

Redefining Educational Leadership in Central Asia

This book makes an important contribution to developing and diversifying the study and practice of educational leadership beyond its Anglo-Saxon roots to emergent contexts in Central Asia. It provides a significant step towards making school and higher education leadership more global through the research and scholarship presented in this volume.

—**Professor Tony Bush, University of Nottingham, UK,
President, BELMAS
British Educational Leadership,
Management and Administration Society**

Today's rapidly changing landscape in education calls for the transformation of institutions all over the world. *Redefining Educational Leadership in Central Asia* stands out as a comprehensive examination of educational leadership in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia. In this volume, contributors from across educational institutions consider leadership to be the most effective way to encourage voice and participation, improve the quality of education, and promote the collective responsibility for creating the society of tomorrow.

—**Dr. Timothy Edward O'Connor, President of the American
University of Central Asia (AUCA)**

As the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, I am delighted to endorse this ground-breaking book on educational leadership policies and practices in Central Asia, with a particular focus on Kazakhstan. This volume is a significant contribution to the field, as it brings together a collection of insightful chapters authored by accomplished experts and emerging scholars from nine different countries. These authors possess extensive experience in conducting cutting-edge research and teaching in Central Asia, as well as holding leadership positions in the education sector.

The diverse perspectives and insights presented in this book reflect a deep understanding of the context and complexities of educational leadership in Central Asia. The authors highlight how leadership is shaped and reshaped by the political, economic, social, and cultural landscape. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of continuous reflection and adaptation of leadership philosophies and practices to meet the evolving needs of educational institutions and society at large.

I firmly believe that this book will serve as a valuable resource for school and university leaders, teachers, students, and researchers interested in educational leadership and the transformation of the educational landscape in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan. Therefore, I wholeheartedly recommend this book to

policymakers, leaders, researchers, practitioners, and students of leadership in Central Asia and beyond.

—*Sayasat Nurbek*, **Minister of Science and Higher Education**
Republic of Kazakhstan

Central Asia is one of the most exciting areas for those seeking to understand education reforms that are moving from tight central control to greater flexibility, innovation and autonomy. Such a radical shift requires a fundamental change in what it means to be an educational leader. Tajik and Makoelle's book offers a thoughtful and compelling perspective on how leadership is evolving to meet the needs of these countries.

—*Dr. Matthew Hartley*, **Professor and Deputy Dean**
Board of Advisors Chair of Education
Founding Executive Director of the Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy
University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

Educational leadership is a contested notion because principles, practices, and approaches to leadership in education are situated in different social, political, cultural, and administrative contexts. Contrary to popular perception, one model or approach to educational leadership cannot be applied to all settings. Alongside this, there is a strong consensus among education policymakers and practitioners that educational leadership at multiple levels is one of the most significant factors that leads to improvement in the quality of education and student learning outcomes.

Post-Soviet independent states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries have initiated massive education reforms in response to disruptive technological advances, economic globalization, demographic shifts due to migration and mobility and the changing geopolitical situation. These reforms are underpinned by an expectation that education as a strategy would enable embedding democratic norms and practices in society. These expectations raise significant questions for educational leadership and how it is enacted across the education systems.

Mir Afzal Tajik and Tsediso Michael Makoelle must be congratulated for compiling this edited volume, which makes a unique and ground-breaking contribution to the field by bringing in multiple perspectives from the post-Soviet Central Asian context. The studies in the volume illustrate well the tensions in global and local practices in educational leadership and make a strong case for an inclusive policy formulation process that takes into account the voice of the practitioners at the grassroots level.

—*Anjum Halai*, **Professor & Vice Provost**
Aga Khan University Pakistan

Educational leadership, as a socially-constructed construct, is highly under-explored in Central Asia and Global South scholarship, and to that end, this is a very timely, important and useful addition to our understanding. The editors and authors, themselves leadership practitioners and scholars, immerse us in grounded, rich cases and meticulous analytical perspectives on the changes and continuities in the meaning, significance, enactment, and reconceptualization of education leadership in the contexts of nine countries across the globe. The volume's analyses provide important insights and raise critical questions about the centrality of the contextual factors and the ability of local education leaders to interact with the unfolding forces, opportunities and challenges that emerge from local-global dynamics. Leadership in education in Central Asia and elsewhere, whether at the levels of school or higher education, classroom teacher or ministry official, has become a defining factor that cannot be disregarded if we care about reforming education for quality, equity, and relevant education for all. This pioneering, in this regard volume, sets the stage for re-theorizing education leadership in the rapidly changing post-Soviet ideological, cultural, technological, and economic/resource contexts. A highly recommended read for colleagues in comparative, international education.

