 2016). A low-quality education system is perceived as a risk to economic prosperity (Knodel and al. 2014). Indeed, education is necessary for social and economic development as “development of modern infrastructure, establishment of an effective state mechanism and creation of a favourable business environment are impossible without educated people”<sup>154</sup>. The *State Programme for the Development of Education for 2011-2020* (MoES 2010, 52) states that economic prosperity and competitiveness rely on labour productivity and thus the state should develop the human capital. Human capital theory was developed in the 1950s and 1960s and the importance of investing in human capital through education to support the economic growth is widely recognized by international organizations (Yakavets 2014, 513). Education is depicted in an economic way in the *Strategy Kazakhstan-2050* as a “huge investment into future” which will enable the country to boost its economic competitiveness and Nazarbayev claimed that “to become a developed and competitive nation we must become a highly educated nation.”<sup>155</sup> In this neoliberal perspective, the education system has to be adapted to the economic needs of the country (Luke 1997) and education reforms are a means to align education with the economic needs. As mentioned before<sup>156</sup>, the development of the 12-year education system is used as an indicator to measure the alignment of the education system with the economic priorities<sup>157</sup>. Thus, the 12-year model of education is considered as a means to increase the human capital of the Kazakhstani population and to boost the whole economy of the country. This is also the case regarding the trilingual development which was pointed out by Nazarbayev as an “important aspect of economic and social modernization”<sup>158</sup>.

The word “competitiveness” is frequently associated with both Kazakhstani students and the Kazakhstani economy. A National report on the education system (MoES 2015, 222) states that “in order to improve the **competitiveness** of Kazakhstani students and to prepare them comprehensively for the subsequent stage of education and/or professional life, Kazakhstan has initiated a step-by-step introduction of trilingual education”. Thanks to these education reforms,

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<sup>154</sup> *State Programme of Development and Functioning of Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 [О Государственной Программе Развития и Функционирования Языков в Республике Казахстан На 2011-2020 Годы]*. Presidential Decree n°110, 52.

<sup>155</sup> Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state”. 2012. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>156</sup> See the first section of the Chapter 4.

<sup>157</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2019. *State Programme for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа По Реализации Языковой Политики в Республике Казахстан На 2020 – 2025 Годы]*.

<sup>158</sup> *2030 Development Strategy - Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Autonomous Educational Organisation*. 2018. Astana, 6.

students are supposedly more competitive on the national and international labour markets boosting the economic growth and thus, benefiting to the whole economy of Kazakhstan. The international organizations also point out the economic imperatives for the reform of the Kazakhstani education system. Thus, a report of the MoES quotes a study of the World Bank realized in 2008 which indicates that the “lack of highly qualified personnel impedes business development. With the extension of the Kazakhstani economy, enterprises will need to hire employees who have strong core skills (...), and also other skills of “high order thinking of the 21st century”<sup>159</sup>. An OECD report claims that with an extra-year of study, students “should improve (...) their potential for the economy of Kazakhstan”<sup>160</sup>.

The expansion of English language teaching is explained by the fact that the education system must correspond to the “dynamics and prospects for the development of the labour market”<sup>161</sup>. In their analysis about English language choices in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Ann and Smagulova (2022) notice that English increasingly comes to represent a move towards modernization and internationalization. The promotion of English language teaching is related to path dependencies in the Kazakhstani economy which relies on the exports of natural resources towards foreign markets contrary to other countries in Central Asia such as Kyrgyzstan whose remittance economy relies mostly on Russia which creates less incentives to learn English. Thus, the Trilingual reforms plans for science subjects to be taught in English: “Since 2017, the general secondary education organisations have been teaching selected subjects of the natural sciences and mathematics cycle (NSC) in English”<sup>162</sup>. The teaching of science subjects in English indicates that the English language is associated with progress and new innovations and technologies as already mentioned in the address of the President Nazarbayev to the nation in 2017: “English is the language of new technologies, new industries and new economy”<sup>163</sup>.

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<sup>159</sup> MoES. 2014. *Kazakhstan Mid-Term Assessment for Achievement Goals of Education for All: Country Report*. Astana, 60.

<sup>160</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 92.

<sup>161</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 4.

<sup>162</sup> ‘New Approaches to Training and Support for Young Talents - MES RK on the Development of Domestic Education and Science [Новые Подходы к Обучению и Поддержка Молодых Талантов — МОН РК о Развитии Отечественного Образования и Науки]’. 2021. *Official website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>163</sup> ‘The President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Address to the Nation of Kazakhstan. January 31, 2017’. 2017. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

