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SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES OF EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION PERSPECTIVES AMONG KAZAKHSTANI HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The interrelation between migration and education represents a complex and dynamic process that has been examined in the academic literature from various research perspectives. In modern society educational migration has become a crucial factor in shaping individual opportunities, influencing access to educational resources and the quality of learning outcomes. The expansion of international programs and scholarships opens new prospects for Kazakhstani high school students planning to continue their studies at foreign universities. This article presents the results of a sociological study conducted among high school students from urban and regional schools to explore their educational plans regarding studying abroad. The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS software to identify socio-demographic patterns in the formation of educational trajectories after graduation. The findings demonstrate that academic criteria are the key determinant in choosing a foreign university. Information sources on studying abroad are primarily associated with digital channels (the Internet and social media); however, the family remains an influential factor especially for students from regional schools. The study also reveals gender- and location-based differences in the level of awareness of academic mobility programs. Interest in state-sponsored educational programs remains relatively high, though it varies significantly across gender and place of residence. Overall, the educational migration plans of Kazakhstani high school students are shaped by a combination of academic motivations and socio-demographic factors, reflecting the complex nature of decision-making in the field of educational migration.

Research value: examining the educational migration plans of Kazakhstani high school students makes it possible to identify differences across various socio-demographic groups and to systematize the preconditions of non-returning educational migration at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

Practical significance: the findings provide a basis for designing incentive strategies aimed at minimizing the risk of non-returning migration through a deeper understanding of how high school students' migration plans are formed. The research methodology can be used in subsequent studies to identify the dynamics of changing migration plans and motives among young people.

Keywords: educational perspectives, education, high school students, international programs, urban and regional schools.

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Қазақстандық жоғары сынып оқушыларының оқу көші-қон перспективасының әлеуметтік-демографиялық ерекшеліктері

Көші-қон мен білім беру өзара байланысты күрделі әрі динамикалық үдеріс ретінде ғылыми әдебиеттерде әртүрлі зерттеу қырынан қарастырылады. Қазіргі қоғамда білім беру көші-қоны білім беру ресурстарының қолжетімділігі мен оқу нәтижелерінің сапасына әсер ететін фактор ретінде сипатталады. Халықаралық бағдарламалар мен грант санының артуы шетелдік жоғары оқу орындарында білім алуды жоспарлайтын қазақстандық жоғарғы сынып оқушылары үшін жаңа мүмкіндіктер ашады. Мақалада қалалық және аймақтық мектептердің жоғарғы сынып оқушылары арасында шетелдік жоғары оқу орындарында білім алуға қатысты жоспарларын

мақсатында жүргізілген зерттеу нәтижелері ұсынылған. Жиналған деректер мектеп бітіргеннен кейінгі білім беру жоспарларын қалыптастырудағы әлеуметтік-демографиялық ерекшеліктерді айқындау үшін арнайы SPSS бағдарламасы негізінде талданды. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, шетелдік жоғары оқу орнын таңдауда басты фактор академиялық өлшемдер анықталады. Шетелде білім алу туралы ақпараттың негізгі көздері цифрлық арналармен (интернет пен әлеуметтік желілер) байланысты болса да, аймақтық мектеп оқушылары үшін отбасының ықпалы маңызды рөлін сақтап отыр. Сонымен қатар, академиялық мобильділік бағдарламалары туралы хабардар болу деңгейінде де гендерлік және аумақтық айырмашылықтар анықталды. Мемлекеттік білім беру бағдарламаларына деген қызығушылық жеткілікті жоғары болғанымен, ол жыныс пен тұрғылықты жерге байланысты айтарлықтай өзгешеленеді. Жалпы алғанда, қазақстандық жоғарғы сынып оқушыларының білім беру көші-қон жоспарлары академиялық және әлеуметтік-демографиялық факторлардың ықпалында қалыптасып, білім беру көші-қоны туралы шешім қабылдау үдерісінің күрделі сипатын көрсетеді.

Зерттеу құндылығы: қазақстандық жоғары сынып оқушыларының білім беру көші-қон жоспарларын зерделеу әр түрлі әлеуметтік-демографиялық топтар бойынша ерекшеліктерді анықтауға және қайтарымсыз білім-беру көші-қонның макро, мезо және микро-деңгейде алғышарттарын жүйелеуге мүмкіндік береді.

