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INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 4 IN KAZAKHSTAN – POLICY OF PARTNERSHIPS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. This article explores the role of international organizations in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) in Kazakhstan. The relevance of the study lies in the strategic importance of education as a foundation for human capital development, social equity, and economic growth in the 21st century. In the context of globalization, quality education is a key determinant of national competitiveness and sustainable development. Kazakhstan, as an active member of the international community, closely collaborates with organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, and UNICEF, whose initiatives have significantly shaped national educational reforms.

The main objective of the study is to assess the contribution of these organizations to the modernization of Kazakhstan's education system, analyzing their financial, methodological, and expert support, while identifying existing challenges in achieving SDG 4.

The methodology combines systemic, comparative, content, and historical-analytical approaches. Sources include Kazakhstan's state programs, official reports of international organizations, and scholarly works in comparative education. This methodological framework enables a holistic view of how global practices are integrated into national policies.

The scientific significance of the study lies in highlighting the necessity of adapting international practices to Kazakhstan's socio-cultural and economic context. The practical significance is reflected in recommendations for improving education policy, reducing the urban–rural gap, strengthening inclusive education, and advancing digital transformation.

The findings demonstrate that Kazakhstan has achieved considerable progress with international support: universal access to primary and secondary education has been largely ensured, digitalization initiatives have accelerated, and a legislative basis for inclusive education has been established. Nonetheless, persistent challenges remain, including regional inequality, teacher shortages, and risks of over-dependence on external models. For sustainable progress, Kazakhstan must balance global standards with national priorities, relying on the development of domestic expertise and research capacity.

Key words: quality education, Kazakhstan, international organizations, UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, UNICEF, inclusion, digitalization

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Introduction

Education in the 21st century is considered a key factor in sustainable development, social stability and economic growth. Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 4), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal involves not only expanding access to educational services, but also improving their quality, developing inclusiveness and eliminating social, regional and gender inequalities. In the modern world, achieving this goal is impossible without the active participation of international organizations that shape the global agenda in the field of education, provide financial, methodological and expert support to states, and facilitate the exchange of successful practices.

Kazakhstan, being an active participant in the international community, has also committed to implementing SDG 4. The country is implementing large-scale programs to modernize the education system, aimed at improving the quality of school and higher education, digitalizing the educational process, developing an inclusive environment and strengthening human resources. However, significant challenges remain on the path to achieving these goals, related to the imbalance between urban and rural schools, a shortage of qualified teachers, limited resources for implementing innovations, as well as the need to adapt international standards to national conditions.

In this context, the role of international organizations is of particular importance. UNESCO acts as a coordinator for monitoring progress within the framework of SDG 4 and the formation of global indicators of education quality. The World Bank actively finances projects related to the modernization of infrastructure and the introduction of digital technologies in Kazakhstan. The OECD exerts influence through international comparative studies (PISA, TALIS, PIAAC), the results of which have become an important incentive for revising educational policies and the content of curricula. UNICEF focuses on promoting children's rights and an inclusive educational environment, which is especially relevant for Kazakhstan with its ethnocultural diversity and regional characteristics [1].

Despite the positive trends, the question of the effectiveness of international initiatives and their impact on national educational policy remains open. On the one hand, Kazakhstan gains access to best practices and funding, which accelerates the modernization process. On the other hand, there is a risk of mechanically borrowing models that do not always consider the specifics of the national system and socio-economic conditions. Thus, the study of Kazakhstan's interaction with

international organizations in the context of implementing SDG 4 is a relevant research task. This article aims to analyze the contribution of international organizations to the development of the education system of Kazakhstan, identify successful practices and existing limitations, and formulate recommendations for further improvement of cooperation in this area.

Description of Materials and Methods

Research on international cooperation in education shows that the involvement of global institutions has a significant impact on the formation of national educational strategies. According to Breakspear (2012), OECD programs and initiatives, in particular PISA, have a “normative impact” on state policies, forming their desire to adapt to international standards of education quality. This is especially relevant for Kazakhstan: the results of participation in PISA have repeatedly become the starting point for reforms in the content of school programs and teaching methods [2,3].

Edwards (2024) emphasizes in his study that the World Bank plays a key role in the process of reforming the educational systems of developing countries, offering not only financial mechanisms, but also expert support. In Kazakhstan, such projects were associated with the modernization of infrastructure and the introduction of digital technologies, which is especially important for overcoming the urban-rural divide [4].

Elfert (2023) analyzes the activities of UNESCO and the World Bank in the context of global education governance, emphasizing that these organizations contribute not only to the development of a normative framework, but also to the coordination of international knowledge exchange. Kazakhstan, being a member of UNESCO and a signatory to key conventions, actively participates in global initiatives, including monitoring the implementation of SDG 4 [5].