The alignment of Kazakhstan's education system with international standards benefits individuals especially given the growing competition in the internationalized world regarding the mobility of students but also regarding skills and competences (Schatz and al. 2017, 174). The 12-year school reform is supposed to increase students' mobility on the international stage as indicated in the *2030 Strategy for the Nazarbayev International Schools* (2018, 19): "Another reason to offer 12-years of schooling is to ensure alignment with other education systems and international standards, as it will allow NIS graduates to enter international universities". Indeed, under the 11-year education system, in order to enter most foreign universities, students are required to study an additional year<sup>164</sup>. The Trilingual reform should promote proficiency in English which is often a requirement to study abroad and NIS students who already benefit from a Trilingual education can enter "international (...) higher education institutions without additional language training"<sup>165</sup>. These reforms not only have an impact on university admissions but also on jobs accessible after the end of the secondary school: a Kazakhstani national report on education states that "the current 11-year school [model] gives graduates access only to Level 3 of the European Qualifications Framework (...) [which means that these graduates] can only work in unskilled jobs. A 12-year school [system] gives full-fledged profile training and takes school leavers to Level 4 of the EQF, allowing them access to more skilled jobs."<sup>166</sup>. This idea is shared by international organizations stating that a transition to a 12-year education gives "more time to prepare future high school graduates for tertiary education or for transition to the labour market"<sup>167</sup>. The former President Nazarbayev (2018) declared that "all our graduates will master three languages at the level necessary for life and work in the country and in the global world" and that these new and unlimited opportunities" will benefit "each citizen of our country"<sup>168</sup>. These opportunities are first economic as the graduates will improve their competitiveness on the labour market but also personal as they will be able to live wherever they wish. The reforms are thus justified in terms of furthering the well-being of citizens and not being driven by political interests: political leaders act to improve the well-being of their population as the "knowledge of three languages is an obligatory condition of

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<sup>164</sup> Kakisheva, Dinara. 2022. *Duration of Education Programmes in OECD Countries and the Impact of Schooling Age on Children's Learning and Development* [Продолжительность Образовательных Программ в Странах ОЭСР и Влияние Школьного Возраста На Обучение и Развитие Детей]. Astana: IAC, 10.

<sup>165</sup> MoES, and Information Analytic-Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]. Astana, 221.

<sup>166</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]. Astana, 215.

<sup>167</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 92.

<sup>168</sup> 'State of the Nation Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, January 10, 2018'. 2018. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

one's wellbeing"<sup>169</sup>. There is a wide consensus in the society on the need to learn English in Kazakhstan from the parents who mostly would not be able to pay for private tutoring<sup>170</sup> and from young people who often perceive English as a means to have a better quality of life and to settle abroad (Sartor 2021, 54). National authorities also notice that school graduates who master the English language are more successful in their studies. In the *National Report 2020 on the State and Development of the Education System* (MoES 2021), Kazakhstani authorities underlined that regarding the United National Testing (UNT), the graduation exam at the end of the secondary schools, "school graduates who passed the test in English showed the highest results in comparison with their peers with other languages of instruction"<sup>171</sup>. The better results of students who pass the exam in the English language might be explained by the fact that these students are probably generally from more privileged backgrounds as the full proficiency in English is still rare in the Kazakhstani population but much more widespread in the urban elites (Anh and Smagulova 2022). The goal of the Outcome Based Education implemented in the new 12-year curriculum is to increase the quality of education regarding international standards but also to prove that the education system is designed for every citizen and that no one is left behind, that the government cares about the well-being of every student. Thus, education reforms are presented as not only beneficial for the whole society and the state but also for the individuals.

Due to its fast economic development, Kazakhstan aspires to be part of the world community of developed countries which partly relies on successful education policies. A modernized system of education which meets international standards would enable Kazakhstan to boost its economic competitiveness and the social well-being of its citizens while the country is increasingly integrated in the world economy. To reform its education system, Kazakhstan relies on the model of economically more developed countries supposed to have better-performing education systems.

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<sup>169</sup> 'Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to the People of Kazakhstan, January 28, 2011'. 2011. *Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*.

<sup>170</sup> MoES, and Information Analytic-Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]*. Astana, 222.

<sup>171</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2021. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2020 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2020]*. Astana, 38.

#### 4.5 Developed countries as role-models for reforms

International practices of national education systems are an important source of inspiration for Kazakhstani education reforms which is underlined in this passage regarding the Trilingual reform: “in international practice language is necessarily taught as an autonomous subject”<sup>172</sup>. This sentence justifies the need to have, in addition to courses taught in different languages of instruction, separate language classes that teach the languages in themselves. This is especially the case for English language teaching for which the international practice is largely developed and on which the Kazakhstani government takes example for the Trilingual reform: “as international experience has shown, the [most] effective way of teaching English is to introduce it as a language subject from the age of 9 to 12 and to implement it by increasing the number of hours and the quality of teaching”<sup>173</sup>. Kazakhstan plans to respect this model introducing firstly English as a language subject and then as a language of instruction.

Most of the time references are made to Western countries especially to European countries even if in a few cases, Asian countries are used as models. European countries are also presented as models in international reports such as this one from the OECD which indicates “a national curriculum should be developed for the 12th grade of schooling (...), that will equip Kazakhstan school-leavers with subject knowledge and skills comparable to those of 18-year-old school leavers in **high-performing European countries**”<sup>174</sup>. According to the *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 – 2026*, drafted by Kazakhstani authorities, the NIS programme which has already implemented the Trilingual curriculum and the 12-year model of education integrates “the best international experience” and “is comparable to the internationally recognised programmes of A-level (UK), O-level (Singapore), IB Diploma Programme (International Baccalaureate)”<sup>175</sup>. The secondary schools diploma mentioned as models are those from developed countries in Europe and Asia. Most of the time, Kazakhstani authorities mention developed Asian countries along with European countries but do not give only the example of Asian countries. In one case, only Asian countries (with no mention of European countries) are presented as models, in the case of education decentralization:

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<sup>172</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026 [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы]*, 32.

<sup>173</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2019. *State Programme for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа По Реализации Языковой Политики в Республике Казахстан На 2020 – 2025 Годы]*.

<sup>174</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 95.

<sup>175</sup> MoES. 2018. *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026 [Концепция Развития Образования Республики Казахстан На 2022 – 2026 Годы]*.

