



CO-SUPERVISION IN KAZAKHSTAN PhD PROGRAMS: THE KAZAKHSTANI + INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISOR MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This study aims to examine the experience of international co-supervision among Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors. There is a lack of systematic data in the scientific literature on international co-supervision, including the influence of institutional and cultural contexts on its productivity. Exploring the unique Kazakhstani experience allows us to offer new analytical perspectives that clarify interpretations of international co-supervision and complement the existing discourse in the field of doctoral training.
Background	In Kazakhstan, over the past two decades, the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model has been implemented, which involves collaboration between two co-supervisors, one of whom is a local scientist, and the other is an international one. This practice is unique among Central Asian countries, replacing the two-stage Soviet model, which included postgraduate studies (candidate of sciences) and doctoral studies (doctor of sciences). The main idea behind the

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	implementation of this model was to ensure the integration of Kazakhstani science into the global research space. However, the practical implementation of international co-supervision remains insufficiently studied.
Methodology	The qualitative study was conducted using the case study research approach and thematic analysis to interpret the interview data. Kazakhstani (n=11) and international (n=7) co-supervisors participated in the study. Two key findings and five themes were identified to describe the co-supervisors' experiences.
Contribution	The study contributes to the understanding of international co-supervision by examining the non-Western context of doctoral education. It identifies barriers to the implementation of the "Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor" model related to shortcomings in the institutional organization of co-supervisors' interactions, language difficulties, cultural characteristics, and differences in research traditions. At the same time, it shows how individual co-supervisors transformed the experience of limited or formal interactions into targeted research collaboration strategies.
Findings	Two key findings are highlighted: (1) institutional organization determines the nature of the interaction between the Kazakhstani co-supervisor and the international co-supervisor; and (2) intercultural factors, such as differences in cultural and academic traditions, research approaches, and professional expectations, as well as language competencies, influence the productivity of international co-supervising.
Recommendations for Practitioners	The study results can be used by universities to develop transparent and effective regulations for interaction between co-supervisors.
Recommendations for Researchers	The authors recommend that researchers conduct longitudinal and experimental studies to comprehensively understand the conditions under which the "Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor" model becomes a driver for integrating local and international research practices, combining resources to prepare competitive doctoral students. Researchers should also examine risks that require systemic correction.
Impact on Society	The results of the study may provide information on how to adjust international co-supervision policies to produce more competent, flexible, and competitive researchers capable of solving complex interdisciplinary and applied problems. In turn, this will strengthen the innovative and socio-economic development of the country.
Future Research	Four directions for future research on co-supervision are proposed.
Keywords	co-supervision, international co-supervision, supervisor, doctoral student, intercultural differences, institutional organization, Kazakhstan

INTRODUCTION

Co-supervision is becoming an increasingly common practice in the international educational space (Guerin et al., 2015; Johansen et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). As a logical continuation of this trend, a new format is gradually emerging – international co-supervision. In particular, in Kazakhstan, since 2005, the "Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor" model has been implemented, which involves collaboration between two co-supervisors: one local and the other international. This practice is unique among Central Asian countries, replacing the two-stage Soviet model, which included post-graduate studies (candidate of sciences) and doctoral studies (doctor of sciences). In accordance with

established requirements, doctoral students can present their final results in one of two forms: a traditional doctoral dissertation, which requires the mandatory publication of at least one article in an international peer-reviewed journal indexed in the Web of Science or Scopus databases, or three articles in Kazakhstani peer-reviewed publications. Or as a series of three or more research articles published in journals ranked in the first or second quartile according to Journal Citation Reports. The main idea behind the introduction of international co-supervision was to provide a “training ground” for the subsequent integration of Kazakhstani science into the global research space (Guerin et al., 2015). This paper examines a little-studied national context – the specifics of the organization and implementation of international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies.

There are virtually no cases of international co-supervision in the scientific literature, where two scientific supervisors are located in different countries. At the same time, studying this experience seems critically important. Given that international co-supervision is associated with several specific challenges stemming from unique historical traditions of education, including differences between countries in the organizational system for creating academic knowledge and the nature of intellectual activity (Kidman et al., 2017).

The aim of the study is to answer the following question: how do international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors describe their experience of international co-supervision? This study seeks to identify positive practices and barriers in the implementation of the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model. The study has a qualitative design using thematic analysis to interpret the data.

The article makes several contributions. First, the results of the study add to the existing literature on international co-supervision in situations where co-supervisors are located in different countries. Second, the study confirms that institutional support and interactions between co-supervisors influence the effectiveness of international co-supervision. Third, it finds that language barriers, cultural differences, and differences in research approaches can both hinder international co-supervision and provide opportunities for research collaboration. Finally, the study provides data on international co-supervision in a region that is largely underrepresented in the literature. This can serve as a basis for future comparative studies. Overall, the paper offers interesting insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

The article continues with a literature review that examines factors influencing co-supervision. The methodology section describes the data collection and analysis procedure, study participants, and ethical considerations. The results are presented by highlighting key themes regarding international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies. The discussion summarizes the findings regarding the specific experiences of international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors, highlights positive practices, and barriers to the implementation of international co-supervision. Limitations and directions for future research are formulated. Recommendations for improving international co-supervision are proposed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this paper, international co-supervision refers to a form of co-supervision in which co-supervisors from different countries and academic cultures collaborate to facilitate a process of mutual knowledge exchange, thereby supporting the supervised doctoral student. An analysis of previously conducted studies allows us to state that the effectiveness of international co-supervision is largely determined by such factors as institutional organization, the nature of interaction between co-supervisors, linguistic and cultural characteristics, as well as the specifics of distance consulting. At the same time, the presented list of factors does not claim to be exhaustive.

INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

The institutional organization of international co-supervision is a multifaceted issue encompassing diverse cultural dynamics, pedagogical practices, and support needs. According to a study by McAlpine (2013), the effectiveness of international co-supervision is largely determined by the institutional conditions and the willingness of co-supervisors to actively engage in academic support processes. However, the study notes that even with high motivation and initiative on the part of co-supervisors, institutional support for such initiatives often remains limited. For example, in the longitudinal study by Bengtson and McAlpine (2022), institutional underestimation of the resource costs required to implement international co-supervision is noted. In fact, more supervision meetings are needed to agree on research strategies. Such insufficient recognition of the resource costs becomes a demotivating factor for investing in international co-supervision.

The lack of a systemic understanding of international co-supervision as a collective institutional responsibility that requires clear integration into educational policy results in a “highly uneven” quality of supervision, making it difficult for new co-supervisors to adapt. This situation reinforces the fragmentation of practices and reproduces dependence on the personal efforts of individual co-supervisors, instead of creating a sustainable and fair academic environment. In this context, the concept of coherence as an institutional responsibility for ensuring the quality of international co-supervision is particularly relevant. As noted in higher education research, coherence at the institutional level implies the creation of mechanisms that ensure uniform results by minimizing dependence on the individual efforts of co-supervisors (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Weiner, 2009).

The scientific literature offers some guidance for universities on organizing international co-supervision. In particular, it is recommended to provide training to co-supervisors on intercultural communication and understanding (Kandiko Howson et al., 2022), with a focus on global quality criteria (Bitzer et al., 2014). It is useful to develop practical guidelines to support co-supervisors in effectively fulfilling multiple responsibilities and overcoming the challenges of cross-cultural consulting (Bitzer et al., 2014), including instructions on how to distribute responsibilities between co-supervisors. Universities should also focus on eliminating language barriers that may hinder effective interactions (Kandiko Howson et al., 2022).

CO-SUPERVISORS' INTERACTION

Working closely with co-supervisors requires clear coordination, the assignment of roles and responsibilities, and the development of a common strategy for supporting the doctoral student. Each co-supervisor can bring their own unique expertise, providing a more holistic view of the research. The most productive co-supervisor relationships tend to be those where a strong professional bond has already been established, characterized by open communication and a high level of trust. Such co-supervisor pairs typically have experience of joint teaching, publishing, and conducting research, which demonstrates their ability to interact effectively in a team environment and enjoy working together (Paul et al., 2014).

