

The Cultural Value of Resilience: the Kazakhstan Case Study

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Abstract

This study highlights the Kazakhs and the Kazakhstanis are being influenced by the value of resilience. Several explanations are put forth on why Kazakhs / Kazakhstanis are resilient. Interviewing method was deployed. Influenced by its geography, history and the value of achievement, Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis are adopting “being resilient” as the value that they work and live by. They are also pushed by the President’s Vision 2030/2050. There were of course, research limitations/implications but future research, if a budget permits, can employ more interviewers. The practical implications are that being resilient is an advantage, it can also lead to strengthen the Republic’s economy. In business, being resilient is vital since it gives the people the necessary rocket fuel. However, it is said that any culture is dynamic, and events may change perceptions and values, and hence, a highlight on whether the Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis are, in fact, “becoming softer” is also discussed. The article provides a new/continuing perspective on cultural value of resilience in Kazakhstan. (165 words)

Keywords: Resilience, Culture, Social values, Kazakhstan

1 Introduction

The Republic of Kazakhstan, the largest state after Russia in the former Soviet Union Bloc and is landlocked (<http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-kazakhstan.html>) An area of 2,724,900 sq. km. marks Kazakhstan as the largest landlocked country in the world, even though it has a shoreline at the Caspian Sea, but no access to the high seas (<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/kazakhstan-political-map.htm>). And Kazakhstan is located in Central Asia (see map in Figure 1). It is the ninth largest country in the world (Abizaid, 2017; Nazarbayev, 2008; Tulakbayeva, 2005) with a population of 18 million people (<http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-kazakhstan.html>).

Kazakhstan, which officially became a full Soviet socialist republic in 1936, was a key but often neglected state during Soviet times. It was to Kazakhstan that Stalin exiled thousands of prisoners to some of his most ruthless gulags. It was also to Kazakhstan that he deported millions of people of all different ethnicities, in an effort to ‘collectivise’ the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan was also the place of the Soviet nuclear test programs and Nikita Khrushchev’s impractical ‘Virgin Lands’ program; these have deep effects on these formerly nomadic people (<http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/kazakh-culture>). Yet Kazakhstan prevails, and it stands tall. Economically, Kazakhstan enjoys a diversified resource base for agricultural, mineral, and industrial output. It enjoys rich deposits of iron, copper, zinc, bauxite, gold, silver and uranium. Kazakhstan also enjoys massive deposits of coal and crude oil and natural gas; its coal reserves is said to exceed 50 billion tonnes (Safavi, 1997, p. 167).

Figure 1 shows the location of Kazakhstan



(Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/asia/kazakhstan/>)

2 Literature Survey

2.1 What is resilience?

Resilience is about bouncing back and moving on in spite of the problems, odds or difficulties that one faces. One is a warrior. One acts, and one has the fighting spirit; one keeps on going to achieve what one seeks to attain. Not deterred by problem(s) or obstacle(s), one makes a comeback and moves on. One moves on, perseveres and further accomplishes.

To be a resilient person is to be “a climber”, and one enjoys a high Adversity Quotient (AQ) (Stoltz, 1997). Being resilient, “one is tough and one does not get easily discouraged” (Low, 2017, p. 1). Resilience is thus the ability to thrive in the face of change and disruption.

Bob Proctor once said that, “The only limits in our life are those we impose on ourselves” (cited in Low, 2017). Indeed, on the contrary, one does not owe anyone a living, instead one owes it to oneself; one is fiercely independent, and one learns and grows.

2.2 Kazakhstan, Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis and resilience

The eleventh through the eighteenth centuries saw recurring control over Kazakhstan by Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. And the people of Kazakhstan consider themselves great warriors and still honour many of the war heroes (<http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/kazakh-culture>). And in modern times, through Baikonur, Kazakhstan “(made its) much-needed first step into space, a step dictated by history itself”, making its way to the stars (Nazarbayev, 2008, p. 276). Traditionally too, modern Kazakhstan has the Golden Warrior (Man) (Zolotoi Chelovek, in Russian) as its symbol and icon (Kazakhworld.com, 2017).