Практикалық маңыздылығы: Зерттеу нәтижелері жоғары сынып оқушыларының көші-қон жоспарларының қалыптасу үдерісін терең түсіну арқылы қайтарымсыз көші-қон тәуекелін бағындыруға азайтуға бағытталған ынталандыру стратегиясын жобалауға негіз бола алады. Зерттеу әдіснамасы кейінгі зерттеулерде жастардың көші-қон жоспарлары мен мотивтерінің өзгеру динамикасын айқындауда қолданыс таба алады.

Түйін сөздер: білім беру жоспарлары, білім, жоғарғы сынып оқушылары, халықаралық бағдарламалар, қалалық және аймақтық мектептер.

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Социально-демографические особенности образовательных миграционных перспектив казахстанских старшеклассников

Взаимосвязь миграции и образования представляет собой многослойный и динамичный процесс, который в научной литературе рассматривается с разных исследовательских перспектив. В современном обществе образовательная миграция становится важным фактором формирования индивидуальных возможностей, влияя на доступность образовательных ресурсов и качество образовательных результатов. Рост числа международных программ и грантов открывает новые перспективы для казахстанских старшеклассников, планирующих продолжить обучение в зарубежных университетах. В данной статье представлены результаты социологического исследования, проведенного среди старшеклассников городских и региональных школ для изучения их образовательных планов относительно обучения в зарубежных вузах. Полученные данные были проанализированы с применением специализированной программы SPSS для выявления социально-демографических особенностей в формировании образовательных планов после окончания школы. Результаты показывают, что ключевым фактором при выборе зарубежного вуза выступают академические критерии. Источники информации об обучении за рубежом преимущественно связаны с цифровыми каналами (интернет и социальные сети), однако семья сохраняет значимое влияние для старшеклассников региональных школ. Выявлены гендерные и территориальные различия в уровне осведомленности о программах академической мобильности. Интерес к государственным образовательным программам остаётся достаточно высоким, при этом наблюдаются заметные различия по полу и месту проживания. В целом, образовательные миграционные планы казахстанских старшеклассников формируются под воздействием сочетания академических мотивов и социально-демографических факторов, что отражает комплексный характер принятия решений в сфере образовательной миграции.

Ценность исследования заключается в том, что анализ образовательных миграционных планов казахстанских старшеклассников позволяет выявить особенности различных социально-демографических групп молодежи и систематизировать предпосылки безвозвратной образовательной миграции на макро-, мезо- и микроуровнях.

Практическая значимость: результаты исследования могут послужить основой для разработки стратегии, направленной на минимизацию риска безвозвратной миграции посредством

более глубокого понимания процесса формирования миграционных планов старшеклассников. Исползованная методология может быть применена в последующих исследованиях для выявления динамики изменений миграционных планов и мотивов молодёжи.

Ключевые слова: образовательные перспективы, образование, старшеклассники, международные программы, городские и региональные школы.

Introduction

In modern society, educational migration shapes individual educational opportunities by expanding or limiting access to educational resources and contributes to improving educational outcomes (Bernard & Bell, 2018). In educational research, migration is defined as the mobility of individuals aimed at obtaining education in a foreign institution, which fosters cultural and social diversity in universities of host countries. Educational migration trend has significantly increased in the 21st century, during which young people, primarily from low-income countries, seek to pursue education in high-income countries (Netz et al., 2024). The most attractive destinations for youth in the context of educational migration are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Youth mobility between high-income countries is more often observed in short-term exchange programs, such as the European Union's ERASMUS+, compared to long-term higher education programs. For instance, in Europe, only about 3% of students study abroad in long-term higher education programs (Börjesson et al., 2025). In some countries, however, this figure may be higher. For example, in Norway, about 6% of students obtain higher education abroad (OECD, 2022).

Studying the plans and migration motives of current high school students to pursue education abroad is important. Studying abroad is considered a legal form of international migration and is also seen as a *de facto* form of labor migration (Liu-Farrer, 2009) and a pathway to immigration (Robertson, 2013). Examining the formation of migration motives during school years helps to understand the initial intention for irreversible migration and contributes to reducing the risks associated with it. Recent years have shown a general trend of young people remaining in the host country after completing their studies abroad instead of returning to their home country. Such mobility of youth is associated with the migration of highly qualified professionals and is defined as a "brain drain" (Tremblay, 2005). This type of mobility becomes increasingly relevant in the context of global capitalism and the competition for talent (Liu-Farrer, 2019 and Lauder et al., 2018), as international students are in high demand as po-

tential skilled professionals (Brown et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding high school students' educational migration plans and motives is increasingly important, especially considering changes in youth value hierarchies and the expanded opportunities for studying abroad.