Choosing a colleague for international co-supervision can bring significant benefits, but also carries certain risks (Robertson, 2017a). One of the key advantages is the ability to distribute the workload evenly between co-supervisors (Buttery et al., 2005; Pyhältö et al., 2023). However, research shows that in practice, co-supervisors often face a number of difficulties. These include disunity in the distribution of supervision roles, uneven distribution of responsibilities, and divergent expectations (Hansson & Schmidt, 2023; Spooner-Lane et al., 2007). In addition, communication difficulties, conflicts related to differences in research approaches, and professional competition (Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017) can also occur. Differences in approaches to scientific supervision can significantly affect the productivity of co-supervisors' collaboration, creating tension and frustration, especially if these approaches are not discussed in advance. Additional challenges may arise from differences in institutional, disciplinary, and cultural backgrounds. In such cases, open discussion of working styles will facilitate a better understanding of each team member's preferences, differences, and similarities,

which will significantly enhance collaboration and reduce the likelihood of conflict (Johansen et al., 2019).

CULTURAL PECULIARITIES OF INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

Co-supervision of doctoral students is a challenging process, especially in multicultural settings (Kidman et al., 2017). In particular, in Kazakhstani doctoral education, international co-supervision can be viewed as an “intercultural contact zone” (Pratt, 1992). In this context, the cultural characteristics of interacting subjects require detailed attention (Pinto, 2020). Previous research suggests that co-supervision in an intercultural setting can be both productive and problematic (Manathunga, 2011; Pinto, 2020). In the former case, international co-supervision is based on an ethnorelativistic perspective, which provides unique opportunities for mutual learning (Manathunga, 2017). In the latter case, cultural differences are perceived as shortcomings and an inability to meet “Western” academic demands and traditions (Robinson-Pant, 2009). Moreover, international co-supervisors may experience culture shock, a feeling of disorientation in a different cultural environment due to challenges to their personal beliefs and values (Alebaikan et al., 2020; Choo et al., 2025). The proposed solution is to enhance the enculturation aspect of international co-supervisory engagement through sharing concerns, needs, and expectations, as well as engaging in collective reflective discussions (Lundgren-Resentera & Crosta, 2019).

The language barrier is another challenge that hinders effective interaction between co-supervisors. Insufficient proficiency in a common language of communication, usually English, may lead to a “lack of clarity” in discussing the topic and procedure of the dissertation research (Kandiko Howson et al., 2022).

DISTANCE INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

Distance international co-supervision addresses the issue of internationalization of research, integration of interdisciplinary approaches, and availability of highly qualified scientific supervision. In this context, Web 2.0 tools facilitate regular communication between co-supervisors and the doctoral student, thereby contributing to the creation of a collaborative research environment (Hamada, 2011; Maor et al., 2016; Ospanova et al., 2019). Harnessing the power of modern information technology can significantly enrich the doctoral experience (Wisker et al., 2021). In addition, international co-supervisors can supervise research from anywhere in the world (S. Kumar et al., 2020). However, distance international co-supervision may face challenges in ensuring effective communication, maintaining personal networks, and the psychological well-being of doctoral students (Wisker et al., 2021). In particular, this form of shared international co-supervision is perceived as a source of increased workload and stress (Else, 2021; Herman et al., 2021). The exclusion of spontaneous consultations over a cup of coffee or in the hallway significantly reduces the volume of interactions (Lambrechts & Smith, 2020). It also makes it difficult to recognize in a timely manner situations in which doctoral students need support (Löfström et al., 2024). To overcome these difficulties, monthly online meetings are recommended (S. Kumar et al., 2020) with an emphasis on informal and unstructured communication (Wang & DeLaquil, 2020). Supervisors should not only be able to provide relevant online resources but also refer doctoral students to experts who can support them in their research or facilitate contacts with researchers in their region (S. Kumar et al., 2020). Sufficient technological and institutional support is a key condition for building effective international co-supervision in an online environment (S. Kumar et al., 2023).

LITERATURE GAPS AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Despite the increased interest in the issue of co-supervision, certain gaps remain in the existing literature. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to their gradual overcoming. First, studies devoted to international co-supervision remain limited. For this reason, there is a lack of systematic data on how institutional contexts, organizational mechanisms, and cultural differences affect the effectiveness of international co-supervision. Second, despite its twenty-year history, the problems of the Kazakhstani

model of international co-supervision in the context of international relations have not received a comprehensive analysis. A small number of published works primarily concern the general aspects of transforming doctoral education (Yelibay et al., 2022), as well as the impact of mandatory publication policies in ranking journals on the research productivity of doctoral students (Bayanbayeva, 2025; Kuzhabekova, 2025). At the same time, the Kazakhstani practice presents a unique situation of an “intercultural contact zone” (Pratt, 1992), in which both new opportunities and significant challenges accompany the interaction between local and international co-supervisors. This context allows us to complement existing research and enrich the discourse with new knowledge on international co-supervising. Third, an analysis of the experiences of Kazakhstani co-supervisors and international co-supervisors opens up opportunities for a deeper understanding of international co-supervising in an environment that seeks to integrate local educational traditions with global trends in research education.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative approach, chosen to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the contextual phenomenon of international co-supervision through the personal experiences of Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The use of case study research (Merriam, 2009) is essential to explore the real context of international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral education. Thematic analysis was used to deeply interpret the data, identify key patterns, and form themes that reflect the participants’ experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (protocol No. 5, dated March 19, 2024). Participation in the study was free, voluntary, and confidential. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the survey and gave consent to the processing of the data obtained.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview method. The interview guide included background (N = 3) and main (N = 8) questions aimed at exploring the experience of international co-supervision in the context of Kazakhstani doctoral education. The main focus was on the issues of division of responsibilities, the impact of language barriers, research traditions and culture, as well as the potential for joint publications and the need for support for the successful implementation of international co-supervision. The full list of questions is provided in the Appendix. Participants were also given the opportunity to share their unique perspectives and experiences beyond the pre-prepared questions. Participants freely expressed their thoughts on topics they considered important or relevant, which allowed for a deeper understanding of their individual perceptions and approach to the practice of international co-supervision.

The interviews were conducted online using the Microsoft Teams platform, which included audio and video recording functions for subsequent analysis. The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 to 60 minutes. The expediency of online interviews is due to several reasons: first, to ensure the availability of international co-supervisors physically located in different countries; second, the online format minimizes the time and resource costs associated with organizing face-to-face meetings with Kazakhstani co-supervisors; third, online interviews allow maintaining a high level of interaction between the researcher and participants; and fourth, the use of digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams simplifies the process of recording interviews, which contributes to more accurate and detailed data analysis.

PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted at a university in Kazakhstan. The participants were selected purposively. The selection criteria were international and Kazakhstani supervisors with experience in international co-supervision of three or more Kazakhstani doctoral students. The invitations to participate in the study were sent to international co-supervisors through the Department of International Cooperation of the university. Kazakhstani co-supervisors were recruited through the Department of Postgraduate Education, as well as through direct contact with potential study participants. The sample included 7 international co-supervisors (Table 1) and 11 Kazakhstani co-supervisors (Table 2), including 7 men and 11 women. The Kazakhstani sample was mostly represented by women, which corresponds to the real demographic situation. According to the National Report on Science (2023), women significantly predominate in the Kazakhstani scientific community. At the same time, the authors admit that gender imbalance could have affected the expression of individual thematic patterns. This was taken into account when interpreting the data and is considered a limitation of the study. Each participant was willing to share their experience of international co-supervision.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of international co-supervisors

Pseudonym	Gender	Country	Research field
Alper	male	Turkey	Humanitarian
Rodion	male	Russia	Humanitarian
Helen	female	Russia	Humanitarian
Arthur	male	UK/Hungary	Natural
Nina	female	Russia	Humanitarian
Steven	male	USA	Humanitarian
Naveen	male	India	Humanitarian

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of Kazakhstani co-supervisors

