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KAZAKHSTAN AS AN EDUCATION HUB: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine how international cooperation contributes to strengthening Kazakhstan's position as an educational hub. Although global academic partnerships are widely recognized major pillars of higher education modernization, few studies have explored Kazakhstan's strategic positioning and the management mechanisms supporting its internationalization efforts. This study introduces a novel comparative framework analyzing how Kazakhstan's internationalization strategies differ from regional counterparts and evaluates the governance mechanisms shaping its academic partnerships.

The methodology consists of a mixed-method approach, including statistical analysis, comparative assessment of universities rankings, as well as content analysis of academic reports. It uses a pragmatic research framework that combines quantitative and qualitative insights in understanding international cooperation: however, its impact faces challenges, including the limitations of secondary data since they can hardly showcase some of the vital institutional obstacles surrounding global academic collaboration.

The novelty lies in the systematic evaluation of management strategies that further international partnerships in higher education in Kazakhstan. In contrast to past studies that largely dealt with the overall consequences of internationalization, this study additionally explores feedback mechanisms and strategic approaches that enable and enhance global engagements for universities.

The findings show international partnerships improve the quality of education, curriculum development, influence research output, and attract foreign students and faculty. The study reveals that Kazakhstani universities are expanding their international networks even further despite the bureaucratic barriers and unequal institutional participation in international partnerships.

This research contributes to the current discourse on higher education internationalization by means of taking Kazakhstan as a concrete case to demonstrate how targeted management strategies could make national education systems stronger in developing countries. Findings suggest specific practices for universities to enhance competitiveness and ensure sustainable growth in international academic cooperation.

Key words: education hub, higher education institutions, international cooperation, Kazakhstan, academic networks.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, international cooperation has turned out to be one of the driving forces of higher educational development, which facilitates knowledge exchange, joint research, and academic mobility for universities worldwide. Globalization of education systems requires adjustments toward the increasingly evolving academic and technological landscape. As part of this global trend, Kazakhstan is increasingly integrating into the international educational space. This process presents both challenges and opportunities that shape the country's higher education landscape. Its universities readily engage in academic partnerships with foreign institutions that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, methodologies, and technologies. This also plays an important role in enhancing quality education and research alongside Kazakhstan's broad goals for foreign academic programs.

Despite the increasing volume of literature on international cooperation in education, relatively few comprehensive studies focus on Kazakhstan's role as an educational hub. International partnerships are considered a key mechanism for improving the quality of education by promoting knowledge exchange and stimulating innovation, but a structured analysis to propose Kazakhstan's strategic positioning in global higher education remains lacking. Understanding contemporary trends, challenges, and opportunities in international collaboration is crucial for strengthening the global positioning of Kazakhstani universities.

Apart from improving academic quality, international cooperation encourages scientific research and innovation in Kazakhstan. The partnerships with foreign institutions include access to advanced technology and methodologies aimed at enhancing the national research potential within the country. Wider collaborative projects with Europe and Asia facilitate the adoption of advanced technologies for sustainable development and information technology-related areas. This illustrates Kazakhstan's growing influence on the international academic and research landscape, strengthening its position as a leading higher education hub in the region.

International student recruitment has a significant impact on raising the quality of education while also laying the foundation for long-term diplomatic and economic relationships with host nations. Graduates study abroad as "goodwill ambassadors," enhancing bilateral relations and building global academic and professional connections [1]. Hence, international educational collaboration is not just an academic process but also a strategic policy instrument to supplement the country's economic growth, cultural exchange, and diplomatic prowess on the global stage.

Kazakhstan's rise to become an educational link embraces not merely its academic pursuit but also the ability to project cultural diplomacy soft power. Combining into the educational program the cultural traditions of Kazakhstan builds an identity of a unique and diverse nature to the international student, which would enable an enhanced understanding of the region. Significantly, this brings to life the engagement between education and diplomacy, a dimension of literature often overshadowed by the scanty repository of knowledge. By constructing an appreciation of Kazakhstan's educational anatomy and forging an intercultural exchange, Kazakhstan's education systems allow the fusion of global academic appointments and Central Asian traditions. The growing concern for international cooperation in higher education has been mirrored by only a few studies addressing the governance mechanisms that enable Kazakhstan to play the role of "an educational hub". This research intends to fill this gap by analyzing management strategies that enhance international cooperation.

The purpose of the research is to examine how international cooperation strengthens Kazakhstan's position as an educational hub. This study introduces a novel comparative framework analyzing how Kazakhstan's internationalization strategies differ from regional counterparts and evaluates the governance mechanisms shaping its academic partnerships. Effective management includes strategic planning, coordination of academic mobility programs, and developing institutional policies that support sustainable international partnerships. The research investigates how academic projects, international programs, and institutional partnerships enhance education quality, promote mobility of students and academic staff, attract foreign students and faculty, and foster collaborations with leading universities around the world.

The objectives for achieving these goals include:

- analyze the monitoring of international educational initiatives for 2023, revealing the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's strategies in improving the quality of education;
- examine the impact of international cooperation on the development of educational programs in Kazakhstan, including participation in global academic projects and exchanges;
- analyze reports and statistical data to determine the significance of international cooperation in education in Kazakhstan and assess its impact on integration into the global education system;
- compare Kazakhstan's university rankings for 2024 to confirm the country's status as an educational hub in Central Asia, including analysis with neighboring countries.