To worry, on one hand, is to immobilise oneself (a leader); besides, worrying is negative; and it is not worth or helpful doing so. Contrariwise, to be resilient, one is a warrior and not a worrier. To be a warrior is to be proactive and productive (Low, 2017). One seeks to advance oneself; one achieves. One does not get stalled, paralysed or immobilised by a problem and/ or an obstacle.

One takes action, a concrete or proactive step to move on; one has the resolution and courage to move on. “Every Kazakhstani should have a sense of his own worth and take responsibility for his actions and life.” And drawing parallels to the Republic and Kazakhstanis, citing the great Abai, Nazarbayev (2008, p. 329) spoke of “If you want to be rich, learn a trade” and citing Kazakh sayings, he spoke of “Try to master seven languages and know seven sciences”; thus, learning, education and action are important to the Republic’s economic growth and its modern development and progress (Low, 2017).

3. Research methodology

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 Kazakhstanis from a cross section of the society. These interviewees ranged from civil service officers, professors, businesspeople to bank employees and other professionals. They were all Kazakhstanis, and several referrals were made in which the researchers relied on some of their contacts to access the participants. The period of the study was conducted from 7 May to 31 August 2017. The composition and age range of respondents are shown in Table I.

Sekaran (2000, p. 296-7) has indicated that, the “sample sizes between 30 and 500 could be effective...and appropriate for most research...Qualitative studies typically use small sample sizes because of the intensive nature of such studies”. The sample size of 45 was decided because of various aspects including costs, time accessibility and limited personal resources. Of importance are the criteria in selecting these respondents; chiefly, the respondents should be:

- (1) Kazakhstan citizens,
- (2) at least 21 years of age, and have at least worked a minimum of two years,
- (3) living in Singapore for, at least, the past five years.

Table I. The composition: job types, age and gender of the interviewees.

Job Types	Age		Number of		Respondents	Males
	21-44	45-60				
Females						
Civil Service	4	4	8	4	4	
Academics	5	4	9	3	6	
Managers (private sector)	5	4	9	6	3	
Business owners	4	4	8	4	4	
Bank employees	3	3	6	4	2	
Others	3	2	5	3	2	
Total number of respondents			45	24	21	
Source: Interview surveys May to August 2017						

At the start of the interviews, the researcher began with some small talk to put the interviewees at ease. As in Low (2007, 2002), the session began by asking the respondents about his or her personal area(s) of interest, often detected in previous interactions, previous telephone calls or in the informal conversations occurring before the actual interview. In face-to-face interaction, small talk, politeness routines and jokes aside, people often more fully express their humanity with this naturalness leading to open expression and comfort (Shuy, 2002). No interviews were audio or video-recorded as they are seen as obstructing the free flow of expressions. Instead, all interviews were transcribed from notes to typewritten pages. Mental notes taken during the interviews were transcribed within 24 hours.

Note that as mentioned in Dawson (2002, p. 28, 29), during the semi-structured interviews, the same questions were asked in each interview, but the researchers also wanted the interview to be flexible so that other important information can still arise. The interview guide sheet was developed, with the following questions (Interview surveys May to August 2017). It helped the interviewer and the interviewee to stay focused on the issues set for discussion and allowed the respondent to do most of the talking.

- (1) How do you perceive Kazakhstanis? What are your views of them, please?
- (2) How resilient are Kazakhstanis?

- (3) What are the ways you perceive that make Kazakhstanis resilient (not resilient)?
- (4) What (historical) events do you think help to shape Kazakhstanis?
- (5) What strengthens (weakens) Kazakhstanis?

