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THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF KAZAKHSTANI STUDENTS

Abstract. The educational programs in Kazakhstan are at a transitional stage, and an aspect of this transition is the internationalization of the university education system to ensure students' competitiveness for global recognition. This study contributes to local internationalization by synthesizing literature on the concept and analyzing the flow of Kazakhstani students over the years. Indeed, the country succeeded in attracting students from other countries, though this was insignificant compared to the mobility of Kazakh students abroad. The highlight of the two strategies employed to improve internationalization is the establishment of foreign centers for study and the recruitment of expatriate scholars in Kazakhstan. Lastly, the use of a foreign language as a means of local internationalization was discussed. At the university level, Kazakhstan may have overrated its proficiency in using English as a working language.

Keywords: student migration, globalization, internationalization, Kazakhstan.

Introduction

Upon the Soviet Union's dissolution, Kazakhstan, along with other countries that emerged after the Soviet Union, faced concurrent requests for economic and political reforms. An identifier of such a transition is evident in the education sector. Therefore, international education programs are perceived as a tool for modernization, enabling Kazakhstan to align with global trends.

The global transition necessitated training professionals across every sphere of life who, upon Kazakhstan's independence, had no option but to work as they had during the Soviet period. It is argued that a hindrance to personnel development and training in Kazakhstan can be traced to the absence of self-sufficiency in the education system (Rustemova et al., 2020).

Hence, internationalization facilitates academic mobility among scholars across countries, promoting knowledge exchange, expertise, and technical know-how. Therefore, an internationalization program through academic mobility introduces many advantages for the nation and institutions of learning.

This forms the basis of this study. Internationalization is a product of globalization, defined as the process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research, and service of institutions (De Wit, 2020).

The aim of placing education on the international scene is to align with identifiers of efficiency and quality in activities of the University as an institution.

The goals to be achieved determines an institution's prestige on international scene, this entails; attraction of international students to grow revenue, expanding universities scope outside regular national base, exposure of researchers, students and teachers to global requirements, strategic partnerships with overseas universities, improvement in quality of education through teacher and student rapport in process of exchange/production of ideas and knowledge.

Economic, global, and technological reasons occasion students' mobility for academic purposes. Over the last decades, it has been observed that a high number of students have moved from the shores of their domiciled countries to study (Weber and Van-Mol, 2023).

At the moment, universities in Kazakhstan are being introduced to the international education services market despite intense international competition among the foremost universities. There is an impending market demand for proficient specialists who drive globalization. It is a duty incumbent upon universities to groom personnel who are highly proficient, qualified, and competitive in skills (Abdimanapov, 2018).

According to Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president of Kazakhstan, the country's competitiveness must be improved. It was suggested that every Kazakh should be equipped with the skills and qualities necessary for the modern age (Nazarbayev, 2017). As noted by Hanson and Sokhey (2020), from 1999 to 2014, 1.6% of Kazakhstan's GDP was spent on education while 12% of the budget on education is committed to Higher Education, in comparison to other countries in the Central Asian region which only commit 1.3% of GDP to education while devoting 8% of budget on education to University Education.

A notable strategy employed by Kazakhstan to improve university education on the international scene was to join the Bologna Process in 2010. Admission to the Western education space was met with exemplary implementation, with foreign policy aimed at ensuring collaboration with Europe by becoming a member of the Organization for World Trade, often referred to as the WTO, and participating in the global market for educational services.

With Kazakhstan being a member of the Bologna process, the central aim of education policy is to ensure future concentration on delivering education that meets standards. As Sperduti (2017) describes, international educational programs are, in some ways, a form of Westernization. However, Kazakhstan's membership in the Bologna process poses several challenges (Temirtassova, 2019).

Internationalization has been described as a double-edged sword, with both positive and negative aspects. As identified by Akinbode et al. (2023), internationalization creates and fosters global social relationships, expands global orientation, ensures collaboration in academic research and improves economic and social benefits.

This study will assess the impact of academic mobility of university educational programs on the competitiveness of Kazakhstani students.

