

Innovative Approaches in the Quality Assurance System in the Context of Expanding the Academic Autonomy of Kazakhstan Universities

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes new forms of quality control of higher education after the reform in 2018—the expansion of academic and managerial independence of universities. The analysis of legislative acts, program, and strategic documents for a retrospective assessment of the formation and development of the institute of accreditation and the use of preventive control by the authorized state body as an innovative tool for quality assessment in universities.

Based on the results of the study of statistical data on state bodies and an expert survey conducted among top management, teachers, and staff in Kazakhstani universities, their perception of the current system of quality assurance of higher education was assessed.

Analysis of the survey results shows a moderate positive attitude of university representatives both to the process of preventive control by the state and to the process of independent accreditation. This suggests that there are opportunities for improving and developing these processes to increase their effectiveness. The main factors of quality from the point of view of representatives of universities are determined. This allows us to identify new directions for the development of the quality assurance system in the future.

Keywords: quality assurance, higher education, academic autonomy, innovation, Kazakhstan

Introduction

New challenges and megatrends of the 21st century such as the unification of the education space and free movement between countries, the development of a unified system for assessing the level of qualifications and recognition of diplomas, and the transition from a raw material economy to a "knowledge economy" have defined new ambitious tasks for our education system. The National Development Plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025 indicates that our country is aimed at achieving levels of socio-economic and institutional development not inferior to the OECD member countries, as well as subsequent accession to the OECD. The strategic focus of higher education is the transformation from primarily state regulation to the development of a self-regulating environment based on the principles of academic freedom and integrity and the responsibility of universities for the quality of education (Decree, 2018).

In order to achieve this ambitious goal and meet the parameters of the OECD countries in the higher education system, the role of university autonomy is of great importance.

The universities' autonomy is one of the fundamental principles of the Magna Carta of European Universities and the Bologna Declaration, which were implemented in the higher education system of Kazakhstan when the country joined the Bologna process in 2010. These documents state that the university is an autonomous institution and that it creates, studies, evaluates, and transmits culture from generation to generation through scientific research and training. In order to meet the requirements of the surrounding world, these studies and training must be morally and intellectually independent from all political authorities and economic pressure (Declaration, 1999).

Currently, there are 120 higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, which have a total of more than 623,000 students (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

In Kazakhstan, the process of expanding the academic and managerial autonomy of universities began in 2018. This happened when significant innovative changes were made to the "Labour Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan", the Law "On Non-Profit Organizations", the Law "On Education" (Law, 2018).

Universities have received new powers to determine the content of educational programs, qualification requirements for teachers, the students' admission procedures, student transfer and restoration procedures, the procedure for organizing and conducting professional practice, and the rules for designating organizations as practice based. In addition, universities were granted the right to establish branches in foreign countries, create endowment funds, open start-up companies, as well as attract additional sources of financial and material resources for the implementation of statutory activities. Before the 2018 reform (Law, 2018), these responsibilities belonged to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Thus, for the Kazakhstan's government and universities, academic autonomy can be considered as an innovative process since, according to researchers, "innovation is defined as implementation of a new idea as perceived by the adopter" (Rogers and Kim, 1985).

The changes also affected the quality assurance system of higher education. The introduction of the new national classification framework, educational programs are now combined into groups on the basis of the programs' subject areas. For that reason, the state licenses are now issued for these areas and not the individual educational programs. This, in turn, stimulates universities to offer various educational programs.

At the same time, the process of monitoring the quality of education has been transformed on the basis of the academic freedom of universities. The state certification of universities has been replaced by a so-called preventive control. This new type of quality control is aimed at supporting and increasing the responsibility of educational organizations, stimulating objective self-assessment, and striving not to fall into the category of violators (National Report, 2019: 193).

In the context of expanding academic freedom, independent accreditation of Kazakhstani universities and educational programs continues to develop. Considering the new norms and changes in legislation, independent accreditation bodies have revised their standards and accreditation processes. The formation of the university internal quality assurance system has become the main focus. The joint and several liability of accreditation bodies and Higher Education Institutes (HEI) for the results of the accreditation have been introduced.

These innovations can be considered as a transition from tight intervention to stimulating management, which follows the basic principles of academic autonomy.

Thus, since "innovation is defined as having a new aspect to it" (Glor, 2021), in this study preventive control and accreditation are considered as innovative tools in quality assurance for Kazakhstani universities in the context of universities' academic freedom. Additionally, the innovativeness of this study lies in a retrospective analysis of the implementation of new approaches to quality assurance in Kazakhstan and the analysis of their perception by university representatives.