A separate layer of research concerns the role of UNICEF. Godfrey et al. (2012) note that the organization plays a key role in developing indicators for assessing “child-friendly schools.” These ideas have been partially implemented in Kazakhstan as part of national inclusive education programs. Lennox, McKenzie, and Williams (2021), in a study on educational strategies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, point to the importance of UNICEF’s experience in overcoming the distance learning crisis, which also found a response in Kazakhstan’s educational policy [6].

Kazakh authors are actively researching national features of the integration of international practices. Thus, Zamirbekkyzy et al. (2024) consider the financing of secondary education as a key factor in the sustainability of reforms and note that international loans and grants are becoming a significant source of resources. Abylkassymova (2020) analyzes the modernization of the content of school education, emphasizing that borrowing international experience should be accompanied by its adaptation to national specifics. Shaimukhanova (2012) in a historical study of the development of the Kazakh educational system shows that international cooperation at different stages became a driver of modernization.

In addition, Volante et al. (2017) emphasize that OECD activities shape not only educational practices but also the political culture of member states, strengthening their involvement in global governance processes. Takayama (2008), analyzing the experience of Japan, shows that the adaptation of OECD recommendations can be accompanied by complex processes of harmonization of national traditions and global standards - a conclusion that has a direct analogy for Kazakhstan. Studies devoted to countries with a comparable level of economic development are also useful for analysis.

Humbatova and Hadjiev (2019) show, using the example of Azerbaijan, that international organizations are an important source of innovation, but their initiatives can conflict with local educational practices [7]. Le and Tran (2021), considering Vietnam, emphasize the importance of an integrated approach in which international recommendations are integrated into national priorities, which allowed the country to significantly improve its results in PISA [8].

Thus, the existing literature demonstrates that international organizations have a multi-level influence on education – from the development of global indicators to funding and expert support for national reforms. In the case of Kazakhstan, this influence is particularly evident through participation in international assessments, the implementation of joint projects, and the adoption of global practices. However, as research shows, the effectiveness of this process largely depends on the state's ability to adapt international models to national conditions, considering the cultural, social, and economic characteristics of the country.

Systemic analysis allows us to consider the educational system of Kazakhstan as part of a broader international system, where global institutions (UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, UNICEF, etc.) play a key role. Within the framework of this approach, the study is based on the consideration of education as an interconnected set of elements: the content of curricula, human resources, infrastructure, financing and digitalization. A systems approach helps to identify how international initiatives are integrated into national reforms and what mutual effects arise at the intersection of global and local factors [9].

Comparative analysis is used to compare Kazakhstan's experience with the practices of other countries in similar conditions or that have achieved significant success in implementing SDG 4. For this purpose, the cases of Azerbaijan, Vietnam and individual countries of the European Union are considered, where international organizations have played a significant role in transforming educational systems. The comparative approach allows us to identify general trends, universal cooperation mechanisms and unique barriers specific to Kazakhstan [10].

Content analysis of official documents and strategies is an important tool for identifying areas of international and national cooperation. The following are used as sources:

- state programs of Kazakhstan (State Educational Standards for Education 2020–2025, concepts of digitalization of education, national plans for the implementation of SDGs);

- reports of international organizations (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Reports, World Bank reports, OECD data on PISA and TALIS, UNICEF analytical materials);

- publications in scientific journals (Comparative Education, International Journal of Educational Development, etc.). The analysis of these documents allows us to assess information on key areas and results of Kazakhstan's interaction with international organizations, as well as to assess the degree of compliance of national policies with the global indicators of SDG 4 [11].

The historical and analytical approach is used to study the evolution of the educational system of Kazakhstan and the stages of its interaction with international organizations. Particular attention is paid to the period from the early 2000s, when the country actively joined global processes and took part in international comparative studies for the first time. Such analysis allows us to trace the dynamics of reforms: from the first steps in adapting standards to the current stage, characterized by active digitalization and the introduction of inclusive practices [12].

Results and Discussion

The Role of International Organizations

International organizations have a key influence on the transformation of the education system in Kazakhstan. UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD and UNICEF perform different but complementary functions. UNESCO forms global benchmarks and indicators of education quality, which allows Kazakhstan to correlate national reforms with international obligations. The World Bank acts as a source of financial resources and expert support, including within the framework of projects to modernize school infrastructure and digitalize education. OECD, through the PISA and TALIS programs, stimulates national reforms through international comparison of educational results, and UNICEF promotes issues of inclusive education and the protection of children's rights [13].

