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## **THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF EDUCATION OF THE KAZAKH ASSR IN 1930-1936: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS**

### *Abstract*

The history of the People's Commissariat for Education of the Kazakh ASSR (1920-1936) occupies a special place in the study of social, cultural, and educational policies of early Soviet Kazakhstan. This period was marked by intense transformations when the system of public education, language policy, and cultural initiatives shaped a new Soviet identity and laid the foundation for societal modernization. Despite the significance of the People's Commissariat for Education as an institution responsible for the cultural and educational development of the republic, the historiographical base of its study remains fragmented and insufficiently systematized. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive bibliographic analysis of scholarly publications dedicated to the activities of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR, its personnel structure, and institutional dynamics. The objective of the research is to identify the main directions of historiographical studies on Narkompros, to systematize the existing scholarly heritage, and to determine the degree of representation of the commissariat's key figures in contemporary academic literature. To achieve this goal, an interdisciplinary approach was applied, which included bibliographic analysis, content analysis, elements of prosopography, and data visualization using digital tools such as VOSviewer. Following the PRISMA methodology, 33 scholarly publications were selected for analysis and historiographical interpretation. The results of the study revealed that the core of historiography is concentrated around topics related to the institutional development of Narkompros, its role in the eradication of illiteracy, cultural policy, and national educational initiatives. A significant concentration of studies is dedicated to the biographies of individual commissars, such as Akhmet Baitursynov and Temirbek Zhurgenov; however, a personalized analysis of the majority of the commissariat's members remains underdeveloped. The analysis of keyword thematic clusters identified four leading trends: the archival turn, interdisciplinarity, chronological deepening, and a lack of biographical research. These observations form the basis for further exploration of Narkompros as an institution reflecting the complex processes of cultural modernization, national policy, and social transformation in Kazakhstan during the 1920s and 1930s.

**Keywords:** Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR, historiography, bibliographic analysis, cultural modernization, personalized approach, archival research.

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## **1930–1936 ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ ҚАЗ АССР ОҚУ-АҒАРТУ ХАЛЫҚ КОМИССАРИАТЫ: ТАРИХНАМАЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ БИБЛИОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУ**

### *Аңдатпа*

Қазақ АКСР Халық ағарту комиссариатының тарихы (1920-1936 жж.) ерте Кеңестік Қазақстанның әлеуметтік, мәдени және білім беру саясатын зерттеуде ерекше орын алады. Бұл

кезең халықтық білім беру жүйесі, тіл саясаты және мәдени бастамалар жаңа кенестік бірегейлікті қалыптастырып, қоғамды модернизациялауға негіз болған қарқынды трансформация кезеңі болды. Наркомпростың республиканың мәдени-білім беру дамуын қамтамасыз ететін институт ретіндегі маңыздылығына қарамастан, оны зерттеудің тарихнамалық базасы фрагментті және жеткілікті жүйеленбеген күйінде қалып отыр. Осы зерттеу ҚазАКСР Халық Комиссариатының қызметіне, оның кадрлық құрамына және институционалдық динамикасына арналған ғылыми жарияланымдарға кешенді библиографиялық талдау жүргізу арқылы осы олқылықтың орнын толтыруға бағытталған. Зерттеудің мақсаты-халық комиссариатын тарихнамалық зерттеудің негізгі бағыттарын анықтау, бар ғылыми мұраны жүйелеу және қазіргі ғылыми әдебиеттердегі комиссариат қызметкерлерінің өкілдік дәрежесін анықтау. Осы мақсатқа жету үшін Библиографиялық талдауды, мазмұнды талдауды, просопография элементтерін, сондай-ақ vosviewer сандық құралдарының көмегімен деректерді визуализациялауды қамтитын пәнаралық тәсіл қолданылды. Prisma әдіснамасы бойынша талдау және тарихнамалық түсіну үшін 33 ғылыми басылым таңдалды. Зерттеу нәтижелері тарихнаманың өзегі Наркомпростың институционалдық дамуына, оның сауатсыздықты жоюдағы, мәдени саясаттағы және ұлттық білім беру бастамаларындағы рөліне байланысты тақырыптар төңірегінде қалыптасатынын көрсетті. Ахмет Байтұрсынов пен Темірбек Жүргенов сияқты жекелеген комиссарлардың өмірбаянына арналған зерттеулердің жоғары шоғырлануы анықталды, алайда комиссариат мүшелерінің көпшілігінің дербестендірілген талдауы жеткіліксіз әзірленген күйінде қалып отыр. Кілт сөздердің тақырыптық кластерлерін талдау төрт жетекші тенденцияны анықтады: мұрағаттық бұрылыс, пәнаралық, хронологиялық тереңдету және өмірбаяндық зерттеулердің болмауы. Бақылаулар 1920-1930 жылдардағы Қазақстандағы мәдени жаңғыртудың, ұлттық саясаттың және әлеуметтік трансформацияның күрделі процестерін көрсететін институт ретінде халық комиссариатын одан әрі зерделеу үшін негіз қалыптастырады.

