

## DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIA STATE POLICY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of educational researchers undertaking fieldwork within three Central Asian countries – Uzbekistan Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Drawing on interviews with educational researchers from within and outside the region, the findings show that researchers encounter numerous ethical and methodological challenges in the process of gaining access to sites and participants, in data collection and in dissemination of findings. Many of them stem from a persistence of Soviet style controls, an underdeveloped research culture and use of standard research ethics guidelines. However, I argue that not all challenges can be blamed on the context of these countries, but in some cases neglect in proper planning and implementation of research is another reason for some challenges faced by researchers. The paper shows that some of the dilemmas and challenges faced by researchers are not unique to Central Asia, but ones that are also encountered in other countries.

**Keywords:** Research in Central Asia; education in Central Asia; educational research; research ethics

### INTRODUCTION

Today, the basis of sustainable development of any state is innovative activity. History has shown that man has come a long way with his intelligence, from inventing the first tools of labor to inventing algorithms and nanoparticles, modern innovative computers, the sun and other high technologies.

It is no secret that the XXI century is the age of engineering and technology. Yes, the name was not given in vain. Environmental events have increased the interest in studying it. This interest has been followed by unprecedented discoveries in science. Surprising news is being created day by day.

After the Central Asian countries gained their independence, their education sectors were forced to adapt to the new political, economic and social conditions. Yet despite enormous efforts made since 1990, the education systems in the region remain unable to offer children and youth an education of sufficient quality. Pressing problems, such as the lack of qualified teachers, inadequate school infrastructure, lack of innovative educational technologies and of modern textbooks, continue to threaten the overall development of students, to hamper the practical development of life skills and to deprive young people of vocational guidance. The programme of GIZ “Education System Reforms in Central Asia” supports the Ministries of Education of four Central Asian countries in their efforts to improve the quality of education, to introduce necessary reforms and to monitor their impact.

We focus our actions and efforts on providing quality education for children and young people from age 6 to 18, in order to facilitate their harmonious development and increase their employability in the future. For this purpose it is necessary to reform the system of training

and retraining of teachers, so that their teaching will meet modern didactic and methodological requirements and enhance the students' interest in learning. We focus on applied subjects such as technology, biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics, as well as on elementary school teaching. In addition, we support regional exchanges of experiences and processes of collaborative learning between the countries of Central Asia. We support the Central Asian countries to maintain an ongoing dialogue on education and to assist the improvement of school education in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan through the implementation of concrete reform projects. Building upon the methodological and didactic innovations developed and tested by the programme during the previous years, we advise our Kyrgyz, Tajik and Turkmen partners in developing and implementing strategies for disseminating these innovations.

Working with schools and teacher training institutions and, this dissemination is achieved through training replicators, through facilitating events and through enhanced networking between our main partner organisations so as to ensure the quality of teacher training and professional development of teachers. In addition, the programme facilitates regular meetings of representatives of the Ministries of Education as well as joint Central Asian studies of student achievement. Based on this improved cooperation in the region, each of the countries receives the necessary data and support in order to implement reforms at the country level.

Rapid changes in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres in our country also require radical reform of the education system, as a comprehensive education system is a comprehensive creative work of young people, which determines the future intellectual potential of the Republic and its prosperity and development. , is a key factor in educating independent practitioners. Therefore, the most important strategic direction in education is the innovative activity of educational institutions. This has been a topical issue in all educational institutions, especially in higher education institutions that train creative, high-potential professionals in the form of innovative technologies.

In particular, there is a growing interest in the use of innovative technologies, pedagogical and information technologies in the educational process.

Logical thinking based on innovative technologies is one of the most important factors in the development of a system of continuing education. They are reflected in a holistic system of various initiatives and innovations that lead to certain changes in the educational process, enriching the content, quality and effective organization of education. The rapid development of science, science and technology, the penetration of new techniques and technologies into all segments of society, the use of information technology in all governmental and non-governmental institutions require continuous education of teachers. The work of teachers is multifaceted, and they will have to play the roles of manager, communicator, guide, organizer, and evaluator.

Understanding the need to reform the education system requires that educational institutions be involved in innovative processes in practice, to see themselves in an innovative space where there is an opportunity to create, and most importantly, to adopt concrete innovations.

Today, the traditional and popular forms of education and upbringing in the school and higher education system are being replaced by innovative processes in the development of educational institutions.

Education is one of the first in our country to launch an active innovation movement. At some point, in the late twentieth century, such movements were launched. For example, the views of A.G. Rivin and V.K. Dyachenko on collective teaching, D.B. Elkonin, V.V. Davydov, L.V. In addition, other innovative educational technologies: dialectical teaching methods (AIGoncharuk, VLZarina), individual-oriented teaching (AAYarulov), "Ecology and dialectics" (LVTarasov), heuristic teaching (AVXutorskoy) dialogue culture (VSBibler, S.Yu.Kurganov), projected self-reflection (GPShedrovitskaya) and etc.

