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Why is Kazakhstani Education System in Public Schools Not as Successful in Promoting Creativity Compared to Specialized/Private Schools?

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Abstract

This project delves into the concept of "Creativity" in school settings in Kazakhstan, comparing specialized/private and public schools' curriculum. The study aims to explore the difference in the teachers' approach, technology and extracurricular activities availability and teamwork processes during the lessons between both types of schools. This study is significant in understanding school curriculum in Kazakhstan, its effects on students' learning processes and creative thinking, and
students' needs and aspirations.

Introduction

Creativity is an important skill in today's dynamic world. Creativity manifests itself in the ability to find non-standard solutions, act in a new situation or create something aesthetically attractive, convenient and at the same time useful. In addition, a creative solution to the problem implies that the student can properly develop his idea and think through various mandatory details and elements not only in the school settings but also in the real world.

Teachers play a special role in the development of students' creativity. They have the main responsibility for identifying and developing the potential abilities and talents of each student. Teachers should know how to design a developing socio-cultural environment, becoming independent in the choice of teaching methods (Valieva, 2018). Creativity in education is the ability of a teacher to find and use non-standard approaches to teaching, lesson preparations and interaction with students. Creativity is necessary to inventive thinking in any domain, and underappreciated in many formal educational environments. All solution making and construction require creative thinking. Yet, almost no schools teach for creativity or train teachers to teach for creativity according to Kaplan (2019).

This project delves into the concept of "Creativity" in school settings in Kazakhstan, comparing specialized/private and public schools' curriculum. The study aims to explore the difference in the teachers' approach, technology and extracurricular activities availability and teamwork processes during the lessons between both types of schools. This study is significant in understanding school curriculum in Kazakhstan, its effects on students' learning processes and creative thinking, and students' needs and aspirations.

The questions I will explore in my research are "Why is Kazakhstani education system in public schools not as successful in promoting creativity compared to specialized/private schools?", "How can teachers and sch-

ool management promote creativity in students?".

The development of creativity in students is an approach, which is influenced by various factors. On the part of educational institutions, precisely schools, it is necessary to ensure the correct and appropriate educational process that reveals the potential of the child.

Literature Review

Creativity is important because it helps people in so many ways and makes their lives better according to Eunice M. L. Soriano de Alencar1 Denise de Souza Fleith, Nielsen Pereira. All the schools need to develop creative thinking in students because it will significantly contribute to students' personal growth, help them approach situations from different angles and navigate through challenging situations. However, the education system at public schools in Kazakhstan focuses mainly on theory without utilizing any innovative technologies or solving real life cases during classes, which leads education in the country to the dearth of creativity promotion in students according to the Bill Alan (2023). Technologies and pedagogical approaches take a crucial part in learning experiences that are not progressive enough in Kazakh public institutions.

Comparison of Public and Specialized Schools Globally

Parents usually hesitate and have to choose between specialized and public schools for their children. The quality of education and curriculum is one of the main factors they consider. According to the U.S.News, there is a difference between students' academic achievements in private and public schools in the US, where students from private schools get higher scores on tests. However, Pianta (2018) in her study shed light on the main reasons for this gap in test results and concluded that academic success is more directly related to having well-educated and wealthy parents.

Comparison of Public and Specialized Schools in Kazakhstan

BilimLand (2023) published the article about education in public and specialized schools and conveyed that technologies and comfortable equipment at specialized ones help teachers make lessons engaging, which positively affects students' scores on the SAT and on their creative thinking skills. Public institutions do not have innovative technologies at classrooms as BilimLand (2023) states, which is aligning with Dossybayev's interview (2023). Nurmukhammed Dossybayev (2023) concluded that a lack of modern technologies and equipment is one of the detrimental factors that has an impact on the quality of education in Kazakhstan. He also highlighted a deficiency of competition between book publishers that causes insufficient amount of high quality student books. A dearth of technologies and outdated teaching materials as mentioned in the articles above, contribute to a less stimulating environment for creativity, which are mainly found in public schools.

Parental Choices and Educational Outcomes

Parents often strive to make the right choice and find the best school for their child, commonly deciding between private and public schools. People mostly favor private schooling instead of public one, however, Scheper (2021), in her research, concluded that private schools are not superior to public institutions. There is a need to highlight the bias approach in this study because of the focus on learning practices at elementary schools only. People want to get their education at private school due to the factor of its ability to better foster

academic and creative skills. The cost is not the main factor in choosing according to Nichols (2010). It contradicts with the article from Радио Азаттык (2023), which points out that in Kazakhstan the financial aspect takes a leading position among all the aspects to consider. This financial strain, citizens of Kazakhstan face, exacerbates social disparities.