**Түйінді сөздер:** ҚазАКСР Наркомпросы, тарихнама, библиографиялық талдау, мәдени жаңғырту, дербестендірілген тәсіл, мұрағаттық зерттеулер.

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## **НАРОДНЫЙ КОМИССАРИАТ ПРОСВЕЩЕНИЯ КАЗАХСКОЙ АССР В 1930–1936 ГГ.: ИСТОРИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ И БИБЛИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ**

### *Аннотация*

История Народного комиссариата просвещения Казахской АССР (1920-1936 гг.) занимает особое место в изучении социальной, культурной и образовательной политики раннесоветского Казахстана. Период был временем интенсивной трансформации, когда система народного образования, языковая политика и культурные инициативы формировали новую советскую идентичность и создавали основу для модернизации общества. Несмотря на значимость Наркомпроса как института, обеспечивающего культурно-образовательное развитие республики, историографическая база его изучения остаётся фрагментарной и недостаточно систематизированной. Настоящее исследование направлено на восполнение этого пробела путём проведения комплексного библиографического анализа научных публикаций, посвящённых деятельности Наркомпроса КазАССР, его кадровому составу и институциональной динамике. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении основных направлений историографического изучения Наркомпроса, систематизации существующего научного наследия и определении степени репрезентативности персоналий комиссариата в современной научной литературе. Для достижения этой цели был применён

междисциплинарный подход, включающий библиографический анализ, контент-анализ, элементы просопографии, а также визуализацию данных при помощи цифровых инструментов VOSviewer. По методологии PRISMA было отобрано 33 научные публикации для анализа и историографического осмысления. Результаты исследования показали, что ядро историографии формируется вокруг тем, связанных с институциональным развитием Наркомпроса, его ролью в ликвидации неграмотности, культурной политике и национальных образовательных инициативах. Выявлена высокая концентрация исследований, посвящённых биографиям отдельных комиссаров, таких как Ахмет Байтурсынов и Темирбек Жургунов, однако персонализированный анализ большинства членов комиссариата остаётся недостаточно разработанным. Анализ тематических кластеров ключевых слов выявил четыре ведущие тенденции: архивный поворот, интердисциплинарность, хронологическое углубление и недостаток биографических исследований. Наблюдения формируют основу для дальнейшего изучения Наркомпроса как института, отражающего сложные процессы культурной модернизации, национальной политики и социальной трансформации в Казахстане 1920-1930-х годов.

**Ключевые слова:** Наркомпрос КазАССР, историография, библиографический анализ, культурная модернизация, персонализированный подход, архивные исследования.

### **Introduction**

Profound transformations in the spheres of state governance, ideological restructuring, and cultural policy marked the period from 1920 to 1936 in the history of Kazakhstan. A crucial component of these changes was the reform of the public education system. At the forefront of this process stood the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros), the central institution responsible for implementing educational and cultural policy in the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. This body held broad powers and played a strategic role in shaping the development of education, science, cultural construction, and language policy within the framework of Soviet modernization. Despite the institutional significance of Narkompros in shaping the foundations of a new Kazakh national identity, historical and pedagogical scholarship on its activities remains fragmented. Contemporary academic literature tends to focus on isolated aspects such as the evolution of Kazakh script, the institutional development of Narkompros, the expansion of the school network, and the role of educational programs in the context of the cultural revolution [1], [2], [3]. At the same time, the composition of the Commissariat itself, its commissars, scientific consultants, administrators, and educators, has received limited attention in historiography. Coverage is typically confined to biographical studies of prominent figures such as Akhmet Baitursynov, Saken Seifullin, Smagul Saduakasov, Temirbek Zhurgenov, Zhanaidar Saduakasov, and Sanzhar Asfendiyarov [4]. The collective work of Narkompros as a decision-making body operating under conditions of political instability, rigid centralization, and ideological pressure remains a subject in need of comprehensive scholarly investigation.

*The relevance of this research* lies in the need to reconceptualize the role of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Kazakh ASSR within the socio-cultural history of Kazakhstan through the lens of personalized institutional analysis. Contemporary approaches to the study of state institutions increasingly incorporate not only institutional perspectives but also network and biographical readings of historical sources. These perspectives enable scholars to uncover mechanisms of governance, internal conflicts, and the interplay between individual actors and the policies they enacted [5]. In this regard, Narkompros represents a unique case: it brought together representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia, Communist Party officials, and Russian specialists, among whom complex configurations of cooperation and rivalry emerged.

*The objective of this study* is to conduct a bibliographic analysis of scholarly publications devoted to the history of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR between 1920 and 1936. The analysis aims to identify the main directions and trends in historiographical research and to assess the extent to which this topic has been developed in academic literature.