Most studies identify wage differences as one of the main motives for migration (Böhme, 2015). However, this conclusion has its limitations, particularly the insufficient consideration of socio-cultural factors influencing youth motives and plans. Educational migration is often described as a one-sided phenomenon, with youth from developing countries aspiring to move to developed countries. However, research results indicate that this assumption is insufficient to fully understand migration motives (Cantwell et al., 2009). For example, studies on students from the USA, Latin America, and Europe studying in Mexico show that, compared to European students, students from the USA and Latin America are more willing to return to their home countries after completing their studies. In other words, the migration intentions of students from the USA and Latin America are more similar to each other than to those of European students. This difference cannot be explained solely by the socio-economic conditions of their countries of origin. Since both the USA and Europe are considered developed countries, the migration motives of students from these countries should theoretically be more similar than those of Latin American students (Lee et al., 2010). Such contradictory findings highlight the need for a comprehensive study of educational migration plans and motives.

This article analyzes the formation of the intention and plans to study abroad and the prerequisites for irreversible migration under the influence of various factors. Educational migration plans are analyzed not only based on the socio-economic differences between the host and home countries but also by examining all factors influencing whether youth return home or stay abroad. Studying migration motives helps assess the importance of the connection to one's place of residence within the youth value system. Examining the process of forming migration plans and motives provides a basis for predicting migration prerequisites. Based on the ex-

perience of previous studies, this research is aimed at investigating the algorithm of formation of youth migration motives in the context of globalization of education.

Literature review

The relationship between migration and education represents a complex and multifaceted process, analyzed in the academic literature from various research perspectives. According to a number of international scholars, educational migration is regarded as an investment in the future, through which parents seek to ensure the long-term sustainability of the family and expand opportunities for income generation (Becker et al., 2022). Youth are considered by researchers as a cohort dependent on parents and family; therefore, decisions regarding educational migration are made not individually, but within the family context (Heckert, 2015). Although young people migrate to study abroad without their parents, they nevertheless remain embedded within the family system (Boyden, 2013). Explanations of educational migration have widely adopted the *push-pull theory*, first applied by McMahon to analyze students from 18 developing countries during the 1960s–1970s (McMahon, 1992). Push factors are associated with difficulties in accessing higher education in the country of origin, such as intense competition, lack of educational institutions, or absence of desired study programs. Pull factors, on the other hand, include the academic prestige of foreign universities, employment opportunities after graduation, the possibility of remaining in the host country, cultural and educational ties between countries, availability of scholarships and grants, as well as active marketing strategies of universities (Loginov et al., 2023). Despite its strong position and widespread application, the push-pull theory has been criticized for overemphasizing macro-level and external factors while underestimating the importance of personal (micro-level) motivations. In response, a modified version of the theory has been developed, incorporating individual motivations such as the pursuit of self-realization and career growth, development of intercultural awareness, family influence, the presence of local social networks in the host country, cost of living, and the desire to avoid stress and daily routine. Nevertheless, within these frameworks, micro-factors are considered as individual and situational circumstances rather than general intrinsic motivations (Lauermann, 2015).

In the literature, two additional theoretical models have also gained recognition: *the consumer decision-making model and rational choice theory*. The Consumer Decision-Making Model is based on consumer behavior theory and describes the decision-making process as a sequence of five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Oliveira & Soares, 2016). In the context of international education, this is interpreted as the desire to study abroad, information gathering, comparison of options, application submission, and the final decision. Rational Choice Theory, on the other hand, views the individual as a rational agent choosing the best option based on a cost-benefit analysis (Eriksson, 2011). In the educational sphere, benefits are associated with returns in the labor market, while costs relate to tuition fees and the risks of failure. According to this logic, if the expected benefits outweigh the costs, a student is more likely to invest in education. Despite the popularity of these economic models, they have been criticized for their one-dimensional approach, in which the complex and multifaceted motivations of students are reduced primarily to economic considerations, while personal, cultural, and social factors remain outside the scope of analysis. International student mobility is shaped not only by the search for economic advantages but also by the pursuit of “cosmopolitan capital” and “ethnic identity” (Bamberger, 2019).

