



## Perceptions of Teachers on Virtual Student Mobility: A Qualitative Case Study in Kazakhstan

Beibitkul S. Karimova<sup>a</sup>, Baglan K. Bazylova<sup>\*b</sup>, Yeriya K. Nurlanbekova<sup>c</sup>, Zhazira S. Ailauova<sup>c</sup> & Zhadyra A. Daribayeva<sup>c</sup>

\* Corresponding author:

Email: [baglan\\_5\\_3@mail.ru](mailto:baglan_5_3@mail.ru)

a. Philological Sciences, Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan.

b. Department of Russian Language and Literature, Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan.


c. Department of Foreign Languages and Translation, Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan.

### Article Info

Received: August 04, 2025

Accepted: January 02, 2026

Published: February 16, 2026

 10.46303/jcve.2026.8

### How to cite

Karimova, B. S., Bazylova, B. K., Nurlanbekova, Y. K., Ailauova, Z. S., & Daribayeva, Z. A. (2026). Perceptions of Teachers on Virtual Student Mobility: A Qualitative Case Study in Kazakhstan. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 9(1), 161-182.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2026.8>

### Copyright license

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of virtual student mobility (VSM) as a pedagogical strategy to enhance foreign language learning and intercultural competence among third-year university students in the Faculty of English Language in Kazakhstan. Using qualitative data from in-depth interviews, the study analyzes educators' views on incorporating VSM into the curriculum and its impact on student engagement, motivation, and cross-cultural understanding. The findings reveal that VSM enables authentic communication with international peers, fostering a global mindset and improving language proficiency without requiring physical mobility. Teachers acknowledged both the advantages and challenges of implementing VSM, highlighting the importance of institutional support and adequate digital infrastructure. This study contributes to research on internationalization at home and provides practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen language education through virtual exchange initiatives in Kazakhstan.

### KEYWORDS

Virtual student mobility; internationalization; internationalization at home; cross-cultural communication; intercultural competence; Kazakhstan.

## INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of education has become a key component of modern educational policy worldwide, aiming to prepare students for globalization and foster their development as global citizens. As Knight (2008) noted, internationalization in higher education involves integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into institutional purposes, functions, and delivery. This process takes multiple forms, including academic mobility of students and faculty, inter-university collaborations across countries, the introduction of international programs and curricula, and the integration of global perspectives into teaching and learning (Barker et al., 2013; Knight, 2008; Marginson, 2023; Mutongoza & Hendricks, 2025; Varga et al., 2023). It not only enhances students' academic and professional competencies but also broadens their worldview and cultivates cultural awareness and tolerance. In Kazakhstan, various strategies—such as international partnerships, mobility initiatives, and “internationalization at home”—have been adopted to develop students' global competencies and strengthen the country's competitiveness in higher education (Jumakulov et al., 2018). The internationalization of education, as discussed by Knight (2008), Barker et al. (2013), and Marginson (2023), has been significantly advanced through Virtual Student Mobility (VSM), which utilizes technology-based platforms to foster global collaboration, intercultural competence, and inclusivity while enhancing students' academic, professional, and cultural growth. VSM represents a central mechanism for advancing higher education internationalization by enabling interaction among international students and educators through information and communication technologies (Bijnens & Beeck, 2006; Ruiz-Molina et al., 2020). It can either supplement or substitute traditional physical mobility programs, offering accessible alternatives for students constrained by financial or personal barriers (Anita & Pacek, 2016; Beeck et al., 2007). The key aims of VSM are to foster internationalization, encourage innovation, and promote inclusivity in higher education by facilitating knowledge exchange and strengthening intercultural competencies (Ruiz-Molina et al., 2020). Implemented through fully virtual, hybrid, or blended models, VSM encompasses activities such as student exchanges, internships, and academic courses. Despite its advantages—such as improving language proficiency and cultural understanding—it faces challenges related to technological infrastructure, institutional identity, and the digital skills required for effective engagement (Anita & Pacek, 2016; Ruiz-Molina et al., 2020).

Kazakhstan's higher education system is undergoing a major transformation to align with the demands of globalization and internationalization (Bokayev, 2023; 2024; Yussupova et al., 2023; Yussupova & Tarman, 2025). These reforms emphasize skill development within academic programs, promote student mobility, expand the use of educational technologies, encourage multilingual instruction, and enhance resources to meet global standards (Bekbauova et al., 2017; Jumakulov et al., 2018). The country is actively striving to improve the quality and reputation of its universities by embracing internationalization as a guiding framework. There is growing recognition of the importance of integrating international and cultural dimensions into

national education, accompanied by deliberate efforts to align with global best practices (Bekbauova et al., 2017). Recent research shows that Kazakhstani universities are increasingly integrating multicultural courses, bilingual and trilingual education models, and joint academic programs with international institutions to strengthen students' global competence (Baishymyrova & Sadykova, 2024; Daurenbek et al., 2024; Kilinc et al., 2023; Kuzembayeva et al., 2024). Universities such as Nazarbayev University and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University actively collaborate with foreign partners to implement best practices in curriculum design and research management. Participation in initiatives like Erasmus+ and the Orhun Exchange Network further enables faculty and students to engage with diverse educational systems and pedagogical approaches. Drawing inspiration from models in Europe, South Korea, and Singapore, Kazakhstan continues to adopt innovative practices such as outcome-based education, quality assurance mechanisms, and digital learning ecosystems. Nonetheless, as global education evolves rapidly, Kazakhstan must continue learning from international experiences while developing its own strategic framework for internationalization to ensure sustained growth and global integration of its higher education institutions.