Kazakhstan will take “into account the experience of successful PISA countries (South Korea, Japan, China: Hong Kong, etc.)” to determine the “adequate level of autonomy of schools in regulating the curriculum” in the framework of the 12-year school reform<sup>176</sup>. Japan is also presented as a model for the development of patriotic, spiritual and cultural values in the new 12-years curriculum as it is a country which “harmoniously combines modern trends with traditional values of the nation”<sup>177</sup>. The fact that European countries are much more mentioned than developed Asian countries is surprising. Indeed, these countries are relevant models for Kazakhstan as some of them had to tackle similar challenges in the past such as economic development and nation building. In Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, education has played an important role in the process of state formation, accompanied by rapid industrialisation and general socio-economic development (Green, 2013). Moreover, these countries often have similar values such as the importance of the traditions as pointed out by Kazakhstani authorities in the Japanese case. The few references to Asian countries might be due to the composition of the OECD: there are few Asian countries which are members and most of the countries are European ones. It is thus easier for Kazakhstani authorities to have already prepared detailed analysis of the education situation in these countries. However, the PISA rankings include a much broader set of countries, but the analysis of the results of these countries might be less detailed than for OECD ones. It should also be underlined that most of the education experts who came to Kazakhstan especially for the development of the trilingual education model were from Western Europe or Northern America<sup>178</sup><sup>179</sup>. Moreover, secondary school diplomas in some Asian countries are not necessarily recognized by European Universities as in the case of Korea described in an official Kazakhstani document<sup>180</sup> while lots of Kazakhstani students want to study in Europe<sup>181</sup>.

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<sup>176</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *National Action Plan for the Development of Functional Literacy for Schoolchildren for 2012 - 2016* [Национальный План Действий По Развитию Функциональной Грамотности Школьников На 2012 – 2016 Годы].

<sup>177</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]. Astana, 285.

<sup>178</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2016. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the End of 2015* [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан По Итогам 2015 Года]. Astana, 221.

<sup>179</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana, 88.

<sup>180</sup> Kakisheva, Dinara. 2022. *Duration of Education Programmes in OECD Countries and Impact of Schooling Age on Children's Learning and Development* [Продолжительность Образовательных Программ в Странах ОЭСР и Влияние Школьного Возраста На Обучение и Развитие Детей]. Astana: IAC, 9.

<sup>181</sup> According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the top 10 destinations for Kazakhstani students in 2020, include 4 European countries (Czech Republic, the UK, Poland and Germany) and only one Asian country (in excluding the Central Asian countries), South Korea.

For the Trilingual education policy, Kazakhstani education experts largely use examples from European models. They explain that in European schools and in many EU countries, the method of teaching subjects in foreign languages has been fruitful which “gives us reason to believe that the method is potentially successful”<sup>182</sup>. However, the use of “gives us reason” and “potentially” testifies to the government’s uncertainty regarding this ambitious way of teaching. To underline similarities with the Kazakhstani education reform, the same document mentions that languages of instruction in the various EU countries are “foreign languages, regional minority languages or other official languages of countries” and the use of English as a language of instruction is “far ahead” of the use of Russian as a language of instruction in European countries<sup>183</sup> mentioning the two languages used in the Trilingual policy.

Other case studies regarding language teaching outside of Europe are also presented. Besides EU countries, Russia is mentioned along with the United States as examples of countries which have applied “immersion methods” regarding French language in the past through private schools in the United States or tutors in wealthy Russian families<sup>184</sup>. This is surprisingly the only reference to Russia as a model country for education in the Kazakhstani official documents analysed. Russia and the United States are presented as successful examples of countries which have a foreign language as a language of instruction legitimizing the willingness of the Kazakhstani government to provide part of the instruction in a foreign language, English. Kazakhstani authorities specially refer to multilingual education systems in multilingual countries such as Canada because Kazakhstan wishes to “continue international cooperation with representatives of other countries and regions implementing the polylingual education programme”<sup>185</sup>. The comparison of Kazakhstan with Canada is rather evident as it is mentioned that in the past the “country had two official languages and many Canadians had difficulty getting jobs or communicating in everyday life”<sup>186</sup>. This can be compared to the situation in Kazakhstan in which individuals who do not master the two languages can encounter difficulties in their personal and professional lives. The authors of the document explain that “a method of language immersion emerged, in which the teacher teaches instructions in the

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<sup>182</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Methodological Recommendations on the Application of CLIL-Technology in the Study Process of Schools [Методические Рекомендации По Применению CLIL-Технологии в Учебном Процессе Школ]*. Astana.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>185</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2020. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan (as of 2019)*, 30.

<sup>186</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 12.

classroom in a non-native language. After a lapse of time the foreign language begins to be perceived by learners as a native language.”<sup>187</sup> This is exactly what the Trilingual policy tries to implement in Kazakhstan with the teaching in three languages for students who are not necessarily native speakers.