This study investigates how different theoretical frameworks are helpful in understanding international cooperation in higher education. According to Goldin and Katz, human capital investment through higher education is one of the major determinants of economic growth and labor competitiveness in a country [2]. Their research suggests that international academic mobility helps in skill acquisition and knowledge transfer. In Kazakhstan, the recent rise in foreign partnerships and dual-degree programs supports this assertion. As

seen from the data provided by the 2023 Monitoring of International Activities of Kazakhstani Universities, student and faculty mobility is increasing substantially on an annual basis, which contributes to human capital formation and, consequently, strengthens Kazakhstan's position as a regional education hub. Rovito, Kaushik, and Aggarwal argue that the presence of international students and researchers in a country significantly contributes to that country's research output and worldwide academic reputation [3]. Their study established international talent's role in innovation and institutional prestige within the US higher education setup. Findings align with the situation in Kazakhstan. Similarly, alongside the growth of academic mobility programs, the attraction of foreign faculty members is considered key. As per the 2023 Monitoring of International Activities of Kazakhstani Universities, the number of international students and faculty members has been steadily increasing, cementing the country as a regional education hub and sharpening its research potential.

There has been increasing interest among the academic community regarding international cooperation in higher education. This growing interest comes from making deeper qualitative insights into valid emerging dynamics of global education, as far as their role in national standards in research order, institutional competition, and academic innovation is concerned.

Literature review. International cooperation has played an important role in the development and modernization of higher education in Kazakhstan. These findings are supported by many research studies and analytical reviews. However, this research narrows down its focus to broad trends in the internationalization process. Despite the growing body of work on higher education in Central Asia, studies specifically addressing Kazakhstan's management strategies for international partnerships remain scarce. The review clustered the related literatures into three themes: internationalization as a tool for modernization, regional cooperation and global integration, and higher education as a strategic development tool.

- Theoretical perspectives on higher education expansion and globalization.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation of this study, two key concepts in higher education research are integrated: Trow's Model of Higher Education Expansion and Altbach's Theories on Globalization in Higher Education.

Based on Trow's model, the development of higher education systems can be traced through three phases of progress: elite, mass, and universal access [4]. This paradigm is very relevant to Kazakhstan, as the country aspires to become an educational hub. Kazakhstan's transition from limited access to massification has been driven by increasing participation in joint degree programs and international collaborations. The country's growing engagement in global academic networks aligns it with broader trends in higher education expansion. However, as Altbach suggests, globalization is another critical perspective for analyzing Kazakhstan's integration into international academic networks [5]. Altbach argues that globalization has reinforced the dominance of certain academic systems, largely due to increasing student and scholar mobility. Kazakhstan's international cooperation efforts are shaped by this dynamic, as the country seeks to strengthen its position within the global education landscape. By establishing partnerships with leading universities, Kazakhstan aims to enhance its academic profile and facilitate knowledge transfer. However, Altbach also highlights challenges such as dependency on dominant higher education models and the risk of academic inequality. These issues are particularly relevant to Kazakhstan, as the country seeks to balance internationalization with the development of a distinct national academic identity.

Most of the existing research on internationalization of higher education in Central Asia is focused on developed countries and specific studies addressing Kazakhstan's aspirational goal of being an educational hub are limited. In particular, detailed analysis of international cooperation management mechanisms in Kazakhstani higher educational institutions and their regional specifics are lacking. There are insufficient studies on universities' strategic approaches to the development of international partnerships, as well as their impact on academic mobility, research output, and institutional competitiveness.

- Internationalization as a modernization tool.

Kapfudzaruwa examines the internationalization strategies of the Global North and South, emphasizing the influence of economic and political environments [6]. This is consistent with the conclusions of Akhmetova, Shamatov, and Tajik, who contend that the educational frameworks of Central Asian nations are influenced by common regional elements instead of global patterns [7]. Kuzhabekova expands on this by highlighting

internationalization as a crucial method for enhancing Kazakhstan's higher education, especially in training faculty and fostering research partnerships [8]. In this vein, Ambasz et al. illustrate also that regional integration improves the quality of education and research output and is consistent with Kazakhstan's ambitions to become an educational hub [9]. Although these studies examine general patterns in internationalization, they do not provide a comprehensive evaluation of the institutional policies and governance structures that underpin enduring international partnerships. Research is required to investigate how universities in Kazakhstan formulate, execute, and assess their international collaboration strategies in real-world scenarios.

– Regional Cooperation and Global Integration.

Kazakhstan's entry into the areas of education in Central Asia has been highlighted by Zhakyanova and Baisultanova, who analyzed the way it acted in promoting educational connectivity with Europe [10]. Building on this, Marinoni and Bartolome expand the discussion by emphasizing the role of academic partnerships and international networks in enhancing higher education adaptability, a key aspect of Kazakhstan's global engagement strategy [11].