Kazakhstan's strategy emphasizes promoting student and faculty exchanges, establishing partnerships with foreign universities, and developing programs that attract international participants. A growing priority is "internationalization at home," which seeks to offer global learning opportunities to all students, including those unable to study abroad (Karimova et al., 2023). Universities are increasingly embedding international perspectives into their curricula through comparative courses, global case studies, and expanded use of English and other foreign languages across disciplines. Institutions also host multicultural events, guest lectures by international scholars, and joint research initiatives that expose students to diverse academic traditions and worldviews. Many universities celebrate international days, language weeks, and intercultural festivals to encourage dialogue between local and foreign students. These initiatives cultivate intercultural competence, global citizenship, and an inclusive academic culture, complementing traditional mobility programs by making international education more accessible. Through these strategies, Kazakhstan aims to equip its students with the skills and perspectives needed to thrive in a globalized world while strengthening the nation's academic and professional competitiveness (Jumakulov et al., 2018). Although the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan has been extensively studied, previous research has largely concentrated on physical mobility programs, national policy frameworks, and institutional strategies (Bekbauova et al., 2017; Jumakulov et al., 2018). In contrast, VSM—an emerging form of internationalization enabled by digital technologies—has received comparatively little academic attention. Moreover, most existing studies focus on universities in major urban centers such as Almaty and Astana, leaving regional higher education institutions underexplored in empirical research.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how educators at regional Kazakhstani universities perceive and VSM within their teaching and learning practices. The study's novelty

lies in situating VSM within the broader framework of internationalization at home (IaH) and grounding its analysis in sociocultural learning theory and multimodal literacy practices. This approach provides a deeper understanding of how virtual academic exchanges enhance students' global, linguistic, and intercultural competencies within the Kazakhstani context—a dimension that remains largely unexplored in the existing national literature.

The primary objective of this study is to examine educators' perceptions of VSM within the context of Kazakhstan's broader initiatives to internationalize higher education. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate how educators at regional universities conceptualize and implement VSM within their teaching practices.
2. Examine educators' perceptions of how virtual mobility influences students' academic, professional, and intercultural development.
3. Identify the pedagogical, institutional, and technological opportunities and challenges associated with integrating virtual mobility into Kazakhstan's higher education system.
4. Develop evidence-based recommendations to strengthen internationalization at home and design pedagogical strategies that foster students' global competencies.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do teachers perceive students' participation in virtual mobility programs?
2. In what ways do educators perceive VSM to mediate students' linguistic, academic, and intercultural development?
3. How do teachers modify their instructional methods to support students engaged in virtual mobility?
4. What benefits and challenges do educators perceive in implementing virtual student mobility within regional higher education institutions?

### **Internationalization as a key to worldwide education**

Today, internationalization has become a major focus for governments and researchers worldwide, though its origins trace back to earlier efforts to promote mutual understanding among nations and foster peace through the exchange of students and scholars (Mariani et al., 2013; Mutongoza & Olawale, 2023). With the rise of globalization, internationalization has evolved beyond traditional exchange programs to play a vital role in developing students' intercultural competence and global awareness (Barragán Codina & López, 2013). This evolution has led to significant transformations in education, reflected in initiatives such as the Fulbright Program, the Erasmus Program (Akli, 2013), the Bologna Process, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda.

Internationalization in education is a multifaceted concept that scholars have defined in various ways, reflecting its ongoing evolution to meet the demands of a globalized world. As noted earlier, Jane Knight, one of the most influential scholars in this field, defines internationalization as a process that shapes the goals and functions of post-secondary education, emphasizing its political dimensions such as curriculum development and

institutional planning (Knight, 1994). Similarly, de Wit (2019) supports Knight's perspective, highlighting that internationalization also underscores the importance of intercultural dimensions within education.

One of the primary reasons internationalization has gained importance in education is the growing influence of globalization. Globalization compels schools and universities to look beyond national boundaries and prepare students for a world characterized by cross-cultural interaction and global collaboration. Consequently, educational institutions must integrate international perspectives into their teaching, research, and partnerships to equip students with the skills and competencies required to navigate an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world. The internationalization of higher education brings numerous benefits but also presents significant challenges, particularly regarding language barriers. These barriers hinder effective communication, academic performance, and participation in exchange programs for both students and staff (Beregovaya & Kudashov, 2019). Difficulties in language comprehension can impede understanding of lectures and study materials, thereby affecting students' ability to adapt successfully to new academic environments (Beregovaya & Kudashov, 2019; Zhundybayeva et al., 2024). Research on the barriers to internationalization identifies several key challenges, including cultural differences, financial constraints, and policy limitations. Practices considered normal in one culture may be unfamiliar or even offensive in another, leading to misunderstandings and discomfort (Arndt et al., 2009). Additionally, limited financial resources prevent some students and institutions from participating in international programs, as travel, tuition, and living expenses abroad can be prohibitively high (Iyanna & Abraham, 2012). Political instability and global health crises further exacerbate these challenges. Consequently, the concept of "internationalization at home" emerged as an alternative approach to provide global learning experiences without requiring physical mobility. Internationalization experiences hold great value across all dimensions of education, and the concept of internationalization at home has made it possible to cultivate a global environment within local institutions (Amblee, 2018). This approach enhances students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and ability to collaborate in diverse teams. It aims to develop global competencies and intercultural skills for all learners, not only those who study abroad (Choi & Khamalah, 2017; Mak et al., 2013; Rudik et al., 2025). By providing international learning opportunities within domestic settings, internationalization at home addresses issues of unequal access to transformative experiences and ensures that every student benefits from exposure to global perspectives (Harrison, 2015). Internationalization at home in higher education plays a critical role in fostering students' cultural awareness and global understanding. Research shows that participation in internationalization at home activities—such as collaborating with international faculty and engaging in specialized programs—enhances students' appreciation of other cultures, promotes global thinking, and increases openness to diversity (Sercu, 2022; Tebbett et al., 2020). These experiences encourage students to view issues from new perspectives and challenge their existing assumptions, particularly

among those with prior travel or multicultural experiences (Tebbett et al., 2020). Moreover, internationalization at home provides a supportive environment where students can interact with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual respect and intercultural understanding (Huang, 2017). Through such initiatives, universities cultivate an internationalized campus culture that equips students with the competencies needed to succeed in an increasingly globalized world (Sercu, 2022). However, many educational institutions worldwide encounter significant challenges in implementing internationalization initiatives. One of the most pressing issues is the shortage of resources, including financial support and technological infrastructure (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). Incorporating international content into the curriculum—beginning with small-scale projects or thematic modules—can serve as an effective and practical approach to facilitate the successful integration of internationalization at home.

