

# **In the Margins: Minority Education in Central Asia**

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## **Conceptual framework**

### *The policy picture in Central Asia*

In order to define the marginalization of ethnic minorities, I review in this section the gaps in policy that negatively impact minority students. Legislation in each country was analyzed in order to understand policies affecting equity and equality in the education of ethnic minorities. To understand current policy regulations on ethnic minority rights, I looked at the former Soviet system of ethnic diversity management, since it continues to dominate the language policies and political ideology in both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The analysis clearly showed that there is a gap between declared principles and their implications. To explain this gap we must first examine the history of Soviet language policies that influenced the post-Soviet educational reforms. It also affects the difference between policy development and policy implementation.

According to state-provided statistics, more than 100 ethnic groups now reside in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh constitution provides equal rights to all citizens regardless of ethnic origin. Article 7, Clause 3 and Article 19, Clause 2 describe the legal status of language: “Every Kazakh citizen has the freedom to choose their own language for communication, instruction and culture events in the public and private sphere. The government is responsible for providing opportunities in education and development in the [ethnic] languages of [all] peoples of Kazakhstan.” In accordance to Article 26, each ethnic group has the right to establish its own ethno-cultural centers and Sunday schools which help shape and promote their language, culture and traditions. Secondary education is provided in a number of minority languages, including Russian, Uzbek and Uyghur.

In Tajikistan, secondary education is provided in five languages: Tajik; Uzbek; Russian; Kyrgyz; and Turkmen. The legal norm in the education law is similar to that of Kazakhstan: “Republic of Tajikistan guarantees its citizens freedom to choose a language of education and secondary education in the national language, but in certain regions the government also ensures education to other minority ethnic groups in their native language.”

Social linguists have pointed out that the Constitution of the USSR recognized the rights of ethnic minority groups, but failed to guarantee a mechanism of enforcement. More specifically, the Soviet Constitutions of 1924, 1936 and 1977 provided limited guidance about laws on ethnic national language. The latter declared that all citizens are equal, no matter what their language choice was. It also stated that each citizen had the opportunity to attend schools in their native tongue and the right to stand in court in their native language. Moreover, these rights had to be publicized in all languages of the Soviet Union, a requirement for all laws and acts passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. None of the legal documents in the history of Soviet constitutional law provided the procedures, how to enact these rights. For example, procedures were not established to support quality education in mother tongue or to guarantee access to higher education in the ethnic language for minority schools graduates. As a result, the post-Soviet countries continue to practice segregation instead of inclusion and integration, often as a result of “minority-neutral” approaches and equality deficits in policy implementation. Hidden message in the Soviet legislation was that ethnic minority languages were in fact less protected and more power was given to the centre and to bureaucracy, which developed education policies based on majority interests (Meschkovskaya, 2007). Russian was the dominant language in the education systems of all Soviet republics and even now high quality education in Central Asia is often associated with Russian-language schools. And higher education was primarily provided in Russian. Today, the Central Asian independent states are mirroring the same majority-oriented policies in their own education systems.

In order to understand the complexity of this transformational educational policy process I used the categorization designed by Peter Rado, a researcher experienced in policy analysis in post socialist societies. This research uses Rado’s four policy options for students from ethnic groups: affirmative action; assurance of minority rights; anti-discrimination; and quality assurance (Rado, 2001). Currently both countries apply complex policies which include a mixture of all four options. However it is not clear whether policy makers intentionally combine policies in the interests of minority rights or simply function within an inherited system. While the first three policies prevail in both Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, the weak presence of quality assurance raises the important question about ensuring equal rights for

quality education for minority students.

In Rado's study entitled "Transition in Education," affirmative action is defined as the policies that address "the problems generated by lower socio-economic status of minority groups that is the effect of past discrimination" (Rado, 2000, 92-93). These policies result in preferential affirmative action that includes the establishment of quotas, the creation of favorable conditions for minorities to enroll in higher education institutions, and the use of free tuition as an incentive.

This policy also includes developmental affirmative action that creates the opportunity for increases in the learning capacity of minority students in the form of scholarships, grants, preparatory zero grades, and more. Such a policy existed in the Soviet Union. It created favorable conditions for minority ethnic school graduates to enroll in prestigious state universities, in capital cities of national republics and / or in Moscow. This approach went hand in hand with the implication of inclusion in the framework of communist ideology.