4. Findings

To the question: “How do you perceive Kazakhstanis?” Forty-one interviewees or 91.11 per cent of the respondents spoke of Kazakhstanis as being “tough” and “are being resilient”. “We want to grow”; one interviewee a 35-year old male explained, “Most Kazakhstanis want to grow and achieve better wealth; and for me, I want to get a good job; and I want to do what I like, and like what I do... The wanting to grow makes us, Kazakhstanis, resilience.” However, interestingly, he quickly added that some Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis want to achieve, grow and increase their wealth to show off or flaunt their wealth.”

In any case, all the interviewees (100 percent) spoke of Kazakhstanis as liking or preferring independence. “It is good that we have our own independence and we decide things for ourselves and for our future”. “We also have much political will”; “we want to run our business independently” (interviewees’ input). They saw their resilience as in the form of being strongly swayed by Republic’s determination to be independent (as in 1991).

“How resilient are Kazakhstanis?” Forty-two interviewees or 93.33 percent of the interviewees spoke of the republic’s geographic and climatic conditions, that is, its’ cold long winters and short summers as making the Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis tough. Similarly, forty-two interviewees or 93.33 percent of the respondents, consisting mainly of business owners, civil servants and academicians refer to this “wanting to grow” as the being resilient dimension (mentioned sixty times). Here, under this category, several interviewees indicated that “Kazakhstanis’ desire to be the first and best brings the Kazakh society and people to new achievements, levels and developments” [Here, the trained eyes of the researchers detected high sense of patriotic fervour in these interviewees’ perceptions]. Thirty-eight interviewees or 84.44 percent of the respondents expressed the resilience factor as running their business independently (mentioned fifty-five). The Republic of Kazakhstan, being “a landlocked country” (forty-two interviewees or 93.33 percent of the interviewees) and the Republic’s vulnerabilities (forty-one interviewees or 91.11 percent of the interviewees) were also cited as factors that make the Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis resilient. Thirty-seven interviewees or 82.22 percent of the interviewees also highlighted that they are “keen to learn to improve themselves” or “better their careers” (mentioned fifty-six times). Thirty-five interviewees or 77.77 percent of the interviewees also spoke “Kazakhs’ rich traditions and ways” as the resilient-contributory factor (mentioned forty-three times) while thirty interviewees or 66.66 percent of the interviewees also spoke of the “push-pull” factor of the President’s vision 2030/ Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 as making the Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis resilient. Some interviewees referred the President as “playing a key role”; he is “a good leader who brought the Republic independence”... “and much progress” (mentioned 34 times).

And interestingly too, twenty-nine interviewees or 64.44 percent of the interviewees also spoke of the country’s resilience as coming from the cultural value of diversity. Twenty-five interviewees or 55.55 percent of the interviewees pointed out the fact that the Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis are open to new opportunities which is due to the heritage of a nomadic culture.

“What are the ways you perceive that make Kazakhstanis resilient (not resilient)?” The majority, thirty-one interviewees or 68.88 percent of the respondents indicated “our independence from Soviet Union” makes Kazakhstanis resilient. And at the pragmatic level, thirty interviewees or 66.66 percent of the interviewees spoke of wanting to “be independent, running their own businesses” (mentioned forty-one times); they felt that “they have more freedom”.

It is also worthy to note that less than half, that is, 20 interviewees or 44.44 percent of the interviewees claimed that the sense of unity accounts for Kazakhstanis being resilient. Here, we can safely say that the Republic is still young in nation-building, and it takes time to foster or spur the people together. In any case, several factors that are unique to Kazakhstan, its land, and its history, unite its people. Kazakhstanis are proud of the country’s abundant natural resources, agricultural potential, and natural beauty. The people are also united in their shared history as a neglected republic during the Soviet years (<http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/kazakh-culture>). Besides, Low (2017; 2017a) also highlighted that the value of unity among the Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis pushes or steers the value of “being resilient”. When the people are united, resilience certainly grows. The Great Chinggis Khan often stressed on unity among his people.