Globally, many universities have advanced internationalization at home by integrating globally oriented courses, fostering interaction with international peers on campus, and implementing virtual exchange programs. In Kazakhstan, higher education institutions are similarly adopting these strategies to provide students with the advantages of international education without requiring physical mobility. This approach equips students with the skills needed to compete in the global job market while broadening their cultural awareness and understanding of the world.

### **Internationalization of Kazakhstan's Higher Education**

The internationalization of higher education has emerged as a central development strategy for universities in Kazakhstan, supported by national initiatives and policies (Jumakulov et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education and Science advances this agenda through student and faculty mobility programs, international partnerships, curriculum modernization, and active participation in the Bologna Process (Bekbauova et al., 2017; Jumakulov et al., 2018). Kazakhstani universities are increasingly collaborating with foreign institutions, offering courses in multiple languages, and engaging in international research projects. These efforts enhance the global visibility of Kazakhstani higher education while enriching the learning experience for students. Partnerships with international universities facilitate joint research, student exchanges, and dual-degree programs, providing students with diverse learning opportunities and valuable global exposure.

While Kazakhstani universities continue to expand global partnerships and study abroad opportunities, they are also focusing on internationalization at home. This approach involves integrating global ideas, perspectives, and experiences into the domestic learning environment, allowing students to gain international exposure without leaving the country. By embedding international elements within local institutions, universities enhance the quality of education and better prepare students for participation in an increasingly interconnected world. Kazakhstani universities are increasingly adopting internationalization at home (IaH) strategies to provide students with the benefits of global education without requiring physical mobility.

For instance, universities now offer courses that address international topics, organize virtual exchanges with students from other countries, and host multicultural events on campus. Through these initiatives, students engage with diverse cultures, develop intercultural competencies, and gain a global outlook while studying within Kazakhstan. Emphasizing internationalization at home (IaH) allows universities to immerse students in diverse cultural experiences and prepare them for active participation in a globalized world. IaH strengthens essential competencies such as cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and global awareness, fostering both academic and personal growth. Recently, VSM has emerged as an important extension of IaH, enabling students to engage in international learning through digital platforms without the need for physical travel. Studies show that VSM enhances intercultural competence, digital literacy, and collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds (Helm, 2020; O’Dowd, 2018). Through the integration of global partnerships, virtual exchanges, and IaH strategies, universities in Kazakhstan aim to create a comprehensive international education experience that extends learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

Grounded in the theoretical framework of VSM, which emphasizes the use of digital technologies to promote intercultural learning and global collaboration without requiring physical travel (Helm, 2020; O’Dowd, 2018; Orakova et al., 2024), internationalization in higher education—particularly through Internationalization at Home (IaH) and VSM—represents a vital approach for enhancing students’ global competencies. Focusing on regional universities in Kazakhstan, this study applies VSM theory to examine how digitally mediated intercultural experiences support student skill development and to identify institutional factors that facilitate or hinder effective implementation. As Beelen and Jones (2015) emphasize, IaH enables universities to cultivate cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and global awareness by embedding international perspectives into curricula and campus life, thereby enriching educational outcomes and preparing students for interconnected professional environments. Complementing IaH, VSM advances these goals through technology-driven platforms that enable virtual exchanges and enhance intercultural competence and digital literacy (O’Dowd, 2018; Ruiz-Molina et al., 2020), especially in diverse educational contexts such as Kazakhstan. However, empirical studies highlight that despite VSM’s potential to foster global citizenship and inclusivity, regional Kazakhstani universities face technological and pedagogical challenges, including limited infrastructure and insufficient faculty training (Anita & Pacek, 2016; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). Case studies from these institutions demonstrate that virtual mobility initiatives have strengthened students’ intercultural competence and professional skills through online exchanges and multicultural engagement, though disparities remain compared to well-resourced urban universities (Jumakulov et al., 2018). By addressing these challenges and building upon the theoretical foundations established by Knight (2008) and Sercu (2022), Kazakhstani universities can more effectively integrate IaH and VSM to deliver comprehensive international education experiences that promote both academic and professional growth.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in Digital Contexts*

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) serves as a foundational lens for this study, positing that human cognition is not an isolated internal process but is inherently social in nature (Lantolf, 2000). According to this perspective, higher mental functions originate first on the interpsychological plane between individuals before they are internalized on the intrapsychological plane within the learner. Crucially, this cognitive development is mediated by the utilization of physical and symbolic cultural tools, which transform elementary mental functions into complex cognitive processes. When examining the specific context of VSM, the application of SCT becomes particularly relevant as it underscores the dynamic interplay between the learner, the tool, and the environment. Within this theoretical architecture, two specific Vygotskian concepts emerge as indispensable for understanding the efficacy of VSM: Mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Mediation refers to the mechanism through which external artifacts intervene to modify the learner's relationship with the world, functioning as a bridge between current abilities and new knowledge. In this instance, VSM operates as the primary mediational tool, regulating the learner's cognitive activity and focus. Complementing this is the concept of the ZPD, which defines the distance between a learner's actual developmental level, determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development achieved under guidance or through collaboration. This zone represents the critical cognitive space where instruction is most effective, allowing learners to achieve tasks with support that they could not yet manage independently. Consequently, analyzing VSM through these twin pillars of mediation and ZPD provides a robust explanation for how external resources are internalized to drive cognitive growth.

### *The Concept of Mediation: Tools and Signs*

Vygotsky argued that our relationship with the world is not direct but is mediated through "tools" (technical means) and "signs" (psychological means, primarily language) (Vygotsky, 1978).

- Technical Mediation in VSM: The digital platform (Zoom, Padlet) functions as the technical tool. It is not a neutral conduit; its "affordances" shape the interaction. For example, the "chat" function allows for synchronous written communication alongside speech, altering the cognitive load.
- Semiotic Mediation in VSM: Language and cultural symbols function as psychological tools. In a virtual exchange, students are constantly mediating meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

### *The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) represents a critical dimension of Vygotsky's theoretical framework, addressing the dynamic nature of cognitive growth. Fundamentally, the ZPD is defined as the distance between a learner's actual developmental level, determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as achieved under

guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). This concept effectively bifurcates learner ability into two distinct strata: the static level of what the learner can currently accomplish autonomously and the dynamic level of what they can achieve with supportive intervention. The "actual" level reflects retrospective development, indicating mental functions that have already fully matured and internalized. In contrast, the "potential" level characterizes prospective development, highlighting functions that are currently in an embryonic state but are accessible through social interaction and mediation. Within this "zone," instruction is widely considered most impactful because it targets skills that are in the process of maturation rather than those already mastered.

