

THE EFFECTS OF THE INTRODUCTION OF AN ELITE GLOBALISED

UNIVERSITY ON OTHER INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF

KAZAKHSTAN

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2019

I, Gulzhanat Gafu, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Word count (exclusive of appendices, table of contents and references): 76,772 words

ABSTRACT

In 2010, Kazakhstan's government established Nazarbayev University, intended to become a world-class research university. This university was also tasked by the government with enhancing the overall quality of the higher education (HE) system by advancing national research capacity for innovative development as well as serving as a model for benchmarking other higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country. Through a qualitative case study with in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, and with application of theories on differentiation/stratification, a glonacal agency heuristic and the analysis of the relationship between elite and mass institutions, this thesis is aimed at understanding the effects of the introduction of Nazarbayev University on the policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

This study revealed that there is general agreement expressed by all parties involved, i.e. regional universities, the Ministry of Education and Science and Nazarbayev University, that the idea of having a global aspiring university like Nazarbayev University is encouraging for the system and other HEIs. However, there is also strong doubt and skepticism among the regional universities towards the idea of a single university's effect on the entire system due to Kazakhstan's current HE development state where the rest of the system is under-funded. Besides, the study shows that there is little established cooperation between Nazarbayev University and other institutions and limited vision and understanding between all parties of how the process of translating Nazarbayev University's experience should work. Moreover, the idea of developing a world-class research university in the context of Kazakhstan has been put in doubt due to the limited research background and potential of the national HE system. This study therefore

suggests that in the question of excellence versus equity, at this stage of HE development, Kazakhstan should focus on a comprehensive systemic approach rather than on a single institution.

THE IMPACT STATEMENT

Though this study predominantly explores a phenomenon in the context of Kazakhstan, its intended impact is in the higher education sector both nationally and internationally. From a national perspective, this study's system-level recommendations are a basis for (re)consideration for national policy makers with regards to strategies and future policies in relation to the higher education system's further development overall in line with the aim of this study to understand the effect of Nazarbayev University (NU), as an 'elite' university, on policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional universities in the country.

In particular, this study informs national HE community and policy makers about how internationalisation and research are being developed in regional universities in the country with implications for the entire public HE system; it also addresses various issues in relation to the increasing emphasis on publishing in international journals and the commercialisation of research results. This study discusses different aspects of adopted international policies that do not seem to be tailored to the realities of national HE and are being resisted. This discussion can inform national policy makers about the need to (re)shape strategies and approaches to internationalisation and research development with specific attention to the context of national HE in Kazakhstan.

Another aspect of impact this study could potentially make is through the voices of the regional state universities to the ongoing reforms directed to differentiating HEIs in the country. Through the responses of regional universities, this study presents the issue of interrelations between different types of institutions and the role of the government in facilitating better or more effective interaction between mass and elite institutions in view of an emphasis on NU as an elite world-class research university and its task to

modernise the entire HE in Kazakhstan. This can inform policy makers, administrators and practitioners in education about possible shortcomings in the current policies and encourage better alignment of legal and organisational structures of institutions of different status for a shared goal of improving the quality of national HE. Similarly, this study can serve a possible start for discussions on the government's strategy of translating NU's experience to the rest of the HE system.

From an international perspective, this study provides a case study of Kazakhstan's HE system, with its post-Soviet legacy, as it attempts to adopt global practices, such as establishing a world-class university, that should be a helpful point of reference for the international community of policy makers when attempting to reform their own HE system. Exploring the case of building a world-class university and its anticipated effect on the entire national HE system through different lenses, such as the interaction between global, national and local forces, the dynamics of institutional organisation and the interrelation between mass and elite institutions within the national HE system, provides deeper understanding of the context that could possibly bring new theoretical insights on how interactions between different types of HEIs are institutionalised and organised in centralised HE systems.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratefulness to my supervisors, Professor Michael Reiss and Dr. Vincent Carpentier for their immense expertise in the subject area and research methodology, tremendous patience reading and commenting on my endless drafts, incredible efficiency in providing their feedback on any piece of writing sent, and unfailing support from beginning to end throughout these three years of my PhD journey. Without their invaluable advice, clear guidance and insightful comments this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to express my deepest appreciation and respect to Dr Christine Hoffmann, Director of UCL Centre for Languages and International Education for her continuous support, for inspiring me to start PhD journey when I was hesitating, and always being by my side when I needed. I am grateful to Jane Skirving for being ready to listen to me and giving her advice whenever I approached her, and to Dr John Carey for being supportive, helpful and hospitable to me and my family during the three years in the UK.

I am grateful to all participants from selected universities and the Ministry of Education and Science for their time and warm welcome during the fieldwork.

I am immensely grateful to my husband and my son for their patience, tremendous support, belief in me and their boundless love that gave me strength to finish my PhD journey on time.

This journey would not have been possible without my parents' continuous efforts to motivate me for knowledge and new horizons since I was 12, and my two sisters for their utmost support and love.

Last, but not least, I am thankful to my friends in Kazakhstan and colleagues in the UK who have been immensely kind and supportive during both good and tough times.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and research problem statement

Over the last couple of decades, higher education has undergone significant changes as a result of the globalisation processes that have led to growing economic interdependence between nation-states. Because of intensive global processes governments have been forced to focus more on developing high skilled workforces for capacity-building (van der Wende, 2011) and thus to put more emphasis on higher education improvement. In other words, to maximise their nation's knowledge and innovation production, national policy makers have been creating policies for their higher education systems to become more competitive in the global arena.

Since universities are seen as a key instrument for nation-state's economic growth and global competitiveness (Salmi, 2009), there is a worldwide quest for 'world-class university' (WCU) and/or 'global research university' (GRU) status among nations and their universities (Liu et al, 2011). The competition for talents for the advancement of national research and innovation and becoming visible in the global knowledge society is also stimulated by the increased influence of ranking systems. While for some nations, status and prestige on the university rankings and world league tables are the main objective in establishing WCUs, for many emerging economies it is also an attempt to improve their overall higher education system operation (Cremonini et al, 2014), for them to respond to global changes and increase nation-state's capacity to compete globally. Hence, to transform their national economy to a more knowledge and innovation-based one, policy makers around the world, in developing economies in particular, are putting much effort into focusing public funds towards a limited number of

universities for them to lift up research capacity and facilitate creation and dissemination of new knowledge for national economic growth (Lee, 2013).

According to Shattock (2017), when identifying a strategy of HE development, governments either choose to support a few selected institutions or the whole system and on the 'institutional benefit versus systemic benefit' scale, institutional development seems to be becoming a priority. However, such differentiated approach triggered by national policies increases stratification between selected and other institutions in the system where there is an unequal distribution of resources reinforcing hierarchy in the system (Marginson, 2016). Nevertheless, with less and less public funds allocated to HE, this discourse appears to be dominating with more and more countries choosing the approach of developing one or few flagship research-intensive universities to 'gain an entry into the knowledge economy of the 21st century' (Altbach and Balan, 2007, p. 2). Even in emerging economies with fewer resources for the HE system, various excellence projects and WCU programs have gained a key place in national governments' agenda (e.g. projects in Russia, Chile, Saudi Arabia; see Altbach and Salmi, 2011).

1.1.1 Research context: Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is not an exception and as an emerging nation (independent since 1991) and economy, rich in oil and natural resources, it is considered by the country's leadership that it is of vital importance for the country not to rely only on oil and gas, but to be competitive in knowledge and innovations (Nazarbayev, 2006). Accordingly, Kazakhstan has established a strategic goal to be in the list of the 30 most competitive nations in the world by 2050 and is putting much effort and attention towards industrial and innovative development of the nation (Kazakhstan-2050, 2012). To help achieve

this aim, the role of higher education has been emphasised in all of the main strategic policy documents as central in the country becoming globally competitive by orienting towards global settings of higher education (MoES, 2014).

Over the last decade, the government has been seeking to optimise the number of HEIs by merging and/or closing some institutions that failed to meet state standards (OECD, 2017). The government's further step to reform the system was directed to diversifying the types of HEIs by introducing a classification of HEIs and categorising them by their ability to carry out research alongside their teaching functions. This includes new definitions of 'National Research University' and 'Research University' introduced within the 'Law on Science' (2011) and the State Program for Education Development 2011-2020 (ibid). The government plans to concentrate research capacity in one or two research universities, giving them more budgetary funding for generating new technologies and innovation, while the rest of the HEIs is recommended to strategise their operations for advancing regional level research (Canning, 2017).

In 2010, the Kazakhstan government established a new institution, Nazarbayev University (NU). The university was set up under partnership with leading foreign universities and is tasked by President Nazarbayev to be 'a national standard of higher education for the rest of the country' (Nazarbayev, 2010), to be a leader in higher education reform and modernisation in Kazakhstan and also to 'contribute to the establishment of Astana as an international knowledge and innovation hub' (nu.edu.kz).

Unlike the rest of the HEIs, NU has been given a special status of an autonomous organisation of education by a new 'Law on the status of Nazarbayev University, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, and Nazarbayev Fund'. This provides NU with possibilities to operate in consistency with international practices ensuring academic

freedom and institutional autonomy, along with a governing structure that will allow the university to be internationally competitive (2013-2020 NU Strategy, nd.). The main features of NU that make it distinct from the rest of the public universities are:

- its legislative independence from the MoES
- run by the board of trustees
- operating through the partnership with leading US, UK and Singaporean universities and research institutes
- using English as a medium of instruction
- having highly competitive admissions process oriented towards merit-based selection of applicants (Ruby, 2017).

The principles of NU's operation set up based on country's development priorities, particularly in advancing research capacity, innovative industry and technology and establishing international academic standards guided by autonomy and academic freedom is expected to bring the national education system up to an international level (nu.edu.kz). These are not standard for the Kazakhstan HE system and make NU a highly internationalised institute of higher learning. Though there are some universities in the country that also work on international education settings, NU is a national project, enjoying great support and promotion from the government.

However, within the new policy shifts in Kazakhstan, no studies have yet been conducted to examine what, if any, is NU's effect, as a new policy measure, on the national HE system as emphasised by the government. To understand this, this study proposes to explore the responses of and interactions between the regional state universities and the globally oriented new university with regards to internationalisation and research policies and practices. Though the policy discourse on NU's influence on

the rest of the system is mainly related to granting autonomy and change of governance system of public HEIs, this study argues that NU's profile as a highly internationalised research university could have a potential effect on the change of policies and practices of internationalisation and research in the public HE sector in view of recent differentiating policies.

1.2 Research setting: research aim, focus and questions

Hence, this research is aimed at understanding the implications of differentiation of types of HEIs in Kazakhstan by looking at the effect of NU, as an 'elite' university, on policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional universities in the country, and the responses of these regional universities to this phenomenon. The specific focus is on 1) how the government's differentiation policies and its emphasis on the elite university is perceived and responded to by regional state universities; 2) what the actual rationales and drives behind the three regional universities' policies and practices of internationalisation and research are; 3) what the interactions in relation to internationalisation and research between NU and regional universities are and how these are carried/developed; 4) and finally, how critical is the government's role in promoting internationalisation and research policies in regional state universities.

The overall research aim is therefore to examine to what extent an 'elite', 'globalised' university affects the research policies and internationalisation practices of regional state universities in Kazakhstan and how the latter respond to that. Thus, this study will attempt to answer the following central questions:

Research Question One: How are regional state universities in Kazakhstan responding to the government's commitment to Nazarbayev University (NU)?

Since 2015, when the new classification of HEIs and certain criteria to define each category of HEIs was first presented, there has been no research to understand how this categorisation works at institutional level and whether there is any definite influence of it on institutions on an organisational level. To answer this question, I will first examine policy documents to understand the logics and rationales behind differentiating universities through accentuating their research activities and emphasis on NU as a model in the national HE. Through analysing strategic documents and interviewing academic and administrative staff at three RSUs, and also at MoES, and analysing those through applying theories on differentiation/stratification including some insights from institutional theory, I will attempt to present a picture of how the new policy shift is presented by MoES and perceived by the three RSUs. This will provide us with some foundation to the next research question.

Research Question Two: How do regional state university staff perceive the relationship between their university and NU?

With the focus of this study to understand the effect of an elite globalised university, the second research question aims to understand how the government's emphasis on NU's experience to modernise the entire HE system in the country is actually taking place. This will be done through interviewing staff at RSUs and NU and analysing those through the relationship between elite and mass institutions and interplay between global, national and local forces with the goal to explore interinstitutional relationships and how collaboration between RSUs and NU is taking place.

Research Question Three: How does NU perceive its role in the national HE system?

The third research question is aimed at understanding the role of NU in the national HE through interviewing key people from management team and those who are in charge of experience sharing with other institutions. This will contribute towards understanding of interinstitutional interrelations from both perspectives (of RSUs and NU) as well as to constructing the picture of the potential of an aspiring for world-class university to build capacity for the entire national HE system.

Research Question Four: What is the government's role in integrating global practices of research and internationalisation at NU within the context of the regional state universities?

Finally, the fourth research question is aimed at understanding how critical the government's role is in facilitating interrelations between different status institutions in the goal of sharing global best practices to the entire public HE system. This research question will also help to draw the conclusion of whether there is an effect of NU as a highly internationalised research university on policies and practices of research and internationalisation at three RSUs.

Through answering the four research questions as well as exploring how research and internationalisation is developed at RSUs, I will attempt to answer the overarching question of whether an elite globalised university can build a capacity for the entire national HE as anticipated by the government in Kazakhstan.

1.3 Theoretical framework

As the foundations of my study are related to several conceptual themes in the higher education literature such as differentiation of HEIs, globalisation and internationalisation, it seems reasonable for this study to employ different conceptual

lens and approaches to explore the effect of NU on the policies and practices of internationalisation and research of the three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

One is through exploring differentiation as a process based on institutional theory of organisation studies or organisational institutionalism, i.e. few insights to interpret interrelation of institutions in the HE field, with the association of organisations in society, and how they interact and interreact. The perspectives I would like to draw upon are mainly built on the notions of environment, resources, and isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; van Vught, 1996).

Another approach employed in my study is Marginson and Rhoades's (2002) glonacal agency heuristic where it is suggested that higher education can be examined in three dimensions: global, national and local. According to the authors, each of these is active in its own extent and has distinctive features, as well as each of the three dimensions is influenced by the other two, though each does not minimise or decrease the others, and they are absolutely not in a hierarchy.

Within this study, what is key is NU which is established by national policies, considered to reach global visibility and tasked to have an effect on local universities. So, here an interplay between global, national and local forces is examined to understand the case.

1.4 Personal interest

The topic of internationalisation in higher education has been of an interest to me since I was a student at the University of Warwick where I received my Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Innovation. That was in 2007 when the idea of joining the European Higher Education Area was emerging, and in my dissertation I explored university academic staff perception in Kazakhstan on this movement towards European

credit transfer system. After graduating from Warwick, I worked for more than two years in Kazakhstan at the Centre for International Programs (CIP), which deals with administering the study abroad of Presidential Bolashak Scholarship recipients. Later, in 2010, I joined the UCL (University College London) team to set up and run UCL's University Preparatory Certificate program at Nazarbayev University (NU) in Kazakhstan. UCL, as one of the strategic partners and one of the first that signed an agreement with the NU to provide educational services, established its pre-university foundation year program in Kazakhstan on the same grounds and standards as it has been conducting it in London. While working there for more than five years it was interesting for me to observe from inside the ambitious aspirations of the government and the new university team in setting up a university which would operate in international partnership and transnational cooperation and serve as a research university model to other local institutions. Moreover, since I am also one of the recipients of a Bolashak Scholarship, and much emphasis is put on us as a new generation of young people educated in the best universities abroad, who are supposed to bring new ideas and knowledge into the country and work for the country's well-being and competitiveness, it is reasonable that I am interested in change and innovation in higher education for my country. Thus, the themes covered in this research are chosen as both personal and professional concern for the national HE in Kazakhstan.

1.5 Relevance and contribution

A number of authors have discussed the concept of WCU, government excellence projects, the challenges of creating such universities and the required transformation processes in these institutions, but they agree that the impact of these institutions themselves in the overall higher education systems needs to be studied, especially

when the WCU projects are generally aimed at enhancing the operation of the whole higher education system in many countries so as to increase each nation's global competitiveness. WCU projects are in the early stages of development all over the world (Cremonini et al, 2013), even more so in Kazakhstan, and the implications of such a project on the national dimension of the higher education system in Kazakhstan, particularly from the point of view of the other HEIs in the country, have not been yet examined. Moreover, there are very few studies that have attempted to explore internationalisation of Kazakhstani higher education, and almost none that has studied internationalisation with relation to research in the context of Kazakhstan as well. I believe that this study of the new university effect that operates on different standards and brings new trends in the sector and its changing effect on research and internationalisation policies and practices in higher education in Kazakhstan can contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the contemporary trends in establishing elite global universities in emerging economies and their effect on the national higher education system. Given that there is a significant amount of literature on internationalisation and world-class universities in the context of Western and developed Asian countries and limitedness of such in the context of Central Asia, this Kazakhstan study will contribute to the academic knowledge and literature on these contemporary topics in higher education research. Furthermore, in a practical sense, I believe that this study could lead to recommendations on policy orientation in higher education improvement at the national scale.

1.6 Structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the changes in higher education and the significance attached to internationalisation of higher

education caused by globalisation and nation-states' attempts to respond to this and emphasises the centrality of higher education for national competitiveness. It discusses a worldwide trend of creating elite universities for nations to attempt to become globally competitive. I also articulate the background to my research, research aim, focus and questions, propose the theoretical approach to explore the phenomenon. This chapter also discusses the research relevance and outline my interest in the subject.

Chapter 2 discusses existing scholarly literature on the main aspects of this study: 1) globalisation processes with further elaboration on the concepts of internationalisation and research; 2) global higher education, the foundations of a global research university, and the global quest for a WCU/GRU with the analysis of the glonacal approach to understand how global, national and local forces interact and inter-react (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002); 3) the issues of differentiation and diversity in higher education with an emphasis on stratification and vertical diversity, as well as exploring new institutionalism as a concept to understand the dynamics of institutional interaction; 4) the relationship between elite and mass systems to understand the interaction between NU and RSUs as two different types of institutions.