It is important to emphasize that international organizations contribute not only to the introduction of new standards, but also to the creation of a platform for the exchange of experience. Kazakhstan, participating in international forums and research, gets the opportunity to integrate into the global educational space, adopt successful practices and adjust its own strategies. However, this role also has a limitation: global initiatives do not always consider the cultural and social context of Kazakhstan, which necessitates critical adaptation [14].

Financing and partnerships

One of the main factors in Kazakhstan's successful interaction with international organizations is financing. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank provided loans and grants to support projects to build schools, equip laboratories, and introduce information and communication technologies. These resources helped speed up the modernization of the education system, especially in rural areas where infrastructure deficits persist [15].

In addition, Kazakhstan actively participates in partnership programs with UNESCO and UNICEF aimed at developing inclusive education and improving

the qualifications of teachers. However, excessive dependence on external financing carries risks. Firstly, international loans can increase the state's debt burden. Secondly, donor priorities do not always coincide with national needs. This leads to a situation where individual projects are launched faster than an internal institutional framework for their sustainable implementation is formed [16].

Kazakhstan and SDG 4: Progress and Challenges

Kazakhstan has made significant progress in implementing SDG 4. Almost universal access to primary and secondary education is achieved, inclusive education programs are being implemented, and digitalization is actively developing. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a test for the system, but at the same time it has accelerated the processes of digital transformation, also stimulated by the initiatives of international organizations. Nevertheless, serious challenges remain. The most acute problem is the gap between urban and rural schools: differences in access to the Internet, qualified teachers and modern educational resources maintain inequality in educational outcomes. Despite the support of international partners, the national system is facing a staff shortage: teacher turnover in rural areas remains high, and their training and retraining programs do not always meet international requirements. The limited adaptation of inclusive education is also a problem: the legislative framework has been created, but practical implementation is hampered by a shortage of specialists and weak infrastructure [17].

Comparative Analysis: Kazakhstan and Countries with Successful Implementation of SDG 4

Comparing Kazakhstan with other countries that have achieved significant success in implementing SDG 4 helps us identify the strengths and weaknesses of the national approach. For example, Vietnam, which has shown impressive results in PISA, has managed to integrate international recommendations into the system of national priorities. Unlike Kazakhstan, where international models are often implemented from the top down, in Vietnam a significant role is given to the participation of teachers and local communities. Kazakhstan's strength is its willingness to cooperate with international organizations and its desire to comply with global standards [18]. This allows it to accelerate modernization and implement best practices. However, its weakness is its excessive focus on international rankings and assessments, which sometimes leads to formal compliance with requirements without their deep integration into the educational system.

Risks of over-dependence on international models

One of the debatable issues is the risk of over-dependence on external models and standards. Kazakhstan, striving to comply with global indicators, may face a situation where international practices are introduced without considering national traditions, regional characteristics and social context [19]. This is manifested, for example, in the adaptation of new pedagogical technologies that have proven themselves well in OECD countries but require a different resource base for effective application in the conditions of rural schools in Kazakhstan. In

addition, excessive dependence on international models reduces incentives for the development of domestic scientific research and innovation. It is important not only to borrow successful practices, but also to form national expertise that will allow them to be adapted to local conditions.

Adapting global practices to local conditions

The key challenge for Kazakhstan remains the need to adapt global practices to national realities. International organizations offer universal solutions, but their effectiveness depends on the state's ability to integrate them into the context of its own educational priorities. An example is the digitalization program: international experts emphasize its importance, but without a parallel solution to infrastructure problems in rural areas, digital transformation can increase social inequality [20]. Thus, the discussion shows that Kazakhstan's participation in global initiatives to implement SDG 4 brings significant results but requires a balance between international standards and national needs. The optimal strategy is not mechanical borrowing, but creative adaptation of international experience based on domestic resources, scientific research, and cultural characteristics of the country.

Conclusion

The study showed that the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) in Kazakhstan is closely linked to the activities of international organizations, which act as the most important partners of the state in the process of modernizing the education system. The contribution of institutions such as UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD and UNICEF are manifested in various forms - from financial and technical support to expert support and the development of global indicators of education quality. Their participation helps to accelerate reforms, expand access to innovations, strengthen human resources and develop inclusive education.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrated that dependence on international models and recommendations gives rise to certain risks. Kazakhstan, striving to comply with global standards, sometimes faces the problem of mechanically borrowing practices that do not always consider the national context, infrastructural limitations and cultural characteristics. For example, the introduction of digital technologies and new pedagogical methods requires significant financial resources and trained personnel, which is complicated by the uneven development of regions. Thus, the key condition for the sustainability of educational reforms is their adaptation to local conditions, based on the social, economic and cultural realities of the country.

