Discussion of usefulness of the National Qualification Test

**Introduction**

National Qualification Testing is a procedure directed to define the levels of professional competence and qualification of pedagogical workers and people equated to them, possessing positions in educational organizations that provide general educational programs of primary, basic secondary and general secondary education and special education programs, according to tests elaborated by an organization determined by the authorized institution in the field of education.

Preparing to write about the discussion of usefulness of the National Qualification Test we first of all considered reviewing literature that is paper works and articles conducted on the given theme. All in all, we analyzed 23 literature sources which somehow touch or have relation to the National Qualification Test or certification, their advantages, problems of implementation and usefulness. Here is the sample of analyzed paper written by Novikov (2012).

While analyzing literature sources on the theme of the National Qualification Test and certification we came across the fact that there were several factors expressing necessity of introduction the National Qualification Test among variety of papers. For instance, in the paper written by Vyalykh (2020) it was stated that nowadays the education market of diplomas is gradually being replaced by the qualifications market. With more frequency one might notice advertisements of certain job where instead of a specialty that a potential employee should have according to a diploma, a set of competencies and qualifications is indicated. Consequently, modern higher educational institution’s graduates have to be able to adapt to these conditions, understand new trends in the development of the industry and technologies, self-determine, make reasonable choices and calculate the risks associated with it. In this context, important role is obviously played by certification or the NQT as a final stage for young specialists to obtain a certain degree of readiness to perform their activity [1].

Similar thought has been expressed in the study written by Bashtanar, (2014). It was also emphasized that today a diploma of higher education, being a confirmation of the availability of theoretical knowledge and confirmation of the ability to process and analyze information, can hardly indicate the presence of the necessary practical competencies in a particular professional field of activity. But in addition to the subjective results of a quick interview with a potential employee at various levels, the employer logically would like to have a physically existing guarantor confirming at least some professional competence of the applicant. The role of such a guarantor has long been firmly established in most developed countries of the world, as well as it will be soon established in our country by a professional certificate [2].

Considering the subsequent labor situations associated with the direct transfer of the labor process in the conditions of the functioning of the system of certification of qualifications, one can also highlight several favorable aspects intrinsic to the "certified" employee and his employer. In most cases, favorable aspects are rather related to employers than employees. Confirming the justification of the hypothesis, it should be taken into account that any employer should theoretically be aware of the fact that the confirmed qualification level of his/her employees can be used by them at least for marketing purposes. After all, the more employees have certain documents confirming their personal qualification level, the more this fact can be used by the employer to improve the efficiency of the organization through the professional level of the company's workforce [3].

That is, if some part of the organization’s employees is being "certified" specialists in a particular field, then in any information sources, such a company can refer to the fact that most of the organization's employees are professionals in particular field, thereby throwing their professionalism to the entire the company as a whole.

Yakovleva, & Krasilova (2015) in their work summarized the necessity for assessing qualification of teachers. Authors said that the need to assess the level of development of teachers' competencies is almost universally recognized, since it:

- helps the teacher to realize the obligation to develop their competencies;

- contributes to the process of transformation within pedagogical culture and practice;

- allows to recognize the formation of new competencies;

- plays an important role in ensuring control over learning outcomes, which contributes to its improvement;

- increases the degree of trust in the teacher on the part of the stakeholders [4].

Another opinion was expressed in the study of Galinovsky, Vinokurova, & Shevchun (2011). It claims that one of the approaches aimed at ensuring a high level of quality of education in the system of higher professional education of engineering is the voluntary certification of university graduates in accordance with the requirements of the employers, which makes it possible to improve the contingent of professionals going to work in their activity area at specialized enterprises in the high-tech sector of the economy, to reduce the time for adaptation of personnel in the workplace.

Thus, the main goal of vocational education in our country is to prepare a qualified employee of the appropriate level and profile, competitive in the labor market, competent, responsible, fluent in his/her profession and oriented in related fields of activity, capable of working effectively at the level of world standards, ready for continuous professional growth, social and professional mobility. In connection with it, the problem of the quality of training and improving the competitiveness of specialists focused on the wide range varieties of the sectors of the economy and production, in the context of the development of market relations, is becoming increasingly relevant. We also need to take into account that the final stage in the training of specialist is recognition of his/her skills and qualifications [5].

