QUALITY ASSURANCE IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UZBEKISTAN, KAZAKHSTAN, AND KYRGYZSTAN

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Abstract. Quality assurance in general secondary education must combine compliance with standards and continuous school improvement. This article compares the documented quality assurance arrangements in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. A qualitative comparative document analysis draws on national regulations, official communications, and international research. The analysis examines school self-evaluation, external assessment, monitoring, intermediary support, and follow-up. Uzbekistan formally links internal and external evaluation; Kazakhstan has revised the status of state attestation; and evidence from Kyrgyzstan highlights the gap between administrative oversight and practical support for teachers. The study proposes an integrated feedback-to-improvement approach. Its conclusions concern documented frameworks and available evidence, not proven causal effects on learning.

Keywords: quality assurance, general secondary education, school evaluation, self-evaluation, educational accountability, Central Asia.

UMUMIY ÖRTA TA’LIMDA SIFATNI TA’MINLAŞ: ÖZBEKISTON, QOZOĞISTON VA QIRĞIZISTONNING QIYOSIY TAHLILI

Annotatsiya. Umumiy örta ta’limda sifatni ta’minlaş davlat standartlariga muvofiqlikni tekshirish bilan birga maktab faoliyatini uzluksiz takomillaştirişni ham qamrab olişi kerak. Maqolada Özbekiston, Qozoğiston va Qirğizistondagi ta’lim sifatini ta’minlaş tizimlarining hujjatlarda belgilangan mexanizmlari qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda me’yoriy-huquqiy hujjatlar, rasmiy axborotlar va xalqaro tadqiqotlarga tayangan sifatli qiyosiy hujjatlar tahlili qöllanildi. Maktablarning özini özi baholaşi, taşqi baholaş, monitoring, hududiy boşqaruv organlari kömagi va keyingi takomillaştiriş çoralari örganildi. Özbekistonda içki va taşqi baholaş özaro boğlangan; Qozoğistonda davlat attestatsiyasining huquqiy maqomi qayta körib çiqilgan; Qirğizistondagi tadqiqotlar esa ma’muriy nazorat va öqituvçilarni amaliy qöllab-quvvatlaş örtasidagi tafovutni körsatadi. Baholaş natijalarini real takomillaştirişga yönaltiruvçi model taklif etiladi. Xulosalar öquv natijalariga sababiy ta’sir isbotiga emas, hujjatlar va mavjud dalillarga asoslangan. Kalit sözlar: ta’lim sifatini ta’minlaş; umumiy örta ta’lim; maktablarni baholaş; özini özi baholaş; ta’limdagi hisobdorlik; Markaziy Osiyo.

ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЕ КАЧЕСТВА ОБЩЕГО СРЕДНЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ УЗБЕКИСТАНА, КАЗАХСТАНА И КЫРГЫЗСТАНА

Аннотация. Обеспечение качества общего среднего образования должно сочетать соблюдение государственных стандартов с непрерывным совершенствованием работы школ. В статье сопоставляются документально закреплённые механизмы обеспечения качества образования в Узбекистане, Казахстане и Кыргызстане. Использован качественный сравнительный анализ нормативных актов, официальных сообщений и международных исследований. Рассмотрены самооценка школ, внешняя оценка, мониторинг, поддержка со стороны промежуточных органов управления и последующие меры. В Узбекистане предусмотрена взаимосвязь внутренней и внешней оценки; в Казахстане изменён правовой статус государственной аттестации; исследования в Кыргызстане указывают на разрыв между административным контролем и практической поддержкой педагогов. Предлагается модель перехода от оценки к улучшению качества. Выводы относятся к документально подтверждённым положениям и опубликованным данным, а не к доказанным причинным эффектам.

Ключевые слова: обеспечение качества образования, общее среднее образование, оценка школ, самооценка, образовательная подотчётность, ЦентральнаяАзия.

