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The Bologna Process and Higher Education Renewal in Kazakhstan: Challenges of Policy Borrowing and Doctor of Philosophy Graduation Requirements

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Abstract

Kazakhstan's entry into the Bologna Process through its 2007 education law marked a pivotal reform in higher education, shifting to a Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) structure. The intent is to achieve global competitiveness by aligning Kazakhstan's educational standards with those of developed countries. This reform aims to converge with advanced economies, facilitating access to the EU and OECD. Central to this policy is the mandate for research-based Ph.D. degrees, with graduation requirements emphasizing qualities needed in a research-driven society. This case study investigates how borrowing educational policies from the Bologna Process shapes Ph.D. graduation requirements and how students adapt to these changes. The findings argue that, despite aligning with social, cultural, and structural models from developed nations, neglecting local socio-cultural conditions undermines Kazakhstan's quest for global competitiveness. The paper argues that addressing local needs rather than merely emulating external models is essential for effective higher education reform. The article concludes that advancing Kazakhstan's domestic socio-cultural needs requires a resolute commitment to developing society's normative structures, particularly by strengthening national identity. Achieving a balance between global competitiveness and local priorities is essential for sustainable progress. The article recommends that educational policy borrowing be selective to incorporate national identity practices, and that governments and politicians reformulate educational borrowing in accord with an atypical non-globalization emphasis.

Keywords: Global Competitiveness; Higher Education; Kazakhstan; Ph.D. Programs; The Bologna Process; Convergence