This study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

- How do programs of international universities, international recruitment into faculty, initiatives on mobility and foreign campuses influence the development of capabilities and competitive skills among students in Kazakhstan?
- What is the contribution of international and foreign campuses to supporting student competitiveness in the higher education sector of Kazakhstan?
- How does the development and use of English as a language of instruction affect Kazakhstan students' global competitiveness?

The general focus of the study is to examine the impact of university international education programs on the competitiveness of Kazakhstani students studying in Kazakhstan, with a view to inward academic mobility.

However, the specific objectives are to:

Assess how programs of international universities, international recruitment into faculty, initiatives on mobility and foreign campuses influence the development of capabilities and competitive skills among students in Kazakhstan;

Examine the contribution of international and foreign campuses to supporting student competitiveness in the higher education sector of Kazakhstan;

Evaluate how the development and use of English as a language of instruction affects Kazakhstan students' global competitiveness.

Literature review

Policies on international education relate to activities such as developing curriculum exchange between faculty and students, language and culture training, the enrollment of international students, and research collaboration initiatives. According to Akinbode et al. (2023), internationalization entails inculcating globally acceptable standards into education provision, teaching, and research. The internationalization involves the following aspects: mobility of academic staff; collaboration for conferences and research purposes; establish campus presence across the border; setting the curriculum at par with international standards; development of educational programs; ensuring the domestic curriculum is competitive enough.

The influence of a country's international education programs depends on factors such as the resources engaged. Both students and staff, and the inter-relationship within an institution and among institutions of learning, feel the impact. As explained by Alemu (2018), a country's resources, history, and culture are closely linked to specific institutions of higher learning.

Salman (2023) opined that education is internationalized when there is mobility in academia, which is essential to individual development and career growth, as it enhances students' exposure to and respect for other cultures and helps them seize opportunities to become aware of them.

As stated by Hong et al. (2021), mobility is the capacity to move between places of residence. The reasons and forms of mobility are identified as educational, economic, and geographical. In Rodriguez-Pena's (2022) view, an individual's ability to migrate and adapt easily can be referred to as mobility. Hence, mobility is not only geographical but also social, professional, and cultural.

As stated by Schwieter et al. (2021), the majority of students used to the domestic system of a series of examinations welcomed international students to broaden international rapport and become more enlightened. As suggested by Rodriguez-Pena (2022), the constituents of mobility capital are proficiency in language, family or personal history, a history of mobility, and experience in adaptation, which allow assessment of pre- and post-experience mobility.

Given the identified constraints, there is a gap between local and international students at Kazakhstan's institutions of learning. Temirtassova (2019) concluded that Kazakhstan's education system is developing relative to other countries due to a perceived lack of strategic vision and the resources needed to establish the required difference.

At the levels of educational institutions, internationalization of learning is flourishing. It becomes crucial not to overlook or underrate the results of intercultural and international learning, to place these outcomes in context, to support academic sustenance, and to design evaluations and results that are aligned with local internationalization.

Analyzing internationalization, Kazakhstan, Moldashev, and Tleuov (2022) opined that university policies should focus on securing publications in peer-reviewed international journals indexed in the WoS and Scopus databases. As a result of inadequate research and doctoral student training, the publication requirements for the PhD degree led to non-conformance among students.

Also, PhD postgraduate students with government scholarship opportunities are listed as a requirement; completing studies within the three-year timeframe imposes an unwarranted burden on candidates. The enormous pressure of publication requirements and the duration of sponsorship in Kazakhstan led to unethical practices, dependence on predatory journals, and tainted co-authorship arrangements.

Internationalization in Kazakhstan has most often been a movement towards developing intimate relations with Universities in North America and Western Europe. Despite this, relations with China have been cordial. Border opening enabled two-way migration; migrants from China settled in the Central Asia axis, and students from Central Asia, mostly Kazakhs,

left for China. The migrations play an essential role in how China is perceived. Central Asians who travel to China regularly experience aspects of Chinese culture, exceptional business opportunities, and state-of-the-art technology (Su, 2024).

Interestingly, Kazakhstan faces internationalization in a manner that deviates from China's purpose. Internationalization in Kazakhstan is seen as embracing the North American model, while in China, the goal is to develop a model in a Chinese way to achieve world-class universities. Vergnaud and Palisse (2018) pointed out that Universities in China lead and are at the forefront by competing for the best institutions of learning globally. To achieve this, competitive programs are in place to support the pursuit of becoming the best.