Pseudonym	Gender	Research field
Aru	female	Social
Anna	female	Humanitarian
Camilla	female	Humanitarian
Samal	female	Humanitarian
Aileen	female	Humanitarian
Sofia	female	Natural
Marat	male	Natural
Alma	female	Humanitarian
Ella	female	Humanitarian
Dana	female	Humanitarian
Vadim	male	Natural

ANALYSIS

In the first stage, interview recordings were transcribed into text format and checked for accuracy and consistency with the original audio recording. The data were anonymized by masking information identifying the participants. Next, coding and comparison of the coded data were carried out. This made it possible to group and combine codes into broader thematic categories and subthemes, and a name was assigned that clarified the context and specificity of the identified phenomenon. At the final stage, analysis and interpretation of themes were carried out within the framework of the research question. An analytical narrative was prepared (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological approach to the study was carefully planned; however, this does not exclude some limitations. First, the study was conducted within a single Kazakhstani university and relies on a purposive sample of Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors. Consequently, the results are oriented towards analytical rather than statistical generalization and therefore require caution when transferring to other contexts (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the sample exhibits a gender imbalance. Second, the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which implies the risk of social desirability bias and recall errors. It is impossible to completely exclude this effect despite the neutral wording of the questions and guarantees of confidentiality. Third, the positionality of the researcher and the interpretative nature of thematic analysis (Lareau, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). Therefore, the credibility of the research data was ensured in accordance with the Lincoln and Guba (1985) framework. A detailed description of the context, sample, and procedures, supplemented by representative quotes, ensured the transferability of the results. Researcher triangulation at all stages of the thematic analysis helped to reduce the influence of individual positionality and enrich interpretation. Reliability was supported by documenting the steps of the thematic analysis, i.e., by forming an Audit Trail. Considering the specified limitations, we believe that the chosen approach is suitable for the study's purpose – examining the practice of international co-supervision in the Kazakhstani context.

FINDINGS

Two conclusions are drawn from the findings. First, the practical implementation of international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies is influenced by institutional aspects and the interaction of co-supervisors, which is implemented in different ways. Second, intercultural factors in co-supervision include language barriers, cultural characteristics, and differences in research approaches. The remainder of this section provides a detailed discussion of the themes developed based on the identified findings, supported by respondents' quotes and references to previous studies. For each theme, the experience of international co-supervisors is described first, followed by that of Kazakhstani co-supervisors.

INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION AND INTERACTION OF CO-SUPERVISORS IN INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

Below are three themes regarding institutional aspects and co-supervisor interactions in Kazakhstani doctoral education.

Institutional organization of international co-supervision

International co-supervisors

The international co-supervisors drew attention to the systemic shortcomings in the institutional organization of international co-supervision. In particular, they noted the lack of formalized procedures and mechanisms regulating the distribution of roles, duties, and responsibilities between the Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors. As a result, the lack of a clear organizational framework becomes a factor contributing to the uncertainty and passivity of the co-supervisors. Helen emphasizes: "Co-supervision is essentially formal due to the lack of institutional mechanisms." In terms of the concept of coherence, the lack of coordinating structural decisions gives rise to "unevenness" in practices and dependence on the individual efforts and motivation of actors (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Weiner, 2009).

Uncertainty undermines the credibility and perceived value of the "Kazakhstani + international co-supervision" model, reducing the international co-supervisors' interest in active participation. For example, Arthur shared: "For foreigners, everything may seem disorganized. This is a negative aspect." In addition, international co-supervisors emphasize their detachment from the process of choosing the dissertation topic. Study participants noted that their role is often limited to passive assessment or

methodological consultation after all the main decisions on the dissertation topic have been made without their participation. Such a practice limits the contribution of the international co-supervisor. Steven describes: “The choice of research topic is not discussed with me. Doctoral students come to me with a topic and ask me to review the methods.” This contradicts the notions of productive international co-supervision as a joint development of the research trajectory and distribution of responsibility for the results (Paul et al., 2014) and limits the potential for mutual learning in the intercultural contact zone (Manathunga, 2011, 2017). In addition, international co-supervisors reported extreme cases of exclusion from the dissertation supervision process. Stephen described this experience:

They often exclude me from the process, and I am no longer involved. There is only one instance of ongoing interaction, and this dissertation is still a work in progress ... It often feels like I am left out of the final stages.

Earlier studies have found that the absence of an effective role model leads to team dysfunction, which negatively affects research performance (Robertson, 2017a).

A separate institutional node is the remuneration of international co-supervisors, which motivates them to devote more time to working with the doctoral student, providing support and timely feedback. However, for some reason, this point is missed in Kazakhstani doctoral studies. International co-supervisors directly point out the importance of transparent compensation mechanisms and recognition of contributions, linking them to the volume of feedback and the frequency of contacts. Naveen noted: “Co-Supervisors can also be offered a small reward for their time.” This finding is consistent with the literature on the need to establish resources and roles in international co-supervision as an organizational routine, rather than as an exclusive personal initiative (Bitzer et al., 2014; Johansen et al., 2019).

At the same time, despite the recognition of institutional problems of co-supervision, international co-supervisors are generally optimistic about the potential of Kazakhstani doctoral education for integration into international research. The participants’ statements emphasize the ongoing structural changes, the gradual transition to Western models of doctoral training, as well as the possibilities for improving existing institutional mechanisms. For example, Arthur acknowledged the dynamic nature of changes in Kazakhstani doctoral education and the need for an adaptation period for sustainable integration into the international research space.

International co-supervision is not particularly well organised, but this could easily be improved and supported. Kazakhstan is still developing its international research base. This does not diminish the importance of previous research, but in the last decade, the emphasis has shifted towards higher education on a more Western model. This takes time.

In this context, international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies can be seen as an opportunity to adapt elements of Western ways of thinking into one’s own intellectual repertoire (Manathunga, 2007).

Kazakhstani co-supervisors

The Kazakhstani co-supervisors also note shortcomings in the institutional organization of international co-supervision. However, they are quite reserved about the idea of transforming the approach, fearing that it will result in no significant improvements, but rather an increase in bureaucratic procedures. Dana made the following comment on this matter:

The institutional organization is rather chaotic. Basically, everything is based on the enthusiasm of the participants themselves. Sometimes university structures try to intervene, but this happens formally and does not always benefit the doctoral students and co-supervisors.

This attitude is rooted in the traditions of national academic management, where administrative initiatives are often accompanied by more complex procedures, increased paperwork, and heightened reporting requirements. As research in the field of educational policy has shown (Deem et al., 2007;

Enders, 2005), excessive bureaucracy can hinder flexibility and innovation in academic management. In addition, excessive bureaucratic procedures create discomfort for international co-supervisors accustomed to more flexible and transparent academic regulations. Aru noted:

Our Kazakh bureaucracy is a hindrance. A huge number of documents that offend the international co-supervisors ... It's awkward in front of them.

The lack of a clear distribution of roles between co-supervisors creates uncertainty in the responsibilities of international colleagues. For example, Aileen emphasized that “international co-supervisors themselves do not understand what they should do.” Marat noted the duplication of functions in international co-supervision: “This should be complementarity, not an overlap of the same responsibilities.”

The insufficient financial motivation of international co-supervisors is highlighted as one of the reasons why international co-supervision often becomes formal in nature, and the expected benefits of international cooperation are not fully realized. Moreover, for the same reason, international colleagues refuse co-supervision. Aileen shared:

There was a period when we invited international co-supervisors, they received good money. But now money is not allocated and they have no interest. In principle, in the conditions of a market economy, there is no money, no interest. I think that this is all fair.

One interviewee emphasized the importance of expanding models of co-supervision. According to Marat, involving co-supervisors from industry will facilitate a closer connection between academic research and the actual needs of industry, thereby increasing the practical relevance of scientific results. This aligns with the Triple Helix model, which emphasizes connections with industry and the application of problems (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

The co-supervisor must be from production, who will set tasks in accordance with production needs. Co-supervision is good, but it is definitely not necessary for the co-supervisor to be international. A co-supervisor from production can be more useful, since we do not know all the industrial needs. This can be a good synergy.

