

внутренней образовательной миграцией. Эмпирическую базу составили: (1) данные Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан о 40 международных проектах (33 действующих и 7 открывающихся в 2026 г.), включая филиалы, кампусы зарубежных университетов, программы двойного диплома и мастерские Лубань, и о региональном происхождении 9418 студентов по состоянию на май 2026 г.; (2) экспертный опрос 151 представителя местных исполнительных органов, вузов, колледжей и школ из 14 регионов страны, проведённый в апреле-июле 2026 г. Использованы институциональный, сравнительный и системный подходы. Выделены четыре международных модели использования филиалов зарубежных университетов в государственной политике. Данные о контингенте выявляют два паттерна: преимущественно местный набор, соответствующий потенциальной удерживающей функции, и межрегиональный набор, при котором заметная доля студентов прибывает из других регионов. Эти данные подтверждают факт межрегиональной мобильности студентов, но не позволяют делать причинные выводы о снижении оттока молодёжи; экспертные оценки отражают ожидания, а не измеренные эффекты. Результаты могут быть использованы при совершенствовании государственной политики в области территориального размещения международных университетских проектов и организации их мониторинга.

Ключевые слова: филиалы зарубежных университетов, региональная миграция, человеческий капитал, высшее образование.

Introduction

Higher education is no longer viewed solely as a social sector responsible for training personnel. Universities increasingly act as institutions of territorial development that concentrate human capital, innovation and economic activity. Over the past two decades, many states have therefore used higher education as an instrument of regional policy aimed at reducing spatial disparities, increasing regional competitiveness and developing the knowledge economy [1; 2]. In this context, university branches abroad have been described as the educational counterpart of business globalization [3].

The establishment of international branch campuses has become one of the most dynamic developments of international higher education, alongside the continued growth of international student mobility [4; 5]. Initially, such projects were regarded mainly as a mechanism for exporting educational services and expanding the global presence of leading universities; today, states increasingly use them to modernize national education systems, transfer technology, attract investment and create new regional development centers [6–9].

Kazakhstan has followed this trend. The Concept for the Development of Higher Education and Science for 2023–2029 [10] envisages attracting leading foreign universities to open branches in the country, and by 2026 the MSHE register included 40 international university projects, 33 of which were operational [11; 12]. Many of them are located outside Almaty and Astana, which raises the question of how such projects relate to internal educational migration – a persistent problem for regions that lose young people to the largest cities. The aim of this article is to determine the role of foreign university branches and partnership

programs in Kazakhstan's regional policy and to examine their relationship with internal educational migration, distinguishing documented student mobility from expert expectations. The article addresses three research questions:

1. which international models for using foreign university branches exist, and which of them the Kazakh model most closely resembles;
2. what patterns of interregional mobility are observed in student enrolment at international projects;
3. how regional experts assess the current and expected effects of these projects.

Literature review

The theoretical framework of the study combines four interrelated approaches.

First, human capital theory (G. Becker, T. Schultz) treats education as a strategic investment that increases labor productivity and contributes to long-term economic growth [13; 14]. In R. Lucas's endogenous growth model, the external effects of human capital explain why skilled people and economic activity concentrate in particular places [15].

Second, the new economic geography (P. Krugman) explains the spatial concentration of economic activity and human capital in the largest cities through agglomeration effects. Within this approach, educational migration can be seen as one of the factors reinforcing interregional imbalances [16].

Third, growth pole theory (F. Perroux) makes it possible to consider universities as institutions around which new centers of economic activity, innovation and territorial development may form [17].

Fourth, the concepts of regional innovation systems (P. Cooke) and the Triple Helix mod-

el (H. Etzkowitz, L. Leydesdorff) show that the contribution of universities to territorial development is greatest when they cooperate closely with government and business in education and training, research and technology transfer [18; 19].

At the same time, most research on foreign university branches focuses on the internationalization of higher education, academic mobility, institutional strategies and the quality of educational programs [6; 8; 9]. Their relationship with internal educational migration, the spatial distribution of human capital and regional development has received much less attention, especially in post-Soviet countries.

Methodology

The study combines institutional, comparative and systems approaches with the analysis of two empirical datasets: administrative data on international projects and an expert survey.