The West drives the Kazakhs' dream of internationalization, and they realize that it is challenging. Kuzhabekova et al. (2022) noted that Western universities that host visiting faculty from Kazakhstan appear to be motivated by profit rather than by a desire to serve humanity through mutual engagement and collaboration.

Competitiveness is conceptualized through three related dimensions in modern research: global capabilities and skill, access to quality educational environments of international standard and international mobility and recognition.

According to Hanson and Sokhey (2020) and Tight (2022), competitiveness is proficiency in English, the ability to speak other languages, skills in intercultural communication, adaptability, and analytical and academic skills aligned with global best practices.

In the view of Tight (2022) and Kuzhabekova & Lee (2020), access to a robust quality educational environment of international standard, exposure to an international curriculum, opportunity to learn from international faculty, involvement in globally recognised integrated programmes and research collaboration in line with global principles.

The positions of Weber & Van Mol (2023) and Akinbode et al. (2023) are that competitiveness is embedded in outbound and inbound mobile academic opportunities, academic network involvement, and globally recognised certification or training.

Materials and methods

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods design that combines quantitative analysis of secondary data (2018–2023) with qualitative content analysis of institutional and policy documents and published research. For convergent design, there was a separate collection of qualitative and quantitative components, analyzed after collection and integrated during interpretation, to answer the research question about the effect of programmes at international universities on students' competitiveness.

Quantitative data were sourced from UNESCO-UIS, which includes statistics on country-level mobility for 2018–2023, the institutional factbook, and reports from the Ministry of Education. The selection of the sources is justified by their consistency and the availability of annual comparable data on the flow of outbound/inbound students, government education expenditures, and the number of international faculty and students.

Qualitative data were sourced from official policy documents, such as the Strategy of Academic Mobility 2012–2020, statements of institutional mission, and descriptions of peer-reviewed programmes and studies on internationalization in Kazakh.

The stated sources provide explanations and context for institutional practices that are not captured by quantitative data. The secondary sources enable triangulation (cross-validation) of trends and help connect policy intentions to observable results in language, mobility, and staffing.

The quantitative component of variables is measured by: inbound mobility in absolute counts of international students registering for studies from 2018 to 2023 in Kazakhstan, outbound mobility in absolute counts of students of Kazakhstani studying out of the country

each year from 2018 to 2023, rate of inward mobility which is the ratio of inbound students to aggregate tertiary registered, where applicable or indicators of adjusted population to support comparison of cross-country, share of foreign faculty which is the percentage of faculty identified as foreign or international where data on institution are available and therefore selected, coverage of English medium program by proxy which is the number of absence or presence of programs that is advertised as medium of English in websites or factbooks of institutions, whereas, where the numbers are not available, qualitative coding is used and expenditure on government education, expressed as % GDP and PPP\$ of yearly expenditure of government on education.

The procedure of quantitative analysis entails:

- descriptive statistics of percentages, rates and annual counts on rates of inbound student growth and rate of inward mobility which calculations define trends from 2018 to 2023;
- trend analysis of year on year change in percentage and rates of compound annual growth which were calculated to indicate mobility and identify phases of decline/acceleration;
- for performance contextualization, there was comparison between rate of Kazakhstan's inward mobility and selected countries in federation of Russia and Central Asia;
- and associating to competitiveness by mapping indicators of quantitative for operationalization of dimensions of competitiveness, such as increase in inbound mobility (increased exposure internationally), sharing of foreign faculty (transfer of knowledge).

The mappings are clearly reported in the results, with each numeric finding attached to at least one sub-dimension of competitiveness.

The procedure for quantitative analysis entails document selection by purposive sampling of selected 8 to 12 documents on policy and institution that are relevant to policy on language and strategy on internationalization; coding by thematic analysis using a priori codes of policy on language, recruitment of faculty, mobility and foreign campuses, with developing sub-codes of accreditation, retention, and alignment of curriculum.

There was line-by-line coding of each document, and summaries generated for each code. Validation was achieved through independent coding of documents by two co-authors, and disagreements were resolved through improving consistency and discussion.

