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PROBLEMS OF INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: SOCIO-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS

The relevance of this study is persistent inequalities in access to quality education and socio-cultural resources between rural and urban areas of Kazakhstan. Despite significant public investment, disparities remain in infrastructure, teaching capacity, and family conditions, directly affecting students' academic outcomes.

The aim of the article is to identify and analyze the key factors determining socio-cultural differences between rural and urban schools.

The novelty of the research lies in a comprehensive approach to educational inequality by integrating family, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions, supported by national statistics and international evidence, and in proposing systemic solutions to reduce disparities.

The methodology is based on a systemic approach, comparative analysis, generalization, and data systematization. The empirical base includes data from the National Bureau of Statistics, national analytical reports, and the PISA-2022 international assessment.

The results demonstrate that inequality is primarily driven by lower household income in rural areas, shortages of highly qualified teachers, limited access to modern educational infrastructure, and weaker digitalization. A persistent performance gap between rural and urban students is identified. The study proposes targeted measures to reduce inequality, including infrastructure development, teacher support policies, and expansion of digital education access.

Keywords: social development, educational inequality, education system, regional peculiarities, socio-cultural challenges.

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Білім берудегі теңсіздік мәселелері: ауыл және қала мектептеріндегі мәдени-әлеуметтік айырмашылықтар туралы

Зерттеудің өзектілігі Қазақстанның ауыл және қала аймақтары арасындағы білім сапасына және әлеуметтік-мәдени ресурстарға қолжетімділіктегі теңсіздіктің сақталуымен анықталады. Мемлекеттік қолдауға қарамастан, айырмашылықтар мектеп инфрақұрылымында, кадрлық әлеуетте және отбасылық жағдайларда көрініс тауып, оқушылардың білім нәтижелеріне тікелей әсер етеді.

Мақаланың мақсаты – ауыл және қала мектептері арасындағы әлеуметтік және мәдени айырмашылықтарды айқындайтын негізгі факторларды анықтау және талдау.

Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы білім берудегі теңсіздікті отбасылық, институционалдық және инфрақұрылымдық факторлар кешені арқылы кешенді қарастыруда, сондай-ақ ұлттық және халықаралық деректер негізінде жүйелі ұсыныстар әзірлеуде көрінеді.

Зерттеу әдістемесі жүйелік тәсілге, салыстырмалы талдауға, жалпылау және жүйелеу әдістеріне негізделген. Эмпирикалық база ретінде Ұлттық статистика бюросының деректері, аналітикалық есептер және PISA-2022 нәтижелері пайдаланылды.

Нәтижелер ауылдық аймақтардағы төмен табыс деңгейі, білікті мұғалімдердің жетіспеушілігі, заманауи инфрақұрылым мен цифрлық технологияларға қолжетімділіктің шектеулілігі негізгі факторлар екенін көрсетті. Оқушылардың білім нәтижелерінде тұрақты айырмашылық анықталды. Теңсіздікті азайту үшін инфрақұрылымды дамыту, мұғалімдерді қолдау және білімді цифрландыруды кеңейту ұсынылады.

Түйін сөздер: әлеуметтік даму, білім берудегі теңсіздік, білім беру жүйесі, аймақтық ерекшеліктер, әлеуметтік-мәдени сын-қатерлер.

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Проблемы неравенства в образовании: социально-культурные различия между сельскими и городскими школами

Актуальность исследования обусловлена сохраняющимся неравенством в доступе к качественному образованию и социально-культурным ресурсам между сельскими и городскими территориями Казахстана. Несмотря на государственные инвестиции, различия проявляются в уровне инфраструктуры, кадрового потенциала школ и семейных условий, что напрямую влияет на образовательные результаты учащихся.

Цель статьи – выявить и проанализировать ключевые факторы, определяющие социальные и культурные различия между сельскими и городскими школами.

Научная новизна заключается в комплексном рассмотрении образовательного неравенства через совокупность семейных, институциональных и инфраструктурных факторов с опорой на актуальные национальные и международные данные, а также в формировании системных рекомендаций по снижению разрыва.

Методология исследования основана на системном подходе, сравнительном анализе, обобщении и систематизации данных. В качестве эмпирической базы использованы материалы Национального бюро статистики, аналитические отчёты профильных центров и результаты PISA-2022.

