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## Education as recourse of middle class mobility in Kazakhstan

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### Abstract

This research explains the importance of education as a resource for the Kazakhstan middle class. The author carries out the analysis of how the education influences people's social position when joining the middle class ranks of Kazakhstan thereby being attractive with its social background. Education tends to slow the progress for many people while obtaining economic and social capital. Consuming education is one of the effective tools for self-actualization and a source of identity for a representative of the middle class. The research is based on qualitative methodology that included 30 deep formalized interviews are conducted among the representatives of the middle class: state employees, managers and entrepreneurs.

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### 1. Introduction

In modern society education is one of the tools of social mobility. A modern person has an opportunity to reach non-ascriptive status through educational institutions. The level of education a person has enables him/her to do corresponding types of activities, jobs, specialties and positions. Particularly in this sense educational system can be considered as a social mobility factor and its most mass channels. It is important to note the level of educational and qualification potential of the middle class is an indicator of human capital. The middle class as the most extended social group is considered by the source of qualified labor forces of reproductive performance of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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## 2. Conceptual framework of the middle class

The term “middle class” is defined as “a segment of society lying between the working class and the upper class” (Scott and Marshall, 2009). The middle class growth is connected with transition to late industrial society. This transition led to considerable increase of those segments of the population, which could be referred neither to the poor, nor to the rich. Productivity progress demanded larger number of highly skilled professionals and experts with high level of education. The development of social infrastructure, education and health care systems resulted in the number of doctors, teachers. We may say that in the basis of the middle class separating process is not so much material welfare criterion, as the criterion of belonging to a particular social and professional group. These groups were characterized by a number of features. Firstly, all their labor is not of physical character that separates them from the working class. Secondly, their representatives have the opportunity to get income not by selling their “simple physical ability to do work activities”, but from their own business or from the education level that is much higher than the majority of population have.

The concept of the middle class could be considered in a wider theoretical context that is the context in a social structure as a whole, the element of which is the middle class. For example, in Weber's views economic or market position of individual skills and education is a criterion in defining social class and group formation (Weber, 1947). A. Gouldner paid attention to that especially the middle class controls the cultural capital and their exclusive position in society that in many respects is defined by their role in knowledge transfer (Gouldner, 1970). J.H. Goldthorpe emphasized the high degree of their job autonomy and the possibility of almost independent decision-making due to the education level and skills they have (Goldthorpe, 1982).

Weberians also denote the role of education in the middle class designation and those who do not possess any property, but have degrees distinguishing them from workers are referred to them (Breen, 1995). P. Bourdieu emphasizes that the cultural capital is represented more quickly than in other institutional forms through education and skills. Education generates distinctive cultural samples (Bourdieu, 1986). The education level is a competitiveness measure of a person in society.

## 3. The case of Kazakhstan's middle class

Now in modern Kazakhstan the middle class consists of two groups: the first are the Post-Soviet middle class who have adapted to new conditions and who have reserved their administrative functions that give them additional and rather high income in the form of bribes and “commission charges” or those who received large equity stakes of some enterprises or some real estates as a result of privatization. The second group is the new middle class, which is forming as a result of new professions and based on high education level and market economy (Lepehin, 2003).

It is necessary to emphasize, that the quality of the middle class in the USSR was one of the highest in the world taking into consideration such indicators as education level and cultural consumption. Due to Balzer's researches the Soviet middle class is “40 million professionals with vocational education”, including “the high-ranking party functionaries operating in the sphere of economy, scientists, officially recognized artists, writers and other people of culture and also the “hundred-ruble” professional class including teachers, doctors and other Soviet professionals. Engineers were referred to the most numerous group and a very diverse category from technical directors of large enterprises to “socialist competition engineers” (Balzer, 1998).

It is worth noting that the 80s would have quickly collapsed ideological foundations of the Soviet society and gradually “everything that was not forbidden became allowed to do”. This, at the same time, with adoption of sole proprietorship laws laid the foundation to formation of new economic behavior models. Intensive development of technology and science, splash in a services sector and also comprehensive activity of the modern state contributed to the emergence of the army of employees, technicians and intellectuals the modern arena, who do not possess their own means of production, but live due to selling their labor and knowledge. The peculiarity of this process is also in the following that with the growth of the new class the privileges education had given them before are not still provided. Now knowledge becomes outdated quickly enough and certified specialists appear in complete dependence either on the state or from large corporations. There is the new middle class managing technology and labor organization process.

It is possible to notice that education is even more important criterion taking into account the country transition from the planned (or command) economy to the market economy. The Kazakhstan top leadership came to understanding of the human capital value for the country in the overall global order. Thus, it gave an impulse to resolute steps in developing educational and employment systems. I would like to emphasize that the education system has been completely changed and all Kazakhstani standards of education have been improved in favor of the

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