

# Education of Kazakh children: A situation analysis

## Save the Children UK, 2006



*This report suggests that in many important ways Kazakh children are not being afforded the same opportunities to learn as other children in Mongolia. In addition to the barriers shared to some extent by children in other poor and rural areas, the language of teaching and learning for Kazakh children is compounding their disadvantage. The particularly low preschool participation rates in Bayan-Olgii aimag and the lack of either Kazakh language preschool materials or Mongolian as a second language instructional strategies mean Kazakh children start school lagging behind in language and literacy skills and may not gain a sound footing in either Mongolian or Kazakh.*



### Kazakh children and learning

Kazakhs comprise the largest minority group and one with the greatest cultural and linguistic distinction from the Mongolian majority.

Many barriers to access and learning are not unique to Kazakh children but are common for all Mongolian children. These barriers result from systemic weaknesses in education delivery caused by the poor condition or lack of facilities, lack of clear and rights focused legislative and policy basis, lack of learning materials, poor quality teaching and learning environments, the high formal and informal costs associated with schooling, poverty and low standard of living of families. A widening disparity between rural and urban education is also evident. These barriers are compounded for ethnic minority Kazakh children who are highly represented in the out of school groups and who additionally face the significant challenge of language.

Recognising this issue, with the financial support of the Canada Fund, Save the Children UK, Mongolia commissioned this education situation analysis of Kazakh children to guide and inform strategy in supporting Kazakh children's rights to education and development.

### The study methodology

This study was mainly qualitative recognising limited available demographic and educational data disaggregated by ethnic group in Mongolia. Research focused on field sites of Bayan-Olgii aimag<sup>1</sup>, Hovd soum in Hovd aimag and Nalaih district of Ulaanbaatar where Kazakhs are the majority or are part of a mixed community. Further data was gathered through document review, semi-structured interviews and meetings with children and parents, officials of Government ministries and other relevant national and international organisations, agencies and donors.

The research had the objective of producing an in depth analysis of the education situation of Kazakh children including investigating the causes of the high drop out rates in the Bayan Olgii aimag, identifying the factors adversely affecting the education of Kazakh children and recommending actions.

<sup>1</sup> An aimag is a province in Mongolia, the main town of each is the aimag centre, districts within that are called soum, and smaller administrative units are called bagh. Cities are divided administratively into units called khoroo.

## General picture of situation for Kazakhs in Mongolia

### *A picture of the population*

Kazakhs are the largest ethnic group in Mongolia and make up 4.4% of the population as a whole and account for 5% of all children aged 0-14.

Bayan-Olgii aimag has a poverty rate of 46% compared to 36% nationally, with over half of the poor being classified as extremely poor. (Census 2000)

Kazakhs mainly live in the far West. Bayan-Olgii at a population of 99,112, is almost entirely Kazakh. Kazakhs also comprise over 10% of the population in neighbouring Hovd, living primarily in the aimag centre, Hovd soum where they are a dominant majority, in Buyant soum where they comprise about one-third of the population, and as a smaller minority in other soums. In the peri-urban area around Ulaanbaatar, the Kazakh community is concentrated in Nalaikh District, in khoroo #4 which is 90% Kazakh. It is a mining community from the 1930s and 40s which originally attracted migrants from Bayan-Olgii to work the mines. While Khoroo #4 residents make up only 19% of the population in Nalaikh District, they are overrepresented among the district's poor families at 37%.

### Context of education participation and performance

**Bayan-Olgii performs poorly on basic indicators of education access and efficiency. Children in this aimag drop out at over three times the national rate—the highest dropout rate in the country—and they attend formal preschool at less than two-thirds of the national average—the lowest preschool participation rate in the country.**

#### *Lower literacy*

While the Khalkh or Mongolian majority over age 7 has an average illiteracy rate of 4.6%, for Kazakhs it is significantly higher at 6.8%. Two other ethnic groups the Darkhad and Khoton

have even higher illiteracy rates of 8.4 and 9.8%, respectively. Another feature of note is that while enrolment and literacy rates in Mongolia tend to favour females, Kazakh females are less literate than their male counterparts. (2000 Census)

#### *Higher dropouts*

In addition to lower literacy rates, the overall school dropout rate in Bayan-Olgii is 6.2% compared to 1.9% nationally. While Kazakhs account for about 5% of the child population in Mongolia and 4% of the total student population at the beginning of 2003-2004 school year, Bayan-Olgii's share of dropouts reported for the same year is 13-16% according to different sources.

