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CONTENTS

PEDAGOGY

Aitimbaev A., Issayev M., Apendiyev T. Scientific and methodological opportunities for using archival materials in teaching the history of Kazakhstan in higher education institutions.....	19
Akhmetova G., Kabdusheva A., Mussina A. A quantitative study on university students' academic writing challenges and learning needs.....	40
Akhmetova Zh.A., Nurgali S., Nurmetova D. Pedagogical foundations of using digital resources in teaching academic writing.....	57
Bekbolat Zh., Zholmakhanova A., Yildirim S. Theoretical foundations of teaching M. Shokai's letters through a research-based approach.....	72
Berdenkulova A.Zh., Zhandavletova R.B., Nazarova G.A. A pedagogical model for improving educational quality through the "comfortable school - society - university" partnership.....	88
Duisenova G., Shyndaliyev N., Shadiev R. Comparative analysis of traditional and virtualized programming education.....	104
Yeskendirova A., Kassenova N., Nogoyev Y. Comparative analysis of texts created by AI and texts developed using quantization technology.....	121
Zhanysbekova Sh., Nurmakhanova Zh., Akasheva A. Actual problems of the formation of pragmatic competence: research based on the results of content analysis.....	136
Zulpykhar Zh.E., Kapanova D.E., Zhilmagambetova R.Z. Modern resources and technologies as a foundation for the development of teachers' professional competencies.....	153
Isaeva A., Ananyeva S. Axiological interpretation of the Kazakhstan theme in the works of K. Paustovsky: methodological approaches to teaching at the university.....	172
Kabzhalelov K.R., Korganbayeva Zh.K., Nurakhmetova A.R. Developing critical thinking through modern chatbots in chemistry education.....	190
Kazhenova Zh.S., Kydyralina L.M., Rakhmatullina Z.T. Problems of developing students' engineering skills.....	208

Kaldarova A., Vasquez M., Kulgildinova T. Developing students' profession-oriented speaking skills through ChatGPT.....	229
Kapbarova G.Sh., Gundogdu A., Baidalieva E.A. History teaching methodology: theoretical and practical foundations of the competency-based approach.....	243
Kozhakhanova L., Amirova A. Prospects for developing media literacy among primary school students.....	260
Kuzhagulova G., Sydykova R., Smailova M Features of education of national values in visually impaired students through Kazakh lyric songs.....	278
Markhmadova Zh.K., Kassymova G.K., Okenova B. Pedagogical aspects of developing and assessing the digital competence of pedagogy-psychologists.....	297
Mateyeva M., Yeralin K., Burkitbaev T. Training future teachers of artistic work for art-historical regional studies.....	318
Makhanov N., Nishanova K. Development of students' cognitive competencies through museum-based education: evidence from South Kazakhstan.....	333
Myrzagereikyzy G., Yermekova Zh.K., Aldzhambekova G.T. The use of action research in preparing future physics teachers for the development of functional literacy of students.....	348
Reginbayeva N., Nametkulova F. Methodological foundations of professionally-oriented physics education based on STEM education for future air transport specialists.....	365
Serikbayeva N., Orynbekova A., Tuyakova U. Methodology for developing digital competence of educational psychologists in modern education.....	385
Toiganbekova M.E., Kazhigalieva G.A. Aspects of creation and specification of educational texts for increasing the effectiveness of training.....	409
Shegebayeva G., Zhumasheva T., Nurbekova S. Prerequisites for the preparation of future educators for the creation of a health-educational environment based on nutriscology.....	422
Shishov S.E., Iovbak A.S., Verko Y.A. Integrated modular physics experiment as a means of organizing students' experimental activities in secondary school.....	443

ECONOMICS

Abdimoldayeva A., Madysheva A., Zhunussova G. Transformation of logistics cost accounting in the agro-industrial complex under digitalization.....	461
Abuova Zh., Duiskenova R., Kadyrbekova D. The concept of sustainable development of the hotel business based on digital transformation and environmental management.....	479
Amantay Mukhit, Kanabekova M., Oralbayeva Zh. Digitalization as a driver of Kazakhstan's economic growth: econometric analysis and structural effects.....	494
Ashim N., Dzhrayova K., Kushenova M. Improving the management of agricultural subsidies: Kyzylorda region.....	511
Assemova R., Abdibekov S., Aitbayeva D. Energy efficiency and innovation in agriculture: empirical evidence from Southern Kazakhstan.....	535
Assanova Zh., Baimukhanova S., Konysbaeva G. Environmental accounting, ESG reporting and digitalization: impact on cost reduction and sustainable development.....	554
Baigelova A., Sadykova Zh., Epanchintseva S. Industrial economy transformation in Kazakhstan: structural shifts, digitalization and productivity growth.....	571
Beisekova Zh., Mutaliyeva A., Kunshigarova L. Transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in 2000–2025.....	590
Beisenbayeva A., Kambarov B., Samenova N. Development of small and medium-sized enterprises in Almaty: ecosystem factors and structural dynamics.....	611
Bekisheva A., Beketova K., Dorohova N. Human resource management practices and employee perceptions in Kazakhstan's civil service.....	629
Bissenbayeva S., Kireyeva A., Zhumaxanova K. Digitalization, government support and innovation activity: evidence from regional analysis in Kazakhstan.....	646
Em O.L., Kim D. Features of risk management in collective investment.....	665

Ibrayeva A., Kenesheva G., Arynova Zh.

Qualification mismatch in the labour market of an industrial region: a conceptual model and measurement mechanism.....684

Juman J., Mukhtarova K.S., Liao Z.

The modern model of China's economic cooperation with Central Asian countries.....701

Karakulova A., Bakirbekova A., Zhangirova R.

Improving the efficiency of digital transformation of agricultural enterprises: an empirical analysis of Kostanay region.....718

Kuralbayeva A.Sh., Issayeva G.K., Zhussipova E.E.

Energy-saving technologies in irrigated agriculture of Southern Kazakhstan: economic and environmental effects.....734

Naimanova Zh., Bakirbekova A., Kuralbayeva R.

Digital inequality and agricultural productivity: evidence from Southern Kazakhstan....749

Nartbayeva A., Dadabayeva D., Altuntas G.

Economic resilience of single-industry towns in Kazakhstan: a dynamic analysis of socio-economic indicators.....767

Nurlanuly A., Petrovčiková K., Shalbolova U.Zh.

Comparative analysis of aviation market development models in Kazakhstan and Slovakia.....785

Nyshanbayeva U., Moldashbayeva L., Urazbayeva Z.

Accounting and valuation of investment projects in digital tourism: an integrated approach.....801

Shegir G., Kerimova U., Kabi Sh.

The transition of the agro-industrial complex of the Almaty region to the production of value-added products.....819

Shiganbayeva N., Razakova D., Orlowska R.

Trade turnover between China and Kazakhstan in the context of contemporary analytical studies: factors, challenges, and risks.....840

Tuzubekova M., Zhunusova A., Kadirova N.

Analysis of SME support incentives in the manufacturing industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan.....857

Yeraliyeva Ya., Ruziyeva E., Alimbekova B.

Trend and structure of research on digital financial literacy: bibliometric approach.....877

Zhassan G., Taibek Zh., Imanova G.