This kind of positive discrimination supported segregation among students instead of promoting inclusion. For example, students who were chosen to represent their minority group were placed in separate groups at the university. This form of tracking system created separate groups within the student body that consisted purely of students who met the ethnic minority quota.

Soviet support for minorities through segregation was possible because of the centralized finance and policy planning system, which was controlled by the Communist Party in Moscow. The party was able to dictate requirements for all universities. In contemporary Central Asia, this situation has begun to change.

First, due to privatization of higher education, political decisions from the center no longer have such strong influence over higher education system in post-Soviet countries. Second, most former Soviet countries have introduced unified national testing systems that determine college admission, which is provided in the national language(s) as seen in Kazakhstan, where the Unified National Test (UNT) test is only in Kazakh and Russian. Later we will discuss how these reforms affect school graduates from ethnic minority schools.

A second policy option is the assurance of minority rights that "addresses the gaps between the rights of persons belonging to any minority groups and the practice in which these rights often do not prevail." (Rado, 2001, 92-93) This form of policy highlights the importance of providing education in child's own language and culture for each minority ethnic group. Assurance policy is implemented through programs on intercultural and or bilingual learning, mother tongue education and

programs containing the teaching of minority language. For example, in the Soviet Union some (smaller) minority languages were only practiced up to primary school or in culture centers. This policy option, oriented towards preservation of traditional culture, was actively supported by Soviet authorities and existed in both countries in this study. This policy continues to operate today.

The third policy action is an anti-discrimination policy, which “aim[s] at eliminat[ing] all kinds of overt, institutionalized discrimination (segregation), as well as its rather hidden forms, such as pedagogical practices that are based on stereotyping and biased expectations” (Rado, 2001, 92-93). Supervising prevention of discrimination, also stressing multicultural sensitivity through awareness-raising classes, regulates this policy. Even though anti-discrimination policy was enacted by legislation In Tajikistan and Kazakhstan this study shows that hidden discrimination still exists within the education systems in both countries.

Finally, the fourth policy is based on quality assurance with “educational development tools that may improve the quality of teaching and learning and may promote differentiated instruction.” (Rado, 2001, 92-93) This policy also aims at equity in education through an integration strategy that forms a system that gives all students a fair chance. This includes differentiated instruction, curriculum choice in different languages and overall sensitivity for all minority rights. This policy requires more than awareness of ethnic minorities but also embracement of their culture and language as equal. Under Soviet system quality assurance for minorities (including children with special needs, and other vulnerable children) was only provided through separate schooling rather than integration in mainstream schools. Quality assurance is the weakest point when it comes to post-Soviet policy agendas in Central Asia. The first three policies have stayed in education system from the Soviet times, but quality assurance has always been disregarded through supporting segregated education rather than comprehensive integration strategy. This is a complex issue that requires extensive research and amendments in government policies to create equal opportunities for minority students, which we will further explore in last section of the article.

### **Gaps in the Margins**

In this section I provide examples from the data that demonstrate policy gaps in standardized tests, textbooks provision and textbook content.

### *Standardized Tests*

An example of policies that proclaim status equality but do not ensure equality of chances is the gap created by the language barriers faced by minority students and their low performance rate in contemporary standardized examinations. After acquiring independence, former countries of the Soviet Union felt the need to introduce new education reforms. Innovative assessment systems were introduced as part of these reforms. However, the new testing systems were not fine-tuned to provide equal opportunities for all potential applicants including minority students learning in their native language (Drummond, 2008).

Unified standardized exams were introduced along with a reformed grading system. Centralized admission test exams for higher education system were implemented in Central Asian states. This step in higher education reform was considered a successful instrument against corruption in the university admission process “After the breakup of the Soviet Union some higher education institutions continued to select students through these traditional procedures. However, with the loosening of bureaucratic controls in the early 1990s, many higher education institutions throughout Eurasia began to introduce written, multiple choice type tests. After the breakup of the Soviet Union some higher education institutions continued to select students through these traditional procedures. However, with the loosening of bureaucratic controls in the early 1990s, many higher education institutions throughout Eurasia began to introduce written, multiple choice type tests. Fighting corruption thus emerged as the primary rationale for admissions regime reform throughout the region. Despite this common rationale, a close examination of what was actually implemented in each of these countries demonstrates significant variation in approach, politics and ultimately what was introduced.<sup>1</sup> Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan serve as useful case studies for demonstrating these differences.” (Drummond, 2008)