#### *Greater delayed entry*

Delayed entry to school, a factor in higher dropouts and lower achievement, is also highest in the Western and Khangai regions, with over 16% of new intakes age 9 or over in 2000. The transition to an 11-year system in 2005-2006 included the change to age seven as the official age to start school. In 2004-2005 in Hovd aimag, 45% of children starting grade one were age 7 or younger. Yet in Bayan-Olgii in 2005/2006 school year, after enactment of the policy only about one-quarter of children starting grade one were aged 7 and start as late as 9 – 10 years old.

#### *Lower preschool participation*

Bayan-Olgii has one of the lowest formal kindergarten enrolment rates in the country, at less than 20% compared to 33% nationally.

Hovd aimag reported that it does not disaggregate preschool participation data by ethnicity. The research found that while formal kindergarten enrolment for the aimag overall is 25%, in Hovd soum it hovers between 9-13% depending on seasonal fluctuation due to the livestock cycle. Although the aimag reports that most of its kindergartens cannot meet the demand for preschool, Hovd soum's Kazakh kindergarten and the kindergarten serving the Kazakh micro-district are both under enrolled. Buyant soum in Hovd likewise

reported anecdotally that while the soum was meeting success in its focus to boost preschool enrolment to increase school readiness, Kazakhs are underrepresented.

## **Policy formulation fails to target Kazakh children**

There is a lack of education policies targeted toward Kazakh children, especially a clear policy on mother tongue and bilingual language approach. This is primarily due to a lack of consciousness at the central level about issues of ethnicity and the condition or needs of ethnic minorities in general or Kazakhs in particular. The translation of textbooks under the new education standards into Kazakh, which began last year, is the only action directly recognising a special learning need.

### ***Lack of central level agreement on the problem***

The lack of political tension or conflict among different ethnicities has caused a complacent attitude by the majority toward the rights of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, a combination of poor understanding of local conditions, negative stereotypes of Kazakhs and a narrow view of egalitarianism contributes to the reluctance to examine the rather complex question of whether Kazakh children's rights to education and learning are being adequately met.

### ***Poor understanding of local situation and needs***

There are only a few groups in Mongolia, such as the Kazakhs and the Tuvas, who retain and practise a distinct culture, religion and language, and to some extent live and marry separately from the rest of Mongolian society. Due to Bayan-Olgii's distance and isolation from the centre, and to the more insular nature of Kazakh culture and Kazakh migration to Kazakhstan, there is an inaccurate assumption that Bayan-Olgii does not need or want attention and assistance from the capital and that Bayan-Olgii receives support from Kazakhstan, so Kazakhs do not need additional assistance.

There is also confusion over when Kazakh

schools were first established in the aimag. More than one central level source affirmed that Mongolian was the primary language in schools and society until the transition period, during which the 1992 Constitution granted the right of minorities to be educated in their native languages. Education authorities in Bayan-Olgii explained that Kazakh schools have actually been in place since the 1940s, although in 1978 the central government issued a resolution asserting Mongolian as the official language. The 1992 Constitution and 1995 Education Law consolidated the legal framework for Kazakh instruction, but did not change existing practice in Bayan-Olgii. However, the assistance Bayan-Olgii received from Kazakhstan in the form of textbook support ended as did the local presence of central level agencies such as the Institute of Education, so the urgency of the need for educational supports has increased.