The research question is formulated as follows: *What is the structure and content of the contemporary academic discourse on Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR, and how are the key figures of the Commissariat represented within it?*

*The significance of the study* is threefold. First, it systematizes and interprets the body of scholarship on a topic that has previously been examined sporadically and without cohesion. Second, it draws scholarly attention to an important yet underappreciated aspect of Kazakhstan's historical science, namely, the institutional biography of Narkompros. Third, the findings of this analysis may prove valuable for broader comparative studies on the history of Soviet people's commissariats in the national republics, as well as for pedagogical and cultural studies concerned with the genesis of the educational system in Kazakhstan.

### **Literature Review**

The historiography devoted to the People's Commissariat of Education of the Kazakh ASSR in the years 1920-1936 occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of political, social, educational, and cultural history. Contemporary scholarly approaches reveal a growing interest in this subject, particularly in the context of nation-building, the eradication of illiteracy, institutional transformation, and the ideological construction of Soviet modernity in Kazakhstan. Despite the substantial body of research available, attention to the personnel composition, biographical reconstruction, and human resource policies of Narkompros remains limited. The most developed area of inquiry concerns the campaign against illiteracy and the creation of a primary education system in the Kazakh ASSR. Scholars have explored the establishment of school networks, the formation of a teaching corps, and the introduction of new pedagogical methods and curricula. A significant contribution in this field includes studies of the literacy campaign (likbez) within the broader framework of Soviet educational doctrine in Kazakhstan, highlighting the scale and forms of organizational pressure applied to accelerate educational modernization [1]. Other studies focus on the regional specificities of educational efforts, particularly regarding national minorities [2] and the long-term effects of literacy campaigns [3]. Institutional development and Narkompros' interaction with other state bodies constitute another well-established theme in the literature. The Commissariat is analyzed as a key link in the Soviet administrative hierarchy, aligning educational policy with party directives. Studies addressing the legal-administrative structure of Narkompros examine its relationships with the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), party structures, and affiliated bodies such as departments for popular schooling, editorial commissions, and publishing houses [4], [5]. An essential contribution to this line of research is the analysis of scientific institutions under Narkompros, such as the Central Biological Station, illustrating the intersection of science, governance, and ideology [6]. Source-based studies have advanced significantly due to increased engagement with archival collections. Of particular importance are investigations utilizing materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Fond No. 81), which contain internal decrees, meeting minutes, correspondence, and statistical reports from Narkompros [7]. These documents enable reconstruction of both the everyday administrative operations of the Commissariat and the evolution of educational policy. Reviews of archival materials related to national minorities and educational integration highlight a rich yet underexplored documentary corpus [8].

Another vital strand of research pertains to the nationality policy of Narkompros. Scholars have examined how educational initiatives were adapted to the ethnocultural diversity of the republic, exploring the implementation of korenizatsiya, the introduction of the Kazakh language into the school system, and instruction in native languages [9], [10]. A recurring theme is the paradox of state policy on one hand, proclaiming support for national identity, while on the other, enforcing ideological homogenization [11].

In recent years, the historiography has increasingly addressed Narkompros through the lens of cultural and social transformation. Studies on the changing sociocultural landscape of the Kazakh ASSR in the 1920s illustrate how the educational system contributed to altering everyday practices and shaping a new type of Soviet citizen and identity [12]. Visual and cinematic sources are used to analyze representations of Narkompros and the «woman question» in Soviet propaganda [13].

Nevertheless, the personnel dimension of Narkompros remains at the periphery of scholarly interest. Although prominent figures are occasionally mentioned concerning key events, their biographies, career trajectories, and participation in policy-making have yet to receive systematic attention. A few studies have addressed Narkompros' involvement in cultural and scientific initiatives, such as its support for the Society for the Study of Kazakhstan, especially during the Orenburg period [14].

Regional case studies have also contributed to a deeper understanding of educational policy implementation. These include analyses of interactions between local authorities and academic institutions in Central and Northern Kazakhstan [15], [16]. Sources from the 1920s press, such as the newspaper *Enbekshi Kazakh*, are used to trace how Narkompros crafted public discourse and communicative strategies [17]. Of particular interest are recent efforts to reassess the historiographical and methodological foundations of the field. Contemporary works compare Soviet, post-Soviet, and independent historiographical traditions, analyzing which aspects of Narkompros' history were marginalized during the Soviet period (e.g., the fate of repressed employees) and which were overly emphasized [18]. This has led to a tendency to recover «lost voices» and to incorporate previously suppressed biographies and documentary evidence into scholarly circulation.

Cultural aspects of education have likewise received attention in the context of initiatives aimed at shaping literary and historical memory. Some works explore the use of school education as a tool of ideological indoctrination and socialization [19], [20]. Educational reforms are interpreted as part of a broader program of cultural modernization, which included both rational pedagogical practices and mobilizational campaigns, such as involving children and youth in the production of textbooks and local history expeditions [21].