Pedagogical Approaches and Creativity

Creative thinking in the learning process is mandatory to develop in students. Harold Bloom (1956) concluded that developing creative thinking in learners has long been considered an essential aspect of education and brain development. Every teacher should provide his students with the opportunity to think creatively to make the learning experience fruitful to them. By incorporating diverse exercises and real life cases to solve, teachers can increase not only the creative skills in students but also the level of involvement during the classes, making them appealing. Skolera (2023) provides us with several creative thinking examples, such as games, activities, questions and the Bloom's Taxonomy, teachers' guide to an exceptional classroom, emphasizing the need for interactive and engaging learning methods. Bakoban and Aljarallah (2015) further support this by demonstrating the beneficial impact of extracurricular activities on creativity and academic performance, suggesting that incorporating such activities in public schools could bridge the creativity gap.

Data and Methodology

In this chapter the research methodology used in the study is described. The instrument used to collect the data, including methods implemented to maintain validity and reliability of the instrument, are described.

Research Setting

The study was conducted remotely via ZOOM platform. Every interview's time limit was 40 minutes.

Study Sample

According to Burns and Grove (1993), a population is defined as all elements (individuals, objects and events) that meet the sample criteria for inclusion in a study. The study population consisted of high-school students from Kazakhstan who study in private/specialized and public schools.

A convenient sample of 8 subjects was selected from the 8 institutions. Mouton (1996) defines a sample as elements selected with the intention of finding something about the total population from which they are taken. A convenient sample consists of subjects included in the study because they happen to be in the right place at the right time according to Polit and Hungler (1993). The simple included 5 high school students from private/specialized schools and 3 high school students from public schools. In the interviews, 1 male and 7 females participated. Available subjects were entered into the study until a sample size of 8 was reached. The sample size of 8 high school students were the total of subjects who were willing to participate in the research and who met the sampling criteria during the two-week period of data collection.

The Sampling Criteria

Subjects included in the sample were selected to meet specific criteria. The high school students from Kazakhstan had to meet the following criteria to be included in the sample.

They should:

- Live in Kazakhstan
- Study at Kazakhstani school: private/specialized or public
- Study at school located in the city
- Be a high-school student and study at 8-11 (12) grades
- Obtain the consent of parents/guardians to participate if they are less than 18 years of age
- Be willing to participate
- Have good internet connection
- Be able to use ZOOM platform

Data Collection Instrument

The interview was chosen as a data collection instrument. The purpose of the research interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters (e.g. factors that influence their attendance at the dentist). Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena. Interviews are, therefore, most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants according to P. Gill, K. Stewart, E. Treasure and B. Chadwik.

Eight interviews were conducted. They all were remote via the ZOOM platform. The list of questions consisted of 23 open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were included because they allow subjects to respond to questions in their own words and provide more detail. The questions were asked in the Russian language and were divided into four sections. The first section aimed at gaining demographic data such as name, age, grade of study at school, family members and their level of education. The second section aimed to know about different schools' curriculum and what opportunities are provided in terms of extracurricular activities. The third section aimed at gaining data about technology availability and needed study space for students. The fourth and last section aimed to know the teaching methods and learning processes at Kazakhstani schools. All these questions were asked to know about students' school curriculum and all the opportunities they have that can effectively promote their creative skills.

Ethics

Subjects were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures that would be used to collect the data, and assured that there were no potential risks or costs involved.

Findings

The following section will introduce the findings of the study. It will focus on teaching approach, student clubs and equipment in specialized/private and public schools in Kazakhstan.

Teaching Approach

Specialized (Private) Schools

In specialized and private schools, teachers and counselors are open to students' ideas and initiatives. They can support them and provide help if necessary. This open approach provides a more supportive educational

experience. Furthermore, this openness in private/specialized schools allows students to engage in extracurricular activities and collaborative projects. Also, it often leads to higher levels of student motivation and self-confidence. For instance:

"We have proactive students at our school. This is important. They want to initiate some events or lead their own school club. Our school supports these students depending on what it is. We can approach the head teacher, the curators and offer our ideas. The most significant thing is the presence of people who are interested in it. If there are any, they give full support in this regard." (Astana, male, 17)

- This quote underscores the opportunity in private and specialized schools to organize and conduct events at school and take some leadership roles. It highlights how it is not only the school that is important for creativity and development but students' interest as well. This creates a vicious cycle of successful proactive involvement of students, where both the school teachers and management and students are involved.

