

# History and Civic Education in Kazakhstan

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## Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of history and civic education within Kazakhstan's secondary school system. Utilizing qualitative content and document analysis, the study examines state-mandated curricula and history textbooks for grades 5–11 used during the 2010–2022 period. The research evaluates several critical indicators, including the institutional status of the discipline, chronological focus, declared key competencies, content selection, and the integration of civic education via the “Fundamentals of Law” subject. Findings reveal that the current curriculum successfully provides a coherent chronological narrative of human development, effectively balancing national history with global processes. While the “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum explicitly focuses on fostering patriotism and national identity, the “World History” curriculum is designed to promote multiculturalism, tolerance, and respect for global diversity. The study highlights significant structural developments, such as the inclusion of “Local History” for grades 5–7 and the move toward interdisciplinary connections with geography, literature, and law. Furthermore, the evolution of civic education is marked by the formalization of law as a standalone subject, incorporating essential modern skills like financial literacy. However, the analysis identifies a persistent tension between reformist goals and the lingering Soviet legacy. Despite efforts to decolonize historical narratives and reassess the revolutionary era, the educational landscape remains influenced by traditional Soviet pedagogical approaches, specific ideological terminology, and a teaching workforce primarily trained in the late Soviet period. The paper concludes that while the transition to a modern, competency-based framework has been substantial, the process of distancing Kazakhstan's historical narrative from its Soviet past remains an ongoing and complex nation-building project.

*Keywords:* Kazakhstan, history education, civic education, curriculum analysis, Soviet legacy, nation-building, “Fundamentals of Law.”

## Introduction

The teaching of history and civic education is important for the democratic development of any country, as it equips citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to build democratic and prosperous societies. Dahl (1992) addresses the problem of ensuring high-quality civic education in contemporary days. As written by Dahl (1992):

If democracy is to work, it would seem to require a certain level of political competence on the part of its citizens. In newly democratic or democratizing countries, where people are just beginning to learn the arts of self-government, the question of citizen competence possesses an obvious urgency. Yet even in countries where democratic institutions have existed for several generations or more, a growing body of evidence reveals grave limits to citizen competence (p. 45).

While the challenge of ensuring quality citizenship education exists in all countries, this chapter aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of education in the upbringing of democratic values and patriotism in the context of Kazakhstani secondary education. The present article analyzes key aspects of Kazakhstan's history and civic education, examining an array of critical indicators that shed light on the country's educational landscape as of 2023.

## Context of the education system

### *Historical-geographical-philosophical context*

In the former Soviet Union, of which Kazakhstan was a part, history textbooks served as a tool of indoctrination; perceptions of history, society, and culture were distorted according to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, which presented the Russian colonial conquests of the republics as voluntary and friendly accession. Thus, the Ministry of Education in Moscow was responsible for approving and regulating what was taught and disseminated in history in 15 diverse republics. In general, history education served to support the ideology of the Soviet state and paid little attention to what the republics were (Kissane, 2005). Accordingly, Soviet history textbooks presented history as a stream of indisputable facts, emphasizing only the positive aspects of the Soviet colonization and industrialization and disregarding the negative consequences

of Soviet rule. Thus, in the process of the so-called “Russification” or “Sovietisation” the main goal was to subordinate the cultures and histories of the individual republics to strengthen the friendship between the peoples and create a common Soviet identity (Kissane, 2005).

Towards the end of the USSR, the situation began to change gradually, and in 1990, the Kazakh government developed a new program on the History of Kazakhstan, which was by then separate from the USSR history program. Before this, the History of the Kazakh SSR had existed as an optional course, usually taught only in Kazakh-language schools in the southern regions where such schools existed. After 1990, it became a compulsory subject throughout the Republic (Kissane, 2005). The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a surge of interest in curricula and pedagogical reforms. Thus, the government of Kazakhstan initiated changes in the teaching of history, proposing a list of corrections to past material and changes to old curricula. The program required new historical facts, more questions about the revolution, and a reassessment of what had previously been presented as Kazakhstan’s voluntary accession to Russia. Thereby, history education in the country became a potentially powerful tool in the new nation-building project (Kissane, 2005). Thus, in Kazakhstan, as in most former Soviet republics, a process of de-Sovietisation and de-Russification began.

De-Sovietisation refers to the process by which nationalizing political systems remove symbols, political institutions, and representatives of Soviet power from the social and political landscape and replace them with new, national ones. De-Russification, in turn, means the abandonment of Russian as the main language of communication in the republic and a shift in emphasis from Russian history to the history of Kazakhstan. Accordingly, every history program published after 1991 emphasizes the need to move away from a curriculum in which European and Russian history dominates over Eastern and Kazakh history. Moreover, teachers were also encouraged to shift their focus to the cultural and historical contributions of Central Asian countries (Kissane, 2005).