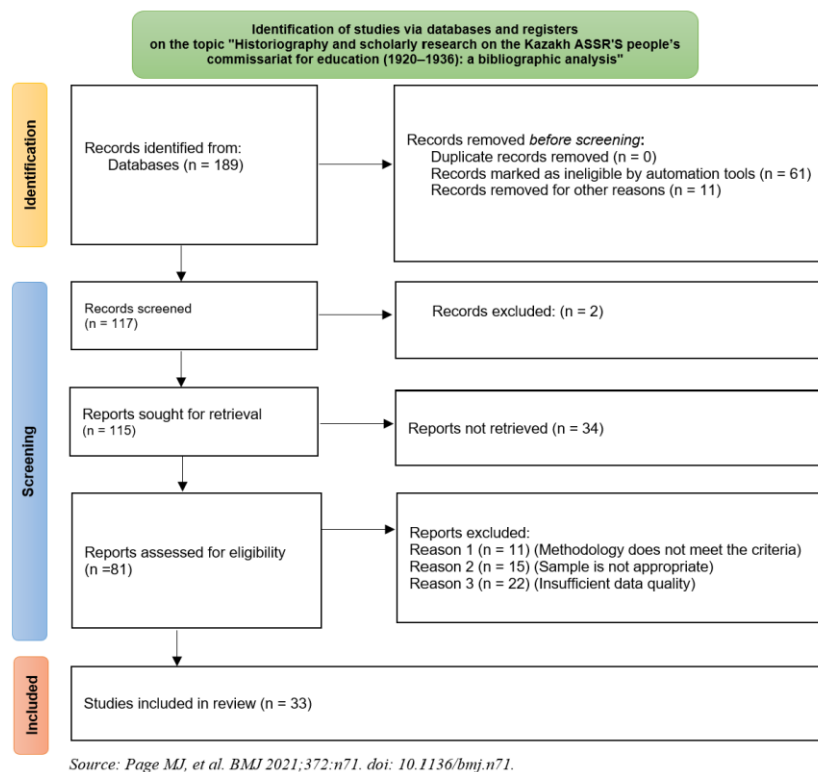
Overall, the historiography of Narkompros in the Kazakh ASSR demonstrates both thematic and methodological expansion, yet it remains fragmented. Most studies focus on institutional, normative, and ideological dimensions, while biographical and prosopographic analyses remain underdeveloped. Given the existence of extensive archival material and the growing scholarly interest in everyday life, human resources policy, and social mobility in the early Soviet period, future research should adopt an integrative approach that combines institutional, personal, and cultural history. This review identifies several key thematic trajectories in the historiography of Narkompros: institutional development, educational policy, nationalities policy, legal-administrative frameworks, scientific and cultural initiatives, and historiographical reflection. While topics such as mass education and administrative structures are well-explored, areas such as personnel biographies, staff dynamics, and the social profile of the Commissariat remain insufficiently addressed. Research is moving toward interdisciplinary approaches and deeper archival engagement, but gaps in coverage and conceptual cohesion persist. In light of the increasing interest in the history of education and national identity in Kazakhstan, the further study of Narkompros as both an institution and a community of actors holds particular relevance.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates bibliographic, historiographical, content, and biographical methods. The primary objective of the applied methodology is to systematize and interpret scholarly publications devoted to the activities of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Kazakh ASSR during the period 1920-1936, with particular emphasis on the personnel composition of the Commissariat and the extent of its representation in historical scholarship. The empirical foundation of the study was constructed through a systematic search for academic sources across leading international platforms such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, as well as national journals included in the Kazakhstan Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science list, and databases such as eLIBRARY, the Russian Science Citation Index, and the Higher Attestation Commission repositories of Russia and Kazakhstan. The search strategy involved the use of combined keyword queries, including terms such as «Narkompros KazASSR», «public education in Kazakhstan», «education in the 1920s», «Akhmet Baitursynov», «Temirbek Zhurgenov», and «Sanzhar Asfendiyarov», among others. At the initial stage, a broad search yielded 189 scholarly publications covering the period from 1946 to 2024. For the selection

of relevant materials, a modified PRISMA methodology was applied. Following the removal of duplicates, title and abstract screening, and content-based evaluation using criteria of relevance, comprehensiveness, and scholarly significance, a total of 33 publications were selected for subsequent bibliographic and historiographical analysis.

The stages of source selection are illustrated in Figure 1, which presents a PRISMA flow diagram documenting each step of the filtration process.



**Figure 1. PRISMA-based flow diagram of the systematic selection of scholarly publications on the history of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR (1920-1936)**

Source: PRISMA

Bibliographic data were analyzed using digital tools such as VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) to generate cluster maps, examine co-authorship networks, assess keyword frequency, and explore the thematic structure of publications. The combination of these methods enabled a comprehensive analysis of the structure of contemporary academic discourse on Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR, the extent to which individual figures within the Commissariat have been studied, and the identification of research gaps and promising directions for future inquiry.

### Results

This section presents the results of the analysis, structured around four key dimensions: publication activity, thematic distribution, chronological evolution, and personalized representation. Citation frequency is an essential indicator of a publication’s impact within the academic community, as it reveals which research topics and methodological approaches have received the most scholarly attention. Table 1 lists the ten most frequently cited works on the history of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR.