Students in specialized schools are not afraid of making mistakes during the classes. They strive to ask their questions and freely express thoughts and opinions. There is also a freedom of discussion, which makes students more likely to participate actively in the class. The fear of a wrong answer usually prevents students from engaging in topic discussions.

"I have never been afraid. Because our teachers are all young. They are around 20-25 years old, so it is not hard and stressful to communicate with them." (Almaty, female, 16)

"At the very beginning, I was afraid of teachers. Then, I realized that they are all kind and responsive. Every student can feel free to interact with teachers and ask their questions." (Almaty, female, 17)

Here, interestingly, one of the students mentions that the age or the type of more modern thinking influences communication with teachers, where the younger the teachers are the easier it is to communicate with them. This indicates that specialized schools are more interested in hiring new staff and being more inclusive.

In terms of team work, students work in groups almost every day or week, depending on the school. Teachers in specialized schools can give students some business cases to solve or projects to do. According to interviewees, teamwork is often during the humanities but also can be at STEM-related subjects.

Overall, teachers and school counselors at specialized (private) schools are open to students' questions, initiatives and ideas. This teaching approach nurtures students' creativity development and aspiration to learn within and outside of the school curriculum.

Public Schools

In contrast to specialized schools, in public schools, students can initiate events, fairs and concerts but with some limitations.

"In our school, fairs, Nauriz or other celebrations are prohibited. The TED-x events only were allowed to us to initiate." (Astana, female, 16)

"We have a lot of events, especially this year. For example, student parties, various charitable fairs. They were organized by activists from our school probably twice a month." (Astana, female, 17)

While the respondents themselves do not mention exactly why these limitations exist, one can assume that it has to do with the "conservative" management of schools. This usually comes down to keeping the old and usual system of operation without including new and innovative thinking. However, it is important to mention

that due to the limited number of respondents, this is not necessarily generalizable to all existing public schools in Kazakhstan.

Students in public schools are not afraid of making mistakes during the classes. However, according to the response from an interviewee, there is a likelihood of fear of speaking in the lessons.

"I am not afraid. The only place I am afraid to make a mistake and open my mouth is in math." (Astana, female, 16)

While only students from private schools were likely to have fear of speaking up, it did vary within the group as well.

Teamwork is another aspect of creative development in students. In public schools, lack of encouraging teamwork is clear. While teamwork frequency varies depending on the school, not all schools require or even encourage teamwork. This can also be one of the key factors in students' creativity.

To sum up, teachers and counselors at public schools mainly focus on theory and discipline. Students in public institutions have an opportunity to ask their questions and organize events, taking leadership roles. However, there is a more stifled curriculum and learning process.

Student Clubs

Private/Specialized Schools

Comparing specialized and public schools in Kazakhstan, specialized schools' average number of student clubs fluctuates between 5 and 15. There is a very diverse range of clubs in specialized schools. For example, according to interviewees from specialized schools, students open psychology, art, drama, dance, math, hiking, debate or speaking clubs, student volunteer organizations and model UN. Student clubs and organizations there can reach up to 100 regular members, who actively participate in all initiatives, meetings and events. Students in specialized schools strive to explore their interests and strengths, leading clubs, and want to impart their knowledge to other people from their schools.

"Students in my school are super active in terms of extracurricular activities and student clubs. Last year, for example, I became a president of the debate club. We have freedom at school. Our teachers and school counselors always support us in our initiatives and ideas." (Almaty, male, 16)

This quote underscores the student initiative in specialized/private institutions in terms of opening their own school clubs and organizations. It also shows that students like to take initiatives as the respondent is proud to emphasize that he became a president of a club.

Overall, specialized (private) schools in Kazakhstan appear to offer a rich and diverse array of extracurricular opportunities and a supportive environment for student initiative. These schools also foster active engagement and personal development.

Public schools

In public schools, there is a deficiency of school clubs and organizations that are opened by students. However, there are some clubs that are usually led by teachers not students, such as robotics, art and dance clubs.