For a more precise measurement of educational migration, *the expectancy-value theory* has also been widely applied in the scientific literature. According to this theory, an individual’s choices and behaviors depend on two key factors: expectations of success and the subjective value of the activity. Values are differentiated as follows: intrinsic value – the enjoyment derived from the activity itself; attainment value – the importance of success in a given task; and utility value – the usefulness of completing the task. Costs include effort, lost opportunities, emotional strain, and distraction from other tasks (Barron and Hulleman, 2014).

Another theoretical framework frequently used in studies of international educational migration is *self-determination theory*. Within this approach, motivation to study abroad is categorized into autonomous and controlled forms. Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation (interest in the activity itself) and identified motivation (external in origin but internalized as a meaningful personal goal, such as the pursuit of career advancement). Controlled motivation, by contrast, includes exter-

nal regulation (behavior influenced by rewards or sanctions) and introjected regulation (behavior driven by feelings of guilt or the need to meet others' expectations) (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Thus, the decision to pursue education abroad is not entirely the result of independent choice but is often shaped by external pressures, including family influence and cultural norms.

Within the framework of sustainable development until 2030, the importance of migration at the international level is emphasized. Migration is regarded as a significant factor contributing both to development and to poverty reduction (United Nations General Assembly, 2020). Educational migration is defined as the process by which individuals seek education outside their country of permanent residence (Sironi et al., 2019). The 2030 Agenda highlights the interconnection between education, economic development, and employment opportunities (SDG 1, SDG 8, SDG 16), inclusivity and lifelong learning (SDG 4), social justice and integration (SDG 16), overcoming discrimination and inequality (SDG 4, SDG 10), and the necessity of global partnership (SDG 17). Education, as the foundation of these interconnections, is particularly emphasized in SDG 4 (Kushnir & Nunes, 2022).

The complex interdependence between education, migration, and sustainable development requires national and international institutions to adopt an integrative and cross-sectoral approach, one that balances the interests of different actors while accounting for both risks and opportunities (UNESCO, 2023). The increasing scale of international migration generates a wide range of complex challenges for educational systems. Key issues include ensuring equal access to educational resources, overcoming language barriers, and fostering an inclusive learning environment. From the perspective of social policy, governments face the task of developing strategies that minimize potential risks while simultaneously harnessing the labor potential of international students (Fayda-Kinik et al., 2024). Taken together, these factors underscore the necessity of moving toward a systemic and interdisciplinary approach that transcends traditional educational models and encompasses the broader socio-economic consequences of international educational migration.

Materials and methods

This study was conducted within the project AP25795411 «International educational migration

of Kazakhstani youth: risks and solutions», funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The article presents the results of a survey of high school students in Kazakhstan. The survey focuses on studying the plans of high school students to pursue education abroad after graduation. The fieldwork was carried out in 2025 among students in grades 9–11 from both general and specialized schools located in large and small cities, as well as rural areas. The total sample included 450 respondents. The study methodology was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Protocol No. IRB-1719 (IRB00010790 al-Farabi Kazakh National University IRB #1). The survey aimed to examine the socio-demographic characteristics and to identify the factors considered when choosing a foreign university, the sources of information about studying abroad, the level of high school students' awareness of academic mobility programs, and their interest in studying at foreign universities through state programs. The survey method proved to be the most effective for studying the educational migration plans of high school students, as it made it possible to cover all key social groups and obtain comparable data on the main parameters. The targeted sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of respondents by gender, grade level (9th–11th), place of residence (city, small town, village), and type of educational institution (general and specialized schools). This approach enabled the identification of intergroup differences and allowed for a comparative analysis of educational expectations and migration plans.

The socio-demographic composition of the sample was formed through targeted selection, which ensured the inclusion of representatives of different social groups. The respondents included male (45.8%) and female (54.2%) students; 9th (36.7%), 10th (40.8%), and 11th graders (22.5%); students from cities (15.8%), small towns (59.2%), and rural settlements (25%). By type of educational institution, 70% were enrolled in general schools and 30% in specialized schools (lyceums, gymnasiums, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, and private schools). The questionnaire contained both open-ended and semi-closed questions grouped into several thematic sections: socio-demographic characteristics; educational plans; attitudes toward studying abroad; sources of information about studying abroad and awareness of academic mobility programs. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis in SPSS (version 21), which made it possible to identify the specifics of

educational plans among different subgroups of respondents.