Chapter 3 provides discussion of the choice of the research strategy in relation to ontological and epistemological aspects with further elaboration on the reason behind the choice of a case study research with semi-structured in-depth interviews and policy documents analysis as methods of data collection. The chapter also gives an overview of what strategy was applied for the data analysis and discusses how the process of analysis was undertaken. Having given some consideration on ethical issues, the chapter provides an account of the pilot exploration of the field that was undertaken at

the very start of my studies and concludes with the summary of main discussion points supported throughout the chapter.

Chapter 4 is aimed at providing a contextual background to contribute to the understanding of the reader of specifics of Kazakhstan as a post-Soviet emerging economy, along with the characteristics of its HE system. Hence, it informs about the country's socio-economic background with further outline of HE system organisation and discussion of historical factors that lead to recent reforms on differentiating HEIs with an emphasis on 'Research University' category. In addition, due to the focus of this study on internationalisation and research policies and practices, the chapter further explores the evolution of university research and internationalisation in the Kazakhstani HE system. Finally, the case universities and their characteristics are discussed and compared with the main points derived from the discussion provided throughout the chapter.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the two chapters dedicated to the findings and the analysis of data and lay the basis for interpreting the main research focus of this thesis. Chapter 5 discusses differentiation policies and the emphasis on the 'Research University' category in the national HE system, RSUs' perceptions of the government's emphasis on Nazarbayev University, their current interrelations with NU and various issues and challenges are involved in this. The RSUs' attitudes towards the role of the government in establishing relationships between mass and elite institutions in the national system will be discussed in this chapter too. It will also elaborate on how NU sees and understands its role in the national HE system, and what challenges and issues they face in fulfilling the task of becoming a GRU and modernising the national HE.

Chapter 5 is then followed by Chapter 6 which provides a picture of the recent development of internationalisation and research in the national HE system in Kazakhstan by exploring the government's policies and reforms according to findings drawn from three RSUs, the MoES and policy documents.

Chapter 7 discusses the main findings outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, addressing the four research questions of this thesis in connection with the concepts explored in the literature review and the data generated from the interviews and policy documents. It is followed by the Conclusion, summarising this thesis, addressing the overarching question of whether an elite globalised university can build capacity for national HE in Kazakhstan, making some system-level recommendations and laying the foundation for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study is aimed at exploring the effect of an elite globalised university on the internationalisation and research policies and practices in three regional state universities in Kazakhstan. By 'elite' in this study I mean the newly established university in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev University, which is tasked by the government to become a global-level research university, and thus it is referred to here as 'elite' solely for the purposes of this study and in the context of Kazakhstan.

To have an overall understanding of the nature of the differentiation processes and emerging 'global research' university in the context of Kazakhstan, this chapter will draw on several conceptual frameworks. First, I will briefly discuss globalisation processes with further elaboration on the concepts of global higher education and the global quest for a WCU/GRU. Further in this view, I will consider the foundations of a global research university with the analysis of the glonacal approach to understand how global and local forces interact and inter-react (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002). Secondly, I will discuss the issues of differentiation and diversity in higher education with an emphasis on stratification and vertical diversity, as there is an argument amongst HE authors that the massification of higher education on the one hand and the emphasis on research and excellence by the top research universities in the global rankings on the other hand are pushing towards highly diverse and stratified higher education systems in the world (Clark, 2008; Hazelkorn, 2005; Marginson, 2016). Thirdly, I will attempt to elaborate on the relationship between elite and mass systems and such institutions to apply this perspective to understanding the interaction between NU and RSUs as two different

types of institutions. As NU is tasked to share its experience with the entire public HE system with the aim of reforming the national HE system, I also propose to explore mechanisms of inter-university collaboration for building capacity and the state's role in this in the HE system in Kazakhstan with the aim of elaborating on this further in the Discussion chapter.

2.1 Globalisation, internationalisation and higher education

2.1.1 An overview of the concept of globalisation

Globalisation is rather one of the most extensively discussed phenomena of the last two decades in the aspects of social science (Yates, 2002). Its multifacetedness and complexity that embraced the world in the 1990s were largely associated with global capitalism and shaped by Anglo-American values (Jones, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002). It has been claimed that globalisation that has been associated largely with neoliberal logic, have transformed the existing geopolitical and socio-cultural order in the world, intensifying interdependence between nations and localities, reinforcing global flows of people; informational technologies; financial transfers; state ideologies and counter-ideologies; information and media resources (Appadurai, 1996, pp.297-299). As a result, a strong movement towards global convergence and integration has been observed (Marginson, 2011b), facilitating various debates on the privileges of globalisation that promote a one-world aspect, and threats of globalisation that may weaken national identities (Held et al, 1999).

Though the concept of globalisation in this study is not applied as a fundamental theory, it is primarily perceived as an umbrella 'force' that underlies different aspects in the focus of this thesis. Regardless of various pros and cons of globalisation debated in the

scholarly literature, its widespread impact on economic, political, social and cultural aspects of life cannot be ignored. Specifically, globalisation as a process is important to understand the changing nature of higher education and an emphasis on global and international policies and practices, namely internationalisation and the significance of research for national HE systems. It is also of key relevance in exploring structural and systemic changes and an increased diversity in HE systems worldwide as a result of global complexities (Teichler, 2006), and in examining the interrelation of two important concepts under study, i.e. internationalisation and differentiation in HE.

2.1.2 Globalisation in relation to higher education

Being predominantly of economic dimension and convergence, globalisation also has broader sociocultural aspect. Breton and Lambert (2003) defines globalisation as “a social process that radically redefines the space for any form of social action and where the compression of time shakes up our notions of the action’s place and territory” (p.26). As such, one of the fields that globalisation has had significant impact on is higher education since globalisation ‘refashioned’ its environment and made it impossible for nations and their higher education systems to be separated and idle from global effects. Held and colleagues’ (1999) much used description of globalisation as “widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness” (p.14) is confirmed by how higher education institutions have become more responsive to changes in societies, cultures, economies and labour markets while stepping out of national boundaries and becoming more international and global (van der Wende, 2011). Marginson and van der Wende (2007) note that globalisation creates a global dimension in higher education that comprises knowledge and information flow, people’s mobility between institutions and partnership networks where knowledge and research are the key elements (p.5).

Along with these, such terms as marketisation, competition and managements became central in the discussion of the global higher education phenomenon, with “other terms, such as knowledge society, global village, global understanding or global learning, are hardly taken into consideration” (Teichler, 2004, p.23). Another set of scholars see the effect of globalisation on higher education in a broader sense including massification of higher education and the use of English as a lingua franca as the main attributes of the globalisation of higher education (Altbach, 2004b).

However, as far as this study concerned, one of the primary effects that globalisation has had on higher education systems is ‘disembedding’ the latter from its national context (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007) due to the intensification of cross-border “flow of people, information and resources” (Beerrens cited in Marginson, 2009, p.11). As the global dimension in many social areas has intensified, international cooperation and collaboration, global networking and partnerships, global benchmarking and rankings, internationalisation and academic mobility have become the strategic priorities of national governments and higher education managers and policy makers (van der Wende, 1997; Teichler, 1999; Rumbley, Altbach and Reisberg, 2012).

Within the development of the knowledge-based economy worldwide, the place of knowledge and research has become important for global engagement and interconnectedness. Hence, higher education institutions have also become a crucial ‘bridge’ that forms and develops this global environment, being not only objects of globalisation but also agents of it (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). Thus, higher education per se is globalising in its dimension. As of this nature, higher education cannot escape from the influences of globalisation, free-market economy paradigms and the competition have become a dominating force in many HE systems across the globe,

although different in different contexts and HE models. To be able to compete nationally and institutionally, it has become important for HEIs to be globally positioned (Marginson, 2006).

2.1.3 Globalisation vs internationalisation

Before looking at internationalisation as a concept, it should be noted that the term globalisation often emerges in the discussions of internationalisation in relation to higher education. Thus, it is important to have them separated and clarified for further discussion in this study.

While there are plenty of works clearly defining the two terms, there is a frequent confusion with regards to the relationship between them. Some scholars accept internationalisation as a reaction to globalisation (de Wit, 2002; Knight, 2008; Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009), but some authors do not differentiate between the two terms and present them as one concept but with different names. This confusion is explained by the different interpretation and usage of the concepts in different ways in different countries (Knight, 2004). For example, in the Russian and Kazakh higher education context, the term globalisation of higher education is more common and widely used rather than internationalisation of higher education.

The hegemonic nature of globalisation closely associated with notions like efficiency, competition and managerialism in higher education that emerged as its economic impact is probably the key difference from internationalisation of higher education. Being defined by some as a reaction to globalisation (van der Wende, 2011), internationalisation is predominantly is about institutional activities that have cross-border purpose such as transnational student-staff mobility, undertaking joint projects in

education and research, cooperation and partnership between universities of different countries (van Vught et al, 2002). Scott (1998) pointed out that not all universities are international but all of them are subject to globalisation (p.122), and while globalisation cannot be totally avoided (Altbach, 2004), internationalisation accommodates a certain degree of autonomy and initiative (Knight, 1997; de Wit, 2002). Furthermore, a general agreement about the effect of globalisation on higher education is intensification of its international context (Altbach, 2004b; Knight, 2008). As Carpentier and Unterhalter (2011) note, globalisation as a process that produces “particular socio-economic practices and forms of (de)regulation” intensifies the internationalisation of higher education (p.160). Further to this, it is important to note that globalisation is a complex and multi-faceted process that promotes “flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas ... across borders” (Knight and de Wit, 1997, p.6), and internationalisation is “an inevitable result of the globalised and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century” (Altbach and Teichler, 2001, p.5), so that the two terms should be used separately. Thus, further I will explore the term internationalisation in relation to the concepts, meanings, rationales and approaches found on the scholarly literature.

2.1.4 Internationalisation: concepts, meanings, rationales and approaches

The most popular definition of internationalisation now used in the literature and referred to by many scholars is one proposed by Jane Knight. According to Knight, internationalisation is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p.11). The crucial component of this definition, according to the author, is that internationalisation is examined at national/sector/institutional levels, so that it can be

relevant to a broader range of contexts and applied “across countries and regions in the world” (*ibid*). It is also important to note that the definition is sufficiently broad to cover the changing dimension of internationalisation along with transforming the nature of post-secondary education. This can be noted in the usage of such terms as *process*, meaning a series of actions or changes happening in a continuous manner, the *international*, *intercultural* and *global* dimension that signifies its embracing breadth, *integration*, denoting a combination of separate elements into a whole picture, and *purpose*, *functions* or *delivery*, three overall concepts based on which any service operates. de Wit and Hunter suggested providing a greater focus to this definition as a result of the analysis of new trends of internationalisation in the European context (de Wit and Hunter, 2015). Looking at the new areas of internationalisation, like internationalisation of the curriculum, transnational education and digital learning, de Wit and colleagues (p.3) expanded Knight’s initial definition as “... the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society”. Adding to the definition “all students and staff” the authors emphasise the importance of the inclusiveness of internationalisation and focusing more on the internationalisation of the curriculum and not on traditional mobility. Another crucial element added is “enhancement of the quality of education”. By this, the authors state that the rationale of internationalisation should not be solely economic and focused on solving “financial shortfalls”, but its aim should be improving the quality of education and making a contribution to society. Different scholars have suggested different rationales for internationalisation, mainly focused on four rationales: economic, political, educational and cultural. Nevertheless, it should be noted that different nation states have different

rationales for internationalisation according to their national strategies, economic standing, political structure, etc. There is no fixed model of rationales that can be relevant to all.

It has been noted by scholars that while changing the scope of higher education, internationalisation itself has undergone substantial changes during the last decade, and the traditional dimension of internationalisation as student and staff mobility at the initial stages has now obtained a more borderless and transnational character in programme and provider mobility (Knight, 2011). In this perspective, Teichler (2009) suggests two aspects of internationalisation. First is related to border-crossing activities associated to HE systems and institutions that have increased in scope and variety from focusing more on foreign language programs, putting more cross-cultural elements into the curriculum to international networking and partnership with HEIs abroad (Altbach and Knight, 2011). The second feature of internationalisation is concerned with the essence of higher education in its change towards being universal or global. Here, internationalisation is considered to be targeting the key functions of higher education like teaching and research, and policies that are directed to the development of an international dimension of these principal activities (Huang, Finkelstein, and Rostan, 2014). Internationalisation in this study is related to the latter point, elaborating, from the one hand, on the Kazakhstan's quest for world-class university through the establishment of a new university of an international scale, and from the other hand, exploring any effects on the institutional policies and practices of internationalisation as an effect of this university that is embedded in the national system and is set to modernise and reform the HE in the country.

Since there are changes in internationalisation itself, the definitions and concept have also been challenged and earlier definitions criticised for 'being too narrow' (Hawawani cited in Trahar et al, 2011, p.27). It has been argued that with new modes of internationalisation, the essence and the focus of the process should be on "integrating an institution into the emerging global knowledge and learning network rather than integrating an international dimension into the context of an existing institution" (ibid, p.27). Within the growing movement towards gaining a world-class status in many developing countries, this seems to be of a more relevance as national governments are putting greater emphasis on the integration of higher education and research in the global knowledge arena (Beall, 2016), through designing internationalisation strategies for their systems and HEIs becoming more engaged and competitive globally (Marginson, 2011). Research and new knowledge production have been seen by governments primarily as ways of meeting this objective (Knight, 2008). Taking into account the interdependence between nations and increasing global connectedness, the internationalisation of research has been emphasised by national policy makers as one of the central rationales for their internationalisation agenda.

De Wit (2013) argues that internationalisation is a recent concept that needs to undergo rethinking as "the discourse of internationalisation does not seem to always associate the reality, in which internationalisation is still more a synonym of international education than a comprehensive process and concept" (p.2). This is critical for countries like Kazakhstan because the country itself is an emerging economy attempting to gain its place in the global knowledge economy and thus internationalisation in Kazakhstan is also gaining importance in Kazakh higher education development.

As every country has its own understanding and interpretation of internationalisation, it is developed and implemented according to national factors. Similarly, approaches that nations and their institutions take towards developing and/or enhancing their level of internationalisation also differ according to various national, cultural and institutional features. Though the major reference to internationalisation is made as a measure to improve HE quality (De Wit and Hunter, 2015), internationalisation is also largely associated with improving positioning in league tables with relevant approaches taken for that, such as recruiting international students and staff, international partnership and co-authorship with international peers (Wihlborg and Robson, 2018). In the European context, for example, internationalisation strategies and approaches are based on their labour market requirements as well as with regards to the need to enhance European research and innovation capacity (Ritzen and Marconi, 2011). Thus, they are aimed principally at national interests rather than international positioning, as, for instance, in China, where they promote “economic openness” (Yemini and Sagie, 2016, p.96). Similar to in the European Union, Kazakhstan’s government strategies for internationalisation pursue national interests of enhancing the quality of HE (Omirbayev, 2015). Consequently, institutional approaches to internationalisation in Kazakhstan are principally determined by the government’s vision and strategies. At the same time, both national interests and international positioning can be part of the same policy goal where government’s role is crucial (Henard et al, 2012).

Wihlborg and Robson (2018) argue that market-driven approaches in HE are dominant, such as an overwhelming position of English over local languages, while they call for more value-based approaches to internationalisation to be developed, such as studies on global citizenship and intercultural understanding (p.9). At the same time, they point out that the approaches and strategies taken for internationalisation are largely

dependent on the level of opportunities and funding. Thus, along with specific aims for internationalisation pursued by the governments and institutions, for internationalisation development and success there should be sustainable financial resources which, in fact, is one of the challenges faced by universities due to the funding cuts on the state level.

In sum, internationalisation strategies and approaches are driven by complex combinations of drivers ranging from market forces to state regulation, from well-established policies to ones that are at a very early stage of development (Henard et al, 2012). Nevertheless, the literature suggests that the most effective way to ensure that internationalisation brings benefits to national HE system requires the alignment of national and institutional strategies within a comprehensive policy level framework.

2.1.5 Internationalisation and differentiation

Debates on how internationalisation and differentiation interrelate are constructed upon the conceptualisation of the changing nature of HE as a result of globalisation dynamism and its effects. There are some discussions among educationists whether internationalisation causes more diverse and complex HE or vice versa, and the internationalisation level of HE depends on how diverse the system is. My aim in this section is to study whether differentiation policies can influence and drive internationalisation policies and practices.

Kehm (2003) outlines four areas of HE that have been reformed due to internationalisation activities. These are: a) changes in the form of knowledge production and increased use of ICT, as well as borderless dispersion of academic knowledge; b) a change in the concept of education from being a public good to a more consumer-oriented commodity and private good; c) transformations in institutional strategies and governance, leading to a more diversified system at local, national and global levels;

and d) the increased role of international and supra-national agencies and their influence on higher education, with a greater impact on how HE and the state interrelate (pp.114-115).

Thus, discussions on internationalisation are gaining importance as an aspect that is influencing and has influenced national policies on differentiation of HEIs (Bloch et al, 2018). As such, for example, within the European Area of Higher Education, establishing the Bologna Process has made significant changes in the way HEIs function in many countries which signed up for it (Sporn, 2003). This has been particularly influential for the post-Soviet HE systems like the one in Kazakhstan that transformed 'old' legacy HE system to a new three-level of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate credit transfer one. Staff and student mobility, quality assurance and accreditation, and qualification framework themes have also been adopted at a national level to integrate with European HE Area (EHEA). Though these actions tend to lead to more homogeneous and integrated HE systems across Europe and some Central Asian area, global imbalances and demands make the HE field more and more structured in a hierarchy of different status institutions functioning through different missions and serving different categories of students. As well as this, the rapid growth in the number of international students, especially in graduate and research programs, has also changed the context in which research universities function (Taylor and Cantwell, 2013). Moreover, as Salmi (2011) indicates, internationalisation, along with "tertiary education ecosystem", is among important factors necessary for successful development of world-class universities (Salmi, 2011, pp.336-337).