"We have school clubs in our schools. However, there are not as many of them as we would like and they are mainly opened by our teachers. We used to have a dance club in the second and third grades. It was absolutely

free for everyone. Unfortunately, after two years of club's activity, it was ultimately closed. Right now we have very few school clubs that are robotics and art clubs. Our teachers lead them. We have many students who are interested in participating there." (Astana, female, 17)

This quote from respondent 2 supports a claim about a lack of student clubs opened by students. Moreover, it shows discontinuity of such activities, as seen by the example of a dance club. The interviewee does mention that students are interested in participating in such clubs, which then shows that their need is not satisfied and their creative potential is not developed. In addition, teachers and school counselors do not usually support their students' initiatives, despite the students' urge to create something on their own. For example:

"Teachers, principals and headteachers did not support half of the students' ideas, they just refused. We have many ambitious students in our school who want to open their own student organizations and initiate different charity events and fairs, but due to the fact that the teachers and counselors do not support them, they simply discourage our desires to do anything at school." (Astana, female, 16)

The respondent above highlights the environment and attitude of teachers, counselors and students toward starting organizations and clubs in their school. Thus, according to the answers of interviewees from both private/specialized and public schools, students there have a desire to explore their interests and open school clubs, conducting regular meetings with participants, events and initiatives. This is the correlation between students from both types of schools.

However, students in public schools usually get tons of rejections from school staff members, who are not open and supportive toward students' ideas. Unfortunately, it is a common practice in public schools. Every person has their own interests, strengths and ideas. But most of the time, the environment they live in and study affects their motivation and aspiration to reveal their personality. Schools can both stifle or nurture their students.

Technologies and study zones at school

Private/Specialized schools

Private/specialized schools are well-equipped by different types of technologies and study zones for students. Students have interactive boards, computers, equipment for robotics and scientific experiments and projects. According to the interviewees, these highlighted equipment are available for students. They take advantage of all the technologies to embark on their personal projects within and outside of the school curriculum, which is necessary for students' personal development and learning processes based on practice. Technologies and scientific/robotics equipment usually boost students' engagement and are extremely important in educational experience.

"We have computers and interactive boards in every class. In computer science lessons, each student has his own laptop that the school has allocated. Everything works well" (Almaty, female, 16)

"We use interactive boards, computers, robotics and scientific equipment almost every day. Frankly speaking, I do not utilize scientific equipment and visit laboratories. However, those who are interested in science can visit laboratories and take advantage of them at any time with the teacher's permission. It is the same with robotics." (Astana, female, 16)

The quotes above support claims about available and quality technologies at institutions. In addition to the well-equipped environment, schools provide several laboratories, libraries, workshops and also coworking

areas in some institutions. All these zones are actively used by students, except for libraries. Libraries are for books only. Students can read and study there but they usually choose not to because of the limited space and stuffiness. Students can take books and read them at home. They have a very diverse range of literature available not only in Kazakh and Russian but also in other foreign languages.

"We have a library at school. There are books in English for different levels, starting from A1 to C1. We have books from such authors as George Orwell and Jane Austen. There is also an extensive selection of Kazakh, Turkish and Russian literature. It is not common to sit in the library at all. You took a book from the library and leave." (Astana, female, 16)

The respondent above underscores the availability of resources to read in their library in Kazakh, English, Russian and Turkish languages. As mentioned before and by the respondent. students cannot use libraries for study purposes. However, most of the time, they have special classrooms and coworking zones next to the libraries if they want to learn additional material outside of the school curriculum or read a book, for instance. Laboratories, workshops and robotics classrooms are well-equipped with technologies on the level of school program and have all the resources needed for students to work on their own projects individually or together, in teams. They usually prepare for contests and competitions in these spaces.

"We have equipment for biology and chemistry. We are doing experiments with them in laboratories. But before using them, we should ask our teachers." (Astana, male, 16)

"There are various workshops for sewing and for some kind of work with hands." (Pavlodar, female, 16)

"We have a robotics club and a special classroom designed for it but I do not go there. Some students who are interested and want to participate in competitions attend this club." (Astana, female, 16)

According to the respondents 3, 8 and 5, students at specialized/private schools have laboratories, robotics classrooms and workshops for projects and scientific experiments.

To summarize, specialized/private schools are well-equipped with interactive boards, computers, scientific and robotics technologies, which enhance students' learning experience and foster innovation.

Public schools

In public schools in Kazakhstan, students also have interactive boards, computers, and scientific equipment.