The institutional approach was used to analyze the policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the development of foreign university branches and to assess their place in the system of regional development.

The comparative approach made it possible to compare the Kazakh model with international experience in establishing and operating foreign university branches.

The systems approach was applied to analyze the relationship between educational policy, internal educational migration, human capital and the socio-economic development of the regions.

Terminology. The projects analyzed differ in legal and organizational status. The article follows the typology used by the MSHE [12]. A **foreign university branch** is a separate structural unit of a foreign university operating in Kazakhstan, as a rule on the basis of a Kazakhstani partner university. A **foreign university campus** is an educational organization established in Kazakhstan by a foreign university under its own brand (e.g., De Montfort University Kazakhstan). A **double-degree program** is an educational program implemented by a Kazakhstani university jointly with a foreign partner, whose graduates receive degrees of both universities. A **strategic partnership** and a **consortium** are long-term cooperation frameworks between a Kazakhstani university and one or more foreign universities. A **certification center** is a Lu Ban workshop, a Chinese vocational and technical

training center established together with a Kazakhstani partner. Double-degree programs, strategic partnerships and consortia are referred to collectively as **partnership programs**, and the term **international project** is used as an umbrella term for all of the above. Elsewhere, the term **campus** is used only when referring to the international literature (international branch campus), the international models in Table 2, or physical infrastructure.

Data sources. The study draws on (1) data from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MSHE): materials on international projects as of July 2026 [11], the MSHE register map of international university projects and project profiles (year of opening, programs, enrolment) [12], and data on student enrolment by region of origin as of May 2026 [20]; (2) regulatory documents, primarily the Concept for the Development of Higher Education and Science for 2023–2029 [10]; (3) the authors' expert survey.

Classification of projects. Each project was assigned to one of the six MSHE types – branch, foreign university campus, double-degree program, strategic partnership, consortium or certification center (Lu Ban workshop) – according to the MSHE register map [12]. The type, location, partner university, year of opening, status and enrolment of each project are given in Appendix A (Table A1). Quantitative indicators are reported for all projects combined and, where possible, separately by type.

Expert survey. The survey was conducted from April to July 2026 using an online questionnaire (Google Forms). The expert method was chosen because enrolment statistics do not capture the perception of educational migration and of international projects at the regional level. Purposive (expert) sampling was used: invitations were distributed through regional education departments, universities and schools. The inclusion criteria were (1) current employment in a local executive body, higher education institution, college or secondary school; (2) a managerial position or at least 5 years of professional experience in education or regional administration; (3) involvement in admission, career guidance, youth policy or regional development. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 151 completed questionnaires from 14 regions representing the northern, central, eastern, western and southern parts of the country were included in the analysis (Table 1). The expert nature of

the sample is supported by the participants' professional experience: 81.5% of respondents had more than 10 years of experience, including 52.3% who had more than 20 years.

Table 1 – Structure of the Expert Sample (N = 151)

Characteristic	n	%
Type of organization		
Higher education institutions	55	36.4
Local executive bodies	44	29.1
Secondary schools (principals and staff)	37	24.5
Colleges and other educational organizations	15	9.9
Professional experience		
More than 20 years	79	52.3
10–20 years	44	29.1
Less than 10 years	28	18.5
Total	151	100.0

Note: Compiled by the authors based on the expert survey.

The questionnaire contained 17 questions grouped into four sections: (1) respondent profile (type of organization, region, work experience); (2) assessment of educational migration in the region (the perceived relevance of educational migration on a five-point scale, change in the outflow of young people over the past three years, main destinations); (3) assessment of the existing and expected effects of international projects, including questions asked only of respondents from regions where such a project operates; (4) conditions and priorities for the location of new projects. Closed-ended questions used single-choice, multiple-choice and five-point Likert-type response formats; two questions were open-ended.

Data processing. Responses were exported from Google Forms and processed in MS Excel. Percentages are calculated from the number of valid answers to each question: N = 151 for questions asked of all respondents; n = 97 for questions asked of respondents from regions with an operating project; and the respective group sizes (n = 55, 44 and 37) for comparisons by type of organization. For five-point scales, the proportion of responses rated 4 and 5 is reported; for multiple-response questions, totals exceed 100%. Open-ended answers were coded thematically. Given the purposive, non-probability sample, the results are analyzed descriptively and interpreted as reflecting the views of the expert community rather than those of the regional population; differences between groups are not tested for statistical significance.