Результаты показывают, что ключевыми факторами неравенства являются более низкий уровень доходов сельских семей, дефицит квалифицированных педагогов, ограниченный доступ к современной образовательной инфраструктуре и цифровым технологиям. Выявлена устойчивая разница в образовательных достижениях учащихся. Предложены меры по сокращению неравенства, включая развитие инфраструктуры, поддержку педагогов и расширение цифровизации образования.

Ключевые слова: социальное развитие, неравенство в образовании, система образования, региональные особенности, социокультурные вызовы.

Introduction

In the new socio-economic conditions, it is necessary to maximize and fully realize the socio-pedagogical potential of young people and adolescents during their free time. It is important to significantly expand the traditional directions, forms, and technologies of working with this social group. Leisure is not only a period of rest, but also a sphere for developing abilities, fulfilling interests, applying knowledge in new situations, and interacting with different people. The main environment where adolescents spend most of their time is school.

School is the place where personality is formed and the period when every individual devotes time to shaping their unique personal characteristics. A person's future destiny and value orientations are directly related to the conditions in which the educational process takes place and the opportunities provided. Free secondary education and equal access to it are guaranteed by the laws of Kazakhstan. However, in practice, shortcomings are observed in the implementation of this principle. These shortcomings are evident in differentiated funding in secondary schools, in material and technical re-

sources, and in the quality of education. Such disparities are most clearly visible between rural and urban schools.

The issue of accessibility and quality of general secondary education is increasingly attracting the attention of specialists both from an institutional and systemic perspective. School is the key link of the education system and the most important among educational institutions. At the same time, by directly influencing socialization, upbringing, and personal development, it also acts as an institution that improves the quality of the state's human capital.

One of the key challenges for modern education systems is overcoming inequalities that are closely linked to socio-economic disparities. In Kazakhstan, despite ongoing reforms and investments, significant differences persist between rural and urban areas in terms of access to quality education, learning conditions, and opportunities for students' social and cultural development.

Existing research indicates that rural students face structural constraints, including limited educational resources, insufficient infrastructure, lower availability of qualified teachers, and restricted access to extracurricular and cultural institutions.

These disparities contribute to unequal educational outcomes and long-term social inequality.

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the key factors shaping socio-cultural differences between rural and urban schools and to develop evidence-based measures to reduce these disparities.

To achieve this goal, the study addresses two main objectives:

(1) to systematize and assess family, institutional, and infrastructural factors influencing educational inequality;

(2) to evaluate their impact on students' educational and socio-cultural development based on national and international data.

The novelty of the study lies in its integrated analytical framework, which combines multi-level factors of inequality (family, school, and regional environment) with empirical evidence from national statistics and PISA-2022 results. Unlike prior studies, this research not only identifies structural disparities but also proposes a set of targeted, system-level interventions aimed at reducing the rural–urban educational gap.

Literature review

Various approaches are used to define educational inequality. The simplest method refers to the fair distribution of both material and non-material resources, i.e., educational inequality is understood as the unfair allocation of educational goods among people.

D.L. Konstantinovskiy (2018), J.C. Passeron (Valle, I.R., 2022), studying educational inequality, noted that it has at least four main sources:

1. The child as an individual with abilities, skills, and unique characteristics;
2. The family and its social, economic, and cultural capital;
3. The school and its material and technical base, teacher training level, and school climate;
4. The neighborhood – the level of development of social infrastructure, availability, and cost of vocational and higher education institutions.

In addition, according to studies by J. Skopek (2019), M. Triventi (2019), and others, access to preschool education is also a source of educational inequality.

The classical model of socio-economic differences in children's equality in education lies in the volume of parental investment in their children's education (Becker & Tomes, 1979). Parents, in rais-

ing children, strive to enrich the child's cultural and educational environment with early developmental potential, supplementary education, care for the child's health and well-being, and supervision of their social circle. In this case, the upbringing process acts as an investment in the child's future. The "natural growth" principle in child-rearing, on the other hand, does not see the necessity of enriching the child's cultural and educational environment or investing in development. Children are given more freedom, and their free time is spent on "unproductive" activities.

Studies aimed at measuring and improving the quality of primary school teaching have shown the long-term impact of quality teaching on students' outcomes. Research involving more than one million children from different regions has found that students taught by highly qualified teachers have a higher probability of entering university, finding higher-paying jobs, and a lower likelihood of engaging in crime during adolescence (Raj Chetty, 2021).