In Kazakhstan, scores from a single standardized test determine access to higher education. The Kazakh Unified National Test (UNT) served both as a high school graduation examination and a higher education selection examination. However, the test is only conducted in Kazakh and Russian, and thereby has until now presented additional difficulty for students from minority schools who are taught in their own language. There are no bilingual education provisions. Russian and Kazakh are included in the curriculum for minority schools as separate subjects,

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<sup>1</sup> A common assumption in all the post-Soviet countries was that in the new admissions systems, the single selection criterion would be test results. In a sense, this was not a new approach as HEI examinations had always been high stakes. The crucial distinction was that under the new systems, the new tests or exams would be conducted by external agencies, not by the HEIs themselves.

but students' proficiency in these languages is not prioritized in practice, and its assessment does not contribute to the evaluation of their performance in core tests. As a result the Unified National Test negatively affected enrollment ratios to minority schools because the parents are choosing majority schools to ensure successful access to higher education for their children.

“As late as spring of 2006, Valyaeva's respondents also reported that there were widespread rumors that the *History of Kazakhstan* test would be administered in the Kazakh language regardless of applicants' language of instruction at school. This caused consternation in the large non-Kazakh speaking community. According to Valyaeva's respondents, the ministry did little to squelch the rumors and speculation leaving the decision on test language 'for a later date.' Thus, UNT development was accompanied by debates on sensitive issues that spread beyond closed-door test item development sessions”(Valayeva cited by Drummond , 2008)

Focus group discussions showed that both Uyghur and Uzbek students do not believe that they receive equitable treatment in comparison to the Kazakh majority. Rather, they believe the new exam system marginalizes graduates from the minority ethnic schools. Students agreed that formally, equal opportunities and conditions have been created in Kazakhstan for each ethnicity. However, *de facto*, they did not feel like well-respected citizens with full rights and freedoms. “In Kazakhstan, representatives of the majority group have more privileges such as to entry to university, to occupy leading posts in the government. [...] We have fewer chances, fewer prospects than Kazakhs do. They have a 'green light' everywhere; we are treated with prejudice” (student, Uyghur School, Almaty City).

The gap between declared rights in education and the reality of ethnically structured education system negatively affects minority social and economic participation in society. While analysis of legislation policies reveals that each country guarantees equal opportunity for education to all students, in reality minority schools are insufficiently funded and lack the government support necessary for development.

### ***Textbook Provision***

One of the primary resources dependent on national funding and support is the development of textbooks in the relevant target languages. The situation regarding textbook availability in minority languages in each of the two countries reveals the hidden inequalities of the national education systems. Lack of financial, material and political support is clearly illustrated by the widespread lack of textbooks and proper instructional material provided for minority schools.

The Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan publishes school textbooks in four languages: Kazakh (national language), Russian, Uzbek, and Uyghur. Despite this, minority schools still experience shortages in supplementary educational materials including teachers' guidebooks. Both principals and teachers from minority schools who taught in Uzbek in Southern Kazakhstan noted that the schools did not receive the necessary supply of textbooks. For example, textbook supply is insufficient for the more than 80 thousand students in 43 schools teaching in Uzbek.<sup>2</sup> According to the National Uyghur Cultural Center in Kazakhstan, Uyghur schools require 52 thousand additional textbooks. Closing the gap becomes a challenge for ethnic communities.

While courses taught in ethnic minority schools must use textbooks that correspond to government standards, differences in their process of development exist across the different languages. Scholars from Kazakh Academy of Sciences prepare educational material in the Uyghur language and literature along with Russian language and literature for Uyghur schools. Meanwhile, scholars from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are invited to write the textbooks for Uzbek and Tajik language and literature. Coordination between these ethnic language and literature textbook authors and the national core subject curriculum developers has sometimes proven challenging. A general lack of proper guidebooks and teaching resources for ethnic minority schools further lowers professional capacity of teachers and academic performance of students.