Research Questions

How were innovative approaches to quality assurance system implemented in Kazakhstan's higher education sphere?

How do Kazakhstani universities rate the new quality assurance system in the context of expanding academic autonomy?

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, a lot of attention has been paid to the issues of university autonomy and the use of new tools within this autonomy, both in practice and in academic literature.

According to research, the external values of higher education, such as the expansion of education systems and the emergence of new educational programs, the reduction of government spending, and the transition to a technology-based economy stimulate the introduction of new systems of quality assessment and control (Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994).

These modern processes have necessitated the modernization of national systems in Europe in terms of changing the content of education, management mechanisms, evaluation of the education quality; i.e. the emergence of a system that has become known as the "Bologna Process" (Ryabova and Cherkasova, 2020).

One of the parameters of the Bologna process is the autonomy of universities and quality assurance in the conditions of this autonomy.

The research notes that institutional autonomy is a necessary condition for effective quality assurance. Without such autonomy institutional quality control will remain powerless. The introduction of institutional autonomy and the simultaneous reduction of state control can,

however, only be implemented in combination with provisions on strengthening accountability. In this regard, in many countries, quality assurance agencies have either been established or transformed in accordance with these new requirements (Reichert, 2008).

To compare the criteria and methodology of quality assurance for the countries participating in the Bologna Process, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were developed and the European Register of Quality Assurance of Higher Education was created.

The Scandinavian countries are considered to be the first in Europe to introduce the "new quality assurance formula" (Haakstad, 2001). According to Talvinen's research (2012), the new quality assurance systems introduced in Finland contained a description of procedures in quality manuals, data collection, and feedback systems, as well as a system aimed at improving quality through the Deming cycle. In his study Ala-Vähälä (2016), based on the work of Rinne et al., reports that, with the introduction of the new Finnish quality audit system, workload has increased and an incompatibility of the concept of quality assurance and academic work has appeared.

Also, taking into account the research results of Finnish colleagues, two points of view have been formed regarding the perception of new quality assurance systems. In polytechnic universities, quality assurance is treated more positively than in research universities (Ala-Vähälä, 2016). According to the author, this is due to the fact that high-quality work and various audits began to be carried out at polytechnic universities several years earlier than at research universities. For that reason, the former rely on the potential advantages that the introduction of quality assurance systems can give them, while the latter are still adapting to these requirements.

The next "pioneer" in the field of quality assurance in Europe was the "Dutch model". In this case, the university umbrella organization, the Associations of Universities of the Netherlands (VSNU), used a quality assessment system including periodic external evaluations of programs. The supervision of external VSNU assessments was carried out by a governmental body, the Education Inspectorate (Chu and Westerheijden, 2019). According to Westerheijden (2013), in general, quality assurance for many teachers and professors "was something that needed to be done once every six years and that was delegated to administrative support staff."

After legislative approval, accreditation was considered as a tool to ensure transparency, comparability, attractiveness and competitiveness of Dutch programs both in Europe and abroad. Accreditation provided the programs with a "quality mark", which subsequently became a solid basis for comparing Dutch programs within the framework of international cooperation and the development of student mobility (Chu and Westerheijden, 2019).

In Portugal, considering new European developments including the Bologna Declaration, a new assessment and accreditation system has been introduced in 2006. It is aimed at ensuring compliance with the minimum requirements of academic cycles and universities (Cardoso et al., 2013). The results of a survey on the perception of quality assurance conducted among Portuguese scientists Cardoso (2013) revealed that they prefer a type of quality assessment that

promotes self-reflection and knowledge, as well as continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

In the Kazakhstani context, fewer works are devoted to the introduction of new approaches to quality assurance in higher education. Many Kazakhstani researchers have mainly discussed the formation and development of a legislatively approved National System for assessing the Quality of Education (Law, 2007). The system includes various control and evaluation procedures in the form of state certification, licensing, and accreditation. Pak et al. (2018) noted that, during the transition from state certification to independent accreditation, there would be a systematic replacement of the basic tools of legal and institutional regulation and quality assurance of higher education. In their opinion, under the conditions of accreditation, universities would be able to provide the public and employers with additional guarantees of the quality of education.

When analyzing the problems of institutional autonomy in Kazakhstan, Hartley noted that one of the cultural norms of decentralization is that quality should be established by periodically reviewing progress towards the goals, i.e. through accreditation (Hartley et.al., 2016).