**Table 1. - Top 10 most cited publications on the History of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR**

No.	Author(s)	Title of the Publication	Year	Source	Citations
1	A.Sadykova	Temirbek Zhurgenov as an Ideologue of Cultural Modernization in Kazakhstan in the 1930s	2023	<i>Central Asian Journal of Art Studies</i>	12
2	K.A. Akhetova, A.A. Abzhapparova	The USSR's Policy on the Elimination of Illiteracy among the Population (the Case of Kazakhstan)	2023	Minsk: Belarusian State University	7
3	L.R. Zolotareva	Development of Artistic and Art-Pedagogical Education in Kazakhstan	2010	<i>Bulletin of the Karaganda University. Pedagogy Series</i>	6
4	D.A. Amanzholova	Transformation of the Socio-Political Space: The Case of the Kazakh ASSR in the 1920s	2019	<i>Russian Regions: A View into the Future</i>	6
5	R.D. Law	Progressive Educators and the Professionalization of Educational Research in the USSR, 1917-1927	2013	<i>Canadian-American Slavic Studies</i>	4
6	F.Nethercott	The Excursionism Project and the Study of Literary Places (1921-1924)	2017	<i>Revue des Études Slaves</i>	3
7	D.Tapalov	Selected Aspects of the Elimination of Illiteracy in Kazakhstan and Its Consequences	2010	<i>Science and New Technologies</i>	3
8	O.Kh. Mukhatova	Archival Sources on the Activities of the People's Commissariat of Education in Kazakhstan (1920s-1930s)	2021	<i>Otan Tarikhy</i>	3
9	S.Zhanibai	The Formation of the Soviet Education System in Turkestan (1920s-1940s)	2019	<i>Asian Journal "Steppe Panorama"</i>	3
10	A.Arkhymatayeva	Policy of the Soviet Union towards Kazakhstan (1927-1938): A Comprehensive Analysis of Political, Economic, and Social Developments	2023	<i>Bulletin of Abai KazNPU. Series: Historical and Socio-Political Sciences</i>	3
<i>Source: Compiled by the authors</i>					

The most cited publication (12 citations) is the 2023 article by A.Sadykova, dedicated to the figure of Temirbek Zhurgenov, who led Narkompros during the cultural revolution of the 1930s. The author interprets Zhurgenov as a key architect of Kazakhstan's cultural modernization, emphasizing his role in adapting overarching Soviet ideology to local conditions. Employing a biographical and source-based approach, the study has proven particularly valuable for research on personalized

histories of education. In second place, with 7 citations, is the work by K.A. Akhetova and A.A. Abzhapparova (2023), which analyzes the USSR's policy of eradicating illiteracy in Kazakhstan. The study focuses on the regional specificity of implementing Soviet-wide campaigns and highlights the critical coordinating role played by Narkompros in mobilizing resources, training educators, and developing methodological materials. L.R. Zolotareva's 2010 article, with 6 citations, ranks third. It explores the development of artistic and art-pedagogical education in Kazakhstan. The work traces the evolution of cultural policy as institutionally linked to Narkompros and underscores the role of creative education in shaping a new socialist identity. Despite being published over a decade ago, the article remains influential within the historiographic discourse. Of particular note is the study by D.A. Amanzholova (2019), which examines the transformation of the socio-political space of the Kazakh ASSR during the 1920s. From a political history perspective, the article analyzes how Narkompros contributed to ideological restructuring through the education system. Its inclusion of interethnic and administrative factors renders the publication a valuable source for understanding early Soviet modernization processes.

In the English-language historiography, the topic has also attracted scholarly attention. R.D. Law's 2013 article analyzes the professionalization of educational research in the USSR between 1917 and 1927, including the role of Narkompros-affiliated scientific institutions. This work integrates the Soviet experience into the broader global context of educational history, thereby extending the scope of analysis. Alongside these comprehensive studies, the top-10 list includes publications focused on specific aspects of cultural and educational activity. For instance, F. Nethercott (2017) examines the excursionist movement as a form of socialist education organized with the participation of Narkompros. Despite its narrow subject, the article highlights the diversity of socialist pedagogical practices. D. Tapalov's 2010 publication investigates practical aspects of literacy campaigns and their consequences. Rich in statistical and archival data, the study is widely used in applied sociocultural research. Similarly, O.Kh. Mukhatova's 2021 article is based on archival sources directly related to the activities of Narkompros during the 1920s-1930s. Notably, the article is written in Kazakh, contributing to the development of the national segment of historiography. The regional dimensions of Soviet educational policy are addressed in S. Zhanibai's 2019 study, which analyzes the formation of the education system in Turkestan during the 1920s-1940s. The study reveals institutional and personnel parallels with Narkompros in the Kazakh ASSR. Rounding out the list is A. Arkhymatayeva's 2023 article, which situates Narkompros within the broader political and social transformation of Kazakhstan between 1927 and 1938. Distinguished by its comprehensive approach, the study evaluates how educational policy shaped societal developments during the Stalinist modernization period. The publications identified represent the most influential contributions to the study of Narkompros and demonstrate sustained scholarly interest in several key areas: the examination of leading figures and personnel, analysis of institutional transformation, investigation of the ideological function of education, and exploration of regional and cultural-historical specificities of educational policy. The high citation rates of these works suggest the emergence of a historiographical core within which both micro-historical episodes and the macro-historical significance of Narkompros in the Soviet modernization process are being actively studied. However, citation analysis alone does not fully capture the scope of scholarly engagement with Narkompros. Beyond themes and methodologies, an essential component of historiographical inquiry is the personalized approach, which allows scholars to trace which historical actors have received academic attention and what roles they played in shaping educational policy in the Kazakh ASSR. In this regard, particular interest lies in the expanded list of key individuals associated with the Commissariat, presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. - Extended List of Key Figures of Narkompros of the Kazakh ASSR (1920-1936)**