A convergence matrix approach was employed for integration. For each research question, a table is created to place quantitative indicators (counts of mobility, shares of faculty, and use of English as the medium of coverage) in rows, along with qualitative indicators (aims of policy, practices of an institution, and challenges reported).

Divergent, convergent and complementary results were clearly stated and discussed in the results and discussion section. This method establishes quantitative association trends between devices and competitiveness affected by internationalization.

In recognition of the limitations of secondary data (inconsistent institutional disclosures and lag in reporting), there may be sampling bias. To reduce the risk of bias in institutions' indicators and reports, multiple sources were used, and inconsistencies were documented. Where quantitative data are unavailable, such as the precise number of programs using English as a medium at each institution, conservative qualitative coding is used, with uncertainty reported (high, medium, or low) instead of an actual number.

Results

Effect of international university programs, international faculty recruitment, and initiatives on mobility and foreign campuses on the development of capabilities and competitive skills among students in Kazakhstan. There is a steady increase in inbound mobility to Kazakhstan, especially from Asian countries. Though competitiveness is not determined by competitiveness, there is also a contributory role of exposure through multiculturalism, language development, academic networking, and enhanced adaptation. Of

greater significance is outbound mobility, reflecting the growing demand for international exposure among students in Kazakhstan.

For this study, inward movement and outward movement will be referred to as inbound and outbound, respectively. The launch of the Bolashak scholarship program encouraged increased student mobility over the years (Perna, et al., 2015).

It is worth noting that students' migration in Kazakhstan is underdeveloped compared to outbound mobility. There is a low level of recorded student movement, mainly from Central Asia. The Academic Mobility strategy developed in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the period 2012 through 2020 highlighted the importance of balancing outbound and inbound mobility.

Currently, the number of international candidates who came to Kazakhstan to study is 9,078, compared with 48,876 Kazakhstani students studying abroad. Jumakulov and Ashirbekov (2016) gathered that the majority of the students are from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and China.

During the period 2013 through 2019, a total of 4,005 inbound students migrated to study in Kazakhstan. A factor to consider is the affordability of education fees and the cost of living in Kazakhstan relative to European countries (Rustemova et al., 2020).

Table 1 shows a systematic increase in the mobility of inbound students from 2018 to 2023. The majority of international students who arrive in Kazakhstan originate from Asia, with a progression from 2018 through 2023.

Table 1

Trend of inbound student mobility based on geography in Kazakhstan

Year/Region	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Europe	1,261	1,357	1,222	1,258	1,348	1,698
Asia	9,691	8,611	11,286	15,547	12,962	20,970
North America	3	4	11	11	3	10
Africa	3	3	9	30	14	37
Total Number of Students	10,958	9,975	12,528	16,846	14,327	22,715

Source: UIS (2024)

This answers research question 1 and the objective 1 statement regarding the progression of international students in Kazakhstan. Mobility of inbound students is considered a crucial source of diversity and revenue on campus.

The idea of promoting private and public educational institutions in Kazakhstan is attractive to international students (Bayetova, 2019 and Smolentseva, 2020).

In Table 2, inbound mobility is lower than in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. In contrast, the inbound mobility rate is higher in Kazakhstan than in other Central Asian countries, as shown in the table. There is a possibility that the Ukraine war will increase the number of international students in Kazakhstan.

Table 2

Inward rate of mobility in Russia and Central Asia

Indicators	Inward rate of mobility					
Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Uzbekistan	0.26262	0.29043	0.27251	0.21425	0.23362	-
Tajikistan	0.55362	0.8302	0.63215	0.84317	-	-
Turkmenistan	0.1959	-	-	-	-	0.26559
Russian Federation	3.04967	3.43472	3.94274	4.25808	4.54407	-
Kazakhstan	1.50921	1.51531	2.00999	2.21043	2.26755	3.31774
Kyrgyzstan	4.50545	4.79422	5.99593	6.3999	7.5951	8.97558

Source: UIS (2024)

International and foreign campuses have integrated curricula and teaching models. This allows domestic students to learn in line with international academic best practices, in a contemporary research environment, with qualifications recognized globally, thereby strengthening competitiveness.