Data from the China Education Panel Survey for the 2013–2014 academic year revealed a significant difference in cognitive skills between urban and rural students, explained by such social factors as the number of siblings in the family, parents' education level, and the interaction between parents and teachers (Yang, J., & Zhao, X., 2021).

The PISA-2000 study in Canada found clear differences in educational achievement between urban and rural students in five provinces (Newfoundland, Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Alberta). The relatively lower educational outcomes of rural students were closely associated with low community education levels and such factors as low wages and unemployment (Cartwright, 2012).

According to N. Smanova (2024), "*students' performance largely depends on the location of the school*," and the correlation between school location and academic achievement remained statistically significant even after accounting for material and human resources. Tastanbekova, K. (2022) argues that highly qualified teachers are unevenly distributed among schools, as they often transfer to schools with additional resources and gifted students.

OECD experts also conclude that a student's place of birth – along with home language and parents' profession – is one of the most influential predictors of school performance. Moreover, these personal characteristics affect not only educational outcomes but also students' aspirations for the future (OECD, 2019).

Many experts agree that the main problem faced by rural schools is the lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities. In their studies, Beimisheva, A.S. and Argynabayeva, Zh.Zh. (2023) noted that despite improvements in general school buildings, many schools still lack classrooms, libraries and laboratories, toilets, playgrounds, clean drinking water, and adequate heating in winter. In turn, the lack of material and technical resources leads to multiple shifts in study groups, which reduces learning time and exacerbates educational inequality.

Methodology

The study employs a systemic approach, comparative analysis, generalization, and systematization methods. A systematic approach to the study of educational inequality in cities and rural areas makes it possible to analyze measures of state support and the development of education as a complex system consisting of interrelated elements. This approach allows consideration of various aspects of influence, interaction, and interdependence between such factors as access to education, infrastructure, and human resources.

Comparative analysis helps identify specific features and trends in development and education in different regions of the country. Generalization methods allow the collection, analysis, and integration of information from various sources and aspects of the study. Systematization of data helps to identify the main trends and conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of the analysis.

To identify cultural and social differences, the following factors were analyzed:

- Family factors, such as parental support and conditions provided, as well as income level;
- School administration factors (educational level, equipment, media classrooms, teaching staff, etc.);
- Urban infrastructure factors (availability of leisure spaces, creative activities, theaters, etc.).

The analytical section of the article uses data from the Center for the Development of Small Schools at the National Academy of Education named after Y. Altynsarin, the National Research and Education Evaluation Center “Taldau” named after A. Baitursynuly, the National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Bureau of National Statistics on living standards and employment, as well as the results of the international PISA-2022 studies, and reports on the social and cultural activities of rural and urban administrations.

Results and discussion

The factors influencing child development are diverse, and among them, the material and physical capabilities of the family play a decisive role. A child’s education, health, personal, and socio-cultural development are largely shaped by the living conditions within the family. Despite the advanced infrastructure, and greater accessibility to quality education and healthcare in urban areas, these issues remain pressing in rural regions.

To make a comparative assessment of the level of family support for the social and cultural development of school-aged children, the following indicators are considered: the average household income, the availability of a separate room/study corner for the student, and the number of children in the family.

Table 1

Comparative analysis of family factors by urban and rural types

Indicators	City	Village
Total population, thousand people	12,265,594	7,525,922
Number of children, thousand people	3,993,292	2,744,725
Average number of children per family	2.63	3.59
Growth rate of the number of children in families, %	103.7	102.1
Share of the population with family income below the subsistence minimum, %	4.0	7.3

Note: compiled based on the data of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

According to the annual report “Children of Kazakhstan” by the National Bureau of Statistics, on average, there are 2.63 children per family in urban areas and 3.59 children per family in rural areas. This indicates the higher prevalence of large families in rural areas. In addition, the share of families with incomes below the subsistence minimum in rural areas is 3.3% higher than in urban areas.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that in large families, parental attention to each child is limited. This, in turn, reflects insufficient access to educational resources (learning materials, internet, digital technologies for learning), healthcare, and emotional support. If this situation is viewed through the lens of A. Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs”, it

becomes clear that in rural areas, children under the age of 18 often do not have their physiological needs fully satisfied. As a result, the pursuit of subsequent motivational needs (stable income, healthcare, self-esteem, and personal development) is delayed. Therefore, such differences between urban and rural areas have a long-term impact on a child's personal, academic, and socio-cultural development and future. This indicates the need for deeper research into the institution of the family in rural areas.