Bloch et al (2018) argue that the strategies and measures institutions take in order to develop internationalisation depend on their core activities, and the degree of

internationalisation allows to differentiate institutions. This is more relevant to the research-oriented institutions due to the nature of research being universal and the value of it when globally exchanged (ibid). This might entail steeper stratification between different categories of institutions, although there is an argument that internationalisation blurs boundaries between higher resourced elite institutions and low funded mass institutions depending on the extent of the intensity of internationalisation of both groups (Deppe et al, 2018), which to an extent speaks for the homogenisation that will be discussed in further sections below. Overall, this is an obvious and predominant debate on how internationalisation influences and changes systemic and structural patterns. However, it is not often discussed, whether policies and practices of internationalisation are shaped in a differentiated HE system. The question is whether a highly internationalised elite institution can or does influence policies and practices of internationalisation of lower strata institutions or within the system overall. This kind of argument can take a different direction and shape depending on national system characteristics.

2.1.6 Internationalisation and/of research

Internationalisation has been considered to make a significant contribution towards the development of world class education (Knight, 2014; Altbach and Knight, 2007). As mentioned by Cheng (2016), the complicated and multi-dimensional nature of internationalisation and the dynamic of international activities facilitate a paradigm shift in tertiary education and contribute to building a world class academic capacity. Therefore, WCUs are considered as highly internationalised institutions and are often discussed in this context. This is also emphasised by the indicators of some league tables (e.g. *THE*), where internationalisation is considered as having a direct influence

on the global standing of a university or is related to research productivity indicators like citations and publications in international journals (Shin and Kehm, 2013). Salmi (2011) notes that internationalisation is crucial for establishing and developing WCUs. This is critical for non-English speaking countries in particular, because English is today's lingua franca, with the majority of research papers being produced in English. International staff and students are considered to make important contributions to research capacity development and advancement (Horta, 2009).

Horta (2009) argues that graduate education and research activities are of critical significance for the development of internationalisation of research. His analysis of the top European universities shows that on average 27% of academic staff are international faculty members (ibid). This contributes to international teaching and research network development in addition to the wide usage of English as the language used to speak at conferences, publish in international journals, etc. This in turn attracts more international students, fostering an even more internationalised climate. As noted by Marginson (2006), this puts emerging economies in a disadvantage position by facilitating one-way flow of international students, further increasing the gap between developing and developed countries. For example, as per Li and Chen (2011), despite China's growing economy, there is still more outbound mobility of students than inbound. However, some authors suggest that a correctly chosen rationale and motives when planning internationalisation could help to narrow these gaps (Cheng, 2016; Egron-Polak, 2012). At the same time, their geographical, demographical, cultural and economic situation would still dictate internationalisation pace and degree. In relation to this, Kazakhstan's picture of internationalisation will be discussed in Chapter 4 on contextual background with further analysis of current situation at RSUs in Chapter 5.

Generally, the research productivity of a university, whereby defined through number of publications and number citations in relation to this study's context (MoES, 2016), is often measured by how international it is, as it is believed that in comparison with intra-institutional and national collaboration, international collaboration brings positive effects to research development, as shown by means of citations and publications (Rostan et al, 2014). One of the surveys conducted by the Changing Academic Profession study showed that countries with high research capacity are also active in international collaboration (ibid).

Kwiek (2015) suggests two approaches to measuring internationalisation with regards to research activities. One, external, uses national statistical data on research production through publications in international journals. The other, internal, is based on data about academic behaviour and attitudes provided by academic staff. My focus on university research in this study is concerned with the former approach in relation to citations and publications, as in the higher education discussion in Kazakhstan the concept of research is clearly separated into two: one is concerned with publications, and the other (Nauka) deals with technology and innovation. The latter is more of a mission of technoparks, scientific innovation centres and labs in Kazakhstan and is regulated by a separate central authority called the Science Committee.

2.1.7 Does mainstreaming internationalisation threaten the culture of national research?

Along with the advantages that internationalisation has for HE systems, discussed in the existing literature (Teichler, 2004; Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008; Knight, 2008), there are also issues and debates acknowledging tensions between the global and the local (Carpentier & Unterhalter, 2011). In particular, along with the criticism of internationalisation through the prism of neoliberal globalisation and marketisation

(Varghese, 2009; Naidoo, 2011), questions of culture and ideology in the process of the internationalisation of higher education have also been examined (Agnew, 2012; Harrison, 2015; Lumby & Foskett, 2016). As such, while internationalisation is rationalised as increasing global connectivity and competence (Agnew, 2012), as well as international convergence and harmonisation of systems, as in the example with Bologna Process, there are also challenges of such global emphasis on the local content and capacity and national HE systems overall.

Within this study, ideological baggage that comes with internationalisation might be related to the notion of quality, in particular with regards to the high emphasis put on internationalisation of research in the national context. For example, as argued by Bridges (2006), too much of a push on internationalising research carries risks of marginalising locally context bound research. He also points out that the internationally standardised “big science paradigm” of publishing in international journals puts pressure on local journals as well as those scholars who rely on their native language (p.149). This is relevant for the emerging economies in particular, where local or national research capacity is at a much lower level of productivity in comparison with developed countries, and where the promotion of internationalised research and publications in international journals in English or other foreign languages threatens locally produced research as well as limiting access to that knowledge for those local scholars who have limited knowledge of English. This, in fact, might be a possible scenario for Kazakhstan where knowledge of English within the university sector is not widespread, especially among elderly academic staff.

At the same time, however significant the above problems with internationalising research might sound, such internationalising seems desirable for at least two reasons.

First, internationalisation can, for example by publishing in Chinese or English, promote local research to a wider international community which, in its turn, may further develop the quality of national research through networks and investment from abroad. For example, collaboration between international and local researchers could help local research to flourish methodologically as well as widen perspectives on existing issues and allow these to be seen from a new angle (Ibrayev, 2019). This can increase international readability (Bridges, 2006) of local research, promoting the importance of research nationally both in government and in society more generally. Secondly, taking into account the global characteristics of research and the stress on the importance of knowledge for the economic development (Lumby & Foskett, 2016), for the country that seeks to be a part of the global community, it is important to expose its national research capacity towards global standards to develop new technologies and innovation, considering the “interactive and reciprocal” (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002, p.306) interconnectedness of global, national and local forces that shape and strengthen one other.

Summary of main points

Globalisation has become a popular theme for discussion in the context of HE over the last two decades. Throughout above review of the literature its undoubtful influence and the challenges it poses for HE systems and national policies have been argued. Globalisation has certainly intensified the international dimension of HE and this has had implications for teaching, research and other educational services (Teichler, 1999). What is important within this study is the understanding of rationales, strategies and approaches to internationalisation as a policy, both at governmental and institutional levels that pursue engagement with the global community, so attempting to improve the

quality of national HE. As such, the pivotal role of internationalisation for establishing WCUs and enhancing research productivity in national HE systems indicates that internationalisation also changes HE systems and structures when research development is taken forward so as to differentiate HEIs.

2.2 Strategising global HE and research excellence in national and international dimensions

2.2.1 Foundations of a global research university

In modern higher education debate, there has been considerable contribution from various experts to identify characteristics and qualities of a global research university. One of them is Phillip Altbach, according to whom successful research universities are mainly public universities (except in Japan and the USA) that operate in a differentiated HE system where little or no competition exists due to being situated at the pinnacle of their system and receiving great state support (Altbach, 2011). As recruiting star academic scholars and catering research is expensive, research universities cannot have inadequate budgets and should have a generous funding; however, this pays off as research universities have a high potential for generating income through intellectual property and high student tuition and fees. Having extensive teaching spaces, laboratories and sophisticated IT possibilities are also referred as of key importance for a research university to succeed.

Another significant contribution to conceptualising what a global research university is was provided by Mohrman et al (2008), who proposed a new concept for theorising this tendency which they called the 'Emerging Global Model' (EGM). Characterising EGM universities as research-intensive, they also emphasise that they "operate in an

environment in which traditional political, linguistic, and access boundaries are increasingly porous” (p.6). Moreover, these universities do not constrain themselves within the boundaries of the countries in which they are located but look far across the globe which makes them ‘trans-national in nature’ (ibid). These universities have a significant influence on not just other institutions in the world who see them as models but also on national HE systems and policies, since scientific research, innovation and technology development have been determined by nation-states as key to their social and economic development. Despite budget cuts on HE that have taken place in many countries, public investment in research universities has often been prioritised for the production of new knowledge that leads to national growth and prosperity in economic and social perspectives. Although many authors agree on some core values of successful research universities, like distinguished academic staff and talented students, academic freedom, governance and academic leadership (Altbach, 2011, Salmi, 2009), Morhman et al discuss EGM as having eight characteristics which would help to understand the concept and identify it from other HEIs. They are (i) global mission, (ii) increasing research intensity, (iii) shifting academic roles, (iv) diverse funding, (v) new relationships among universities, government, business and society, (vi) adopting worldwide recruitment strategies for students, faculty and administrators, (vii) increasing complexity of university organisation, and (viii) global collaboration with different non- and multi-governmental organisations.

Morhman et al (2008) are confident that EGM as a framework could be relevant to HE systems in many countries as the intensity of globalisation processes pressurise nation-states to adjust the model to their own perspective. However, as the EGM universities are regarded as ‘elite’ strata of the system they are located in (Altbach and Balan, 2007; Salmi, 2009; Shin, 2009), and not all HEIs can become an EGM institution, Marginson’s

(2016) interesting point of creating world-class systems (WCS) rather than focusing on developing world-class universities seems reasonable. He suggests that bringing forward the idea of WCSs would involve all HEIs institutions despite their missions, to look at “questions of system design and inter-institutional setting and interfaces” (p.64).

As a summary of different views on what global research university is, Marginson’s (2012) outline is particularly relevant to this study that highlights its local, national, global presence with high degree of research and internationalisation:

It is a university embedded effectively in its local and national context on an ongoing basis, and one that also has an established global role and presence. In addition, it is adequately resourced in revenues and human skills, and its systems of governance openness, initiative and the freedoms necessary to make strategic executive decisions in relation to developing new knowledge and interpretations across the range of disciplines. Moreover, it is partly internationalized and so aware of what is happening in other institutions. Further, it exhibits strong global connectivity in communication, collaboration, two-way flows of knowledge and ideas, and continuing flow of faculty and students moving in and out of the institution. Above all, it has research capacity sufficient to generate globally significant output in the sciences and social sciences, thus enabling it to position itself in worldwide knowledge circuits and claim reputation of a bona fide modern university. (p.16)

Alongside this, in so far as this study is concerned with contemplating the idea of a research university in the context of the theories of differentiation, it is also worthwhile to mention that the model of the research university that is broadly emphasised now in the global education system has its roots in an American model that was developed on the basis of the California Master Plan for HE. Clark Kerr’s idea of differentiating the public higher education system in California into three levels to nurture research development as well as to facilitate further mass access to HE (Altbach, 2011) has proved to be and is being referred to as an effective way to organise and manage HE

that serves a broader range of social diversity and meets a variety of demands of the local and national community. Within the three-tiered public HE, the difference is clearly articulated in the missions and functions of the institutions. Clark Kerr's concept of the research university in the Californian system reinforces several key features. The central of those is the internal governance by academic professors who have a key role in decision making. Meritocracy, academic freedom, importance of research though teaching is not undermined, and a service mission are other crucial constituents of the University of California, Berkeley, one of the top universities in the world which has been developed and sustained within the California Master Plan. Hence, it is not surprising that the concept and characteristics of the research university of the Californian system are looked at by many nation-states in their attempts to establish their own research universities in the global competition for the world-class status. This system will also be discussed in relation to understanding differentiation at a later stage of this chapter.

2.2.2 Quest for a world-class university (WCU)

With the emphasised importance of knowledge economy, the term 'world-class university' has gained the attention of various stakeholders in the higher education systems worldwide as these universities are thought to play a key role "in creating and disseminating knowledge, educating a highly skilled workforce for technological and intellectual leadership, and serving the needs of society" for their nation's ability to compete in the global arena (Wang et al, 2012, p.9).

Though the concept itself emerged some decades ago, it is still unclear what a world-class university is. There have been numerous attempts to define the term, since almost every nation is trying to have at least one (Altbach, 2004), as there seem to be a very small number of countries that are not touched by this movement (Marginson, 2012).

Quite a large amount of research and discussion has been conducted to explore the idea and concept of WCUs, rationales for developing WCUs, criteria and system requirements for creation of those both in developing and well-established economies in the world, national policies with regards to WCUs, and the effects of such projects within the nation's higher education systems (Altbach, 2011; Salmi, 2009; Liu, Wang and Cheng, 2011; Cremonini et al, 2013; Shin and Kehm, 2013). Salmi (2009) in his *The Challenge of Establishing World Class Universities* has focused on the various models of WCU development, Altbach (2011) in his book discussed leadership for WCU in developing countries, and Altbach and Salmi (2011) in *The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities* have pointed out some generic factors and strategies that accelerate the development of world-class universities. These characteristics of world-class universities, often referred to by many authors include governance, resources, infrastructure, leadership and autonomy.

However, Marginson (2012) criticises these identified characteristics as being too generic and unable to be applied to every national context. Though there is a predominant Anglo-American discussion in relation to the world-class university term, the forms WCUs are developed vary in different countries depending on "cultural-historical differences manifest in development strategy, especially variations in the role and character of government, in relations between nation-state and higher education institutions, and in the social practices of education" (Marginson, 2012, p.14). For example, in post-Confucian countries, there is a strong interrelationship between the state and family educational values that brings a Post-Confucian model of WCU (ibid), while in the Finnish context, the government's policy mechanism directed towards creating world-class universities was aimed at "a need for change" in the system of higher education (Nokkala and Valimaa, 2017).

The concept of 'world class university' first emerged in China when the government established special funding for their two universities to enhance the national research capacity. This later increased to 39 universities (Ma, 2013). The Chinese government actions then has resulted in starting the same movement in many other countries. Governments of South Korea and Japan in South-East Asia, Germany and France in Europe have made steps towards implementing WCUs and Excellence policies in order to increase their global competitiveness.

Thus, as the literature suggests, the issue of creating a WCU is of critical importance mainly to non-English-speaking countries. The initiatives for this trend emerged from these countries due to their struggle to set up the sustainability of their economy based on knowledge and innovations (Shin and Kehm, 2013). A strong representation of Anglo-American universities in the world league tables is another reason why the idea of building WCUs came from non-Anglo-American nations. The fact that the top universities in the league tables are from advanced Western (meaning North American and European) systems that have great emphasis on the value of research, make other nations follow the rule, sometimes simply copying policies. These top universities are the ones that typically have a long history and have already acquired a reputation for their scientific research systems (Horta, 2009). Therefore, they are much advantaged in advancing further their research excellence. They are regarded as being a brand in the global higher education and research arena, and thus referred to as 'world-class'. For instance, Sheldon Rothblatt (2009) describes world class universities as "the handful of inordinately wealthy private research institutions" with huge resources referring to leading universities in US (p.xix), though these top universities do not seem to call themselves as such. In line with this, there are debates that WCU has a more aspirational and norm-referenced basis that is predominantly used by developing

systems where the term is much defined by the university's performance in the league tables which does not give an understanding of "where *university* stands in relation to objective capacity or output" (Marginson, 2012, p.15). Moreover, the author argues that performance in the rankings is not an empirical base on which to call universities world-class. He suggests that the criterion-based term *global research university* (GRU) could be more applicable to measure performance of the universities. Acknowledging the distinction of WCU and GRU above, both terms in this thesis will be used interchangeably, as both of them are of relevance and applied in HE debate in Kazakhstan.

2.2.3 League tables as a facilitator of the WCU concept

Global university ranking first appeared in 2003, when Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China published the first *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU) which enormously affected and changed the global higher education sphere (Hazelkorn, 2015). Later in 2004 another major, much-referred to ranking, the *Times Higher Education* (THE) QS World University Ranking emerged (in collaboration until 2009 and later having their own versions of league tables). Since then, university rankings have become widely used to refer to as an absolute guide for measuring universities' performance. Though there have been ongoing criticisms of the way the rankings measure the quality of universities, the global rankings have become a reason for the introduction of a 'world class' concept into strategies of many nations and institutions (ibid). In other words, concern over excellence in higher education and their universities' position in the global rankings has secured national policy agendas (Rostan and Vaira, 2011). Moreover, university rankings have intensified competition among both nations and universities. Hazelkorn (2015) suggests that HEIs all over world are "restructuring

their organization, strategy, recruitment policy, pedagogy, etc. to improve their position and reap the benefits of their position or visibility within rankings” (p.205).

Stensaker and Kehm (2009) suggest that rankings have five key implications on HE. According to them, in the first instance, rankings are now referred to as a means for regulating the HE market. The second interpretation of rankings is as part of globalisation processes since they are now popular across countries. Rankings are also seen as an audit mechanism to respond to the public’s need for accountability. In relation to individual institutions, rankings can be helpful in creating an image, status and reputation of universities and thus making them globally visible. And finally, rankings can also be considered as a feature of the knowledge society in the globalised world where the quality of knowledge production is valued and universities as centres for knowledge creation are emphasised (p.ix-xi).

Along with these, there are numerous criticisms among different involved parties with regards to various constituents of ranking systems and their role and influence in the field of higher education. Some of them include rankings tending to homogenise HEIs (Marginson, 2011), focusing on the international dimension rather than the national and local (Deem, Lucas and Mok, 2008), and teaching being undermined in favour of research (Shin, 2014). Indeed, leagues tables are primarily concerned with the research performance of institutions (Dill, 2009). In addition to this, the concept of a world-class university which has extensively been embedded across global higher education due to the rankings has been drawn from the universities in the top league tables and are basically research universities (Deem, Lucas and Mok, 2008). However critical some experts might be towards the word ‘world-class university’, rankings have had a

considerable influence on this concept of being referred and aspired to, though it should be clarified what the ranking systems mean by the concept.

2.2.4 WCUs at the national scale

WCUs in the literature are mainly considered in the framework of nation-states as a tool to increase their global visibility or manage the global competition tension (Luo, 2013). WCUs around the world are initiatives of the governments, not the universities. It is a big challenge to create one, particularly for developing countries, as availability of resources is crucial in this matter (Altbach, 2004; Salmi and Liu, 2011). Though initiatives to create a world class university generally come from the idea of competing with the top western universities, borrowing their model of excellence in research the policies and conditions of WCUs “vary from country to country, from university to university” and these depend on national and local features of each country (Marginson, 2012). Thus, in order to understand policies and objectives behind WCU projects, I would further discuss the examples of several significant WCU projects in emerging economies, but not the countries in the ‘global core’ group (Sabzaliyeva, 2017), whose universities have a longstanding tradition, history and prestige and whose models were pursued by many countries in their quest for world-class education and excellence. The global core players here are North American and European countries. Though world-class university and excellence projects and programmes have been instituted all over the world, I will focus on such policy efforts in China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, as the former two are the two big neighbours of Kazakhstan and the latter has the similar specifics of being an oil-rich developing state.