After the dissolution of the USSR, the post-Soviet republics faced the need to replace the source of common values and goals with something new. A defining feature of post-Soviet historical narratives is the concept of territoriality, which frames all ancient inhabitants of a republic’s current land as the direct ancestors of its modern-day citizens. In this way, the newly created borders became historical realities long before

the Soviet period. In this regard, Kazakhstan is no exception, where the territorial aspect plays a fundamental role in the construction of the country's past. The central idea forming the official history of Kazakhstan is that all peoples who lived on the territory of modern Kazakhstan played a role in the formation of the Kazakh people, and therefore, they have a place in the history of the country (Emre Gürbüz, 2013, pp. 3). However, territorial inclusiveness has its limits and does not include ethnic groups that migrated to Kazakhstan after the 18th century, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Uighurs, Koreans, and others. Only those people who lived within the modern borders of Kazakhstan before the formation of the Kazakh Khanate are considered to be the ancestors of the Kazakh nation. However, today, the inclusiveness of all ethnic groups of Kazakhstan is manifested on another level when all citizens of the Republic are *Kazakhstanis* (Emre Gürbüz, 2013). Thus, the continuity in the territorial understanding is partly related to the very need to anchor the state within existing borders. It should be noted here that the traditional territorial understanding cannot be seen only as an external influence adopted from the Soviet period, as it is also driven by internal needs. Therefore, the main task became to assert the legitimacy of the state within the given borders (Emre Gürbüz, 2013). Today, there is a tendency in Kazakh historiography to go beyond territoriality. For example, the study of the Kipchaks outside of Kazakh borders, Sultan Baybars, ruler of Egypt, or Attila, Khan of the European Huns. Thus, Kazakh historiography is on its way to becoming a field that studies not only the past of the peoples who lived on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, regardless of their ethnic origin but also the past of all Kazakh tribes, regardless of the land on which they lived (Emre Gürbüz, 2013).

### ***General description of the education system***

The Republic of Kazakhstan has undergone significant transformations in its post-independence education system, with a substantial emphasis on revising curricular content and pedagogical methods, especially in teaching the nation's history. The education system is categorized into several levels: preschool education, primary education, basic secondary education, general secondary education, technical and vocational education, post-secondary education, and higher and additional education. Each level incorporates history education in some form, ensuring a continuous and comprehensive understanding of Kazakhstan's history from a young age. The curricu-

lum of history and civic education in Kazakhstan is structured around Bloom’s taxonomy to develop knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking regarding the ethnic, political, socio-economic, and cultural history of Kazakhstan. Finishing grade 11, students undergo the standardized university entrance test, called the Unified National Test (National Testing Centre, 2010). The Unified National Test consists of two main blocks. The first block has mathematical literacy, reading literacy, and the history of Kazakhstan. This block includes multiple-choice questions, with 10 questions each for mathematical and reading literacy, while the history of Kazakhstan has 20 questions. The second block consists of two subjects of a student’s choice, and several questions as well as the type of answers depends on the subject of choice. For example, world history can be chosen in combination with fundamentals of law, geography, or foreign language subjects (National Testing Center, 2010).

*Table 1. Educational areas in the content of school education (“Instructional and methodological letter”, 2023).*

No	The level of school education	Educational areas	The content of historical and civic education in educational areas	ISCED level equivalent
1	Primary education Grades 1-4	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics”, “Natural Sciences”, “Man and Society”, “Art”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	The educational field of “Natural Sciences” includes subjects: “Knowledge of the world”, “Natural Sciences”	ISCED 1 (age period of 6-10 years)
2	Basic secondary education grades 5 – 9	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics and Computer Science”, “Natural Science”, “People and Society”, “Art”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	The educational field of “Natural Science” includes subjects: “Geography”, “Biology”, “Physics”, “Chemistry”  The educational field “People and Society” includes subjects: “History of Kazakhstan”, “World History”	ISCED 2 (age period of 11-15 years)

3	General secondary education Grades 10 – 11	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics and Computer Science”, “People and Society”, “Natural Science”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	<p>The educational field of “Natural Sciences” includes subjects: “Geography”, “Biology”, “Physics”, “Chemistry”</p> <p>The educational field “People and Society” includes subjects: “History of Kazakhstan”, “World History”, “Fundamentals of Law”, “Self-knowledge”</p> <p>The educational field “Physical culture” consists of subjects: “Physical education”, “Initial military training”</p>	ISCED 3 (age period of 16-17 years)
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The main providers of school education in Kazakhstan are government-funded public schools operating under the guidance of local educational authorities and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The education system is also supported by various specialized educational organizations, such as the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), the country’s flagship schools.

Education in Kazakhstan is primarily funded by the central government, as indicated in the “Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan”. The government allocates resources for the development of educational infrastructure, curriculum development, teacher training, and other essential components of the education system. This centralized funding approach ensures equitable access to quality education across different regions of the country, allowing for a consistent educational experience for all students. Since 2020, public schools in Kazakhstan have been funded using the principle of “per capita funding”, referring to the amount of money allocated for each student within a given educational institution (“On approval of the Methodology of per capita regulatory financing...”, 2023). However, according to a recent news article (“Schools in Kazakhstan: uneven funding...”, 2022), the budget for one public school in 2022 was 159 million Kazakhstani tenge, which is approximately 353,586 USD. This was 3.7 times less than the budget of one NIS school, which was 592.1 million Kazakhstani tenge, which is approximately 1,316,720 USD.