A comparative analysis with other countries, in particular Vietnam and Azerbaijan, showed that the successful implementation of SDG 4 depends on the state's ability to integrate international recommendations into its own priorities and strategic goals. The Vietnamese experience demonstrates that with the active participation of teachers and local communities, international standards can be organically integrated into the national system, ensuring sustainable growth in the quality of education. Kazakhstan has strengths in the form of institutional

openness and readiness for international cooperation, but at the same time needs greater consistency between global and local priorities.

Despite the remaining challenges, Kazakhstan has made significant progress in ensuring universal access to education, developing digitalization and creating a legal framework for inclusive education. National programs, implemented with the support of international organizations, have laid the foundation for further modernization. However, the problems of regional inequality, shortage of teaching staff, limited infrastructure and insufficient practical implementation of inclusion continue to hinder the full achievement of the goals.

In conclusion, it should be noted that sustainable development of the education system of Kazakhstan in the context of SDG 4 is possible only if a balance is found between global initiatives and national interests. International organizations should be viewed not only as donors and sources of standards, but also as partners whose recommendations require critical adaptation and localization. For Kazakhstan, it is strategically important to form its own expert base, develop national research in the field of education and create mechanisms to ensure the long-term sustainability of reforms. Thus, the contribution of international organizations to the implementation of SDG 4 in Kazakhstan can be characterized as significant, but it requires rethinking in the direction of greater flexibility, adaptability and reliance on domestic resources. Only with this approach will Kazakhstan be able not only to achieve the target indicators, but also to build a modern, competitive and socially fair education system that meets the challenges of the 21st century.

Recommendations

An analysis of the role of international organizations and Kazakhstan's progress in achieving SDG 4 allows us to develop several practical proposals aimed at increasing the effectiveness of educational policy and the sustainability of reforms.

1. Financing and resource provision

- Increase the share of the national budget allocated to education, with an emphasis on the development of rural schools, since this is where the infrastructure deficit is most acute.
- Make more active use of grant programs and subsidies from international organizations but minimize dependence on loans by creating a system of co-financing projects with the participation of the state and the private sector.
- Develop mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of the use of funds provided by international partners to increase transparency and accountability.

2. Inclusive education

- Strengthening the training of specialists (defectologists, tutors, speech therapists) capable of working in inclusive classes, relying on both international experience and national traditions.
- Create resource centers in rural areas that support inclusive schools and ensure the exchange of experience.
- Expand cooperation with UNICEF and UNESCO to implement indicators for assessing the quality of inclusion and their regular monitoring.

3. *Digitalization*

- Continue developing digital infrastructure, especially in rural schools where access to high-speed Internet remains limited.
- Use international practices (for example, World Bank programs), but adapt them to the real conditions of Kazakhstan, taking into account the level of training of teachers and the availability of equipment.
- Introduce platforms for distance and blended learning with a focus on sustainable use, and not just short-term effects.

4. *Adaptation of international practices*

- Develop a national system of examination of educational reforms, including scientists, teachers and community representatives, to assess the applicability of international initiatives.
- Focus on localizing global practices: do not mechanically implement standards, but integrate them considering the cultural, social and economic characteristics of Kazakhstan.
- Focus on exchanging experiences with countries in similar conditions (Vietnam, Azerbaijan), which will allow for the application of more relevant development models.

5. *Scientific research and national expertise*

- Support research in the field of pedagogy, sociology of education and educational policy, focused on the analysis of Kazakhstan's specifics.
- Strengthen the participation of national experts in international projects so that Kazakhstan acts not only as a consumer, but also as a generator of innovative ideas.

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ И РЕАЛИЗАЦИЯ ЦУР 4 В КАЗАХСТАНЕ - ПОЛИТИКА ПАРТНЁРСТВА И ВЫЗОВЫ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию роли международных организаций в реализации Цели устойчивого развития 4 (Качественное образование) в Казахстане. Актуальность исследования определяется стратегическим значением образования для формирования человеческого капитала и обеспечения конкурентоспособности страны в условиях глобализации. В XXI веке качественное образование рассматривается как ключевым фактором устойчивому развитию, социальной справедливости и экономическому росту. Казахстан, став частью глобального образовательного пространства, активно взаимодействует с международными институтами — ЮНЕСКО, Всемирным банком, ОЭСР и ЮНИСЕФ, что оказывает значительное влияние на направление национальных реформ.

Цель исследования заключается в комплексном анализе вклада международных организаций в модернизацию образовательной системы Казахстана, оценке их финансовой, методической и экспертной поддержки, а также выявлении существующих проблем и ограничений в реализации ЦУР 4.