—*Sarfarozi Niyozov*, Associate Dean and Professor,
**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto, Canada**

Redefining Educational Leadership in Central Asia: Selected Cases From Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to resilient teachers and selfless leaders whose tireless efforts have transformed lives, transcended boundaries, and ignited a passion for learning in students. Your impact extends far beyond the classrooms, schools, and universities as it reaches deep into the hearts and minds of generations to come. Your legacy will forever shine as a testament to the transformative power of education.

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables	<i>xi</i>
About the Contributors	<i>xiii</i>
Preface	<i>xix</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>xxi</i>

Part 1: Secondary School Leadership Perspectives

Chapter 1 Leadership Context	3
<i>Mir Afzal Tajik</i>	
Chapter 2 Educational Leadership in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Historical Evolution and Reconceptualization of Leadership	19
<i>Mir Afzal Tajik and Rauan Yesselbayev</i>	
Chapter 3 Educational Leadership: Secondary Education Perspectives From Kazakhstan	37
<i>Tsediso Michael Makoelle</i>	
Chapter 4 Fundamental Educational Reforms Shaping School Leadership in Kazakhstan	49
<i>Lyazat Turmukhambetova and Tsediso Michael Makoelle</i>	
Chapter 5 Exploring the Development of Teacher Leadership in Kazakhstan: Results From Two Successive Studies	75
<i>Gulmira Qanay and Matthew Courtney</i>	

Chapter 6 Kazakhstani Perceptions of Educational Leadership and Culture 103

Maganat Shegebayev, Aisham Seitova and Sazali Yusoff

Chapter 7 Kazakhstani Principals' Views on Equity in Gifted Education Programs 113

Galiya Daulet and Janet Helmer

Chapter 8 Myths and Realities of School Development Planning: Kazakhstani Principals' and Teachers' Perspectives 131

Assemgul Bukutova and Mir Afzal Tajik

Part 2: Higher Education Leadership Perspectives

Chapter 9 Higher Education Leadership in Contemporary Central Asian Contexts 155

Martha Merrill

Chapter 10 Academic Leadership and Navigating Changes: The Case of Kazakhstan's Higher Education Leadership 171

Aida Sagintayeva

Chapter 11 Higher Education Reforms and Policy Context: Implications for Leadership in Kazakhstan 181

Peter Shon

Chapter 12 University Leaders' Performance in the Higher Education System of Kyrgyzstan 201

Chynarkul S. Ryskulova

Chapter 13 Leadership Lessons From the Great Steppes of Central Asia: Opportunities, Obstacles, and the Way Forward 221

Mir Afzal Tajik and Tsediso Michael Makoelle

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 2

Fig. 2.1.	Bureaucratic Model of Leadership.	20
Fig. 2.2.	Mix of Bureaucratic and Participatory Models of Leadership.	21

Chapter 5

Fig. 5.1.	Teacher Leadership in Kazakhstan Schematic Model for Study 1 and 2.	90
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Chapter 8

Fig. 8.1.	Theoretical Framework.	138
-----------	------------------------	-----

Chapter 5

Table 5.1.	Descriptive Statistics of Participating Teachers.	82
Table 5.2.	Study Phases and Data Collection.	83
Table 5.3.	Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Leadership Items and Scales: Study 1 and 2.	84
Table 5.4.	Inter-factor Correlation Matrix for Factors in Study 1 and 2.	87
Table 5.5.	Model Fit for the Life Satisfaction Models.	88
Table 5.6.	Item-Factor Loadings for Factors in Study 1 and 2.	88

Chapter 6

Table 6.1.	Result of Demographic Statistics for Kazakhstani Teachers, $N = 87$.	107
Table 6.2.	Descriptive Statistics, $N = 87$.	108

Table 6.3.	Multiple Regression Analysis of School Culture as Predictors and ‘Defining the School Mission’ Dimension of Instructional Leadership as Dependent Variable.	108
Table 6.4.	Multiple Regression Analysis of School Culture as Predictors and ‘Managing Instructional Program’ Dimension of Instructional Leadership as Dependent Variable.	108
Table 6.5.	Multiple Regression Analysis of School Culture as Predictors and ‘Developing School Climate’ Dimension of Instructional Leadership as Dependent Variable.	109
Table 6.6.	Multiple Regression Analysis of School Culture as Predictor Toward Trust as Criterion Variable.	109
Chapter 7		
Table 7.1.	Characteristics of Participants.	119
Chapter 9		
Table 9.1.	Data Relevant to Higher Education Contexts in Central Asia.	160
Table 9.2.	Freedom House 2020 Rankings.	162
Table 9.3.	Participation in International Organizations.	163