Climate risk management in the banking sector: ESG-based global and Kazakhstani experience.....891

МАЗМҰНЫ

ПЕДАГОГИКА

Айтимбаев А.Т., Исаев М.С., Апендиев Т.А. Қазақстан тарихын жоғары оқу орындарында оқытуда архив материалдарын пайдаланудың ғылыми-әдістемелік мүмкіндіктері (1920–1950 жж. Оңтүстік Қазақстандағы саяси қуғын-сүргін құрбандары тағдырлары негізінде).....	19
Ахметова Г.С., Кабдушева А.Б., Мусина А.Б. Университет студенттерінің академиялық жазылымдағы қиындықтары мен оқу қажеттіліктеріне арналған сандық зерттеу.....	40
Ахметова Ж.А., Нұрғали С., Нурметова Д. Академиялық жазуды оқытуда сандық ресурстарды пайдаланудың педагогикалық негіздері.....	57
Бекболат Ж.Н., Жолмаханова А.Б., Сейфуллах Йылдырым Мұстафа Шоқай хаттарын зерттеушілік әдіс арқылы оқытудың теориялық негіздері.....	72
Берденкулова А.Ж., Жандавлетова Р.Б., Назарова Г.А. «Жайлы мектеп – қоғам – университет» серіктестігі негізінде білім сапасын арттырудың педагогикалық моделі.....	88
Ескендірова А.А., Касенова Н.Б., Ногоев Ю.Я. ЖИ арқылы жасалған мәтіндер мен кванттау технологиясы арқылы әзірленген мәтіндердің салыстырмалы талдауы.....	104
Жанысбекова Ш., Нурмаханова Ж., Акашева Ә. Прагматикалық құзіреттілікті қалыптастырудың өзекті мәселелері: контент-анализ нәтижелері бойынша зерттеу.....	121
Дүйсенова Г.А., Шындалиев Н.Т., Шадиев Р.Н. Дәстүрлі және виртуалды бағдарламалау білімінің салыстырмалы талдауы.....	136
Зулпыхар Ж.Е., Капанова Д.Е., Жилмагамбетова Р.З. Педагогтердің кәсіби құзыреттілігін дамытудың негізі ретінде қазіргі заманғы ресурстар мен технологиялар.....	153
Исаева А.А., Ананьева С.В. К. Паустовский шығармашылығындағы Қазақстан тақырыбының аксиологиялық интерпретациясы: жоғары оқу орнында оқытудың әдіснамалық тәсілдері.....	172
Кабжалелов К.Р., Қорғанбаева Ж.Қ., Нурахметова А.Р. Химияны оқыту барысында заманауи чат-боттар арқылы сыни ойлауды дамыту.....	190

Каженова Ж.С., Қыдыралина Л.М., Рахматулина З.Т. Оқушылардың инженерлік дағдыларын дамыту мәселелері.....	208
Калдарова А.К., Васкез М.А., Кульгильдинова Т.А. Студенттердің кәсіби-бағдарланған айтылым дағдыларын ChatGPT арқылы дамыту.....	229
Капбарова Г.Ш., Гюндогду А., Байдалиева Э.А. Тарихты оқыту әдістемесі: құзыреттілікке негізделген тәсілді қолданудың теориялық және практикалық негіздері.....	243
Кожыханова Л., Амирова А. Бастауыш сынып оқушыларының медиасауаттылығын дамыту перспективалары.....	260
Кужагулова Г.Е., Сыдыкова Р.Ш., Смаилова М.С. Көру қабілеті бұзылған білім алушыларды қазақтың лирикалық әндері арқылы ұлттық құндылықтарға тәрбиелеудің ерекшеліктері.....	278
Мархмадова Ж.Қ., Касымова Г.К., Өкенова Б. Педагог-психологтың цифрлық құзыреттілігін қалыптастыру және бағалаудың педагогикалық аспектілері.....	297
Матеева М.А., Ералин Қ., Буркитбаев Т. Болашақ көркем еңбек мұғалімдерін өнертанымдық өлкетануға даярлау.....	318
Маханов Н., Нишанова К. Музейлік білім беру негізінде оқушылардың танымдық құзыреттіліктерін дамыту (Оңтүстік Қазақстан мысалында).....	333
Мырзагерейқызы Г., Ермакова Ж.К., Алджамбекова Г.Т. Болашақ физика мұғалімдерін оқушылардың функционалдық сауаттылығын дамытуға даярлауда action research пайдалану.....	348
Регинбаева Н.А., Наметкулова Ф.Д. Болашақ әуе транспорты мамандарына физиканы STEM білім беру негізінде кәсіби-бағдарлы оқытудың әдістемелік негіздері.....	365
Серикбаева Н.Б., Орынбекова А.С., Туякова У.Ж. Қазіргі білім беруде педагог-психологтардың цифрлық құзыреттілігін дамыту әдістемесі.....	385
Тойғанбекова М.Е., Қажығалиева Г.А. Оқытудың тиімділігін арттыру үшін оқу мәтіндерін құру және нақтылау аспектілері.....	409

Шегебаева Г.У., Жумашева Т.С., Нурбекова С.М.

Болашақ тәрбиешілерді нутрициология негізінде денсаулық сақтау-білім беру ортасын құруға дайындаудың алғышарттары.....422

Шишов С.Е., Иовбак А.С., Верко Е.А.

Орта мектепте оқушылардың эксперименталдық қызметін ұйымдастыру құралы ретінде интеграцияланған модульді физика эксперименті.....443

ЭКОНОМИКА**Абдимолдаева А., Мадышева А., Жунусова Г.**

Цифрландыру жағдайында агроөнеркәсіптік кешендегі логистикалық шығындар есебін қайта құру.....461

Абуова Ж., Дүйсеннова Р., Кадырбекова Д.

Цифрлық трансформация және экологиялық басқару негізіндегі қонақ үй бизнесінің тұрақты даму тұжырымдамасы.....479

Әшім Н., Джрауова К., Кушенова М.

Ауылшаруашылығы субсидияларын басқаруды жетілдіру: Қызылорда облысы...494.

Мұхит Амантай, Кенабекова М., Оралбаева Ж.

Цифрландыру Қазақстанның экономикалық өсуінің драйвері ретінде: эконометрикалық талдау және құрылымдық әсерлер.....511

Асемова Р., Абдибеков С., Айтбаева Д.

Ауылшаруашылығындағы энергия тиімділігі және инновациялар: Оңтүстік Қазақстан бойынша эмпирикалық дәлелдер.....535

Асанова Ж., Баймуханова С., Қонысбаева Г.

Экологиялық есеп, ESG-есептілік және цифрландыру: шығындарды төмендетуге және орнықты дамуға әсері.....554

Байгелова А., Садыкова Ж., Епанчинцева С.

Қазақстандағы өнеркәсіп экономикасының трансформациясы: құрылымдық өзгерістер, цифрландыру және өнімділіктің өсуі.....571

Бейсекова Ж., Муталиева А., Куншигарова Л.

2000–2025 жылдары Қазақстандағы кәсіпкерлік қызметтің трансформациясы.....590

Бейсенбаева А., Қамбаров Б., Саменова Н.

Алматыда шағын және орта кәсіпкерлікті дамыту: экожүйелік факторлар және құрылымдық динамика.....611

Бекишева А., Бекетова К., Дорохова Н.

Қазақстанның мемлекеттік қызметіндегі адам ресурстарын басқару тәжірибелері және қызметкерлердің қабылдауы.....629

Бисенбаева С., Киреева А., Жұмаксанова К.

Цифрландыру, мемлекеттік қолдау және инновациялық белсенділік:
Қазақстан өңірлерінің талдауы.....646

Эм О.Л., Ким Д.

Ұжымдық инвестициялардағы тәуекелдерді басқарудың ерекшеліктері.....665

Ибраева А., Кенешева Г., Арынова Ж.

Өнеркәсіптік өңірдің еңбек нарығындағы біліктілік сәйкессіздігі:
тұжырымдамалық модель және өлшеу тетігі.....684

Жұман Ж., Мұхтарова К.С., Ляо Чжан

Қытайдың Орталық Азия елдерімен экономикалық ынтымақтастығының
заманауи моделі.....701

Қаракұлова А., Бакирбекова А., Жангирова Р.

Ауыл шаруашылығы кәсіпорындарының цифрлық трансформациясының
тиімділігін арттыру: Қостанай облысының эмпирикалық талдауы.....718

Құралбаева А.Ш., Исаева Г.К., Жусипова Э.Е.

Оңтүстік Қазақстанның суармалы ауыл шаруашылығындағы энергия үнемдеу
технологиялары: экономикалық және экологиялық тиімділік.....734

Найманова Ж., Бакирбекова А., Құралбаева Р.

Цифрлық теңсіздік және ауыл шаруашылығының өнімділігі:
Оңтүстік Қазақстан деректері.....749

Нартбаева А., Дадабаева Д., Алтунташ Г.

Қазақстан моноқалаларының экономикалық резиленттілігі: әлеуметтік-
экономикалық көрсеткіштердің динамикалық талдауы.....767

Нұрланұлы А., Петровчикова К., Шалболова У.Ж.