Levels of evidence. The analysis distinguishes three levels: (1) documented interregional mobility – the regional origin of stu-

dents enrolled in international projects at a single point in time (MSHE data); (2) expert assessments and expectations (survey data); (3) the causal effect of projects on migration, i.e., whether students would have left their region or chosen another destination in the absence of the project. The third level cannot be established with the available cross-sectional data, as this would require comparison with the period before the projects opened or with a control group. Accordingly, the terms “retention” and “attraction” are used below to describe enrolment patterns rather than proven effects.

Foreign University Branches as an Instrument of State Policy: International Experience

In this study, foreign university branches and partnership programs are considered an instrument of state regional policy that may influence the educational attractiveness of territories, the redistribution of internal migration flows and the development of regional human capital.

International experience shows that states use foreign university branches to address a wide range of tasks that go far beyond the internationalization of higher education. Depending on national priorities, they become a tool for developing the knowledge economy, modernizing the higher education system, training personnel for priority industries or developing particular territories. Similar organizational arrangements may serve different strategic goals, and the examples below also differ in their institutional structure (branches, joint universities, education hubs hosting several institutions). The typology is therefore

based on public policy goals rather than on countries or legal status.

The first model aims to create large international education centers of global significance.

Its best-known examples are Education City in Qatar and Dubai International Academic City in the United Arab Emirates.

In both cases, government policy brings together leading foreign universities, research centers, innovation infrastructure and members of the international academic community within a single urban agglomeration. This creates a highly competitive educational environment that attracts international students, researchers and investment, and foreign universities become part of the strategy of economic diversification and of positioning the country in the global knowledge economy [7].

This model, however, primarily strengthens already established global cities and does not aim to reduce internal regional disparities.

The second model integrates foreign universities into the comprehensive development of special economic zones and innovation territories.

The most notable examples are EduCity Iskandar in Malaysia and Incheon Global Campus in the Republic of Korea, where universities are part of a unified infrastructure that includes technology parks, research centers, a modern urban environment and high-tech enterprises (on the concept of education hubs and knowledge-innovation clusters, see [7]).

Unlike international education hubs, the main purpose of this model is not to export educational services but to provide personnel for new economic centers and to increase the investment attractiveness of the territory. Universities become one of the elements of a comprehensive regional development strategy.

The third model is particularly evident in China, where joint educational institutions are created with the mandatory participation of national universities.

The best-known examples are the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and Xi'an

Jiaotong–Liverpool University. China's state policy focuses on the transfer of modern educational technologies, the development of research infrastructure, improving the quality of professional training and modernizing the national higher education system [21].

Unlike the previous models, the key result here is not so much the attraction of international students as the institutional development of national universities and the integration of international educational standards into the national higher education system.

The fourth model treats foreign university branches as an element of state spatial development policy.

In this case, decisions on opening branches take into account the sectoral specialization of the region, the economy's demand for personnel, research potential and the demographic situation. Branches are expected to retain young people, attract students from other regions, supply the economy with qualified personnel and create new concentrations of human capital.

Elements of this model can be identified in regional projects in China and Malaysia, where foreign universities are integrated into government programs of territorial development and economic diversification [7; 21]. It should be emphasized that this model is identified analytically: the international literature describes it less systematically than the first three, and its effects on internal migration have rarely been measured.

This model is of greatest interest for the present study, as it allows foreign university branches to be considered as a potential tool for redistributing human capital and increasing regional competitiveness.

The comparative analysis shows that differences between national approaches are determined primarily by the objectives of public policy rather than by the organizational form of the branches. This makes it possible to identify four main models for using foreign university branches in public policy (Table 2).