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Peter Shon has successfully graduated with a PhD degree and is working as Communication Officer at the Central Asian Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Transformation (CARCEIT) at Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan. He has been working in education for nearly two decades, both in higher education and K-12 international schools. He has worked in Asia to establish and nurture emerging international schools in Taiwan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, and China. Before his time in Asia, he worked as the Assistant Director of Admissions at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he closely engaged with domestic and international student populations. His research focuses on international and comparative studies, student mobility, educational policy mobility, and globalization.

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Associate Dean, Head of Graduate Programs, and Director of Outreach Centres and education development programs at AKU-IED. Dr Tajik brings over 34 years of experience in both school and higher education. His teaching and research specializations include educational leadership and management, school improvement, teacher education, qualitative research, English-medium instruction (EMI) studies, and community-based education. He has co-edited a book and published several chapters and articles with Taylor and Francis, Sage, Elsevier, Oxford University Press, Lexington Books, and other publishers. He is the recipient of the Nazarbayev University Award for Academic Integrity (The Kehinde Award, 2023) and the AKU's Award for Sustained Excellence in Scholarship of Application, 2009.

Lyazat Turmukhambetova is a researcher with a focus on initial teacher education (ITE) programs and mentoring. During her doctoral study at Nazarbayev University, she explored mentoring programs during the practicum within Kazakhstani ITE, showcasing the main challenges and research opportunities within the school–university partnerships. The insights gleaned from her research contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on effective mentoring strategies within the Kazakhstani educational landscape. Along with mentoring and ITE, Lyazat is interested in the research on equal access to education. In 2018, she participated in the SOROS Kazakhstan research fellowship and studied ungraded schools and their access to resource centers in Kazakhstani rural areas. Furthermore, in recognition of her research interest in gender equality and education, Lyazat represented the United Kingdom as a delegate at the UN Women in 2023, dedicated to using innovation and technological change to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

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Preface

This book is fascinating and significant. Fascinating because it analyses the shift from the former centralized USSR system through a process of rapid and necessary change to all levels of education systems in Central Asian countries. In doing so, the book draws upon the substantial literature on change, context, and leadership. It is significant because it adds a dimension to our understanding of these key concepts. And it is a scholarly and accessible work integrating international insights with intra-national factors.

The editors provide introductory and concluding chapters, framing a series of varied case studies focused primarily on Kazakhstan and to a lesser extent Kyrgyzstan. However, the scope also addresses similarities – as well as considerable differences – across Central Asian countries more generally.

Case study contributors have extensive but quite diverse experiences of working in international contexts. Their backgrounds are similarly diverse, from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Taiwan, and North America. A commonality is leadership roles in Central Asian countries in management, teaching and research, and policy development.

The “story” which unfolds is not simple or linear. And it is sometimes counter-intuitive, at least from an outside perspective. It is easy, and sometimes convenient, to dismiss the demise of the USSR as creating a platform for sustained, unimpeded improvement and reform of educational systems. Case studies illustrate that realities of the former system included high participation rates, at least at the school level, tuition-free education, well-qualified and respected teachers, and numerous research institutes. But then, the break-up led to partial system collapse and the removal of much funding, decreased access to (particularly rural) schooling, among other challenges and setbacks.

It becomes clear that maintenance of core attributes combined with positive and innovative development has been difficult and complex and has been achieved to varying extents in Central Asian countries. At the same time, the case studies – qualitative and quantitative – illustrate many successful initiatives which have tackled inevitable challenges in areas such as excellence/equity, coping with decentralization, and professional development. The university sector (with support from donor agencies) has had a major role.

Hence, the quality of educational leadership in Central Asia – at all levels – has been critical in responding to vacuums and imperatives post-1991. And this leadership was shaped by a rapidly changing context. Kazakhstan, for example,

has transitioned from a low to an upper-middle-income country. Indeed, the scale and rapidity of change is challenging, almost bewildering, to the outside reader.

A strength of this book is articulating the problematic nature, no matter how benign the intent, of transplanting external theories and practices to foreign contexts. In response, the various contributors identify insights and understandings which have proven to be transferable and/or adaptable. This particularly applies to the role and form of leadership as key to achieving reform, although the nature, focus and developmental stage of these reforms differ across Central Asian countries.