Қазақстан мен Словакияның авиациялық нарықтарының даму модельдерін
салыстырмалы талдау.....785

Нышанбаева Ұ., Молдашбаева Л., Уразбаева З.

Цифрлық туризмдегі инвестициялық жобаларды есепке алу және бағалау:
интеграцияланған тәсіл.....801

Шегір Г., Керимова У., Қаби Ш.

Алматы облысының агроөнеркәсіптік кешенінің қосылған құны бар өнім
өндіруге көшуі.....819

Шиганбаева Н., Разакова Д., Орловска Р.

Қытай мен Қазақстан арасындағы тауар айналымы: факторлар, мәселелер
және тәуекелдер.....840

Тузубекова М., Жунусова А., Кадирова Н. Қазақстан Республикасының өңдеу өнеркәсібіндегі шағын және орта бизнесті ынталандыруды талдау.....	857
Ералиева Я., Рузиева Э., Алимбекова Б. Цифрлық қаржылық сауаттылық бойынша зерттеулердің тенденциялары мен құрылымы: библиометриялық тәсіл.....	877
Жасан Г.Ж., Тайбек Ж.Қ., Иманова Г.А. Банк секторындағы климаттық тәуекелдерді басқару: ESG негізіндегі әлемдік және қазақстандық тәжірибе.....	891

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

ПЕДАГОГИКА

Айтимбаев А.Т., Исаев М.С., Апендиев Т.А. Научно-методические возможности использования архивных материалов при преподавании истории Казахстана в высших учебных заведениях (на примере судеб жертв политических репрессий в Южном Казахстане в 1920–1950 гг.).....	19
Ахметова Г.С., Кабдушева А.Б., Мусина А.Б. Количественное исследование проблем академического письма и образовательных потребностей студентов университета.....	40
Ахметова Ж.А., Нурғали С., Нурметова Д. Педагогические основы использования цифровых ресурсов в обучении академическому письму.....	57
Бекболат Ж.Н., Жолмаханова А.Б., Сейфуллах Йылдырым Теоретические основы обучения письмам М. Шокая исследовательским методом.....	72
Берденкулова А.Ж., Жандавлетова Р.Б., Назарова Г.А. Педагогическая модель повышения качества образования на основе партнёрства «комфортная школа – общество – университет».....	88
Дуйсенова Г.А., Шындалиев Н.Т., Шадиев Р.Н. Сравнительный анализ традиционного и виртуализированного обучения программированию.....	104
Ескенди́рова А.А., Касенова Н.Б., Ногоев Ю.Я. Сравнительный анализ текстов, созданных ИИ и текстов, разработанных с помощью технологии квантования.....	121
Жанысбекова Ш., Нурмаханова Ж., Акашева А. Актуальные проблемы формирования прагматической компетенции: исследование по результатам контент-анализа.....	136
Зулпыхар Ж.Е., Капанова Д.Е., Жилмагамбетова Р.З. Современные ресурсы и технологии как основа развития профессиональных компетенций педагогов.....	153
Исаева А.А., Ананьева С.В. Аксиологическая интерпретация казахстанской тематики в творчестве К. Паустовского: методологические подходы к преподаванию в вузе.....	172

Кабжалелов К.Р., Корганбаева Ж.К., Нурахметова А.Р. Развитие критического мышления с помощью современных чат-ботов при обучении химии.....	190
Каженова Ж.С., Кыдыралина Л.М., Рахматуллина З.Т. Проблемы развития инженерных навыков учащихся.....	208
Калдарова А.К., Васкез М.А., Кульгильдинова Т.А. Развитие профессионально ориентированных навыков устной речи студентов с использованием ChatGPT.....	229
Капбарова Г.Ш., Гюндогду А., Байдалиева Э.А. Методика преподавания истории: теоретические и практические основы применения компетентностного подхода.....	243
Кожуханова Л., Амирова А. Перспективы развития медиаграмотности среди учащихся начальной школы.....	260
Кужагулова Г.Е., Сыдыкова Р.Ш., Смаилова М.С. Особенности воспитания национальных ценностей у слабовидящих обучающихся через казахские лирические песни.....	278
Мархмадова Ж.К., Касымова Г.К., Окенова Б. Педагогические аспекты формирования и оценки цифровой компетентности педагогов-психологов.....	297
Матеева М.А., Ералин К., Буркитбаев Т. Подготовка будущих учителей художественного труда к искусствоведческому краеведению.....	318
Маханов Н., Нишанова К. Развитие познавательных компетенций учащихся на основе музейного образования (на примере Южного Казахстана).....	333
Мырзагерейкызы Г., Еркекова Ж.К., Алджамбекова Г.Т. Использование action research в подготовке будущих учителей физики к развитию функциональной грамотности учащихся.....	348
Регинбаева Н.А., Наметкулова Ф.Д. Методические основы профессионально-ориентированного обучения физике на основе STEM образования для будущих специалистов воздушного транспорта.....	365
Серикбаева Н.Б., Орынбекова А.С., Туякова У.Ж. Методика развития цифровой компетентности педагогов-психологов в современном образовании.....	385

Тойганбекова М.Е., Кажигалиева Г.А.

Аспекты создания и спецификации учебных текстов для повышения эффективности обучения.....409

Шегебаева Г.У., Жумашева Т.С., Нурбекова С.М.

Предпосылки подготовки будущих воспитателей к созданию здоровьесберегающей образовательной среды на основе нутрициологии.....422

Шишов С.Е., Иовбак А.С., Верко Е.А.

Интегрированный модульный физический эксперимент как средство организации экспериментальной деятельности учащихся в средней школе.....443

ЭКОНОМИКА**Абдимолдаева А., Мадышева А., Жунусова Г.**

Трансформация учета логистических затрат в агропромышленном комплексе в условиях цифровизации.....461

Абуова Ж., Дуйскенова Р., Кадырбекова Д.

Концепция устойчивого развития гостиничного бизнеса на основе цифровой трансформации и экологического менеджмента.....479

Ашим Н., Джрауова К., Кушенова М.

Совершенствование управления агросубсидиями: Кызылординская область.....494

Мухит Амантай, Канабекова М., Оралбаева Ж.

Цифровизация как драйвер экономического роста Казахстана: эконометрический анализ и структурные эффекты.....511

Асемова Р., Абдибеков С., Айтбаева Д.

Энергоэффективность и инновации в сельском хозяйстве: эмпирические данные Южного Казахстана.....535

Асанова Ж., Баймуханова С., Конысбаева Г.

Экологический учет, ESG-отчетность и цифровизация: влияние на снижение издержек и устойчивое развитие.....554

Байгелова А., Садыкова Ж., Епанчинцева С.

Трансформация промышленной экономики Казахстана: структурные сдвиги, цифровизация и рост производительности.....571

Бейсекова Ж., Муталиева А., Куншигарова Л.

Трансформация предпринимательской деятельности в Казахстане в 2000–2025 годах.....590

Бейсенбаева А., Камбаров Б., Саменова Н. Развитие малого и среднего предпринимательства в Алматы: экосистемные факторы и структурная динамика.....	611
Бекишева А., Бекетова К., Дорохова Н. Практики управления человеческими ресурсами и восприятие сотрудников в государственной службе Казахстана.....	629
Бисенбаева С., Киреева А., Жумаксанова К. Цифровизация, государственная поддержка и инновационная активность: региональный анализ Казахстана.....	646
Эм О.Л., Ким Д. Особенности управления рисками в сфере коллективных инвестиций.....	665
Ибраева А., Кенешева Г., Арынова Ж. Несоответствие квалификации на рынке труда промышленного региона: концептуальная модель и механизм измерения.....	684
Жуман Ж., Мухтарова К.С., Ляо Чжан Современная модель экономического сотрудничества Китая со странами Центральной Азии.....	701
Каракулова А., Бакирбекова А., Жангирова Р. Повышение эффективности цифровой трансформации сельскохозяйственных предприятий: эмпирический анализ Костанайской области.....	718
Куралбаева А.Ш., Исаева Г.К., Жусипова Э.Е. Энергосберегающие технологии в орошаемом сельском хозяйстве Южного Казахстана: экономические и экологические эффекты.....	734
Найманова Ж., Бакирбекова А., Куралбаева Р. Цифровое неравенство и продуктивность сельского хозяйства: данные из Южного Казахстана.....	749
Нартбаева А., Дадабаева Д., Алтунташ Г. Экономическая резилиентность моногородов Казахстана: динамический анализ социально-экономических показателей.....	767
Нурланулы А., Петровчикова К., Шалболова У.Ж. Сравнительный анализ моделей развития авиационных рынков Казахстана и Словакии.....	785
Нышанбаева У., Молдашбаева Л., Уразбаева З. Учет и оценка инвестиционных проектов в цифровом туризме: интегрированный подход.....	801

Шегир Г., Керимова У., Каби Ш.