In their review of changes and developments in education quality assurance in Kazakhstan that takes into account the report of the OECD and the World Bank, Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova (2017) noted that "the government is trying to introduce new models of quality assurance (without changing the basic structures) as a significant number of centrally controlled mechanisms and highly bureaucratic procedures." Minazheva (2020) also noted the need for important tools for improving the quality of domestic education and increasing the competitiveness of Kazakhstani universities would be a university quality assurance system with appropriate mechanisms.

Previous foreign studies have shown that the Bologna Process has become a factor of great changes in the quality assurance of most European countries. At the same time, the effectiveness of the introduction of new quality approaches was evaluated by university professors, who are the main implementers of these approaches in practice.

The research of Kazakhstani scientists mainly studies the implementation of the parameters of the Bologna process, including accreditation and universities autonomy. The limitation of these studies is that many works were written before the expansion of the universities' autonomy and the introduction of preventive control as an innovative approach to quality assessment. Also, as a part of this study, the university representatives' opinions on their perception of the introduction of new approaches to quality assurance after the educational reforms of 2018 were collected for the first time.

Methodology

Retrospective analysis and analysis of secondary data were used to analyze the implementation of new approaches in the Kazakhstani quality assurance system. The necessary information was obtained from open sources, including statistical data of the Committee for

Quality Assurance in Education and Science, the Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility, and the Information and Analytical Center under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Content analysis of legislation, strategic and program documents, national reports, speeches was also carried out.

In order to rate the implementation of innovative preventive control and accreditation tools, between March and July 2022 an expert survey using the Google Forms tool was conducted with 758 participants among top management, staff, and teachers in Kazakhstani universities. The restrictive parameter of participation was the presence of at least five years of work experience at the university. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 36,307 faculty members worked at universities in Kazakhstan, excluding the five-year experience factor (Statistical Collection, 2021: 140).

To analyze the responses, the descriptive statistics method was used. It allows the summary and presentation of the information available in the data set. On the basis of this analysis, tables and diagrams were created and statistical indicators such as the number and percentage of responses, average and median were calculated.

Table 1 identifies the the main socio-demographic parameters in the sample studied. The majority of respondents were women (74.9%) who worked at universities in the form of NPJSC (47%), the majority were aged 41 to 50 years (34%) and had work experience in higher education of 11 to 20 years (37.3%).

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	25,1%
Female	74,9%
Age	
25-30 years	10,2%
31-40 years	24,9%
41-50 years	34%
51-60 years	20,9%
61 year and above	9,9%
Work experience at the university	
5-10 years	23,5%
11-20 years	37,3%
21-30 years	26,9%
31 year and above	12,3%
Type of university	
A university with a special status	9,9%
University, in the form of a non-profit joint-stock company (state university)	47%
Joint-stock companies and private universities	42,7%

In order to comply with academic research ethical standards, the questions of the Expert Survey were approved by the Research Committee of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Research findings and discussion

Since 2010, Kazakhstan, having become a participant in the Bologna process, has implemented its main parameters to transform the higher education system into one that better resembles the systems of developed countries and ensures its quality.

Implementation of new approaches in the higher education quality system

The Bologna Process supports the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of universities and encourages the use of independent accreditation as a quality assurance tool (Sagintayeva and Kurakbayev, 2015). Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova argue that the recent reforms in the higher education system of Kazakhstan are explained by the government's great concern for the quality of education, which is a prerequisite for a broad national desire for international competitiveness (Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova, 2017).

According to the Kazakhstani legislation, state control in the higher education system is carried out in order to ensure the right to education by the state and compliance by legal entities delivering educational programs of higher education of their educational activities with the requirements of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of education (Law, 2007).

Since 2018, the current legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan has undergone significant changes in the field of state control.

Firstly, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on improving the regulation of entrepreneurial activity" dated May 24, 2018 introduced a new institute of preventive control into the Entrepreneurial Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which conceptually changed the system of state control. Unlike the previous system of inspections, the main purpose of this is the prevention of offences without initiating administrative proceedings.

The main tasks of preventive control are to identify the causes and conditions of the illegal behaviour of the subject of control, to explain the legal consequences of the offence, and to convince the controlled subject of the necessity of law-abiding behaviour. On the basis of the control results, universities are given time to eliminate the identified violations. If the detected violations are not eliminated for the second time, then administrative penalties are imposed on the university and a second check is carried out. In the case of repeated failure to eliminate them, the verification materials are transferred to the court for revocation of the permit document. Thus, the authorized body carries out preventive measures in terms of preventing risks in the activities of educational organizations.