### **Stereotypes of Kazakhs help to rationalise their isolation and condition**

All ethnic groups are granted full citizenship under the Constitution and there is no evidence of institutional discrimination against any ethnic groups. However, in the course of the research certain negative attitudes and stereotypes surfaced. Prominent among these is the view that Kazakh isolation in Bayan-Olgii and their tradition not to intermarry with other groups explains the faulty assumption that Kazakhs have no desire to learn Mongolian or mix with Mongolians. In fact, in mixed Bayan-Olgii soums that have Mongolian classes, an increasing number of Kazakh families place their children in Mongolian classes. Another false assumption is that Kazakhs value education less than Mongolians or are unwilling to make the effort to improve their situation.

### ***Narrow concept of egalitarianism limits development goals***

Equity tends to be understood as impartial treatment, or the non-discrimination against and non-restriction of particular groups, rather than as meeting special needs requiring targeted assistance in order to ensure equitable opportunities to learn. In one soum in Hovd aimag, following a clear description of the

special difficulties Kazakh students faced because of language barriers, the response to the question about any special strategies to assist struggling second language learners was: “No, we treat all equally and do not distinguish by ethnicity”. This approach of emphasising equal delivery and policies treating all people and groups of children exactly the same is not in line with the rhetoric and paradigm of the new education standards which focus on a child-centred approach, addressing individual learning needs, and using an open curriculum to flexibly develop learning appropriate to local conditions. Maintaining a narrow definition of equity, without consideration of special learning needs, will significantly limit Mongolia’s ability to fulfil the spirit and objectives of Education for All.

#### **Lack of measurement and data to monitor performance and progress**

There is a need for better disaggregated data and further study into whether Kazakhs are disproportionately represented among the poor, herders, migrants or other disadvantaged groups which might call for more focused targeting of socioeconomic development policies and supports by ethnicity.

### **Language dimensions of Kazakh opportunity to learn**

Unlike many other countries where national policy requires the national language as the language of instruction and discourages the use of ethnic languages in schools, the Mongolian Constitution and Education Law assert the right to learn in native languages. Throughout Bayan-Olgii aimag and in Hovd soum, children do attend Kazakh schools. Yet, while teaching in mother tongue is important in supporting cognitive access, this alone is not sufficient for providing quality education.

### **Kazakh schools language and learning**

#### ***Mismatch in language of instruction and learning materials/curriculum***

While children are technically granted the

right to learn in their native language, there are several interlinked barriers to instructional quality and learning in Kazakh schools. These include inadequate learning materials in Kazakh language, lack of alignment to a standard curriculum, short supply of text books, textbooks not matching the language of instruction or the curriculum framework.

The New Education Standards 2005, have not been translated into Kazakh, although MECS<sup>2</sup> plans to gradually translate at least primary level textbooks into Kazakh. However, during the field research for this study, few of the sites had received the textbooks introduced this year even in Mongolian and none had received newly translated Kazakh textbooks. In the meantime, most classrooms even in grades one and two are being taught in Kazakh but using Mongolian textbooks, interfering with Kazakh children’s learning of not only foundational literacy skills in one language, but also other subject matter.

#### ***No attention to second language acquisition***

A fundamental issue that undermines quality instruction and learning for Kazakh children is the lack of attention given to the teaching or learning of Mongolian as a Second Language. There are no special training courses, materials or methods to prepare teachers, and no research or studies conducted in this area by linguists or literacy specialists. Pre-service preparation is the same for Mongolian Language teachers whether they will teach Mongolian children who already speak the language, or Kazakh children who do not. Thus, there are no tools or special methods to build communication skills and to build on native language literacy to accelerate second language learning. When Kazakh students first take Mongolian as a subject, it is for only one hour a week. In Kazakh communities where there is little environment to use or even hear Mongolian outside of the classroom, this is inadequate to develop proficiency to learn.