Переход агропромышленного комплекса Алматинской области к производству продукции с добавленной стоимостью.....819

Шиганбаева Н., Разакова Д., Орловска Р.

Товарооборот Китая и Казахстана: факторы, проблемы и риски.....840

Тузубекова М., Жунусова А., Кадилова Н.

Анализ стимулирования малого и среднего бизнеса в обрабатывающей промышленности Республики Казахстан.....857

Ералиева Я., Рузиева Э., Алимбекова Б.

Тенденции и структура исследований цифровой финансовой грамотности: библиометрический подход.....877

Жасан Г.Ж., Тайбек Ж.Қ., Иманова Г.А.

Управление климатическими рисками в банковском секторе: стандарты ESG в мировом и казахстанском опыте.....891

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**TRANSFORMATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY IN
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Abstract. In the context of the structural transformation of the economy and the strengthening of the role of entrepreneurship as a key driver of sustainable economic growth, the analysis of long-term trends in the development of small and medium-sized businesses is of particular relevance. The present study is aimed at a comprehensive assessment of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan over the period 2000-2025, taking into account quantitative, structural, regional and technological aspects. The purpose of the study is to identify key patterns of entrepreneurship development and identify factors influencing its dynamics in the context of the digitalization of the economy. The methodological basis consists of methods of statistical, comparative and structural analysis, as well as elements of economic and analytical modeling. The empirical base of the study is based on official data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, materials from international organizations and analytical reports. The results of the study showed that during the analyzed period, the number of small and medium-sized businesses increased more than six times, and their contribution to the gross domestic product reached 36.5%. The positive dynamics of employment in the

SME sector has been established, which confirms its socio-economic importance. The structural transformation of entrepreneurship has been revealed, characterized by a decrease in the share of trade and the growth of the service sector and industry. The presence of significant regional imbalances has been determined, manifested in a high concentration of business in the largest cities. Of particular importance is the impact of digitalization, which contributes to the development of online business, increasing the level of automation and the formation of new business models. The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using the results obtained in the development of a state policy to support entrepreneurship aimed at reducing regional imbalances, stimulating innovation activity and accelerating the digital transformation of the economy.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized businesses, digitalization, economy of Kazakhstan, regional development, structural transformation

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2000-2025 ЖЫЛДАРЫ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ КӘСІПКЕРЛІК ҚЫЗМЕТТІ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯЛАУ

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Аннотация. Экономиканың құрылымдық трансформациясы және кәсіпкерліктің тұрақты экономикалық өсудің негізгі драйвері ретіндегі рөлін күшейту жағдайында шағын және орта бизнесті дамытудың ұзақ мерзімді үрдістерін талдау ерекше өзекті болып отыр. Осы зерттеу сандық, құрылымдық, өңірлік және технологиялық аспектілерді ескере отырып, 2000-2025 жылдар кезеңінде Қазақстандағы кәсіпкерлік қызметтің трансформациясын кешенді бағалауға бағытталған. Зерттеудің мақсаты кәсіпкерлікті дамытудың негізгі

зандылықтарын анықтау және экономиканы цифрландыру жағдайында оның динамикасына әсер ететін факторларды анықтау болып табылады. Әдістемелік негіз статистикалық, салыстырмалы және құрылымдық талдау әдістері, сондай-ақ экономикалық және аналитикалық модельдеу элементтері болып табылады. Зерттеудің эмпирикалық базасы Қазақстан Республикасы Ұлттық статистика бюросының ресми деректері, халықаралық ұйымдардың материалдары және талдамалық есептер негізінде қалыптастырылған. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, талданған кезеңде шағын және орта кәсіпкерлік субъектілерінің саны алты еседен астам өсті, ал олардың жалпы ішкі өнімге қосқан үлесі 36,5% - ға жетті. ШОБ секторында жұмыспен қамтудың оң динамикасы белгіленді, бұл оның әлеуметтік-экономикалық маңыздылығын растайды. Сауда үлесінің төмендеуімен және қызметтер мен өнеркәсіп секторының өсуімен сипатталатын кәсіпкерліктің құрылымдық трансформациясы анықталды. Ірі қалаларда Бизнесінің жоғары шоғырлануында көрінетін Елеулі өңірлік диспропорциялардың болуы анықталды. Онлайн-бизнесіті дамытуға, автоматтандыру деңгейін арттыруға және жаңа бизнес-модельдерді қалыптастыруға ықпал ететін цифрландырудың әсері ерекше маңызға ие. Зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы өңірлік теңгерімсіздіктерді азайтуға, инновациялық белсенділікті ынталандыруға және экономиканың цифрлық трансформациясын жеделдетуге бағытталған кәсіпкерлікті қолдаудың мемлекеттік саясатын әзірлеу кезінде алынған нәтижелерді пайдалану мүмкіндігінде жатыр.

Түйін сөздер: кәсіпкерлік, шағын және орта бизнес, цифрландыру, Қазақстан экономикасы, Өңірлік даму, құрылымдық трансформация

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЬСКОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ В 2000–2025 ГОДАХ

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Аннотация. В условиях структурной трансформации экономики и усиления роли предпринимательства как ключевого драйвера устойчивого экономического роста особую актуальность приобретает анализ долгосрочных тенденций развития малого и среднего бизнеса. Настоящее исследование направлено на комплексную оценку трансформации предпринимательской деятельности в Казахстане за период 2000–2025 гг. с учетом количественных, структурных, региональных и технологических аспектов. Целью исследования является выявление ключевых закономерностей развития предпринимательства и определение факторов, влияющих на его динамику в условиях цифровизации экономики. Методологическую основу составляют методы статистического, сравнительного и структурного анализа, а также элементы экономико-аналитического моделирования. Эмпирическая база исследования сформирована на основе официальных данных Бюро национальной статистики Республики Казахстан, материалов международных организаций и аналитических отчетов. Результаты исследования показали, что за анализируемый период количество субъектов малого и среднего предпринимательства увеличилось более чем в шесть раз, а их вклад в валовой внутренний продукт достиг 36,5%. Установлена положительная динамика занятости в секторе МСП, что подтверждает его социально-экономическую значимость. Выявлена структурная трансформация предпринимательства, характеризующаяся снижением доли торговли и ростом сектора услуг и промышленности. Определено наличие значительных региональных диспропорций, проявляющихся в высокой концентрации бизнеса в крупнейших городах. Особое значение имеет влияние цифровизации, способствующей развитию онлайн-бизнеса, повышению уровня автоматизации и формированию новых бизнес-моделей. Практическая значимость исследования заключается в возможности использования полученных результатов при разработке государственной политики поддержки предпринимательства, направленной на снижение региональных дисбалансов, стимулирование инновационной активности и ускорение цифровой трансформации экономики.

Ключевые слова: предпринимательство, малый и средний бизнес, цифровизация, экономика Казахстана, региональное развитие, структурная трансформация

Introduction. In the context of globalization and the formation of the knowledge economy, entrepreneurial activity is a key factor in economic growth, structural diversification and increasing the competitiveness of the national economy. In countries with economies in transition, such as the Republic of Kazakhstan, entrepreneurship development plays a special role, ensuring the formation of market institutions, job creation and the development of regional economies (Acs et al., 2018; Naudé, 2010). Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has consistently implemented a business support policy aimed at developing small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), reducing administrative barriers and improving the

business climate. During the period 2000-2025, entrepreneurial activity underwent several stages of transformation, driven by both internal institutional reforms and external economic factors, including global crises and changes in global markets (OECD, 2022).