Education quality assurance has become a central concern in the governance of school systems because expanding access to schooling does not automatically secure effective learning, equitable opportunities, or trustworthy public institutions. Governments require mechanisms for defining minimum expectations, evaluating institutional

performance, and intervening when pupils are not being adequately served. Schools simultaneously need professional feedback, time for collective inquiry, and access to resources that turn assessment results into better teaching. These purposes can be complementary, but they also generate tension when information produced for accountability is disconnected from everyday classroom improvement. Thus, the existence of an inspection mechanism alone cannot establish that a system assures educational quality in the fuller sense of the term.

General secondary education offers an especially consequential setting in which to examine these tensions. Schools operate within public mandates while serving communities with unequal resources and different educational needs. Quality is multidimensional: curriculum implementation, classroom instruction, student learning, school leadership, safety, inclusion, and family engagement are all relevant, but are not equally observable through single tests or administrative checklists. Frameworks that place too much weight on easily counted indicators may overlook the conditions that produce improvement, while systems that rely solely on professional judgment may lack consistency and public transparency..

Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan present an analytically useful comparison. The three countries share aspects of a post-Soviet administrative inheritance, yet have pursued different reforms in quality regulation, school management, and local support. Their proximity does not justify treating them as a homogeneous policy region: legislative terminology, institutional mandates, available evaluation data, and relationships between central and territorial actors must be examined individually. Comparative analysis therefore offers an opportunity to distinguish common governance dilemmas from country-specific designs, without assuming that policies can be transferred unchanged from one jurisdiction to another.

In Uzbekistan, Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 91 of 14 February 2024 introduced a school attestation and accreditation framework involving internal self-evaluation and subsequent external assessment. Its provisions also establish risk-analysis-based monitoring of education quality in state general secondary schools. This provides a clear formal link between standards, institutional evaluation, and the detection of conditions that might threaten quality. Whether such arrangements routinely yield useful school improvement, however, cannot be established from the legal text alone. It requires examination of implementation processes and school-level evidence.

In Kazakhstan, the trajectory includes a particularly recent legal change. Official communications report that, from February 2026, state attestation ceased to be a type of preventive state control; new rules effective in May 2026 frame it as a comprehensive evaluation of the quality and accessibility of education against compulsory state standards. The legal change potentially alters the relationship between evaluation and regulation, although the effects of its implementation remain to be studied. In Kyrgyzstan, an assessment reported by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning in July 2026 points to the difference between formal district-level school-support duties and a working practice dominated by reporting and compliance-related assignments . These developments make the accountability–improvement relationship particularly salient.

International assessment evidence underscores why a narrow compliance perspective is insufficient. The OECD's PISA 2022 country notes document substantial foundational-learning challenges in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. For example, the proportions of 15-year-olds reaching at least Level 2 in mathematics were 19% in Uzbekistan and 50% in Kazakhstan, although neither statistic directly measures inspection effectiveness. Kyrgyzstan is not included in this two-country PISA comparison, and the absence of a matching outcome statistic must not be interpreted as an equivalent performance value. Assessment results indicate important questions for policy rather than proving that a particular quality assurance arrangement caused them.

Quality assurance refers here to the connected arrangements by which authorities and schools define educational expectations, assemble credible evidence, judge strengths and needs, provide support, and review corrective action. It is not synonymous with accreditation, inspection, testing, or school ranking. Accreditation normally concerns recognition against specified standards; inspection is an external review technique; monitoring may track trends and risks; and internal evaluation is the systematic inquiry undertaken by the school itself. A coherent system links these functions without presuming that any one instrument can capture the entirety of education quality.

Accountability has at least two interacting faces. Answerability requires actors to explain decisions and demonstrate attention to legitimate standards; improvement requires opportunities and capacities to change practices when problems are recognized. UNESCO's 2017/18 Global Education Monitoring Report warns against simple assumptions that more accountability instruments automatically produce better learning: responsibilities and information must be aligned with institutional capacities and broader system conditions . An improvement-oriented interpretation consequently examines not only what inspectors check but also who uses the evidence, what assistance schools receive, and whether gains are independently followed up.