Despite the institutional immaturity of international co-supervision, the Kazakhstani co-supervisors noted positive aspects, including the possibility of expanding methodological approaches, mutual learning, and integration into the international research space. Anna reported

I think it is enriching. But there may be some disputes and nuances, but this also teaches us some flexibility. International co-supervision is useful because it introduces us to a different scientific tradition.

This result is consistent with the conclusion of Agné and Mörkenstam (2018) that co-supervision enhances mutual learning. It also creates a space for the integration of different scientific traditions within one dissertation (Thong et al., 2025). Thus, international co-supervision can be viewed not only as a unification of methodologies but also as an epistemic space of interaction. The results of such studies have the potential for wider scientific and practical application.

The obtained results allow us to state that international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors tend to evaluate the institutional organization of international co-supervision through the prism of systemic deficits. At the same time, international co-supervisors emphasize the potential of Kazakhstani doctoral education, which can be realized through improving the institutional organization of international co-supervision. However, Kazakhstani co-supervisors recognize institutional shortcomings and are concerned about the peculiarities of national academic management.

Interaction of co-supervisors

International co-supervisors

In the interview, two international co-supervisors reported sufficient interaction with their Kazakhstani colleagues. In particular, Nina describes an example of productive cooperation based on close coordination, which she figuratively calls a “triangle of support.” At the same time, Nina emphasizes the key role of the Kazakhstani co-supervisors in organizing the interaction. Emphasizing the ownership of the institutional initiative by the host party, while the activity of the international co-supervisors remains variable and, according to her, depends on personal motivation. The key factor in the successful interaction of the co-supervisors is long-term joint research practice. According to Nina, the co-supervisors have more than ten years of experience in scientific collaboration, which has led to the formation of stable professional relationships and open communication. Thus, this example confirms the findings of Paul et al. (2014) and Robertson (2017b) that the most successful relationships between co-supervisors are based on pre-formed and stable scientific connections.

We work as a triangle: a doctoral student, a Kazakhstani co-supervisor, and me ... In my case, everything depends on the Kazakhstani side ... And of course, a lot depends on my desire.

Naveen, who has five years of experience working at a university in Kazakhstan, emphasized that this practice contributed to a deeper understanding of the local context and facilitated coordination with colleagues. This case demonstrates the importance of the international co-supervisor’s embeddedness in the host country’s national context as a factor compensating for institutional gaps in the interaction of co-supervisors (Lundgren-Resenterra & Crosta, 2019). However, in order to create equal conditions for interaction, regardless of the level of the international co-supervisor’s previous immersion in the local academic environment, it is advisable to organize appropriate institutional support.

This happens [*Authors’ note: this is about co-supervisors not knowing each other*]. But I personally know all the main scientific supervisors of my doctoral students, perhaps because I worked in Kazakhstan.

Most interviewees reported a formal and fragmented nature of interaction with their Kazakhstani co-supervisors, which was limited to administrative procedures, without any real scientific collaboration. Such interactions, they said, did not provide full support for dissertation research and limited the opportunities for constructive contribution to the development of doctoral students’ research potential. For example, Stephen described his experience as follows:

There is very little interaction between me and the local scientific supervisors, practically none. Sometimes it seems that I am just a supervisor on paper, a formality when signing documents. My real contribution to the project seems very limited.

In some cases, even knowing the Kazakhstani co-supervisors does not change the situation. Alper shared this experience: “Even in the very rare cases when I know the Kazakhstani co-supervisor, we have very little discussion about the research progress of the doctoral students.” Rodion noted an extreme case of lack of interaction, in which the international co-supervisor does not know who the Kazakhstani co-supervisor is: “To be honest, I don’t know who the Kazakhstani co-supervisor is.” The identified problem is a consequence of the shortcomings of the institutional organization. In particular, it points to poorly defined procedures and the absence of institutional mechanisms that would help ensure acquaintance and establishment of contact between the two co-supervisors. This leads to complete isolation of the parties. The illustrated problem is reflected in the published literature. It is noted that despite the potential benefits, international co-supervision may not always be successful (Hansson & Schmidt, 2023). Among the key challenges, researchers highlight the lack of clarity in the distribution of roles between co-supervisors (Ahmed et al., 2024), as well as powers and responsibilities (Kálmán et al., 2022; V. Kumar & Wald, 2023).

Thus, taken together, the participants’ statements reflect a common problem – the prevalence of a formal, non-systemic, and episodic nature of interaction, which hinders the effective implementation

of the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model. The presented results echo the assumption of Johansen et al. (2019) that the affiliation of a co-supervisor to different universities, scientific fields or cultures may lead to a lack of clarity in the division of roles and responsibilities.

Kazakhstani supervisors

Three Kazakhstani co-supervisors of the natural sciences track reported close cooperation with international co-supervisors based on long-term acquaintance and joint research activities within the framework of scientific projects. For example, Sofia emphasized that long-term cooperation with international co-supervisors facilitates effective distribution of responsibilities and consistency in decision-making. In addition, the unique research specialization and limited circle of experts make international co-supervision not just a formal function, but a logical continuation of research collaboration.

My last five PhD students have one international co-supervisor. This is my long-time collaborator, with whom we work very closely. We have a very specific topic of scientific direction, so I do not have a very large choice of specialists ... We have joint projects, and the human factor plays a big role ... Therefore, with the international co-supervisor, we have an established working tandem. Starting from setting up the experiment and ending with the discussion.

The obtained results resonate with research showing that trusting relationships between colleagues facilitate coordination of activities and increase the overall productivity of international co-supervision (Robertson, 2017b). In such cases, there is a high degree of involvement of both parties, regular communication, joint publication activity, and integration into international research networks. In contrast, the lack of close acquaintance between co-supervisors results in poor awareness of professional values, work habits, unwillingness to provide regular feedback, and mismatched expectations. In this case, international co-supervision usually does not develop into a full-fledged partnership. For example, Anna reported that despite a brief face-to-face acquaintance, the lack of a closer professional connection made it difficult to interact with her international colleague. Consequently, visual or formal acquaintance is not a sufficient basis for establishing a stable channel of scientific communication. The lack of trust and personal contact is perceived as a barrier to genuine collaboration. This finding is consistent with a study by Paul et al. (2014) that compared shared scientific supervision with shared parenting.

We had no connection, although we knew each other visually, as he came to our university. However, the lack of personal close acquaintance complicates interaction.

Reflecting on the reasons for ineffective interactions, two study participants highlighted the motivation of the doctoral student as a critical factor. In particular, the passivity of doctoral students leads to a loss of trust and interest on the part of the international co-supervisor, which negatively affects the involvement of the doctoral student in the dissertation research and interactions with the Kazakhstani co-supervisor. This result is consistent with the finding that the loss of trust jeopardizes teamwork and negatively affects each participant (Robertson, 2017b). Therefore, doctoral students need to be proactive and independent in seeking support from co-supervisors (Lahenius & Ikävalko, 2014). I also noted that frequent meetings with co-supervisors contribute to the research productivity of doctoral students (Pyhältö et al., 2022). Alma described her experience as follows:

We had a very productive collaboration with one international co-supervisor. He is very proactive – three years of constant close contact. The doctoral student promptly completed all the work within the framework of the dissertation research and articles. After this successful experience, we took on a second doctoral student, who eventually lost contact with us. And the international co-supervisor said, “I will not take doctoral students anymore.”

Seven Kazakhstani co-supervisors reported minimal interaction with international colleagues and described the practice of international co-supervision as largely formal. Their statements emphasized

that international co-supervisors are generally not involved in active scientific supervision of the doctoral student, but rather play a symbolic or supporting role. For example, Aru explained the lack of real cooperation by the fact that co-supervision is essentially a one-sided request for assistance. Using the term “academic philanthropy,” she metaphorically pointed to the informal and optional nature of the participation of international co-supervisors.

It’s not a collaboration where we both supervise a PhD student. No. Rather, we ask them to support us, to help us. In my opinion, it’s academic charity.