### *The Virtual ZPD*

Building upon Vygotsky's foundational definition, recent scholarship has significantly expanded the boundaries of the theoretical framework to conceptualize the "Virtual ZPD" within digital learning environments. Central to this expanded framework is a critical re-evaluation of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), a role traditionally assigned almost exclusively to teachers or adult instructors, but which undergoes significant diversification in a VSM context. Within the dynamic ecosystem of virtual exchanges, the hierarchy of knowledge becomes fluid; international peers frequently assume the mantle of the MKO, particularly regarding linguistic nuances and cultural competencies specific to their own backgrounds. This reciprocal mentorship allows for a symmetrical scaffolding process where learners alternate between the roles of novice and expert depending on the specific cultural or communicative task at hand. Furthermore, the concept of the MKO is radically extended in this domain to include non-human agents, suggesting that the technology itself acts as a sophisticated partner in the learning process. For instance, digital affordances such as automated translation plugins, grammar checkers, or predictive text algorithms provide immediate, just-in-time scaffolding that mediates the learner's interaction with the target language. These technological interventions effectively offload cognitive burden, allowing the student to perform complex communicative acts that would otherwise exceed their independent capability.

### *Multimodal Literacies: Decoding the Digital Screen*

#### *Defining Multimodality*

Multimodality refers to the combination of different semiotic "modes" to create meaning. We identify five primary modes relevant to education:

**Table 1.**

#### *Semiotic Modes and Their Application in Virtual Study Meetings (VSM)*

<b>Mode</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Application in VSM</b>
Linguistic	Words (vocabulary, grammar).	Spoken English; text in chat.
Visual	Images, colors, layout.	Screen-sharing; video backgrounds.
Gestural	Movement, body language.	Decoding a nod on a webcam.
Audio	Volume, pitch, rhythm.	Tone of voice; accents.

Mode	Definition	Application in VSM
Spatial	Organization of space.	Navigating "breakout rooms".

*Multimodal Literacy as a Prerequisite for VSM*

Multimodal Literacy is the ability to effectively interpret and create meaning across these modes.<sup>8</sup> In VSM, a student must simultaneously process the linguistic input of a peer and the visual input of their shared screen. Misunderstandings often arise from "modal mismatch"—for example, misinterpreting a silence (Audio mode) as disagreement rather than a technical lag.

*Synthesis: The Theoretical Lens of the Study*

This study posits that VSM creates a Virtual ZPD mediated by multimodal tools. The "Impact" of VSM (RQ2) is theoretically framed as the extent to which this mediation successfully scaffolds student development.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine educators’ perceptions and experiences of virtual student mobility within a regional university in Kazakhstan. The case study approach enabled an in-depth examination of the phenomenon in its real-world context, focusing on how virtual mobility is implemented, understood, and experienced by participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations, providing comprehensive and contextualized insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating virtual mobility into higher education.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected over a three-month period during the spring of 2025 at a regional public university in southern Kazakhstan known for its active involvement in international collaboration initiatives. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on educators with direct experience in teaching or coordinating virtual mobility courses. The final sample included 15 university instructors representing diverse disciplines such as foreign languages, education, and social sciences.

Data were gathered from three distinct sources to ensure triangulation:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were the primary method, enabling participants to discuss their experiences, challenges, and perceptions. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in English, Russian, or Kazakh. The interview protocol was piloted with two non-participant colleagues to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. The final questions focused on three theoretical dimensions: pedagogical adaptations (how teachers scaffold learning), technological mediation (how tools shape interaction), and perceived student engagement.
2. Digital Artifacts: To capture the multimodal nature of VSM, the researcher collected digital artifacts with participant consent. These included screenshots of asynchronous interactions (e.g., Padlet boards, Moodle forum posts) and anonymized chat logs from synchronous Zoom

sessions. These artifacts provided direct evidence of the "multimodal literacies" described by teachers in the interviews.

3. Institutional Documents: Secondary data included the university's "Strategic Plan for Internationalization 2020-2025," course syllabi for the 2024-2025 academic year, and internal reports on student mobility statistics. These documents were analyzed to contextualize the teachers' narratives within the broader institutional mandates.

Informal classroom observations were also carried out during 10 selected online sessions (approximately 500 minutes of observation) to gain a deeper understanding of the pedagogical approaches employed in real-time.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected for its flexibility in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process involved multiple stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, organization of these codes into broader thematic categories, and refinement of the themes to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions. Phase 1 involved immersion in the data. In Phase 2, initial codes were generated deductively from the theoretical framework (e.g., 'scaffolding', 'visual mode') and inductively from emergent data (e.g., 'digital fatigue'). Table 1 illustrates the evolution from raw data to theoretical categories. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of their perspectives. Triangulation across multiple data sources—interviews, institutional documents, and classroom observations—further enhanced the validity of the results. Additionally, reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge the researcher's positionality and minimize potential biases.

**Table 2.**

#### *Examples of Coding Strategy*

Raw Data Extract	Initial Codes	Theoretical Category
"My students were too shy to speak, so I told them to put pictures in the chat first."	[Visuals] [Chat Function]	Multimodal Scaffolding
"The internet in the village is so bad, they drop out every 10 minutes."	[Connectivity Issue]	Breakdown of Mediation

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the university's research ethics committee. All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms

were assigned to all participants, and identifying details were removed from the data. All research materials were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

## FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of the collected data—comprising semi-structured interviews, digital artifacts, and institutional documents—yielded three overarching themes that characterize the educator experience of Virtual Student Mobility (VSM). These themes reflect the interplay between pedagogical aspirations and structural realities in a regional university context. The first theme, *Expanding the Zone of Proximal Development through Virtual Mediation*, explores how teachers perceive VSM as a scaffold for linguistic and intercultural growth. The second theme, *Transforming Pedagogy through Multimodal Literacies*, examines the necessary shift from text-based to multimodal instruction in digital spaces. The final theme, *The Digital Divide and the Illusion of Mobility*, offers a critical perspective on the technological and sensory limitations that constrain the VSM experience. Together, these findings map the complex topography of internationalization at home.