Hopefully the book will be read, in a Western context, not simply as an interesting discourse on a “foreign” region. Rather, courses on educational leadership and change can use this book as a way of illuminating Western assumptions, bringing the latter into high relief and critique. And it is important to note that some case studies illustrate that the developmental connection and process have by no means only been with the West. As one example, the bulk of Kazakhstani higher education students studying in another country do so in Russia (acknowledged now to be more problematic because of the Ukraine-Russia conflict), followed by China through Belt and Road.

Without doubt, this book is an invaluable resource for educational leaders in Central Asia and those wishing to understand this region. In terms of *consolidating knowledge* of systems and practices, the book is very useful. In terms of *understanding the evolution* of such practices, this book illustrates the how and why. And, in terms of *proactive insight*, the book identifies dynamics (and institutions) which are leading to improvement at all levels of the educational systems.

This book will be influential and widely read. But the pace of change, and challenges and variation in achievement within and across countries, suggests another edition will be needed before many years have passed.

Robert Baker
Former Professor and Provost
Aga Khan University

Acknowledgments

From the very realization and identification of the knowledge gap arising from the lack of credible literature on educational leadership in the post-Soviet region of Central Asia to the conceptualization, development, and successful completion of this edited volume, I, the lead editor, have had the great pleasure of working with several friends, colleagues, students, and scholars representing over nine countries around the globe. This project would not have been possible without their support, expertise, and encouragement. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest appreciation and gratitude to all those who have supported me, directly or indirectly, throughout this project. They generously shared their insights, research, and experiences to enrich this book and make it a comprehensive and insightful resource on educational leadership in Central Asia.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my co-editor, Professor Tsediso M. Makoelle, who triggered my motivation and pushed me to take the lead on this important project. Without his motivation, support, and trust in my abilities, I would have hesitated to embark upon this daunting task. In addition to his contributions as the co-editor, Professor Makoelle has also authored and co-authored several insightful chapters in this book.

I am immensely grateful to Aida Sagintayeva, (Dean, Graduate School of Education – GSE – at Nazarbayev University – NU), whose strong belief in the importance of research and dissemination of knowledge in the field of educational leadership in Central Asia has been a driving force behind this book. Not only did she encourage and wholeheartedly support this project, but she also contributed a chapter that added immense value and credibility to this volume.

My special thanks to all our team members – the chapter contributors, whose collective efforts and generous contributions have made this book a reality. I am truly honored to work with a team of highly accomplished scholars and leaders, as well as emerging and young scholars whose insightful research, engaging case studies, thoughtful analysis, and rich experiences have contributed significantly to the overall quality of the book. Despite their ongoing commitments and critical leadership engagements, they always ensured their timely response, willingness to review, revise, and refine their chapters, and overall professionalism that made the entire process smooth and enjoyable.

I am grateful to my university (NU) and department (GSE) for providing us with a conducive environment, institutional backing, and resources for research and scholarly pursuits. I acknowledge NU Collaborative Research Program (Grant # 021220CRP1322) and NU-FDC Grant (090118FD5307) that enabled me to visit

schools and universities across Kazakhstan and collect useful data about educational leadership and management practices. I sincerely thank the university and GSE administration, the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Vice Dean for Research, faculty colleagues, staff, and students who have always supported and appreciated knowledge sharing and scholarly endeavors such as this book.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my respected teacher, mentor, and friend – Professor Robert Baker – for writing the insightful “Preface” for this book. I am truly honored and most fortunate to have a friend like him. He has not only contributed to this book but to my entire education career. Thank you so much, Robert, for always supporting me and my work.

I am truly grateful to the distinguished leaders and scholars who have graciously provided their endorsements for this book. Your kind words of support and recognition have added immense credibility to our work, and we are truly honored to have endorsements from highly respected scholars and leaders from Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America.

Special thanks go to the Emerald Publishers for their invaluable technical, professional, and moral support. Their expertise, guidance, and commitment to quality have been instrumental in shaping this book into its final form. We are grateful for their collaboration and for believing in the importance of disseminating knowledge and insights about educational leadership from a relatively less-known and under-researched context of Central Asia. In conclusion, I sincerely appreciate everyone who has contributed directly or indirectly to this book. I hope this volume will serve as a valuable resource and ready reference for researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and students in educational leadership and management in Central Asia, other post-Soviet states, and globally.

Mir Afzal Tajik