"Well, there are interactive boards, normal ordinary computers that work fine and scientific equipment. We have microscopes at school and other equipment for experiments and some chemistry reactions to deduce." (Shymkent, female, 17)

Still, however, interviewees' responses from public schools are divided into two types. Some people say that they have all the technologies mentioned above at their schools, and these technologies work well. Others claim that technologies at their schools, such as interactive boards and computers do not work at all or partially operate.

"We have computers, robotics and interactive boards in school but not scientific equipment. Some computers are broken and interactive boards are only in 2-3 classrooms." (Astana, female, 17)

"Computers are available, but students sometimes cannot study using them due to technical problems. There are also interactive boards, but unfortunately not in all classrooms. It is quite inconvenient for the students." (Astana, female, 16)

Respondents 4 and 2 highlight the availability of interactive boards and computers at school but mention frequent technical issues. In terms of scientific equipment and robotics, some public schools have them and some don't. When it comes to libraries, coworking zones, laboratories and workshops, all the schools have libraries and workshops but not always coworking zones and laboratories. If they have laboratories, they are available for teachers only.

"There is probably one laboratory. I do not go there. Students don't use it because it is not for public use. We also have workshops. They are mainly for junior school." (Astana, female, 17)

"We have a small coworking space in the library. Students sometimes studied there, but, unfortunately, not always, because the library itself is very stuffy." (Shymkent, female, 16)

These quotes support the claim about availability of libraries, coworking zones, workshops and laboratories at public schools. However, highlight the fact that some zones are not accessible for students.

According to the answers from students from private/specialized and public schools, they have technologies and study zones needed during the learning processes. Students can use available technologies on the lessons and take advantage of libraries, coworking zones,classrooms dedicated for robotics or workshops. However, the main difference between both types of institutions is the accessibility of provided resources. These available technologies or study zones can be limited for students in public schools because of technical issues or lack of scientific equipment to work in laboratories.

Limitations and Implications

As with everything, there are advantages and limitations to the process. Exploring curriculum at specialized/private and public schools provides a good test of how participatory creativity applies within and outside of the learning processes in the education system in Kazakhstan. It is an important step to positively affect education in Kazakhstan in terms of creative skills, teaching approach, and opportunities of extracurricular activities at schools. However, this study has potential limitations, which should be mentioned. During research on effectiveness of specialized/private and public schools in promoting student creativity, there was a problem of data shortage on the Internet. A lack of available and reliable data about education in Kazakhstan and a deficiency of prior research studies on the topic were the main limitations during the writing process. Additionally, the limited time on conducting the study also placed some restrictions on the process.

This study is a first study on creativity development in Kazakhstani schools. Researchers who want to choose a similar topic for their studies can utilize the findings described here. Also, this study highlights a space for curriculum improvement in terms of creativity development in students, which can be helpful for government people and schools to properly understand the students' needs and aspirations.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of creativity within the educational system in Kazakhstan, particularly comparing the approaches and effectiveness of specialized/private schools and public schools in promoting creativity among students. The study aimed to explore key questions: why the Kazakhstani school system is less successful in enhancing creativity compared to specialized/private schools, and how teachers and school management can better foster creative skills in students.

To answer these questions, data was gathered from 8 high-school students from both specialized/private and public schools to get a comprehensive view of the current state of creativity in Kazakhstani schools.

Through the analysis of curriculum differences, teaching methods, availability of technology and extracurricular activities, as well as teamwork processes, the study sought to understand the factors that influence creative development in students. The findings indicate that while specialized/private schools tend to offer more resources and employ teaching methods that encourage creativity, public schools often face challenges such as limited resources and rigid curricular structures that usually hinder the development of creative thinking.

The study suggests that fostering creativity in students requires an intentional effort from both teachers and school management. This includes adopting non-standard teaching approaches, integrating technology effectively, and providing diverse extracurricular opportunities. Schools that successfully implement these strategies are more likely to nurture students' creative potential, preparing them for real-world challenges. Also, investing in teacher education, particularly in creative teaching methods, could be a critical step towards closing the creativity gap between public and specialized/private schools. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, schools can better adapt to the rapidly changing world and significantly support and help their students. Findings suggest that students from both types of schools are proactive individuals who want to explore their interests, collaborate with other people, improve their skills and knowledge and positively contribute to their communities. However, the school they attend decides for them what is "better" for their growth and self-development.

The findings highlight the need for educational reforms in public schools, ensuring that all the students in Kazakhstan, regardless of the type of the school they attend, can develop the creative skills necessary for success in today's dynamic world.

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