Reflections of international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors suggest that both groups of respondents agree that the key conditions for successful interaction are established professional connections, trust, and the initiative of doctoral students. Otherwise, international co-supervision becomes formal. At the same time, international co-supervisors rightly emphasize the importance of showing interest and activity on the Kazakhstani side. In turn, Kazakhstani co-supervisors experience difficulties in establishing productive contact with unfamiliar international co-supervisors. We believe that, on the one hand, this situation is due to the lack of a regulated structure for regular meetings, agreeing on roles, and exchanging research ideas. On the other hand, belonging to different academic cultures and research practices leads to a divergence of expectations regarding roles and responsibilities. International co-supervisors are guided by their own norms of the academic environment, where horizontal communication and a high degree of researcher autonomy dominate. While in Kazakhstani universities, elements of hierarchy (Lin et al., 2024) and formality of interaction are preserved. This mismatch can manifest itself in different feedback styles, frequency and form of communication, and understanding of the degree of responsibility of each co-supervisor. Therefore, institutional support is needed to regulate the interaction of the international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors.

Distance international co-supervision

International co-supervisors

Two international co-supervisors reported fairly frequent online consultations, during which joint discussions of dissertation research are held. These cases demonstrate the potential of online formats, provided that they are well-thought-out and the co-supervisors are motivated. For example, Naveen noted that he holds three to four online meetings with each doctoral student, with the mandatory participation of a Kazakhstani co-supervisor. The participant emphasizes the importance of regularity of such meetings in conditions of limited face-to-face contact. He also considers it necessary to introduce a schedule of online meetings as a mandatory component of international co-supervision. This thesis is consistent with the recommendations proposed by S. Kumar et al. (2020), according to which online meetings should be organized at least once a month, and in the early stages it is advisable to meet more often.

We had three to four online meetings for each PhD student. The PhD student presents their work, and I contribute. The Kazakhstani co-supervisor is present at these meetings ... Require regular virtual meetings and reports to ensure interaction.

It should be emphasized that despite the availability of modern technical means for organizing remote communication, in the real practice of international co-supervision, in most cases, systematic online consultations are absent. Also, there are no agreed-upon schedules for interaction between co-supervisors. Communication, as a rule, is carried out episodically and is limited to providing individual comments. This significantly reduces the contribution of international co-supervisors to the research process of doctoral students.

Kazakhstani co-supervisors

The Kazakhstani co-supervisors noted that the main channels of interaction with international colleagues are WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, and email. For four co-supervisors, the online format of interaction is perceived as quite productive. In general, it allows for regular consultations and discussions of research progress. Similar results were obtained in the study by Choo et al. (2025). At the

same time, this group of co-supervisors regretfully recalled the lost formats of face-to-face interaction, such as visits of international co-supervisors and long-term research internships of doctoral students. In their opinion, personal communication ensures closer communication, helps to strengthen professional ties, and allows for much more effective coordination of research activities. It is important to emphasize that this point of view was expressed by participants who have long-standing research collaborations with international co-supervisors. These observations echo the findings of Pollard and Kumar (2021), who noted the greater effectiveness of a hybrid approach to co-supervision. As an example, we cite the statement of Sofia.

I used to really like it when there was an opportunity to invite international co-supervisors ... Now we can only communicate via WhatsApp or video. There used to be two internships. A doctoral student could go in the second year and in the third year. The internship in the third year was already more productive, because the first time, the doctoral student went and got used to it. When coming for the second time, he quickly fits in. Now there is some kind of program, but it is not very convenient for international professors.

Unfortunately, most of the Kazakhstani co-supervisors reported an almost complete lack of online communication. Contact with international colleagues is sporadic or completely absent, which makes it difficult to implement international co-supervision. Camilla shared:

There has been no activity from his [*Authors' note: international co-supervisor*] side yet. From my side, there have been two email exchanges to discuss her [*Authors' note: doctoral student's*] direction and how he can help her. So I don't have a close relationship with the international co-supervisor yet.

The analysis of the results shows that the experience of international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors in online interaction is largely similar, but has differences in the perception of the productivity of distance formats. International co-supervisors emphasized the potential of regular online meetings, provided that they are systematized. Kazakhstani co-supervisors, noting the potential of technical means for promptly discussing the progress of the study, simultaneously expressed regret about the loss of the practice of face-to-face visits of international co-supervisors, which ensured closer integration and effective coordination. At the same time, both groups of respondents acknowledge the lack of clearly regulated schedules and structured forms of joint online consultations, which makes communication episodic and reduces the real contribution of international co-supervisors.

Thus, international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors shared their perceptions of the institutional conditions governing co-supervision, as well as interaction practices, including in the online environment. The experiences shared by the interview participants revealed both common difficulties associated with the lack of clear regulations, insufficient support from universities, and role blurring, as well as positive examples when interaction is built on trust, regular communication, and distribution of responsibility. Particular attention was paid to the difficulties in coordinating expectations between co-supervisors and the lack of coordination in the distance form of cooperation.

CROSS-CULTURAL FACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

The following are two topics related to the cross-cultural aspects of co-supervision in Kazakhstan's doctoral programs.

The language barrier

International co-supervisors

Four English-speaking international co-supervisors identified difficulties caused by the language barrier as a key challenge in international co-supervision. As a result, there is limited interaction between co-supervisors, a decrease in the effectiveness of supervision, and a hindrance to integrating Kazakhstani research into the international research landscape. This finding resonates with studies by Pinto (2024) and Lin et al. (2024). For example, Alper reported, "The language barrier might be one of the

reasons why no Kazakhstani co-supervisor contacted me to discuss the doctoral student's dissertation research." These results reflect the conclusions of Alebaikan et al. (2020) that language issues impact the development of supportive relationships between co-supervisors.

Three of the international co-supervisors were native Russian speakers. Since the language of communication with their Kazakhstani co-supervisors was Russian, they did not experience any communication difficulties. The obtained data suggests that having a common language for interaction can significantly reduce the risk of formalizing a relationship.

Kazakhstani co-supervisors

Six Kazakhstani co-supervisors noted difficulties stemming from their insufficient command of English. The language barrier significantly complicates interaction with English-speaking international co-supervisors, making international co-supervision more formal and less productive. Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014) aptly characterized language as one of the eight "amplifiers" that complicate international co-supervision, specifically affecting various aspects of communication: the speed of reading and writing, the swiftness of understanding and responding, and the ability to negotiate and respectfully express disagreement. For instance, Camilla, based on her observations, reported that using intermediaries, such as translators, to communicate with international co-supervisors leads to a distortion of the content and increases the risk of losing significant details during the international co-supervision process.

If the local supervisor does not speak English – the international language of communication – it is very difficult to establish communication; there are many misunderstandings because, before writing an email or simply making a phone call, they need to have a translator sit next to them ... Sometimes I listen to the translations myself and note how they omit important words.

In response to the existing language barriers, Kazakhstani co-supervisors developed an adaptive strategy of selecting Russian-speaking international co-supervisors. Despite minimizing communication difficulties, this practice objectively narrows the opportunities for expanding international cooperation and choosing potential co-supervisors. Ella mentioned: "We try to find Russian-speaking international co-supervisors, at least those who understand Russian." Dana also confirmed that they managed to avoid communication problems thanks to cooperation with Russian-speaking international co-supervisors.

In my case, there were no problems because the advisors were from Russia and Lithuania. We spoke Russian. But if the international co-supervisors had been English-speaking, difficulties might have arisen.

Unlike participants who indicated the language barrier as a significant obstacle, five Kazakhstani co-supervisors reported no difficulties in interacting with English-speaking colleagues, viewing proficiency in English as an important condition for full-fledged scientific collaboration. For example, Sofia stated her language competence as follows: "I am fluent in English: I write, read, and speak." Marat pointed out that in the natural sciences, proficiency in English is perceived as a professional necessity and a mandatory condition for international integration.

In our natural science field, there have always been fewer problems related to English. We know the language, of course; if someone does not know it, they must learn it because it is necessary for work. There are no alternatives.