One of the most rapidly progressing in the global HE landscape is China's example of forming world-class research universities. The aim behind the Chinese government's

policies to create world-class universities is “to improve the quality and international competitiveness of China’s higher education at a global level” (Huang, 2015, p.206). The initial reforms in the Chinese HE were channeled into two major projects, 211 Project and 985 Scheme, where the former was focused on improving teaching and research in 100 HEIs for domestic needs, and the latter sought to establish a few elite institutions to be recognisable and competitive globally (Mok, 2016). The latest scheme announced by the Chinese government is called the Double World-Class Project which is aimed at increasing the global visibility and standing of Chinese universities by 2049.

Few such attempts can be observed across the previous Soviet countries, except that Russia launched the 5-100 project in 2013 aimed at improving leading Russian universities’ positions in league tables and their competitiveness in the global arena (<http://5top100.com>). According to this programme, 21 universities across the country were selected by the Council on Competitiveness Enhancement of Leading Russian Universities for them to increase the national research capacity to be globally competitive and recognisable. It is anticipated by the Russian government that by 2020, at least five of these universities will be positioned in the top 100 universities in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking. Considering Shattock’s (2017) conclusion of the illusion of occupying top positions in league tables in a short-term period, it is interesting to observe the two major developing global players’ strategies, with China’s third such project planned until 2049 with two universities already in the top 50 and Russia’s scheme ambitiously projected to be achieved by 2020. To note, in the 2017 Shanghai Jiao Tong’s Academic Ranking of World Universities, there is only one Russian university (Moscow State University) represented in the top 100 (<http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2017.html>). In both countries, a number of existing universities have been selected and funded by their governments with the

primary goal of gaining global recognition and becoming competitive in the world education arena.

In recent years, generous investments were made by the governments in the Gulf region to improve the quality of their national HE systems through establishing knowledge cities in UAE and Qatar and setting up international branch campuses and creating the new King Abdallah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia. What is similar to Kazakhstan is that the governments in these countries relied on international help and assistance in setting up and further leading these projects with the aim of contributing to local sustainability.

Discussing Saudi Arabia's KAUST and Kazakhstan's NU, Koch (2014) suggests that the policies behind both projects are aimed at expanding nationalism and national ideology through public investments in HE as a means of supporting the national future. With both countries having a long tradition of funding their students' education abroad, these projects may be seen as domesticating international HE by bringing and embedding Western standard HE into the national HE context. At the same time, these efforts also lie in the neoliberal hegemony of globalisation and internationalisation of HE (Koch, 2014), as both countries are oil- and gas-producing states and their goal behind creating a new institution is also based on moving from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy. Shattock (2017), in turn, is somewhat sceptical about Saudi Arabia's strive for world-class university status due to the specifics of its political climate and the time required to become a renowned global university.

In all these examples of building WCUs in developing nations, governments are more directive and the role of the state in higher education is crucial, especially in the "battle for academic excellence" (Wang et al, 2012). In such emerging economies, universities

mostly rely on state funds and support to achieve global standing, though other sources of funding such as endowment funds are also crucial (Altbach, 2004). And relevant strategies and policies are then adopted both at state and institution levels (Wang et al, 2012). These strategies at both levels are mainly concerned with reforms in the approach to funding, internationalisation and governance (ibid). Though the existing models of the WCUs are built following standards of the North (Altbach and Balan, 2007), there is a strong assumption that the emerging number of world-class universities around the world will definitely change the character and design of WCUs and make them more plural than that which currently exists (Marginson, 2012).

2.2.5 Some existing criticism of WCU in the national HE context

While WCU projects have now become widespread, there are criticisms encountered concerning the italicised meaning given to these projects by the governments (Cremonini et al, 2013). First, there is the problem of scarce public budget funds that are allocated to these WCUs. The question is whether it is justified to put a great deal of public money into one institution with an aim to improve the whole higher education system (ibid). Concern over the concentration of public money on just selected higher education institutions is based upon the growing gap between WCUs and the rest of the universities in the system who do not get the same amount of support and resources from the government (Hou et al, 2012). This issue seems to be of more criticality to emerging low and middle-income countries where national HE systems are still on the developing path and have yet to achieve the progress desired.

Following this issue there is a question whether WCUs bring the expected benefits to national higher education systems. Cremonini et al (2013) argue that according to circumstances some WCUs might contribute to the advancement of the standards,

whereas in some cases one might observe a disintegration of the higher education system of the nation. Another issue emerging is the limited attention to teaching. Hazelkorn (2011) pointed out that given that teaching is the most important social contribution of universities, it is strangely absent from the ranking criteria. There is a strong argument that by putting more and more emphasis and resources on research in selected 'elite' universities, there is a possibility of neglecting 'ordinary' universities which might lead to an opposite result than that anticipated by governments (Cremonini et al, 2013). As Carpentier and Unterhalter (2011) note, while trying to transition to a global higher education where new policies and practices emerge, it should be carefully considered whether new practices lift up higher education systems or create even more inequalities. Hence there is an emerging need for studying whether and how WCUs are redirecting and what, if any, benefits they are bringing to national higher education systems.

Further to this point, another very distinctive discourse in relation to establishing or developing WCUs, particularly in emerging economies, is that global practices and standards are almost universally seen to be the ones to which to aspire, as these practices have already been considered to be effective in bringing development and improvements according to the experiences of developed and sustainable economies. As such, one way of understanding WCUs as a globalised entity within the national HE setting is to analyse how global, national and local forces interact for which, in this study, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) glonacal agency heuristic is chosen and employed.

2.2.6 The glonacal approach for understanding global and local interrelations

As the foundations of my study are related to several conceptual themes in the higher education literature such as differentiation of HEIs, globalisation and

internationalisation, and due to the fact that these concepts, though related are distinct, theories that would discuss all these concepts in one framework are limited. That is why it seems reasonable for this study to employ different theories to explore the effect of NU on the policies and practices of internationalisation and research of the three regional state universities in Kazakhstan. I will start with discussing various theories related to the global and local context of HE first, as globalisation processes and global challenges are one of the major causes that have indeed re-shaped national HE systems and imposed reforms in the national education systems in many countries (Eggins, 2003).

Before looking at these theories, it is reasonable to identify what is meant by global and local with regards to HE in this study. Emmanuel Jean Francois in his *Building Global Education with a Local Perspective* (2015) suggests that global “refers to issues, theories, processes, programs, policies, institutions, and overall teaching and learning practices in post-secondary education that have implications for countries across the globe within the context of globalisation” (p.58). In contrast, national and local higher education is education that takes place within the setting and boundaries of a nation state and serve national and local needs. However, as the world is rapidly changing and globalisation dictates its requirements, nation states have integrated global aims into their national HE systems for their people to be globally competent citizens with skills necessary for the global labour market, and thus the importance of global HE, which is about training graduates who are aware of and understand and value the world around them (Francois, 2015), is being increasingly reinforced globally.

In the literature related to research in education, global higher education and its application in the local context has been discussed within several theoretical frameworks

or approaches. One of the principal frameworks used in recent times is Marginson and Rhoades' (2002) glonacal agency heuristic where it is suggested that higher education exists in three dimensions: global, national and local. The authors argue that while each of these is active in its own extent and has distinctive features, each of the three dimensions is influenced by the other two, though each does not minimise or decrease the others while positioned linear. Marginson and Rhoades introduce the term 'glonacal agency' where agency or agencies are the units that exist in the three dimensions.

The framework considers mutual interactions and intersections between or within these three dimensions that can influence and shape elements of each or other dimensions. The authors also note that the global dimension of higher education is formed by globalisation to develop "integrated systems and relationships beyond the nation-state" (ibid, p.288). The global dimension of higher education is often referred to as the flow of knowledge and information, networks, and movement of people between systems and institutions (Marginson, 2011b, p.12). While the institution and its campus are presented as a local part of the triangle, the national is about policies and regulations that frame higher education including research (ibid). Though all HEIs within a nation state are placed and operate in the national dimension, some of them could be more globally oriented, having more global activities in their operations, such as those trying for world-class and global research status, while others have local foci and aspirations. As international activities have a significant impact on becoming globally acknowledged (Salmi, 2009), it is easy to understand why such universities are strategising towards world standards.

Another way of discussing 'globality' and 'locality' in higher education systems can be undertaken through Francois's (2015) *glocal* higher education theory, where he

discusses global and local dimensions, with 'local' covering 'national' as well. According to Francois, "glocal HE is the interwoven of the global with the local to design, plan and deliver HE programs based on the principles of think globally, act locally and think locally, act globally" (p.87). Francois argues that the glocal is a collaborative mix of the global and local that provides different HE stakeholders with a global perspective in a local context while keeping local values and traditions. 'Global' here is presented as an outside element which is not geographically located, while 'local' instead has geographical location and is referred to as an insider perspective.

What Francois (2015) suggests is glocal symbiosis, a mutualistic relationship between different species – a biological term which, with regards to higher education, is explained as a synergy of two dimensions in order to create one field with increased potential. Though there is 'a mutualistic relationship' between the global and the local, where both are influenced by each other, there is a possibility that the local element accepts more effects, as the global elements are deliberately introduced and implemented within the local context for the latter to learn from the best practices of the globe.

However, Francois (2015) notes that the concept of glocal HE is designed for "analysing, planning, implementing and sustaining educational policies and programs, and projects in transnational and transcultural contexts" (p.xi). This seems to be more relevant to the transnational branch campus establishing projects when a branch of a foreign university is set up in another country where the establisher should consider local features and where the project results in a strong blend of global and local. Within my research, this perspective could potentially be applied if the central discussion was NU as an individual institution with an emphasis on its global features but positioned within Kazakhstan's national HE dimension. In this case, NU could be discussed within the glocal framework

of Francois as being an institution that has a blend of global and local features and perspectives.

However, the aim of this study is to understand the effect of NU as an elite globalised university embedded in the national HE system and tasked to build capacity for local institutions. Thus, Marginson and Rhoades's (2002) glonacal heuristic seems to be of more relevance with the focus of the heuristic on "the intersections, interactions, mutual determinations of these levels (global, national, and local) and domains (organizational agencies and the agency of collectivities)" (p.289). As such, this approach is seen as a tool to understand and uncover how global, national and local forces interact. Here central is the effect of NU which is regarded as an elite globalised university, a product of the national government to become globally visible while reforming and modernising the local HE.

At the same time Marginson and Rhoades indicate that "we need work that attends to local response and reality, explores local institutions, and considers local practices" (p.286), in view of the fact that much is known about global pressures and challenges, but very little work has been undertaken to explore local responses to those. Thus, NU's effect on the local HEIs (RSUs) and, more importantly, the RSUs response to this as a differentiating and internationalising policy of the government will be analysed through the glonacal heuristic.

Along with this, it should be noted that the need for world-class university education has pushed many governments to restructure their HE systems through stratifying HEIs and concentrating on the research development (Marginson, 2009). Bleiklie (2011) states that national aspirations and attempts towards excellence and world class education trigger differentiation in the HE system. This leads to a discussion of differentiation and

diversity in higher education systems and how this contributes to an understanding of the context in Kazakhstan.

2.3 Differentiation of and diversity in higher education systems

In the first instance, differentiation of HE institutions have been caused by the dramatic expansion of higher education that happened in many countries with waves in a post-war period as a result of economic growth in 1960s and later in 1990s with the coming of the neoliberal market paradigm and establishment of private HE providers (Shavit et al, 2007). Governments perceived diversification as an essential and desirable mechanism to restructure national higher education systems as they wanted their higher education systems to become more responsive and flexible to the needs of a diverse society (Meek, 2000; Dakka, 2015). Hence, within the HE literature, the discourse on differentiation is predominantly related to the expansion and massification that entailed greater diversity in the structure and composition of HE worldwide (Guri-Rosenblit et al, 2007). One of the prominent contributions to this topic was made by Martin Trow in his essay on the transition from elite to mass higher education (Trow, 1974). In his developmental theory of HE, the author discusses issues of HE development in 'advanced' countries where the participation in higher education has increased dramatically, turning elite systems of that period to a mass HE system and enrolment reached an indication of up to 50% of the school leaver age group.

At the same time, Teichler (2017) discusses many other developments and discourses that contributed to the reinforcement of differentiation tendencies, one of which is argued to be due to the globalisation process, dominating demands of the knowledge economy, and the global competition among nations (also see Teichler, 2006 and van der Wende, 2008). Moreover, Teichler (2006) argues that though the debates on differentiation have

been on-going for more than 40 years, they have actually intensified in the last two decades or so due to globalisation discourses. Raising the value of research and graduate education caused by the quest for WCU which, in its turn, is provoked by league tables, made many countries, including Kazakhstan, to re-consider their national priorities towards not only more diversified economies, but also, their HE systems.

Quite a large proportion of the literature discussed differentiation and diversity widely and in depth in many respects, more often in relation to functional, structural, systematic and programmatic aspects (Teichler, 1998; Meek et al, 1996; Douglas, 2004; Huisman, 2015). Differentiation has also been questioned about its potential consequences for social inequality (Boliver, 2011; Reimer and Jacob, 2011; Triventi, 2013).

In this section, I will discuss differentiation and diversity of HE systems from the perspective of both HE theory and policy. I will first discuss what the concepts of differentiation and diversity mean in HE, and what the differences between these two concepts are. I will further specifically elaborate on theories of external diversity, in relation to differences between institutions, and within that, institutional isomorphism, and how it relates to the research focus of this study.

2.3.1 Concepts of differentiation and diversity in higher education

The two concepts of differentiation and diversity are generally discussed together in the higher education studies' literature, but it would still be useful and reasonable to distinguish these two concepts. Many scholars in the relevant literature refer to Huisman's (1995) review of the two concepts (Goedegebuure et al, 1996; Vaira, 2009; Dakka, 2015; van Vught, 2008) which he theorised within a biological/ecological sense. Though he concludes that looking at these concepts from the biological perspective does not have a direct translation towards higher education studies, and he points out

that “it seems untenable to maintain the ideal typical distinction between differentiation, diversity and diversification” (p.51), his review still offer a clear separation of the two concepts where differentiation is a dynamic process, and diversity “should be reserved for indicating the variety of types of entities within a system” (ibid). Goedegebuure et al (1996) suggest that Huisman’s conceptual framework theorises differentiation as a trend of change and diversity as its measurement at a certain period of time.

Another classification that has gained popularity among researchers and is referred to widely in the higher education literature is Birnbaum’s (1983) distinction of diversity as systemic that specifies different institutional types, structural that outlines organisational difference between institutions, e.g. division of authority (Dakka, 2015), and programmatic diversity that refers to differences in curricula (Teichler, 2008). Within European HE debates, Teichler’s classification of 1988 deserves attention as well; it describes institutional types in a more general way as: a) short-cycle higher education or non-university higher education; b) academic versus vocational higher education; c) unitary systems, binary systems and hierarchical systems; d) multipurpose models or specialised models; e) vertical systems; f) elitist models; g) comprehensive higher education systems. In the context of this study, found Trow’s (1995) definition of diversity below most helpful and comprehensive as it relates to systemic diversity concerned with the differences between “institutional type, size and control found within the higher education system” (Birnbaum cited in van Vught, 2009, p.1).

By diversity in higher education I mean the existence of distinct forms of post-secondary education, of institutions and groups of institutions within a state or nation that have different and distinctive missions, educate and train for different lives and careers, have different styles of instruction, are organised and funded differently and

operate under different laws and relationships to government. (cited in Meek et al, 2000, p.3)

Dakka (2015) notes that institutional diversity is particularly crucial in the knowledge economy context where the labour market dictates high needs. This indeed is one of the common arguments in favour of diversity. Discussing various other arguments among HE scholars, F. van Vught (2008) outlines that diversified higher education is better than non-diversified higher education as diversity in HE is “supposed to produce higher levels of client orientation, social mobility, effectiveness, flexibility, innovativeness and stability” (p.6). There is also a strong argument that diversity maintains a reasonable balance between mass and elite HE, and that the sustainability of elite institutions is largely dependent on how comprehensive mass institutions are (Trow cited in van Vught, 2008). Indeed, expansion of HE and the emergence of mass HE has introduced some pressures into the traditional established systems as along with new forms of higher education the overall system has to be adjusted to new realities (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009).

2.3.2 Conceptual lenses and ways of understanding differentiation in relation to focus of this research

Differentiation in this study is formulated according to Vaira’s (2009) definition as “a process by which entities in a system, and thus the system as a whole, become more complex, incorporating, and thus reflecting the larger environment they operate in” (p.137), and this is what this study refers to in the context of Kazakhstan’s recent reforms to restructure the system through making it more complex and more diverse. One of the research questions of this study deals with the interrelations and interaction between the state, the elite university and regional state universities, and thus differentiation

referred to by Vaira as a process that “emphasises the relationship between environment and single entities inside it” (ibid) sounds relevant for this study’s purpose, though I look at NU as a unique institution, and RSUs as another entity different from NU in various aspects.

2.3.2a Using institutional theory of organisation studies or organisational institutionalism

As such, the conceptual basis of differentiation as a process within this study is constructed under several perspectives taken from institutional theory of organisation studies or organisational institutionalism. Generally, organisation studies have become quite popular in studies related to higher education with application of various aspects to understand complex institutional environment. Particularly, organisational studies in higher education research deal with various changes that happen at both system and institutional levels and investigate how different actors manage and respond to these changes (Teixeira et al, 2004; Huisman, 2009; Locke et al, 2011). Thus, organisational studies are seen as relevant due to changes in policy level as well as due to the emergence of a new institution in the higher education field in Kazakhstan which is not just one of the existing institutions in the field but has features that make it absolutely different from the rest. In this study, organisational studies are also helpful to understand different structural and cultural factors that underlie interaction between different types of institutions (Fumasoli and Stansaker, 2013). However, what is more specific to this study is the question of (a) the interaction between different types of institutions and (b) the factors for effective collaboration between these institutions in light of the government’s directive policies.