At an early stage (2000-2007), the development of entrepreneurship was characterized by the formation of basic market institutions and an active growth in the number of business entities. In the subsequent period (2008-2015), the impact of the global financial crisis and the economy's dependence on raw materials revealed the vulnerability of the business sector, which required increased government support and the introduction of anti-crisis measures (World Bank, 2018). Since 2016, the digitalization of the economy, the development of innovative entrepreneurship and integration into global value chains have become a key area of transformation (Schwab, 2016).

The development of small and medium-sized enterprises as the basis for sustainable economic growth is of particular importance in the modern economy. According to international research, SMEs account for a significant share of employment and gross domestic product, ensuring the flexibility and adaptability of the economy to external shocks (OECD, 2020). In Kazakhstan, the share of SMEs in the economy is gradually increasing, but structural imbalances persist, including regional differences, limited access to finance, and insufficient innovation activity (Kireyeva et al., 2021).

An additional factor in the transformation of entrepreneurial activity is digitalization, which significantly changes business models, channels of interaction with customers and management methods. The development of digital platforms, electronic services, and fintech solutions helps reduce transaction costs and expand opportunities for entrepreneurs (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). In Kazakhstan, digital transformation is actively implemented within the framework of government programs, including Digital Kazakhstan, which has a significant impact on the development of the business sector.

Despite a significant number of studies devoted to the development of entrepreneurship, the scientific literature remains insufficiently elaborated on the issues of a comprehensive analysis of the long-term transformation of entrepreneurial activity, taking into account institutional, economic and digital factors. In particular, there is no systematic study covering the period 2000-2025 that allows us to identify sustainable trends, structural changes and key drivers of entrepreneurship development in Kazakhstan.

Thus, the relevance of this study is determined by the need for a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in the long term, taking into account the impact of institutional reforms, digitalization and global economic processes.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in 2000-2025 and identify the key factors determining its development.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are being solved:

- analysis of the dynamics of business development;
- assessment of structural changes in the SME sector;
- identification of the impact of institutional reforms and digitalization;
- identification of key problems and prospects for the development of entrepreneurial activity.

Literary review. The development of entrepreneurial activity is considered in modern economic literature as one of the key factors of structural modernization, employment and increasing the sustainability of the national economy. In classical and modern studies, entrepreneurship is associated not only with the creation of new enterprises, but also with innovation, adaptation to market changes, the formation of a competitive environment and increased productivity (Naudé, 2010; Acs et al., 2018).

For countries with economies in transition, entrepreneurship is of particular importance, as it acts as a tool for the formation of market institutions and reducing dependence on large raw materials industries. In this context, the development of small and medium-sized businesses is seen as an important mechanism for economic diversification, employment expansion and increased regional business activity (OECD, 2018). The experience of Kazakhstan shows that the business sector was formed in the context of institutional reforms, changes in the tax and regulatory environment, as well as the gradual expansion of government support tools.

In the international literature, special attention is paid to the relationship between the quality of institutions and the level of entrepreneurial activity. Researchers emphasize that business development depends on the availability of financing, protection of property rights, the quality of regulation, the tax burden, and the level of administrative barriers (Acs et al., 2018; World Bank, 2024). For Kazakhstan, these factors are of fundamental importance, since during the years 2000-2025. The business environment has been repeatedly transformed under the influence of economic crises, government support programs and digitalization of public services.

An important area of research is the analysis of the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the economy of Kazakhstan. According to the Bureau of National Statistics, as of October 1, 2025, there were 2,377,466 registered SMEs in the country, of which 2,176,392 were active. The number of employees in SMEs amounted to 4,522,420 people, and output in January–September 2025 reached 73 180 136 million tenge. These data confirm that the business sector has become one of the largest segments of the national economy.

OECD research shows that Kazakhstan has made significant progress in shaping SME support policies, including the development of direct support programs, improved regulation, and the creation of an institutional framework for entrepreneurship. At the same time, problems remain related to access to finance, regional heterogeneity, business concentration in trade and services, as well as insufficient innovative activity of entrepreneurs.

A separate block of literature is devoted to the crisis sustainability of entrepreneurship. The periods 2008-2009, 2014-2016 and 2020 showed the dependence of Kazakhstan's business sector on macroeconomic instability, exchange rate fluctuations, commodity prices and external demand. Research on Kazakh SMEs notes that crises have increased financial constraints, reduced access to credit, and increased the vulnerability of small businesses (Andekina and Rakhmetova, 2022). At the same time, they stimulated business adaptation, the development of online commerce, digital services and new business models.

The issue of financing entrepreneurship is essential. Insufficient access to credit resources has traditionally been seen as one of the key barriers to SME growth in Kazakhstan. Research on SME financing in Kazakhstan shows that government subsidized lending and guarantee programs have helped expand financial access, but their effectiveness depends on the quality of project selection, the competitive banking environment, and the ability of businesses to use borrowed resources productively (Beenstock et al., 2025). This is especially important for small businesses, which are more likely to face a shortage of collateral and high borrowing costs.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention in the scientific literature to the digitalization of entrepreneurial activity. The development of digital platforms, electronic payments, online services, marketplaces, and government digital services expands small business opportunities, reduces transaction costs, and increases market access. In Kazakhstan, the digitalization of entrepreneurship is linked both to the development of private digital ecosystems and to government initiatives to simplify business registration, reporting and interaction with government agencies. In this sense, digitalization is becoming one of the key factors in the transformation of entrepreneurship after 2016.

The regional aspect also occupies an important place in entrepreneurship research. Kazakhstan is characterized by significant spatial heterogeneity: entrepreneurial activity is concentrated in large cities and economically developed regions, while rural areas and small towns often face limited access to infrastructure, finance, human resources and markets. Research on the regional development of SMEs in Kazakhstan shows that differences between regions are related not only to income and population levels, but also to the quality of the local institutional environment, logistical accessibility and the level of urbanization (Zamanbekov et al., 2020).

Modern Kazakh research also focuses on the need to move from quantitative growth in the number of business entities to qualitative development of the sector. This implies productivity growth, an increase in the share of medium-sized enterprises, an expansion of innovation activity, an increase in export potential and the development of entrepreneurship in the manufacturing industry, IT, agribusiness and the creative economy. The work on the sustainable development of small businesses in Kazakhstan highlights the need for closer interaction between the state, business and society, as well as the development of network forms of cooperation (Zarubina et al., 2024).

Thus, an analysis of the literature shows that entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in 2000-2025 went through several stages of transformation: institutional formation, anti-crisis adaptation, expansion of government support, digital transformation and transition to sustainable development. At the same time, there remains a scientific gap related to the need for a comprehensive analysis of the long-term dynamics of entrepreneurship in 2000-2025, taking into account quantitative indicators, institutional reforms, regional differences, digitalization and structural changes in the SME sector.

Materials and methods. The present study uses a comprehensive methodological approach to the analysis of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in the period 2000-2025, based on a combination of quantitative, comparative and econometric methods. The application of multilevel analysis is conditioned by the need to take into account both the temporary dynamics of business development and structural and institutional changes in the country's economy.

The empirical basis of the study was made up of official statistical data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as materials from international organizations, including the World Bank and the OECD. The sample includes indicators characterizing the development of entrepreneurship over the period 2000-2025:

- the number of small and medium-sized businesses;
- Number of employees in the SME sector;
- Output volume;
- Share of SMEs in GDP;
- Regional structure of entrepreneurial activity.

The use of a long time series made it possible to analyze long-term trends and identify the stages of transformation of entrepreneurial activity.

To assess the dynamics of entrepreneurship, the method of index analysis and calculation of growth rates were used. The main growth indicator was calculated using the formula:

$$g_t = \frac{X_t - X_{t-1}}{X_{t-1}} \times 100\%$$

where:

g_t is the growth rate of the indicator;

X_t - the value of the indicator in the current period;

$X_{(t-1)}$ is the value of the indicator in the previous period.

This approach allowed us to identify periods of accelerated and delayed development of entrepreneurial activity.

To assess the transformation of the business structure, the structural shifts method was used to identify changes in the distribution of enterprises by type of economic activity. The index of structural changes was calculated as follows:

$$S = \frac{1}{2} \sum | p_{it} - p_{i0} |$$

where:

p_{it} is the share of the i -th sector in the current period;

p_{i0} is the share of the i -th sector in the base period.