Thus, the opinions of international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors converge on the point that the language barrier is one of the key factors determining the success or formality of international co-supervision. In particular, English-speaking international co-supervisors emphasized that the limited language competencies of their Kazakhstani colleagues reduce communication efficiency. At the same time, international co-supervisors proficient in Russian noted the absence of such difficulties,

indicating the importance of a common language for reducing the risk of formalizing interaction. Kazakhstani co-supervisors also acknowledged that insufficient knowledge of English makes international co-supervision more formal. However, some Kazakhstani co-supervisors, primarily from the natural sciences, viewed proficiency in English as a professional norm.

Cultural specifics and differences in research approaches

International co-supervisors

As noted by Grant and Manathunga (2011), supervision in different cultural contexts, on the one hand, creates rich opportunities for mutual learning and research integration, while on the other hand, it presents a space of complex and sometimes contradictory challenges. The results of this study confirm this duality of experience in the context of international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral programs. Three international co-supervisors reported a strong interest in international co-supervision, viewing this practice as a platform for developing their own research interests and expanding research collaboration. Arthur shared his motivation for international co-supervision: “I decided to work in Kazakhstan because it was an excellent place for my own research.” Similarly, Naveen linked his interest to the fact that Kazakhstan was already within his field of scientific interest: “My doctoral dissertation was dedicated to Kazakhstan and Central Asia.”

However, in practice, the expectations of international co-supervisors encountered limitations related to differences in scientific approaches and strict adherence to local standards. Alper pointed to an existing conflict in Kazakhstani doctoral programs between the desire to implement international research practices and the need to comply with local regulations, which significantly limits the contribution of the international co-supervisor.

I tell doctoral students not to believe my words because then it might take you longer to finish your dissertation. So even if you like similar dissertation styles, know that this is an international standard, but do what your local supervisor says according to Kazakhstani standards.

Under these circumstances, international co-supervisors find alternative forms of supporting doctoral students, shifting the focus from local regulations to integration into the international research discourse by helping to prepare publications for high-ranking journals. Alper describes his experience this way: “I mainly enjoy helping doctoral students publish articles in English.”

One significant obstacle to effective international co-supervision, noted by international co-supervisors, is the difference in approaches to supervision and research planning. For example, Stephen emphasizes the existence of a gap between local academic practices and global scientific requirements. “Frankly speaking, most Kazakhstani professors in the social sciences are not trained in the proper methods of preparing doctoral students for international competition.” Stephen’s comment reflects a broader problem described by Kidman et al. (2017) about the Western intellectual tradition establishing epistemological hegemony, as a result of which Eurocentric forms of knowledge production are presented as dominant and universally acceptable. In this context, the discrepancy between local approaches to doctoral training and international standards is perceived by international co-supervisors as a factor limiting the effectiveness of international co-supervision.

Differences in research planning procedures are particularly evident in the practice of early thesis topic approval in Kazakhstani doctoral programs, unlike international practice, where the research topic is chosen as one delves deeper into the subject area and refines their research interest. Early topic approval limits the flexibility of doctoral students, reduces their ability to adapt their research plans in accordance with new knowledge and academic development, which is also perceived by international co-supervisors as a barrier to the successful implementation of international co-supervision. As Alper notes, the requirement to choose and approve a topic within the first months of study causes certain difficulties.

Doctoral students are asked to choose a dissertation topic in the first months of study. And it is very difficult to change the topic later. This is not a very good idea because doctoral students are still attending classes; they are not sure what they are interested in writing about. So, perhaps by the end of the year, they will have their own topic because, while attending classes, they can think and see what emerges.

Three co-supervisors from Russia did not highlight significant differences in cultural specifics and research approaches, emphasizing a shared scientific past, and noted only a difference in the dissertation defense procedure.

Kazakhstani co-supervisors

Kazakhstani co-supervisors note that international colleagues experience culture shock when encountering the specifics of the local academic culture, formed at the intersection of post-Soviet management practices, national mentality, and modern reforms. This conclusion aligns with the results of research by Alebaikan et al. (2020). Marat emphasizes that international co-supervisors perceive the Kazakhstani doctoral system as an environment with a high level of formality and hidden mistrust, which differs from the more open, trust-based models of interaction adopted in international academic communities. The latter refers to the university administration's implicit doubts about the competence and intentions of co-supervisors, which is expressed in excessive control procedures and limitation of autonomy. "The system is built on distrust, and this is very unpleasantly striking for international colleagues when working with us ... They are very tactful, so out of respect, they pretend not to notice certain things."

Three study participants linked the passivity of international co-supervisors to the perception of Kazakhstan as a peripheral scientific platform in the international research landscape. Aru shared:

International co-supervisors are not interested. Our academic culture does not suit them. Perhaps Central Asia, Kazakhstan in particular, is not the region where they want to invest resources. I have extremely rarely seen international co-supervisors actually help doctoral students.

Eight Kazakhstani co-supervisors in the social sciences and humanities pointed to serious differences in research approaches. In particular, it was noted that Kazakhstani academic traditions are perceived by international co-supervisors as excessively "heavy" and poorly suited for highly specialized research. Furthermore, the differences encompass fundamental ideas about research procedures, the relevance of scientific questions, and the acceptability of analysis methods. Aru emphasized that "the design of Kazakhstani dissertation research does not meet international standards."

Kazakhstani co-supervisors also note that dissertation research often lags behind international trends in relevance. Alma shared that this makes it difficult to choose a topic relevant to both parties. In this context, it is necessary to mention the importance of developing inclusive supervision (Showunmi et al., 2024), because despite the irrelevance and lack of interest in the dissertation research topic, the agreed international co-supervisor is still expected to provide support and expert knowledge.

We are not developing as fast as Western countries. What happens there comes to us with a delay, previously within ten years, now maybe five. An example from my practice: when approving topics, and we contacted international colleagues, they said: "How can you research this? This was researched by us long ago; it is not relevant. I recommend doing this and that." We were surprised. For them, it was irrelevant, but we might have even heard about it somewhere, but overall, had not yet come to the thought that it needed to be researched.

Situations arise where Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors present conflicting requirements for the structure, content, and methodology of the dissertation research. This is a consequence of the clash of two research cultures and leads to doctoral students having to split their efforts trying to meet the expectations of both sides. This identified problem is consistent with the results of research by Olmos-López and Sunderland (2017), Almlöv and Grubbström (2024), Kaguhangire-Barifaijo and

Nkata (2021), which emphasize that differences in expectations lead to the fragmentation of research projects and a reduction in their integrity. Camilla shared her experience:

Different approaches to the PhD contribute to international co-supervisors demanding one thing, while in Kazakhstan, the requirements are different. Then doctoral students have to spend energy and time to meet the requirements of the international co-supervisor and only apply some small part in the dissertation research. Because the main requirement for the defense is here. International co-supervisors do not understand our requirements.

To minimize the aforementioned contradictions, some Kazakhstani co-supervisors have developed an adaptive strategy of distributing responsibilities. The Kazakhstani co-supervisor focuses on controlling the dissertation research and its compliance with local standards, while the international co-supervisor provides support in preparing and publishing articles in high-ranking journals. Samal reported on this practice.

The international co-supervisor does not participate in formatting the dissertation. Typically, they simply offer their variations and comments. It is very interesting to work with international co-supervisors who have a high Hirsch index and publication activity. Because we send them an article and get back a lot of comments with recommendations on presenting results and applied approaches. We work very productively with these international co-supervisors.

At the same time, in the natural sciences, differences in research approaches are almost non-existent. Three Kazakhstani co-supervisors in physics noted that this is facilitated by the achievement of global unification of scientific methods, the use of generally accepted experimental and analytical techniques, as well as a very long-standing and active collaboration with international colleagues. On this matter, Marat expressed a categorical position:

There are international standards common to all. If you work within them, you work. If you do not work within these standards, then you are not a real researcher.