Bakhtiyarova examines Kazakhstan's use of higher education as a tool of soft power, leveraging academic initiatives for cultural and political influence in Central Asia [12]. This perspective aligns with Hamdullahpur's findings, which highlight the role of international collaborations in facilitating knowledge exchange and fostering intercultural competence — key components of Kazakhstan's global engagement strategy [13]. However, while these studies explore the geopolitical and cultural impact of international partnerships, they do not provide a systematic analysis of how universities manage such collaborations at the institutional level.

While Zinilli et al. [14] focus on the European experience in transnational higher education cooperation and suggest organizational strategies applicable to Kazakhstan, Hwami et al. provide a regional perspective, analyzing recent trends and challenges in internationalization policies across Central Asia [15]. Despite these valuable insights, neither study examines the specific administrative frameworks or policy mechanisms adopted by Kazakhstani universities to sustain long-term international agreements.

– The Strategic Role of Higher Education in Kazakhstan's Development.

Several studies examine higher education reforms in Kazakhstan within the framework of international standards. Nurgalieva and Nygymetov focus on performance evaluation tools, highlighting internationalization as a key driver of university competitiveness and education quality [16]. Expanding on this, Varpahovskis and Kuteleva explore transnational higher education in Kazakhstan, analyzing its intersections with human rights issues and global educational practices [17].

At the policy level, Tajik and Makoelle discuss ways in which integration within global academic networks is necessary for the initiation and advancement of educational reforms and leadership strategies in Kazakhstan [18]. Last, the Monitoring of International Activities of Kazakhstan's HEIs in 2023 confirms the increase of global partnerships in reinforcing their effect on modernization and competitiveness in universities [19].

Thus, this study aims to fulfil the aforementioned gap by examining how international academic initiatives leveraged in Kazakhstan support the country's strategic positioning in the field of global higher education, providing a basis for more theoretical considerations in the future.

MAIN PART

Methods. This research is a mixed-method study supported by quantitative and qualitative analysis to evaluate the impacts of international cooperation on higher education in Kazakhstan. A mixed-method approach was applied, integrating a statistical assessment of international partnerships, content analysis of higher education policies.

The study follows a pragmatic research philosophy, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a balanced approach to evaluating international cooperation in higher education.

The data for the analysis comes primarily from secondary data sources, including the 2023 Monitoring of International Activities of Kazakhstani Universities, statistical reports, and international rankings (e.g., QS World University Rankings 2024). The study further explores the management strategies employed by universities in boosting international cooperation. This was conducted by means of content analysis of university internationalization strategies, comparative to partnership agreements, student exchange data,

and institutional policies that were considered. Such an undertaking gives insight into how effective these governance mechanisms are in assisting with the management of their international collaborations.

Correlational analysis and statistical modeling were employed to assess the impact of international agreements on educational quality. Key variables included the number of partnerships, joint degree programs, faculty exchanges, and student mobility. The statistical models were designed to identify significant trends and potential causal relationships between internationalization efforts and university performance.

This research acknowledges several limitations:

- First, reliance on secondary data may not fully capture the internal administrative and strategic challenges faced by universities.
- Second, while statistical modeling provides valuable insights into trends, it does not account for the decision-making processes behind international partnerships.

Future research could complement this study with expert interviews to explore institutional perspectives on internationalization strategies.

Results and discussion. Kazakhstan has emerged as a regional hub for education, strengthening its influence in Central Asia and beyond through academic cooperation and international partnerships. At the heart of this process lies the capability for international cooperation mediating knowledge-sharing, scholarly research, and increased international visibility for Kazakhstani educational institutions. The development of international academic partnerships is not only a tool for education quality improvement but also a strategic instrument for enhancing Kazakhstan's diplomatic and economic presence in the region.

This drive toward deeper integration is being powered in large part by the expansion of dual degree programs and collaborative research. Such initiatives align with the Network Economy Theory, which emphasizes the role of interconnected institutions in fostering knowledge exchange and innovation. Programs like these stand to overhaul Kazakhstan's educational system while elevating Kazakhstan's profile in the global academic community. These initiatives contribute to a more competitive and internationally integrated higher education sector.

A notable example is the IDEA (Internationalization through Digital Education in Asia and Caucasus), founded by Prof. Dr. H.-K. Brauweiler at the West Saxon University of Applied Sciences in Zwickau, serves as an excellent example of a successful international collaboration. Funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the program seeks to improve digital education opportunities throughout Asia and the Caucasus. The program includes online courses, virtual mobility, and joint degree programs in management and applied computer science, allowing students and faculty to develop essential skills and cross-cultural competencies. It also encourages academic networking by providing grants to support international conferences, collaborative research projects, and digital learning materials. This reinforces the internationalization of higher education and strengthens the region's stature as a center for educational development.

According to the Analytical Reference: Results of the Monitoring of International Activities of Universities in 2023 [19], 51 Kazakhstani universities, in collaboration with partner institutions, will implement 212 dual degree programs, representing a 12% increase compared to 2022, when 195 programs were offered. Of the total number of programs, 143 are delivered in Russian, accounting for 22% of the overall total.