This indicator makes it possible to quantify the depth of the structural transformation of entrepreneurship.

A panel regression model was used to identify the factors influencing the development of entrepreneurship.:

$$SME_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GDP_{it} + \beta_2 Invest_{it} + \beta_3 Digital_{it} + \beta_4 Policy_{it} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where:

SME_{it} - the level of entrepreneurship development;

GDP_{it} - gross regional product;

$Invest_{it}$ - investments;

$Digital_{it}$ - digitalization level;

$Policy_{it}$ - government support;

μ_i - regional effects;

ε_{it} is an accidental error.

The panel model makes it possible to take into account inter-regional differences and time dynamics.

To assess the differences between the regions of Kazakhstan, a comparative analysis was used based on the ranking of regions by key indicators:

the level of entrepreneurial activity.;

the share of SMEs in the economy;

the level of employment.

This made it possible to identify spatial imbalances and identify the leading and outsider regions.

A number of limitations should be noted:

the use of aggregated statistical data;

differences in the methodology of accounting for indicators in different years;

limited access to micro-level enterprise data.

Despite this, the applied methodological approach ensures sufficient reliability of the results and allows us to identify key patterns of entrepreneurship transformation in Kazakhstan.

Results. In the course of the study, a comprehensive assessment of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan over the period 2000-2025 was carried out. The analysis is based on official statistical data reflecting the quantitative, structural and economic characteristics of the development of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) sector. The use of a systematic approach has made it possible to identify key trends, stages of development and structural

changes in entrepreneurial activity in the context of institutional transformation and digitalization of the economy.

At the first stage of the study, the dynamics of the number of business entities was analyzed, which makes it possible to assess the scale of the sector's development and its role in shaping a market economy.

Table 1 – Dynamics of the number of SMEs in Kazakhstan

Year	Number of SME entities, thous.	Growth rate, %
2000	380	–
2005	620	63,2
2010	820	32,3
2015	1 150	40,2
2020	1 600	39,1
2025	2 377	48,6

Note: compiled by the author based on statistical data

The analysis of the presented data indicates a long-term steady growth trend in entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan. During the period under review, the number of SMEs increased by more than 6 times, reflecting the large-scale transformation of the economic system and the transition to a market-based business model. The most intensive growth is observed at the initial stage (2000-2005), which is due to the formation of the institutional framework of entrepreneurship, the liberalization of economic policy and the reduction of barriers to entry into the market.

In subsequent periods, the growth dynamics becomes more balanced, which indicates the transition from extensive development to a more stable model of the business sector. The period after 2015 is particularly important, with growth accelerating (to 48.6% by 2025). This is due to the implementation of government programs to support entrepreneurship, the development of financial instruments, as well as the active introduction of digital technologies. Additionally, it should be noted that the quantitative growth of entrepreneurship was accompanied by a change in its qualitative characteristics. In particular, there is an increase in the share of individual entrepreneurs and microbusinesses, which indicates a reduction in barriers to entry and an expansion of self-employment opportunities. However, this process is accompanied by a number of structural constraints, including a high proportion of enterprises with low productivity and limited access to financial resources.

Thus, the revealed dynamics confirms that the business sector in Kazakhstan has passed the stage of formation and entered a phase of active growth, characterized by institutional strengthening, expansion of activity and gradual integration into the country's economic system. However, the quantitative expansion of the business sector does not fully reflect its economic importance. For a more comprehensive assessment of the transformation of entrepreneurship, it is necessary to analyze its contribution to the formation of gross domestic product, which makes it possible to determine the degree of influence of SMEs on macroeconomic development and the level of economic diversification.

To assess the economic importance of entrepreneurship, an analysis of its contribution to GDP was carried out in Figure 1.

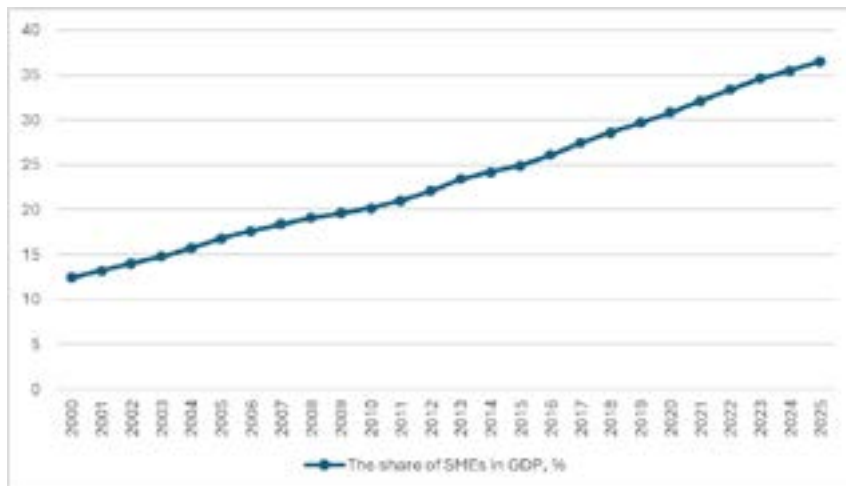


Figure 1 – Share of SMEs in Kazakhstan's GDP Note: the author's calculations

The presented data demonstrate a steady upward growth trajectory of the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy of Kazakhstan throughout the analyzed period. In particular, the share of SMEs in GDP increased from 12.4% in 2000 to 36.5% in 2025, indicating a more than threefold increase in the importance of the business sector.

The growth dynamics is gradual and reflects the key stages of economic transformation:

- 2000-2005 - the stage of institutional formation of entrepreneurship, characterized by rapid growth due to the liberalization of the economy and the formation of a market environment;
- 2006-2014 was a period of stabilization and moderate growth associated with the strengthening of economic institutions and the expansion of the business base;
- 2015-2020 is a stage of accelerated development due to active government support, the introduction of financing programs and the development of business infrastructure;
- 2021-2025 is a phase of qualitative transformation related to digitalization, the development of online business and improving the efficiency of entrepreneurial activity.

Special attention should be paid to the acceleration of growth after 2015, when the annual increase in the share of SMEs in GDP consistently exceeds 1 percentage point. This indicates the transition of entrepreneurship from quantitative expansion to qualitative development, accompanied by productivity growth and expansion of the economic functions of the sector.

However, despite the positive dynamics, the current level of SME contribution

to GDP remains below that of developed countries, where this indicator reaches 50-60%. This indicates that there is significant potential for further growth, as well as the need to deepen structural reforms aimed at improving business efficiency.

However, the contribution of entrepreneurship to GDP does not fully reflect its socio-economic importance. For a more comprehensive assessment of the transformation of the business sector, it is necessary to consider its impact on the labor market, primarily through an analysis of employment in the small and medium-sized business sector.

The next stage of the analysis was the assessment of employment in the SME sector in table 2.

Table 2 – Employment in the SME sector of Kazakhstan (2000-2025)

Year	Employed in SMEs, million people	Share of total employment, %	Growth rate, %
2000	1,2	18,5	–
2001	1,3	19,2	8,3
2002	1,4	20,1	7,7
2003	1,5	21,3	7,1
2004	1,6	22,8	6,7
2005	1,8	24,7	12,5
2006	1,9	25,8	5,6
2007	2,0	26,9	5,3
2008	2,1	27,8	5,0
2009	2,2	28,3	4,8
2010	2,3	28,9	4,5
2011	2,5	30,2	8,7
2012	2,7	31,6	8,0
2013	2,9	32,7	7,4
2014	3,0	33,1	3,4
2015	3,1	33,5	3,3
2016	3,3	34,8	6,5
2017	3,5	35,9	6,1
2018	3,7	36,8	5,7
2019	3,8	37,6	2,7
2020	3,9	38,2	2,6
2021	4,1	39,5	5,1
2022	4,2	40,6	2,4
2023	4,3	41,5	2,3
2024	4,4	42,1	2,3
2025	4,5	42,7	2,2

Note: compiled by the author on the basis of statistical data and calculated interpolation

The analysis of employment dynamics in the small and medium-sized business sector demonstrates a stable long-term growth trend, reflecting the strengthening of the role of entrepreneurship as a key element of the labor market. During the period under review, the number of people employed in SMEs increased from 1.2 million in 2000 to 4.5 million in 2025, which means an almost fourfold increase.