No.	Full Name	Position / Role	Period	Notes / Source
1	Akhmet Baitursynov	People's Commissar of Education	1920-1921	First head of Narkompros; initiator of reforms in the Kazakh school system
2	Seydaly Mendeshev	Acting People's Commissar	1921-1922	Concurrently served as Chairman of the Central Executive Committee
3	Zhanaidar Sadvokasov	People's Commissar	1922-1924	Implemented national personnel policies
4	Saken Seifullin	People's Commissar	1924-1927	Prominent writer; developed the Kazakh school system
5	Oraz Zhandosov	People's Commissar	1927-1929	Initiator of the alphabet reform
6	Temirbek Zhurgenov	People's Commissar	1929-1933	Led the cultural revolution; trained the national intelligentsia
7	Ilyas Kabylov	People's Commissar	1933-1937	Repressed; remains understudied
8	Smagul Sadvakasov	Deputy Commissar / Collegium Member	1920s	Politician and educator
9	Mirzhakyp Dulatov	Textbook Author	1920s	Worked on educational commissions under Narkompros
10	Mukhtar Auezov	Expert, Narkompros Associate	1930s	Developed curricula for higher education
11	Kanysh Satpayev	Scientific Commissions	1930-1935	Participated in setting educational standards
12	Beimbet Mailin	Literary Contributor	1920s-1930s	Authored texts for primary schools
13	Uzakbay Kulymbetov	Collegium Member	1930s	Administrator; later repressed

*Source: Compiled by the authors*

The data presented in Table 2 allow for the reconstruction of the institutional and personnel structure of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Kazakh ASSR during the years 1920-1936, as well as for an assessment of the degree to which individual figures have been studied in the scholarly literature. The analysis helps to outline the internal organization of the Commissariat, characterize the orientation of its educational policies, and determine the extent of the Kazakh intelligentsia's participation in the governance of public education.

First, the core of Narkompros' administrative hierarchy was formed by the People's Commissars, who directly led the development and implementation of educational policy in the republic. These included Akhmet Baitursynov (1920-1921), Seydaly Mendeshev (acting, 1921-1922), Zhanaidar Sadvokasov (1922-1924), Saken Seifullin (1924-1927), Oraz Zhandosov (1927-1929), Temirbek Zhurgenov (1929-1933), and Ilyas Kabylov (1933-1937). Their frequent turnover reflects the intense political dynamics of the era, driven both by all-Union cadre rotations and internal factional struggles over control of the cultural sphere. Particular attention must be paid to Akhmet Baitursynov, the first People's Commissar of Education of the Kazakh ASSR. His tenure marked the beginning of the Kazakh national educational project: he initiated reforms to create native-language schools. He developed an Arabic-script alphabet adapted to the phonetics of the Kazakh language. He also played a key role in establishing the Academic Center under Narkompros. Baitursynov and his associates represented the so-called Alash group, which promoted cultural nationalism and sought autonomy in the development of a Kazakh model of education. Following a short transitional period under

Mendeshev, Narkompros was led by a new generation of politically engaged Kazakh intellectuals. Zhanaidar Sadvokasov and Saken Seifullin continued efforts to nationalize the education system, emphasizing the training of pedagogical cadres and the development of the Kazakh language as a medium of instruction. Seifullin, known primarily as a prominent literary figure, championed the incorporation of Kazakh literature into the school curriculum. Under Oraz Zhandosov, an alphabet reform was initiated, reflecting the broader trend of cultural modernization in the 1920s. This trajectory was further radicalized by Temirbek Zhurgenov, who focused on the «cultural revolution» developing theaters, establishing institutions of higher learning, and training a national scientific intelligentsia. The case of Ilyas Kabylov, who served as People's Commissar in the final prewar years, is particularly noteworthy. Despite his high-ranking position, he remains one of the least studied figures in historical scholarship, a reflection of limited source availability following his repression during the Great Purge of 1937 and the subsequent erasure of politically «unreliable» individuals from official memory. A similar fate befell Uzakbay Kulymbetov, a Collegium member of Narkompros, who was also later repressed.