International organizations such as OCED might be aware of the potential dangers of taking inspiration from foreign models and try to warn Kazakhstani authorities regarding it. Thus, while Kazakhstani authorities strive to implement a specialized education in upper secondary level on the models of various Western countries such as the US, France or Germany, an OECD report points to “the dangers in "buying in" unmodified international models: systems that work well in one country may not suit another country with a different economy, culture, and educational heritage regarding the profiled school”<sup>188</sup>. However, the Western countries’ models are compared, analysed and in some cases, criticized by Kazakhstani authorities. For instance, the extension of studies raises the question on the appropriate age to start and end compulsory schooling. To school the children earlier is not an option favoured by Kazakhstani authorities which take the example of UK which has an early age of compulsory schooling compared to “world standards”. They mention studies which demonstrate that children who go to school earlier “have a higher risk of later educational failure, difficulties in integrating into the labour market and lower earnings in adulthood” and which point to “the benefits of a later start to formal schooling”<sup>189</sup>. This reluctance towards supporting an earlier age for pupils to start school can be associated with the importance of traditional values and of the family in the Kazakhstani education discourses as mentioned in the first section of the Chapter 3.

The countries of the former socialist bloc are used as points of comparison, and some are also used as models. The other CIS countries are mentioned only a few times as comparisons for reaching international education standards regarding for instance the academic load which might be explained by the lack of comparative studies between these countries. The experience of the former Soviet countries is also used to justify the reforms as in this extract mentioning that “12-year secondary education is implemented in 136 countries, including developed countries: USA, Japan, Germany, France, Finland, etc. Of the post-Soviet countries,

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 103.

<sup>189</sup> Kakisheva, Dinara. 2022. *Duration of Education Programmes in OECD Countries and Impact of Schooling Age on Children's Learning and Development [Продолжительность Образовательных Программ в Странах ОЭСР и Влияние Школьного Возраста На Обучение и Развитие Детей]*. Astana: IAC, 4.

Uzbekistan, Ukraine and the Baltic states have chosen a 12-year model of education”<sup>190</sup>. This emphasizes that the common education practice nowadays among the most developed countries but also among the post-Soviet countries is to have a 12-year model of school education allowing the Kazakhstani Government to justify the transition to this new education model. Interestingly, Russia still has an 11-year system of education which is not mentioned. The successful example of some post-socialist countries is used as references by national authorities and international organizations. For instance, a Kazakhstani report indicates that an “Outcome-Based-Education” model is being adopted by a growing number of countries, including post-socialist countries (Slovenia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, etc.)<sup>191</sup> which is the model of teaching that Kazakhstan wants to implement in the new 12-years curriculum. The OECD also takes these countries as models for Kazakhstan regarding the reform of the teaching methods indicating that “a number of countries which share the same systemic heritage have shown that improvement is possible” and taking almost the same countries as examples<sup>192</sup>. It is interesting to note that while the Eastern European model of education is often perceived negatively by the West in a process of otherization, they can be presented as a model for Kazakhstan. The country tries to adopt a “catching-up thesis” regarding countries from the former Socialist bloc which successfully managed to reach the Western education standards (Bain 2010, 50) as Central Asian policy makers are relatively late comers to implementing education policy reforms (Niyozov and Dastambuev 2013).

Thus, developed countries, in particular West and Eastern European countries, are presented as models for the 12 years education reform and the Trilingual policy. These countries are chosen as models for their recognized education practices on the global stage especially by international organizations but also as their education systems are well documented by the large amount of data and analysis available. The education practices of these countries are reappropriated by Kazakhstani policy makers regarding the local context especially for the Trilingual teaching and in considering national identity building purposes.

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<sup>190</sup>MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>191</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]*. Astana, 207.

<sup>192</sup> OECD. 2014. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Secondary Education in Kazakhstan*. OECD Publishing, 73.

#### 4.6 The articulation between national identity and internationalization

This sub-chapter explores the interactions between national identity and internationalization in the discourses regarding the two reforms.

##### *The complementary purposes of internationalization and national identity*

The reforms always emphasise a double goal: to strengthen the Kazakh or Kazakhstani national identities and at the same to modernize the country economically and socially. Indeed, the government of Kazakhstan has tried to create a unifying idea of nation building “outside the ethnic or civic framework, regarding economic performance and competitiveness as unifying factors.” (Burkhanov 2020, 34). The investment in the human capital of Kazakhstan is perceived as crucial for the development of the nation state and the establishment of the national identity of Kazakhstan (Yakavets 2014, 514) on the national and international stages. Policy makers focus on economic policies such as the development of human capital to develop an economic environment in which individuals can increase their material well-being (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002, 4). As explained in the literature review, the former President Nazarbayev had based his legitimacy on the country’s economic prosperity (Matveeva, 2009) which explains the emphasis placed on the development of human capital and thus on education policies adapted to a globalized world. Thus, national identity can be an identity which projects to the future (Guiberneau 2001 in Ariely 2019, 765) through internationalization.

National identity and internationalization are not presented as contradictory but complementary processes in the two education reforms analysed. For instance, the *National Report on the state and development of the education system* (2014, 72) claims that educational materials are updated for the education efforts to “improve the Kazakh component and reflect social and economic modernization of the country”. Similarly, the “best books in the social sciences and humanities” are supposed to be translated into the Kazakh language<sup>193</sup> simultaneously enabling the promotion of the national language and internationalization of the education system. The government’s ambition to transition to the Latin alphabet is then a means to modernize the Kazakh language making it more international and more influential serving national identity

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<sup>193</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2019. *State Programme for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 [Государственная Программа По Реализации Языковой Политики в Республике Казахстан На 2020 – 2025 Годы]*.

interests. The Three language reform perfectly reflects this articulation between national identity and internationalization as the reform encourages at the same time Kazakh language teaching to strengthen the national identity but also English language teaching to open further the country to the world and to “modernization”. Thus, an official document regarding the Trilingual reform declares that “all three target languages in the educational process should not be developed in competition, but in unity”<sup>194</sup>.