But one of the most important ideas was stated in the research paper of Makovich, (2015). It is as follows: certification of graduates of higher educational institutions might work as a way to bridge the gap between professional and educational standards.

Educational standards designate the competencies that should be formed in a graduate, and the educational means by which particular competency will be formed. At the same time, the vision of the competencies set of the employer and the official education institution often does not coincide. Meanwhile, it is the employer who sets the tasks and values in a particular professional area. And if one does not clearly know his/her set, then the competence-based approach to education will not improve the situation on the labor market and will not improve the quality of specialists. Thus, it would be effective to provide graduate students with the opportunity to determine their professional level by passing through the procedure of a qualification exam in the area of competence of the employer. The result would be a confirmation of qualification, i.e. the certificate. Participation of students in the professional certification procedure is optional, but both interest in it and positive/negative results are key information for improving the educational process at the university [6].

Almost the same opinion stated Alieva, & Pavlyuchenko, (2010) while writing about weak connection between the labor market and the educational services market. Problems in this segment of state regulation are related to the quality of services provided in the field of vocational education. Among the reasons is the lack of orientation of vocational education towards obtaining applied knowledge, ignoring the real needs of the labor market. As the emphasis now is on the strict adherence to educational standards, mastery of academic information, which in practice is not in demand.

However in the study of Galyamova, & Kiyamova, (2018) emphasis was shifted to the universities and their significant role in the course of introduction of certification. According to that, main condition for the competitiveness of a higher pedagogical educational institution in the context of modernization of all levels of education is the level of professional competence and the quality of training of its graduates - future teachers. In the context of the introduction of new standards, in higher education there is an active introduction of innovative educational technologies, interactive teaching methods and various forms of control over the formation of professional competencies.

Also, in this paper the components of the teacher's professional competence are named. Galyamova, & Kiyamova, (2018) express the opinion that evaluation of the professional competence of a teacher may soon become one of the most important issues regulated by the state educational system, which is true nowadays. The study adds that in many countries, there is a strict system for selecting school teachers in accordance with established standards. A description of the professional exam models is contained in the results of a study conducted by the American Educational Testing Service (ETS). The identification and description of teacher training and certification models in different countries is the main activity of ETS. The results of their research give an idea of the model, the individual elements of which can be traced in a wide range of variations in the course of foreign qualification procedures. .

While analyzing various literature sources on the given theme it was noted that many authors within the framework of their studies tried to conduct their own models of potential certification exams in different areas of specialties.

Researchers identify two main directions in the organization of such evaluation procedures:

1. The first direction consists in expanding the system of assessed competencies. Such procedures involve testing the skills of the future teacher to work with technical teaching means, demonstrating their pedagogical knowledge, special achievements in a certain area;

2. The second direction is to change the format and structure of the assessment procedure. At the same time, the professional assessment of the teacher's achievements turns into an assessment of practical skills for the implementation of pedagogical technologies and methods, the ability to carry out professional communication. This direction of qualification procedures involves changing tests by demonstrating the stages of solving professional problems.

For instance, researchers Galyamova, & Kiyamova, (2018) have chosen the second direction when compiling their model project of approbation of the competence-oriented exam. Based on the analysis of the results of certification procedures, taking into account the reliability of the professional standard, the methodologists of NSPU (Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University) developed and tested a competency-oriented exam (COE) on the discipline "Teaching Methods", improved criteria for evaluating professional competence of a graduate of a pedagogical university. Approbation was carried out at the historical-geographical and mathematical faculties.

The content of the COE included designing a scenario for a training lesson on a specific topic indicated in the examination card for an hour using educational literature, a demonstration of a fragment of the lesson, solving a case problem, and reflection. The positive aspect is that during the exam, not only the assimilation of theoretical knowledge in the field of teaching methods is checked, but the direct mastery of methodological skills that show the readiness of the student for future professional activities [7].

But one of the main imperfections of the above-written sample is that the exam is greatly time consuming. Compared to the electronic test model of certification COE is at a disadvantage from this point of view. And the criteria of evaluation are much easier when it comes to evaluation of tests, as the whole process of evaluation might be automated.

