International Conference on Research in
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
27 - 29 November 2026 Vienna , Austria

Global Competitiveness, Educational Policy Borrowing and White Elephants in Kazakhstan's Universities

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Abstract

Global competitiveness is like the lion and the impala roaming the open field in the Serengeti looking for a booty. Each freely comes and goes, but with a prize for the impala to pay because the mighty lions are in control and can consume the small and weak animals at their discretion. The analogy of the lion and the impala above conveys the commonly implied notion of the incursion of advanced knowledge-based economies into less developed countries. This study examines the potential of indiscriminate educational policy borrowing from advanced knowledge-based economies to reform human capital development and make Kazakhstan's universities globally competitive. The article critically examines and reformulates beliefs about human capital, focusing on how it drives development and enhances global competitiveness. The present inquiry employs a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the global competitiveness goals underlying educational policy borrowing in Kazakhstan. The study draws a link between global competitiveness, educational policy borrowing, and white elephants. Findings indicate that many of the borrowed policies are incompatible with Kazakhstan's normative education context and are merely white elephants that may not enhance global competitiveness or catapult Kazakhstan into becoming one of the 30 or 40 advanced economies of the world, as the government intended. Accordingly, indiscriminate policy borrowing in Kazakhstan compromises the national identity of the higher education community. Whereas it is essential to become closer to advanced knowledge-based economies, it is also important to find ways to avoid the forfeiture of the best accomplishments of national education, self-identity, and culture.

Keywords: Educational Reform, Educational Policy Borrowing, White Elephants, Development, Globalization, Human Capital Theory, National Identity.