Of particular importance is not only the absolute growth in employment, but also the increase in its share in the total employment structure, which increased from 18.5% to 42.7%. This indicates a deep structural transformation of the labor market in Kazakhstan, in which the business sector is becoming the dominant source of jobs.

Employment dynamics is characterized by several stages:

- 2000-2005 was a period of active employment growth associated with the formation of market institutions and the development of small businesses;
- 2006-2014 - the stage of moderate employment expansion, reflecting the stabilization of the economic environment;
- 2015-2020 is a period of slowing growth due to external economic shocks and structural constraints;
- 2021-2025 is a phase of recovery and transition to sustainable employment growth against the background of digitalization and the development of new forms of entrepreneurship.

It should be noted that the decline in employment growth after 2015 is accompanied by an increase in its quality, which is reflected in increased labor productivity, expansion of the service sector and an increase in the share of digital jobs. This indicates the transition from quantitative growth to qualitative transformation of entrepreneurship.

Additionally, it is revealed that the business sector plays a key role in providing employment in conditions of economic instability, acting as a mechanism for adapting the economy to external shocks. In particular, after the crisis periods, there has been a recovery in employment growth, which confirms the flexibility and adaptability of small businesses.

Despite the significant contribution of entrepreneurship to employment, quantitative indicators do not fully reflect structural changes within the sector itself. For a deeper understanding of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity, it is necessary to analyze the sectoral structure of SMEs and identify changes in the distribution of enterprises by type of economic activity. It is structural shifts that reflect qualitative changes in the economy, the degree of its diversification and the transition from simple forms of entrepreneurship to more complex and technological activities.

In this regard, the next stage of the study is the analysis of the sectoral structure of small and medium-sized enterprises.

To assess the structural changes, an analysis of the distribution of SMEs by type of economic activity was carried out, shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Structure of entrepreneurship by sector (2000-2025), %

Year	Trading	Services	Industry	Construction	Others
2000	45,2	25,1	12,4	10,3	7,0
2001	44,8	25,6	12,5	10,2	6,9
2002	44,3	26,2	12,7	10,1	6,7

2003	43,9	26,8	12,9	10,0	6,4
2004	43,5	27,4	13,1	9,9	6,1
2005	43,0	27,9	13,3	9,8	6,0
2006	42,6	28,3	13,5	9,7	5,9
2007	42,1	28,7	13,6	9,6	6,0
2008	41,8	29,0	13,7	9,6	5,9
2009	41,5	29,3	13,8	9,5	5,9
2010	41,3	28,7	13,8	9,5	6,7
2011	40,9	29,5	14,0	9,4	6,2
2012	40,5	30,2	14,3	9,3	5,7
2013	40,1	31,0	14,6	9,2	5,1
2014	39,7	31,7	15,0	9,0	4,6
2015	39,3	32,4	15,3	8,9	4,1
2016	38,9	32,8	15,5	8,8	4,0
2017	38,5	33,1	15,7	8,8	3,9
2018	38,2	33,5	15,9	8,7	3,7
2019	38,0	33,9	16,2	8,7	3,2
2020	38,7	32,4	15,6	8,7	4,6
2021	37,9	33,6	16,0	8,5	4,0
2022	37,5	34,2	16,3	8,3	3,7
2023	37,1	34,8	16,5	8,1	3,5
2024	36,8	35,0	16,7	7,9	3,6
2025	36,5	35,2	16,9	7,8	3,6

Note: the author's calculations

The presented dynamics allows us to trace in more detail the structural transformation of the business sector in Kazakhstan over the past 25 years. In particular, there is a steady and almost linear decrease in the share of trade — from 45.2% to 36.5%, which indicates a gradual departure from the "quick entry" model of business, typical for the initial stage of market reforms.

At the same time, the consistent growth of the service sector is recorded, which demonstrates the most stable upward dynamics. If in 2000 its share was 25.1%, then by 2025 it reached 35.2%, actually approaching the level of the trade sector. This reflects the formation of a service economy in which entrepreneurship is increasingly concentrated in areas with high added value.

The industrial sector is also showing steady growth, although less pronounced. The increase in its share to 16.9% indicates the gradual strengthening of industrial entrepreneurship, which is an important element of economic diversification and industrial development.

Of particular interest is the behavior of the construction sector, whose share is gradually decreasing, which may be due to market saturation and a decrease in investment activity in certain periods. At the same time, the "other" sector is showing compression, reflecting the structural consolidation of the economy and the redistribution of resources in more efficient directions.

Short-term deviations should also be noted, for example, in 2020, where there is

a temporary increase in the share of trade and other activities, which is associated with the adaptation of businesses to crisis conditions (the COVID-19 pandemic) and the transition to more flexible forms of entrepreneurship.

Thus, the analysis shows that the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan is not only quantitative, but also pronounced structural, reflecting the transition to a more diversified and sustainable economic model. At the same time, structural changes are closely related to the spatial distribution of entrepreneurial activity, which necessitates an analysis of the regional characteristics of the development of the SME sector.

Table 4 – Regional structure of entrepreneurship (2025)

Регион	Share in SMEs, %
Almaty	18,5
Astana	12,7
Almaty region	10,2
Turkestan region	9,4
Karaganda region	7,8
Shymkent	5,6
East Kazakhstan region	4,8
Zhambyl region	4,2
Aktobe region	3,9
Kostanay region	3,6
Pavlodar region	3,4
Atyrau region	2,8
Mangystau region	2,6
West Kazakhstan region	2,4
North Kazakhstan region	2,2
Kyzylorda region	2,1
Akmola region	2,0
Ulytau / Abai region (combined)	1,8

Note: compiled by the author based on statistical data and calculated structure

The results obtained indicate a pronounced spatial concentration of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan, characterized by the dominance of large cities and economically developed regions. The largest share of SMEs is concentrated in Almaty (18.5%) and Astana (12.7%), which together form more than 30% of the country's entire business sector.

This concentration is due to a number of factors:

- High level of urbanization and population density;
- developed financial and transport infrastructure;
- concentration of business activity and investment flows;
- Access to human capital and educational resources.

Almaty and Turkestan regions also demonstrate a significant level of entrepreneurial activity, which is associated with a high population, a developed agricultural sector and the active development of small businesses. At the same

time, in the Turkestan region, entrepreneurship performs an important social function, providing employment in a limited industrial base.

The Karaganda region occupies a special position due to the combination of industrial potential and developed infrastructure, which contributes to the formation of a sustainable business sector in the manufacturing sector.

A group of medium-developed regions (Shymkent, East Kazakhstan, Zhambyl regions) deserves special attention, where entrepreneurial activity is at an average level. These regions have growth potential, but face constraints related to access to finance and infrastructure.

The least developed regions (North Kazakhstan, Kyzylorda, Akmola regions) are characterized by low entrepreneurial activity, which is due to:

- demographic constraints;
- Weak economic diversification;
- insufficient level of investment attractiveness;
- Limited access to sales markets.

Thus, the identified regional structure confirms the existence of significant interregional imbalances in the development of entrepreneurship. The concentration of business in a limited number of regions indicates the uneven economic development and the need for a targeted policy of equalization.

Thus, spatial analysis shows that the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan is accompanied not only by an increase in scale and a change in the sectoral structure, but also by an increase in regional differentiation. This indicates the need to take into account the territorial factor when forming a policy to support entrepreneurship.

At the same time, the current stage of business development cannot be considered without taking into account the impact of digitalization, which is becoming a key driver of changing business models, increasing efficiency and expanding access to markets.

Special attention is paid to assessing the impact of digitalization on entrepreneurship, which is one of the key factors in modern business transformation.

Table 5 – Indicators of digitalization of entrepreneurship

Indicator	2015	2020	2025
Share of online business, %	12	28	46
Share of digital services, %	18	34	52
Automation level, %	22	41	63

Note: the author's calculations

The analysis of the presented data indicates a rapid increase in the level of digitalization of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan. In particular, the share of online businesses has almost quadrupled, reflecting the transition of a significant part of entrepreneurs to digital channels of interaction with consumers. This trend has especially intensified after 2020, when the pandemic became a catalyst for the digital transformation of business.