More generally, education reforms should combine traditional Kazakhstani practices but also innovative international practices. The *Concept of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2022 - 2026* (MoES 2018) states that the elitist Nazarbayev Intellectual School programme “integrates the best Kazakh and international experience”. In the Trilingual reform, teachers themselves must combine these various practices “to use all the unique experience and knowledge of cultural traditions of peoples, universal values and world culture in creating a favourable educational environment”<sup>195</sup>. As noted by Bain (2010), there is a need to refer to pre-Soviet educational practices to legitimize the education reforms and to make them compatible with Western education concepts. In the case of Kazakhstan, there are also references to Soviet traditions even if they are not explicitly mentioned. Contrary to other post-colonial countries, Kazakhstan did not base its legitimacy on rejection of the Soviet past and of the former colonizer but has instead endorsed the Soviet past as an historical experience which made the country what it is (Matveeva 2009). For instance, the individualization of education promoted by international organizations in the new 12 years curriculum can seem contradictory with the “one-fits-all” approach coming from the Soviet times (Silova 2018, 12). When referring to Outcome Based Education, Kazakhstani authorities mention that in “traditional pedagogy”, probably during the Soviet times, Kazakhstani teachers were already used to formulate teaching goals when making lesson plans<sup>196</sup>. To emphasise the idea that education should not concern only intellectual skills but also the development of the full personality, as advised by OECD experts for the updated content of 12-year school education model, a Kazakhstani document underlines that this is in tune with Abay's ideas (a famous thinker in

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<sup>194</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Methodological Guidance on the Application of a Unified Language Standard for Teaching Three Languages in the Educational Process of Schools in Kazakhstan* [Методическое Руководство По Применению Единого Языкового Стандарта Обучения Трём Языкам в Учебном Процессе Школ Казахстана]. Astana, 18.

<sup>195</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education* [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]. Astana, 5.

<sup>196</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2019. *National Report on the State and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 2018*. Astana, 106.

Kazakhstan) “about [a] fully functioning person”<sup>197</sup>. It is also explained that the “traditional pedagogy” in Kazakhstan (probably during Soviet times) involved training goals which “implied the formation of certain personal qualities and properties of a character” and had components “similar to the structure of competence, a concept that came from Western pedagogy”<sup>198</sup>. Thus, Kazakhstani authorities associate the individualization of education, presented as a Western concept with the education tradition of Kazakhstan in pre-Soviet and Soviet times to make them compatible.

When the respect for the Kazakhstani nation, culture and values is mentioned as an important aspect of the education curricula, respect for other cultures in the world (i.e. in a spirit of tolerance) is almost systematically mentioned at the same time. In the Kazakhstani official education discourses, respect for the homeland is almost consistently linked to respect for the cultures of other peoples. For instance, in the new 12-year curriculum which is under implementation, in the primary and lower secondary school, students should be initiated to the national, ethnic, and state values and in upper secondary schools, students should understand the “dialectical unity of universal, national and ethnic values”<sup>199</sup>. Interestingly, universal values come later in the curriculum, after the understanding of national values, which are supposed to be the foundation of the pupil's education and probably the foundation of personal identity, which is more easily modulated at a younger age. The accent on tolerance towards other cultures, as in the case of the various national cultures of Kazakhstan, can be explained by the multicultural component of the Kazakhstani society and how the leaders build their power on the absence of ethnic conflict in the country. Another possible explanation is the multi-vector policy of Kazakhstan which attempts to rely on various international partners while avoiding taking strong positions on the international stage and trying to maintain good relations with most of the international community. More generally, tolerance values are common discourses promoted by the international organisations in education and are widespread nowadays in national education discourses as it has been analysed in the cases of Lithuania (Beresniova 2010) and Poland (Mach 2022), countries which do not have a positive international image regarding tolerance.

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>199</sup> МоES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

According to official education discourses, the future citizens of Kazakhstan should be educated to be good citizens in the society of Kazakhstan but also to be citizens of the world. Thanks to the Trilingual reform, “multilingual children can make a significant contribution to the society, country and the global community”<sup>200</sup>. The 12-year education reform should strengthen “the moral foundations that one needs as a member of society and as a subject of international cooperation”<sup>201</sup>. School curricula around the world are increasingly presenting students as members of a global community with the view that human beings form the ultimate unit of moral concern (Ramirez 2009 in Szakács 2018; Ariely 2021). This combination of various identities has been analysed in other countries such as Oman in which the curricula “should prepare pupils for becoming rightful Arab nationalists, decent members of the Islamic community and efficient global citizens” (Pingel 2017, 319). Thus, Soysal (2002) cited in Szakács (2018, 208) notices that there is an “unnecessary dichotomisation” between the national and international levels and that “there is a need to reconceptualise the transnational as integral to the very structuration of the national”. To be active and efficient citizens of Kazakhstan and of the world, the students should master IT skills, learn the “universal human values”<sup>202</sup>, acquire a “global mindset”<sup>203</sup> and be aware of environmental issues in the frame of the new 12-year curriculum. Ramirez (2009) cited in Szakács (2018) notices an increasing emphasis in national curricula worldwide on issues such as environment and human rights. However, among the values promoted by the international system, democratic values are interestingly mentioned very few times as already mentioned in the third part of the Chapter 4 while the concept of citizen is often used which can be explained by the autocratic nature of the regime in Kazakhstan. The *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education* (MoES 2010) indicates that one of the trends in the education system of the “developed countries” is to strengthen the “role of civic-patriotic, spiritual-moral, multicultural, healthy and ecological education for students”. This quotation is interesting whereas in some Western European countries, the concepts of patriotism and spirituality are sometimes undermined and badly perceived especially in education and the teaching of patriotism is widely debated in Western countries (Archard 1999; Curren and Dorn 2018; Westheimer 2006). For instance, the concept of spirituality is almost never mentioned in the Finnish education curriculum (Tirri and Ubani

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<sup>200</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2016. *Single Language Standard of Learning Three Languages*. Astana, 279.