Among the 51 higher education institutions participating in the program, 8 are national universities implementing 115 programs, 20 are public institutions with 59 programs, 9 are joint-stock universities offering 19 programs, 14 are private universities also with 19 programs, and 1 is an international higher education institution with one program [19].

The largest number of students enrolled in dual degree programs is concentrated at the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (353 students), Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (288 students), Aktobe Regional University named after K. Zhubanov (286 students), North-Kazakhstan University named after M. Kozybaev (191 students), KBTU (145 students), Kazakh State Law University (79 students), and Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University (59 students) [19].

Kazakhstan's universities are increasingly attracting foreign students and faculty, particularly from neighboring countries, thereby fostering cultural and academic exchanges. The effective management of international cooperation is contingent upon financial sustainability, administrative efficiency, faculty

engagement, and government regulations, among others. Additional challenges include bureaucratic access regarding visa processing, differences in accreditation standards, and limited institutional capacity for international program management. Explicit governance structures and investment in international office development allow universities to perform better in terms of global engagement and international rankings. In this context, educational programs developed in collaboration with leading global universities play a significant role in enhancing the international appeal of Kazakhstani education. This endeavor contributes to solidifying the country's position as a center for scientific research and innovation.

As shown in table 1, Kazakhstan leads Central Asia in the number of universities included in the QS World University Rankings [20]: Asia 2024 and the positions of its leading universities. The country is represented by 34 universities, two of which are in the top 100: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in 29th place and L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in 71st place. These results highlight Kazakhstan's growing reputation in higher education, driven by international collaborations, academic mobility programs, and strategic initiatives aimed at improving global competitiveness [20].

Table 1 – Comparison of Central Asian Countries in QS World University Rankings: Asia 2024

Indicator	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan
Number of Universities in Ranking	34	14	5	2	1
Average Ranking	254	357	425	478	485
Universities in Top 100	2 (KazNU named after al-Farabi — 29, ENU named after L.N. Gumilyov — 71)	0	0	0	0
Ranking Range	29–480	280–480	410–490	460–490	480–500
Number in Top 200	5	0	0	0	0
Features	High level of universities in top 100 and top 200 recognized in Asia	Developing system, gradual improvement	Presence in the ranking with lower positions	Limited representation, only a few universities	Weak representation, only one university
Note – Compiled by the authors based on the QS World University Rankings: Asia 2024 [20]					

In comparison, Uzbekistan is represented by 14 universities, which are ranked lower, and the country has no representatives in the top 100 universities. Kyrgyzstan has a minimal presence with five universities, which are ranked even lower, indicating existing gaps in academic reputation and limited opportunities for international cooperation. Tajikistan is represented by only two universities with even more modest positions, reflecting current challenges in improving the quality of educational programs and academic reputation in the international arena. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has only one university, which is also one of the lowest among the Central Asian countries [20].

This contrast depicts how Kazakhstan has been successful in leveraging international cooperation not only to create inputs for educational development but also to assure its higher education institutions better standing around the globe. Through its vigorous attraction of students from abroad and academic partners, Kazakhstan continues to position itself as an educational hub within Central Asia and offers competitive programs in accordance with global standards.

Regular monitoring of international activities should aim at up-to-date trends and the perspective of future developments. The 2023 Analytical Report on International Activities of Kazakhstan's HEIs presents key aspects of the ongoing transformation in higher education and summarizes strategic activities of further integration into the global academic community [19].

According to the report, information was received from 103 out of the 119 civil higher education institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, with the exclusion of Nazarbayev University, military academies, and specialized

institutions. This database provides a wide overview of internationalization efforts being undertaken across the country and the starting point for reviewing any measure of efficiency directly linked to various academic cooperation initiatives [19].

Table 2 provides data on the total number of active international agreements at Kazakhstan's HEIs, which stood at 6,044 in 2023 — a 9% decline from 6,650 in 2022. This reduction may be linked to shifts in international policies, economic conditions, and evolving strategic priorities of universities [19].

Table 2 – Total Number of Active International Agreements at Kazakhstani Universities

Year	Total Number of the international agreements
2019	6373
2020	6796
2021	5960
2022	6650
2023	6044
Note – Compiled by the authors based on the source [19]	

The signed agreements encompass various forms of collaboration, including:

- Exchange of experience, teaching, and research staff, as well as graduate and undergraduate students for teaching, research, professional development, internships, and practicums.
- Organization of joint scientific and methodological conferences and seminars, along with participation in events hosted by partners.
- Exchange of publications, scientific materials, and research findings.
- Development of joint cooperation projects and research programs.
- Creation of joint author teams to produce textbooks, monographs, and scientific publications. This cooperation covers educational, scientific, informational, and publishing activities.

Table 3 analyzes the distribution of international agreements in terms of directions. The largest number of agreements is related to the exchange of teaching staff and academic mobility of students (59%). This underlines the importance of academic mobility in the context of international cooperation and internationalization of education in Kazakhstan [19].

Table 3 – Number of the agreements by directions

Direction of the agreement	Number of the agreements
Faculty exchange and student academic mobility	3554
Professional development	312
Cooperative projects	341
Dual and joint degree programs	288
Cooperative research	1539
Note – compiled by the authors based on the source [19]	

At the same time, there is insufficient development of areas related to joint research and educational programs, which may indicate the need to strengthen work in these areas. It is important to note that successful internationalization requires not only a quantitative increase in international agreements but also their qualitative content. It is necessary to expand bilateral programs that ensure not only the education of students but also the active participation of HEIs in international scientific and educational projects.