Table 2 – Typology of International Models of Using Foreign University Branches in Public Policy

The model	The main goal of public policy	Typical examples	Expected main effect
International educational hubs	Formation of a global educational and scientific center	Education City (Qatar), Dubai International Academic City (UAE)	Attracting international students, researchers and investment
Educational clusters within special economic zones	Integrated development of new territories	EduCity Iskandar (Malaysia), Incheon Global Campus (Republic of Korea)	Staffing new sectors of the economy and increasing the investment attractiveness of the region

Joint universities	Modernization of the national higher education system	University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (China)	Transfer of educational technologies and development of national universities
Branch campuses as a tool of regional policy	Development of human capital and spatial development of regions	Regional projects in China and Malaysia	Redistribution of educational migration, strengthening of regional human resources and formation of new growth centers

Note: Compiled by the authors based on [7; 9; 21].

International experience thus shows a gradual shift in the role of foreign university branches: initially regarded mainly as a tool for internationalizing higher education, they are increasingly becoming part of state policy on human capital and territorial development. It is from this perspective that the current policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan is analyzed below.

Kazakhstan's Model of Developing Foreign University Branches and Partnership Programs

International cooperation in higher education has a history of more than twenty years in Kazakhstan. Until the early 2020s, it was represented mainly by branches of Russian universities, the best known of which are the Kazakhstan branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Kostanay branch of Chelyabinsk State University. Despite their importance, these projects developed separately and did not form a unified state policy in the field of transnational higher education. Such a policy took shape in the 2020s, including within the framework of the Concept for the Development of Higher Education and Science for 2023–2029 [10].

According to the MSHE register of international university projects [12], Kazakhstan had 40 such projects in 2026: 33 operating and 7 scheduled to open in 2026. Apart from the multinational group of strategic partners of Nazarbayev University, these projects involve universities from 12 countries. The largest numbers of projects listed in the register involve universities from Russia (8), the United Kingdom (7), the USA (6) and China (6), followed by the Republic of Korea (4), France and Germany (2 each); Italy, Poland, Türkiye, Uzbekistan and Hungary are represented by one project each (Appendix A, Table A1). This structure indicates a diversified pattern of international cooperation without dependence on a single education system.

The projects differ in organizational and legal status and cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. The MSHE distinguishes

23 branches, 5 foreign university campuses, 6 double-degree programs, 3 certification centers (Lu Ban workshops), 1 strategic partnership and 1 consortium [12]. Branches thus account for more than half of the projects, while about one fifth are partnership programs implemented by Kazakhstani universities without a separate structural unit of the foreign partner. The total number of projects therefore characterizes the scale of transnational cooperation but not the number of conventional branch campuses with comparable academic autonomy and involvement of the parent university. To ensure comparability, the type of each project discussed below is specified, and conclusions based on enrolment data refer to international projects as a whole rather than to branches only.

The network has expanded rapidly [12]. De Montfort University Kazakhstan began operating in 2021; in 2022, the MEPhI branch, the double-degree program of City University of Hong Kong and the strategic partnership with the University of Arizona were launched; in 2023, Heriot-Watt University and Northwestern Polytechnical University branches were established, along with a Lu Ban workshop. The most intensive expansion occurred in 2024–2025. In 2024, projects involving Coventry University, Queen's University Belfast, Penn State, Beijing Language and Culture University, the D. Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology, SeoulTech, the University of Minnesota, the University of Lorraine, the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers and the Kazakhstan–German consortium were launched; in 2025, projects involving MGIMO, Gubkin University, Cardiff University, Woosong University, Marche Polytechnic University, the New York Film Academy and Arizona State University followed. Seven more projects, including KAIST and the University of Debrecen, are scheduled to open in 2026.

Most of the new projects have not yet completed a full educational cycle, which limits the possibility of assessing their impact on graduation, employment and the retention of graduates in the regions.

A key feature of the Kazakh model is the wider geographical distribution of international higher education. New projects have appeared in Aktobe, Atyrau, Kyzylorda, Petropavlovsk, Taraz, Taldykorgan, Semey, Turkestan, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Kostanay; as a result, international programs are now represented in 14 administrative-territorial units of the country.

It is, however, premature to speak of full decentralization. Of the 33 projects, 11 are located in Almaty, 6 in Astana and 2 in Shymkent: 19 projects (57.6%) are concentrated in the three cities of republican significance, and 14 (42.4%) are located in other regions.

This reflects two multidirectional processes. On the one hand, government policy promotes international programs outside the largest agglomerations. On the other hand, Almaty and Astana retain advantages related to the concentration of leading universities, research infrastructure, English-speaking faculty, potential applicants and employers.