Internalization of educational programs in Kazakhstan entails developing proactive policies that require in-depth examination. First, establishing foreign institutions and campuses as they are linked to private entities and overseas universities. Secondly, diverse mechanisms enable international academic personnel to work at universities in Kazakhstan. Also, many institutions in Kazakhstan use English as the language of instruction to sustain internationalization.

The third section of this study analyzes the progression of internationalizing education through devised strategies: the establishment of new universities with an international orientation, the recruitment of foreign academic staff, and the gradual adoption of English in education.

The genesis of many universities, as revealed in Table 3, highlights participants' intent to shape internationalized policy through private and public education.

The aim is to ensure an international legacy is laid through improvement in the quality of education.

Table 3

Recent international universities founded in Kazakhstan between 1992 and 2013

Institution	Establishment Year	Dimension Internationally	Geography
Sorbonne-Kazakhstan Institute	2013	Partner: HEI, language (French)	Almaty
Nazarbayev University	2010	Faculty, partners: HEI, programs, language (English)	Astana
International Business School	2008	Partners: HEIs	Almaty
Kazakh British Technical University	2001	Partner: UK Faculty, programs, language (English)	Almaty
Ahmet Yesevi University	1993	Partner: Turkey	Turkestan
Suleyman Demirel University	1996	Partner: Turkey Faculty, programs, language (Turkish)	Almaty
Kazakh American University	1997	Faculty, partners (HEIs), and language (English)	Ust-Kamenogorsk
Lomonosov Moscow State University	2001	Partner: HEI	Astana
University of Central Asia	2000	Partners: Aga Khan Development Network, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, language (English)	Tekili
German Kazakh University	1999	Partner: Germany Faculty, programs, language (German)	Almaty C
Nazarbayev University	2010	Faculty, partners: HEI, programs, language (English)	Astana
KIMEP	1992	Faculty, programs, language (English)	Almaty

Source: Lee & Kuzhabekova (2018).

In 1992, a private international university, the Management Institute of Strategic Research and Economics, was founded in Kazakhstan, inspired by North American educational models, with faculty members recruited mainly from Kazakhstan.

As an illustration, the University of McGill, Canada, assisted the International Executive Center at Kimep in 1998. At Kimep, English is the language of instruction. Upon the creation of Kimep, the governments of Kazakhstan and Turkey worked closely to establish the Universities of Ahmet Yesevi and Suleyman Demirel.

The institutions established are a testament to the cultural and historical relationship that subsists between the two countries. Thereafter, the University of Central Asia was created as the foremost international university formed under the auspices of the Aga Khan Development Network.

A close relationship between the government of the United Kingdom and the University of Kazakh Technical and British was established in 2001 (Lee and Kuzhabekova, 2018).

The demonstration of Table 3 reveals that Kazakhstan is a testing ground for internationalizing educational institutions. Universities established are by-products of the diplomatic wits of some countries (France, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Germany, among others) seeking to build connections with Kazakhstan, as well as of private actors (foreign universities and foundations).

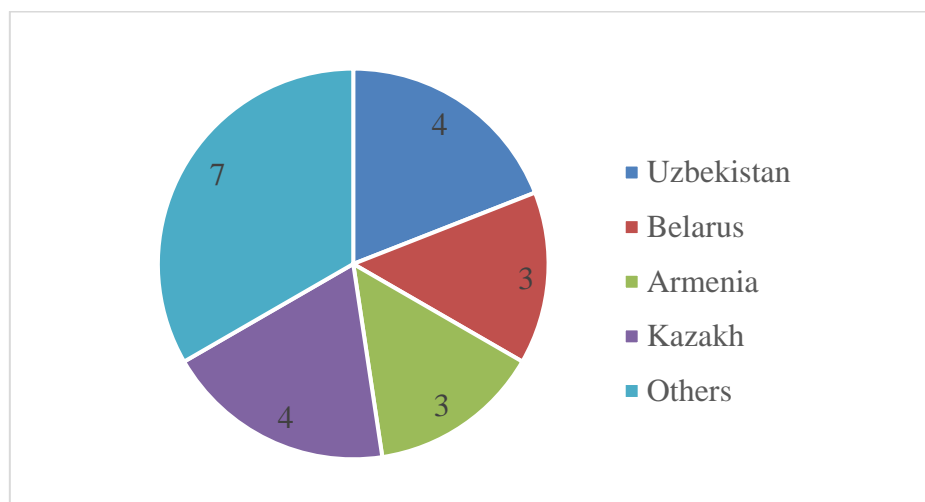
In 2010, the University of Nazarbayev was established in Kazakhstan as a significant investment in an international university that represents the country's image. The University of Nazarbayev is a representation of modern Kazakhstan, where English is taught, academics are recruited globally, and it continues to expand after the admission of its first cohort of students in 2010.