To Chinggis Khan, a single people are like a single arrow, but many tribes combined become powerful; they become like a quiver of arrows. The latter is stronger. Teamwork and solidarity, as the Mongolian saying – “Union is source of success (Evlevelbutne)” goes, was therefore preferred. Teamwork is indeed a way of life and a critical component of work-life in modern organizations. And team leadership is critical for organizational growth. Successful leaders develop and use their effective teams to attain organizational (national) goals. (Lussier & Achua, 2007, also cited in Low, 2009, p. 80;Low, 2017.).

The interviewees expressed the various ways that make Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis resilient, and these can be summarized as in Table II and as shown in Figure 1.

Table II. The ways that make Kazakhstanis resilient with the number and percentage of respondents having these perceptions.

What makes Kazakhstanis resilient?	No. of respondents	Percentage
<i>Key answers:</i>		
Strongly swayed by the Republic’s determination to be independent (pre-1991)	45	100
Geographic and climatic conditions (cold long winters, short summers)	42	93.33
Kazakhstan is a landlocked country	42	93.33
Wanting to grow	42	93.33
Strongly influenced by the Republic’s vulnerabilities	41	91.11
“Run own business independently”	38	84.44
Keen on learning and self-improve to secure good careers	37	82.22
Kazakh’s rich traditions and ways	35	77.77
“Push or pull” by the President’s vision 2030/ Strategy Kazakhstan 2050	30	66.66
The value of diversity	29	64.44
Openness to new opportunities (which is the heritage of nomad culture)	25	55.55
Sense of unity	20	44.44

5. Analysis and discussion

5.1 Resilience among Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis

Twenty-three interviewees opined that, “we’re warriors; we are resilient” (mentioned 23 times). Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis are warriors and not worriers (Low, 2017).

Interestingly, several interviewees, many aged 45 to 60 years, expressed this, “Kazakhstanis just have to be resilient, is there a choice?” Several interviewees spoke of “being landlocked” and squeezed between two giants, Russia to the North and China to the East.

“We’ve to be resilient.” Indeed today’s “much political will exist” (several interviewees’ input; mentioned 34 times). The political will is still there, and it is very strong. In the past, seemingly Kazakhstan had been changed by the Soviet Union; its people looked and acted differently and its language had partially been neglected; however, the Kazakh people were still proud of their history and their heritage (<http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Kazakhstan.html>).

5.2 Resilience and Kazakhs’ traditions and ways

Kazakhstan is a land of extremes – cold in winter, hot in summer; the Kazakhs have faced for millennia and still face today: little arable land, scarce water resources, extreme climate conditions. (<http://www.nowruzinternational.org/regions/central-asia/kazakhstan/kazakhs/essays/1>), and to this author, its geography and climate also make the citizens tough. Kazakhstan, the land of the great Steppes and a landlocked country, is resilient; the Kazakhstanis are tough people. Historically, it is known that the Kazakhs came from the great Chinghis Khan and from a warrior race.

The Kazakhs can be said to be resilient people (Low, 2017). Traditionally, the Kazakhs are nomadic and the young males have to tend to sheep (Kazakh: Koi jasy). Teenagers had to be able to graze a flock of sheep in rainy, windy, or sunny weather, as well as to protect them from wolves and wild dogs. This was a difficult task, but the ultimate task for a young Kazakh male (Ashalova, 2002).

Guarding (Kuzet) was challenging in olara (the interval of time between the end of the preceding and the beginning of the coming month) and kuzu (the time of shearing). This was a period that hungry wolves might attack the sheep; a time guards did not have time to joke. The guards would also set traps and dig holes; such guarding would show courage and carefulness (Ashalova, 2002).