From the perspective of the new economic geography, this configuration is to be expected: knowledge-economy institutions tend to locate where human capital and infrastructure are already concentrated [16]. The current Kazakh model can therefore be described as hybrid: it combines the continued dominance of the largest educational centers with the gradual regionalization of the network.

The second feature is a pronounced focus on engineering, technical and natural sciences. According to the MSHE, about 80% of the educational programs implemented belong to technical fields, while the rest cover business, education and creative industries [11].

The branch of Gubkin University in Atyrau implements programs in oil and gas technologies.

In Aktobe, the Heriot-Watt University branch at Zhubanov University provides training in electrical power engineering, petroleum engineering, energy management and computer engineering.

In Kyzylorda, the double-degree program of SeoulTech and Korkyt Ata University covers computer science, information systems, programming, cybersecurity, data management and artificial intelligence architecture.

In Taldykorgan, the programs of the Marche Polytechnic University branch focus on agriculture, agronomy and environmental protection.

The strategic partnership of the University of Arizona and Kozybayev University (North Kazakhstan University) in Petropavlovsk is also

indicative: along with information systems, it offers programs in biotechnology, plant science, plant protection, chemical expertise, electronics, pedagogy and inclusive education. This combination corresponds to the agricultural specialization of the North Kazakhstan region while also expanding the regional range of educational offerings in the social and digital spheres.

This orientation is consistent with the concepts of regional innovation systems and the Triple Helix, according to which a university becomes a factor of territorial development when it cooperates closely with regional government and the regional economy [18; 19]. Whether such cooperation actually develops can be assessed only after the first cohorts of graduates enter the labor market.

International projects and interregional student mobility: local and interregional enrolment patterns

According to the MSHE, as of May 2026, the 33 projects for which enrolment data are available had a total of 9,418 students [20]. More than 2,000 students (over 20% of the total) came from other regions of Kazakhstan, and more than 400 were international students. These figures show that international projects are already part of interregional and international educational mobility. However, they describe the composition of the student body at one point in time and do not show how migration flows have changed since the projects opened.

The composition of enrolment differs considerably across projects. Analysis of students' regional origin makes it possible to distinguish two patterns.

The first is a local enrolment pattern, in which most students are residents of the host region.

At the Heriot-Watt University branch in Aktobe, 437 of 514 students (85%) are residents of Aktobe region. At the Gubkin University branch, 90 of 97 students (about 93%) come from Atyrau region. At the Kostanay branch of Chelyabinsk State University, 1,792 of 2,021 students (88.7%) are residents of Kostanay region.

These projects mainly expand the educational offer for local youth. Such a composition is consistent with a potential retention function; however, the data do not show how many of these students would otherwise have left

the region, so the retention effect itself cannot be measured on this basis.

The second is an interregional enrolment pattern, in which a notable share of students comes from other regions.

The most significant example is the strategic partnership of the University of Arizona and Kozybayev University in Petropavlovsk. Of its 1,234 students, 925 are from North Kazakhstan region and 309 (about 25%) from other regions of the country, including 74 from Turkestan region, 43 from Kyzylorda region, 26 from Akmola region, 15 each from Aktobe and Mangystau regions, 12 from Almaty region, 10 each from East Kazakhstan and Zhambyl regions, 8 from Zhetisu region and 7 from Karaganda region.

From the perspective of growth pole theory, this case is of particular interest. Petropavlovsk is not usually regarded as a major destination of interregional educational migration, yet the program enrolls students from almost all regions of the country, including the remote southern and western regions. This suggests that the academic brand, program content and state support may partly offset the peripheral position of a city. To confirm that the partnership has generated a new flow rather than redistributed an existing one, the regional origin of its students should be compared with the enrolment of North Kazakhstan University before 2022; such data were not available for this study.

At the same time, most of the program's students still come from North Kazakhstan region. The project thus combines both patterns: a predominantly local student body and an additional inflow from other regions.

The mobility of students from Mangystau region deserves special attention. The region is geographically remote from the main educational centers, which increases transport and housing costs. Nevertheless, the regional breakdown shows at least 69 students from Mangystau region enrolled in 15 international projects.