## **Position of history and civic education**

### ***General Aspects***

As per analysis in 2023, the Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Obligatory Standard of Education are the primary legal normative documents regulating the education system. The National Academy of Education, named after Ybyrai Altynsarin of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a scientific centre that carries out methodological and scientific-methodological support of the education system and the educational processes. This centre forms the basis for state compulsory education standards, model curricula, and study programs. “History of Kazakhstan” is a compulsory subject from the 5th to the 11th grades, with an annual load of 72 hours per year, except in the 10th and 11th grades, where it is studied once a week for 36 hours per year in a shortened format. History is integrated with other subjects under the educational field of “People and Society”, which includes “World History”, “People. Society. Law”, and “Self-knowledge”. Textbooks for “History of Kazakhstan” are either recommended or approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, ensuring quality content suitable for different age groups. “History of Kazakhstan” is a mandatory subject for the final certification in the 11th grade. The certification assesses students based on Bloom’s taxonomy, covering knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This process aims to develop in-depth knowledge of key issues in Kazakhstan’s history, cultural-historical development, and historical thinking skills (Educational areas in the content of school education (“Instructional and methodological letter”, 2023).

## **Periodic Focus of History Education**

### ***History of Kazakhstan***

The curriculum of the subject “History of Kazakhstan” covers the ancient history of the country. It examines the development of nomadic pastoralism in Kazakhstan, as well as ancient nomadic confederations. Specifically, it analyzes such ancient confederations as the Sakas, Huns, and Sarmatians and their associated archaeological findings, worldview, art, and social structure. The curriculum also examines individual historical figures

of the period, such as Tomyris and Attila, and certain historical events, such as Alexander the Great's campaign into Saka territory and the Huns' westward migration (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The medieval history of Kazakhstan is also covered in the curriculum by examining the states and their socio-cultural features from the Turkic Khaganate to the Kazakh Khanate and listing some significant historical events. Within these topics, the history of Kazakhstan between the 6th and 17th centuries is explored by examining the emergence of the first Turkic states, such as the Turkic Khaganate and the Oghuz and Kimak states, and the cities that emerged along the Silk Road are also discussed. The curriculum also analyzes the process of the Islam's penetration into the region and related events. Moreover, the Mongol conquest of the territory and the subsequent formation of the Kazakh Khanate are examined (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The curriculum then considers premodern and modern national history, studying the period from the Kazakh Khanate in the 17th century to the collapse of the USSR. Thus, this segment includes the main historical developments, such as the growth and decline of the Kazakh Khanate and its subsequent subjugation to the Russian Empire, as well as an analysis of the numerous national liberation movements and attempts by Kazakh intellectuals to restore national sovereignty after the 1917 revolution. The curriculum then examines the establishment of the Soviet rule in Kazakhstan and subsequent events related to it, including the repression of local intellectuals, participation in World War II, and the general sociocultural changes that occurred in the country during the Soviet period (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

When it comes to contemporary national history, the curriculum covers the period from the end of World War II to the present day. In particular, various periods of Soviet Kazakhstan are studied, including the so-called "thaw", the "era of stagnation", and so on. In the end, several topics about Kazakhstan after 1991 are discussed in detail. Thus, this segment examines Soviet Kazakhstan's historical events. It first considers Kazakhstan after World War II and then in the respective eras of the "Thaw", the "Era of Stagnation", "Glasnost", and "Perestroika". It then examines Kazakhstan after 1991 as an independent subject of international relations and the major events that occurred in the country, including privatization, the first presidency, the relocation of the capital, and various national economic and social programs (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The last topic in the History of Kazakhstan curriculum is “The Culture of Contemporary Kazakhstan (from 1991 to the present).” This topic examines major developments in national science and education and explores culture within the context of globalization. It also deals with state educational policy and the differences between traditional and extremist religious worldviews (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

### ***World History***

The World History curriculum covers the prehistoric period of human development, examining the period from hunter-gatherers to farmers and pastoralists. This topic studies the origins of humanity through various theories and explores prehistoric human communities. Early religious beliefs such as animism, fetishism, and totemism are also examined, as well as the concept of the “Neolithic Revolution” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Further on, the curriculum separately studies ancient world history, examining civilizations such as Ancient Egypt, Ancient India and China, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire. These topics examine the social and political structure of ancient societies, as well as their mode of production. The emergence of the first scientific disciplines and the influence of agriculture on their development are also analyzed. In addition, such phenomena of the ancient world as ancient Egyptian temples and pyramids, the Indian caste system, Chinese moral teachings, and the Athenian democracy are discussed (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). In the curriculum, the Middle Ages segment covers topics from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the Reformation. This segment begins by analyzing the reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire and the formation of feudal societies. A separate topic then examines the history of Islam and the Golden Age of Islamic culture. The differences between the absolutist monarchies of the West and the East are also explored. This is followed by a discussion of the effects of the plague and the great geographical discoveries (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). In the World History curriculum, the pre-modern and modern periods include major historical events in the world - from the English and Industrial Revolution to World War II. This segment covers a very wide range of topics, from European revolutions and their colonial invasion of the East to the Enlightenment movement. The resistance of China and India to colonization and the abolition of slavery in the United States, Atatürk’s war of liberation, and the causes of both World Wars are also examined. In addition, a separate topic examines the

development of 19th and 20th-century art and literature (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The curriculum then covers contemporary world history, analyzing historical events from World War II to the present day, such as the Cold War, the process of decolonization, the creation of international organizations, and more. Accordingly, this segment covers various topics related to contemporary global history by analyzing the political and economic map of the world after World War II. It examines the causes of the Cold War and the subsequent formation of two opposing blocs, decolonization movements in former colonies, and the creation of international organizations such as the United Nations. In addition, a separate topic looks at Asia, particularly the economic phenomenon called the “East Asian Miracle”. The relationship between national identity and the effects of globalization is also examined (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022.). The final topic in the World History curriculum is “Culture in the second half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st century”. The topic explores the influence of mass media on the cultural development of nations, as well as trends in contemporary world culture. It also examines the concept of digital society and the new art forms associated with it (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