However it also could be that the two main directions in the organization of evaluation procedure might be mixed. As it was represented in the research paper of Vyalykh (2020) where it was claimed that to identify the degree of readiness of a graduate to perform new professional functions associated with changes in the profession since 2018 new forms of assessment have been used in the institutions of the Kursk region. The certification exam takes place in two stages. At the first stage, students answer 35 questions in a test form, selected from the database using the method of random number selection. At the second stage, graduates perform a practical task for 6 hours, demonstrating their skills in assembling and welding a construction using a drawing and a technological map. As a result, only 76.6% of graduates were able to confirm their qualifications in 2018 and 77.8% of graduates in 2019. It was added that in educational institutions that cooperate most closely and successfully with employers, this figure is close to 100%.

This sample of potential exam seems to be the most reasonable as it combines traditional knowledge checking in the form of test and practical part to see the real skills of future specialist. The next thing that logically follows after the mentioned pilot projects is difficulties and conditions of successful implementation of certification procedure. Thus, Nikiforov, (2012) having written about necessity of introduction the mechanism for the development and implementation of social and professional certification of university graduates as a tool to increase the mobility of young professionals, calculates possible difficulties of its fulfillment.

The researcher emphasizes that unlike the developed Western countries, the introduction of such a system for assessing the level of competence of higher education graduates encounters a number of fundamental problems:

- lack of an appropriate legal and regulatory framework;

- lack of sufficient experience in the practical implementation of this system into practice;

- lack of a unified approach to the formation and implementation of social and professional assessment of the qualifications of a university graduate;

- the conservatism of the thinking pattern of employers, the teaching staff of universities, the students themselves [8].

It is obvious that most of the enumerated difficulties come from the novelty of such evaluation system. We know that the history of NQS and the NQT in our country started only a decade ago. Thus, we don’t have proper experience in this field as well as necessary regulatory framework.

Another factor hindering the launch of this process is the low awareness of students about social and professional assessment and certification of qualifications. It might be recommended to carry out explanatory work among senior year students about necessity of introduction the exam, advantages they could obtain upon passing it.

However as it is written in the paper of Boribekov (2019) the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan is working to form the basis for the National Qualifications System, including:

- improvement of professional standards, including reconsideration and approval processes;

- development and execution of a system for reconsideration and updating educational programs for technical and vocational education and higher education;

- development of a roadmap for the creation of an independent system for assessing and awarding qualifications through the provision of consulting support to pilot industry centers for testing and professional certification;

- providing methodological and consulting support in the organization of the activities of the newly created centers for qualification confirmation;

- training of personnel of qualification confirmation centers participating in project testing;

- accreditation of centers and their inclusion in the register of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken" [9].

As we can notice one of the crucial components of implementing the NQT is certification centers themselves. It needs certain amount of time to successfully manage to equip such centers as well as train personnel.

While in their study Yakovleva, & Krasilova (2015) analyzing foreign experience comes to the conclusion that the effectiveness of the assessment largely depends on the extent to which all participants of the procedure have reached a common understanding regarding the goals of assessment, the content of competencies, and the criteria for their assessment. Therefore, they come up with certain conditions upon successful implementing of the procedure:

- find a balance between trust and control;

- ensure transparency of the entire assessment procedure;

- use both external and internal evaluation;

- involve stakeholders in the evaluation [10].

What might be added is that high-quality measuring materials should be used to determine the development level of competencies, ensuring reliable results.

Existing experience, including a foreign one, shows that certification as a measure of professional assessment is valued when it measures the skills that are needed in the process of work; when it is reliable and does not give anyone an unreasonable advantage in passing the assessment, i.e. really confirms the same level of qualification among equally trained people, regardless of where they were trained. A qualifications certification system which meets these requirements is built on the basis of a number of principles. The most important of them are the following:

- delegation of assessment to independent experts;

- mandatory involvement of employers' representatives as experts in the development of requirements and assessment of qualifications;

- systematic training and confirmation of the professional competence of experts conducting the assessment [11].