Notably, the educational geography of these students is not limited to Almaty and Astana: they follow new interregional routes that differ from the traditional movement to the two largest cities.

Thus, the relationship between international projects and internal educational mobility is not uniform. Some projects mainly enrol local students, others draw on neighboring regions, and still others recruit nationwide. These differences

may be related to the reputation of the foreign partner, the program profile, the number of state-funded places, transport accessibility, the availability of dormitories and the size of the host university; testing these factors requires project-level data that are not yet available.

The analysis also reveals a number of limitations.

First, most new projects are at an early stage: a significant share opened in 2024–2025 and do not yet have enough graduates to assess their impact on regional labor markets.

Second, projects are highly concentrated in the largest cities: although international education is spreading to the regions, more than half of the network (17 of 33 projects) is located in Almaty and Astana.

Third, organizational heterogeneity complicates comparison: a branch, an independent foreign educational institution and a joint program differ in scale, autonomy and the depth of the foreign partner's involvement.

Fourth, enrolment data show students' place of origin but not their migration motivation. The presence of students from another region confirms the fact of mobility but does not show where they would have enrolled in the absence of the project, and the lack of data for the period before the projects opened does not allow changes in flows to be assessed.

Fifth, there are still no systematic data on graduate employment and retention in the regions, employer involvement, research outputs and the impact of projects on innovation. These indicators are needed to test the propositions of the theory of regional innovation systems and the Triple Helix model.

Enrolment data therefore record the movement of students but do not reveal changes in young people's educational preferences, the perception of international projects at the regional level or their expected socio-economic effects. These questions were addressed in the expert survey.

Results and discussion: expert assessments of the role of international projects in regional development

The results below reflect the opinions and expectations of experts (the second level of evidence) and should not be interpreted as measured effects of the projects.

The survey indicates that experts regard educational migration as a significant problem of regional development. 47.7% of respondents

rated its relevance at 4–5 points on a five-point scale, and 56.3% reported an increase in the outflow of young people over the past three years. The main destinations named were Astana (79.5%) and Almaty (66.2%); 39.1% named foreign universities and only 10.6% universities in other regions of Kazakhstan (multiple answers were allowed).

These assessments are consistent with the propositions of the new economic geography concerning the concentration of human capital in the largest centers: according to the experts, despite the expansion of the regional university network, educational flows in Kazakhstan remain predominantly centripetal.

School representatives perceive this trend most acutely: 75.7% of principals and school staff ($n = 37$) reported an increase in educational migration, compared with 52.7% of university representatives ($n = 55$) and 50% of representatives of local executive bodies ($n = 44$).

This difference may reflect the position of professional groups in the education system: schools directly observe graduates' choices, whereas universities and local authorities assess migration indirectly.

Experts generally assess the potential of international projects positively: 49.7% of respondents expect a high or very high impact on the socio-economic development of the regions, 31.8% a moderate impact and 18.6% a low impact.

Two migration-related effects stand out among the expected results: retention of young people in the region (49%) and an inflow of students from other regions (46.4%). Almost as many experts associate the projects with training qualified personnel (49%) and improving the quality of education (44.4%). Thus, experts perceive international projects both as an instrument of educational policy and as a potential mechanism for the territorial redistribution of human capital.

Of the 151 participants, 97 reported that a foreign university branch (in the respondents' understanding, which may include partnership programs) operates in their region. Of these, 63.5% believe that after its opening there was a noticeable inflow of students from other regions (about half of this group described it as significant and the other half as moderate), and 78.6% noted an increase in the region's attractiveness for students. These are respondents' perceptions: the enrolment data presented above confirm interregional recruitment for

some projects (e.g., in Petropavlovsk) but show predominantly local enrolment for others (e.g., in Aktobe and Atyrau).

The survey also shows that experts perceive the potential influence of the projects most clearly in the educational sphere. Assessments of their impact on investment attractiveness, innovation and the regional economy reflect expectations rather than observed results, since most projects opened recently and do not yet have graduates, employment outcomes or completed research and industrial projects.