According to the Analytical Reference: Results of the Monitoring of International Activities of Universities in 2023 [19], 81 universities in Kazakhstan participated in 321 international projects with foreign organizations and partners in 2023, reflecting a slight decrease from 2022 (363 projects). Among these, 159 were scientific projects (down from 167 in 2022, a decrease of 4.8%) and 163 were educational projects (down from 196 in 2022, a decrease of 16.8%). This trend points to a shift in international cooperation focus, with a particular emphasis on projects in health, education, international relations, and technical and agricultural fields [19].

The Erasmus+ program remains the leading program for Kazakhstani universities: 59 universities are involved in 164 projects under this program. The main partners include EU funds, Asian countries, the Association of Asian Universities "TRIGGER", as well as UN organizations and government programs of countries such as the USA, China and Turkey. It should also be noted that the British Council supports 10 Kazakhstani universities within the framework of the projects "Interlink" and "Creative Spark", aimed at the development of university partnership strategies and entrepreneurial skills [19].

The leading position in the scientific sphere is occupied by Al-Farabi KazNU, which implemented 35 scientific projects, increasing the indicators by 34.6% compared to 2022 (26 projects). Among the educational projects in 2023, Narkhoz University, Al-Farabi KazNU and KazNAIU are leading, demonstrating growth and stability of participation in joint educational initiatives [19].

In 2023, 31 Kazakhstani organizations of higher and postgraduate education are implementing joint educational programs with foreign partners, which demonstrates growth compared to last year. These include 4 national universities, 9 universities with the status of non-profit joint stock companies (2022 - 4), 6 universities in the form of joint stock companies (2022 - 2), 10 private universities (2022 - 4) and 1 international university. The total number of joint educational programs reached 84 compared to 65 in 2022, including 62 bachelor's programs (2022 - 35), 23 master's programs (2022 - 22) and 1 doctoral program established with international partners, reflecting the growing interest in international cooperation and exchange of experience [19].

Current data on the participation of 81 Kazakhstani universities in 321 international projects and the implementation of 84 joint educational programs with international universities are key indicators that Kazakhstan is developing as an educational hub, attracting interest and strengthening integration into the global educational ecosystem [19].

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of active international agreements among different types of Kazakhstani higher education institutions in 2023, highlighting variations across national, public, autonomous, and private universities [19].

The distribution of international agreements by types of Kazakhstani HEIs in 2023 is as follows:

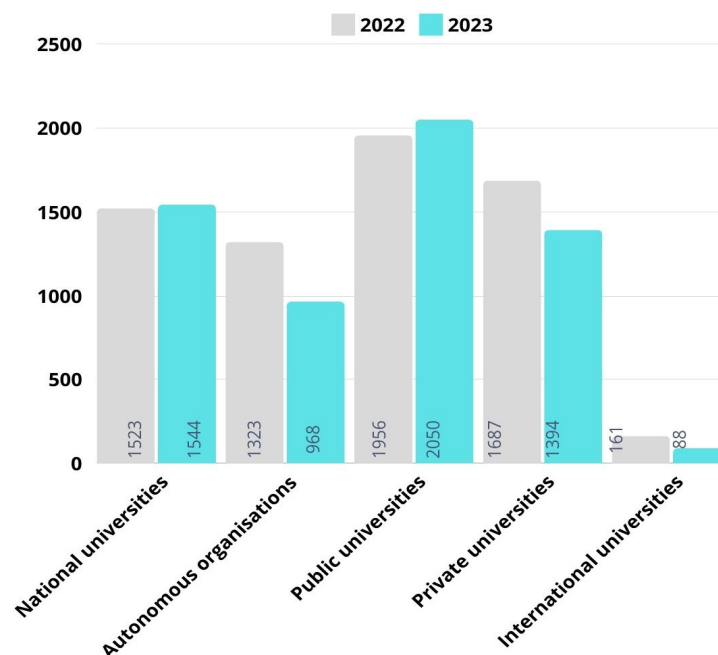


Figure 1 – Number of active international agreements of higher education in Kazakhstan, units

Note – compiled by the authors based on the source [19]

National universities showed a slight increase in the number of agreements, from 1523 in 2022 to 1544 in 2023, reflecting stability and perhaps a more strategic approach to international partnerships. Public universities also showed significant growth, signing 2050 agreements in 2023 compared to 1956 in 2022, which indicates increased activity in establishing international cooperation [19].

In contrast, autonomous organizations and private universities saw a decline in the number of agreements. Autonomous organizations signed 968 agreements in 2023 compared to 1323 in 2022, while private universities signed 1394 agreements compared to 1687 in 2022. The number of agreements involving international universities also decreased, with only 88 agreements in 2023 compared to 161 in 2022 [19].