So, while organisation studies will contribute to the understanding of dynamics in the field, interinstitutional relations and the role of the regulatory body (DiMaggio and Powell,

1983), further area of my discussion lies within the new institutionalism perspective which employs the insight into the dynamics within organisation itself giving some comprehensive idea of drivers and factors of change in them (Fumasoli and Stansaker, 2013). Thus, in exploring the response of RSUs to the state emphasis on NU and its potential effect on the policies and practices within RSUs, institutional theory could be a constructive framework of reference.

Meyer and Rowan (2006) provide three dimensions of using institutionalism for analysis. One discusses the importance of cognitive understanding of individuals for social construction of institutions. In this aspect, Ramirez (2006) signifies shared values and beliefs for social construction of institutions, with respect to dominant value of American model of university, and how this is diffused globally, sometimes with a clash with local cultures. This also seen as relevant in examining tendency towards isomorphism in HE systems (Meyer and Rowan, 2006).

Another view that institutional theory examines is the changing relationship between state, institutions and markets. In this aspect, as Meyer and Rowan (2006) emphasise, “markets are embedded within institutions and thus affected by institutionalized forms of property, security, modes of enforcing contracts that are developed by states and enacted in civil society” (p.7). And finally, the third topic is related to historical aspect of building institutions. The specific issue here is not just historically described who and how organisations are constructed, but how power and conflict change the theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

However, while suggesting the use of institutional theory in this study, I do not draw on all of its perspectives. To be specific, the use of institutional theory is helpful to understand how changes in the environment (macro policy level) affect dynamics within

institutions (Frolich et al 2013), and to interpret the interrelation of institutions in the HE field with the association of organisations in society to see how they interact and interreact. Specifically, such perspectives of institutional theory as environment, resources and isomorphism will be discussed.

As such, the notion of environment where institutions are located, especially the governance system, is paramount, as “it constraints, shapes and penetrates the organisation” (Scott, 2001, p.xiv). For example, the influence of changes and how institutions respond might be dependent on which type of university governance is active; a bureaucratic-academic type where state control prevails or managerial-corporate type where universities are given some kind of freedom and steered by the government from distance (Bleiklie, et al, 2017). Universities as organisational entities and social actors are embedded in and operate within their cultural, administrative and policy environment of existing field (DiMaggio and Powel 1983, Scott 2008, Clark 1983). The complex nature of environment created by various local political norms, rational spaces and policies (Wooten and Hoffman, 2008), together with external global tendencies, influence organisations and precondition their behaviour (Frolich et al, 2013).

Furthermore, individual higher education institutions are regarded as components of an ‘open system’ that operate in the social, political and economic environment, that receive inputs and produce outputs within their setting (Scott, 2001; van Vught, 2008). In this aspect of being an open and social system, any transformations that take place in it are considered as a result of institutional interaction with its environment with its tensions and pressures (Diogo et al, 2015).

With an emphasis on the environment where HEIs function, the dynamic of diversity is presented by Van Vught who suggests taking into consideration the ability of institutions to acquire resources, and the factor of competition between organisations for scarce resources in order to survive (van Vught, 1996, p.51). Here, resource dependency highlights how organisations and their environment interact and influence each other, emphasising “the idea of mutual influencing”, and how resources are crucial for the organisations’ survival and effective functioning (van Vught, 1996, p.52). In scarce resources conditions, the author underlines that this perspective should also be considered with respect to other actors in the field, i.e. other institutions, to observe how they interact with each other within the system, as competition between organisations depending on how structured they are and what resources are available in the certain environment they are embedded in, causes some similarity between them. However, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that “structural changes in organisations are less driven by competition or by the need for efficiency, but by bureaucratisation and other forms of organisational change that make organisations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient” (p.147). The dominant force in this process is contended to be the state.

Further to this idea of the state as a force, I would like to discuss an institutional paradox presented by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) meaning that the initial diverse organisational field once established, becomes homogeneous under various isomorphic pressures. According to these authors, institutional isomorphism happens as a result of coercive pressures from other organisations in the field, mimetic pressures forcing them to imitate the behaviour of more successful organisations, and normative pressures generated from professional norms and values.

In the higher education sector, institutional isomorphism emphasises the fact that institutions have to adjust to the presence of other institutions in the system that are more successful. In the conditions of uncertainty and ambiguously understood procedures and technologies, mimetic processes derive from coercive authority when institutions are pushed to model other institutions of the same category that are embedded in the same or similar environmental conditions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This type of convergence towards a common model or similar policies and structures also stems from the professional culture, and the norms and values of staff that diffuse through various networks and collaborative activities (ibid; Diogo et al, 2015).

According to the authors, modelling can be understood as a response to uncertainty, when one organisation can “serve as a convenient source of practices that the borrowing organisation may use” (ibid, p.151). However, in relation to what this study is concerned with, NU as a model is specifically imposed by the authority of the government, which can possibly be interpreted as a response to uncertainty in terms of global demands and trends. Moreover, there are obvious trends promoted by supra-national agencies to converge towards internationally accepted modes and policies such as the Bologna Process and other global practices (Diogo et al, 2015).

Within each system, one should understand the purposes underlying differentiation reforms, as well as various factors such as unitary, binary or multiple sector systems, centralised or decentralised governance, and the dynamic and dominance of either public or private sectors (Clark, 1996). For this study, all three perspectives can be applied to understand the dynamics of differentiation reforms in Kazakhstan, and interrelations between various status actors within the system. However, the significance of structural isomorphism that leads to homogeneity and how resource-

dependency is crucial for “survival and success” (van Vught, 1996, p.53) can contribute towards assumptions about the government’s objectives as of differentiation reforms and the role of NU in the context of Kazakhstan.

Particularly, one way of understanding the situation in Kazakhstan of system diversity could be interpreted twofold. On the one hand, there is a clear purpose to differentiate HE by introducing new types of institutions such as NU as an autonomous institution of education, and national research and research universities with different missions and status. On the other hand, the policy measure of putting NU as a model for the rest of the public HEIs could potentially lead to homogeneity of HEIs, which may happen when the new forms emerge as a result of directive state policy rather than naturally, as in the case of emerging private HEIs in the early nation-building days of Kazakhstan. Hence, a question arises of whether there is an evident coercive or ‘forced’ isomorphism performed by the government through tasking other HEIs to line up with NU through transmitting its best practices. At the same time, in a heavily centralised HE system with a low public spending on HE, where public institutions are not financially and institutionally autonomous, and heavily rely on state funds, resource-dependency defines to what extent imposing NU as a model is feasible. There is a difference in status and legal framework these two types of institutions function within one system that should also be taken into account. Hence, although new institutionalists argue that organisations are likely to adopt similar practices and perspectives to be ‘isomorphic’ with others in the same field, especially those that are more successful, differences in organisational, structural and cultural forms might make the process difficult. Thus, this study argues that differences in institutional environment between “brokers and downstream adopters” (Kuzhabekova et al, 2017, p.353) should be taken into consideration when aiming at policy transfer, as well as other structural and cultural

differences. This study further argues that when there is a strong intervention of the state that singles out one or few universities from the system as a model, providing them with better opportunities, there emerges an artificially created stratification of institutions with an evident hierarchy and inequality of resources. Hence, I will further discuss how stratification happens between mass and elite institutions in HE.

2.3.3 Vertical diversity and stratification (mass and elite institutions)

According to Teichler (1996), diversity in higher education systems can be distinguished according to vertical and horizontal dimensions. While vertical is related to “quality, reputation and prospective status of graduates” (p.355), horizontal is about mission, governance and organisational culture. At the same time, vertical diversity illustrates high or low positioning of, in our case, institutions, in relation to each other, while horizontality separates them as variation (Douglass, 2007). In this view, vertical diversity is also regarded as stratification to describe vertically placed order (Bloch and Mitterle, 2017; Marginson, 2017), when institutions are differentiated in a hierarchy in relation to their status and position, primarily encouraged by markets and league tables (Croxford and Raffe, 2014; Dakka, 2015).

Considering stratification as a perspective rather than a discipline, that studies size and scale, Trow (1984) suggests that stratification as a process, not a vertical order of HEIs, is reinforced by two sources. One is defined by the state and the state policy, and the second is by academic prestige and status judged by different stakeholders. Whereas globally the second dimension occurs more often, in the case of Kazakhstan, the first seems to be the case, with the state identifying some universities as ‘superior’ to others, giving the former more autonomy, resources and material support (p.134).

Marginson (2016), as one of the scholars who has recently written extensively on the topic of stratification, discusses different factors that enhance stratification nationally and globally, at the bottom and at the top (p.8). The factors that are related within the national boundaries include competition for student places and competition that is forced by policies. In both cases there is an advantage for top elite HEIs, especially universities in binary or diversified systems where other non-university HEIs exist. It is also mentioned by the author that these factors bifurcate the field into high-selecting and low-selected HEIs, widening the gap between high elite and low mass systems. He also argues that while there are cuts in funding in mass HE in many countries, other HEIs that are research-intensive and are striving for WCU status are attracting more resources and talented students for the enhancement of science. This is evidence of global stratification (ibid). Discussing various outcomes of global stratification, the author states:

The overall outcome is an identifiable worldwide system of stratification of higher education, calibrated by comparative science power (science publication and citation drive global ranking), that structures global competition in this sector, and feeds into national competition to an extent that varies from nation to nation. Worldwide stratification combines the national and global dimensions of higher education in a jagged, uneven and partly open fashion. It is not a stable arrangement. National and global hierarchies shift and change. New HEIs, transformed HEIs and newly rising national systems are constantly emerging, especially at global level. (ibid, p.14)

In the vertically structured field with an existing hierarchy between the elite subfield and mass subfield, where each of them has its own principles of hierarchisation (Bourdieu, 1993), specific attention is given to elite institutions, and how they are differentiated from the other mass institutions by many aspects and characteristics (Trow, 1984). In some cases, the gap between the two kinds of institutions is further increased by the state and

competition created by their policies (Marginson, 2016), by its reluctance or inability to put more resources or provide more autonomy to the lower-status institutions. In his other work, Marginson (2008) suggests that this kind of “polarity helps to understand relations of power within national systems, where heteronomy is shaped by governments, market forces and both together” (p.305). This in turn created differentiated policies with regards to more autonomous and selective elite universities and less prestigious “heteronomous” institutions (ibid). Interestingly, the characteristics of the elite universities work to their advantage too, since they are basically attractive for talented scholars and students, who bring more ideas, knowledge and expertise to the university, described as “advantage begets advantage” by the author, making the rich richer, and the poor poorer (Byun et al, 2013). Specific characteristics of leading elite universities that guarantee the preservation of their high status in comparison with other low-status institutions, along with other contemporary authors’ conceptualisation of WCU and GRU, could contribute to understanding issues and challenges between elite and mass institutions in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, on the assumption of the norms and so-called global standards that the new elite university promotes, this can also help to understand what policies and practices could be of potential focus for reforming the rest of the higher education system.

2.3.4 Mission differentiation and the role of research

Different governments deal with restructuring their higher education systems in different ways, aiming for different outcomes. According to what governments aim for, various kinds of approaches to differentiation are discussed in the literature, for example, diversity in system, structure, functions or programs. While in the post-war period, the need for more types of institutions was manifested by the demands of the dramatic

expansion to educate the growing number of students from diverse backgrounds (Trow, 2000), and in the 1990s, more diversity in the HE system was a concern for economic growth (Guri-Rosenblit et al, 2007). To this extent, a focus on research and 'big science' (Enders and de Boer, 2009) has become a policy aim for achieving excellence in the changing attitude towards knowledge and its value for socio-economic growth. As Gibbons et al (1994) argue, there has been a shift in the mode of knowledge production which is transforming institutions, disciplines, policies and practices. That is why one of the growing tendencies in the national HE policy arena is an attempt to differentiate HE institutions (mainly universities) into 'teaching only' and 'research only', as differentiating the academic system and drifting mission has been considered as a primary factor in advancing research (van der Wende, 2014; Altbach, 2009). Along with differentiating institutional mission, such policy changes involve implementing procedures to modify systems of governance to allow more institutional autonomy, changing criteria for faculty recruitment, and funding based on research performance (Altbach, 2013; Shin and Lee, 2014). As discussed earlier in this chapter, establishing a global research university and a quest for a world-class university is an obvious illustration of such policies. The trend for differentiation has also been triggered by the rising influence of international ranking systems (Vaira, 2009). The fact that league tables evaluate specific indicators like research productivity and science development clearly influences national governments' vision to divide HEIs for teaching and research, though this division originated with the rise of research university concept in 19th century, long before the appearance of league tables (Perkin, 2007).

Though differentiation by research intensity is crucial for HEIs for its effects on the funding level and their status and position (Teichler, 1996), there is criticism of this approach as well. The shortcomings emerge from the criticism of established support

and special attention from the government that might cause a gap among research-oriented and teaching-oriented institutions, creating elitism and opportunities for research institutions to preserve their place at the top of the pyramid (Shin and Lee, 2015). Moreover, such policies produce pressures on institutions, and as argued by Kitagawa (2009), “in light of excellence and diversity reforms universities are experiencing challenges in trying to be both excellent in teaching and research and ‘diverse’ without having institutional capacity to meet these expectations” (p.521), as well as jeopardising other areas of institutional activities (van der Wende and Don, 2009). This might be the case for institutions like RSUs under study, which appear to be under more pressure from the government and society expectations to be in line with other successful universities, especially when research and production of new knowledge are expected by governments and societies as a ‘taken for granted’ element of the universities (Enders and de Boer, 2009).

2.3.5 The role of the elite universities in national systems

Historically, the adjective ‘elite’ referred to universities in two ways. First, it related to universities that catered for the offspring of wealthy families; secondly, it applied to traditional classical education focused on humanistic cultural enlightenment (Douglas, 2010). Since Martin Trow identified three stages of transformation of higher education, which comprise elite, mass and universal higher education, there have been many discussions as to what elite higher education or an elite university may stand for as we see different interpretations of meaning of ‘elite’ within different nations depending on the context and establishment of their HE systems.

According to Kitagawa (2009), the majority of current elite universities in Japan originated from imperial universities that were established under some particular social

and historic context and have been historically treated as elite by the government. Despite the fact that the Japanese government stopped referring to these institutions as elite imperial, attempting to promote equality under laws between universities, the financial support from the government for these elite universities are still bigger than other national and private universities (Kitagawa, 2009). Moreover, following the trend in the Asian continent in particular of universities claiming to possess world-class status, these universities have been protected from massification in order to foster research excellence “to drive the national economy ... and to rival the world’s top universities” (ibid, p.258).

In the French dual system, the model of grandes écoles constitutes the meaning of elite academia (Deer, 2009). These are the highly selective institutions that establish the standards of academic excellence that others French institutions are encouraged to follow. Though in the traditional understanding grandes écoles were considered as teaching institutions with high selectivity, being resource-rich, they were significantly emphasised by the French government for advancing research concentration and developing their research capacity since the introduction of new programs related to the establishment of world-class institutions (Cremonini et al, 2013).

Similarly, in Australian HE, there are elite universities formed as Sandstones (Group of Eight), in the UK, this is the Oxbridge, and in the US, this is the Ivy League that share similar characteristics such as being highly-selective, research-intensive, well-off universities that are branded internationally for their excellence, though established and developed in different historical and social contexts. Despite having a global reputation of being top universities in the world, in the national context they have been under

tensions and agenda of debates in relation to social stratification and class reproduction (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009, p.304).

Nonetheless, as can be seen, the contemporary understanding of the elite university often reflects concepts of a 'global, 'top' or 'world-class' university with high research capacity and teaching quality and having global and international recognition (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2009). Therefore, the terms 'elite' and 'world class' in this study could be used interchangeably, having similar meaning. However, what should be noted is that these elite universities have significant history and traditions as elite institutions, while in relation to my study, NU is referred to as elite according to other characteristics that makes it such and differs from other HEIs in the Kazakh national system.

With the move towards mass HE, size and shape of HE systems underwent structural changes. Taking into account elite institutions in the UK, US, Australia, Japan and France, Palfreyman and Tapper (2009) indicate that the development of mass higher education has resulted in a structural differentiation and hierarchy between HEIs, though cannot be observed as an ultimate force that has led to it. According to them, one of the key pressures of expansion were cost-related, and for elite institutions preserving legacy and reputation in publicly-funded systems meant having privileged access to state funds (p.3). It is also stated by the authors that few governments like China, Japan and Germany have made deliberate efforts towards control of funding for further support of elite institutions to be positioned as leading institutions in the league tables.

Though there is a strong focus on elite institutions in the quest for world-class university status, their role in a broader perspective of national economic and social development has not been discussed much. In this light, for example, Kehm and Pasternak (2009) criticise the fact that German Excellence Initiative covers only research activities with

greater emphasis on graduate education, without supporting excellence in teaching or other services.

Nevertheless, Tapper and Palfreyman (2009) suggest looking at the role of elite institutions in making structural changes in higher education can be discussed from economic, sociological, demographic and educational studies, and from political science and management studies perspectives. Though all these could be relevant to a degree within the HE context, my focus in this study is the impact of an elite university on the regional state universities and the interrelations between NU, state universities and the government. This, therefore, implies both a political and an organisational angle of looking at the issues under study. Moreover, in the Kazakhstani HE context, the political perspective is strongly reinforced by the centralised governance and control of the structural differentiation that is not observed to the same extent in the context of the UK, other Western European countries or North America, for instance. Thus, it seems likely that there is an influence of the regulator in relation to interactions between different strata of HEIs.

2.3.6 Inter-institutional collaboration in a top-down management structure

In a rapidly changing global order, governments and their HE systems face various challenges, including increased managerialism and competition for global rankings in the growing knowledge-based economies. To solve these issues, governments propose and implement various policy reforms and restructuring of systems. Educators and policy makers acknowledge the need for more collaborative partnerships between institutions for the purpose of innovative research and education, as it is challenging to exist in isolation in the current global setting.

A scan overview of the literature advised that the debates and discussions are largely based on collaboration between university and industry that was promoted with the growing discourse around entrepreneurial university (Kitagawa, 2009), university and society, university and business, university and non-university sectors of higher education.