#### ***Teacher language limitations***

Lack of teacher competency in the Mongolian language impacts student learning in at least two

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fundamental ways. First is the ability with which teachers can teach effectively in Mongolian language and foster good communication skills and learning across all subject areas. Second is the ability with which teachers can develop their own skills, knowledge and methods through available training and materials. Most teachers in Kazakh schools are Kazakhs who graduated from Kazakh schools and live in communities where there is little use of Mongolian. While many primary teachers are trained in Arhangzhai or Ulaanbaatar where training is conducted in Mongolian, others are trained in Bayan-Olgii Teacher's College, where instruction is theoretically in Mongolian, but where instructors support students in Kazakh. Other teachers are trained in Kazakhstan and return to Mongolia. There is no common graduation standard for teacher training institutions. Each sets its own requirements, including for Mongolian language, and the quality and standards can vary widely from institution to institution. Thus Mongolian remains a second or even a foreign language to many.

#### ***Unclear bilingual strategy***

Under the current system, Kazakh children are disadvantaged in a Mongolian learning environment. In Bayan-Olgii, late transition into Mongolian instruction and the lack of adequate learning materials in Kazakh in the earlier grades contributes to a situation where students may not be sufficiently proficient in either one. The lack of kindergarten materials in Kazakh further undercuts the development of strong early literacy and school readiness skills. Without a consistent plan for Mongolian language acquisition and for shifting instruction from Kazakh to Mongolian, the result is likely to be confusion.

The current system is more like a sudden and late switch between two monolingual approaches, rather than a systematic one that gradually develops sufficient proficiency in a second. According to teachers, most Kazakh children do not become proficient in Mongolian and need extra instructional support in Kazakh all the way through graduation.

#### ***Unclear decision making on language learning***

There is some confusion about where the

decision of when to transition from native to Mongolian language instruction lies. Especially in Bayan-Olgii where there is little external environment to support Mongolian language use and learning, this is a critical decision. Parents and teachers in many soums expressed the belief that children could benefit from earlier transition into Mongolian but felt that the policy was already set by the Ministry. Given a choice, they stated their desire to transition at the end of primary school. This issue needs to be settled by more than ad hoc decisions and must consider both what is best educationally as well as parental and children's views.

### **Mixed schools language and learning**

The language challenge has different dimension in schools with mixed ethnic populations. In Bayan-Olgii, a school with both Kazakh and Mongolian or other ethnic groups puts Kazakh children in separate classes following the structure of Kazakh school instruction while other students learn in Mongolian from grade one. Segregation of Kazakh and Mongolian children until the upper secondary level raises some concerns.

Other inequities arise as a result of class size. Because there are fewer Mongolian children, Mongolian classes may have only 10-15 students in each class compared to 30 or 40 students in the Kazakh classes. Class size can also disadvantage Kazakhs when small class sizes cause school authorities to combine Kazakh and Mongolian classes. In these cases, Mongolian is used as the language of instruction and parents report that the sudden switch causes Kazakh students to fall behind and sometimes dropout.

### **Mongolian school language and learning**

#### ***Lack of second language learner training and supports***

In other geographic areas where Kazakhs are the minority, and even in some cases where they are the majority, Kazakh students are

mixed in regular classrooms and Mongolian is the only language of instruction. As in Kazakh schools, Mongolian school teachers do not have any special training in teaching Mongolian as a Second Language and thus, teachers and school officials complain about the additional burden of having to teach mixed language classrooms. While they describe Kazakh children as hard working and good with learning, primary teachers also note the pressure they face, saying that many teachers do not like to have Kazakh students because they are difficult to teach.

In general, schools do not provide special classes for accelerating Mongolian language acquisition nor do they use mother tongue supports to facilitate learning. Buyant soum school in Hovd aimag noted that its language of instruction is Mongolian even though over half of its students are Kazakh and only Kazakhs living in the soum centre speak Mongolian before entering school.

#### ***Unequal standards and expectations***

In teaching children with special learning needs there is a tendency to lower expectations or standards for learning, rather than providing the necessary supports to help children reach common standards. Teachers and education officials in both Hovd and Bayan-Olgii revealed ongoing local debates about whether or not to set lower standards for Kazakh children in Mongolian schools. Doing so would perpetuate the injustice of taking those who need more, and giving them less.