“Die-hard” (interviewees’ inputs; mentioned 40 times), Kazakhs’/ Kazakhstanis’ resilience can also be, in some ways, seen in modern times through the transformation of the abandoned Soviet towns (Russian: zabroshennyegoroda) after independence; several of them such as Chilik (<https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1411592>; <http://www.omskmap.ru/point/kydykchilik/lore/184>) and Zhanatas (<http://www.unikaz.asia/ru/content/istorii-kazahstanskih-gorodov-zhanatas>; Low, 2018, forthcoming) rejuvenated and grow into “new” towns.

5.3 Resilience and women

Women too were important to survival in nomadic culture, and required to know how to ride and fight. The generations of ancestors are especially revered or respected, the legends of their wisdom and courage are still told in epics by Kazakh bards called zhirau

(<http://www.nowruzinternational.org/regions/central-asia/kazakhstan/kazakhs/essays/1>).

“If you look at a modern Kazakh woman you will see a strong woman,” expressed one interviewee). “The typical Kazakh/ Kazakhstani woman would have these qualities: she graduates from a university, she has a stable job, family and children. Of course, there are many women who stay at home and look after the children, while their husbands earn money, but more often one will see working women with a family. Indeed some of these women are very good leaders.” Another interviewee indicated that, “Although Kazakh society is dominated by men, women play active role in all spheres of life, at all levels, but mainly occupy the average rank in the hierarchical staircase.”

Several post-graduate qualified women interviewees stressed that Kazakh women today are “women who are pushed by personal growth” and wanting to grow themselves; they are tough. Many have “the inner will to develop” (mentioned twenty times). These match with what were stated in Low (2017). Today’s Kazakhstani womenfolk, an important part and force, should be better tapped and be incorporated into the Republic’s workforce participation for its economic growth and development. Low (2007a, pp. 690) further stated that mentoring and coaching too can be used as part of diversity management to promote the employment of women, breaking the glass ceiling and training them for higher posts (Dessler, 2005; Low, 2007a) within the organizations. Networking helps too (Dessler, 2005, Low, 2007a). Of significance, the local women can also network, and join the women networking groups such as the Almaty International Women Association (AIWA). And all these add on to the women’s strengths as well as the Republic’s resilience.

5.4 Resilience in terms of the value of diversity

64.44 percent of the interviewees also spoke of the country’s resilience; some stated that “historically, we’ve been open to outsiders”, “foreigners are welcome and these contribute our wanting to learn, being keen to learn, learning new experiences(, and growing),thus making us resilient” This fits aptly with what has been indicated in Low’s (2007a, p. 690) article.

Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic Republic (Low, 2017; 2007a). Over the past two hundred years the region attracted many Russians and Ukrainians moving into the empire’s frontiers, and in the Soviet era it became home to whole populations exiled by Stalin, including Chechens, Meskhetian Turks, Tatars, Koreans and Germans (<http://www.nowruzinternational.org/regions/central-asia/kazakhstan/kazakhs/essays/1>). Low (2007a, p. 694) also highlighted the following pointers:

Kazakhstan (too) can enjoy... the melting pot edge. Basically, Kazakhstani people can in fact tap their ethnic diasporas, networking and relationship-building. What is true for Singapore with the various ethnic Singaporeans (the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians) – through their respective trade chambers – tapping the rich ethnic connections globally for mutual benefits... can also be used by Kazakhstan. In other words, the diversity and the presence of the various ethnic groups can be a boon: Just like the Koreans who develop good ties with the South Koreans; ethnic Russians can also connect well with the Russians in Russia. Recently, Pyatyorochka, Russia’s largest retailer has announced its’ opening in Almaty (Sadatov, 2004, cited in Low, 2007a).

“Kazakhstan Inc.”, a network of Kazakhstan’s major ethnic trade associations and chambers such as the European Business Association of Kazakhstan (Eurobak) and Union of Film Makers may thrive on collaborative efforts to boost the Republic’s economic growth; diversity and networking then can be seen in the big picture and work to the Republic’s advantage. The value of diversity too has its benefits when it comes to the nation’s education.