## **Declared Key Competencies in History Education of Kazakhstan**

### ***History of Kazakhstan***

The curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan” is directed towards equipping the students with a set of specific competencies and skills that develop their understanding and knowledge of history. The main aim of the curriculum is to develop the students’ basic historical thinking skills, such as interpretation of historical sources, orientation in time and space, and skills of historical analysis and explanations (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). These specific competencies and skills are formed based on historical concepts, which include: 1) change and continuity, 2) cause and effect, 3) proof, 4) similarities and differences, 5) significance, and 6) interpretation (p. 3210).

As per analysis in 2023, in the curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan,” it is stated that “The content of the subject “History of Kazakhstan” allows understanding the unique-

ness of the culture of our ancestors, the place and role Kazakhstan in world history, its contribution to the development of the global civilization” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3208). The aim of developing patriotism is highlighted in the curriculum, and it is interwoven with the development of such complex analytical skills as “development, research, thinking, communication skills” (p. 3208).

According to the report by Hoskins et al. (2008), the competencies of the curriculum can be divided into affective (identity, values, attitude) and cognitive (knowledge and skills) competencies (p. 21). In the statement of objectives of the curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan,” the values and identity competencies are combined in one set. Thus, it can be seen that the curriculum aims to develop a patriotic citizen, proud of one’s national history. One important element of Kazakhstani history curricula is that patriotism and love for the homeland are not positioned in contrast to universal human values but are complemented as a set of competencies necessary for the development of the national identity of a Kazakh citizen.

*Table 2. Competency groups adapted from Hoskins et al. (2008).*

	Competence	Competence type	Description
1.	Identity	Affective	“Sense of personal identity, sense of community identity, sense of national identity, sense of global identity” (p. 21)
2.	Values		Values include “human rights, democracy, gender equality, sustainability, peace/non-violence, fairness and equity, valuing involvement as active citizens” (p. 21)
3.	Attitude		Attitudes include “political trust, political interest, political efficacy, autonomy and independence, resilience, cultural appreciation, respect for other cultures, openness to change/difference of opinion, responsibility, and openness to involvement as active citizens, influencing society and policy” (p. 21).

4.	Knowledge	Cognitive	Knowledge about “human rights and responsibilities, political literacy, historical knowledge, current affairs, diversity, cultural heritage, legal matters and how to influence policy and society” (p. 21).
5.	Skills		Skills including “conflict resolution, intercultural competence, informed decision-making, creativity, ability to influence society and policy, research capability, advocacy, autonomy/agency, critical reflection, communication, debating skills, active listening, problem-solving, coping with ambiguity, working with others, assessing risks (p. 21)”

The curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan” provides a more concrete competence of “consciousness,” which implies the development of the attitudes listed by Hoskins et al. (2011). It states that “Historical consciousness is the knowledge of history, the interpretation of historical experience and the lessons derived from it, social forecasting (based on an understanding of the essence of the present, the invariance of the past, and the alternativeness of the future), and the awareness of historical responsibility for one’s actions. Historical knowledge, which is an important component of the educational process, contributes to the development of the individual as a citizen and a patriot” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Thus, the competencies of historical consciousness and historical knowledge are connected with the development of attitudes of responsibility and societal involvement, as well as cultural appreciation.

The curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan” divides the knowledge competencies into three groups: knowledge about the main stages of the societal development in Kazakhstan from the ancient period to modern days, knowledge about the formation of national values throughout history, and the knowledge of main historical events and processes in Kazakhstan (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Following Hoskins et al. (2008), the curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan” divides the “Skills” into five main categories, including critical analysis, making judgments based on historical facts, research, and communicative skills. Overall, 2022 curriculum of the

“History of Kazakhstan” is directed towards equipping the students with a set of specific competencies and skills that develop their understanding and knowledge of history.

### ***World History***

While history teachers are engaged with encouraging their students to think historically by involving them in “interpreting and analyzing historical artefacts” (Waring & Robinson, 2010, p. 22), the teachers of the World History discipline are faced with a slightly different task. According to Manning (2003), World History is “the story of connections within the global human community” (p. 3), and he further adds that such terms as “connections and human community” (p. 3) are usually associated with World History. Similarly, Girard and Harris (2013) posit that World History “can be seen as a catch-all course title that might include a regional approach, a current affairs approach, a “Western civ” approach, or a global approach” (p. 440). In other words, the World history discipline seeks to address “global interconnections, multiple perspectives, and inquiry into global issues” (Girard & Harris, 2013, p. 438). As World History goes beyond the usual historical narratives and takes a “global approach” (Girard & Harris, 2013), we will look at the curriculum of World History in Kazakhstan from a competency-based perspective.