Second, the structure of Narkompros included a wide array of experts, editors, methodologists, and administrators who played a critical role in shaping the substantive content of educational policy. These individuals constituted the intellectual foundation of the Commissariat. For example, the involvement of Mirzhakyp Dulatov, a renowned textbook author, highlights the organic connection between educational reform and the ideas of the Alash movement. Mukhtar Auezov and Kanysh Satpayev represented a new generation of scientific elites shaped during the transitional period from cultural nationalism to socialist enlightenment. Their work in commissions, methodological councils, and educational institutions illustrates the multi-level expert engagement within Narkompros. Analysis of available sources indicates that the overwhelming majority of individuals listed in Table 2 were, in some way, affected by Stalinist repression in the 1930s. This underscores the tragic fate of the Kazakh intelligentsia, which, despite its immense contribution to the development of education, became a victim of the Soviet regime's purges. Zhurgenov, Kulymbetov, Dulatov, Mailin, and Kabylov, among others, were either executed or silenced, which has significantly complicated scholarly efforts to reconstruct their legacies. Thus, Table 2 reflects not only the personnel composition of Narkompros, but also the evolution of the public education system under conditions of ideological and institutional pressure. It reveals the high degree of involvement of the Kazakh intelligentsia in school reform, curriculum development, and the construction of scientific infrastructure, as well as the vulnerability of these actors to the repressive apparatus of the Soviet state. Reconstructing their biographies is a critical step in restoring the historical memory of early Soviet educational policy in Kazakhstan.

Further analysis of the keyword co-occurrence network visualized using VOSviewer, based on the corpus of selected publications, reveals a multilayered yet relatively stable structure of the research field. At its center are the terms «Kazakh ASSR», «Narkompros», «archival sources», and «people's commissariat for educ» (see Figure 2).



«ideological education», and «education reform». Within this thematic grouping, «Narkompros» is interpreted as a central mechanism of the cultural revolution, administrative unification, and ideological indoctrination. The dominance of terms such as «policy», «modernization», and «ideological education» suggests a trend toward rethinking Soviet educational policy as an integral component of broader modernization efforts, wherein schooling functioned not only to eliminate illiteracy but also as a channel of political and ideological socialization. This cluster draws heavily on political history and the history of ideas, thereby reinforcing interdisciplinary linkages within the field.

A third significant trajectory concerns the educational infrastructure and personnel policy cluster (green), defined by terms such as «education system», «pedagogical institutes», «teacher training», «1930s», and «archival sources». The concentration on the 1930s suggests a chronological shift in research focus from the earlier experimental *korenizatsiya* policies of the 1920s to the period of centralization, standardization, and professionalization of the teaching workforce. The analytical trend here is a gradual movement from institutional description to the reconstruction of educational governance practices and teacher training systems, including regional perspectives. However, prosopographical research into key figures remains underdeveloped, corresponding with the weak articulation of personal names within the keyword network.

Of particular note is the national policy and literacy cluster (yellow), where terms such as «1920s-1930s», «Soviet education», «literacy», «national policy», and «Soviet cultural policy» converge. This cluster reflects increasing scholarly interest in the paradox of Soviet nationality policy: the declared promotion of ethnocultural diversity was often accompanied by rigid ideological standardization in educational content and governance practices. The cluster reveals a conceptual bridge between the «cultural initiative» of the early Soviet years and the subsequent drive for centralization. The chronotope «1920s-1930s» connects these reform waves and illustrates the transformation of educational approaches from cultural nationalism to a disciplinary model of socialist education.

Another significant grouping is the language and alphabet reform cluster (blue), characterized by terms such as «alphabet reform», «Alash movement», «archival research», and «1920s». This cluster captures increasing attention to language policy as a central element of cultural modernization and nation-building. The vector is supported by the active use of 1920s press materials and archival sources, bringing this cluster into proximity with the institutional-archival one and further confirming the «archivalization» of research practices.

Finally, the notably isolated position of the node «education» in the network suggests a semantic ambiguity and methodological realignment in the field. This isolation can be interpreted as a sign of the historiography's gradual shift away from broad, under-operationalized terms toward more specific and analytically grounded categories such as «Soviet education», «educational policy», «teacher training», and «administrative structure». This movement reflects a broader academic trend toward conceptual precision and critical refinement of the scholarly vocabulary used to study Soviet education and modernization processes.

### **Discussion**

The historiographical analysis of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Kazakh ASSR, conducted through a combination of bibliographic, cluster-based, and personalized approaches, reveals the complexity of the field and the presence of stable thematic lines that define current academic debates. The dominant vector of historiography remains the institutional perspective, in which «Narkompros» is examined as a state apparatus integrating cultural modernization, nationalities policy, and educational reform. However, a comparative analysis of publication activity and keyword structure indicates that the personal dimension encompassing the figures of commissars and staff members remains significantly underdeveloped. This asymmetry in the representation of «Narkompros» history presents a crucial research challenge: the need to move from general institutional narratives toward prosopographical analysis and the reconstruction of networks of personal relationships, influence, and administrative strategies. A key observation is the «archival