Методология основана на системном подходе, сравнительном анализе, контент-анализе стратегических документов и историко-аналитическом исследовании этапов модернизации образования в Казахстане. В качестве источников использованы государственные программы, официальные отчёты международных организаций и научные публикации в области сравнительного образования.

Научная значимость работы заключается в выявлении особенностей взаимодействия Казахстана с международными партнёрами и в разработке концепции адаптации глобальных практик к национальному контексту. Практическая значимость выражается в возможности использования результатов для совершенствования образовательной политики, снижения регионального неравенства, развития инклюзии и цифровизации.

Основные результаты показывают, что Казахстан достиг значительного прогресса в сотрудничестве с международными организациями: создана нормативная база инклюзивного образования, активно развивается цифровизация, обеспечен широкий доступ к школьному образованию.

Однако остаются нерешёнными проблемы: разрыв между городскими и сельскими школами, кадровый дефицит и риски чрезмерной зависимости от внешних моделей. В перспективе устойчивое развитие образования в Казахстане возможно только при условии баланса между глобальными инициативами и национальными интересами.

Ключевые слова: качественное образование, Казахстан, международные организации, ЮНЕСКО, Всемирный банк, ОЭСР, ЮНИСЕФ, инклюзия, цифровизация

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ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ҰЙЫМДАР ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ 4-ШІ ТДМ ЖҮЗЕГЕ АСЫРУ - СЕРІКТЕСТІК САЯСАТЫ ЖӘНЕ МІНДЕТТЕР

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Андатпа. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы Тұрақты даму мақсаты 4 (Сапалы білім беру) жүзеге асыруда халықаралық ұйымдардың ықпалын кешенді талдауға арналған. Ақтуалдығы білімнің ХХІ ғасырда әлеуметтік-экономикалық даму мен адами капиталды қалыптастырудағы стратегиялық мәнімен түсіндіріледі. Білім беру жүйесі жаһандану үдерістерінде мемлекеттердің бәсекеге қабілеттілігінің негізгі көрсеткіші болып табылады. Қазақстан халықаралық қауымдастықтың толыққанды мүшесі ретінде БҰҰ, ЮНЕСКО, Дүниежүзілік банк, ЭЫДҰ және ЮНИСЕФ секілді ұйымдардың қолдауына сүйене отырып, ұлттық білім беру саясатын жаңғыртуда.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – халықаралық ұйымдардың Қазақстандағы білім беру реформаларына қосқан үлесін бағалау, олардың қаржылық, әдістемелік және сараптамалық қолдауының мазмұнын ашу, сонымен бірге ұлттық контексте кездесетін негізгі қиындықтарды айқындау.

Әдіснамалық тұрғыдан зерттеу жүйелік, салыстырмалы, мазмұндық талдау және тарихи-талдамалық әдістерге негізделді. Зерттеу дереккөздері ретінде мемлекеттік бағдарламалар, халықаралық есептер (ЮНЕСКО, Дүниежүзілік банк, ЭЫДҰ, ЮНИСЕФ), сондай-ақ салыстырмалы білім беру саласындағы ғылыми еңбектер пайдаланылды.

Ғылыми маңызы – жаһандық тәжірибелерді сын тұрғысынан зерделеу арқылы Қазақстанның білім беру саясатын жетілдіру жолдарын ұсыну. Практикалық маңызы – ауыл мен қала мектептері арасындағы теңсіздікті қысқарту, инклюзивті білім беруді дамыту, цифрлық инфрақұрылымды нығайту және халықаралық тәжірибені бейімдеу бойынша ұсыныстарды қалыптастыру.

Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, Қазақстан халықаралық әріптестердің қолдауымен айтарлықтай прогреске жетті: жалпыға қолжетімділік

қамтамасыз етілді, цифрландыру қарқынды дамуда, инклюзия бойынша құқықтық база жасалды. Алайда аймақтық теңсіздік, кадр тапшылығы және халықаралық үлгілерге шамадан тыс тәуелділік мәселелері шешілмей отыр. Осыған байланысты білім беру реформаларының орнықтылығы халықаралық тәжірибені ұлттық ерекшеліктерге бейімдеуге және ұлттық ғылыми әлеуетті арттыруға байланысты.

Тірек сөздер: сапалы білім, Қазақстан, халықаралық ұйымдар, ЮНЕСКО, Дүниежүзілік банк, ЭЫДҰ, ЮНИСЕФ, инклюзия, цифрландыру

Қаржыландыру: Бұл зерттеуді Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің Ғылым комитеті қаржыландырады (грант № AP19577392).

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