Results and discussion

The survey results revealed that almost half of the surveyed high school students plan to pursue education abroad after graduation (45.8%), while rest of them intend to continue their studies at Kazakhstani institutions (54.2%). An analysis of the factors influencing the choice of a foreign university shows that the decisive criterion for the overwhelming majority of students planning to study abroad is the quality of education (89%). This finding indicates that academic standards and program content serve as the primary reference point in decision-making regarding educational migration. Financial affordability (39.7%) and the safety of the host country (32.9%) also play a substantial role, highlighting the importance of not only academic but also socio-economic conditions for high school students. University prestige (31.5%) is perceived as an additional, though less critical, factor compared to the quality and affordability of education. The possibility of remaining in the host country after graduation (27.4%) reflects the long-term migration intentions of some students, while climate, cultural environment, and lifestyle (26%) are considered secondary yet relevant circumstances. The least significant factor proved to be proximity to home (2.7%), which demonstrates students' readiness for spatial mobility and their orientation primarily toward the quality and conditions of the educational process abroad. Overall, the findings indicate the predominance of academic and pragmatic motives over socio-cultural ones in shaping the educational migration plans of high school students. The data are presented in Table 1.

The analysis of information sources about studying abroad showed that the main source for high

school students is the Internet and social media: this option was indicated by more than three-quarters of respondents (76.4%). No statistically significant gender differences were observed (male – 63.2%, female – 64.6%). Parents and relatives also play an important role (38.3%), which highlights the family nature of decision-making regarding education. Gender differences are more pronounced in this source: girls more often than boys rely on parents as an information source (39.4% and 23.6%, respectively). Educational agencies serve as a source for almost every fifth student (18.9%), with girls turning to them somewhat more frequently than boys (24.6% and 17.9%, respectively). Teachers and school (12.4%), as well as friends (8.9%), are used considerably less often; however, in both cases, girls demonstrate higher involvement compared to boys (19.1% and 11.0%; 9.2% and 8.5% accordingly). Thus, the structure of information sources reflects a combination of digital channels (primarily the Internet) and social environment (family, to a lesser extent school and peers), while gender differences are observed in the degree of orientation toward family and professional intermediaries. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 1 – Factors considered when choosing a foreign university

№	Answer options	Value in %
1	Quality of education	89%
2	University prestige	31,5%
3	Affordability of education (financial)	39,7%
4	Safety of the host country	32,9%
5	Climate, culture, lifestyle	26%
6	Proximity to home	2,7%
7	Opportunity to stay in the host country after graduation	27,4%

Table 2 – Sources of information on studying abroad by total sample and gender

№	Answer options	Value in % (by the Sample)	By gender	
			Male	Female
1	Internet and social media	76,4%	63,2%	64,6%
2	Educational agencies	18,9%	17,9%	24,6%
3	Teachers and school	12,4%	11,0%	19,1%
4	Parents and relatives	38,3%	23,6%	39,4%
5	Friends	8,9%	8,5%	9,2%

The analysis of differences in sources of information about studying abroad across place of residence revealed several specific features. In large cities, the leading source, as in the overall sample, is the Internet and social media (65.0%). However, in small towns this figure is even higher (75.0%), which may reflect a greater reliance on digital channels due to the relative lack of other resources. In rural areas, the significance of the Internet also remains high (69.2%). Educational agencies are somewhat more frequently used by respondents from villages (17.4%) and cities (16.8%), while in small towns their role is slightly lower (11.4%). Teachers and schools as sources of information are of limited importance (7.1–10.1% across all groups), but their role is slightly more pronounced in small

towns (10.1%). The most significant differences are observed in the influence of family and relatives: while only 13.0% of students in large cities rely on them, this share reaches 42.5% in small towns and 37.7% in villages. This highlights the greater importance of family and close social circles in less urbanized communities. Friends remain a less significant source of information, with their share being almost the same across all settlement types (around 7%). Thus, the structure of information sources varies depending on the type of settlement: residents of large cities tend to rely more on digital resources and formal structures, whereas in small towns and villages there is a stronger orientation toward family and close social networks. The data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – Sources of information on studying abroad by place of residence