To prescribe preventive control, the authorized state body carries out a set of measures, the so-called risk assessment system, consisting of a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators

related to the direct activities of the subject of control. For this purpose, a checklist of 46 indicators was approved; until 2020 it included 105 points (Joint Order, 2015).

Secondly, according to the previous version of the checklist, 77 points out of 105 required the presence or absence of a certain amount of resources and documents. At the same time, their impact on the quality of education and performance in practice was not analyzed.

Thirdly, the normative legal acts in the field of higher and postgraduate education now contain only framework requirements. The main activities and regulation of intra-university processes are carried out in accordance with independently developed university documents. Starting from 2021, not only is the fact of the existence of an internal document of the university, developed to take into account the framework regulatory requirements subject to verification, but an assessment of its implementation is also carried out (Table 2).

Table 2: New Requirements to be Checked and Evaluated as Part of Preventive Control

UNTIL DECEMBER 2020	FROM 2021
The existence of the charter of the university containing a list of requirements in accordance with Article 41 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education".	The existence of the charter and compliance with its provisions .
Availability of documents confirming the management of the personnel (employees) of the university by its personnel policy, including advanced training of senior personnel, pedagogical and scientific staff of the university	Compliance with the personnel policy approved by the university: qualification characteristics and competitive replacement of positions of university employees.
Availability of information on professional development and/or retraining of personnel over the past five years in accordance with the profile of the disciplines taught.	Providing professional development of teachers at least once every five years, for heads of educational organizations, professional development in the field of management at least once every five years.
The educational organization has funded research and development work in accordance with the contract with organizations and enterprises	Ensuring the organization and conduct of research work at the university.

Source: Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Republic of Kazakhstan. Table created by the authors

With the introduction of preventive control as a new quality assessment tool, the number of Kazakhstani universities has decreased from 131 in 2018 to 120 in 2022. The main violations of the legislation were violations regarding the admission of applicants, the hiring of teachers who did not meet the established qualification requirements, teachers further training related issues, teacher workload planning, final certification of students, etc. Thus, in accordance with the decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (2019) announced that the government has taken "... the strictest measures against universities, including private ones, which have turned, let's be honest, into organizations for printing and issuing diplomas."

In Kazakhstan, accreditation was introduced in the early 2000s in the form of state accreditation of universities based on 27 quantitative performance indicators approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Kalanova, 2013). Such

accreditation did not meet international requirements, as it was based on quantitative data and duplicated the certification process. Therefore, the start of the implementation of accreditation was viewed as a "complete failure" and was criticized by various stakeholders (Kalanova, 2013; Pak et al., 2017).

The next stage in the development of the accreditation institute in Kazakhstan was the creation of a National Accreditation Center. It was the only accreditation body at that time, which achieved two important goals: the first—the formation and improvement of the legislative framework of the accreditation process of universities while taking into account the best practices of European and American accreditation agencies; the second—the formation of the first pool of Kazakhstani accreditation experts through seminars and training (Shakhanova, 2009).

In the future, with the change in legislation, the role of accreditation increased due its departure from state control. This made accreditation an independent and voluntary procedure (Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova, 2017). In 2015, complete transition from state certification to institutional and program accreditation took place. State control remained in the form of compliance checks for licensing requirements (Pak et al., 2017).

It is legislatively approved that the accreditation of educational organizations is a procedure for the accreditation body to recognize the compliance of educational services with the established standards (regulations) of accreditation in order to provide objective information about their quality and confirm the availability of effective mechanisms to improve it (Law, 2007).

In addition, incentive measures for universities to undergo the accreditation procedures have been legislated: only accredited universities can be funded from the state budget and issue diplomas of their own standard recognized by the government. With this in mind, at the moment, 104 universities have institutional accreditation and 108 universities have program accreditation for 3,899 educational programs (Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility, 2022).

With the expansion of the universities' autonomy in 2018, the main state body in the field of quality assurance of education has been transformed from a Control Committee into a Quality Assurance Committee. With the increase in the share of accredited universities and programs, the Government had doubts about the accreditation process since some universities that had undergone accreditation did not confirm the quality of educational services when passing inspections by the state body. Therefore, the joint and several liability of accreditation bodies and HEIs for the results of accreditation was introduced. In other words, if the university was closed after inspections, this would allow exclusion of the accreditation body from the National Register (Order, 2016: paragraph 13).