As to the forms of collaborative arrangements, the literature differentiates such forms of inter-institutional collaboration as associations, consortia, partnerships and cooperation (Lang, 2002; Coombe, 2015). The forms of collaboration can be different and are also named in a variety of ways in different nations. For example, in the US context, a cluster of universities is a common form of inter-university collaboration, while in post-Soviet countries, association is normally used to indicate collaborative framework between institutions. Consortia are also commonly found in western cultures, though it sounds more like a business-related term.

According to Lang (2002), collaboration between institutions does not occur spontaneously but as a result of careful and deliberate consideration. Collaborative activities across institutions are mainly observed in relation to joint research, publications and staff and students exchange between universities nationally and internationally. Since there is a great emphasis on global engagement, international collaboration seems more prioritised in most of the higher education settings. International collaboration between universities can be oriented towards comparative studies between two countries or understanding of cultural features, history, traditions of the involved countries. The mechanism for such collaboration is usually agreed between the interested parties without governmental involvement, though these types of collaboration are usually advised as necessary for development and improvement.

Discussing various barriers and enablers to sustain inter-university collaboration, Coombe (2015) outlines heterogeneous and homogeneous collaboration according to whether institutions are similar with common features, e.g. research universities, or those with “diverse perspectives and expertise”, e.g. public and private institutions (p.332). The nature of collaboration also depends on the system institutions function in. So, in a centrally governed system, such collaboration is normally coordinated by the government, while in such systems as in the US, universities have more autonomy. Within the top-down or governmental or macro level structures, where the government sets out a clear task, policies and instructions of on how the end results should be achieved, cooperation between institutions could be coordinated on a macro level by the government. In bottom-up structures, on the contrary, such efforts are in the hands of institutions where institutions are given more freedom to act and the government has the role of an observer. In addition, collaboration forms are defined as voluntary and statutory (Patterson cited Combe, 2015).

As the focus of this study is the effect of an elite university on regional state universities, the discussion around mechanisms for heterogeneous collaboration between diverse mission institutions tasked for one national goal set by the central government will follow in future chapters within the data analysis, though there has not been encountered a plethora of literature on this for debate.

Conclusion

A worldwide paradigm of knowledge economy and dominant dynamism of league tables and rankings have influenced national HE policies in many countries. Research universities are considered to be at the heart of the global knowledge society through their capacity for producing new knowledge and cutting-edge research and training

graduate students (Altbach, 2013). Since maintaining research is expensive, and demand greater governmental funding and other support, nation-states have been adopting differentiation policies of academic systems through a diversity of strategies, missions and funding schemes among HEIs. By singling out a few of their universities, national governments are striving to build 'world class' universities as 'centres of excellence' by concentrating research resources in a small number of HEIs (Kitagawa, 2015), as almost every nation wants to have at least one internationally recognised research university to be able to compete globally. The global quest for a world-class university, the emphasis on research universities in attempts to increase national competitiveness and economic growth, and how WCUs/GRUs are perceived by many national governments as a policy measure is reviewed.

In this literature review chapter, I attempted to conceptualise various concepts and theories that could contribute towards understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. These, linked to research questions of this study, draw several key points.

1. Global and local dimensions of HE and their interaction
2. Policies aimed at differentiating HEIs and emphasis on RU
3. Dynamics of institutional interaction as per institutional theory
4. Elite and mass institutions and their interrelations

Theoretically, two key approaches were considered as applicable for understanding the issues under study. One is the glocal approach and glocalisation theory to construct a framework for the analysis of the interrelation of the global and local dimensions of the HE system and within its elements. Secondly, an institutionalism perspective of

organisational theory was taken as a basis for examining the diversity of the HE field and interrelations between different status institutions within the university sector. The two theoretical frameworks complement each other, covering two broad areas in relation to globalisation/internationalisation and differentiation/diversity and stratification. These, though, are not presented as an ultimate and absolute principle for providing a conceptual picture of the issues under study, as there exist a number of possible frameworks for understanding the Kazakhstan HE system depending on what the focus is. For example, Kuzhebekova et al (2018) studied policy transfers between educational flagships (NIS, Kasipkor and NU) and other educational organisations in school, technical vocational colleges and HE to wider systems in Kazakhstan through exploring the process of knowledge transfer and applying inter-organisational learning theory from management studies.

Differentiation as a process that promotes the generation of different types and form of higher education is discussed in this chapter as being fortified as a result of globalisation and the demands of the global knowledge economy. The diversity of HEIs has been accepted by governments as an effective measure for providing equality in access to HE and protecting elite research universities. In this attempt, internationalisation is seen as one of the key factors that increases differentiation between institutions. League tables and the quest for a world-class university do impact how systems are structured with efforts directed to internationalisation in order to attract more talented students and staff, to have high impact publications and research productivity. In addition, there emerges the issue with vertical diversity and stratification within institutions in the national HE systems as a result of such policy measures and increased support from the government to research universities and allocation of performance-based funding.

CHAPTER THREE
CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND
DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS DIVERSIFICATION IN
KAZAKHSTAN

Introduction

Very little work has as yet been undertaken on the topic of differentiation in the HEI system in Kazakhstan. This chapter is therefore aimed at providing a contextual background to contribute to the understanding of the reader of specifics of Kazakhstan as a post-Soviet emerging economy, along with the characteristics of its HE system. Hence, it starts by informing briefly about the country's socio-economic background by presenting the account for Kazakhstan's transformed focus from an extractive to a knowledge economy. It then provides an outline of HE system organisation with further discussion of historical factors that lead to recent reforms on differentiating HEIs with an emphasis on 'Research University' category. These accounts are important for establishing an understanding of the government's initiative behind establishing NU as a world-class-to-be institution in the national HE context. In addition, due to the focus of this study on internationalisation and research policies and practices, the chapter will further explore the evolution of university research and internationalisation in the Kazakhstani HE system.

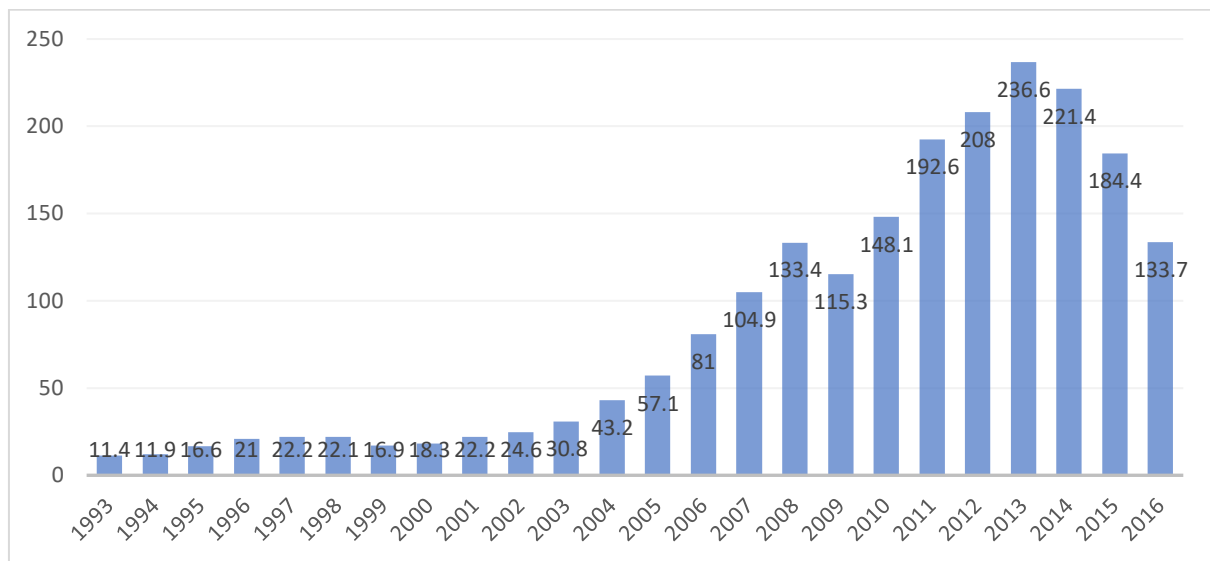
3.1 Kazakhstan's socio-economic background and its changing agenda towards knowledge as a driver of economic diversification in the country

Kazakhstan is the largest landlocked country with a relatively small population of about 18 million people. It is one of the more sparsely populated countries in the world with

just 6.3 people per sq.m (World Bank, 2016). The average age is 27, which makes it a young state (British Council, 2017). Kazakhstan's population is comprised of more than 130 ethnicities. Kazakhs, currently constituting 63.1% of the population (stat.gov.kz), are native people who have owned the land for more than 550 years since 1465 when the first Kazakh Khanate was founded by Kerei and Zhanibek khans, the descendant of Genghis Khan. Among other ethnicities, the largest group is comprised of Russians (23%) (stat.gov.kz). The official language is Kazakh. Russian is identified as a language of interethnic communication and is used in everyday business. It is worth noting that despite the government's continuous efforts directed at enhancing the status of Kazakh, which was subjugated to its minimal usage in Soviet times, Russian has still a dominating application across-the-board. Though many post-Soviet states chose to transfer to their mother tongue completely (e.g. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and others) (Pavlenko, 2008), President Nazarbayev's 'multi-vector politics' seem to aimed at maintaining a good relationship with Russia from both economic and political point of view (Hanks, 2009). The trilingual policy in school education is one of the manifestations of the government's unwillingness to abolish Russian.

Kazakhstan's economy is largely dependent on the extractive sector as it possesses vast reserves of oil, gas and other mineral resources and is ranked among the leading countries in the world for output. This was crucial to recover the national economy at the early stages of independence when the oil and gas industry provided more than half of the growth of real GDP in the country (MoES, 2016). Currently, oil and gas production contributes almost 30% to the national GDP (World Bank, 2016), with the mining industry forming almost 16% (Ministry of National Economy, 2016). Figure 3.1 below shows the country's GDP in billion USD since 1993.

Figure 3.1. Kazakhstan's GDP in billion USD since 1993.



Source: Ministry of Education and Science

As shown above, there has been until recently a substantial growth of GDP over the 25 years of Independence. According to the World Bank, this is an indication of a positive trend in economy, industry, and population income (World Bank, 2016). However, the decline in oil price in the global market caused a significant fall in national GDP in 2009 and after 2013. This also caused a continuous devaluation of the national currency, tenge (KZT) (from 120 KZT in 2009, 155 KZT in 2012, 185 KZT in 2014, and 360 KZT in 2016). With the National Bank's 'free-floating' policy, the USD exchange rate has been changing with indices of 327-362 KZT between late 2016 and August 2018. As of 2016, GDP comprised 137.3 billion USD, while GDP per capita is USD 7,715 (World Bank, 2016). The inflation rate in 2016 reached 8.5% which is in comparison with OECD countries is extremely high (OECD, 2017).

The influence of the knowledge economy pushed the leadership of the country to transform its vision and the national economy route from relying on the extractive sector towards investments into knowledge and innovative research. Over the period of 2001-

2011, a significant growth of public expenditure on R&D from six bn. KZT to more than fifty bn. KZT took place (Kasataya, 2012). Furthermore, in December 2012, President Nazarbayev called for extensive reforms in all spheres of the national economy with a long-term goal of positioning the country among the 30 top economies in the world by 2050 (Nazarbayev, 2012). This strategy of economic diversification identified “knowledge and innovative research” as central to achieving the goal (Nazarbayev, 2014). However, despite bold initiatives and increased investments in R&D, Kazakhstan’s position in the Global Innovation Index remains low, being 74th out of 126 economies in 2018, though it is presented as one of the top three economies in Central Asia along with India and Iran (Cornel University, INSEAD, and WIPO, 2018). Hence, despite a series of ambitious reforms intended to strengthen the country's economy through diversification, Kazakhstan has a long way to go before entering the table of the top 30 economies.

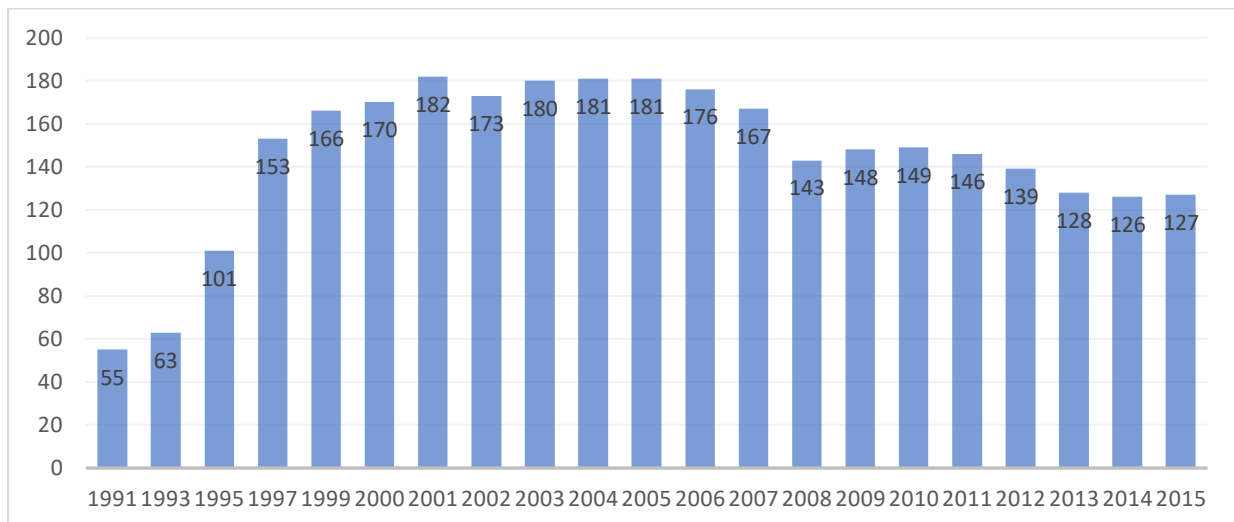
3.2 Higher education system: overview and background for differentiation of HEIs

The higher education system in Kazakhstan is centrally governed by the Ministry of Education and Science, and legislatively maintained by the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK), and the ‘Law on Education’ of 2007. At the same time, the basic principles of the development of education, program objectives, and relevant key indicators are established through state programs that create a core basis for implementing state policy in education. The principal state program to date is the 2011-2020 State Program for Education Development (MoES, 2011).

Substantial transformations in the HE system took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the country obtained its independence in 1991. Key reforms of the government have been directed towards the development of human capital and training

of graduates who possess relevant knowledge and skills for the benefit of the national economy and society (Canning, 2017). That is why a major emphasis was made to develop the legislative foundation for higher education institutions to update programs in order to sustain the independence of the country in professional training and to satisfy market needs (Kuzembayeva and Oskolkova, 2011). One of the responses of the government to political, economic and social change was the creation of a competitive environment in the higher education market allowing different forms of ownership of HEIs to occur. This shift to a market economy gave rise to a significant expansion of the national HE system. Figure 3.2 below shows the dynamics of the growth in number of HEIs since 1991 to 2015.

Figure 3.2. Number of HEIs over the last 25 years



Source: International Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA)

As shown in Figure 3.2, the HE sector, which comprised 54 state universities in 1990-1991, had 153 functioning HEIs by 1996-97, of which almost 100 were new private ones, with the highest number of HEIs in 2001-2002. Though this massification was thought to solve the problems of unemployment of the youth in the country (MoES, 2016), it is not a secret that the launch of new institutions in a quick manner resulted in a low quality

of teaching and resources too (ibid). Besides, programs offered in the majority of HEIs were predominantly of humanities and law majors, which was then considered as a shortcoming in view of the government's aim to increase specialists with technical and engineering education (MoES, 2016). However, there is an opinion that the unstructured regulation of the system by the then recently established Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) was one of the reasons underlying this expansion (Sagintayeva et al, 2017). On this account, the Ministry's justification for such massification is the state shifting away from central planning and transitioning to a neoliberal market policy, giving more space for private ownership and competition (MoES, 2016). While both assumptions are reasonable, the government's focus on preserving what was achieved during the Soviet system, which was considered as one of the best in the world of its time, would have provided a long-term advantage for the HE system of the independent Kazakhstan. Moreover, tighter control from the side of the government on granting license for providing educational services for institutions established rapidly might have helped prevent the occurrence of so many small-scale institutions with limited academic and material infrastructure that caused a fall in the quality of HE education in the country.

In 2006, the MoES began to regulate the size of HE and ran several reforms by toughening quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms, leading to a decrease in the number of HEIs. At the same time, according to the MoES, the index of the number of HEIs relative to the number of people in Kazakhstan is one of the highest in the world (MoES, 2016). As of the 2016-2017 academic year, there are 125 HEIs functioning in Kazakhstan with the population of 17.4 million people, making 144 thousand people per HEI. In comparison, for the same period, in Russia there are 662 HEIs for the population of 146 mln (220 thousand people per HEI) (kommersant.ru, statdata.ru), while in the UK

there are 162 HEIs for 65 mln people (500 thousand people per HEI) (Universities UK, 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2017).

3.2.1 Differentiation and Diversity of HEIs in Kazakhstan

Hundred and twenty-five public, private and non-civil higher education institutions in Kazakhstan are diversified by missions, functions and profiles (MoES, 2016). The HE system in the country is a multiple-institutions system with the majority categorised as universities. Sixty one public institutions are divided into national and state universities, academies and a music conservatoire. Private universities are mainly established as joint-stock companies with full financial autonomy from the state, but their curriculum is overseen by MoES. The types and number of HEIs in Kazakhstan are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Types and number of HEIs in Kazakhstan

Type of HEI	Quantity
National University	9
State university	31
Private university	54
Joint-stock type public university	16
Non-civil university	13
Autonomous organisation of education (AOO)	1
TOTAL	125

Source: Compiled by Author from MoES reports

Note: The term 'regional' is not used in relation to universities in official and state HE documents. The term 'regional university' in this study is solely used by this researcher to indicate the location of the case universities.

According to MoES (2016), to date, 48.3% of the total number of students study in public universities, 50.3% in non-state educational institutions and 1.3% in branch institutions. HE in universities is carried out at the expense of the state budget and on a fee-paying basis. The share of students studying at the expense of the state budget in 2015 was 139,330 (29.3%); on a paid basis – 335,511 people (70.7%). Annually, the state allocates about 33,000 state grants for university education, including 80% for undergraduates, 18% for taught masters and 2% for doctoral students.