The results show that cultural specifics and differences in research approaches are a fairly strong source of tension. International co-supervisors, initially viewing the Kazakhstani doctoral system as an opportunity to expand scientific horizons and build research collaborations, in practice face limitations associated with the need to comply with local regulations. In particular, the requirement for an early choice of dissertation topic (often an irrelevant topic), limited flexibility in research design, and a mismatch of academic expectations. Kazakhstani co-supervisors generally confirm the presence of the aforementioned barriers, additionally noting the culture shock of international colleagues associated with high formalization and the specifics of the research culture. At the same time, Kazakhstani co-supervisors acknowledge the lag in the relevance of dissertation research behind global trends. The differences are especially pronounced in the social sciences and humanities. In the natural sciences, on the contrary, unified standards and the unification of research methods help reduce the gap.

Thus, the second conclusion is that international co-supervision is significantly influenced by the language barrier, cultural specifics in academic communication, as well as differences in research approaches and scientific traditions. However, these factors not only act as a source of difficulties but also create conditions for the professional development of co-supervisors and the enrichment of research activities.

DISCUSSION

This study expands the understanding of the Kazakhstani practice of implementing international co-supervision within the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model. The analysis has identified two key conclusions. First, the success of international co-supervision is determined by its institutional organization and the specifics of the interaction between the co-supervisors. The second

conclusion is that intercultural factors – such as differences in cultural and academic traditions, research approaches, and professional expectations, as well as language competencies – influence the depth of involvement of the co-supervisors and the degree of coordination in their joint research activities.

POSITIVE PRACTICES OF IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION IN THE “KAZAKHSTANI + INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISOR” MODEL

Long-standing research ties between co-supervisors, including joint scientific projects accompanied by regular communication and mutual trust, create a foundation for comfortable and effective interaction within the framework of international joint dissertation supervision (Paul et al., 2014). Under such circumstances, international co-supervision functions as a platform for overcoming research challenges and exchanging ideas. Three Kazakhstani and two foreign co-supervisors shared similar experiences.

It is important to note that the natural sciences are more integrated into the international research space. This has been made possible by the long-term collaboration of Kazakhstani scientists with international colleagues. Additional state funding has allowed universities to acquire modern laboratory equipment necessary for conducting research. The application of universal methodological approaches based on standardized protocols and tools recognized by the international scientific community has contributed to improving research quality. Another key factor for successful co-supervisor collaboration in the natural sciences is the mandatory proficiency in English. We believe that an additional explanation for this successful experience may be the fact that the tradition of international co-supervision in the natural sciences has a longer history in the international context (Manathunga, 2012). This explains why co-supervisors in the natural sciences, compared to those in the social sciences and humanities, more often view cultural diversity as an opportunity for professional enrichment and learning (Manathunga, 2007).

Furthermore, despite the mentioned complexities of institutional organization, international co-supervisors noted the significant potential of Kazakhstani doctoral programs for integration into international research. Their statements emphasized the need for further development of practical implementation mechanisms for international co-supervision. Kazakhstani co-supervisors also highlighted several positive aspects, including the expansion of community boundaries, the exchange of unique and informal knowledge that is rarely reflected in scientific literature, the enrichment of research tools, increased publication activity in international journals, and the development of flexibility and the ability to work under conflicting expectations. The obtained results indicate that under certain conditions, international co-supervision contributes to the transformation of individual co-supervisor experience into a collective resource.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION IN THE “KAZAKHSTANI + INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISOR” MODEL

The study results showed that despite the existence of successful examples of international co-supervision, situations of minimal and formal interaction between co-supervisors dominate in Kazakhstani doctoral programs. In most cases, cooperation is limited to fulfilling administrative procedures and is not accompanied by full-fledged scientific communication. A shared repertoire of joint practices is underdeveloped, which hinders the formation of a full-fledged research community. The identified difficulties are, among other things, a consequence of the underdevelopment of the institutional mechanism for forming full-fledged research collaborations (Halse & Malfroy, 2009). Attempts to integrate international supervision approaches into the national context have not yet demonstrated the desired results. The reason lies in the fact that the existing institutional environment for supervision does not sufficiently account for everyday practices, including the distribution of roles and re-

sponsibilities between co-supervisors, strategic prospects for integrating international standards, bureaucratic barriers, and low funding for co-supervisors. As a structural solution to this problem, international co-supervisors proposed implementing standardized interaction mechanisms to facilitate communication and increase the accountability of the parties. In turn, Kazakhstani co-supervisors expressed caution. This is explained by their experience working within the Kazakhstani bureaucratic system, where attempts at improvement often lead to additional administrative barriers, reduced flexibility, and increased workload. Thus, the restraint of Kazakhstani co-supervisors is a reaction to the specifics of national management, characterized by a high level of formalization and documentary support for processes. This result is consistent with studies that outline the systemic difficulties of developing countries in adapting Western models of doctoral training (Hartley et al., 2016; Sabzalieva, 2019).

Furthermore, despite the broad possibilities of modern digital technologies, their use is extremely limited and unsystematic. This situation can be explained by the immaturity of the community; that is, stable practices uniting co-supervisors and the doctoral student into collective research activity have not been formed. For this reason, digital technologies are not perceived as a natural part of international co-supervision. Therefore, what is needed is not simply the introduction of digital technologies, but the formation of a context in which online interaction becomes an organic part of the overall research practice.

At the same time, the positive examples presented above suggest that the initiative shown by Kazakhstani co-supervisors in establishing communication with international colleagues will help form transparent channels of interaction, reduce formalism, and strengthen cooperation (Wald et al., 2022).

An interesting result is the identified role of the doctoral student as an actor in the interaction between co-supervisors. In particular, the activeness and engagement of the doctoral student contribute to strengthening the ties between co-supervisors. Conversely, a passive stance from doctoral students erodes trust (Robertson, 2017b) and leads to formal international co-supervision. In this case, interaction between co-supervisors is limited to fulfilling administrative requirements. It does not develop into full-fledged cooperation, knowledge exchange, joint research planning, and coordination of work with the doctoral student. This result intersects with the conclusion of Robertson (2017a) that low engagement of participants in joint research activity carries a risk of dysfunctionality and negatively affects team members.

A key challenge for co-supervisors in the social sciences and humanities is the difference in research approaches. As the results showed, international co-supervisors viewed Kazakhstan as a promising platform for joint research. However, methodological discrepancies limited the transfer of international research experience into the Kazakhstani doctoral program and also became an obstacle to forming sustainable scientific communities, reducing the motivation of international co-supervisors and, in many cases, leading to their formal participation. This kind of West-centric perspective from international co-supervisors, without considering the national context, echoes the findings of Kidman et al. (2017).

In turn, Kazakhstani co-supervisors saw international co-supervision as an opportunity to enter the international research space, including through joint publications in high-ranking journals. Unfortunately, in the social sciences and humanities, effective collaboration was achieved only in rare cases. The reasons lie in misunderstandings due to methodological asymmetry, the irrelevance of dissertation topics for the international research community, and a personal unwillingness to work within international research standards. It is noteworthy that Kazakhstani co-supervisors interpreted the distancing of international co-supervisors as a consequence of the perception of Kazakhstan as a research periphery, which corresponds to the conclusions of Kidman et al. (2017).

Furthermore, a significant obstacle in joint supervision is the language barrier, as reported by both international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors. According to the results, insufficient English proficiency among Kazakhstani co-supervisors significantly reduces the productivity of co-supervision, leading to misunderstandings and inconsistencies in oversight (Pinto, 2024). In extreme cases, the language barrier completely eliminates the possibility of communication between co-supervisors.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE ON INTERNATIONAL CO-SUPERVISION

The study results contribute to an existing gap in the literature concerning the institutional organization of international co-supervision. It has been established that the lack of clear regulations, insufficiently developed coordination mechanisms, and weak institutional support negatively impact the effectiveness of international co-supervision. Moreover, these factors lead to difficulties in interaction between Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors, ambiguity in the distribution of roles and responsibilities, and reduced motivation for joint research activity. Therefore, improving institutional organization should provide transparency and clear regulations for interaction, flexibility, and efficiency in decision-making, while maintaining a balance between formal requirements and creative freedom. Thus, this study contributes to the understanding by confirming that regular interaction between co-supervisors, supported by institutional mechanisms, promotes the development of cross-cultural dialogue and enhances the exchange of experiences.