Equality of cultural and social opportunities among adolescents is the foundation of the education system in many countries, including Kazakhstan. By ensuring the idea of social and cultural justice, education becomes the main driver of the national economy, influencing the fate of both the state and society. International research demonstrates that a child's place of residence is often considered one of the most important factors affecting academic achievement. The quality of the social environment and the schools in the region where the child lives play a decisive role.

Currently, there are 7,833 schools operating in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023–2024 academic

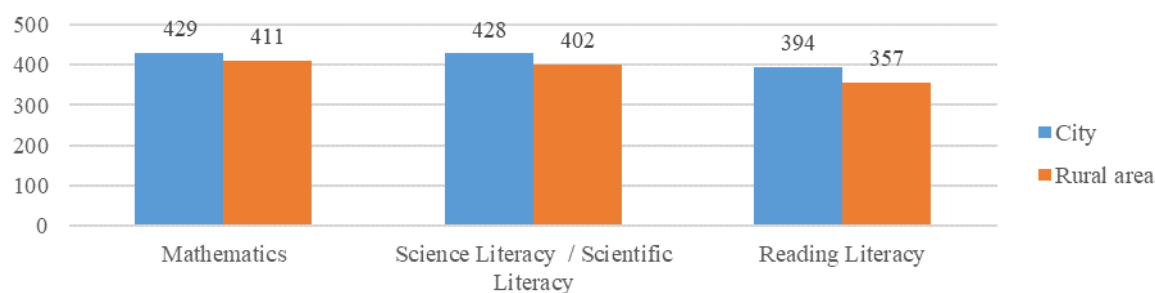
year). Among them, 5,271 schools are located in rural areas, while 2,562 are in urban areas. Since 2019, Kazakhstan has been implementing large-scale infrastructure projects, having provided over one million student places in 1,200 new schools. As a result, the number of schools shows a positive growth trend today (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). The Turkistan, Akmola, and Almaty regions lead in the number of rural schools, with the highest number (868 schools) located in rural areas of Turkistan region (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

Across the Republic of Kazakhstan, there are 3,812,279 school students, of which 1,555,132 (39.4%) are in rural settlements. The highest number of rural students is recorded in the Turkistan region, while the largest share of urban students is in Almaty city (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

According to the results of the international PISA-2022 study, the gap in literacy levels between urban and rural students persists. In this case, urban students demonstrated higher results in all three areas of assessment within PISA-2022.

Figure 1

Results in Mathematics, Scientific Literacy, and Reading Literacy by Location and Cycles of Educational Institutions, 2022 (scores)



Note: Compiled based on the results of the PISA-2022 international study

The differentiation between rural and urban schools is evident across all major characteristics of the educational process. Eliminating this gap requires scientifically grounded justifications. To create a favorable learning environment for every student, schools must be equipped with diverse facilities and resources that foster the development of academic, cultural, and social skills. For instance, music halls, workshops, sports gyms, libraries, and swimming pools not only support physical devel-

opment but also serve as essential infrastructure elements that help unlock children's creative potential. In such schools, teachers are provided with broader opportunities, actively utilizing a variety of technologies and tools that enable them to consider multiple aspects of student learning and development.

To assess social and cultural equality between rural and urban schools, the following three groups of indicators may be considered:

1. The qualitative composition of the teaching staff in rural schools: the proportion of teachers with qualifications as teacher, teacher-moderator, teacher-expert, teacher-researcher, and teacher-master.

2. Disparities in material and technical resources: the level of library and book provision, the availability of language laboratories, multimedia and creative classrooms, sports halls, school canteens, and other facilities.