Since Soviet times, when HE in Kazakhstan was first established, HEIs in Russia and other former Soviet Union countries have been differentiated more horizontally than vertically by “institutional types, levels of programmes, official functions of study programmes” (Teichler, 2008, p.355), into regional universities and flagship universities at the top of the hierarchy, such as Moscow State University and St Petersburg State University (Froumin and Leshukov, 2016). In Kazakhstan, such flagship status was held by the current Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) that served as a pedagogy and methodology centre. HEIs were aimed at teaching and training specialists, while research was done in specific science and research centres and institutions overseen by the Academia of Science. Higher education provision did not have a mass character since the training was done according to state order, and HEIs and students were not high in numbers as in neoliberal market-oriented economies. The move to a more market-orientated economy has furnished Kazakhstan’s HE system with more diversified HEIs that offer a rather broad range of programmes. For example, in the capital city of Astana alone, there are eleven HEIs and nine of them are mono-profile

institutions, the exceptions being the Eurasian National University and Nazarbayev University which prepare graduates in various specialisations.

Massification characterised by the growth of private providers in the first 10-15 years after Independence (gained in 1991) has caused differentiation by the type of ownership in public and private HEIs. The rise of private HEIs did not change the purpose of the HE system and it continued contributing to the sole specialist training strategy in predominantly social sciences and arts by over-supplying graduates in economics, business and law specialties.

During his speech at the Parliament of Kazakhstan in 2011, the then Minister of Education, Mr Zhumagulov pointed out that the number of HEIs and students (377 students per 10 000 people) in Kazakhstan is in excess in comparison with world practice (e.g. Japan – 222; Germany – 258). To avoid overloading the national economy with a large number of non-demanded graduates, the then management of the MoES proposed a new classification of HEIs which is the aim of ‘optimising’ the number of students and HEIs and transforming the system by creating research universities in order to encourage research and innovation development (parlam.kz, 2011). Thus, the expansion of the HE system, which was required/necessary in the early years of independence, has now seemed to be an issue for the government, and differentiation of HEIs by their mission and functions to cultivate more research-intensive universities is a priority.

Table 3.2 illustrates old and new differentiation of HEIs that is outlined in the amended in 2015 version of the ‘Law on Education’ (MoES, 2015).

Table 3.2. Old and new differentiation of HEIs in Kazakhstan

Old differentiation	New differentiation
National University	National University
State university	National Research University
Private university	Research University
Joint-stock type public university	University
Non-civil university	Academy
Autonomous organisation of education (AOO)	Institute

Source: Compiled by Author

This differentiation system is mainly based on the US model of HEI classification where HEIs are differentiated by categories and offer different standards of service (Yedilbayeva, 2011). With diverse missions, higher education institutions are mainly differentiated by their scope for research and teaching. This means that the HEIs are stratified according to their mission with research universities being at the top of the system and whose main focus is the generation and transfer of new knowledge through research and innovation. According to the strategic document, the MoES will be evaluating the research aspirations of HEIs in order to select institutions that are eligible for research status and thus receive more funding from the government (State Program of Education Development, 2011). Though it is not within the scope of this study, another new feature of the planned system is that graduates will get a diploma of the state standard if their HEI has been institutionally accredited by an independent quality assurance body; otherwise, it will be one of the HEI's individual own template. This is

expected to create competition for students among HEIs by improving the quality of teaching and resources.

Then, usually, follow universities that have both a research and teaching focus. And the last two types of HEIs are those that only teach undergraduate programs and cannot grant research degrees. The pivots of the new differentiated system are envisaged to be national research and research universities that are provided with the biggest part of the budgetary funds for research activity. Today, five flagship universities, namely Al Farabi Kazakh National University, Gumilev Eurasian National University, Kazakh National Pedagogical University named after Abay, Kazakhstan National Technological University named after Satbayev and Nazarbayev University (NU), have been granted either of the above-mentioned statuses. Except for NU, which was established in 2010 and has not yet been ranked, the other four have been making significant changes and focusing on research and have managed to enter the QS World University Rankings, the first two being positioned in the top 400 and the other two in the top 500 as of 2018 (QS World Rankings 2017-2018).

3.3 The evolution of university research in Kazakhstan

The evolution of university research in Kazakhstan is closely related to its Soviet legacy, as the foundation for it was laid then. Research then was purposefully separated from HEIs by the Soviet government and functionally given to specific research institutes (OECD, 2007). Only a few selected universities were given privileges of engaging in research, mainly technical institutions in Moscow, while the rest focused on training the labour force for various enterprises all over the Soviet Union (Smirnova, 2015). This is, in fact, one of the criticisms of the past Soviet experience of research organisations.

After the Soviet collapse, science did not progress but was in a dire state as was everything else in the country (Smirnova, 2015). Research was separately conducted at various institutional levels, such as the Academy of Science, independent agencies, and universities. Although in the early period of independence, the government was keen on importing new technologies from overseas (Zhurinov, 2010), it later put forward a range of reforms and restructuration policies in line with the knowledge and innovation discourse dictated by globalisation. Since 2001, the importance of research and innovation for the development of the national economy has been identified in many strategic documents and state programs and modernisation of university research started to take place. The two main legal documents State Programme for Education Development 2011-2010 and 'Law on Science' of 2011 that regulate university research call for new approaches in university system governance for the sake of enhancing the university research capacity in the country. As a result, a new grant scheme and increased public expenses on R&D were introduced such as (i) basic funding of research projects of universities and research organisations via state orders; (ii) grant funding in order to improve the level of scientific research, scientific and technical potential and competitiveness of scientific organisations and their teams, scientists, as well as commercialization of the results of scientific work; (iii) targeted funding aimed at solving strategically important state tasks and carried out on a competitive basis (articles 24-27, Law on Science, 2011, zakon.kz). The research funding allocation is controlled by the MoES Committee and the National Centre of Science and Technology Evaluation founded in 2011. Except these funding schemes, government also expects universities to fulfil their research through searching for other funding sources such as regional and local budget, student fees, contracts with private sector, investments or endowments and commercialisation of research outcomes. These legal norms were followed by the

launch of the State Program for Foundation and Development of the National Innovation System of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005–2015, following which the National Innovation Fund, technology parks in a number of regions, design offices, centres for innovation, commercialization offices, and local venture capital funds were all established (The Concept of Innovative Development of Kazakhstan till 2020). This also is regulated by the ‘Law on Innovative Activity’ accepted in 2002, and changed in 2006 and 2012, which identifies innovations as key to innovative development in the country and the role of universities in it. While ‘Law on Science’ regulates social relations in the field of science and scientific and technical activities, determines the basic principles and mechanisms for the functioning and development of the national scientific system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, ‘Law on Innovative Activity’ sets out the legal basis for the development of innovation process. One of the characteristics of this Law and relevant policy documents is that it anticipates mechanisms for the integration of education, research and industry by creating around the universities an area of research organisations aimed at providing the learning process with new knowledge. The key is the creation of conditions for the commercialisation of the results of scientific research and R&D of universities. Furthermore, in 2015, the ‘Law on commercialization of the results of scientific and (or) scientific and technical activities’ was adopted which also reinforces the connection between education, research and industry and support for the commercialisation of research.

A further measure taken by the government in promoting university research was diversification of HE sector, including establishing Nazarbayev University to become a flagship in realising the principle of the tri-unity of education, research and industry (MoES, 2016). This specific emphasis on enhancing university research was particularly covered by a number of state policies and legal documents, such as the State

Programme of Educational Development 2011-2020, the 'Law on Science' of 2011, the 'Law on Commercialisation' of 2015 and the State Programme for Industrial-Innovative Development 2013. In particular, Article 10 of Law on Science specifies that a 'Research University' is "a higher education institution implementing a university development program approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and participating in organizing and conducting basic and applied research and other scientific, technical, research and development works" (zakon.kz). It also specifies that the main task of a research university is the integration of scientific activity and the educational process at all levels of higher and postgraduate education. Despite this clarification, the Law does not give much help towards understanding the process of obtaining research university status for RSUs.

As a note, despite the significant reforms and incentives promoted by the government, the overall funding of R&D in the country remains at a low level of 0.17% share of GDP as of 2016-2017 (MoES, 2016). This figure is low compared to OECD countries that Kazakhstan strives to be like, where an average indicator of public spending on R&D is 2.37% (OECD, 2017). In addition to scarce funding, there are debates that for the real progress in R&D, Kazakhstan has many other issues to be addressed, especially in university research and its management (Smirnova, 2015).

3.4 The government's efforts to develop internationalisation of HE in Kazakhstan

The main policy reforms in HE from the early stages of independence were oriented towards the extension of international relations in higher education which was marked by setting up of principles of national HE diploma recognition abroad and international diplomas in Kazakhstan (ratification of the Lisbon Convention), promotion of study abroad and international educational exchange programs through various grant

schemes. Thus, the discussion on globalisation and internationalisation in Kazakhstan is largely covered by two topics. One is the governmental study abroad program and the second, much more widely discussed, is the Bologna Process and the changes in HE that have been implemented as a result of Kazakhstan's becoming one of its members. In other words, the main two areas of internationalisation for Kazakhstan HE have been exporting students for study abroad and 'internationalisation at home' by integrating international elements into the national system. The reasons for these will be analysed in Chapter 6.

At the same time, the earliest governmental strategy to respond to the growing global competition has been supporting the establishment of new institutional models such as KIMEP (Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Planning) in 1992, and KBTU (Kazakh British Technical University) in 2001 to prepare high-quality specialists for business and oil industry spheres (Sagintayeva et al, 2017). Further governmental efforts were directed towards providing more autonomy to HEIs under the principles of the Bologna Declaration after becoming a member in 2010. Though the government's policies in giving more autonomy to some selected national universities have taken place since 2012, the main example of this reform is NU opening in 2010 which is aiming to become a world-class research university, and which is the central topic of this study.

The Presidential 'Bolashak' Scholarship for talented youth to study abroad at the leading universities of the world, signed by the President of Kazakhstan in 1993, is the major element of the internationalisation policies that are aimed at training qualified specialists for the priority sectors of the national economy (CIP, n.d.). Between 1993 and 2005, around 100 students had received the first Bolashak grants. In 2005 President

Nazarbayev initiated a major expansion of the program to up to 3000 students studying at a time in 27 countries in Europe, Asia and Oceania and North America (bolashak.gov.kz). Scholarship recipients receive full funding for their tuition, living, visa, medical and book expenses throughout the duration of their studies. They are obliged to return to the country after their studies and work according to their received major in the country for five years. In 24 years of functioning, 9,645 scholars have graduated from various leading HEIs abroad through Bolashak scholarship, of whom 2,855 are on Bachelor programs, 4,721 on Master's programs, 135 on research fellowships and academic internships, 121 are doctoral students, and 1,813 are short-term professional internship graduates. Of the total number of those, 52.6% completed training in social sciences, 38.2% in engineering, 7.4% in medical sciences and 1.8% are art majors. Though these are relatively small numbers, the latest research concludes that Bolashak likely generates benefits to both individual recipients and to the society in the country in general terms (Perna, Orosz and Jumakulov, 2017).

Another significant reform aimed at bringing the national HE closer to international standards was signing the Bologna Declaration and becoming a member of the European Area of Higher Education in 2009. These efforts were made as the government instituted ambitious plans to align “structures and policies to make higher education more internationally translatable” (Sparks et al, 2015, p.110), as these were seen as crucial for improving the quality of higher education in the country (MoES, 2016). Becoming a member of the Bologna Process resulted in implementing three-tier education (Bachelors-Masters-PhD cycle) and the ECTS system, promoting academic freedom and mobility, quality assurance and accreditation principles and setting up a qualifications framework throughout the higher education system (Sagintayeva and Kurakbaev, 2013). However, beyond these main specifications of the Bologna Process,

a broader impact of Europeanisation in higher education covering such areas as testing, teaching workload and research can also be observed (Tampayeva, 2015).

With regards to the current priorities of the government for higher education improvement for 2016-2020, these are largely aimed at advancing education and research through increasing international elements in the system. Much attention is given towards increasing partnership with leading international HEIs, of student mobility to up to 20% by 2020, staff internships in international partner-universities and laboratories, integration of teaching, research and business, commercialisation of research and technologies, implementation of corporate management in HEIs, further implementation of institutional and financial autonomy and academic freedom in public civil universities, modernisation of admissions policies to be constructed on the basis of international tests like ACT and SAT, and language certificates like IELTS, TOEFL, DEFL, DALF, etc., increasing the number of program taught in English (MoES, 2016). The government sees NU's role as crucial in these reforms as it applies new international strategies and instruments in operation.

Thus, as Kazakhstan has transited from central planning to market-driven economy (Sagintayeva et al, 2017) and education has been considered as a central driver for innovative and technological development of the country, the last 10 to 15 years in Kazakhstani HE has been marked with active reforms directed towards improving the quality of HE through aligning the national structures with international standards and concentrating on research and innovation. Along with this, positive efforts were made towards integrating with international HE area through facilitating Bolashak education abroad programme and becoming a signatory of the Bologna Declaration. Another set of recent reform emphasis of classifying HEIs by their missions and establishing NU is

thought to build research and innovation capacity in the country where NU is presented as a model of best practices in research and governance (Canning, 2017). Though in the latest Innovation performance review of Kazakhstan (2012) NU along with nine national universities are indicated as research-potent universities with stratified attention given to these central universities, there seem to be very little analysis done on policy level on regional universities and what are the implications of recent policies on them, especially in terms of NU's anticipated effect on the entire system.

Conclusion

The brief account of Kazakhstan's socio-economic background and recent reforms in HE provided in this chapter contributes to the perception of the reasons behind and factors that lead to differentiating HEIs in the country. In this account, it is pointed out that the allowed growth of private HEIs in the first ten years after Independence resulted in the high number of HEIs and an over-supply of graduates in the country. This did not solve Kazakhstan's problems with the lack of technical and engineering specialists that occurred as a result of the pervasive migration of specialists from many areas out of the country after the Soviet collapse (vlast.kz). Furthermore, Kazakhstan has not been left aside from global challenges and the hegemony of the knowledge-based economy. Universities that were mainly active in teaching and preparing specialists as of Soviet legacies are now required to strengthen their research capacity as they became central in the discourse of increasing the national economy. Hence, the government has sought to differentiate a few universities as research universities along with the creation of NU as an institution of a new model giving these universities more funding and support to strengthen the research capacity of the entire system.

Along with this, this chapter provided some background of how university research and internationalisation evolved in the course of time. In both accounts, one can note that significant attempts have been made towards strengthening internationalisation and research in the university system. While internationalising HE is being conducted via implementing a range of pivotal programs such as the Bolashak scholarship for educating talented youth in leading universities of US, Europe, and Asia, signing the Bologna Declaration and committing to its principles, in the university research system state reforms were directed to setting up various centres and offices for research and commercialisation. Since the aim was to give a descriptive background of these issues due to limited literature, an analytical picture of the current situation will be provided in Chapters 5 and 6 as per data interviews and documentary analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative case study research attempts to understand the effect of the introduction of an elite university on internationalisation and the research policies and practices of three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

In line with the research aim of this study identified earlier in Chapter 1, this study pursues achieving an understanding of: 1) how the government's differentiation policies and its emphasis on the elite university is perceived and responded to by regional state universities; 2) what the actual rationales and drives behind the three regional universities' policies and practices of internationalisation and research are; 3) what the interaction in relation to internationalisation and research between NU and regional universities is and how these are undertaken and developed; and 4) finally, how critical is the government's role in promoting internationalisation and research policies in regional state universities.

I will attempt to answer the four specific research questions that follow from this research aim:

1. How are regional state universities in Kazakhstan responding to the government's commitment to NU?
2. How do regional state university staff perceive the relationship between their university and NU?
3. How does NU understand its role in the national HE system?

4. What is the government's role in integrating global practices of research and internationalisation of NU within the context of the regional state universities?

Through conducting in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, this research attempts to provide a better understanding of the interrelationships between the three parties – the state, NU, as an autonomous university, and the regional state universities – through the analysis of policies and practices related to research and international activities at different levels.

This chapter provides discussion of the choice of the research strategy in relation to ontological and epistemological aspects. It further elaborates on the reason behind the choice of a case study research with semi-structured in-depth interviews and policy documents analysis as methods of data collection. The chapter then gives an overview of what strategy was applied for the data analysis and discusses how the process of analysis was undertaken. Having given the brief consideration on ethical issues, the chapter provides an account of the pilot exploration of the field that was undertaken at the very start of my studies and concludes with the summary of main discussion points supported throughout the chapter.

4.1 Research strategy: qualitative research methodology

When studying a research problem, research strategy and approach is essentially dependent on the nature of the central problem itself and what a researcher is trying to find out (Punch, 2009). As has been identified in Chapter 1 and reiterated in the introduction to this chapter, this study is particularly interested in exploring and understanding the effects of the new elite university in the national higher education through the perceptions and feelings of people involved in three RSUs in Kazakhstan. Though the study has deliberately chose to focus on looking at the case through the

perspective of RSUs as the party that has the most pressure from the state, the phenomenon proved to be complex and understudied. This meant that researching the problem from only one perspective might restrict the picture and limit full understanding of the current state of the national HE in Kazakhstan with regards to questions examined. Thus, to construct a comprehensive and systematic picture, the Ministry of Education and Science and NU itself were involved in the research as actors that are important for interpreting the case. Hence, in this study, the attempts to acquire knowledge, define truth and construct reality are made through the RSUs responses, Ministry's attitude and NU's perception of its role, namely through "feelings and personal responses" of staff in the three organisational institutions (Atkinson and Wallace, 2012, p.20). For this reason, qualitative research method was found most suitable to understand the phenomenon within a particular context through interpreting meanings that were generated from interviews and documents (Silverman, 2014).

At the same time, it should be noted that despite the fact that this study is not quantitative in its essence, numbers obtained from the literature and documentary analysis, such as the number of students and staff over time, the degree of internationalisation, the level of research activity through statistics of publications and funding allocated between different universities, are used considerably to complement to the comprehensiveness of the picture.