Tajikistan has experienced a different set of problems. Prior to 2000, minority schools there followed the curricula of countries of minority origin, and textbooks were delivered from Uzbekistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, or Turkmenistan. In addition to curricula from each country, these schools must follow national requirements for Tajik language proficiency, national history, and Tajik literature. After 2000, all schools were required to follow national curriculum set by the Tajik government and to spend an equal amount of time on all subjects. These changes created gaps between curriculum and textbooks for non-Tajik language schools.

Another significant problem for ethnic minority schools especially in Tajikistan stems from the development of new textbooks. New reforms have only affected primary grades, while higher-level students continue to use old textbooks. Without necessary tools such as textbooks and teaching resources, government policy becomes impossible to implement. As a result, ethnic minority schools are viewed

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<sup>2</sup>Minority Rights Group international, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Kazakhstan: Uzbeks, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49749cf9c.html> Retrieved from the Web on 12 October 2009.

as a second-rate choice among minority parents due to low quality of teaching.

### ***Textbook Content***

Since textbooks are the primary vehicle for the development of education, their content is important. The first stage of educational reform included extensive revisions to these books. For example, history education in Kazakhstan has been reformed in four areas: first new content reflecting Russification and de-Sovietization has been added to the curriculum; second, development of new teaching methods and Kazakh oriented pedagogical approaches; third awareness of the need for new standards for history teaching and fourth the inclusion of Kazakh citizenship education (Kissane, 2005)

History textbooks now emphasize national identity as that of the majority language group. As a result these reforms failed to include the history of minority groups residing in the country. By pushing their own national paradigm, governments affected also the civil enculturation of citizens of minority origin.

### **Sampling and data collection**

Sampling for this project focused on students and teachers from various ethnic groups in two countries. Kazakhstan has nearly 15.4 million people, 53.4 percent of which are Kazakhs. The largest minority groups after Russians (30%) and Ukrainians (5.4%) are Uzbeks (2.5%) and Uyghurs (1.4%).<sup>3</sup> Both of these groups are offered schooling in their own language. In Tajikistan, minorities make up 20.1% of the population (total population more than 7.3 million people).<sup>4</sup> Uzbeks form the largest minority group at 15.3 % and are also offered schooling in their mother tongue.<sup>5</sup>

In Kazakhstan, three ethnic groups were surveyed. The first included students of the majority (titular) ethnic group from Kazakh language schools and their teachers. The other two groups were Uzbek and Uyghur students from schools teaching in the minority language and their teachers. A similar majority-minority dynamic was explored in Tajikistan, where Tajik served as the majority and Uzbek was the minority.

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<sup>3</sup> This figure is based on the 1999 Census in Kazakhstan as reported in the CIA Factbook.

<sup>4</sup> This figure is based on the 2000 Census in Tajikistan as reported in the CIA Factbook.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Uzbekistan borders both of these countries and is also a former Soviet republic. Uyghurs live primarily in north-eastern China as well as in bordering nations such as Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.



In Kazakhstan, the survey sample included 40 secondary schools. A total of 1200 minority and majority students and 300 teachers participated in the survey. The majority and two minority groups were equally represented by 400 students and 100 teachers in accordance to research sampling strategy. In Tajikistan, 37 secondary schools were sampled. The survey sample included 380 students and 107 teachers from schools teaching in Tajik and 180 students and 49 teachers from minority schools teaching in Uzbek.

In addition to the survey, five focus group discussions were conducted with 75 students from minority and majority schools in both countries.

## Results

Focus groups demonstrate that the reception of the content of history textbooks varies between groups. In Tajikistan, Uzbek minority students were satisfied with how Uzbeks were represented in the teaching materials on the basis that Tajik and Uzbek cultures have “a lot in common.” In addition, they relied on their teachers to provide extra information about their ethnic group. In contrast, Uzbek minority students in Kazakhstan thought that their ethnic group was underrepresented in the national curriculum and textbooks. They argued that they “don't even study history of [their] own ethnicity in elective courses, have to learn it themselves” (Uzbek school, Sairan). Most minority students in Kazakhstan pointed out that they felt that majority group's history dominated all of the history textbooks, which left out the history of their groups. Uzbek students also showed great interest learning “more about the famous Uzbeks, who left their mark on Kazakhstan”.