It becomes essential at this level to have an understanding and do an analysis on the impact of international education programs on stages of state formation after the Socialist space- that is, states that are regrouping under severe international pressures which other countries created in the mid-twentieth century or before do not experience. The university almost instantly took the lead among other universities in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the internationalization process has been ongoing since inception, with about 84% of faculty members being foreign professionals invited to Kazakhstan; the medium of instruction is English, and the university collaborates with top-ranked universities around the world (Rustemova et al., 2020).

In the meantime, universities with offshore campuses in Kazakhstan have been making progress in using English and Russian. Undeniably, the Kazakh education system reflects the country's shift from the model of the Russo-Soviet to the globalized Anglo-Saxon world.

With the country's integration into the global economy, operations remain within Russia's sphere of influence in education, politics, and culture.

Figure 1 displays the establishment of foreign and international campuses in Kazakhstan. This is expected to ensure competitiveness among students of Kazakhstan in assessing the impact of international university programs. This answers research question two and achieves the objective of statement two.

Figure 1*Destinations of Russian offshore campuses*

Source: Kleibert et al. (2020)

As stated by Dushinski (2017), visiting lecturers reduce program implementation costs and are economically efficient. The visiting professionals possess a broad, modern, and international body of knowledge gathered over time from high-quality, high-pedigree universities. There is also knowledge sharing, which helps improve research quality at host universities. Indeed, both private and public educational institutions benefit from internationalization. International students and faculty also influence the academic environments of the host university.

The investigation by Lee and Kuzhabekova (2018) reveals Kazakhstan as a marginal state that is actively pursuing internationalization. Motivations of academics on the international scene who migrate to Kazakhstan for employment on a full-time basis, though this is a reversal of talent flow in contradiction of the extant empirical review. Notably, about 41% of respondents in this research resided in two or more countries before migrating to Kazakhstan. Although frenzied mobility was not a criterion for selecting participants, its occurrence among respondents indicates an attraction to international work and the realities of the academic job market. Without being surprised, people emigrate from a country when there are few or no employment opportunities. In academia, the job market has become highly competitive due to the excess number of doctoral holders in Europe and the United States.

In total, the three issues are representations as push-factors which motivate participants to leave former places of abode: labor market, unpleasant working conditions, and marital status and age. The categorization shows that push factors are complex, similar to differences in agency in relocation decisions.

It is interesting to note that, years after the study's data collection, about half of the participants concerned had already left Kazakhstan. The reasons participants left are not within the scope of this study; this result raises concerns about the sustainability of recruiting international personnel in Kazakhstan despite favorable expectations. In implementing the recruitment of international faculty members, Kazakhstan could place greater emphasis on attracting talent among scholars. Also, development of retention strategies is germane to addressing international faculty members' needs in seeking appreciable work.

Assuredly, empirical study reveals that foreign staff were motivated to migrate to Kazakhstan out of curiosity and a desire to be employed in an environment where they could advance their careers. According to Mowbray (2022), the University of Nazarbayev has been

interesting and hence attractive, which provides an advantage for human capital development in positioning for global, local, and regional influence.

As Mowbray (2022) notes, staying at Nazarbayev University has been interesting because it offers an avenue for systemic human capital development to achieve global, local, and regional impact. Moreover, it can be a realization of a long-time career dream and a way to make a helpful impact.

Identified challenges in taking up a teaching post internationally include acquiring explicit knowledge rather than just implicit knowledge. Across 59 countries worldwide, the University of Nazarbayev has nearly 500 faculty members with broad exposure to a blueprint for university administration (Mowbray, 2022).