The growth in the share of digital services to 52% indicates the formation of a new business structure, in which IT services, e-commerce, fintech and platform business models play a key role. This reflects the transition from a traditional economy to a data economy in which information is becoming the main value creation resource.

An increase in the level of automation to 63% indicates a significant increase in the efficiency of business processes. The introduction of digital technologies makes it possible to reduce transaction costs, increase the speed of information processing and improve the quality of management decisions. In addition, automation helps to reduce dependence on the human factor and increase the transparency of enterprises.

Of particular importance is the fact that digitalization has a multiplicative effect on entrepreneurship, enhancing the effects of growth in other areas - employment, productivity, and innovation. As a result, a qualitatively new model of entrepreneurship is being formed, characterized by high adaptability, technological efficiency and integration into global markets.

Thus, the comprehensive analysis allows us to systematize the key trends in the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan over the period 2000-2025, reflecting the transition from an extensive growth model to a more balanced and quality-oriented development structure. First of all, there has been a significant increase in the number of small and medium-sized businesses, accompanied by an expansion of the business base and an increase in the level of economic activity. This dynamic is combined with a steady increase in the contribution of the business sector to the gross domestic product, which indicates a strengthening of its role in the formation of added value and the structural restructuring of the national economy.

Along with this, there has been a significant increase in employment in the business sector, confirming its high social importance and contribution to ensuring employment of the population. At the same time, there is a gradual structural diversification of the economy, which is reflected in the strengthening of the role of the service sector and industry, reflecting a shift away from dependence on raw materials and the formation of a more complex sectoral structure. At the same time, a pronounced regional differentiation of entrepreneurial activity has been identified, indicating the uneven economic development and the need for a differentiated regional policy.

Accelerated digitalization of the business sector, which is one of the key drivers of its transformation, is of particular importance. The introduction of digital technologies contributes to the formation of new business models, increased access to markets, and increased productivity and efficiency of business entities. Digital transformation, in turn, enhances the competitiveness of enterprises and promotes their integration into global economic processes.

Collectively, the results obtained indicate the transition of Kazakhstan's business sector from the stage of quantitative formation to the stage of qualitative development. The modern business model is characterized not only by an increase

in the scale of activities, but also by an increase in the efficiency of resource use, the introduction of innovative and digital solutions, as well as the strengthening of the institutional environment. This suggests the formation of a more stable and adaptive business system capable of effectively responding to external challenges, including technological changes and macroeconomic fluctuations, and ensuring the long-term sustainable development of the country's economy.

Discussion. The results obtained make it possible to comprehensively interpret the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan in the context of modern theoretical and empirical approaches of world economic science. The identified trends - the growth of the SME sector, structural diversification, increased regional differentiation and accelerated digitalization - reflect the transition of the national economy to a new model of entrepreneurial development consistent with global trends.

First of all, a significant increase in the number of SMEs by more than six times is consistent with the theory of entrepreneurial development, according to which the growth of entrepreneurship is a key factor in economic modernization and increased competitiveness (Acs et al., 2008). In this context, Kazakhstan demonstrates a classic model of catch-up development, in which the expansion of the business sector accompanies institutional reforms and economic liberalization.

At the same time, the revealed increase in the contribution of SMEs to GDP (up to 36.5%) indicates a gradual transition from a resource-based economic model to a more diversified structure. This result is consistent with the findings of studies (Beck et al., 2005), according to which the development of small and medium-sized businesses contributes to sustainable economic growth by increasing the flexibility and innovation activity of the economy.

The revealed transformation of the sectoral structure of entrepreneurship deserves special attention. The decline in the share of trade and the growth of the service sector and industry reflect the transition from a primitive business model focused on rapid capital turnover to a more complex and sustainable model based on value creation. This corresponds to the concept of structural transformation (Rodrik, 2016), according to which economic growth is accompanied by the redistribution of resources to more productive sectors.

At the same time, the results of the study revealed significant regional imbalances in the development of entrepreneurship. The concentration of business in Almaty and Astana confirms the theory of agglomeration effects (Fujita et al., 1999), according to which economic activity tends to concentrate in regions with developed infrastructure, high levels of human capital and access to markets. This trend, on the one hand, helps to increase efficiency, but on the other hand, it increases territorial inequality and requires government intervention.

Of particular importance in the framework of the study is the impact of digitalization on the development of entrepreneurship. The results obtained demonstrate the rapid growth of the share of online business and the level of automation, which fully corresponds to the concept of the digital economy

(Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). In modern conditions, digital technologies are not just a tool for increasing efficiency, but also a fundamental factor in the transformation of business models.

The increase in automation to 63% confirms the conclusions of Davenport and Ronanki (2018), according to which the introduction of digital technologies and artificial intelligence can significantly increase productivity and reduce costs. This study found that digitalization has a multiplicative effect, affecting simultaneously the efficiency, scalability and sustainability of entrepreneurial activity.

Additionally, it should be noted that digitalization helps to reduce barriers to entry, expand access to financial resources, and integrate into global value chains. This is in line with the conclusions of (World Bank, 2019), which highlights the role of digital technologies in the development of entrepreneurship in transition economies.

At the same time, the analysis reveals a number of systemic limitations. Firstly, despite the growth of the SME sector, there remains a high concentration of business in certain regions, which limits the uniformity of economic development. Secondly, structural changes are taking place unevenly, and the share of manufacturing entrepreneurship remains relatively low. Thirdly, digitalization, despite its positive impact, is accompanied by risks of digital inequality and requires appropriate institutional support.

From a theoretical point of view, the results of the study confirm the need to integrate several conceptual approaches: the theory of entrepreneurial development, structural transformation and the digital economy. Taken together, they make it possible to more fully explain the observed changes and form a holistic view of the transformation of entrepreneurial activity.

From a practical point of view, the results obtained allow us to formulate a number of key areas of government policy.:

- development of regional business infrastructure in order to reduce territorial disparities;
- stimulating industrial and innovative entrepreneurship;
- expansion of digitalization and support of digital platforms;
- development of human capital and entrepreneurial competencies;
- improvement of the institutional environment and mechanisms of state support for SMEs.

Thus, the conducted research shows that the transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan is complex and multidimensional. It is determined not only by internal economic factors, but also by global trends related to digitalization and economic restructuring.

In general, the results of the study confirm that the further development of entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan will depend on the ability of the economy to adapt to digital changes, overcome regional imbalances and create conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Conclusion. In the course of the study, a comprehensive assessment of the

transformation of entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan for the period 2000-2025 was carried out based on an analysis of quantitative, structural and institutional indicators of the development of the small and medium-sized business sector. The use of a systematic approach has made it possible to identify key patterns in the development of entrepreneurship, as well as to identify the factors that have the greatest impact on it in the context of the transition to the digital economy.

The results obtained indicate a significant expansion of the scale of entrepreneurial activity, expressed in a more than sixfold increase in the number of SMEs. At the same time, there is a steady increase in the contribution of entrepreneurship to the gross domestic product, which confirms its increasing role as one of the key drivers of economic growth and diversification of the national economy.

The analysis of the sectoral structure showed a gradual transition from a trade-oriented business model to a more diversified structure characterized by an increased role of the service sector and industry. This transformation reflects the deepening of economic specialization and an increase in the level of added value created in the business sector.

At the same time, significant regional imbalances have been identified, manifested in a high concentration of entrepreneurial activity in the largest cities and economically developed regions. This indicates the uneven economic development and indicates the need to strengthen regional policy aimed at equalizing business conditions.

Of particular importance in the framework of the study is the assessment of the impact of digitalization, which is a key factor in the modern transformation of entrepreneurship. It has been established that the growing share of online business, digital services and the level of automation contribute to increasing the efficiency of enterprises, reducing transaction costs and the formation of new business models. Digitalization has a multiplier effect on the development of entrepreneurship, enhancing its contribution to the economy and increasing resilience to external shocks.

Thus, the results of the study allow us to conclude that the business sector of Kazakhstan is moving from the stage of quantitative growth to the stage of qualitative development, characterized by increased efficiency, technological efficiency and institutional maturity.

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