1. The analysis of interviews, institutional documents, and classroom observations identified three key themes that capture educators' perceptions of VSM within the context of a regional university in Kazakhstan: Expanding access and intercultural engagement,
2. Transforming pedagogical practices through digital and multimodal learning, and
3. The Digital Divide and the Illusion of Mobility

Each theme illustrates how virtual student mobility is reshaping teaching practices, learning experiences, and perceptions of internationalization within Kazakhstan's regional higher education context.

### **Expanding Access and Intercultural Engagement**

A key finding of this study is that educators viewed virtual mobility as a democratizing mechanism that expands students' access to international learning experiences. Participants consistently noted that many students in regional universities face barriers to participating in physical exchange programs, including financial constraints, family responsibilities, and institutional limitations. Consequently, virtual mobility was regarded as an inclusive and practical alternative, enabling students to engage in global learning and intercultural collaboration without the need to travel abroad.

As one foreign language instructor observed, "Most of my students have never been abroad, but during the virtual course, they worked in teams with students from Europe and Türkiye. It made them realize they are part of a bigger world." Another educator noted how participation in a joint online course enhanced student engagement: "They became more active, more confident in expressing their ideas in English. It was not just learning — it was transformation." In Vygotskian terms, the international student served as a specialized More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) who demanded communicative competence. The virtual

environment provided the motivation that the local teacher could not artificially generate, pushing students into their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Educators observed that these experiences nurtured intercultural communication skills, openness, and empathy, reinforcing students' awareness of cultural diversity. Several participants linked this to the broader national goal of building a globally competent generation. From the perspective of sociocultural learning theory, these virtual interactions represent authentic social practices where learning occurs through collaboration, dialogue, and shared meaning-making across cultural boundaries. This finding aligns with the concept of internationalization at home (IaH), which emphasizes embedding global perspectives into the domestic learning environment. Teachers viewed VSM as a way to "bring the world into the classroom," enhancing intercultural competence even for students who never travel abroad.

### **Transforming Pedagogical Practices through Digital and Multimodal Learning**

The second major theme reveals that virtual mobility encouraged educators to reconsider their pedagogical practices and cultivate new forms of digital literacy. Participants reported experiencing a steep learning curve as they adapted to emerging technologies, online communication tools, and collaborative platforms such as Moodle, Zoom, and Padlet. Several educators noted that teaching in a virtual international environment required them to adopt more interactive, student-centered, and multimodal instructional strategies. As one participant explained, "I had to change my traditional lecture style. Now I use breakout rooms, collaborative writing tools, and visual tasks. Students learn by doing and sharing." Teachers also emphasized that VSM contributed to their professional development. Collaborating with international colleagues exposed them to diverse pedagogical perspectives and innovative teaching practices. As one senior lecturer reflected, "Working with European partners helped me see how learning outcomes can be assessed differently. I now focus more on skills and reflection rather than memorization." The incorporation of multimodal literacy practices—such as the use of visuals, videos, and digital storytelling—was especially valued for enhancing student engagement and accommodating diverse learning styles. Educators emphasized that these approaches made online collaboration more authentic and meaningful. As one instructor observed, "When students had to create a joint digital project, they learned not only language but also teamwork and cultural negotiation."

These findings reveal that virtual mobility generates a dual impact: it enhances students' learning experiences while advancing teachers' professional growth and digital competence. The process also encouraged educators to challenge traditional classroom hierarchies, transitioning from the role of "information transmitters" to that of "learning facilitators" within an interconnected global community of practice.

### **The Digital Divide and the Illusion of Mobility**

Although most participants recognized the benefits of virtual mobility, they also identified several systemic and logistical barriers that hinder its full implementation. The most commonly

reported challenges involved technological limitations, insufficient language proficiency among participants, and a lack of institutional recognition for virtual exchange initiatives.

Several teachers cited unstable internet connections, outdated equipment, and limited technical support as ongoing challenges. As one participant explained, “Sometimes the system crashes in the middle of class. Students lose motivation when they cannot hear or see their partners properly.” Another major challenge involved students’ uneven linguistic preparedness. Although most virtual courses were conducted in English, educators noted wide variations in language proficiency that occasionally impeded communication and engagement. To address this, teachers provided additional support and incorporated bilingual explanations; however, many agreed that more robust language training is essential to ensure students’ effective participation in international virtual programs. Institutional barriers also emerged as a recurring theme. Many educators noted that virtual mobility initiatives are often perceived as “extra activities” rather than integral components of university policy or strategic planning. As one teacher remarked, “There is no formal reward system or workload credit for this kind of teaching. We do it because we believe in it, not because the system supports it.” This lack of institutional recognition highlights a broader policy gap within Kazakhstan’s higher education system, where virtual mobility initiatives often remain fragmented and reliant on individual commitment rather than strategic planning. As Knight (2008) and Beelen and Jones (2015) emphasize, sustainable internationalization depends on comprehensive institutional policies, ongoing staff development, and robust digital infrastructure—components that are still in the process of being established in many regional universities.

A subset of teachers expressed deep skepticism about the depth of cultural learning, describing VSM as ‘culture through a keyhole.’ They argued that the sensory limitations of the screen created an ‘illusion of mobility,’ offering a sanitized experience that could not replicate the olfactory or haptic reality of physical travel.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

Overall, the findings indicate that virtual student mobility is an emerging yet influential approach to advancing the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan. It strengthens students’ intercultural competence and language proficiency while simultaneously promoting pedagogical innovation among educators. However, the success of VSM ultimately relies on the effective alignment of institutional policies, technological infrastructure, and comprehensive support for educators.