turn» in contemporary historiography. Cluster map analysis confirms the growing role of archival sources, which not only expand the empirical base but also allow for a re-evaluation of established narratives regarding early Soviet educational policy. Materials from the Central State Archive of Kazakhstan and regional collections have become indispensable tools for reconstructing the internal dynamics of «Narkompros», uncovering previously neglected themes such as political repression, intra-institutional conflict, and regional specificities of educational governance. The use of archival documents enables more nuanced analysis of the evolution of administrative decision-making and its alignment with the ideological priorities of the Soviet state. A second key trend is the growing interdisciplinarity of research. Contemporary studies at the intersection of political, educational, and cultural history have allowed for a reassessment of «Narkompros»'s role. On the one hand, it is conceptualized as a node in the Soviet administrative hierarchy implementing campaigns such as literacy eradication and korenizatsiya; on the other, it is interpreted as a cultural hub promoting the formation of a new model of socialist society. The presence of terms such as «cultural policy», «Soviet modernization», and «ideological education» in research clusters reflects an increasing interest in understanding educational policy as an instrument for shaping collective identity and mobilizing the population. A third observable trend involves the chronological expansion of the studied period. While earlier works tended to focus on the 1920s formative stage for the Kazakh school system, experimental alphabet reforms, and mass literacy campaigns, contemporary scholarship has increasingly shifted toward the 1930s. This period is characterized not only by the institutional consolidation of «Narkompros» but also by the intensification of centralized control, repressive processes, and dramatic changes in personnel policy. Figures such as Temirbek Zhurgenov and Oraz Zhandosov have become central objects of analysis, as their biographies exemplify the transition from nationally oriented educational projects to tightly regulated Soviet models of cultural policy. Particular attention must also be given to the theme of language policy and alphabet reforms, represented in the blue cluster. This aspect is understood as a key marker of cultural modernization and nation-building. The transition from Arabic script to Latin, and subsequently to Cyrillic, not only reflects the political will of the central authorities but also symbolizes profound shifts in the cultural identity of society. Studying these processes in the context of «Narkompros» activity makes it possible to assess how educational reforms functioned as instruments for generating a new cultural code and standardizing pedagogical practices.

In sum, the discussion of analytical results demonstrates that contemporary historiography of «Narkompros» in the Kazakh ASSR is moving from fragmented studies of individual initiatives toward a more holistic perspective, one that integrates institutional, biographical, and cultural-political dimensions. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain, including the lack of personalized institutional history, insufficient attention to regional specificities, and weak integration of sociocultural approaches. A promising direction for future research lies in reconceptualizing «Narkompros» as a community of practice, a collective of administrators, educators, writers, and scientists whose interactions shaped the educational and cultural agenda of the republic under Soviet modernization. This approach would allow for a fuller understanding of «Narkompros» not merely as a bureaucratic structure but as an institution that helped define Kazakhstan's trajectory of cultural development in the interwar period.

### **Conclusion**

The bibliographic analysis of the historiography of «Narkompros» in the Kazakh ASSR (1920-1936) achieved its objective by providing a comprehensive overview of the contemporary scholarly discourse on the subject. The study identified the main trajectories of historiographical development, including institutional, cultural-educational, national, and archival dimensions. This not only enabled the systematization of accumulated knowledge but also helped highlight key problem areas and research prospects. The answer to the research question lies in the observation that institutional and ideological studies predominantly shape the historiographical structure, while personal and biographical components remain marginal. At the same time, a consistent scholarly interest in specific commissariat figures such as Akhmet Baitursynov, Temirbek Zhurgenov, and Saken Seifullin has

been revealed. Their biographies are often explored through the lenses of cultural modernization and national policy. However, the contributions of many other participants in the Commissariat remain underrepresented and require further historical reconstruction. Thus, an apparent asymmetry has developed within the historiographical field between institutional analysis and the study of human resources, forming a significant area for future exploration. The results of this study affirm the importance of the archival turn in current historiography. Engagement with unpublished sources, regional and central archival materials, and the press of the 1920s-1930s creates opportunities for a deeper and more objective understanding of educational policy, its internal dynamics, and contradictions. This approach makes it possible to go beyond established narratives and uncover new aspects of «Narkompros» as a key element in the Soviet cultural and educational system. The scientific novelty of this study lies in its attempt to combine bibliometric analysis with a personalized historiographical review, allowing for the identification of both well-studied dimensions and those still in the historiographic «shadow». An important outcome is the mapping of current research trends, including institutional-archival, ideological, and national-political clusters, which together reflect the main directions of scholarly interest. Accordingly, future research on «Narkompros» of the Kazakh ASSR should aim to deepen personalized analysis, expand interdisciplinary perspectives, and make greater use of archival data. A promising avenue is the construction of an «institutional biography» of «Narkompros», in which career trajectories, educational initiatives, and cultural projects are situated within the broader context of sociocultural transformation in early Soviet Kazakhstan. These findings may also serve as a foundation for comparative studies on the history of Soviet people's commissariats and the formation of national education systems in the multinational space of the USSR.

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