<sup>201</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

<sup>202</sup> MoES. 2010. *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020*, 35.

<sup>203</sup> MoES. 2010. *Concept of 12-Year General Secondary Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Концепция 12-Летнего Среднего Общеого Образования в Республике Казахстан]*.

2013) and in the French curriculum, the concept of spirituality is totally banned from the school curriculum along with any religious teaching (Briançon and al. 2020). The objective of developing civic and moral qualities among students is more necessary in autocratic countries to ensure their legitimacy. In his analysis of the link between regime stability and higher education expansion in Kazakhstan, Tokbolat (2022) identifies patriotism as an important value transmitted in higher education curricula to ensure the legitimization of the regime. Students are taught to recognize the regime's political authority through patriotic education designed to educate citizens who support both the nation and the government. This analysis can be applied to the primary and secondary education curricula discussed in this thesis.

Ideas of strengthening the national identity through civic and moral values mingle in Kazakhstani education discourses with ideas of individualism which may seem contradictory. Thus, according to Kazakhstani official discourses, the education system should promote the multiple values of “patriotism, national identity, harmonious development, active citizenship, empathy, self-expression and hard work”<sup>204</sup>. Blum (2016) noticed that traditional values such as group solidarity and interpersonal harmony can co-exist with modern values of individual achievement and competition. Thus, the hybridization theory of Blum (2007) seems relevant in the Kazakhstani education system which sometimes absorb or sometimes reject global values. It should also be noted that adopting aspects of Western culture may not convey any message but may be simply statement of modernity (Blum 2016).

### *The development of the Kazakh language and identity limited by globalization*

At the same time, there is a fear of losing national identities due to globalization as explained in the *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education* regarding the Trilingual policy: “In modern conditions the human way of life is being unified in a certain way, many national differences are being erased, people lose their connection with their roots and the moral experience of previous generations is devalued.”<sup>205</sup> This fear may stem from the fact that Kazakhstan is a relatively young country with a relatively fragile national identity that its political leaders are constantly striving to

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<sup>204</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2019. *National Report on the State and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 2018*. Astana, 85.

<sup>205</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2021. *Methodological Recommendations on the Results of Monitoring the Development of Multilingual Education in Secondary Education [Методические Рекомендации По Результатам Мониторинга Развития Многоязычного Образования в Среднем Образовании]*. Astana, 5.

strengthen. The development of the Kazakh language and identity may thus seem limited by globalization processes.

English and Russian language teaching are more necessary in a globalized world than Kazakh language teaching, useful mainly in symbolic dimensions for national identity building. As in the Soviet times, in the Trilingual reform, Kazakh language is used to teach local knowledge such as national literature as well as national history and geography<sup>206</sup>. On the contrary, Russian language is used to teach World History<sup>207</sup> which can be a colonial legacy of the Soviet times and gives Russian language a higher degree of importance. This could be only a pragmatic separation between the two subjects, but this also reflects an ideological vision. English is now used for teaching sciences which were considered as the most cognitively challenging and prestigious subjects during Soviet times whereas universal and technical knowledge was taught in Russian language during the USSR. By deciding to teach these subjects in English and Russian, both languages are presented as strong assets for the mobility in the globalized world which could create competing discourses about these languages in the future reflecting shifting geopolitical dynamics. The Kazakh language is positioned in an inferior position regarding subject teaching as this one is only used for local subjects contrary to the other languages. In another perspective, the diffusion of English language teaching could be an instrument to strengthen national unity as according to Silova (2009), references to external systems or practices enables the coalition of opposing groups for the support of a third supposed more neutral. This can be applied to English language teaching which can be understood as a way for the Kazakhstanian authorities to achieve a balance between nationalist Kazakh and Russian groups, a role that the Kazakh language cannot hold.

Surprisingly, contrary to Laruelle (2014) and Anceschi's (2014) observations, there are only two references to Eurasia in the documents analysed which are not explicitly used as ways of justification for the reforms. A document regarding the Trilingual policy indicates that Kazakhstan is "at the centre of the Eurasian continent"<sup>208</sup>. The *Concept of Education Development by 2015* (MoES, 2004) underlines the purposes of building an Outcome based

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<sup>206</sup> MoES, and Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015. *Roadmap for the Development of Trilingual Education for the Years 2015-2020 [Дорожная Карта Развития Трёхязычного Образования На 2015-2020 Годы]*.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> MoES, and National Academy of Education Y. Altynsarin. 2018. *Methodological Guidance 'On the Application of a Unified Language Standard for Teaching Three Languages in the Educational Process of Schools in Kazakhstan' [Методическое Руководство По Применению Единого Языкового Стандарта Обучения Трём Языкам в Учебном Процессе Школ Казахстана]*. Astana, 18.