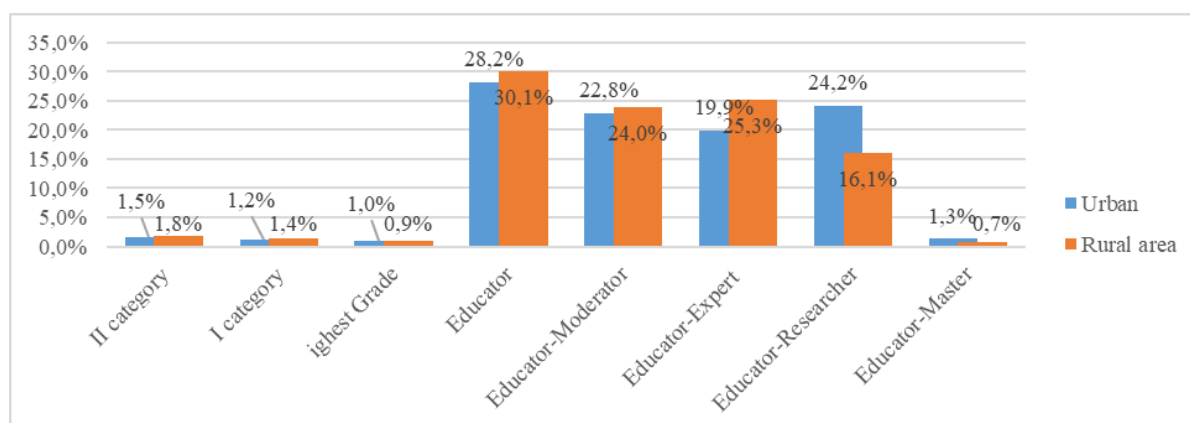
3. The level of information and communication technology (ICT) provision: access to the Internet and its speed, the student-to-computer ratio, the availability of interactive whiteboards, and related indicators.

As noted above, various factors affect the quality of education, among which one of the most significant is the quality of the teaching staff. In 2023, the general secondary education system employed **399,595 teachers**, of whom **187,501 (47%)** worked in urban areas and **212,094 (53%)** in rural areas.

Compared to 2022 (90%), the proportion of teachers who transitioned to the new qualification category system increased significantly in 2023 (96%) (National Center for Research and Educational Evaluation “Taldau,” 2023). According to statistical data, the share of teachers holding the “teacher-researcher” (24.2%) and “teacher-master” (3.7%) categories is considerably higher in urban areas than in rural ones. Conversely, rural areas demonstrate a greater proportion of teachers with the “teacher” (30.1%) category. This may be considered one of the reasons for the differences in educational attainment between adolescents in rural and urban areas. Therefore, ensuring access to professional development courses, material support, and opportunities for the exchange of best practices is of particular importance. By intensively supporting the professional growth of teachers in rural areas, it is possible to reduce the educational gap between adolescents in rural and urban settings.

Figure 2

Distribution of Teachers in Public Secondary Schools by Qualification Categories in Urban and Rural Areas, 2023 (%)



Note: Compiled based on data from the National Center for Research and Educational Evaluation “Taldau” named after A. Baitursynuly, National Collection of Education Statistics of Kazakhstan.

The results of the international PISA program for assessing student achievement demonstrate the correlation between students’ educational outcomes and the material resources of schools. In this regard, both the level of provision of the necessary material and technical infrastructure—which enables schools to perform their informational, cultural, educational, healthcare, and spiritual development functions and the rational use of these resources are of critical importance (National Report on the Results of PISA-2022 in Kazakhstan).

To enhance the quality of education in the learning process, schools need classrooms equipped with modernized and interactive facilities. The provision of schools with language laboratories, multimedia classrooms, and interactive whiteboards began in 2005. However, as indicated in the reporting documents of the Center for the Development of Small Schools under the National Academy of Education named after Y. Altynsarin, small schools (ШЖМ) still face a shortage of modernized classrooms and other interactive equipment.

Table 2*Provision of Modernized Classrooms in Urban and Rural Areas, 2023 year*

Subjects	Number of Equipped Schools	Urban	Rural
Total number of schools	5212	1815	3397
Physics	3982	1540	2442
Chemistry	3813	1501	2312
Biology	3608	1439	2169
Language and multimedia classrooms	2144	726	1418
STEM	656	476	180

Note: Compiled on the basis of the National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023, prepared by the A. Baitursynuly National Center for Research and Educational Evaluation “Taldau”.

According to the data of the National Collection of Education Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan – 2023, in 10.2% of schools (534 institutions) sports halls are located in adapted buildings, while 12.5% of schools do not have sports facilities at all.

Table 3*Number of Schools Equipped with Sports Halls in Urban and Rural Areas, 2023 year*

Indicators	Total	Urban Areas	Rural Areas
Number of schools with sports halls	6851	2331	4520
Number of sports halls equipped with standard equipment	5902	2168	3734
Number of schools with sports grounds	1819	420	1399

Note: Compiled on the basis of the National Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023, prepared by the A. Baitursynuly “Taldau” National Research and Educational Evaluation Center.