Despite the overall decrease in the number of international agreements signed compared to the previous year, the increase in activity among public universities indicates a trend that may affect the strategies of autonomous organizations and private universities in the future. Nevertheless, the number of international agreements remains significant, demonstrating the continued interest and activity of Kazakhstani HEIs in international education.

Kazakhstani universities cooperate with educational institutions from 82 countries. Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of Kazakhstan's international agreements, showing that 47% are concentrated in CIS countries. This underscores the importance of regional cooperation and the close ties maintained by Kazakhstan's HEIs with neighboring countries. The 17% decrease in the total number of international agreements necessitates careful analysis. Possible reasons include global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic and political changes in partner countries, and internal reforms in the international cooperation policies of Kazakh HEIs [19].

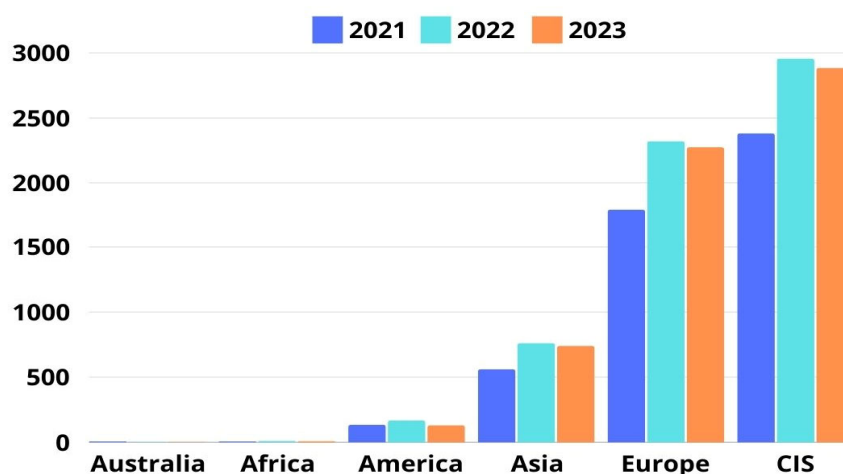


Figure 2 – Number of international agreements by region, units

Note – compiled by the authors based on the source [19]

Europe and Asia exhibit a steady increase in the number of agreements, indicating a high interest in collaboration with these regions. America maintains a stable number of agreements with moderate growth. Africa and Australia have a relatively low number of agreements but show a slight increase in 2023, suggesting the beginning of enhanced engagement with these regions [19].

In recent years, Kazakhstan has been actively attracting the international academic community, turning its educational system into a point of contact between cultures and knowledge. In 2023 alone, the number of centers and representative offices of foreign universities operating on the basis of Kazakhstani universities increased from 10 to 16, which indicates the high attractiveness of the country for international partners. These centers play an important role by supporting the exchange of students, implementation of joint scientific projects and cultural programs. At the same time, Kazakhstani universities are also strengthening their international presence: today 17 Kazakhstani universities have 35 representative offices, branches and offices in 12 countries,

including the USA, Germany, China and Turkey. This trend emphasizes Kazakhstan's strategic aspiration to become an educational bridge uniting East and West, creating conditions for transnational cooperation, cultural diplomacy and sustainable knowledge exchange [19].

International partnerships have become an essential instrument to respond to changing educational demands, enhancing education quality and institutional adaptability. Collaborative programs, exchange of academics and students, and partnerships with various international agencies constitute a more active and responsive education system. Through these initiatives, institutions may communicate best practices, develop innovative curricula, and provide professional development opportunities for their students. In the increasingly competitive global academic landscape, international partnerships position universities more effectively and are thus a strategic tool for strengthening institutional reputation.

The analysis of international activities of Kazakhstani HEIs in 2023 brought to light premises for pride and concern alike. On the positive side, national and public universities provide stable growth in international agreements, indicating a more structured and strategic partnership approach. Cooperation with 82 nations emphasizes Kazakhstan's outreach in its academic networks, making it active in the global educational community. On the negative side, the decline of international agreements among the autonomous and private universities indicates the need for this sector to rethink their engagement strategies, or else reduce collaboration may further limit knowledge transfer and research opportunities.

Nevertheless, these elements probably will not impede, but quite on the contrary, will affirm Kazakhstan's qualifications as a prospective regional education resource. The conclusion drawn here is that the decline in agreements does not signify a weakening of international consolidation but represents — the changing face of strategic priorities. The rising number of agreements among national and public universities connotes a more focused, target-based approach to international cooperation, thus fortifying its ambitions in Kazakhstan to expand its presence as a reputable global player through high-impact partnerships.

To emerge as a successful international education hub, several major strategic enhancements are called for in Kazakhstan. One of the foremost priorities is the establishment of a comprehensive governance model for the management of international cooperation. Universities should work on establishing long-term strategies for working together with global partners, to simplify administrative processes for receiving international students and faculty, and earmark specific funds to implement internationalization plans. Improving digital infrastructure to support virtual academic exchanges and joint research programs can enhance Kazakhstan's position as an educational hub. And lastly, monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be put in place to evaluate the impact of international partnerships on institutions' performance and excellence in academia. Stronger infrastructure for international students — providing comfortable living arrangements, student support and orientation, and cultural adaptation programs — is central to attracting and retaining global talent. Also, the internationally experienced faculty increase will improve teaching quality and research capabilities. To gain the best of both worlds, Kazakhstan's universities are also expected to grow with respect to research excellence, increase international publications, and actively engage in global academic networks. Further investment in research and innovation centers will be important in attracting interested students and faculty in modern academic developments.