**Figure 1. Teachers and Fair Representation in History Textbooks**

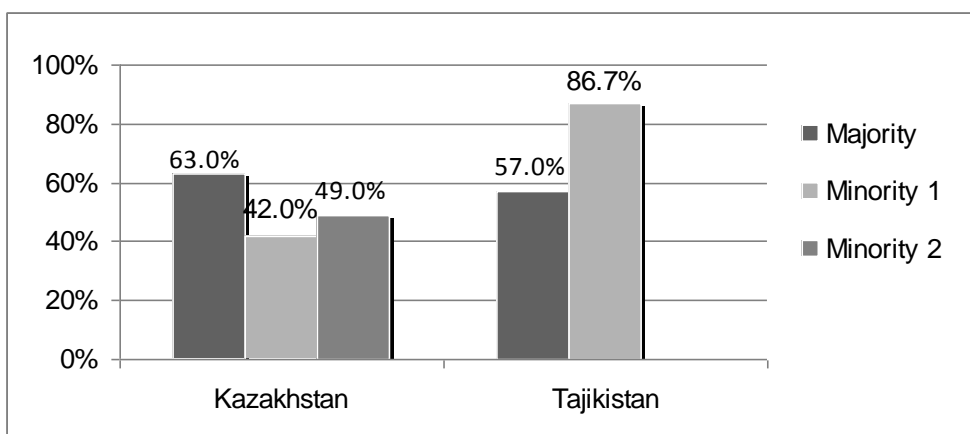


Figure 1 shows that 63% of the majority school teachers in Kazakhstan agree that representation of minority and majority groups in history textbooks is balanced and fair, while less than half of minority school teachers agreed with the statement. In Tajikistan, the answers of Uzbek minority school teachers are more positive in comparison with the opinions of their colleagues from majority schools. 86,7% of Uzbek teachers agree that the history of majority and minority groups is fairly reflected in Tajik history textbooks. This teachers' opinion is supported by students from Uzbek schools in Tajikistan, who seem to be satisfied with how Uzbeks are presented in the teaching materials and expressed the feeling of shared values. "There is enough information about us (Uzbeks). Because, like it was said before, we have a lot in common."(Student, Uzbek school, Istaravshan city).

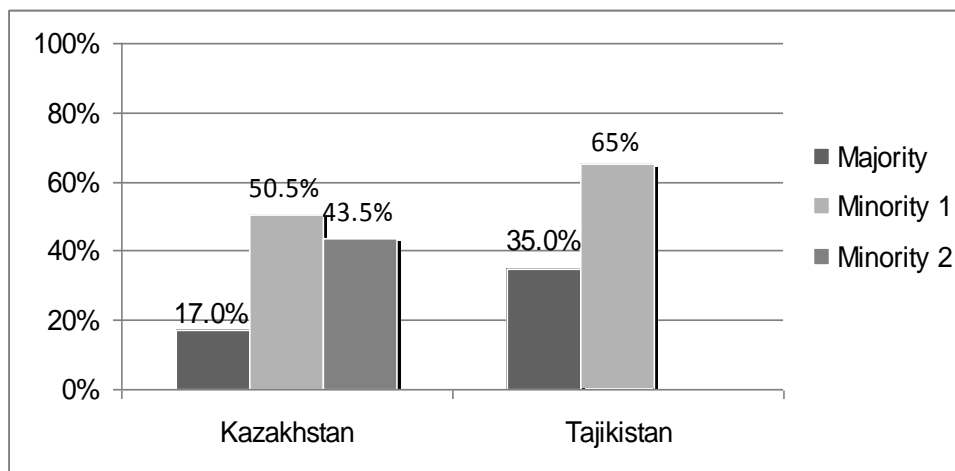
In both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, textbooks lacked information on the history of other minority ethnic groups, like the Tatars or the Turks. Both students and teachers claimed that they "are not informed about other ethnicities [who live in our country]" (Student, Uzbek school, Istaravshan city).

### ***Cultural rights and equal chances in education and future career***

Qualitative and quantitative data obtained from focus groups and survey questionnaires suggests that minority students and teachers hold a contradictory view in regard to the social and political role of minority schools. While the importance of learning in the mother tongue and of maintaining ethnic cultural identity is valued among minority communities, social chances of students in minority and majority schools are not always perceived as equal.