The curriculum of World History discipline explicitly and clearly states the aims and objectives, the competencies to be developed as well as the expected learning outcomes. Upon reviewing the curriculum, it became clear that it indeed focuses more on globality, multiculturalism, and universal human values. In other words, the key competencies the students learn in this discipline revolve around the development of such skills and values as respect and tolerance towards other cultures. To be exact, the main aim of the World History discipline is to teach students a sense of history, tolerance, and respect for the culture and history of different countries, instill universal human values developed over many centuries, and develop their research, thinking, and communication skills (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3306). It is also highlighted that the subject is aimed to develop “historical thinking” in students, which is based on the conceptual understanding of the following: “1) change and continuity; 2) cause and effect; 3) proof; 4) similarity and difference; 5) significance; 6) interpretation” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The content of World History discipline builds upon the main four sections: Section 1: the development of social relations includes such topics as social structures and inter-

action; Section 2: the development and interaction of cultures, including religion, art, science, and philosophical systems; Section 3: the development and interaction of political systems including government characteristics, structures, forms of government, empires, wars, uprisings, and revolutions; Section 4: the development of economic relations including economic systems, evolution and interaction, and historical models of economic systems (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3308).

The students are expected to develop such competencies as analyzing and evaluating historical examples, explaining the cause and effect of historical events, providing arguments and evidence based on analysis of historical events, comparing historical events and facts, justifying the significance of historical events, and explaining different points of view on historical events (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The aforementioned competencies are expected to be developed on a gradual basis from 5th to 9th grades. For example, there are 10 sections in grade 5 each of which is concentrated on a certain civilization, i.e. Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, Ancient Greece, Ancient China, and The Roman Empire. The students are expected to explain and describe certain events that took place in these civilizations. Also, in the first five sections, the students are expected to understand, explain, and describe, then towards the next sections the students are expected to also define, characterize and compare certain events. In grade 6 the students learn about the impact of religion on certain historical events, the Renaissance period and Scientific Revolution. Grades 7 and 8 include learning about India and the United Kingdom in the 18th century, the French Revolution, European colonial dominance in the 19th century, the power increase of the United States of America, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Grade 9 covers Globalization, the development of Asian countries, science, education, technology, and culture from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Starting from grades 6 to 9, the students are expected to analyze, evaluate, interpret and provide arguments, and draw conclusions. From this, it is evident that the curriculum is not only learner-centred but also develops the students' competencies and skills from a broader spectrum to a more precise and, in some cases, demanding spectrum. It is also clear that the curriculum covers the history of various civilizations by introducing the students to different religions, cultures, and perspectives.

## Structure and content selection

This section reviews history textbooks for the 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades in both Kazakh and Russian language comprehensive schools, including the specialized Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (Kabuldinov et al., 2020ab; Kabuldinov et al., 2018; Kumekov et al., 2017; Omarbekov et al., 2018; Oskembayev et al., 2019ab; Dzhandosova, 2019; Akhmetova et al., 2017; Bukayeva et al., 2017; E-textbooks, 2021).

The curriculum (2022-2023) covers Kazakhstan's history, including its cultural heritage and its development in the context of global history. The curriculum for grades 5-9 on the subject of "History of Kazakhstan" is broken down into periods in chronological order, from ancient times to the present day. The taught content is designed to give students an in-depth knowledge of key issues concerning the political, socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural history of Kazakhstan across different eras. It includes various sections such as "The Development of Social Relations," "The Development of Culture," "The Development of Political Systems," and "Economic Development." Meanwhile, a course titled "Local History" has also been integrated into the content of the "History of Kazakhstan" subject for grades 5-7. The teaching materials for the latter course educate students about the main stages of various historical processes on the territory of Kazakhstan while also informing them about its natural resources, historical monuments, and cultural sites. In addition, there is content on traditional crafts, cultural and literary heritage, as well as notable people, many of whom are famous across different regions of Kazakhstan (Altynsarin Academy, 2022).

Although the history curriculum in Kazakhstan is not fully interdisciplinary, efforts are being made to connect the subject of history with other disciplines, such as geography, culture, literature, art, music, law, economics, and politics, to promote a more holistic understanding of the country's historical events and cultural heritage. For example, linking history with geography could potentially help students gain a better understanding of the spatial contexts of certain historical events, which often have geographical significance. The history textbooks can thus give readers a strong grasp of territories and the ability to read maps (e.g. when studying the migrations of ancient cultures) while providing information on the locations and descriptions of fossil fuels, agricultural developments (e.g. Saks' gardening culture, and virgin lands), tools and utensils for

everyday use, jewelry, stone monuments (e.g. Balbal stone sculptures), and architectural monuments of each covered period (e.g. the Aisha Bibi and Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleums) (Kumekov et al., 2017a, 2017b). Elsewhere, the development of poetry (*jir/jirau*) culture (e.g., Qoblandy Batyr and Qarabek Batyr) is also taught, where, as well as historical accounts, information about knights' hunting and archery are also provided (Kumekov et al., 2017ab).

The study of historical periods often involves exploring the art, literature, and music of the times, thereby providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the given era. For example, the school textbooks supplement details of historical events with evidence from literature (for example, "The Disaster of Otyrar " by M. Shakhanov is referred to as the famous battle between the Mongol army and Turkic tribes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Furthermore, historical events are often interconnected with social, political, and economic factors. With that in mind, the curriculum integrates social studies concepts to help students grasp the broader societal implications of such events. For instance, students are taught the basics of law and legislation through "Jeti Jarǵı" (Seven Charters) introduced by Tauke Khan (Omarbekov et al., 2018). Moreover, the school textbooks for grades 8 and 9 demonstrate links between history and other disciplines like economics (e.g. industrialization and the Turkestan-Siberian Railway (Turksib) development, as well as literature and music (e.g., composers including Qurmanghazy, Dauletkerey, and Abai). In addition, the curriculum covers the more recent trends and developments in Kazakhstan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century too, and mentions Nazarbayev University (the country's flagship university), the state-funded Bolashak Programme, and the Kazakhstan-2030 Strategy (Oskembayev et al., 2019).