One of Kazakhstan’s tertiary institutes, Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP), the premier English language University, located in Almaty, has one of its formal statements that reads as “Feeling and understanding the difference; the difference is indeed obvious” (KIMEP, 2004 brochures/ Low and Bergeneva, 2005, cited in Low, 2007a). Here, the difference can be interpreted as diversity. Most of its faculty members are recruited and selected from abroad; and they are trained abroad too; these coincide with the points raised by Wagner and Hollenbeck (2002, cited in Low, 2007a) in capitalizing on diversity. There is a foreign faculty, but exchanged programmes are also held for local staff, and most are sent to America and other universities to be trained. Its diverse faculty also teaches in English and an American style of education... (Low and Bergeneva, 2005, cited in Low, 2007a).

Besides, one big advantage from valuing diversity is the break or prospect to grow the employee and the organizational potential. This means higher morale; after all, people feel valued for what they bring to the organization. It also creates improved relationships at work, because people obtain the skills to identify, understand and accept cultural differences (Low, 2007a, p. 695; Low, 2017; Low, 2017b). Growing employee skills and valuing diversity have become a bottom-line business issue. The researchers would argue that other than the above benefits, like one Singapore example, it proves that having a cosmopolitan melting pot helps, the foreign professionals or experts are wanted to meet shortfalls or deficits in local manpower and to jump-start new economic plans (Low, 2007a, p. 695, Low, 2017; Low, 2017b).

5.5 Psychological resilience

President Nursultan Nazarbayev successfully moved the capital from Almaty to Astana in 1997, in part to stifle a nascent Russian separatist movement (Abizaid, 2017). And the activity of 15 terrorist organizations identifying themselves as Islamic was outlawed; Islamic fundamentalism has not gained wide support in the Republic (Edelbay, 2013).

Traditionally, the Kazakhs are free from religious fanaticism. Kazakh religious tolerance helped peaceful coexistence of various religions (Edelbay, 2013). Where “psychological resilience” is concerned (should there be a terrorist attack), it appears that the government has it much in control. Abizaid (2017) spoke of Nazarbayev’s administration as stable (that denotes resilience), and it has been able to contain the ethnic, religious and economic strife that has led to the rise of Islamic extremism in other Central Asian republics. Connected to this, several interviewees expressed that “the President has been pushing for a stronger, progressive and more stable Kazakhstan”; “he is a good leader” (mentioned 34 times). These tie-in with Noor’s (2013) point that “President Nazarbayev was ranked as one of the top five great leaders of world whose contribution has led their country to the highest level of development”.

Although a strong need exists for the people to know or be assured of the political succession, to the researchers, symbols or icons are there to strengthen the people’s mental or spiritual anchors. Several interviewees spoke of “many Kazakhs own horses and keep pictures of them in their houses or offices”, “yurts are important symbols too, reflecting of our formally nomadic lives is the yurt, a Central Asian dwelling resembling a tepee... transportable and utilitarian on the harsh Central Asian steppe”. These symbols and icons (see also <http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/kazakh-culture>; <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Kazakhstan.html>) are necessary to boost the mental or psychological resilience. Of significance too, *Forbes* reported that in Astana, from the Central Concert Hall shaped like the national instrument, the *dombra*, to Khan Shatyr mall built to resemble a nomadic yurt, the city captures the desires of a leader, and Kazakhstanis attempting to construct a national heritage from the ruins of a nomadic and Soviet past (Abizaid, 2017).

5.6 The other side of the coin

Having said all these, on the flip side, there are indeed mitigating factors that show Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis are becoming less resilient.

Indeed, there is a need for Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis to toughen up. It can be argued that there is too much reliance on the Government as “the father leader” as coined by Low (2007b; 2006).