#### ***Lack of mother tongue learning***

Although students have a right to learn in their native language by law, many mixed population Mongolian schools do not offer Kazakh as a subject. In these cases, it is not entirely clear who has made the decision of whether or not to offer any native language learning.

In some cases, it did not appear that parents' wishes were consulted or taken into consideration.

#### ***Teacher attitude and discrimination***

The research uncovered cases and anecdotal evidence of teacher discrimination against

Kazakh children who do not speak Mongolian who try to enrol in aimag centre schools. One report highlighted that some teachers refused to accept children from the countryside, claiming they did not meet arbitrary criteria on how to read and write. In the field research for this study, Kazakh parents in a mixed Mongolian and Kazakh school in Hovd centre related how Kazakh children were denied entry to preschool because they did not speak Mongolian.

#### ***Difficulties with information and communication***

Language barriers not only limit student learning but can also adversely affect Kazakh access to information and communication. Most information, education and communications (IEC) materials are developed and distributed in Mongolian and while there is a recognised need for Kazakh language IEC materials and trainings, there is no budget. Agencies stated that awareness building efforts in Bayan-Olgii were hampered by language barriers, which caused difficulties communicating with parents. Kazakh parental participation is also constrained by communications from schools being in Mongolian and parent meetings being conducted in Mongolian.

In the same way Kazakh communities have failed to access information and communication in the education sector, they may also be missing important benefits or entitlements in other sectors which could benefit education participation and performance through improving knowledge and practices in health, nutrition, agriculture, or business development.

#### **Medium language of learning**

##### ***Kazakh schools in Bayan-Olgii:***

Most Kazakh schools in Bayan-Olgii aimag follow the same approach and structure. The language of instruction for all subjects in grade one is Kazakh. Students begin Mongolian Language as a subject in grade two (grade three prior to 11 year school system) and continue as a subject until grade 8 (previously grade 9). At this stage there is transition into Mongolian as the language of

instruction for all subjects for grades 9 and 10. After transition into Mongolian, students continue to take Kazakh as a subject.

***Kazakh school in Hovd Soum, Hovd Aimag:***  
Hovd soum is over 95% Kazakh and has the only Kazakh school in the aimag. Here, the structure is slightly different than in Bayan-Olgii Aimag, with the transition to Mongolian as the primary language of instruction set for grade 5, or at the end of primary school.

***Mixed schools in Bayan-Olgii:***  
Where communities have mixed ethnic populations, classes are generally separated by ethnicity. For example, the grade one intake in one soum school may have three classes, with two Kazakh classes and one Mongolian class. The Kazakh class would follow the structure described above for Kazakh schools while the Mongolian class would learn in Mongolian. These classes are in theory mixed once students reach the upper secondary level where all instruction is in Mongolian. In theory, Kazakh families and children can elect to start school in a Mongolian class.

***Mongolian schools and mixed schools in Hovd aimag and Nailakh:***  
Mongolian schools, including one school in Bayan-Olgii centre, conduct all classes and instruction in Mongolian. Outside Bayan-Olgii aimag, schools with mixed student populations are also considered Mongolian schools and conduct all instruction in Mongolian. In most cases, few of the teachers are Kazakh or can speak Kazakh and there are few supports in place to accelerate learning Mongolian. Also of note is that in these schools, Kazakh language is not offered as a subject.

## Recommendations

A framework is needed to develop an equitable, responsive, quality educational system that serves the needs of all of Mongolia's children. There is a clear need to strengthen policy and practice in the area of ethnic minority education.