The "History of Kazakhstan" curriculum for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is arranged differently. It is ordered thematically, albeit chronology is maintained within the individual chapters (Dzhandosova, 2019). The curriculum does not place a particular emphasis on political history, with the historical events covered evolving around the following four main themes: historical events and leaders; the formation of Kazakhstan; colonial and Soviet Kazakhstan; and independence and modern history. For 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the basic content of the curriculum is divided into four sections: "Civilization: Features of Development," "Ethnic and Social Processes," "Wars and Revolutions," and "Cultural Development" (Al-tynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 200). Meanwhile, the "History of Kazakhstan" curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> grade is essentially a review of all courses taught from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Kabyldinov

et al., 2020). At this stage, students undergo preparations for the standardized university entrance test, the Unified National Test (National Testing Center, 2010). In 11th grade, the basic content of the curriculum for this subject comprises the following four sections: “Civilization: Features of Development,” “Political and Legal Processes,” “Development of Socio-political Thought,” and “Development of Education and Science.” These sections are divided into subsections that contain grade-level learning objectives in the form of expected outcomes (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 200).

By the standard “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum for students in grades 10 and 11, as well as for those who pursue the social and humanitarian elements in the “World History” curriculum, there is research to be conducted at the end of each academic quarter (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202, 210). The recommended topics for research papers for students in the 10th grade in the “History of Kazakhstan” subject are: (1) The Great Steppe in the History of World Civilization; (2) Ethno-social Formation of Kazakh Society; and (3) The Evolution of Kazakh Statehood; (4) Culture and Traditions as the Genetic Code of the Nation. Moreover, for research papers in 11th grade, the following four topics are recommended: (1) Features of the Economic Development of Kazakhstan in Different Historical Periods; (2) Ethnic Groups of Kazakhstan: History and Destinies; (3) The Consolidating Role of Socio-political Thought; and (4) Contributions of Figures from Kazakhstan to the Development of Science and Education (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202-203).

In the curriculum 2022-2023, there are also elective courses on both the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” subjects that include issues related to historical eras, states, historical figures, economic, political, cultural, and social issues of history, and the works of historians. Additional materials for both the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” subjects can be reviewed in the following sources: Bilimdiler Sayti, 2014; Grishin, n.d.; Index Group, n.d.; Nikolayev, 2000; QazContent, 2022; and Zlygostev, 2002. In addition, recommended topics for elective courses for “History of Kazakhstan” are: (1) The Golden Man as a Cultural Monument; (2) Turkic Scientists of the Middle Ages; (3) History of Traditional Kazakh Life; (4) Cultural and Historical Foundations of Kazakh Folk Crafts; and (5) The Alash Movement and its ideas (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202-203). Meanwhile, topics for elective courses in the “World History” curriculum are (1) Masterpieces of Advanced World Culture; (2) History of World Museums; (3) Nomadic Civilization in the Eurasian Space; (4) Historical Demography; (5) Globalization

Processes: Theory and Modernity; (6) Socio-political Movements in World History: Communist, Socialist, and New Democratic Movements; (7) The Scientific and Technological Revolution and its Influence on the Social and Spiritual Sphere; and (8) Western Civilization: Problems and Development Processes (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 211).

## **Civic Education in Kazakhstan**

As per analysis done in 2023, civic education in Kazakhstan is represented by the subject “Fundamentals of Law”, which is offered as a compulsory course for grades 9-11. However, it is an elective subject for students taking the standardized university entrance test, the Unified National Test (National Testing Centre, 2010). In total, each grade receives approximately 36 lessons per year dedicated to civic education, but in grades 10-11, with the humanities focus the amount doubles.

As per analysis in 2023, the basic curriculum for grade 9 includes seven major sections: law and the state, constitutional law, civil law, labour law, family law; administrative law, and criminal law. For grades 10 and 11, the curriculum further extends to cover public law, private law, fundamentals of procedural law, and international law (“Fundamentals of law subject books for grade 9, 10, 11”, 2019).

At the end of each academic quarter in grades 10 and 11, students are expected to engage in research work, researching topics such as the evolution of forms of state and law; characteristics of the features of branches of public law; the role of private law in ensuring legal protection of private property. Also, in grade 11, the financial literacy component aims to provide students with basic but essential knowledge about banking operations, loans, and credit systems, as well as budgeting and financial planning (“Instructional and methodological letters for Kazakhstani schools”, 2023). This part of the curriculum equips students with the skills to make informed decisions that will affect their long-term financial health, empowering them to be more responsible citizens. However, the curriculum of the “Fundamentals of Law” subject does not cover digital citizenship nor the development of digital skills (“Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11”, 2019).

