

Beyond traditional degrees: Micro-credentials as a response to COVID-19 in higher education

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Background on Kazakhstan

Population: 20 million people

(Ualikhanova, 2023)

GDP expenditure on higher and
graduate education – 387 billion tenge
(Aulbekova, 2023)

The European Higher Education Area &
the Bologna Process – 2010, ECTS
(IQAA, n.d.)

National Qualifications Framework
(NQF) in 2012

Establishment of Nazarbayev University
in 2010



Top 30% of the world's research universities
(NU Enters THE World University Rankings,
n.d.).

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Impact of COVID-19

ONLY

79%

of HEIs had internet access before the pandemic; many lacked robust IT support.

“

All higher education institutions and colleges in Kazakhstan switched to online/distance learning on March 16, 2020.

SEIA Project:

- ▶ Survey of 1157 students, 44 administrative heads, and 133 teaching staff.
- ▶ Faculty: Only 42% aware of online teaching resources.
- ▶ Students: 31% perceived a decrease in education quality due to limited resources and teacher feedback.

Lessons Learned:

Need for improved digital
infrastructure;

Faculty training;

Equitable access to
digital learning tools.

Lifelong learning encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal types of education.

FE: the school-college-university framework

IE: self-paced training not validated with certificates.

NFE covers vocational training, professional retraining, seminars, lectures, and online courses.

Concept of Lifelong Learning, 2021



Introduction of new terms



The Concept of Lifelong Learning also introduces such terms as "**micro-qualifications**," "**nanodegrees**," "**nano-training**," i.e., getting necessary professional skills in a short period of time. Certificates and credentials gained through micro-qualifications will be converted into "**stackable degrees**" ("Concept of Lifelong Learning", 2023).

BY 2025

130k

**UNEMPLOYED CITIZENS
EXPECTED TO FIND JOBS**

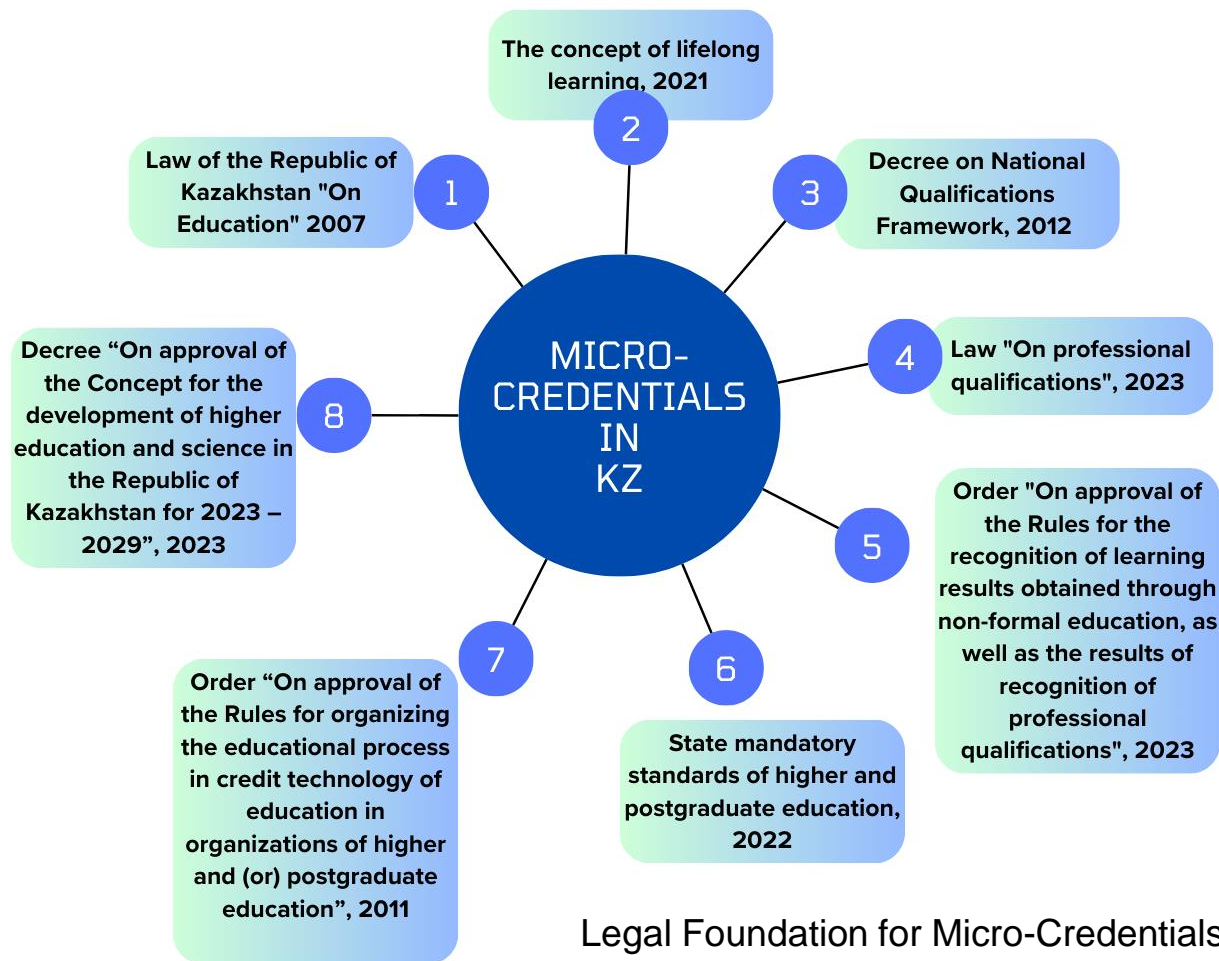
17%

of the adult population (aged 16-65) have undergone any non-formal training, which is three times fewer than in other countries, on average.

Definition of Micro-credentials

A micro-credential is "the **record of the learning outcomes** that a learner has acquired following a **small** volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been **assessed** against **transparent** and clearly defined criteria" (Council of the EU, 2022).





Legal Foundation for Micro-Credentials in Kazakhstan

Knowledge Gaps:

Guiding policies &
documents;

Quality assurance;

Cost & accessibility;

Digital skills &
infrastructure.



Remaining questions

In terms of student accessibility, micro-credentials might benefit students who are already highly qualified, adding value to their advantages in the labor market (Flannery & McGarr, 2014). The potential gap here is ensuring equitable access to micro-credentials, avoiding the emerging Matthew effect – the increased disparity in achievement which occurs when more knowledgeable students become even more competent and competitive while underrepresented groups fall behind (Rigney, 2010).

1

What will be the long-term outcomes of the implementation of micro-credentials in Kazakhstani higher education?

2

Will microcredentials be an affordable lifelong learning options become? Will they enable more equitable access to continuing education?

3

How will microcredentials be impacted by the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

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