International partnerships with leading universities and research centers should also be strategically strengthened. The extension of joint programs, dual degrees, and transnational educational projects will establish a strong foundation for global recognition of Kazakhstan. The bureaucratic procedures on enrolling foreign students and hiring international faculty should be streamlined in order to become an important part of fostering international cooperation. Making these procedures easier will positively impact flexibility, enhancing academic exchanges and allowing the Kazakhstani universities to attract top-quality talent in a significantly shorter amount of time.

At the same time, constructing a unique educational identity—that is centered on intercultural dialogues and regional expertise about Central Asia—will put Kazakhstan as a distinctive draw for international students. Drawing attention to the Eurasian perspective in education may lure students hunting for insights into the economics, politics, and cultural dynamics of the region. Broadening the horizon of scholarship programs and research grants for international students and young scholars would even make Kazakhstan more attractive for studies and research.

Altogether, these moves will boost Kazakhstan's international reputation and, in the long run, bring it into its own sustainables as an influential educational center.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that Kazakhstan is, indeed, on its way to strengthening its position as a regional educational hub, attracting foreign students, researchers, and academic partners. The expansion of joint-degree programs and collaborative research projects has indeed played a pivotal role in modernizing Kazakhstani education, elevating the country's global academic standing. Kazakhstan is also featured in Central Asia as a leader in the university rankings indicating its commitment to educational excellence and global collaboration.

However, several challenges remain. Accreditation mismatches, faculty exchange constraints, and administrative barriers in student mobility hinder seamless international cooperation. To address these issues, Kazakhstani universities should prioritize policy standardization in international agreements to streamline bureaucratic processes and enhance institutional efficiency. Additionally, strengthening monitoring mechanisms for internationalization will help universities and policymakers make data-driven decisions and refine their strategic approaches. Future research should also incorporate institutional case studies to examine how governance structures shape the long-term success of academic partnerships. At the same time, continuous efforts are required to expand joint educational programs and collaborative research initiatives, ensuring their long-term effectiveness. Kazakhstani universities should actively seek new avenues for global cooperation and integrate best practices from leading academic institutions worldwide to enhance their international competitiveness. By tackling these challenges, Kazakhstan can ensure not only quantitative growth in international collaborations but also their qualitative impact on higher education development.

The study points out the challenges of minimal resources set aside for international project management and institutional alignment with global educational standards. These have prompted the study to carry this out in line with strategies to strengthen institutional set-up for the quality assurance programs. Successful internationalization is not merely about increasing the number of agreements but also about ensuring their depth and long-term impact on Kazakhstan's modernization and global integration in higher education.

In proceeding to the future, one of Kazakhstan's sustainable development towards establish an educational and scientific center will be the enhancement of international cooperation in substantive research and academic mobility. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms for international activities should also make it possible to make more effective decisions in policy and strategic adjustments.

For Kazakhstan to finally get there as a serious education hub within Central Asia and beyond, it needs to forge deeper international partnerships, increase academic mobility. This needs both to expand the internationalisation agreements' list and to assure high-quality impact on these countries: employing education as a genuine tool for "soft power" to improve a country's global auspices.

So, the development of Kazakhstani higher education into a major educational hub is a complicated and evolving process requiring coordinated action at both national and institutional levels. A continued focus on international interaction, academic excellence, and strong policy implementation would, therefore, serve to further consolidate Kazakhstan's higher education system and its regional and global position in academic participation.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН БІЛІМ БЕРУ ХАБЫ РЕТІНДЕ: ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛДАНДЫРУДЫ СТРАТЕГИЯЛЫҚ БАСҚАРУ

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АНДАТПА

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – халықаралық ынтымақтастықтың Қазақстанның білім беру хабы ретіндегі позициясын нығайтуға қалай ықпал ететінін зерттеу. Жаһандық академиялық серіктестіктер жоғары білім беруді модернизациялаудың негізгі тіректері ретінде кеңінен танылғанымен, Қазақстанның стратегиялық ұстанымы мен оның интернационалдандыру жөніндегі күш-жігерін қолдайтын басқару тетіктерін зерттеулері аз. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстанның интернационалдандыру стратегияларының аймақтық әріптестерінен қалай ерекшеленетінін талдайтын және оның академиялық серіктестігін қалыптастыратын басқару тетіктерін бағалайтын жаңа салыстырмалы құрылымды ұсынады.

Зерттеу әдіснамасы – статистикалық талдауды, университеттердің рейтингтерін салыстырмалы бағалауды, сондай-ақ академиялық есептердің мазмұнын талдауды қамтитын аралас әдісті көздейді. Ол халықаралық ынтымақтастықты түсінудегі сандық және сапалық түсініктерді біріктіретін прагматика-лық зерттеу жүйесін пайдаланады: дегенмен, оның әсері қиындықтарға, соның ішінде қайталама дерек-тердің шектеулеріне тап болады, өйткені олар жаһандық академиялық ынтымақтастыққа байланысты кейбір маңызды институционалдық кедергілерді анық көрсетпейді.