The portrayal of political participation and activism reflects the historical context of the nation’s political landscape. The textbooks primarily emphasize the existence of six officially registered political parties in Kazakhstan, highlighting the formalized structure

of the country's political system. Within this framework, citizens are largely described not as active participants of the democratic system but rather as passive mediators between these political parties and the government. They can exercise their political rights to the freedom of association, to manage public affairs, and to participate in peaceful demonstrations. Political rights in these textbooks are mentioned briefly. The absence of a dedicated chapter on political activism may indicate a limited historical emphasis on grassroots movements or civil society organizations in the country's political development ("Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019).

Also, state-approved "Fundamentals of Law" textbooks appear to allocate limited space to discussing environmental challenges and sustainable development. While they do acknowledge that one of the responsibilities of citizens is to care for the environment and natural resources, this topic seems to receive relatively scant attention. It's worth considering that the limited coverage of environmental challenges and sustainable development in the textbooks (years?) may be due to the existence of separate subjects or courses that explore more deeply into these issues. In educational curricula, topics like environmental science, ecology, and sustainable development are often taught as standalone subjects ("Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019).

In "The Fundamentals of Law" textbook (2019) in Kazakhstan, readers will discover a strong patriotism. The textbook employs powerful symbols such as the Kazakh flag with its bright blue sky, which represents freedom and openness, and the golden steppe eagle, a revered national symbol embodying strength and resilience. These symbols, deeply ingrained in Kazakhstan's history and culture, serve to evoke a profound sense of national pride and unity among its citizens. Additionally, the emphasis on the legal framework and the Constitution within the textbook underscores the significance of the rule of law in preserving the nation's sovereignty and fostering civic duty, further instilling a deep sense of patriotism and responsibility in its readers. The textbooks make a concerted effort to nurture a sense of national identity by referencing historical figures like Al Farabi and Abay, who are celebrated for their contributions to Kazakh culture, philosophy, and literature. Furthermore, the textbooks place a significant emphasis on the role of the family within civil society. By highlighting the family as the primary institution, the curriculum underscores the importance of strong familial bonds in shaping individuals' values, ethics, and social responsibility, ultimately contributing to the broader national identity and the well-being of Kazakhstan as a whole.

In the 11th-grade textbook, a notable section explores the concept of interconnectedness through global or supranational citizenship. Kazakhstan aspires to join the ranks of developed nations, positioning itself as a subject of international law with its ambitions aligned with its global standing. The curriculum underscores Kazakhstan's active engagement on the international stage, highlighting the country's global partnerships with other nations and its membership in various prominent world organizations. These affiliations demonstrate Kazakhstan's commitment to collaborating on a multitude of global issues, reflecting its role as a responsible and active participant in the international community ("The Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019). Additionally, the textbook mentions the existence of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, a unique institution in the country's socio-political landscape. This assembly is designed to promote interethnic harmony and inclusivity, reflecting Kazakhstan's commitment to fostering unity among its diverse population. By including this institution in the curriculum, the textbooks underscore the nation's dedication to embracing and celebrating its rich cultural mosaic as a fundamental component of its identity and global citizenship aspirations.

## **Dilemmas on history and civic education in Kazakhstan**

There are some worthwhile observations to make here on the reviewed history textbooks. During the comparative analysis, some debatable statements were found in the textbooks. For example, Burkhanov and Sharipova (2023, pp. 4-5) state that "the History of Kazakhstan textbook for 5th grade narrates about commonalities between the Shumer and ancient Turkic writing systems." According to scholars, this statement was initially made by the Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov (Artykbayev, Sabdanbekova, and Abil, 2010, pp. 11, 92). Another important example was taken from the 7th-grade history textbook, where some of the content on the periodization of the ancient Turkic writing system was questionable (Zholdasbayev 2012, p. 44).

Elsewhere, history textbooks by Toleubayev, Zhanuzak, and Koigeldiyev (2010, p.69) and Sadykov and Toleubayev (2011, p.155) explain the term "anthropology" as a physical anthropology, thereby referring to a traditional Soviet understanding of it. Moreover, in some textbooks, terms such as "ethnos" and "nation" were still interpreted by a traditional Soviet or Stalinist understanding (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2023, p.5). Ethnicity and iden-

tity issues started to appear in textbooks from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in a short section called “Formation of the Kazakh Ethnicity” and then in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a chapter called “Beginning of the Formation of Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.” Meanwhile, the textbooks for grades 10 and 11 contained two sections, one called “Formation of the Kazakh People” and the other named “Ethnic Composition of the Kazakh People” (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2023, p.12). All the reviewed history textbooks were written by different researchers. Previously, history textbooks looked more like scholarly works with many dates, facts, and names that required memorization by heart and no illustrations or pictures. Relatedly, Burkhanov and Sharipova (2023) claim that many history textbooks written for schools were criticized for being too complex for school children as they had been prepared by academic researchers rather than school educators or teachers (p. 4). To sum up, the Soviet legacy still affects history education in Kazakhstan through the contents of its textbooks, as well as through the terms used, ideology taught, and teaching approaches taken.