One of the latest changes in Kazakhstan's education quality management system made to achieve consensus on clear goals and expectations of the quality assurance system has been the approval of the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Education. These Guidelines are a set of norms regulating the systems of internal and external quality assurance of education, as well as tools for improving quality in accordance with the current legislation of the Republic of

Kazakhstan in the field of education, as well as the recommendations of international organizations and standards in the field of quality assurance. The innovativeness of the guidelines is that, in comparison with the current legislation of Kazakhstan, its content describes in detail the concepts of "quality culture" and "quality assurance", defines its elements and principles at all levels of education, and also focuses on the formation of an internal quality assurance system in educational institutions (Order, 2022).

At the end of this part of the study, a comprehensive table that showcases the main stages of the formation and development of the institute of accreditation in Kazakhstan is provided (Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of Development of Accreditation in the Field of Education in Kazakhstan

Year	Stages
2001–2005	✓ Implementation and implementation of State accreditation based on 27 indicators
2005–2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The beginning of the transition from quality control to a quality assurance; ✓ Creation of the National Accreditation Center (NAC) under the Ministry of Education and Science; ✓ Transfer of state accreditation functions to an independent competitive environment
2011–2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Entry of two national agencies into ENQA and EQAR; ✓ Revision of the standards of national accreditation bodies in accordance with the ESG-2015; ✓ Establishment of the Republican Accreditation Council; ✓ Formation of the National Register of Accreditation Agencies; ✓ Cancellation of the certification procedure for civil HEIs
2018–2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Expansion of academic and managerial independence of universities; ✓ Legislation to introduce universities' responsibilities for the creation of an internal quality assurance system
From 2020 to the present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Transformation of the Committee for Control in the Field of Education and Science into the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Field of Education and Science; ✓ Creation of Guidelines for quality assurance in education (a set of norms regulating the systems of internal and external quality assurance of education); ✓ Introduction of joint and several liability of accreditation bodies and HEIs for the accreditation results.

Source: Kalanova (2013); Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova (2017). Table created by the authors.

Assessing the new quality assurance system in the context of expanding academic autonomy

The introduction of innovative approaches to the Kazakhstan's quality assurance system can be viewed as compliance with the trends of the "fashion" of European countries. Westerheijden, basing on Hood's opinion, notes that "Changes in what are considered accepted ideas in public administration occur through a process of fashion and persuasion, and not through evidence formulated in strict deductive logic, controlled experiments, or even a systematic analysis of existing cases" (Westerheijden et al., 2014).

University employees are the first ones being exposed to the implementation of parameters and indicators of new approaches to quality assurance. It is therefore important to identify their perception of these approaches and how they rate their effectiveness.

Within the framework of the conducted expert survey, the academic community of universities in Kazakhstan was asked three main groups of questions:

1. Assessment of the understanding of the "quality assurance" concept;
2. Assessment of the effectiveness of the main regulations in the field of quality assurance;
3. General assessment of the state administration of the quality assurance system in Kazakhstan.

The survey results show that respondents understand the importance of quality assurance differently. The plurality of respondents (47.9%) chose the "all of the above" option, which includes:

(1) Recognition of the existence of quality, striving for it, the desire to ensure quality, the concept of quality, its implementation, quality control;

(2) A set of activities (processes) on the management of educational services aimed at achieving the established educational requirements and at instilling confidence in participants that their requirements will be met;

(3) A set of institutional structures, procedures, forms and methods for establishing the compliance of the education quality with the compulsory national education standards, the needs of the individual, society and the state;

(4) Creating an environment where confidence in the activities of universities is formed by providing the necessary information about the quality (reporting) for the university and the public, as well as providing advice and recommendations for its improvement (enhancement).