From a sociocultural perspective, virtual mobility functions as a dynamic learning environment in which knowledge is co-constructed through mediated and cross-cultural interactions. At the same time, the study underscores the need to address digital inequality, language barriers, and institutional recognition systems to fully harness the transformative potential of virtual exchange in higher education.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study align with the broader discourse on the internationalization of education, emphasizing the value of virtual mobility as an effective means of developing students' global competencies. As discussed in the introduction, the primary goals of internationalization have traditionally been to foster mutual understanding among nations, promote peace, and cultivate intercultural competence through the exchange of students and scholars (Mariani et al., 2013). In the context of globalization, these aims have evolved, and virtual mobility now represents a modern approach that responds to the needs of an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world (Barragán Codina & López, 2013). The study's findings reveal that virtual mobility promotes creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills while also challenging traditional conceptions of intercultural learning. In contrast to earlier internationalization models that emphasized physical mobility (Knight, 1994; de Wit, 2019), the results show that virtual environments can successfully cultivate global citizenship through sustained and reflective interaction among culturally diverse participants. Educators observed that such exchanges require students to navigate ambiguity, negotiate meaning, and adapt communication strategies in real time—processes that strengthen intercultural awareness and cognitive flexibility. Thus, virtual mobility not only complements but also redefines international learning by positioning digital collaboration as a distinct and transformative mode of global engagement. A major advantage of virtual mobility lies in its capacity to address the financial and logistical barriers commonly associated with traditional mobility programs (Iyanna & Abraham, 2012). The findings indicate that students developed substantial cultural and linguistic competence without the need for physical relocation. This outcome aligns with the concept of “internationalization at home” (Amblee, 2018), which aims to extend international learning opportunities to a broader range of students, particularly those who may lack the means to engage in conventional study-abroad experiences. However, the study also identifies several challenges associated with virtual mobility, including technological limitations, difficulties in coordinating across time zones, and communication barriers. These results align with prior research highlighting language proficiency gaps and cultural differences as major obstacles to internationalization initiatives (Arndt et al., 2009; Beregovaya & Kudashov, 2019). Nonetheless, the study emphasizes that virtual mobility holds strong potential to overcome the logistical and financial constraints of traditional mobility programs, providing a more inclusive and accessible platform for global learning. Within Kazakhstan's higher education landscape, virtual mobility functions as a vital element of the country's broader internationalization strategy. As discussed in the introduction, Kazakhstani universities are actively strengthening international partnerships, expanding foreign language instruction, and enhancing their global visibility (Jumakulov et al., 2018). Integrating virtual mobility into these efforts allows a greater number of students to participate in international learning experiences without requiring substantial financial or logistical resources. This approach reflects global trends in higher education, where institutions increasingly incorporate virtual exchange

programs and cross-cultural collaborations into their curricula to advance internationalization goals (Sercu, 2022).

The study confirms that VSM functions as a robust environment for the Virtual ZPD. However, the findings introduce a critical caveat: The Virtual ZPD is fragile. For rural Kazakhstani students, the 'tool' of mediation (internet) is unstable, meaning their access to the ZPD is intermittent.

In conclusion, the findings of this study affirm that virtual mobility is a significant and effective component within the broader framework of internationalization. Despite the challenges associated with its implementation, its contributions to developing intercultural competence, global awareness, and essential 21st-century skills are substantial. As higher education institutions continue to evolve in response to globalization and digital transformation, virtual mobility will remain a key mechanism for preparing students to succeed and contribute meaningfully in an interconnected world.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined educators' perceptions at a regional university in Kazakhstan regarding the implementation and impact of VSM within the nation's broader effort to internationalize higher education. Grounded in sociocultural learning theory and multimodal literacy frameworks, the research demonstrated that teachers view VSM as both a pedagogical innovation and a strategic approach to advancing internationalization at home (IaH). The findings reveal that teachers view virtual mobility as an inclusive and transformative educational practice that fosters students' global competencies. Educators emphasized that participation in virtual exchanges enhances essential skills such as critical thinking, intercultural communication, collaboration, and creativity. They perceived VSM as an accessible and equitable form of internationalization, allowing students from regional and resource-limited institutions to participate in meaningful cross-cultural learning experiences without facing financial or logistical obstacles.

At the same time, teachers acknowledged several challenges that limit the effectiveness of virtual mobility, including technological instability, language barriers, insufficient institutional support, and the absence of formal recognition for VSM initiatives. Despite these difficulties, most educators demonstrated a strong professional commitment to improving the quality of virtual programs and embedding global perspectives within their teaching practices. This reflects an increasing awareness of VSM's importance in preparing students to engage successfully in an interconnected academic and professional environment. Overall, the study concludes that teachers in regional Kazakhstani universities regard virtual mobility as a practical and valuable means of advancing internationalization, particularly when supported by adequate institutional frameworks, reliable digital infrastructure, and ongoing professional development. Their perspectives reflect a balance of optimism regarding the pedagogical benefits of VSM and realism about the operational challenges that must be addressed to ensure its long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Based on these insights, several practical recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutional Support and Policy Integration:** Universities should formally incorporate virtual mobility into their internationalization strategies by embedding it within curricula, workload models, and quality assurance frameworks to ensure long-term sustainability and institutional commitment.
2. **Professional Development for Educators:** Ongoing professional training in digital pedagogy, intercultural communication, and online collaboration tools should be provided to strengthen educators' competence and confidence in facilitating virtual exchange programs.
3. **Language and Digital Skills Enhancement:** Both students and faculty require continuous language support and digital literacy development to effectively navigate communication and technical challenges during virtual mobility activities.
4. **Infrastructure and Technical Resources:** Strategic investment in reliable ICT infrastructure, stable internet connectivity, and dedicated technical support teams is crucial for the effective and seamless operation of VSM initiatives.
5. **Collaborative Research and Program Evaluation:** Expanding research across multiple institutions and conducting comparative evaluations can offer deeper insights into the academic, intercultural, and professional impacts of virtual mobility in diverse higher education contexts.