Students and teachers from minority groups in both countries have shown approval for separate schooling that is considered good for the preservation of the ethnic culture and identity. On the other hand, this approval varies from group to group and from country to country.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who approve of separate schools for majority and minority ethnic groups. While in Tajikistan, about 65% of the minority students think that separate schools for majority and minority are a good thing, in Kazakhstan the approval is somewhat lower - between 40% and 50% of minority students in Kazakhstan think that separate schooling is good. It is important to note that in both countries, only about 20% of teachers from majority schools approved of separate schooling system.

**Figure 2. Approval for Separate Schools**

Students see the ethnically/ linguistically separated schools as a norm, and their evaluation of the importance of minority language for future career seems to be conditioned by a factor of separation among ethnic communities, at least at the school level. Thus, in Kazakhstan, about 70% of Uyghur school students and about 54% of Uzbek school students agree that perfect knowledge of their (minority) language and culture is important for successful professional career. Only 7,5% of majority students in Kazakhstan agree. In Tajikistan, 67% of Uzbeks strongly agree that perfect knowledge of Uzbek language and culture is important for their future professional career. In contrast, only 5% of majority (Tajik) students share this conviction of the high professional and social value of Uzbek language. Evidently, separate schooling invests minority students with a high confidence in the value of their ethnic culture – but this value remains intrinsic to the ethnic community, and is not shared by their peers belonging to the majority.

Focus group findings reveal the same support for schooling in own language but a contradictory stance on future professional chances. In Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, all focus group participants from minority schools claimed that the best education for them is in their mother tongue. “I understand in Uyghur much better than in any other language. Here we are all the same ethnicity, so it is easier to understand each other.” (Student, Uyghur School, Alma Ata city). Minority students argued that going to school in their native language is necessary in order to retain identity, language, and communication within their own ethnic community. However, they also noted that minority schools face issues, which negatively affect their future professional endeavors. “It is good that we are learning in our own native language but if we want to plan for our future, for example get a university degree, we are

limited. In universities, there are no departments in Uzbek, except for pedagogical.” (Student, Uzbek school, Tajikistan).

Gender discrimination is also a factor in minority language schools. Observations from the study revealed that Uzbek parents approach the choice of schools for their children depending on the gender. Parents choose minority (Uzbek) schools for girls and majority schools for boys. In explaining their choice, parents acknowledge the quality difference between the two schools. For boys, they give higher preference to the majority schools, which provide easier access to university education. *My little brother goes to the Tajik school, but when I asked my parents why they did that, they answered that secondary education is enough for girls. For boys to go further, it is better to know Tajik language well* (Girl-student from Uzbek school, Istaravshan city). The example shows that perceived difference of education outcomes in minority and majority schools causes parents to choose strategies that increase gender inequality.

The academic limitations of schools for minorities further accentuate the need for ensuring gender equality within the education system of Tajikistan. Although the government has enacted multiple reforms of the education system to combat gender inequality in schools, including providing financial assistance to female students and promoting the discussion of gender issues in the media, and quotas for female students in institutions of higher learning, many of these initiatives have not been accompanied by either adequate financial resources, or appropriate implementation mechanisms (Magno, Silova, Wright and Demeny, 2003). Our research on students from minority ethnic groups has demonstrated that inequalities between majority and minority schools have double weight when applied to female students from ethnic minorities.

## **Discussion**

The research conducted in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan reveals a gap in education chances between minority and majority schools. Both states maintain the same schooling structure segregated by languages of ethnicities living in the country, as inherited from the Soviet times. The governments apply more or less unified curriculum policies, but the outcomes at the level of ethnic minority schools are not always the same as in majority schools.

The gap between the declared equality of students independently of language and ethnicity and the actual structural inequalities between schools may be a syndrome of the post-Soviet transition in education in Central Asian countries. Reforms in

education have been implemented to meet the needs of the emerging nation-state (i.e., to democratize the society through education) , rather than to empower the citizens independently of their background. The basic elements of reform — creating an education law, improving new system of teacher training, supplying textbooks, establishing national curriculum (including history revision) and introducing unified assessment and evaluation — have been accomplished with very limited assurances of educational equity. Education reform strategies in the two decades since national independence have been determined by emergency demands to re-build, re-construct, provide and supply. Both Central Asian countries have implemented various important educational initiatives: for example, the targeted support of rural mountainous schools, the development of sets of secondary school textbooks in Tajikistan and introduction of National United Test in Kazakhstan.