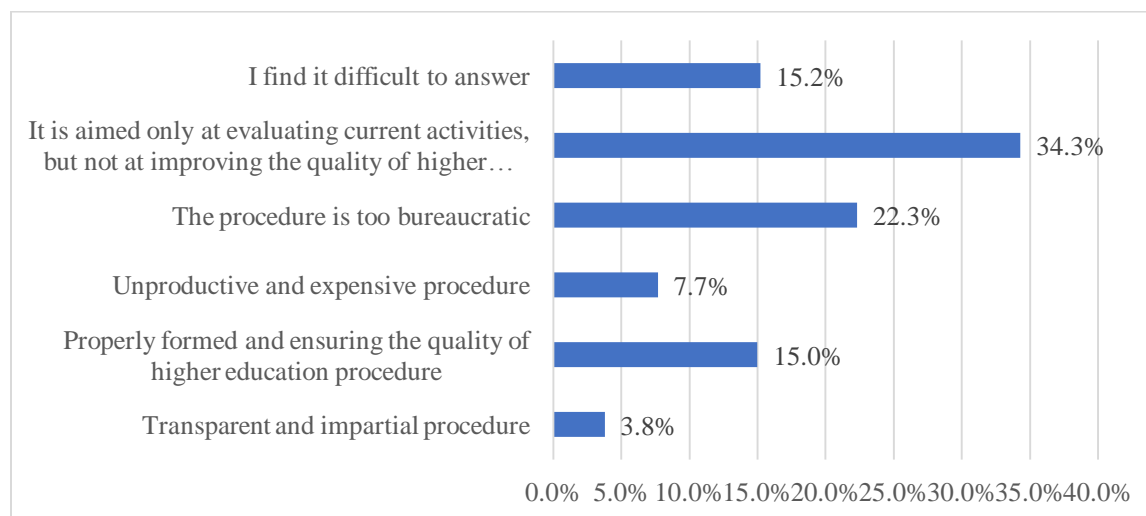
The clear misunderstanding of the important term by the majority of respondents is most likely due to the fact that this concept has been officially approved by the Kazakhstani legislation relatively recently in the new Guidelines for Ensuring the Quality of Education (2022). The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" (2007) mainly uses concepts such as "quality control" and "quality assessment". This makes it possible to explain the choice of the other share of respondents (17%) of the third (3) option since universities are accustomed to meet the requirements established by the state body. A third group of respondents (18.2%), however, chose option four (4), which gives hope that universities seek to gain confidence in their activities from the state and society and recommendations, rather than strict control, are sufficient for the improvement of their quality.

Meanwhile, a deep understanding of what quality assurance means and how to achieve it is the basis for the formation of a quality culture. This is essential for building a trusting relationship between the government and higher education. It, in turn, will allow universities to be granted full academic autonomy.

When conducting preventive control, an analysis of risk criteria is carried out. Such criteria include the norms of the compulsory national education standard (2022), indicators of qualification requirements for educational activities (2015) and standard rules for the activities of universities (2018). In other words, this check is carried out to verify quantitative data and compliance with regulatory acts. In these conditions, it is difficult to determine the level of quality itself, identify existing problems, and find effective solutions to improve the quality of higher education.

As part of the survey, 34.3% of the respondents noted that the preventive control process is only aimed at assessing current activities, but not at improving the quality of higher education. Another part of respondents (22.3%) define preventive control as an "overly bureaucratic procedure". At the same time, 15% and 3.8% of the respondents view preventive control as a "Properly formed and quality-ensuring procedure for higher education" and a "Transparent and impartial procedure", respectively (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Characteristics of the Preventive Control Procedure



Out of the total number of respondents, only 13 people (1.7%) wrote their opinion, which mostly expressed criticisms. For example: "Professional control has absolutely nothing to do with quality assurance"; "A document-centric and inefficient procedure"; "This is a formal procedure that has nothing to do with quality assessment. A lot depends on the examiner's personality: their level of competence, propensity to corruption"; "Has an indirect relation to ensuring the quality of education"; and "Does not meet the requirements for autonomous universities. More as an element of possible management, not promotion".

Studies have previously noted that the majority of Kazakhstani professors referred to excessive bureaucratic micromanagement of universities by the Ministry of Education and the entrenched practice of strict reporting (Sagintayeva and Kurakbayev, 2015).

When rating the main regulatory act on preventive control—the requirements in the checklists—most of the respondents (26.5%) stated that its requirements "Provide a threshold

level of quality of higher education"; the other part (20.3%) noted that "They have a limited function to improve the quality of higher education".

Thus, on the basis of the conducted research and the results of the survey, it can be concluded that preventive control, due to its excessively bureaucratic and formalized nature, does not actively encourage subjects of the education sector to adopt a creative approach, does not stimulate their initiatives aimed at achieving ambitious goals. This is primarily due to its main purpose, which is to establish the fact of compliance or non-compliance of the educational organization with the minimum requirements established by the state.