Kuzhabekova and Lee (2020) state that policymakers are expected to implement policies that promote internationalization of research programs by international faculty members, thereby strengthening the capacity of domestic research in Kazakhstan. Analysis of social and bibliometric networks revealed contributions to areas of research prioritized by government policies and by collaborations linking universities in Kazakhstan to networks outside the country, through research that provides opportunities for apprenticeships for upcoming.

Following Sabzalieva (2017), Kazakhstan's education policies are influenced by many external actors, including Anglo-American universities, the World Bank, the European Union, and other nations such as Singapore, China, and Russia. It is outside the state's vision that the government has decided to align with international best practices, not under coercion or external influence. Yet, it cannot be concluded based on a test of time that the University of Nazarbayev model is sustainable and has enduring benefits.

Four different types of foreign academics were identified by Charlene et al. (2022): those who seek to explore diverse cultures and countries, those who seek the opportunity to stay away from unpleasant situations, those who are motivated by higher remuneration and those who seek to gather experience by working in an international space to achieve progression in their career. Possibly, the four academic categories are an attraction to Kazakhstan. Hence, it is challenging to predict the influence of this mode of internationalization on Kazakhstan's education system.

A strategic way to ensure the competitiveness of Kazakhstani students is to promote the use of English as a step towards globalization and internationalization. The policy instituted is the result of several factors, including the lack of competitiveness among universities in Kazakhstan in the international market, minimal technical support, inadequate accommodation facilities, and limited courses taught in English as the medium (Rustemova et al., 2020). To increase the number of students admitted, the number of courses universities teach, and the number of available programs. This becomes possible as a result of a trilingual (English, Kazakh, and Russian) agenda at all education levels, as decided by the government. The extant literature posits inbound mobility as beneficial, for example, by enabling an international context in the learning environment (Jumakulov and Ashirbekov, 2016).

Teaching students in global languages contributes to the competitiveness of Kazakhstani students internationally. Hence, Kazakh stands as the lingua franca, Russian for communication among inter-ethnic groups, and English for integration into the international community. Therefore, it is the decision that citizens should adopt the three languages, even as Kazakhstan adapts to the realities of the contemporary world, with trilingualism as an indicator of the country's competitiveness.

Experts believe that investing in the national language should be consistent and better than before to sustain Russian as a language. The role of the Russian language is well understood by everyone as enabling cooperation among ethnic groups and serving as an integrating bridge language. Russian, as a language, plays an essential role in professional and cultural settings in Kazakhstan, with knowledge of its future competitiveness. The last

component relates to the essence of learning English as a language needed in the global world, with an abundance of innovation and information. Most professionals view language as a design to improve competitiveness in Kazakhstan. Students of Kazakh are interested in learning English, but notable changes within the academic program cannot be overridden (Polatova et al., 2020). Despite all, the application of three languages to the entire education system in Kazakhstan is very much under debate. In plain terms, the skills and resources required to develop quality skills using the three languages among the students are not available. This thus provides answers to research question three and the achievement of statement of objective three.

Discussion

Kazakhstan's education policies aim to develop an education system aligned with international standards, enhancing quality and integrating the country into communities of science and education. Regarding universities in the post-Soviet period, Chankseliani (2022) identified their operation amid political, social, and economic revolutions following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The revolutions took different paths in their respective countries, and currently, there is diversity in each nation's position across political, human, and economic development, as assessed by conventional global indicators.

Analysis reveals that Kazakhstan's pathway to internationalization is unique among Central Asian countries, which face inadequate resources, and even among Russia and China. It is recent that authoritarian regimes aggregate available resources to develop policies for the internationalization of educational programs; as discussed by Hanson and Sokhey (2020), an essential and relevant evaluation of education policies in countries with a similar position to Kazakhstan is needed.

In Kazakhstan, the economy's growth is linked to oil, and there has been subsequent investment in education to enhance domestic and internationalization. However, economic growth has stagnated, with a corresponding reduction in spending on educational activities (Hanson and Sokhey, 2020). The majority of universities are self-reliant as they depend on private education financing. Although some students from Kazakhstan are on scholarship to study at government universities, the majority must pay tuition fees.