While the reforms to history and civic education in Kazakhstan have been positive since independence 1991, some experts argue that more needs to be done to promote critical thinking and analysis skills in the classroom. For example, some teachers may still be using traditional teaching methods, and some textbooks may still contain biased information. Also, teachers’ teaching styles and pedagogical approaches are still largely influenced by the Soviet legacy. The reason for that is that most public-school teachers were raised and educated in the late Soviet period. Fimyar and Kurakbayev (2016) argue that in the teaching community, the Soviet system of education was still often referred to as being “successful, fundamental and the best in the world” (p.86). Kashkimbaev (2013) argues that one of the main problems with teaching history in Kazakhstan is that textbooks still contain a significant amount of Soviet propaganda. For example, the narratives from neighbouring regions, such as Astrakhan in Russia, sometimes might overshadow local perspectives. This leads to an education that may not always be neutral or comprehensive, thereby affecting students’ understanding of their heritage and global history (Valieva, 2013). Also, the coexistence of Russian and Kazakh languages in the educational system is a testament to the close cultural ties between Kazakhstan and Russia. However, this linguistic diversity poses its own set of challenges. The majority of educational materials, particularly in history, are often available in just one language, hindering those not proficient in that language from accessing critical educational resources (Kashkimbaev, 2013).

Additionally, local authors (Valieva, 2013; Kashkimbaev, 2013) identify several other challenges facing the teaching of history in Kazakhstan, including a lack of resources, such as textbooks and other teaching materials, large class sizes, a high workload for teachers and a lack of support for teachers to develop their skills.

While the Kazakh educational curriculum 2022-2023 does cover essential civic topics, such as financial literacy and private/civil law, there's a missed opportunity for contextual depth. For example, Grade 11 students learn about banking, loans, and contracts but often without the historical backdrop that would enrich their understanding of these subjects. This detachment from historical contexts can result in a lack of comprehensive education. With a young national identity, Kazakhstan faces the tricky balance of fostering national pride while ensuring an unbiased historical narrative. The call for a unified approach to teaching history often leans towards a government-endorsed version of events, potentially stifling critical thinking and creating an uneven educational landscape across different schools.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has extensively introduced a collection of works on history and civic education in Kazakhstan. It has applied qualitative content and document analysis to examine the history curriculum and textbooks used at public schools to provide a deep understanding of history education in Kazakhstan. This method incorporated different indicators such as the position of history education, periodic focus, declared key competencies, structure and content selection, civic education, and, finally, the dilemmas concerning history and civic education. The data for this paper included history textbooks used in grades 5-11 that were in use in Kazakhstan during the 2010–2022 period.

By providing a general description of the secondary education system in the country, it conveys specific knowledge of history and civic education in Kazakhstan, its general aspects, periodic focus, key competencies, content, and dilemmas. Even though the Kazakh government has initiated changes to the old history curriculum, not all such reforms have gone smoothly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Upon gaining its independence, a new Kazakhstan history program was developed by the Kazakh government in 1990, in which an attempt was made to distinguish it from the USSR history program.

The new program required some correction of historical facts and the reassessment of some issues concerning revolutions and periods of colonialism. Kissane (2005) argues that history education in the country became a potentially powerful tool in the new nation-building project (p. 50). That process, according to an article by Burkhanov & Sharipova (2023), is still ongoing.

A comprehensive content analysis of the history curriculum 2022-2023 here has helped to clarify which periods are covered in the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” basic secondary education. The main finding is that the curriculum provides students with a comprehensive understanding of history, presenting a logical and coherent account of human development as well as national history. Moreover, the history curriculum encompasses all historical periods of note in both Kazakh and world history, breaking them down into separate segments for examination, from the prehistoric period to the present day.

The “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” curricula clearly state the aims, key competencies, and learning outcomes for students. Specifically, the “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum states more explicitly that it aims to develop patriotism in school students, while the curriculum for “World History” clearly sets out to develop multiculturalism and tolerance towards other cultures. Moreover, the subjects seem to develop not only cognitive competencies, such as knowledge and skills, but also affective competencies, such as values, attitudes, and intended behaviour, through instilling a blend of patriotism and multiculturalism. As a result, various competencies seem to complement each other across disciplines, developing gradually from grades 5 to 9.

While exploring structural and content aspects of the history curriculum, it was identified that a course titled “Local History” has been integrated into the taught content for the “History of Kazakhstan” subject in grades 5-7. The teaching materials therein provide details about the main stages of the historical processes from ancient times to the present day while also covering natural resources, historical monuments, and cultural sites. In addition, cultural and literary heritage is included, as well as famous people. Although the history curriculum is not fully interdisciplinary, some efforts are being made to connect history with other disciplines, such as geography, culture, literature, art, music, law, economics, and politics, to encourage a more holistic understanding of historical events and cultural heritage. Indeed, there is a close interdisciplinary connection between the “World History” and “History of Kazakhstan” subjects, which helps to avoid duplication

of educational material. In addition, it allows the history of Kazakhstan to be taught in the context of historical global processes. The historical periods described in the school textbooks for both subjects are identical.

Civic education has undergone significant changes in recent years. The most notable aspect of this evolution has been the introduction and enhancement of civic education as a separate subject in secondary schools, under the title “Fundamentals of Law.”

A key feature of Kazakhstan’s education system is its history curriculum, which includes both compulsory subjects such as “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History,” centrally approved by the Kazakh Ministry of Education. Even though there have been some changes made to the content of the history curriculum, the teaching style and pedagogical approaches are still largely influenced by the Soviet legacy. The reason for that is that most public school teachers were raised and educated in the late Soviet period. The Soviet legacy still affects history education in Kazakhstan through the contents of its textbooks, as well as through the terms used, ideology taught, and teaching approaches taken.

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