In addition, as part of the expert survey, respondents rated the effectiveness of preventive monitoring and accreditation (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Evaluation by Universities of the Effectiveness of Preventive Control and Accreditation

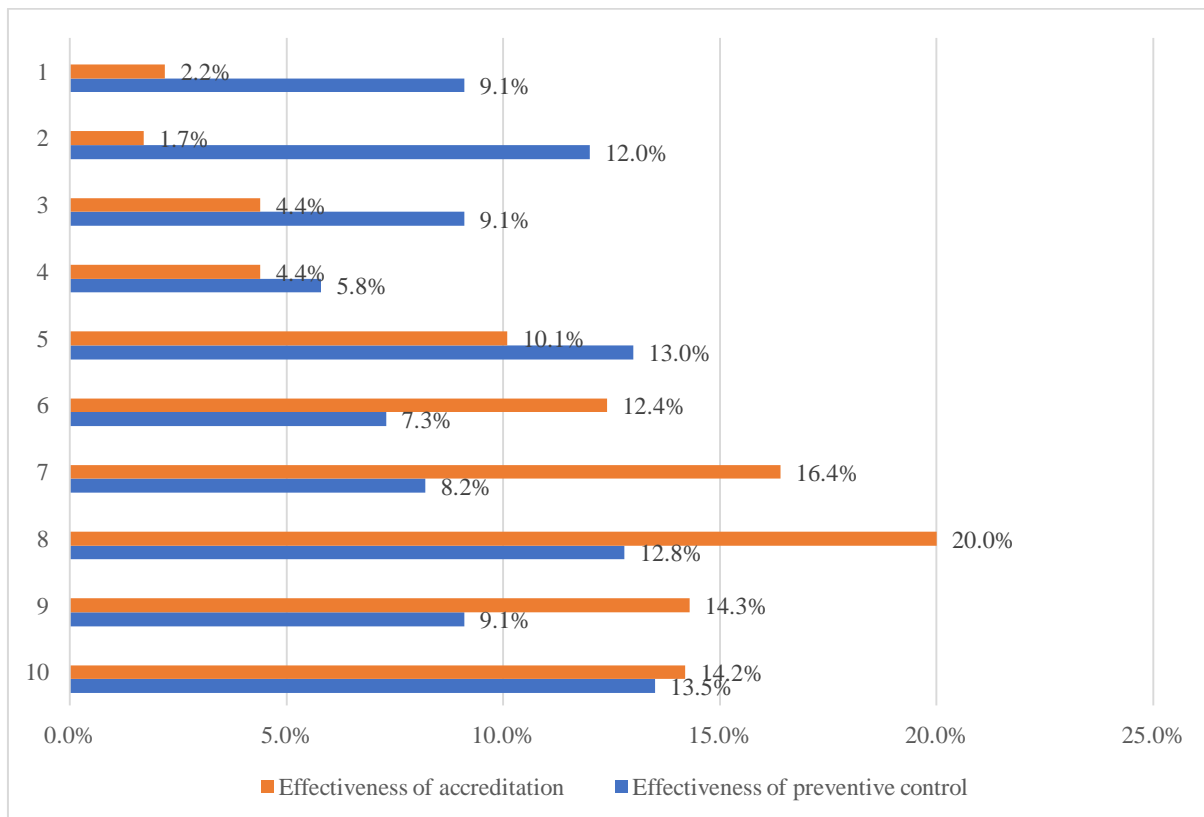
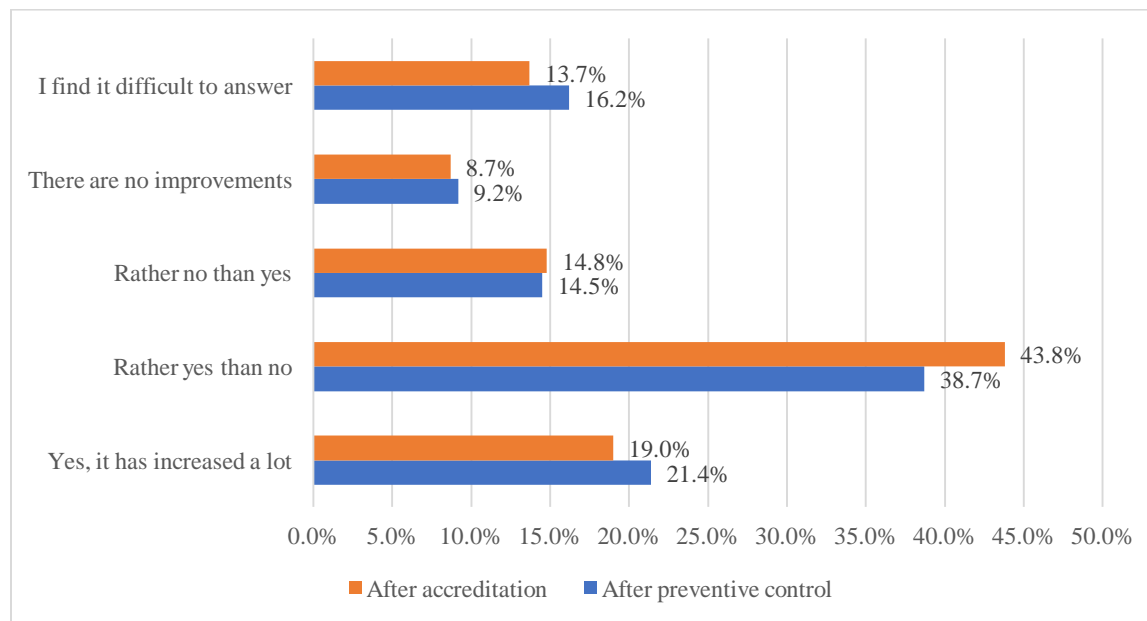