Education in the framework of the 12-year reform claiming that the various educational goals are among else, “trilingualism” and “Eurasian multiculturalism”. The goal is to frame the reforms in the context of the supposed multiculturalism of the Eurasian region, but this argument is only mentioned once in this document from the beginning of the 2000s. It could however be difficult to associate the Trilingual reform with the Eurasian ideology as the Kazakh language is only spoken in Kazakhstan. The Russian language could have been linked to a Kazakhstani transnational Eurasian ideology, but Kazakhstani officials probably do not take this stance to avoid strengthening the position of the Russian language and to irritate some parts of the society. Even if the Eurasian concept is not mentioned as such, Kazakhstan aspires through its reforms to become a source of inspiration for education especially in Eurasia.

#### *The use of education reforms as a soft power tool for Kazakhstani authorities*

The goal of these reforms is also to present Kazakhstan as a model in education in the region and among the developing countries, strengthening the Kazakhstani state and national model on the international stage. Kazakhstan strives to be a model for education especially in the region as indicated in the *State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020* (MoES 2010, 53): “Kazakhstan will rank among the leading CIS states in education development results”. The country desires to be a model in the region especially regarding the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) which have already implemented these reforms. NIS schools’ experience should be spread in regional events such as G-Global, an international platform of experts on global issues especially regarding Eurasia, the Astana Economic forum and the NIS International Conferences and consulting services could be provided<sup>209</sup>. All these international events are led by Kazakhstan and education is part of a more general strategy to be a leader in the region. To have a good education system recognized internationally by attaining a strong position in education rankings is also part of a country’s soft power. It can be used as an international branding as shown the case of Finland which is known for its very high-quality education system (Schatz and al. 2017).

Efforts to disseminate the Kazakhstani model of education are reflected in the organization of a Forum at Karaganda University in 2016 entitled “Language education in the conditions of socio-cultural transformation of modern society” to popularize the idea of trilingual education

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<sup>209</sup> 2030 Development Strategy - Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools Autonomous Educational Organisation. 2018. Astana, 23.

and organize an exchange of experience regarding language education<sup>210</sup>. Representatives from cultural organizations from various countries such as Germany, France, Poland or Russia were invited<sup>211</sup>. This reflects the desire of Kazakhstani authorities to present the country as a model on the international stage of a tolerant and multicultural society especially in the education field. The Kazakhstani Government's willingness to internationalize secondary education is related to its willingness to internationalize higher education as higher education is also an important part of a country's soft power (Nye 2005). A national report underlines that "language training plays a crucial role in the internationalization of higher education"<sup>212</sup> and to attract foreign students, education in English should be developed. Indeed, the membership of Kazakhstan to the Bologna process leading to recognition of qualifications among the member countries is a tool to attract fee-paying foreign students particularly from Asian countries who are seeking to study in English language (Silova 2011). The goal is also to increase the visibility of Kazakhstan on the international stage (Silova 2011) due to its performing system of education at all the levels (primary, secondary and higher education).

To sum up, surprisingly, internationalization and national identity are depicted as complementary processes in the educational reform process in Kazakhstan for both the Trilingual reform and the 12-years curriculum in which Kazakhstani policy makers try to combine local and international practices and values. This strong link between national identity and internationalization is especially noticeable in the use of education reforms as a soft power tool for the Kazakhstani authorities on the global stage. However, national identity development in the Kazakhstani education system through the Kazakh language and culture can be hindered by globalization compared to Russian and English languages which bring more opportunities for Kazakhstani individuals on the international stage which partly explain the Trilingual policy. Kazakhstani leaders are aware that the knowledge of Kazakh language and culture brings less more opportunities for Kazakhstani students and in this regard, a certain fear that internationalization hinders national identity building in the Kazakhstani education system can be noticed.

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<sup>210</sup> Bezkorovainaya Ksenia, 'Kargu Will Host an International Olympiad for the First Time in Kazakhstan [КапГУ впервые в Казахстане проведет международную олимпиаду]'. 2016. *ekaraganda.kz*.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> MoES, and Information-Analytic Center. 2017. *National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Year 2016 [Национальный Доклад о Состоянии и Развитии Системы Образования Республики Казахстан, Год 2016]*. Astana, 302.

## 4.7 Conclusions

The empirical analysis demonstrates that international rankings and reports produced by international organizations are mobilized by national officials to justify the Kazakhstani education crisis. Thus, according to the official education documents analysed, the education system must be reformed to enable the attainment of international education standards so the country can develop further economically and socially. The claimed benefits brought by these education reforms are not only for the state but for the individuals who benefit from this stronger integration into the globalized world. The Kazakhstani official documents analysed mention the education systems of other countries, which are used as models for certain “developed countries” such as the EU or as a means of comparison, particularly with other post-socialist and post-Soviet countries. International discourses around lifelong-learning or human capital as well as international institutions (OECD, UNESCO...) reports directly affect the content of the education reforms and the national discourses surrounding them. Interestingly, Kazakh and globalized values are never presented by Kazakhstani officials as in competition but as complementary to improve the education system and the internationalization of the education system also serves national identity goals such as national unification and increased national prestige on the international stage. Whereas the 12-year education reform relies more on international standards, the Three language education reform relies on countries’ specific experiences and international practices. A distinction can be made between the 12-year education system which is widely used around the world and largely encouraged by international institutions and the Trilingual reform which might be more controversial.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this research relies on the importance of ideologies to understand political reform and identifies two ideological drivers in education reforms discourses in Kazakhstan: the consolidation of the national identity and the desire for internationalization. The main goals of the research were to analyse how both Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities are used to justify these education reforms and how at the same time, the international environment was mobilized to justify these education reforms. A third research question tried to understand the possible differences of justification between the Twelve years reform which is a borrowed policy and the Trilingual reform which is more specific to the national context of Kazakhstan. The empirical analysis relies on official education documents (national reports, laws...) from Kazakhstani authorities since the launch of these two education reforms which are the main education reforms at the pre-tertiary level in the post-independence period of Kazakhstan. International organization reports have also been used as a complementary source of information to understand the international context of these reforms.