The second key conclusion confirms that international co-supervision, which unites researchers from diverse cultures and academic environments, faces several challenges related to language barriers, cultural nuances, and differences in research methodologies. Language barriers can hinder interaction and create risks of misunderstanding key points. Cultural differences, including hierarchical norms, communication styles, and expectations from joint activities, can reduce the engagement of co-supervisors. Differences in methodologies, research quality criteria, and data interpretation can cause disagreements in research strategies. However, these factors not only create obstacles but also open opportunities for developing intercultural competence and enriching scientific approaches through the synthesis of diverse traditions. This potential is clearly demonstrated in the natural sciences, where international co-supervision is characterized by significant integration of international standards and methodological approaches.

It has been established that effective co-supervision goes beyond simple information exchange, as it implies involvement in joint research practice based on regular communication, shared goals, mutual recognition of expertise, and the development of trust. An important observation was the potential for engagement in a process of mutual learning through the exchange of different research approaches, supervision styles, and methodological solutions.

Another important contribution of this study is the expansion of international discussion on the advantages and challenges of international co-supervision in an intercultural context. Unlike the dominant analysis of Western models of international co-supervision in scientific literature, this study is the first to address the Kazakhstani context, revealing the features of the national approach. Thus, the study presents to the scientific community data on international co-supervision in Central Asia – a region poorly represented in publications – forming a basis for further comparative studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of current trends in doctoral education and Kazakhstan's desire to strengthen its position in the international research space, the introduction of international co-supervision has become a strategically significant step. However, the practical implementation of the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model is associated with a number of difficulties and often demonstrates limited effectiveness. The conducted study allows us to set directions for modifying international co-supervision, taking into account specific limitations and opportunities. First of all, it is necessary to pay

attention to the institutional organization (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Weiner, 2009). In particular, to regulate the format, distribute functions, and responsibilities between co-supervisors. This will ensure transparency and prevent formality in international co-supervision. At the same time, it is important to avoid excessive bureaucratization of the process and preserve the academic freedom of co-supervisors. The introduction of digital platforms for scheduling meetings and joint research work will help solve the problem of geographic distance.

Particular attention should be paid to organizing systematic professional development for co-supervisors (Huet & Casanova, 2021). This includes implementing programs, seminars, and training sessions on differences in academic cultures, managing cognitive and cultural diversity, supervisory styles, conflict resolution, and developing flexibility in scientific communication. Training for Kazakhstani co-supervisors in English as the primary means of communication in the international research environment is also essential. This will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of international joint supervisory efforts, strengthening international ties, and providing high-quality support to doctoral students.

One of the sensitive issues is the lack of trust in both Kazakhstani and international co-supervisors on the part of the university. Therefore, it is advisable to clearly define aspects of activities subject to regulated reporting, as well as those related to the zone of academic freedom. It is recommended to replace the system of administrative pressure with regular communication. In particular, to provide for the possibility of feedback from co-supervisors on barriers and opportunities in their practical activities. A trusting attitude towards co-supervisors is especially important in the context of international cooperation, where excessive control is perceived as a sign of an archaic management model and reduces the academic reputation of the university.

The practice of approving the topic of dissertation research in the first 2-3 months of doctoral studies causes cultural and academic dissonance among international co-supervisors (Alebaikan et al., 2020). Therefore, the designated procedure should be adjusted, including providing for the mandatory involvement of the international co-supervisor in choosing a research topic that is relevant to the international research space.

Another problematic aspect of international co-supervision is the divergence of research approaches and scientific traditions (Almlöv & Grubbström, 2024; Kaguhangire-Barifaijo & Nkata, 2021; Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017). Co-supervisors face difficulties in aligning expectations, forming a unified research logic, and providing coordinated feedback to the doctoral student. It is recommended that regulatory rules be revised at the level of national educational policy in order to provide co-supervisors with freedom in choosing methodological strategies. Ensure recognition of different forms of scientific validity accepted in international practice.

We believe that the proposed recommendations will help create conditions conducive to the establishment of sustainable interaction between co-supervisors.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has provided some interesting findings on the practice of international co-supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies. However, there are some limitations that require further exploration. First, this study mostly examined the experience of international co-supervision in the social sciences and humanities, with some references to the natural sciences. Future research could examine disciplinary differences in more detail, including areas not covered in this paper, such as engineering, medicine, etc. Second, the study is limited to the opinions of international and Kazakhstani co-supervisors. Therefore, we cannot comment on the experiences of doctoral students regarding their perception of the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model. We recognize this as an important topic for further research. Third, the identified institutional, linguistic, and methodological barriers represent promising areas for future research. In particular, it is advisable to study practical measures to overcome them, including institutional support mechanisms, co-supervisor training programs, and

strategies for improving intercultural communication competence. Fourth, the gender imbalance in the sample may be reflected in the implementation of international co-supervision, limiting the ability to extrapolate the findings. A promising direction for further research would be to conduct a comparative analysis of the experience of international co-supervision with more gender-balanced co-supervisors. Finally, another limitation concerns the geographical aspect. Given that this study is limited to Kazakhstan, future comparative studies in Central Asian countries may reveal regional patterns. It should be noted that at present, the practice of international co-supervision, in addition to Kazakhstan, is officially implemented only in Kyrgyzstan, while in other Central Asian countries, a similar format has not yet received institutional consolidation.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the experience of international co-supervision of the “Kazakhstani + international co-supervisor” model, which made it possible to identify positive practices and existing barriers. Positive examples of international co-supervision were characterized by the presence of stable professional relationships, regular communication, mutual trust, and common research interests. The most successful experience was that of co-supervisors in the natural sciences, where international research standards are applied. However, a significant number of cases were associated with the formal nature of interaction due to institutional shortcomings, language barriers, asymmetry in research approaches, and cultural differences. All of the above complicates the full integration of international experience and limits the research prospects of doctoral students. These problems are especially acute in the social sciences and humanities.

The research results indicate that the success of international co-supervision directly depends on the degree of involvement of co-supervisors and doctoral students, the consistency of their actions, and the availability of effective institutional support mechanisms.

From a practical point of view, the presented findings can be used by universities to develop transparent and effective regulations for interaction between co-supervisors. The study results contribute to an identified need to clarify roles and expectations (Ahmed et al., 2024) and transform challenges such as unplanned and implicit support outside formal meetings and activities (Almlöv & Grubbström, 2024, p. 19) into opportunities to strengthen co-supervision processes.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Y.T., upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions for Kazakh and international co-supervisors

Background questions:

1. What is your research area?
2. How many doctoral students have you supervised? How many doctoral students did you supervise together with another supervisor?
3. How many doctoral students did you advise together with Kazakh supervisors? In which Kazakh universities have you co-supervised doctoral students? (question only for international co-supervisors)

Key questions regarding co-supervision of Kazakh doctoral students:

4. How is the interaction between co-supervisors and the doctoral student structured? Is it possible to jointly make key decisions regarding the doctoral student's research?
5. Is there an exchange of experience between co-supervisors in order to create opportunities for the implementation of effective joint practice?
6. What positive or negative features of the organization and implementation of co-supervision of Kazakh doctoral students can you highlight?
7. Does the language barrier affect the productivity of the interaction between co-supervisors?
8. Are there any difficulties in co-supervising due to differences in research traditions, approaches to conducting and designing research, culture and ethics?
9. What kind of support, as a co-supervisor, do you need to implement joint supervision in Kazakhstani doctoral studies?
10. In Kazakhstani doctoral studies, is scientific co-supervision more of a formality or a truly well-organized and functioning practice?
11. In your opinion, in general, in the international educational space, co-supervising doctoral research can be considered as productive cooperation, or is it still a "useless conflict", i.e., it is difficult for two co-supervisors and a doctoral student to come to an understanding, share responsibility and control over the research, etc.?

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