The documentary corpus was purposively selected for relevance, authority, and cross-country comparability, with materials publicly accessible by 23 October 2026. Uzbekistan's primary legal anchor is Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 91 (2024), consulted through the national Lex.uz legal database. Kazakhstan's anchors are its Law on Education, the ministerial criteria for organizational evaluation, and official 2025–2026 reports describing state attestation and the May 2026 rules. Kyrgyzstan is represented by official institutional context, IIEP-UNESCO's 2026 assessment account, and the 2024 school stakeholder study associated with Schools2030. International interpretive material includes OECD's school evaluation framework and PISA 2022 country notes, UNESCO's accountability report, and relevant UNICEF research on Kyrgyzstan. Sources published after the period under consideration were excluded.

Selection was structured around four criteria. First, a source had to concern general secondary schooling, rather

than only universities or vocational education. Second, authoritative legislative and ministry materials took priority for legal or institutional claims, because secondary commentary can misstate the effect of regulatory amendments. Third, empirical reports were favored when discussing implementation or school-level experiences, because legal rules are not evidence of behavior. Fourth, sources had to contribute identifiable evidence to at least one comparison dimension. Public web publication dates, document titles, and persistent links were checked where available. References indicate original-language titles where that is necessary for accurate identification.

The analysis used a six-domain coding matrix: (a) governance authority and legal mandate; (b) external assessment and state attestation; (c) school self-evaluation and professional participation; (d) assessment data and interpretation; (e) district or intermediary support; and (f) corrective measures, follow-up, and equity safeguards. Each document was read against these questions. Evidence was then separated into three levels: normative requirement, administrative reporting, and empirical observation. An analytical inference is marked as such and not presented as a statutory fact. This distinction is essential because an established requirement to undertake self-assessment cannot demonstrate that school staff participate meaningfully or that improvement results.

Cross-country comparison presents translation and temporal challenges. Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Russian terminology may not map perfectly onto English expressions such as attestation, accreditation, or inspection. For example, a procedure labeled 'state attestation' can change its legal status even while retaining its name. The Kazakhstan analysis therefore explicitly incorporates the 2026 reclassification, rather than treating a pre-2026 description as current. The country's 2025 totals are historical activity figures, not evidence that 2026 law had already operated. Likewise, evidence on the Kyrgyz district-support problem describes the assessed system at the time of the reported research and not every individual district or school.

Methodological triangulation involved checking where legal provisions, official implementation accounts, and research findings addressed the same domain. Absence of evidence was not coded as proof that a practice does not exist. Comparability was considered stronger for formal structures than for school-level outcomes, where published data differ substantially between countries. PISA indicators are used only as contextual illustrations and not as dependent variables for testing policy effectiveness. No causal coefficients, significance tests, or composite country rankings are reported.

Ethically, the study uses public institutional materials and published research and therefore involves no newly recruited human participants or identifiable private records. Its main integrity commitments are accurate attribution, proportionate inference, and transparency concerning limitations. The study is best understood as a structured comparative policy analysis that generates testable propositions for subsequent mixed-methods fieldwork rather than a definitive audit of the three national systems.

Uzbekistan offers an unusually explicit articulation of a two-stage evaluation sequence in its 2024 school regulation. Kazakhstan provides detailed evidence of centrally governed attestation, an established criteria framework, and a new 2026 legal definition. Kyrgyzstan offers highly informative recent observations on how district education officials mediate between central policy and classroom practice. These differences suggest that the location of the main policy bottleneck may vary: sequencing and use of self-evaluation in Uzbekistan; implementing a newly classified evaluation process in Kazakhstan; and converting middle-tier oversight into practical professional support in Kyrgyzstan.

Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 91 establishes the most detailed legal anchor used in this study. Its first annex regulates attestation and state accreditation for relevant preschool and general secondary educational institutions. The regulation defines attestation as a principal form of state supervision intended to determine conformity with state educational standards and requirements. For general secondary institutions, the formal attestation process includes an internal stage, described as institutional self-evaluation, followed by an external assessment conducted through the authorized bodies or eligible international accreditation organizations under specified conditions .

The internal stage matters because school actors are formally required to evaluate performance against common indicators, identify deficiencies, and consider measures for addressing them. In principle, this can supply the first step of a local improvement process. In practice, institutional self-assessment can be implemented as a reflective professional inquiry or reduced to an administrative exercise preparing files for external reviewers. The document demonstrates that self-evaluation is legally specified; it does not resolve which pattern predominates across schools. That question would require school improvement plans, observation of review meetings, and interviews with school staff.