This should be tackled through a joint approach of ensuring equal educational opportunity for Kazakh children through improving core elements of teaching and learning, and strengthening planning and implementation systems of policies and programmes targeting ethnic minorities. ***Awareness raising at all levels is essential to tackle pervading negative attitudes towards Kazakh children and their families.***

## Remove barriers to education access, quality and relevance

***Address the language learning needs of Kazakh children.*** The first step to overcoming obstacles to participation and increasing learning opportunities and retention for Kazakh children is addressing the problems of language and its impact on learning and perceived accessibility and relevance of education.

- *A clear and appropriate policy and legal framework on bilingual and second language teaching is needed to clarify and protect the educational rights and entitlements of ethnic minority children.*
- *A teacher training and development framework is needed to meet the demands of a good bilingual teaching system as well as an effective Mongolian as a second language programme and transitional language strategy for Kazakh children attending Mongolian schools.*
- *Further study and piloting are necessary to evaluate a range of mother tongue instruction, bilingual instruction and transitional models to identify most appropriate solutions for different Kazakh contexts across Mongolia*
- *It is necessary to develop teachers' effectiveness in addressing Kazakh learning issues, through specialised methodologies for language learning, specifically based on a sound understanding and implementation of the new paradigm of Mongolia's New Education Standards*
- *It is vital to localise the content and materials of schooling to improve its relevance and quality and tackle the lack of materials and resources available in Kazakh language.*

Creating an unambiguous legal base and

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enabling policy supports for effective and innovative methods of bilingual and mother tongue instruction will enhance the quality and relevance of education for ethnic minorities. This should specify the conditions for native language or bilingual instruction, and the minimum instructional supports that are guaranteed to second language learners in Mongolian schools. For effective implementation, time, material and human resource support must be defined. This should explicitly set out instructional time in the curriculum, special staffing requirements, and competency standards for teachers in bilingual teaching methods or in teaching Mongolian as a second language.

Further study and piloting are necessary to evaluate a range of mother tongue instruction, bilingual instruction and transitional models to identify most appropriate solutions for different Kazakh contexts across Mongolia and develop accompanying learning materials and training programmes.

The New Education Standards move decidedly away from a fixed content based curriculum and provide flexibility for teachers to contextualise and modify the curriculum locally. Training and continued local support networks on implementing the new standards would not only improve instructional quality overall, but would also result in far greater curriculum relevance to Kazakh culture and life.

***Expand preschool preparation for Kazakh children.*** Participation in early childhood development is acknowledged to improve school readiness, cognitive development, and subsequent school performance and retention. Increasing the low preschool participation level in Bayan-Olgii and other Kazakh communities

would bring significant improvements in Kazakh participation in school. Early language and literacy development is particularly important for Kazakh children who have to face bilingual or immersion language learning environments.

- *Expand access to formal preschool for Kazakh children and develop early language and literacy.*
- *Promote innovative alternative pre school models.*

## Improve policy and programme planning and implementation mechanisms

***Increase use of Kazakh language in order to broaden participation in Kazakh communities.*** Using the local language demonstrates will for genuine community engagement and participation in the Kazakh context. Information materials such as those promoting the importance of preschool participation will be understood and shared if they are produced and disseminated in Kazakh.

***Improve collection, monitoring and evaluation of data disaggregated by ethnicity to support better policy and programme planning.*** Mechanisms need to be established through collaboration with MECS and the National Statistics Office to ensure collection and analysis of disaggregated data for monitoring education performance and other related socioeconomic indicators.

***Enhance coordination of education stakeholders working with and for ethnic minority children.*** For effective planning and implementation of education policies for ethnic minorities a cohesive approach to working with ethnic minorities is needed between GOM agencies, national and international organisations and other education stakeholders.

*Serious recognition and immediate attention must be given to break down the additional barriers faced by ethnic minority children of Mongolia to realise their rights to education and to meet the target of Education for All Mongolian children by 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals.*

**This is a summary of *Education of Kazakh Children* by Sandra S Huang for Save the Children UK, 2005.**

SCUK reserves the right to amend data cited in this summary. The final report and briefings are available in English and Mongolian. For more details contact monscf@magicnet.mn. Telephone: 976-11-329371.