At the same time, strategies focusing on social inclusion values could be strengthened . Hence, the system of separate schools for minorities in effect tacitly offers minority students and their parents a choice between education that reinforces cultural identity and education that provides a basis for successful economic competition in society. The result of this undeclared choice is indirect but real discrimination of minority students.

As demonstrated by the case of National United Test in Kazakhstan, the system of unified high-stakes tests for school leavers, in itself a step forward in unifying the academic quality assurance in the school system, has been compromised by a lack of attention to the structural inequalities it creates for minority school students, who have to travel to another school to take the UNT in a language other than the language of instruction in their school. Therefore this innovation provided in two majority languages (Kazakh and Russian) negatively influenced the access to higher education for graduates from minority schools.

Several factors may have influenced the emergence or reproduction of structural inequalities between majority and minority schools. The first is the heritage of Soviet ideology, which still forms a common base for the perception of the importance of ethnic minority education and its goals and values among the ethnic communities and also among the policy-makers in both countries. The complicating factor is that in current situation the strong reform motivation has been oriented toward the majority of students, perhaps unintentionally disregarding the interests of ethnic minorities

The findings of the present study demonstrate that while there is demand for education in minority languages (and readiness on behalf of the state to provide

such education), the understanding of the value of minority schooling is framed in the terms of cultural reproduction of the minority community, and not in terms of empowerment of individual students from the minority. The maintenance of separate minority schools is not accompanied by insistence on quality assurance. Meanwhile, the perception of career opportunities of minority students and teachers in comparison with the majority is less optimistic.

So far the policy-makers in Central Asia have not found ways to achieve social inclusion through education in order to empower the citizens and to strengthen the development potential of the new nations. Responses to the shortages described in this article should follow principles that promote socially cohesive society through education. Building a new nation is dependent on developing an able citizenry comprised of all members of a population. It would be advisable for policy makers to consider quality assurance policy options as education is redesigned in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

Also we will observe that those students who attend schools in languages other than the national language sometimes are not able to take the UNT, therefore have limited future career opportunities.

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## Summary

### **In the Margins: Minority Education in Central Asia**

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School systems separated along language lines have pushed ethnic minorities into the margins. This article reviews separate education for ethnic minorities in two Central Asian countries - Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Students and teachers from minority and majority groups in each country were asked 1) whether separate schools for minorities persevered minority cultural identity and 2) whether such schools undercut equal educational opportunities for minority students. Analysis indicates that in some political, social and educational contexts separation puts minority youth at a disadvantage, which in turn keeps them from fully integrating into society. Redressing this situation requires a commitment to guaranteeing rights and full citizenship for minorities.

This paper explores how separate school systems deepen ethnic and political divisions in society rather than promote equality and equity. It begins with a number of questions. How much emphasis do current education reform initiatives put on equity and equality in minority schools? What is the balance between economic and civic imperatives in the education policy process in the two countries? What are the main features of post-transition phase in education and how it affects separate education?

As mentioned in the foreword of this issue, data analyzed for this study was collected under the auspices of the “Divided Education, Divided Citizens?” project, which was conducted in seven post-socialist countries. This article concentrates on separate schooling for different ethnic and linguistic groups and issues related to the civil enculturation of minorities in two Central Asian countries, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Study participants from minority and majority language-track schools in each country were asked to observe whether separate schools for minority ethnicities served to preserve culture or instead undercut equal educational opportunity.

Pervious investigations have found that education plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals’ perceptions of their own ethnicity. Korostelina (2008) in researching history education across for countries (Ireland, Taiwan, China, and North Korea) found that history textbooks reinforce ethnic loyalties and play an important role in shaping ethnic identity in History education. Specifically in Central Asia, Kissane (2005) found that history education reform in Kazakhstan has been an important part of shaping post-Soviet Kazak identity.

Before going into the methodology section, it would be helpful to give more background

information about the study and its focus on Central Asia in particular. How is minority education reform different in Central Asia from other countries? What are some of the important policy contexts that the readers need to be aware of?