The second annex establishes risk-analysis-based education quality monitoring for state general secondary institutions. It describes identification of conditions and potential consequences associated with deterioration in educational quality or non-compliance and explicitly identifies professional development, student learning, leadership responsibility, and innovative pedagogy among monitoring purposes .

Several design features are therefore potentially constructive: a legal bridge between internal and external review, multidimensional evaluation criteria, and explicit risk-based monitoring. Their effectiveness cannot be assumed from textual design. Three unresolved implementation questions deserve attention. Who participates in creating the school's self-evaluation evidence? How are weak indicators distinguished from structural constraints outside a principal's control? What enforceable or supported cycle follows the external assessment? Answers would reveal whether the architecture functions mainly as an accreditation checkpoint or as a learning mechanism for school teams.

PISA 2022 illustrates a separate reason to take implementation seriously. According to the OECD country note, only 19% of assessed 15-year-olds in Uzbekistan attained at least baseline Level 2 proficiency in mathematics, and 14% reached the corresponding reading threshold . These indicators show challenges in foundational competencies, not the

success or failure of Resolution No. 91, which postdates the assessment. Using the PISA figures to evaluate the impact of a 2024 rule would be chronologically invalid. They instead underscore the need for school quality processes to connect diagnosis with substantive learning support.

Kazakhstan's quality assurance arrangements are situated within its Law on Education and the work of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Education and territorial bodies. Evaluation criteria for preschool, secondary, technical and vocational, and post-secondary organizations were approved through ministerial Order No. 486 of 5 December 2022 and have subsequently been amended. These provisions place state standards and defined evaluation criteria at the center of institutional scrutiny. As in Uzbekistan, the existence of standards helps establish common expectations but does not, by itself, specify the intensity of developmental support offered to each school.

The Committee's official account of control measures for 2025 states that state attestation was undertaken in 2,706 educational organizations, including institutions across more than one educational level . The number is therefore not a count of secondary schools alone. Nor should it be interpreted as a success rate or causal demonstration of school improvement. Rather, it establishes the substantial administrative scale of the then-operating evaluation system and illustrates the practical burden of managing information across a heterogeneous sector.

In 2026 the legal framing changed materially. Kazakhstan's official explanation states that a new Article 55-1 of the Law on Education took effect on 1 February 2026, and new state-attestation rules under ministerial Order No. 114-NQ of 30 April 2026 entered into force on 17 May 2026. In the revised formulation, state attestation is no longer treated as preventive state control without a visit but as a comprehensive assessment of education quality and accessibility against the compulsory standards of the relevant level. This distinction is crucial: descriptions written before that transition cannot be presented as the current legal position.

PISA 2022 data provide context, but do not rank the effectiveness of the national inspectorate. The OECD notes that 50% of Kazakhstani students reached Level 2 or higher in mathematics, 36% in reading, and 55% in science. Kazakhstan scored below the OECD average across these domains, while its school autonomy responses also reveal that principals in many surveyed schools held significant hiring responsibility. Autonomy over one managerial function does not necessarily imply autonomy in curriculum or evaluation design. A credible QA assessment would need to investigate how administrative responsibilities relate to a school's capacity to respond to evidence.

Kazakhstan's case highlights a distinction between regulatory evolution and implementation effects. It is possible to observe the new purpose and institutional mandate, and to identify the historical scale of attestation. It is not yet defensible to infer that the post-May 2026 process has strengthened instructional quality or equity across secondary schools. The next research priority is tracing what happens after a school receives evaluation feedback: whether it is accompanied by technical help, whether a school can challenge inaccurate judgments, and whether follow-up prioritizes pupils' educational needs.

Kyrgyzstan is especially revealing because recent evidence addresses the practical work of district education authorities rather than merely describing their official existence. In July 2026 IIEP-UNESCO reported on a national assessment, undertaken with UNICEF and partners, of district-level capacity to support schools and teachers during major education reforms. District education departments and their methodologists were examined as intermediaries translating national policies into classroom practice. The report situates the assessment within reforms that include the transition to 12-year schooling and curriculum modernization.