To the above written principles, on which the system of independent certification of qualifications should be built, one can add a number of others, namely: voluntariness of passing the assessment of qualifications; protection of the rights of persons wishing to confirm their qualifications during the assessment of qualifications; availability of assessment procedures; ensuring confidentiality in relation to personal data obtained during the assessment and certification of qualifications.

The thing that we would like to consider next is advantages getting by the participants of this process. Thus, the paper written by Gorkovenko (2013) names major advantages employers receive in the process of assessing qualifications.

It states that certification of qualifications as a tool for continuous improvement of workforce qualifications allows employers to receive a more qualified work resources; constantly improve their competencies; ensure high motivation and labor efficiency; ensure a higher quality of products, performed labor, rendered services; increase profitability and, as a result, the competitiveness of an economic entity.

Therefore, a tool for assessing and certifying qualifications can be considered as a stimulator for the formation of a continuous process of training labor resources throughout their entire career. In addition, as the world practice of using this tool has shown, the system of certification of professional qualifications can be considered as an effective mechanism for regulating emerging imbalances in the equilibrium of labor resources in the labor market. The system of certification of professional qualifications directly affects the level of labor productivity and economic efficiency of an economic entity. Enterprises, thanks to this tool, get an additional lever for managing labor resources and optimizing the cost of staff training [12].

In his study Vyalykh (2020) mentions the advantage getting by graduates when passing the procedure. He states that the certificate of qualification, which the graduate receives along with the diploma, will give an advantage in his/her employment and increases his/her value for an employer. The author also adds that independent assessment of qualifications is a good tool to raise the quality of vocational education and training of specialist to a new level. But for the most effective work towards independent assessment of qualifications, it is necessary that graduates consciously and voluntarily participate in this procedure. Along with these ideas Vyalykh (2020) wrote that independent evaluation will continue to stimulate higher educational institutions to better educate future professionals especially in the field of practical use of the skills.

Novikov (2012) adds that in general, it can be argued that certification of qualifications is an effective way to assess the quality of educational services, their effectiveness in terms of the degree of satisfaction of both the requirements of employers and the needs and expectations of the graduates themselves, regardless of the time they provide services. In turn, the quality of the educational service determines the competitiveness of the service itself, the educational institution that provided it, and its recipient - a graduate, an employee.

**Conclusion**

Nikiforov (2012) summarizes main advantages and reasons for the awareness by all the participants of the need to introduce an independent assessment.

For employers:

- a unified criterion for the selection of highly qualified, most competitive young professionals would be conducted;

- the ability to influence the quality and structure of the educational process in a higher professional school.

For universities:

- the presence of feedback from the main consumers of the educational product, which allows to adjust to the educational process in order to improve it;

- improvement of the image and criterion attestation indicators.

For students:

- increasing one's own mobility in the labor market;

- expanding opportunities for successful employment, building a professional career, self-realization.

Despite that, in Western Europe, the USA, Australia and some other countries, along with a high assessment of the effectiveness of certification, there are also critical points of view about the application of standards in assessing the professional competence of teachers. Here are main arguments in its favor:

- such an approach presents the teacher's role in fragments, in parts, and not as a whole, where everything is interconnected;

- emphasis is placed on measurable aspects of performance and results, while not taking into account the more subtle qualities of the teacher and situational factors;

- the standard takes precedence over the diversity of teachers' opinions;

- prescribing certain norms can turn teachers into “suppliers of knowledge, fixing the results of students' activities, and pedagogical techs”;

- specification of goals and standardization of activities can lead to the fact that the behavior of teachers will be contrary to the fundamental values of education, such as altruism and intellectual independence.

Summarizing the variety of opinions in this paper, we can draw conclusions about the theoretically possible impact of certification of qualifications on the domestic labor market and labor relations. As a result, it turns out that professional certification can theoretically:

1. help reduce the time spent on recruiting employees;

2. contribute to the increase and confirmation of the level of human capital of labor resources;

3. contribute to increasing the competitiveness of employees without work experience or with little work experience;

4. contribute to improving the quality of labor resources;

5. contribute to the growth of the efficiency of personnel work;

6. contribute to increasing the economic mobility of labor resources;

7. promote the development of the institution of vocational education;

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