The highest level of agreement (90.1%) was with the statement that branches should be located taking into account the economic specialization of the region. 87.4% of respondents agreed that branches could become regional centers of science and innovation, and 84.1% that they could increase the investment attractiveness of the region. These figures reflect expectations about the potential of the projects rather than an assessment of their current performance.

Among the main conditions for the successful operation of international projects, respondents most often named modern campus infrastructure, research laboratories, academic autonomy and partnerships with regional enterprises. As priority fields for new projects, they named artificial intelligence, engineering, agriculture, medicine and information technology. This set combines a nationwide technological agenda with the specific personnel needs of the regions.

Conclusion

The study shows that the development of foreign university branches and partnership programs has become one of the priorities of state policy in Kazakhstan and has become an area of state policy combining the tasks of internationalizing higher education, developing human capital and promoting regional development.

International experience shows that foreign university branches can be used to increase the competitiveness of national education systems, develop educational exports, create global education hubs or modernize the university sector. The Kazakh model has a different configuration of priorities: international projects are linked to spatial development, training personnel for priority sectors of the

economy and strengthening regional educational capacity. At the same time, the network remains concentrated in Almaty and Astana, so the model is best described as hybrid.

Enrolment data show that international projects are already associated with interregional student mobility: more than 20% of their students come from other regions, and two enrolment patterns can be distinguished – predominantly local and interregional. Experts expect the projects to help retain young people and attract students to the regions. However, the available data do not allow us to conclude that international projects reduce the outflow of young people or have created new migration flows: this requires comparison with the period before the projects opened and longitudinal data on graduates.

The study has several limitations. Most projects started operating recently, which does not allow long-term effects to be assessed. There are no systematic data on graduates' employment and retention in host regions, the

research output and productivity of the projects or their impact on regional labor markets. Enrolment data are cross-sectional and do not allow students' educational trajectories before and after the projects opened to be traced. The expert sample is purposive, so the survey results reflect the views of the professional community and cannot be generalized to the population of the regions.

Further research should analyze the long-term migration trajectories of graduates, compare the regional origin of students before and after the projects opened, assess the contribution of the projects to regional human capital and their interaction with employers and innovation infrastructure, and compare the effectiveness of different types of transnational education projects. The results can be used to improve state policy on the development of foreign university branches, to plan their territorial location and to design a monitoring system that records the regional origin of students and the destinations of graduates.

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Author Contributions

Rystina I. - prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, participated in the development of practical recommendations, contributed to the refinement and revision of the empirical material. **Aikenova D.** - served as the corresponding author, expanded, developed the conceptual framework of the study, refined the research methodology and was responsible for the technical formatting of the work.

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Appendix A. International University Projects in Kazakhstan

Table A1 – International University Projects in the MSHE Register (2026)

No.	Foreign university / Kazakhstan host institution	Country of Origin	Project Type (MSHE)	City	Year Opened	Status	Students, total (MSHE profiles)	Host-region residents / students (May 2026)
1	Lomonosov Moscow State University (Kazakhstan branch)	Russia	Branch	Astana	before 2020	Operating	–	–
2	Chelyabinsk State University (Kostanay branch)	Russia	Branch	Kostanay	before 2020	Operating	–	1,792 / 2,021
3	Moscow Aviation Institute (Baikonur branch)	Russia	Branch	Baikonur	[–]	Operating	–	–
4	NRNU MEPhI / Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	Russia	Branch	Almaty	2022	Operating	167	–
5	Heriot-Watt University / Zhubunov University	United Kingdom	Branch	Aktobe	2023	Operating	518	437 / 514
6	Northwestern Polytechnical University / Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	China	Branch	Almaty	2023	Operating	200	–
7	Penn State (Mont Alto) / Satbayev University	USA	Branch	Almaty	2024	Operating	5	–
8	Queen's University Belfast / Narxoz University	United Kingdom	Branch	Almaty	2024	Operating	47	–
9	Beijing Language and Culture University / Astana International University	China	Branch	Astana	2024	Operating	243	–
10	D. Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology / Dulatly University	Russia	Branch	Taraz	2024	Operating	82	–
11	Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers / Kazakh National Agrarian Research University	Uzbekistan	Branch	Almaty	2024	Operating	88	–
12	University of Lorraine / Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University	France	Branch	Almaty	2024	Operating	540	–
13	WSG University (Bydgoszcz) / Shakarim University	Poland	Branch	Semey	[–]	Operating	–	–
14	Gubkin University / Utebayev Atyrau University of Oil and Gas	Russia	Branch	Atyrau	2025	Operating	100	90 / 97
15	Marche Polytechnic University / Zhetysay University	Italy	Branch	Taldykorgan	2025	Operating	32	–
16	New York Film Academy (NYFA Kazakhstan)	USA	Branch*	Kaskelen (Almaty region)	2025	No marker	100	–
17	Arizona State University / Auezov University	USA	Branch*	Shymkent, Almaty	2025	No marker	–	–
18	Grenoble INP – Phelma, UGA / Satbayev University	France	Branch*	Almaty	2026	No marker	–	–
19	Colorado School of Mines	USA	Branch*	Zhezkazgan	2026	No marker	–	–
20	University of Exeter / Karaganda Technical University	United Kingdom	Branch*	Karaganda	2026	No marker	–	–
21	University of Glasgow	United Kingdom	Branch*	[–]	2026	No marker	–	–
22	Ufa State Petroleum Technological University / Zhangir Khan University	Russia	Branch	Uralsk	2026	Opening 2026	–	–
23	University of Debrecen / Astana IT University	Hungary	Branch	Astana	2026	Opening 2026	–	–
24	Anhalt University of Applied Sciences / Almaty University of Power Engineering and Telecommunications	Germany	Branch	Almaty	2025–2026	Opening 2026	52	–