The most consequential reported finding is a gap between formal support mandates and operating routines. Although methodologists recognize assistance to teachers and schools as part of their responsibilities, reporting, data administration, and compliance-related activities dominate their work. The UNESCO account characterizes the existing configuration as more effective at transmitting instructions and verifying compliance than at providing sustained, classroom-oriented professional assistance . This is direct evidence about a middle-tier implementation challenge, not proof that all external accountability is unnecessary.

A complementary school-level research report associated with Schools2030 investigated stakeholder perceptions of education quality in schools across Chui, Naryn, and Osh regions. The report describes surveys of 253 parents, 293 teachers, and 324 pupils, as well as qualitative interviews and focus groups, using a multidimensional education-quality lens. The findings identify pressures concerning resources, uneven opportunities, and differences in how stakeholders understand educational quality. Because the research used selected schools rather than a national probability sample, its results should be interpreted as contextual evidence and not an estimate for all Kyrgyz schools.

The 2026 assessment should not be misread as a complete legal mapping of Kyrgyzstan's attestation or accreditation procedures. The documentary corpus provides firmer empirical support for district-level practices than for every current statutory requirement across school types. The analysis accordingly makes narrower claims for Kyrgyzstan than for the detailed Uzbek regulation or the Kazakhstan 2026 official rule notice. This asymmetric treatment is analytically preferable to inventing a perfectly parallel three-country regulatory matrix when the documentary evidence does not support one.

A further implication concerns reform sequencing. Moving toward longer schooling and updated curricula increases demands on school leadership and teachers. If the same district structures are expected both to monitor compliance and to coach educators, workload and role design become quality assurance issues. Strengthening the developmental side may require differentiated job descriptions, professional training for methodologists, fewer duplicative returns, and explicit monitoring of whether school support reaches classrooms, rather than simply issuing additional guidance from the center.

A first shared issue is the relationship between uniform requirements and diverse school contexts. Common standards can protect students' educational entitlements, yet identical documentation demands may place disproportionate pressure on rural or resource-limited schools. A second issue is the handling of results. Data collected for external compliance may be sufficiently robust for institutional judgments but too aggregated to guide individual teachers. A third is evaluator and leadership capacity: recommendations cannot be implemented merely because they are written in a report. Fourth, transparency needs to coexist with safeguards against simplistic rankings and the strategic manipulation of measured indicators.

The findings place Central Asian school quality assurance within a broader policy dilemma identified by comparative education research: school evaluation systems need credibility and common standards, but their contribution to learning depends on whether results are interpreted and acted upon locally. The national documents examined here establish meaningful commitments to quality regulation; they do not establish an automatic transfer of those commitments into improved instruction. A productive research agenda should therefore shift attention from counting evaluations to tracing the path from assessment finding to pedagogical change.

Uzbekistan’s combination of internal and external stages offers an institutional starting point for such a transition. Self-evaluation can encourage principals and teachers to identify weaknesses before inspectors arrive. But institutional incentives matter. If schools believe the sole objective is to avoid adverse external judgments, their self-review may emphasize favorable indicators and documentary conformity. If reviewers instead ask how teachers used pupil work, classroom observations, and family feedback to modify instruction, the same formal stage can become an improvement tool. The relevant design issue is not whether schools produce a self-evaluation report, but whether professional deliberation and credible action are evident in the process.

Kazakhstan's revised definition provides a second potential policy lever. Moving state attestation into a comprehensive assessment of quality and accessibility can encourage a fuller conception of institutional performance, including students whose barriers may not be visible in aggregate averages. Nevertheless, the reclassification is recent and should be investigated prospectively. Researchers could compare evaluator guidance, school perceptions, corrective action requirements, and support resources before and after May 2026. Without such implementation evidence, favorable or unfavorable judgments about reform effects would be premature.