Жұмыстың құндылығы – Қазақстандағы жоғары білім берудегі халықаралық серіктестіктерді одан әрі жалғастыратын басқару стратегияларын жүйелі бағалауда жатыр. Интернационализацияның жалпы салдарын қарастырған алдыңғы зерттеулерден айырмашылығы, бұл зерттеу университеттердің жаһандық өзара әрекеттесуін қамтамасыз етіп, оны күшейтетін кері байланыс механизмдері мен стратегиялық тәсілдерді тереңірек талдайды.

Нәтижелер – халықаралық серіктестіктер білім беру сапасын жақсартатынын, оқу бағдарламаларын әзірлейтінін, зерттеу нәтижелеріне әсер ететінін және шетелдік студенттер мен оқытушылар құрамындарын тартатынын көрсетеді. Зерттеу көрсеткендей, қазақстандық университеттер бюрократиялық кедергілерге және халықаралық серіктестіктерге институционалдық қатысудың теңсіздігіне қарамастан өздерінің халықаралық желілерін одан әрі кеңейтуде.

Бұл зерттеу Қазақстанды ұлттық білім беру жүйелерін дамушы елдерде нығайтуға бағытталған мақсатты басқару стратегияларының нақты мысалы ретінде қарастыра отырып, жоғары білімді интернационалдандыру жөніндегі қазіргі дискурстың дамуына үлес қосады. Нәтижелер университеттердің бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыруға және халықаралық академиялық ынтымақтастықтың тұрақты өсуін қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған нақты тәжірибелерді көрсетеді

Түйін сөздер: білім беру хабы, жоғары оқу орындары, халықаралық ынтымақтастық, Қазақстан, академиялық желілер.

КАЗАХСТАН КАК ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫЙ ХАБ: СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИЕЙ

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель данного исследования – изучить, как международное сотрудничество способствует укреплению позиций Казахстана в качестве образовательного центра. Несмотря на то, что глобальные академические партнерства широко признаны важнейшими опорами модернизации высшего образования, лишь немногие исследования рассматривали стратегическое позиционирование Казахстана и управленческие механизмы, поддерживающие его усилия по интернационализации. Данное исследование представляет новую сравнительную схему, анализирующую, как стратегии интернационализации Казахстана отличаются от региональных аналогов, и оценивающую механизмы управления, формирующие академические партнерства.

Методология состоит из смешанного метода, включающего статистический анализ, сравнительную оценку рейтингов университетов, а также контент-анализ академических отчетов. В работе используется прагматичная исследовательская схема, сочетающая количественные и качественные показатели в понимании международного сотрудничества. Однако ее применение сталкивается с проблемами, в том числе с ограниченностью вторичных данных, поскольку они не могут продемонстрировать некоторые из жизненно важных институциональных препятствий, окружающих глобальное академическое сотрудничество.

Научная новизна заключается в систематической оценке управленческих стратегий, способствующих развитию международного партнерства в сфере высшего образования в Казахстане. В отличие от предыдущих исследований, которые в основном были посвящены общим последствиям интернационализации, в данном исследовании дополнительно изучаются механизмы обратной связи и стратегические подходы, которые обеспечивают и усиливают глобальное участие университетов.

Результаты показывают, что международные партнерства повышают качество образования, улучшают разработку учебных программ, влияют на результаты исследований и привлекают иностранных студентов и преподавателей. Исследование показывает, что казахстанские университеты еще больше расширяют свои международные сети, несмотря на бюрократические барьеры и неравное участие институтов в международных партнерствах.

Данное исследование вносит вклад в актуальный дискурс об интернационализации высшего образования, рассматривая Казахстан как конкретный пример того, как целевые управленческие стратегии могут укрепить национальные образовательные системы в развивающихся странах. Полученные результаты предлагают конкретные практики для университетов, направленные на повышение конкурентоспособности и обеспечение устойчивого роста международного академического сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: образовательный хаб, высшие учебные заведения, международное сотрудничество, Казахстан, академические сети.

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THE ECONOMICS OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN DUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM: ADDRESSING THE NEET CHALLENGE IN KAZAKHSTAN

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the research – The problem of weak engagement of enterprises in the dual education system is relevant in many countries of the world. In this regard, the authors aimed to evaluate the degree of involvement of all stakeholders, their level of interest, and their influence on the dual education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Methodology – The authors used theoretical methods of research to determine the level of involvement of key stakeholders in rolling out the dual education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Researchers utilized data derived from secondary sources provided by the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan «Atameken as well as official statistics from the Republic of Kazakhstan's Bureau of National Statistics».

Originality/value – The article analyses the level of stakeholder engagement in the dual education system and its influence on the youth unemployment rate in Kazakhstan.

Findings – Within the dual education system enterprises play the role of representers of the labor market and also take place as one of the key stakeholders. They not only set their qualification requirements for future employees but also educate young professionals and become a transitional point to working life.

Keywords: dual education system, vocational education, technical and vocational education, stakeholder engagement.