Among Central Asian republics, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have been ranked environments in which to undertake research (Central Eurasian Studies Society 2016). Opinions on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are varied (Central Eurasian Studies Society 2016), while limited information is available to assess the difficulty of undertaking research in Turkmenistan. In general, Central Asian countries have been lumped into the category of the least open societies (Freedom House 2017), particularly Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where even the educational system is undermined by political indoctrination (Silova, Johnson, and Heyneman 2007).

Policy makers in Central Asia stress the importance of research in improving the educational system, on guiding good practices and informing policies (Nazarbayev 2014; Rakhmon 2014; Sputnik 2016). Yet, empirical studies on the state of research in education and the experiences of educational researchers conducting research in Central Asia remain scant. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring and presenting the experiences of educational researchers in the three Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Integration of science and industry, cooperation between private entrepreneurs and the state, support for international relations of small and medium-sized innovative businesses are important conditions for the development of innovative activities. It should be noted that in the developed countries of the world, almost half of the innovations are carried out by organizations, small and medium-sized businesses. For example, according to the U.S. National Science Foundation, the number of innovations implemented in small firms is much higher than in medium and large firms per unit of cost. In addition, small firms are about a third more advanced in terms of innovation and customer delivery than large firms.

The integration process of science and industry will be most effective only if universities and technical institutes, together with manufacturing companies and firms, determine their share in patented development and implement research and innovation projects. It is no coincidence that 85% of all international patents issued by the European Patent Office are the result of such joint development.

The aim is to develop a better understanding of the challenges faced by 'insider' and 'outsider' educational researchers across the region in the process of gaining access to sites and participants, data collection and dissemination of findings. The terms 'insider' and 'outsider' are used based on how participants referred to themselves when describing their experiences of conducting research in Central Asia. However, with globalisation, migration of people, ideas and policies, researcher identities can be multiple, flexible and changing between insider and outsider (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015). Cross-cultural studies show that the position of researchers is not fixed but rather changes as they become more familiar with the historical, social, cultural, political and ethical context of their research (Milligan 2016).

In fact, two participants of this study, who initially considered themselves to be outsiders, highlighted that their experience of working in the region, which provided them with a better understanding of contextual issues, led them from being a complete 'outsider' to what Milligan (2016) terms as an 'inbetweener', an approach that helped her to build greater trust with her participants. The central research question that guided the study was 'What are the Methodological and ethical challenges that educational researchers face in Central Asia?' The study contributes to the literature on research contexts within Central Asia, and adds to a body of literature that utilises the division of 'outsider' and 'insider', to interpret the methodological and ethical dilemmas faced by researchers.

World experience shows that only in countries with a well-developed innovation system, innovation processes are carried out effectively, and technologies and other popular products are commercialized. The participation of the state in this process, the real sector of the economy and the support of innovative activities of leading companies are important. After all, science is the basis of this integration mechanism, which ensures the technical progress of the state and the socio-economic development of society.

Since 2009, more than 2,000 teachers of secondary schools and educational colleges have acquired new professional and methodical-didactic knowledge within our training courses. These teachers actively apply this knowledge, including new methods of teaching. For example, classes in natural sciences are oriented towards practical experiences from everyday life, through experiments done by the students. Such new concepts of teaching enhance motivation not only among teachers, but also among students. The ministries of education have successfully integrated our tested modules into the curricula of their national capacity building programs for teachers, using them to improve their systems of preparation of educational professionals. A growing number of teachers who have undergone such training are currently working as trainers themselves, teaching their colleagues using knowledge gained in the courses.

Brussels signed a project to modernize education at 15 universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and at 4 European universities – in Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Luxembourg.

The Innovative Eurasian University, Almaty Technological University, L.N. Eurasian National University are participating in the project from Kazakhstan. Gumilyov, as well as the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Most challenges faced by researchers appeared to be similar across all three countries. However, the findings point out that control and censorship over research and fear among participants is more prevalent in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Yet, Kazakhstan appears more progressive in promoting research, funding opportunities and developing research ethics guidelines. Surveillance, censorship and bureaucracy in research may be a unique characteristic of research in Central Asia, and issues that stem from the Soviet past. However, the literature shows that surveillance and censorship are issues that are also encountered by researchers in other contexts such as the Middle East (Hett and Hett 2013), Pakistan (Shamim and Qureshi 2013) and other post-Soviet Countries (De Soto and Dudwick 2000; Kutsyuruba 2017; Oleksiyenko 2014a). Findings from this study should of course be considered in light of the limitations, particularly the sample size, which does not permit broad

generalisation. Yet, the findings can be useful for doctoral students, academic scholars and independent researchers and consultants that are planning to undertake research in the region. The study also contributes to policy makers' understanding of challenges faced by researchers and addresses the need to create a more enabling environment to support research. Moreover, it contributes to the debates on ethical and methodological dilemmas faced in research within a non-Western context.

The initiator and coordinator of the project is the University of Ruse, Bulgaria, which has nearly 20 years of experience in managing such large-scale projects. The main goal of the project is to modernize the higher education system in Central Asia using new technologies.

In conclusion, it should be noted that if today's innovative technologies are successfully applied in science and education, the new generation will learn from this world experience and grow up, and the future of our country will be bright. There is no doubt about it.

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