Kyrgyzstan’s evidence sharpens the importance of intermediary institutions. National policy may define ambitious goals, but teachers often interact most directly with district methodologists rather than national authorities. When administrative collection absorbs these professionals' time, the problem is not necessarily a lack of evaluation data. It may be a failure to translate diagnosis into subject-specific advice and sustained collaboration. The findings reported by IIEP-UNESCO (2026) suggest that evaluating the workload, competencies, and incentives of district personnel should be as integral to quality assurance as assessing schools themselves.

Equity should inform every stage. A national assessment threshold may reveal a serious learning challenge but cannot explain whether a school lacks specialist staff, has high student mobility, serves multilingual communities, or is affected by infrastructure constraints. An equitable system protects minimum standards while comparing schools against relevant contextual information and offering additional support where need is greatest. Stakeholder research from Kyrgyzstan, which highlights disparities in resources and opportunities, supports taking these contextual differences seriously. The goal should be neither to excuse poor provision nor to punish institutions for circumstances they lack authority to alter.

The use of international assessments requires similar restraint. The PISA 2022 data for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are suitable for identifying broad system-level learning concerns and informing policy priorities. They cannot prove that a particular national evaluation system is effective, especially when regulatory reforms took effect after the assessment year. Nor can they provide a three-way comparison with Kyrgyzstan in the absence of matching observations. Quality assurance research benefits when outcome metrics are linked to well-defined interventions, longitudinal designs, and careful consideration of confounding conditions rather than attached rhetorically to reform announcements.

The policy implications for Uzbekistan are consequently conditional. First, authorities could develop practical guidance making the internal-evaluation phase demonstrably analytical rather than primarily documentary: teacher teams could examine pupil work, attendance patterns, inclusion barriers, and classroom observations against a limited number of school priorities. Second, external assessors could explicitly judge the quality of diagnosis and follow-up planning, not only compliance snapshots. Third, risk monitoring could be paired with structured support and context-adjusted indicators. Fourth, professional development for school leaders and evaluators could prioritize constructive feedback and improvement planning. Fifth, public reporting could clarify which findings describe conditions, which reflect change over time, and which remain uncertain.

Regional learning should be reciprocal rather than one-directional. Uzbekistan can observe how Kazakhstan operationalizes its new concept of quality-and-accessibility assessment and how Kyrgyzstan responds to evidence on district methodologists. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan may likewise find relevant lessons in Uzbekistan’s explicit internal–external assessment linkage, while avoiding assumptions that legal wording alone produces school agency. A regional research network could use common interview guides, indicator definitions, and document templates to evaluate the quality assurance process across jurisdictions more consistently.

Several limitations constrain the conclusions. The analysis relies on publicly available documents with uneven national coverage; it does not verify day-to-day school practice in Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz evidence is

stronger on middle-tier implementation but narrower on a full legal inventory. Official reports may use differing organizational denominators, and legal amendments can rapidly change the status of mechanisms. The study is not a systematic review of every paper published in multiple languages, nor a representative national evaluation. All policy recommendations should therefore be treated as propositions for piloting and evaluation.

Future research should use a sequential mixed-methods design. A first phase could catalog the evaluation criteria, inspector guidance, school self-assessment templates, and follow-up requirements currently in force in each country. A second phase could select urban and rural schools across socioeconomic settings and interview school leaders, teachers, district professionals, pupils, and families. Direct observation of feedback meetings and analysis of anonymized school improvement plans would provide evidence of actual use. A third phase could follow the same institutions over time, examining whether changes in review practice precede demonstrable improvements in instruction and learner experience. Such a design would test rather than merely assert the causal pathway proposed here.

This article compared selected quality assurance arrangements in the general secondary education systems of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan through national regulation, official reporting, and recent research evidence. The central conclusion is not that any one country has an inherently stronger system, but that comparable challenges arise at the point where standards and evaluation must become meaningful institutional improvement. Uzbekistan's 2024 framework contains a formal internal–external assessment sequence and risk-based monitoring; Kazakhstan's 2026 reform reconceptualizes state attestation as a comprehensive assessment of quality and accessibility; and recent evidence from Kyrgyzstan identifies a practical gap between district-level compliance duties and sustained pedagogical support.

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