As can be observed, 90% of urban schools and 85% of rural schools are equipped with sports halls. Another manifestation of inequality is that approximately 15% of rural schools lack libraries, canteens, and buffets. Furthermore, in 1,497 rural settlements there are no schools at all, and 25,352 students are transported to attend school. Among children in

these villages, 90% study in nearby schools, 9% attend and reside in boarding schools, while less than 1% are compelled to live with relatives in order to access education. In the 2023 academic year, 55 schools were classified as being in an emergency condition, almost all of which were located in rural areas. Such schools operated in eight regions of the country (including the highest number in West Kazakhstan Region – 14, Kyzylorda Region – 8, Ak-tobe Region – 5, Atyrau Region – 5, and Turkistan Region – 4). In these hazardous conditions, 10,389 students continue their education. In addition, 35% of small-complete schools are housed in adapted buildings, while 8.2% of their facilities require major renovation (National Center for Research and Educational Evaluation “Taldau” named after A. Baitursynuly, 2023).

The informatization of the education system is currently one of the priority directions of social and cultural development in modern society. Mastery of information and communication technologies (ICT) has become a fundamental necessity for every citizen, on par with literacy skills such as reading and writing. Within the framework of the “Digital Kazakhstan” state program adopted in mid-2017, the informatization and digitalization of education were identified as strategically important directions for the development of the educational system.

The social aspect of introducing ICT into school education lies in ensuring equal access to distance learning across all subjects for every school in Kazakhstan, including small-complete schools. Currently, there is one computer for every five students nationwide, while in rural areas this ratio rises to one computer per eleven students. In 2017, the “Digital Kazakhstan” program was launched to provide high-quality Internet access to promising rural settlements. By the end of 2025, more than 4,000 rural villages are expected to be connected to high-speed Internet. Since 2019, the joint project “Modernization of Secondary Education” of the World Bank and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been under implementation. This project aims to equip all rural schools in the country (5,400 institutions) with ICT infrastructure.

Overall, the application of ICT in education has been shown to accelerate and simplify the learning process by threefold while improving educational quality by two to three times, as confirmed by researchers and educators in various countries. Today, the spread of ICT makes it possible to anticipate a paradigm shift in teaching and learning. In this regard, it is necessary to expand and finance a compre-

hensive set of measures aimed at enhancing adolescents' skills in the use of ICT for their development.

Factors influencing the strengthening of adolescents' interaction with society include the geographical location of their residence and the level of infrastructure development. Studies in scientific publications indicate that the infrastructural gap between urban and rural areas—particularly in access to education, culture, and information—can be observed in differences in the level of socialization and the formation of cultural values among adolescents. This also affects adolescents' psychological behavior, namely their sense of freedom in society and their ability to adapt quickly within social environments. For the cultural and social development of adolescents, in addition to educational institutions, it is essential to ensure the functioning of cultural and art institutions, recreational facilities, sports and wellness organizations, as well as youth organizations.

Table 4

Statistics on Cultural Centers for Adolescent Development, 2022 year

Indicators	Urban Areas	Rural Areas
Libraries	128	121
Theaters	73	0
Circuses	3	0
Museums	133	142
Number of cultural and leisure facilities	937	6,202
Number of cultural events held for children	14,409	55,049
Amusement and recreation parks	208	40

Note: Compiled on the basis of data from the National Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

As shown in the table, artistic and cultural institutions (such as theaters and circuses) are located exclusively in urban areas, while the majority of institutions intended for personal development (libraries and museums) are also concentrated in cities. An analysis of museum types reveals that most museums located in rural areas are local history museums, whereas the majority of historical and cultural museums are situated in urban areas.

Although a large share of cultural and recreational facilities (6,202 units) are concentrated in rural areas, their quality and level of equipment re-

main very poor. However, thanks to the initiatives implemented under the “*Aul – El Besigi*” program, the number of cultural and public events for children in rural areas has been steadily increasing.

While cities offer opportunities for cultural diversity and artistic creativity, rural areas are characterized by broadly organized but substantively limited cultural events. Such comparative analysis highlights the need to improve the quality of regional infrastructure and reduce cultural inequalities in order to ensure the comprehensive development of adolescents. Accordingly, an analysis of cultural and social disparities between urban and rural areas reveals the following issues:

– **Family-level disparities.** Families living in rural areas tend to have more children, lower income levels, and limited access to educational resources, reducing parents' ability to provide individualized support. This often results in the insufficient fulfillment of children's physiological, psychological, and social needs, which in turn may slow down their personal development.