As a young independent and multicultural country, education reform discourses in Kazakhstan put a lot of emphasis on national identity building. In the discourses analysed, the national identity narrative relies on the contradictions between a civic Kazakhstani identity and a national Kazakh identity. The two education reforms analysed try to transmit shared traditional values and to foster Kazakh language for nation building purposes. The national identity narrative is complicated by the status of Russian language teaching as this language is the language of the former colonizer but is still in widespread use in society and in the post-Soviet space acting as a vector of openness to the world contrary to the Kazakh language. More generally in the education process, the Soviet legacy is still present and impacts the current education reforms. Thus, the efforts to replace the Russian culture and language with the Kazakh language and culture as vectors of the new national identity are limited by these various factors including also geopolitical considerations in a context of Russian imperialism towards the former post-Soviet space.

The internationalization process is supposed to benefit at the same time the Kazakhstani nation and the whole population. There are pragmatic reasons for internationalization. To adapt to international standards in education allows Kazakhstan to join various international

organizations and thus to be recognized on the global stage as a developed country while gaining more geopolitical weight. As a member of some of these organizations, Kazakhstan already had to adopt some norms. Another advantage of these reforms is that the global mobility of the population is facilitated through the recognition of their diplomas and their command of English. There are also ideological reasons associated with the adoption of a neoliberal rhetoric: these reforms should benefit Kazakhstan's economic growth and the whole well-being of the society especially while the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime is based on economic prosperity.

Internationalization and national identity are not presented as contradictory processes in Kazakhstani official discourses regarding these reforms. The goal is to shape at the same time a Kazakhstani citizen and a citizen of the world, with joint values between national and global values such as tolerance, respect for the other cultures and an active sense of responsibility. The theory of hybridization of Blum (2007) seems relevant in this case: Kazakhstani leaders adopt some globalized discourses and reject some others or at least adapt them to the local context including the authoritarian nature of the regime. For instance, official Kazakhstani education discourses narrowly associate the democratization of the education system to decentralization or present patriotism as a common value in education systems around the world while it is largely debated. Education discourses also try to draw a continuity between Kazakh traditions, the Soviet system and the Western model to justify the adoption of international practices. These education reforms are also a way for Kazakhstan which is the wealthiest country in Central Asia to promote an innovative education system in the region and to be a model for others of how to transition from a Soviet model of education to a "modern" education style adapted to regional particularities. Interestingly the rhetoric regarding the Eurasian space is very rarely mobilized by the Kazakhstani authorities regarding these education reforms contrary to what had been observed by authors such as Laruelle (2014) and Ancheschi (2014).

The two reforms strive to adapt to globalization pressures through the promotion of the English language presented as the language of globalization and through the harmonization of the Kazakhstani curricula with the international standards. The international community strongly supports the 12-year curriculum but is more reserved regarding the adoption of the Trilingual reform as a domestic reform with high national stakes. International discourses regarding these reforms are used by Kazakhstani authorities as a tool of legitimization. Kazakhstani authorities

do not only refer in their discourses to international organizations but also to the best practices of model countries, mostly developed Western countries.

Some differences between the two education reforms analysed can be noticed: the Trilingual reform, a “homemade” reform is much more directly concerned by national identity issues as the goal of the reform is explicitly to strengthen the position of the Kazakh language and culture in the society. The other proclaimed goal is to have a multilingual and multicultural society through the teaching of two additional languages, Russian and English. The 12-year education reform, a direct translation of international practices, has an impact on the whole curricula and on the values transmitted, addressing more directly economic issues.

There has been little change in the discourse on these reforms since the 2000s, particularly during the transition of power from Nazarbayev to Tokayev in 2019, although the transition to the Latin alphabet in the education system and in the whole society has been slowed down during this term. As these reforms are very difficult to implement in practice, the need to challenge them in discourses is probably rather limited. Moreover, changes of discourses regarding education reforms can take time as they often involve planning on several years.

As a limitation, this thesis only analyses the discourses but not the effects in practice of these discourses. As for now, they seem rather limited as these reforms are very ambitious to implement regarding the practical conditions of schooling especially in areas outside of the city centres in Kazakhstan as these schools often have very basic infrastructures and lack of teaching staff. This explains why these reforms have been delayed several times and are only really implemented in the elitist Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS).

Thus, this thesis demonstrates national education reform discourses in Kazakhstan are influenced by the international context but also how these national discourses reappropriate the international context to serve national identity interests such as nation-building. It would be interesting to analyse the concrete effects of these reforms in order to understand how international practices really influence national education practices beyond official rhetoric. Another interesting area of research would be to carry out a comparative analysis of the discourses on educational reform in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, given that the strengthening of the English language and the introduction of 12-year education are common challenges, in order to understand the similarities but also the differences in the

interactions between internationalisation and national identity, bearing in mind that some of these countries are dependent on international aid in the field of education.

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