As displayed in Table 4, government expenditure on education falls by 1% of GDP from 2016 to 2023, and there is a reduction in financing for students in tertiary institutions from 2344.0 to 2304.5 PPP\$ (in comparison with the US\$) during the period under review. As a result, there is no assurance of state funding to implement internationalization policies in the near future. Government spending on education is influenced by the global economic crisis, security or political unrest in Kazakhstan, and the War in Ukraine.

Table 4

Kazakhstan's spending on Education

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Expenditure of the Government as % of GDP	3.8	3.3	3.4	2.7	2	2.7	2.5	2.8
Basic funding of a student (PPP\$)	-	2344.0	2281.6	2631.5	2356.1	2078.4	1855.2	2304.5

Source: <https://uis.unesco.org/en/country/kz> (2024)

Table 4 reveals government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, in line with the basic funding of a student. This reveals the government of Kazakhstan's commitment to education in 2016 and 2023.

Looking at history, universities in Kazakhstan are familiar with centralized control. It is premature to assess decentralization as an achievement and allowance of autonomy to institutions. There is an observable belief that the idea of institutional autonomy is about transferring educational practices across nations. It is interesting to note that policy formulation documents refer to autonomy as the world's best practice, despite little being known about its importance in social settings.

This study has analyzed the impact of international educational programs on the competitiveness of Kazakhstani students. It can be concluded that the result is not skewed, with improvement over the last three decades (Rimantas et al., 2021), yet not fully achieved and facing difficulties (Tight, 2022). Universities in Kazakhstan are currently involved in a diverse range of international networks. Universities signify a component of a nation's branding (Eggeling, 2020). Several universities established in the country, influenced by foreign teaching models, are associated with productivity research (Kuzhabekova and Lee, 2020). The number of international students emigrating to Kazakhstan for their studies is increasing.

Chanseliani et al. (2020) and Bayetova (2019) state that, despite the foregoing, privatization and inequalities in access to education are on the increase. The model of educational management and governance in Kazakhstan remains lagging (Dengelbaeva et al., 2020). An instance is the use of the English language for instruction purposes, which depicts an existing gap between institutional and political will to internationalize.

Conclusion

In conclusion, internationalizing education programs to foster competitiveness generates opportunities, supports knowledge acquisition, accelerates innovative work methods in educational systems, enhances cultural agreement, and contributes to the sourcing of work for the new generation in the labor market.

As stated earlier, the challenge of internationalization in education is the shortage of qualified, knowledgeable personnel in foreign languages. In this context, it relates to English as a language, given that there are students who studied across the shore under the Bolashak Programs, coupled with a centralized management system to achieve effective results. To address this, it is essential to achieve decentralization in managing the education system, enhance the quality of management systems, and develop multilingual, competitive, and highly potential specialists.

Analysis reveals the difficulty of transitioning from institutional and political will to globalization and internationalization to solidify research, teaching, and implementation. Therefore, for a country such as Kazakhstan, which is undergoing a long-term transition, proactive policies must be developed to encourage internationalization: improved use of foreign languages, foreign staff and students' recruitment, outbound and inbound mobility of staff and students, and involvement in global research projects.

These are made possible by revenue generated from Kazakhstan's natural resources to finance international collaborations and openings. Yet it is observed that the process of internationalization is affected by inadequate structural facilities and the inability of university actors to operate above board internationally. The attraction of foreign post-graduates, faculty, and graduates enables system improvement while taking cognizance of international and national labor market demands.

As stated earlier, on average, four categories of researchers visit Kazakhstan annually, believing they will have a long-term stay to contribute to internationalization in the education system. Another critical concern is that if the attraction of expatriate lecturers continues in Kazakhstan in significant numbers, this may lead to the loss of indigenous staff, resulting in unemployment and brain drain in the long run. Hence, in consideration of ensuring the

competitiveness of Kazakhstani students through international education programs, the expected and desired ratio of local to foreign staff in teaching and research must be considered.

An avenue for future research is exploring potential local hurdles that may hinder efficient internationalization in international education programs. It is crucial to address possible inequalities in Kazakh students' access to international Education.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interests regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Mira Iskakova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Proofreading. Sandugash Kaldygozova: Data Collection and Curation, Resources, Validation, Writing – Review and Editing. Maigul Shakenova: Literature Review, Data Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Final Editing.

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