Here, the Economist (2006, p. 13) reported of “soft paternalism”, and the government appeals to the citizenry, nudging them to do things that are best in their interests. Since its independence in 1991, almost everything (such as internal security, national security, environment, infrastructure, education, tourism, business development, healthcare, housing and even old-age security) has been taken care of by the Kazakhstani Government. So, in a way, one can carefully say that it appears perhaps natural for the people to take things for granted; and these with nurturing parents and a fatherly government. One can suppose that these can be seen as presently, even in the near future, as threatening the resilient make-up of the Kazakhstanis.

5.7 A cause for concern?

Be it as it may be, the trend is still worrying, with some existing cause of concern. Some interviewees even expressed that “some Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis are merely interested to make money or be wealthy and to show off”. If this is so, the materialism and greed may set in, and this can certainly be bad for the Kazakhstani society. Besides, as life, living and lifestyle gets more comfortable, people can and do get soft – as this can be seen in history when the Mongols and the Manchus were ruling China; they became soft when they adopted a more sedentary, inactive lifestyle.

Nonetheless, like a ship’s anchor, the Government has played a crucial pro-active role as can be seen from President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Vision 2050, it has created “a solid pathway for the people of Kazakhstan to foster forward their dream of becoming one of the greatest nations of the world” (Noor, 2013). Accordingly, Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 “highlighted long-term strategies to achieve these goals and takes a pragmatic approach in detailing each segment of social, economic, strategic and cultural plan while providing effective mechanisms for achieving progress in the face of domestic, regional and international challenges” (Noor, 2013).

One interviewee stressed that “when you have an education, nobody can take it away from you”; education can, as such, build in some form of [mental] resilience among the people. While the economy is being strengthened, it is worthy to note that through education as in Strategy Kazakhstan 2050, the people could also get smart and trained, sharpen their skills and better their mental resilience while having jobs and being employed [They can enjoy thus lifetime employability]. OECD (2016) mentioned the need for continuing efforts in adapting the education and training systems, with the need to upgrade technical and vocational training system as well as to create sector-specific training centres with linkages to industry. A number of American-style universities are also growing, and these include the Kazakh-American University and the Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering or KazGASA. Of special mention is the Nazarbayev University which is a modern and rapidly growing university initiated by the President of Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev; he is seeking to promote a qualitative leap forward in the preparation of the next generation of national technical and scientific elites to assist in the country’s industrial-innovative development (Topuniversities.com, 2017).

6. Limitations and benefits of the study

In conducting this study, one of the key limitations is the time and cost constraint; hence, additional interviews or focus group studies have not been made. Perhaps, the sample size of 45 persons limits depth of analysis. As in Low (2002), one of the findings, and a typical limitation that most researchers face, is that there might be occasions when the interviewees were not as totally forthright as the researcher would have liked them to be in their answers. Possibly the interviewees regarded those questions as sensitive ones, particularly if they involved the effects of politics, Government rule and the Department of State Security. Justifiably, one needs to be, or at least sound, politically correct. This could have happened. The researchers have, in a way, factored this in – it was expected to happen – and the researchers would suggest and propose that further research consider this. In business, being resilient is vital since it gives the people the necessary warrior spirit. For its greater survival, Kazakhstan needs to better compete with other countries. The present study confirms Kazakhstanis’ subscription to “wanting to learn and grow” and being resilient; the study is beneficial since Kazakhstanis, as a nation, can now know where they stand. Besides, they may be afraid to fail, but they do not stop at there. As one interviewee puts it, “they can reinforce and spur themselves by visioning, planning and taking action via President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Vision 2030/ Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 to attain ‘peace, development and progress’.”.

7. Conclusions

Overall, Kazakhstanis can be assessed as resilient, and such a value or a conviction held can be factored as an asset to Kazakhstanis and to the Republic as a whole. Although there are some dampening factors such as increasing materialism and showing-off, Kazakhs/ Kazakhstanis do “work hard”, “always seeking to succeed”.

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