– **School-level disparities.** Significant differences exist between urban and rural schools. Urban schools have teachers with higher professional qualifications, well-equipped modern classrooms, and advanced ICT resources. In contrast, rural schools often lack these opportunities; many are located in adapted or unsafe buildings and face shortages of modernized classrooms. In some regions, small-complete schools are being closed due to inefficient funding, forcing students either to attend boarding schools or commute to schools in other villages.

– **Infrastructure-level disparities.** Despite the large number of cultural facilities in rural areas, their weak material and technical base, as well as limited substantive content, hinders adolescents' cultural development and the full realization of their creative potential.

According to data from the National Statistics Agency, inequality between rural and urban areas has contributed in recent years to increased internal migration from villages to cities. This trend has led to demographic imbalances, population decline in rural areas, and rising ecological burdens. Furthermore, it has resulted in the weakening of agricultural and local economic activities in rural regions, while exacerbating housing shortages, traffic congestion, unemployment, and social tensions in urban areas. Therefore, ensuring equitable access to social and cultural infrastructure across both urban and rural areas must be considered one of the priority directions of the national development strategy.

Conclusion

Educational inequality leads to unequal income distribution, which in turn undermines trust in the state. In the context of urban and rural development systems, a number of measures can be proposed to ensure social and cultural equality among adolescents:

Implementation of regional development or mentoring programs. Such programs should provide opportunities for young people educated abroad to work, undertake internships, and deliver mentoring sessions in rural areas. By motivating rural youth and fostering their interest in education, this approach can contribute to reducing educational inequality.

“Infrastructure for people.” In the process of optimizing and consolidating rural settlements, it is essential to establish and develop the necessary infrastructure in key hubs so that relocated populations can find employment, continue their education, and fully realize their potential. If infrastructure remains underdeveloped, these communities risk becoming a source of recruitment for extremist organizations and of low-quality temporary labor. Weak rural infrastructure also hampers the effective implementation of the state program “With a Diploma to the Village.” Thus, strengthening rural infrastructure must become a priority.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) as a driver of equality. In Kazakhstan, as in other contexts, social and cultural inequality begins with unequal educational opportunities. Currently, one of the primary requirements for young specialists is proficiency in information technologies, which significantly influences their future career success. The experience of Estonia demonstrates the importance of digitalization in education. Since the late 1990s, Estonia has implemented the “Tiger Leap” and “Tiger Plus” programs, which introduced ICT into the secondary education system and created a robust digital infrastructure. Today, Estonia ranks 24th among 142 countries in ICT development. Following this model, Kazakhstan should expand the focus of the “Digital Kazakhstan” program to the education sector, with particular emphasis on equipping rural schools with ICT. This will contribute to building a highly skilled workforce and developing human capital.

Preservation of rural schools and small-complete schools (SCS). Currently, Kazakhstan is closing many SCS, which restricts access to education

for children living in small villages and infringes on their constitutional right to education. International experience shows the importance of maintaining small schools. For example, in the United States and Finland, even the smallest schools are preserved, with one teacher often teaching multiple subjects to students of different ages. Rural teachers in the U.S. are paid nearly double the salaries of their urban counterparts. In Finland, distinctive features of general education include a culture of self-evaluation within schools, practice-oriented learning, individualized student support, and smaller class sizes. In urban schools, where classes exceed 20 students, teaching assistants support teachers. Other models, such as those in Australia and Sweden, utilize cluster mechanisms: large schools act as hubs, while SCS operate as “suppliers” or “satellites,” with transportation provided for students to attend hub schools according to a set schedule. This model enables SCS students to benefit from a broader curriculum.

Transparency and accountability in the implementation of state programs. The development and execution of state programs should involve open public discussions, with all stages widely disseminated. Errors and challenges faced by program implementers should be identified and analyzed. Since science is a continuous and evolving process, the scientific and technical base of schools must be updated systematically. Open reporting would also allow schools to exchange experiences and complement each other’s practices.

In conclusion, addressing social and cultural inequalities in education in Kazakhstan and ensuring equal opportunities for all children will guarantee the full protection of their rights and support their holistic development.

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