Figure 2 shows a big difference in the rated effectiveness of preventive control and accreditation. 77% of respondents rated highly the effectiveness of accreditation (from 6 to 10 points), whereas the effectiveness of preventive control at this level was rated by only 51% of respondents. Meanwhile, only 22.8% of respondents noted the low effectiveness of accreditation, whilst for preventive control the number was 49.1%.

Apart from that, as part of the survey, respondents were able to rate the level of quality improvement at their university after undergoing preventive control and accreditation. As shown by the results, the responses between the two options divided almost equally (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Assessment of the level of quality improvement after passing preventive control and accreditation



Thus, experts view the impact of such innovative approaches as professional control and accreditation on quality improvement in two ways. Preventive control, however, is viewed less positively since its primary purpose is to establish whether or not educational organizations comply with the minimum requirements established by the state.

At the same time, experts rated the accreditation in a positive way, since this approach introduced more innovations, such as:

- development of an internal quality assurance system, when institutional and individual recommendations are aimed at continuous quality improvement.
- conducting an assessment based on the ESG that establish generally accepted quality assurance practices and the Guidelines establishing examples of good practice in relevant areas for consideration by all parties involved in the quality assurance procedure;
- increasing the independence and objectivity of quality assessment by involving students and employers as members of the expert groups; when they become a "lens" that sees the results and subsequent changes in quality assurance.

Despite the development of the institute of accreditation, however, there is still a tendency toward a formal approach to both preparation for the accreditation procedure and conduct of self-assessment. As noted in the 2007 OECD and World Bank report, Kazakhstan cannot effectively use the accreditation tool "until universities abandon the mentality of

compliance and approach institutional self-enhancement with enthusiasm; that they are the owners of the educational process" (OECD and World Bank, 2007). According to international experts, the change will not happen as long as a large number of central control mechanisms remain in place.

Conclusion

Thus, in Kazakhstan, despite the desire to expand the autonomy of universities, two types of assessment of the quality of higher education are used: preventive control and accreditation. Preventive control was introduced relatively recently by replacing the state certification. Accreditation has undergone significant changes since 2001, ranging from state accreditation to independent accreditation.

The survey results proved that, despite the cancellation of state certification, the elements and approach in preventive control remain "bureaucratic" and "limiting the universities' autonomy." In these conditions, it is difficult to determine the level of quality itself, identify existing problems, and find effective solutions to improve the quality of higher education, which contradicts the parameters of autonomy. The state maintains a compliance mentality by setting quantitative quality indicators.

The majority of respondents (77%) positively noted the effectiveness of accreditation. The development of accreditation and its main parameters has brought more innovations for quality assurance. These range from a conscious understanding of the "quality assurance" concept to the use of a self-assessment tool and interaction with key stakeholders in the accreditation process. This allows universities to take full responsibility for the quality of services provided, to create the necessary conditions for quality improvement, which follows the basic principles of autonomy.

Taking into account the positive perception of independent accreditation by the academic community, today the question is brewing as to whether it is already relevant to use these two approaches in parallel with duplicate goals (achieving quality and improving quality) in quality assurance. The use of accreditation alone would make it possible to evaluate, in addition to quantitative indicators, the effectiveness of achieving these indicators, and, taking into account this assessment, to offer recommendations for further quality improvement. This would correspond to the tasks set by the state, which seeks to achieve development at the level of OECD countries, where a self-regulating environment based on the principles of academic freedom and honesty prevails.

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