In conclusion, this research adds to the expanding body of knowledge on internationalization at home by emphasizing the educators' perspective—an often-underexplored aspect of virtual mobility research. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' global learning experiences, and their perceptions are essential for ensuring that virtual mobility evolves beyond a technological innovation to become a truly transformative and pedagogically meaningful educational practice. By addressing current challenges and harnessing its inclusive potential, virtual student mobility can further develop as a key mechanism for broadening global learning opportunities and strengthening Kazakhstan's active participation in the international higher education arena.

## REFERENCES

- Akli, M. (2013). Study abroad and cultural learning through Fulbright and other international scholarships: A holistic student development. *Journal of International Students*, 3(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v3i1.513>
- Amblee, N. (2018). Special issue on the internationalization of higher education: Introduction. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 13(3), 373–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499918796>
- Anita, A., & Pacek, M. (2016). Challenges in implementing virtual mobility in higher education. *Journal of International Education Research*, 12(3), 45–60.

- Arndt, N. T., Coltice, N., Helmstaedt, H., & Gregoire, M. (2009). Origin of Archean subcontinental lithospheric mantle: Some petrological constraints. *Lithos*, *109*(1-2), 61-71.
- Baldassar, L., & McKenzie, L. (2016). Beyond “just being there.” *Teaching Sociology*, *44*(2), 84–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X16631126>
- Barker, M., Hibbins, R. T., & Woods, P. (2013). Bringing forth the graduate as a global citizen: An exploratory study of master’s-level business students in Australia.
- Baishymyrova, A. & Sadykova, A. (2024). Investigating the Relationships Between Intercultural Competences, Academic and Professional Self-Efficacy of Translators, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *15*(3), 374-399. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5837/691>
- Beeck, E. F., Larsen, C. F., Lyons, R. A., Meering, W. J., Mulder, S., & Essink-Bot, M. L. (2007). Guidelines for the conduction of follow-up studies measuring injury-related disability. *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, *62*(2), 534-550.
- Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). Redefining internationalization at home. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area* (pp. 59–72). Springer. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0
- Bekbauova, D., Iddrisu, I., Suleiman, A. S., Suy, R., & Islamjanova, A. (2017). Internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan. *Journal of Social Science Studies*, *4*(2), 165–176. <http://doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v4i2.11018>
- Beregovaya, O. A., & Kudashov, V. I. (2019). The problems of linguistic and academic adaptation of international students in Russia. *Integration of Education*. <http://edumag.mrsu.ru>
- Bijnens, H., & Op de Beeck, I. (2006, April). Virtual Mobility in Europe: From Pilot Level Towards Integration in Mainstream Education. In *Bridging the gap between Business and Business Schools. Proceedings of the 17th SPACE Annual General Meeting* (pp. 37-43).
- Bokayev, B. (2023). Beyond Borders: Understanding Intellectual Migration among Kazakhstani Graduates of Foreign Universities, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *14*(3), 167-188. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5226/630>
- Bokayev, B. (2024). The Socialization of International Students in American Society and its Education System: A Comprehensive Literature Review, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *15*(3), 289-316. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5834/688>
- Bowden, J., Marton, F., & Säljö, R. (2017). The role of narrative in understanding the lived experiences of students. In R. K. O’Connor & R. J. Martin (Eds.), *Educational narratives and identity* (pp. 45–60). Springer.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.
- Choi, S., & Khamalah, J. N. (2017). Internationalization at home. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *26*(1), 104–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791702600201>

- Codina, J. N., & López, R. H. (2013). The importance of student mobility, academic exchange and internationalization of higher education for college students in a globalized world: The Mexican and Latin American case.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002>
- Darquennes, J., du Plessis, T., & Soler, J. (2020). Language diversity management in higher education: Towards an analytical framework. *Sociolinguistica*, 34(1), 7–29. <https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2020-0003>
- Daurenbek, S., Açıık, F., & Ryskulbek, D. (2025). The Impact of Contrastive Analysis on Turkish Linguistic Competence: An Empirical Investigation Among Students in Kazakhstan. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 8(2), 97-123. <https://doi.org/10.46303/icve.2025.21>
- de Wit, H. (2019). Internationalization in Higher Education, a Critical Review. *SFU Educational Review*, 12(3), 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i3.1036>
- Farxodovna, D. K. (2020). Basic concepts of linguocultural studies. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/Volume02Issue09-62>
- Földes, C. (2023). Interculturality and its linguistic consideration: Three paradigms. *Ezikov Svyat (Orbis Linguarum)*.
- Goodman, B. A., & Kambatyrova, A. (2022). Both necessary and irrelevant: Political economy and linguistic injustice of English in higher education in Kazakhstan. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2022(278), 77–94.
- Harrison, G. (2015). *Next Generation Databases: NoSQL and Big Data*. Apress.
- Helm, D. (2020). The environmental impacts of the coronavirus. *Environmental and Resource Economics*, 76(1), 21-38.
- Huang, L. (2017). Co-curricular activity-based intercultural competence development: Students' outcome of internationalization at universities. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 54(2), 184–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1184098>
- Hwami, M. (2023). A geopolitics of knowledge analysis of higher education internationalization in Kazakhstan. *British Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3949>
- Iyanna, S., & Abraham, J. A. (2012). A comparative cost analysis of undergraduate business degrees for international students in selected countries. *International Journal of Biometrics*, 7(2), 145–160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v7n4p145>
- Jonbekova, D., Kim, T., Kerimkulova, S., Ruby, A., & Sparks, J. G. (2021). Employment of international education graduates: Issues of economy and resistance to change. *Higher Education Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12321>
- Jumakulov, Z., Ashirbekov, A., Sparks, J. G., & Sagintayeva, A. (2018). Internationalizing research in Kazakhstan higher education: A case study of Kazakhstan's state program of industrial innovative development 2015 to 2019. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 23(3), 234–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318786445>