No.	Foreign university / Kazakhstan host institution	Country of Origin	Project Type (MSHE)	City	Year Opened	Status	Students, total (MSHE profiles)	Host-region residents / students (May 2026)
25	De Montfort University Kazakhstan	United Kingdom	Foreign university campus	Almaty	2021	Operating	1,000+	–
26	Coventry University Kazakhstan	United Kingdom	Foreign university campus	Astana	2024	Operating	418	–
27	Cardiff University Kazakhstan	United Kingdom	Foreign university campus	Astana	2025	Operating	316	–
28	Woosong University Kazakhstan	Republic of Korea	Foreign university campus	Turkistan	2025	Operating	108	–
29	KAIST	Republic of Korea	Foreign university campus	Alatau	2026	Opening 2026	–	–
30	University of Minnesota / Baitursynov University	USA	Double-degree program	Kostanay	2024	Operating	23	–
31	City University of Hong Kong / Satbayev University	China	Double-degree program	Almaty	2022	Operating	105	–
32	SeoulTech / Korkyt Ata University	Republic of Korea	Double-degree program	Kyzylorda	2024	Operating	241	–
33	MGIMO / L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	Russia	Double-degree program	Astana	2025	Operating	104	–
34	Dong-Eui University / Baitursynov University	Republic of Korea	Double-degree program	Kostanay	2026	Opening 2026	–	–
35	Gazi University / Zhanibekov University	Türkiye	Double-degree program	Shymkent	2026	Opening 2026	–	–
36	University of Arizona / Kozybayev University	USA	Strategic partnership	Petropavlovsk	2022	Operating	1,000+	925 / 1,234
37	Strategic partners of Nazarbayev University (University of Cambridge, UCL, University of Pennsylvania, University of Wisconsin, University of Warwick, Duke Fuqua, UPMC, Lee Kuan Yew School, ORAU, Berkeley Lab, University of Pittsburgh, Colorado School of Mines)	Multinational	Strategic partnership	Astana	–	Operating	–	–
38	Kazakhstan–German consortium (TU Berlin, TU Darmstadt, TUHH, HS Koblenz, htw saar, HS Hof, HS Mittweida, TH Wildau) / Yessenov University	Germany	Consortium	Aktau	2024	Operating	155	–
39	Lu Ban workshop / Serikbayev East Kazakhstan Technical University	China	Certification center	Ust-Kamenogorsk	2023	Operating	453 (incl. ENU)	–
40	Lu Ban workshop / Academy of Logistics and Transport	China	Certification center	Almaty	[–]	Operating	–	–
41	Lu Ban workshop / L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	China	Certification center	Astana	2026	Opening 2026	–	–

Note: Compiled by the authors based on [12; 20].