№	Answer options	Place of residence		
		City	Small town	Village
1	Internet and social media	65,0%	75,0%	69,2%
2	Educational agencies	16,8%	11,4%	17,4%
3	Teachers and school	7,3%	10,1%	7,1%
4	Parents and relatives	13,0%	42,5%	37,7%
5	Friends	7,3%	6,8%	7,2%

Regression analysis shows that gender and place of residence have different effects on the use of sources of information about studying abroad. Female high school students demonstrate a higher tendency to rely on parents, relatives, teachers, and educational agencies, while the use of the Internet and friends is practically independent of gender. Place of residence also plays a significant role. High school students from small towns and rural areas are

more likely to use the Internet and rely on family, whereas the use of educational agencies and school-based sources varies moderately. The most significant factors influencing the choice of information sources are gender and place of residence in the case of parents and educational agencies, while the Internet and friends remain relatively neutral with respect to socio-demographic characteristics. The data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 – The Influence of Gender and Place of Residence on the Use of Information Sources about Studying Abroad

Source of Information	Coefficient β (Gender, Female)	Coefficient β (Small Town)	Coefficient β (Village)
Internet and social media	+1,4	+10,0	+4,2
Educational agencies	+6,7	-5,4	+0,6
Teachers and school	+8,1	+2,8	-0,3
Parents and relatives	+15,8	+29,5	+24,7
Friends	+0,7	-0,5	-0,2

The analysis of the data shows that the level of awareness among high school students about academic mobility programs remains limited. Only 28.8% of respondents reported being well informed about initiatives such as Bolashak, Erasmus+, and DAAD, while the majority (43.4%) had only heard of them without possessing detailed knowledge. Almost one-third of the sample (27.8%) was not familiar with such opportunities at all. A gender-based comparison reveals relatively minor differences. Among male students, the share of those well informed is 25.0%, while among female students it is 30.0%. At the same time, males are somewhat more likely to indicate superficial

awareness of the programs (46.9% compared to 42.5% among females). The proportion of those who have “never heard of them” remains nearly the same (28.1% among males and 27.5% among females). Thus, the results indicate that despite the availability of state and international mechanism supporting academic mobility in Kazakhstan, high school students’ awareness of them remains insufficient. The slightly higher level of awareness among female students may reflect their greater involvement in educational initiatives; however, overall the data emphasize the need to expand informational and educational outreach in schools. The data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 – Awareness of High School Students about Academic Mobility Programs (Bolashak, Erasmus+, DAAD) by the Sample, Gender and place of residence

Category	Variables	Answer options		
		Well aware	Have heard of them, but not familiar	Never heard of them
Gender	Male	25,0%	46,9%	28,1%
	Female	30,0%	42,5%	27,5%
Place of residence	City	50%	38%	12%
	Small town	28%	37%	35%
	Village	14%	58%	28%
By the Sample in total		28,8%	43,4%	27,8%

The analysis of differences in the level of awareness of academic mobility programs reveals the impact of place of residence. The highest level of awareness is observed among high school students from large cities (50%). In small towns, this indicator is almost twice as low (28%), while in rural areas it is minimal (14%), indicating a pronounced gap between urban and rural students. At the same time, high school students from rural areas are more likely to have only superficial knowledge of such programs: 58% of students reported that they had “heard of them but are not familiar,” compared to 37% in small

towns and 38% in large cities. In turn, a complete lack of awareness is most characteristic of students from small towns (35%) and rural areas (28%), while among students from large cities, only 12% reported being unfamiliar with such programs. Thus, the comparative analysis indicates significant territorial differences in access to information about educational opportunities abroad: students from large cities have a clear advantage, whereas those from small towns and rural areas remain less informed and are more likely to face a deficit of high-quality informational resources. Data are presented in Table 5.

Table 6 – Interest of High School Students in Studying Abroad through Government Programs (e.g., “Bolashak”) by Sample, Gender and Place of Residence

Category	Variables	Interest of High School Students in Studying Abroad through Government Programs		
		Interested	Not interested	Not sure
Gender	Male	56%	9%	35%
	Female	40%	3%	57%

Continuation of the table

Category	Variables	Interest of High School Students in Studying Abroad through Government Programs		
		Interested	Not interested	Not sure
Place of residence	City	58%	1,2%	40,8%
	Small town	38%	10%	52%
	Village	53%	5%	42%
By the Sample in total		49,3%	5,6%	45,1%