- Karimova, B., Bazylova, B., Makasheva, A., Nurlanbekova, Y. & Ailauova, Z. (2023). Students' Linguocultural Competence: Insights from Internationalization at Home, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 14(4), 379-405. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5450/653>
- Karlik, M. (2023). Exploring the impact of culture on language learning: How understanding cultural context and values can deepen language acquisition. *International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.59009/ijlllc.2023.0035>
- Kenebayeva, A. (2019). *Internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan: Policies and initiatives for the internationalization of higher education*. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5231-4.ch009
- Kilinc, E., Tarman, B., & Yussupova, S. (2023). The Association Between College Students' Participation Behavior and Social Media Use. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 8(2), 55-67. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2023.11>
- Knight, J. (1994). *Internationalization: Elements and Checkpoints*. CBIE Research No. 7. Canadian Bureau for International Education. 220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9.
- Knight, J. (2008). *Higher education in turmoil: The changing world of internationalization*. Sense Publishers.
- Kosherbayeva, A., Issaliyeva, S., Mussabekova, G., & Rk, A. M. (2020). Theory and practice of internationalization of universities in the context of global challenges of the time.
- Kovinthan, T. (2016). Empowerment through narrative: Narratives in the education system. *Journal of Educational Inquiry*, 8(2), 23–37.
- Kuzembayeva, G., Maigeldiyeva, Z., Kussanova, B. & Maydangalieva, Z. (2024). Heritage Language Experiences and Proficiency Among Ethnic Kazakhs Abroad: Exploring Challenges, Language Skill Requirements, and Acquisition Barriers, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 15(3), 348-373. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5655/690>
- Lantolf, J. P. (Ed.). (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Li, A., & Ashirbekov, A. (2014). Institutional engagement in internationalization of higher education: Perspectives from Kazakhstan. *International Higher Education*, 77, 17–19. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2014.78.5805>
- Mak, A. S., Grealish, L., Daly, A., Neill, J. T., Barker, M., Henderson, S., Woods, P., & Buys, N. J. (2013). Internationalization at home: Enhancing intercultural capabilities of business and health teachers, students and curricula.
- Marginson, S. (2023). Limitations of the leading definition of “internationalization” of higher education: Is the idea wrong or is the fault in reality? *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21(5), 765–783. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2264223>

- Mariani, A. W., Pêgo-Fernandes, P. M., & Samano, M. N. (2013). Internationalization of universities: The need to navigate in foreign waters. *São Paulo Medical Journal*, *131*(1), 3–4. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1516-31802013000100001>
- Miller, K., & Levy, M. (2022). Internationalization and global relevance: Challenges and strategies for higher education. *Higher Education Review*, *54*(3), 102–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2079892>
- Moshtari, M., & Safarpour, A. (2023). Challenges and strategies for the internationalization of higher education in low-income East African countries. *Higher Education*, *86*(2), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-00994-1>
- Moshtari, M., & Safarpour, S. (2023). Technological barriers to virtual student mobility: A global perspective. *International Journal of Educational Technology*, *10*(1), 89–104.
- Mutongoza, B., & Hendricks, E. (2025). Social Media and Student Protest Mobilisation in South African Universities: A Review of Literature on Motivations and Limitations. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *10*(2), 205-219. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2025.34>
- Mutongoza, B., & Olawale, B. (2023). The Unnoticed Few: Exploring the Challenges Confronting International Students and Staff at a Rural University in South Africa. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, *6*(2), 107-122. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.11>
- O’Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: State-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, *1*(1), 1–23.
- Orakova, A., Nametkulova, F., Issayeva, G., Mukhambetzhanova, S., Galimzhanova, M., & Rezanova, G. (2024). The Relationships between Pedagogical and Technological Competence and Digital Literacy Level of Teachers. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, *6*(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2024.2>
- Pogorelskaya, A. M., Troitskiy, E., & Pakulin, V. S. (2024). Higher education internationalisation in Kazakhstan (2022–2023): Course continuity or change in the focus? *Vyshee Obrazovanie v Rossii (Higher Education in Russia)*.
- Qiang, Z. (2003). Internationalization of higher education: Towards a conceptual framework. *Policy Futures in Education*, *1*(2), 248–270. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2003.1.2.5>
- Ruby, A., Kuzhabekova, A., & Lee, J. T. (2016). International faculty recruitment in Kazakhstan: The case of Nazarbayev University.
- Rudik, Z., Gerfanova, E., Dalbergenova, L., & Naviy, L. (2025). Intercultural Citizenship in Foreign Language Education: A Study with Kazakhstani Pre-Service English Teachers. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, *7*(2), 195-227. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2025.18>
- Rudman, L. A., & Aldrich, N. (2017). The power of narrative in education: Addressing systemic prejudices. *Journal of Educational Research*, *50*(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2016.1149834>

- Ruiz-Molina, M., et al. (2020). Virtual mobility and digital literacy in higher education. *European Journal of Education*, 55(4), 512–526. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIL.2020.110683>
- Seitzhanova, A., Plokhikh, R. V., Baiburiev, R., & Tsaregorodtseva, A. G. (2015). New trend of education in Kazakhstan: English as the medium of instruction. *Perspectives of Innovation in Economics and Business*, 15(1), 113–116.
- Sercu, L. (2022). Internationalization at home as a factor affecting intercultural competence: A study among Belgian university students. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(3), 536–557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2094815>
- Tebbett, N., Jöns, H., & Hoyler, M. (2020). Openness towards diversity? Cultural homophily in student perceptions of teaching and learning provided by international and home academics. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 19(4), 522–544. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1835464>
- Varga, A., Fehérvári, A. & Trendl, F. (2023). The Power of Community: Supporting the Learning Path of Roma University Students, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 14(3), 117-144. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/4962/628>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yussupova, S., & Tarman, B. (2025). Cultural Empathy and School Climate in Kazakhstan: A Factor and Cluster Analysis of Students' Perceptions. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, 7(1), 47-65. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2025.3>
- Yussupova, S., Tarman, B., Kilinc, E., Tolen, Z., Assyltayeva, E. (2023). Adaptation of the Global Citizenship Scale in a Multicultural Country: Kazakhstan, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 14(3), 305-327. <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5169/636>
- Zhundybayeva, T., Nametkulova, F., Sugirbekova, A., & Orakova, A. (2024). Comparison of Motivation and Job Satisfaction of Teachers Working in Schools with Low and High International SACERS Scale Scores. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, 6(2), 177-195. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2024.17>