According to the obtained data, almost half of the respondents (49.3%) expressed interest in studying abroad through government programs. However, gender-based differences were identified: among male students this indicator is higher (56%) compared to female students (40%). This may indicate that male students are more likely to associate their future with the opportunities provided by international educational programs. A small share of respondents (5.6%) reported no interest in studying abroad. At the same time, this proportion is higher among male students (9%) than among female students (3%). Thus, among female students there is almost no categorical rejection of government-sponsored study abroad opportunities. Of particular note is the high percentage of undecided respondents (45.1%). Among female students, their share exceeds half (57%), whereas among male students it is only 35%. Female students are more likely to remain uncertain about choosing an educational trajectory abroad. The reasons may include family expectations, cultural factors, or the level of awareness about available programs. Overall, the findings suggest that interest in government-sponsored study abroad programs prevails in the sample, but nearly half of the respondents do not have a clear

position. Gender differences are quite pronounced: male students tend to show greater interest and less uncertainty, whereas female students are significantly more likely to hesitate in determining their educational plans for studying abroad through government programs.

A comparative analysis by place of residence demonstrates the highest share of interested students among those living in cities (58%) and rural areas (53%). At the same time, in small towns, the level of interest is significantly lower, amounting to only 38%. The share of students not interested also varies: only 1.2% of respondents indicated this, whereas in small towns the figure reaches 10%, and in rural areas – 4%. This indicates that small towns are more likely to show skepticism or face barriers to participation in international educational programs. A high proportion of undecided respondents is particularly characteristic of small towns (53%), compared to 40,8% in cities and 42% in rural areas. Thus, small towns stand out with the greatest degree of hesitation and uncertainty, which may be related to limited awareness of government programs or insufficient confidence in the prospects of studying abroad. The data are presented in Table 6.

Table 7 – Features of High School Students' Interest in Government Programs for Studying Abroad

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-statistic	p-value
Constant (General school, Female, City)	39,0	2,5	15,6	<0,001
Gymnasium / Lyceum	13,1	4,0	3,28	0,02
NIS	61,0	12,0	5,08	0,001
Private school	32,4	10,5	3,09	0,03
Male	16,0	5,0	3,2	0,02
Small town	-1,0	4,5	-0,22	0,84
Village	14,0	6,0	2,33	0,05

School type, gender, and place of residence have different effects on high school students' interest in government programs for studying abroad. The largest positive effect is observed for students of NIS, increasing interest by 61%, followed by private schools (+32.4%) and gymnasiums/lyceums (+13.1%), all statistically significant. Male students show 16% higher interest than female students. Living in small towns does not have a significant effect, whereas living in a village is associated with a 14% higher interest compared to living in a city, on the threshold of statistical significance. The model explains approximately 82% of the variance in interest ($R^2 \approx 0.82$). The data are presented in Table 7.

Overall, the results suggest that more positive attitudes toward studying abroad through government programs are found among high school students from large cities and rural areas, whereas small towns are characterized by the lowest interest and the highest level of uncertainty. This reflects territorial differences in the perception of educational migration.

Conclusion

The conducted study made it possible to identify the key features of the educational migration plans of Kazakhstani high school students. The choice of a foreign university is primarily determined by academic criteria: the quality of education is perceived as the main benchmark, while prestige, climatic, and cultural conditions play only a secondary role. At the same time, pragmatic factors are also taken into account when making decisions – such as af-

fordability of education, safety, and the prospects of long-term stay abroad.

The analysis of information sources about studying abroad shows the dominance of digital channels (the Internet and social networks), while the family continues to play a significant role, especially in small towns and rural areas. Female students tend to rely more on parents and educational agencies, whereas male students are more oriented toward independent information search. These differences highlight the gender-specific features of educational planning.

Awareness of academic mobility programs remains limited and varies depending on place of residence: students from cities demonstrate a higher level of awareness, while those from small towns and villages are often restricted to superficial knowledge or are entirely unfamiliar with the opportunities available. Interest in participating in government programs for studying abroad is expressed by almost half of the respondents; however, a significant share remains undecided. At the same time, gender and territorial differences are quite pronounced: male students are more likely to express interest, female students show greater hesitation, and students from small towns are characterized by the highest level of uncertainty in their plans.

Thus, the educational migration plans of Kazakhstani high school students are shaped at the intersection of academic motives and socio-demographic conditions. The findings emphasize the need for targeted informational and advisory work that takes into account gender and territorial differences, thereby ensuring equal access to international educational opportunities.

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