4.1.1 Why a case study?

Generally, every research method has an explanatory, exploratory or descriptive purpose. And every existing research method has its advantages and disadvantages. To identify which research method to apply to answer specific research questions, Yin (2014) suggests taking into consideration three important conditions: "the type of

research questions posed, the extent of control a researcher has over actual behavioural events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events” (p.9). My research seeks to explore effect and impact of a new university, established in 2010 by the government in Kazakhstan, which strives to become a world-class research university, on building capacity for research and internationalisation. This is a concrete case and a contemporary phenomenon taking place in Kazakhstan. Thus, an exploratory case study seems to be an ideal approach to explore this social phenomenon though fully understanding ‘the case’ in its natural context and setting (Punch, 2009) and to answer specific ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions of this study (Yin, 2014).

The case study as a research method is used in many fields, especially in social sciences when exploring individual, organisational, social, political processes and phenomena, or “a contemporary set of events” (Yin, 2014, p.14) where a researcher does not have much or any control. Moreover, with its holistic focus, a case study is more about a strategy of “organising social data to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied” (Good and Hatt cited in Punch, 2009, p.119). Case study research has also attracted many researchers for its feature that allows to apply different data generation methods and different sources (Gillham, 2000) as it is more about what to explore rather than how (Stake, 2003).

Although case study is one of the commonly used methods in many social sciences, it has been criticised as being less rigorous and subjective that lack systematic procedures, “undisciplined” and “weak empirically” (Gerring, 2007, p.6; see also Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). Besides, stronger criticism towards case study has been shown for its lack of generalisation one can make out of a single case and apply to a

wider population (Flyvberg, 2006). However, what makes case study research specific is its dependency on the context and the knowledge the researcher generates based on it, as contextual knowledge contributes to a better understanding of the specific settings and practices (Miles, 2015). Hence, as Yin indicated (1994) that generalisations are made not to populations but to theory, there is no a particular intention to make generalisation out of the three RSUs.

At the same time, given the broader message that does not only speak to the situation in Kazakhstan, generalising from one case has been considered. Specifically, this case which discusses the phenomenon within one nation's boundary brings forward issues and challenges that can be relevant in other countries too, for example, by providing a comparative context that promotes further dialogue as well as alerting researchers and policy makers to other variables and communicating contextual differences (Stenhouse et al, 1982).

In particular, if we consider the case as an instrument to understand a phenomenon within specific contexts, despite some characteristic nuances relevant to this case only, the topicality of the issues under study, such as what is meant by 'world-class university' globally, might shed light or even trigger more questions to be discussed and elaborated upon for international policy makers. Thus, in presenting a story of Kazakhstan in establishing its WCU and further exploring its effect on the local capacity, this case study might inform the broader international policy community of some possible "extension of experience and as a contribution to practical wisdom" (Bridges, 2010, p.88).

4.1.2 What is a case in this study?

Though different scholars define 'case' differently, in this study it has been perceived as a procedure of inquiry according to Merriam (1998), since this gives more freedom in exploring more than one case or set of cases. As such, the phenomenon under study in this thesis is the effect of an aspiring elite university on internationalisation and research policies and practices of three regional state universities. The aim is to understand the phenomenon through perceptions of regional universities, as well as to complement this understanding through perspectives of NU and the state. This study is considered as a single case study (the effect of an aspiring elite university) with multiple cross-sector cases as the study involves three different types of organisations, namely the RSUs, NU and the Ministry in charge. Thus, through analysing perceptions of staff at three RSUs, examining NU's understanding of their role and studying Ministry's view on the differentiation policies and emphasis on NU, I aim to understand interrelations between different types of institutions and to draw a comprehensive picture of the effect of NU on the HE system in Kazakhstan in a broader context.

4.2 Design, selection of cases and sampling

To answer the research questions of this study, qualitative semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis were employed. I conducted a total of 29 interviews with key administration and academic staff responsible for research and international activities including senior members of staff in charge of strategic development at RSUs, NU and MoES. The key staff included staff from the departments of Postgraduate studies and International cooperation, deans of faculties and senior academic staff. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman (1956) suggests that when a person enters the presence of others, he presents himself or a situation in a particular way, to

give an impression of attributes that are claimed as a reality. Such a person is likely to perform in a way that at least takes account of the expectations of others. Though this point of Goffman's potentially applies to all interviewees, a greater concern in this study was in relation to the top senior staff of the regional state universities, who I initially planned to interview. The concern was that they might not present what is actually going on in terms of internationalisation and research practices in their institutions or might want the researcher to think what they present is a 'real reality' (ibid, p.26), due to their status and policies imposed by the strong, centralised government. Therefore, it was decided that university staff on the ground in charge of the areas studied would be the appropriate for the researcher to get a picture of what the current state is in the regional universities.

The data gathered from the interviews was triangulated through the analysis of policy documents. These included major national strategic documents on education such as 'Law on Education' of 2007, 'Law on Science' of 2011, 'Law on the status of Nazarbayev University, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Nazarbayev Fund' of 2011, State Program for Education Development for 2016-2019, and strategic documents of the universities containing their mission, development plans and others related to research and international activity in general. The period to be looked at is 2011-2016.

The three universities have been chosen from the list of 33 universities that have had a collaborative training project with the NU in 2014-2016. State universities have always been a bedrock of the higher education system in Kazakhstan, and, being under the centralised governance of the Ministry of Education and Science, have a high level of accountability, and are expected to follow the governmental line. Considering an emphasised importance of the NU by the government in policy documents, these

universities are 'tasked' to 'learn' from NU's experience (SPED 2016-2019). At the initial stage of developing the research idea, I thought I would examine national universities in Kazakhstan. However, after close investigation of the current situation in the higher education sector and NU's recent activity, and discussion with my supervisors, we agreed that regional state universities would present a more interesting case. To my mind, this is due to the national universities being the flagship universities in Kazakhstan, having long history, significant infrastructure, high achievements in education and science and being represented in the *THE* world rankings for universities. Due to the government's differentiation policies, national universities are having great attention and support from the government in raising research 'awareness' and culture into the higher education system. In comparison with national universities, regional universities are stratified lower in their status of state universities. Moreover, all national universities are located in the two big cities of Astana and Almaty. According to findings of the Institute of Economic Studies from July 2016, there is a critical disproportion of development between larger cities like Almaty and Astana, where a great deal of investments are centralised and where national universities are located, and regions, which should also be taken into consideration in the market economy conditions. With regards to higher education, this can be traced in Li and Ashirbekov (2014) who also note that there is a gap in development between institutions in Kazakhstan, particularly between metropolitan and regional HEIs. Furthermore, during my pilot exploration of the field I identified that the regional universities are more keen and active in collaborating and learning new practices from NU's experience. Another point discussed initially was whether I would send questionnaires to all state universities and further interview selected samples for deeper exploration of the topic. However due to limited time and

resources of the researcher this option did not seem to be feasible, in particular given the size of the country.

To maintain confidentiality, I numbered these universities 1, 2 and 3. All three are state universities located in three regions of Kazakhstan: RSU 1 in East Kazakhstan, RSU 2 in Central Kazakhstan, and RSU 3 in North-East Kazakhstan. As Kazakhstan is a significantly large country (the 9th largest in the world), the location of the three universities was selected for the researcher's convenience in respect of travel and the ease of access to the site. Furthermore, these universities are placed in the top 10 among 126 universities in the national ranking table (egov.kz) and this has served as an additional criterion for sampling; they have shown high results in their research productivity and international activities in 2016 National Rating according to Kazakhstan's Independent Quality Assurance Agency's (IQAA) methodology (nkaoko.kz).

All state universities have the same status in the higher education legislation, and are not stratified by their legal standing, though there is a difference in the amount of resources they receive from the government based on the state order for training specialists, which is basically the number of students they would get funding for, and research and innovation projects they conduct, including research grants and publications. According to the State Program for Education Development 2016-2019, public funds are also allocated according to accreditation results, region's and university's development strategies. Yin (2014) suggests that for generalisation purpose in case study a researcher should not consider cases as samples but as a way to "shed empirical light" on some theories (p.40). Even if we take into consideration that all state universities are on the same line or strata, different location, strategic vision and other

factors might not be helpful to make statistical generalisation out of the three components of the case. Therefore, findings from this study would serve more to help me to “describe, understand and interpret” (Lichtman, 2010, p.96).

4.3 Case universities: RSUs and NU

4.3.1 RSUs 1, 2 and 3

This thesis examines three regional state universities, located in regions with massive metallurgic, mining and machinery manufacturing industries, which represent an essential contribution to the economic development of the country. Each RSU is the main scientific, educational and methodological centre of its region, producing a labour force primarily for the needs of the region along with one of the main emphases of the government to integrate education, research, and business. RSU 2 was established amongst the first teaching institutes in Kazakhstan in the 1930s and later became the second institution of higher education with a state university status; RSU 1 and RSU 3 were founded later in the 1960s as a teaching and an industrial institute respectively. Today, all three are leading multi-faculty universities in their regions, ranked among the top multi-faculty universities in the General Ranking of the universities of Kazakhstan (IQAA, 2017). Among all three, only RSU 2 is present in world rankings. In the latest QS Ranking for Emerging Europe and Central Asian universities for 2018, it is positioned in the top 150 out of 300 represented (topuniversity.com).

Structurally, all three, being multi-faculty, contain different faculties and research centers with the research focus on teaching and pedagogy, engineering, natural sciences, energy, and environmental studies. Table 4.1 summarises a range of different characteristics of the three RSUs.

Table 4.1. Characteristics of the RSUs studied in this research

	RSU 1	RSU 2	RSU 3
Founded	1952	1938	1960
Profile	Multi-profile classic university	Multi-profile classic university	Multi-profile innovative university
Organisational system	On the basis of economic management right	On the basis of economic management right	On the basis of economic management right
Mission	Ensuring the leading role of the University in the international scientific and educational space for the formation of competitive specialists for the innovative development of Kazakhstan.	Integration of research and education, which serves as the basis for the dynamic development of society	No data available on their website
Within the new classification aims at	University	Research University	Research University
Number of faculties and departments	4	13	9
Total programs	83	138	116
Undergraduate programs	50	75	66
Graduate (Master's) programs	30	51	46
PhD programs	3	12	4
The academic staff as of 2016-2017	315	893	526
% of staff with degrees (Doctors and	51%	43%	53%

Candidates of Sciences, PhD)			
Total students as of 2016-2017	6676	9336	9444
Undergraduate	6028	7694	8766
Graduate	646	1590	643
PhD	2	52	35

Source: Compiled by Author

According to the websites of the three RSUs, all are actively involved in international cooperation, having partnerships with various public and government institutions, and national and international HEIs. International cooperation is aimed at the integration of the university into the global educational system, participation in inter-state organisations, and collaboration with leading universities of neighboring countries and far abroad.

4.3.2 Nazarbayev University (NU)

Created in 2010 by the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan in line with the government's Kazakhstan – 2020 economic and social development program, Nazarbayev University (NU) is an autonomous academic institution, striving to become a global-level research university. As a national project, its mission states “to be a model for higher education reform and modern research in Kazakhstan and to contribute to the establishment of Astana as an international innovation and knowledge hub” along with its strategy of “becoming a leading model of higher education, which would establish a benchmark for all higher education institutions of the country” (nu.edu.kz). The main features of NU that make it distinct from the rest of the public universities is its legislative independence from the MoES, maintained by being run by its board of trustees,

operating through the partnership with leading US (University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Duke, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Colorado School of Mines), UK (University of Cambridge, UCL and University of Warwick) and Singaporean (National University of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy) universities and research institutes, using English as a medium of instruction, and having a highly competitive admissions process oriented towards merit-based selection of applicants (Ruby, 2017). Unlike the rest of the HEIs, NU has been given a special status of an autonomous organisation of education by a new law 'On the status of Nazarbayev University, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), and Nazarbayev Fund' that provides possibilities to operate in accordance with international practices, ensuring academic freedom and institutional autonomy, along with a governing structure that will allow the university to be internationally competitive (2013-2020 NU Strategy, n.d.).

There are eight schools at NU with three of them offering only graduate taught Master's and PhD programs. Other five schools offer undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs. Each school has its own international strategic university or a separate school partner in collaboration with which academic programs have been developed. In the 2017-2018 academic year, there are 4269 students of whom 708 are studying on the Foundation program, 2369 on the undergraduate, 806 on the graduate, 99 on the doctoral and 70 are Doctor of Medicine students (nu.edu.kz, 2018).

Until 2016, each year NU has been enrolling 500 new undergraduate students to the Foundation year program, on the basis of a state scholarship that covers tuition and accommodation. Since 2016 this number has increased to 700. By summer 2017, there had been three cohorts of Bachelor's and Master's degree graduates, the first taking

place in 2015, and one cohort of doctoral students who were the first doctoral students enrolled in 2014 (nu.edu.kz, 2017).

From different research centers and institutions that functioned at the early stages of its operation, NU later set up the National Laboratory Astana for conducting fundamental and applied research in priority areas for the country, as defined in the government's strategic documents, such as Kazakhstan-2020, Kazakhstan-2050 and One hundred concrete steps. These areas are mainly related to science, engineering and technology development.

The University started to be built from the ground up in 2007, and construction of its various sites are still being carried out. It is planned to finish building by 2020. Currently, its campus comprises of newly-built modern academic and administrative buildings, student dormitories and staff apartments with various facilities necessary for a comfortable living, all connected with a covered glass skywalk enabling students and staff to access buildings without leaving the premises.

4.3.3 Summary of characteristics

Among the three RSUs, RSU 2 is the oldest and the biggest university and can be placed in line with some national universities in Kazakhstan. According to my observations during the fieldwork, this university is better resourced and equipped in terms of premises and material resources. This was also noticeable in respect of what the conditions were their offices and classrooms where I conducted my interviews. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain data on the overall budget RSUs receive from the state; however, according to the number of state grants for research projects and a number of publications, RSU 2 receives higher number of research grants than the other two, which will be shown in Chapter 5 related to research development theme.

In all parameters, RSU 1 is smaller than the other two universities. This is explained by the presence of another major technical university in the region. Since the region is one of the extensive industrial hubs of the country, specialist training is largely maintained in that other university. However, I have not opted to study that university as it is in the list of universities identified by the government for the Industrial-Innovative development program which is done in collaboration with NU and other 10 technical universities throughout the country. As these universities are having a specific partnership with NU within the framework of developing the curriculum for training engineering and technical specialists, and not in internationalisation and research which is the focus of my study, I have excluded them from my primary case university sampling.

Moreover, RSU 1 has suffered from quite frequent leadership changes since 2007. The longest period of time a rector stayed there in the last nine years was 1.8 years (data from interview). Staff whom I interviewed are sure that the current disadvantaged state of the university is directly connected with the impermanent management. However, even with the new recruiting system when rectors are designated through an open voting system without direct involvement of MoES, there is no implication of whether the new system will change the current situation with frequent change of rectors.

Table 4.2 summarises the key differences between NU and RSUs.

Table 4.2. Differences between NU and the three RSUs in this study

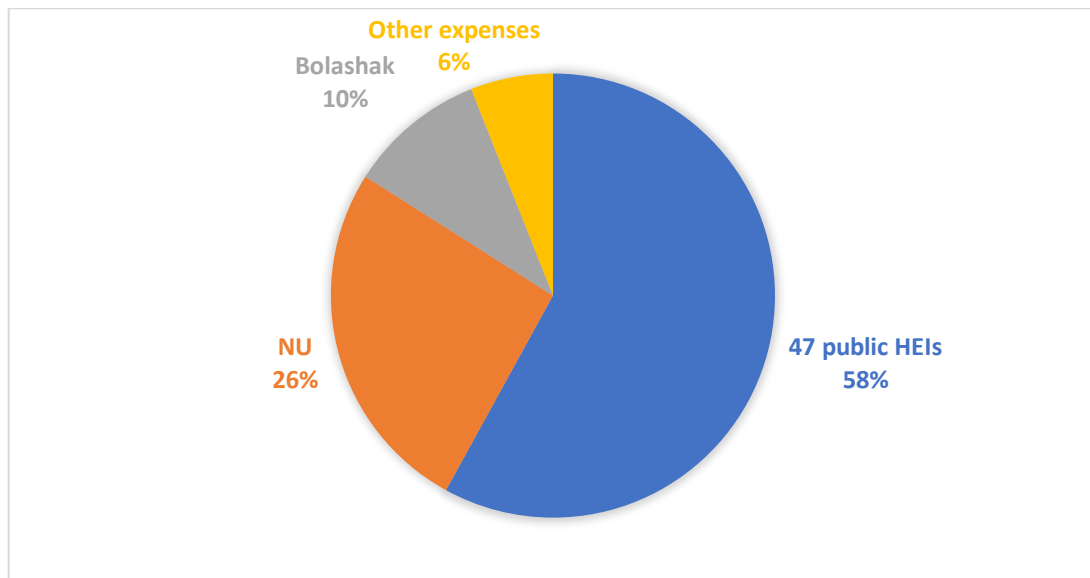
Characteristics	Case universities	
	NU	RSUs
Status	Autonomous	Centrally governed by MoES
Classification	Research university	Multi-profile university

Functioning	Under the specific law on status of Nazarbayev University	Under state standards
Reports to	Prime Minister's office	Ministry of Education and Science
Implementation strategy	International strategic partnership	State program
Mission	To become a global-level research university	Regional leadership in specialist training and local research
Governance	Board of Trustees	MoES
Language of Instruction	English	Russian/Kazakh
Admissions	Specific by international testing	Unified National Testing
Academic programs set up	Autonomously	According to state standards with limited freedom
Funding per student	About 21,400 USD	About 2,000 USD
Staff-student ratio	1:10	1:16 (average of three RSUs)

Source: Compiled by Author

In comparison with NU, RSUs function in a totally different legal framework, organisational status, missions, needs, governance system, the language of instruction, admissions policy and, finally, budget. Figure 4.1 shows the share of public spending on NU and the 47 public HEIs.

Figure 4.1. Public spending on NU and the rest of the HEIs



Source: OECD, 2017

As shown, quite a large proportion of the budget funds are allocated to NU in comparison with other 47 public institutions in the system (26% for NU vs 1,2% per public HEI). While in public universities the funding allocated per student is around 2,000 USD, at NU one student's study costs more than 21,000 USD (stat.gov.kz). Similarly, expenses for staff salaries at NU exceeds those in public universities by at least five times. This is due to the fact that the majority of staff (78%) are internationally hired (nu.edu.kz). NU seeks high profile researchers with a number of publications who are "cost expensive" (forbes.kz/process/education/kto_takoy_sovremennyiy_vyisokooplachivaemyiy_professor). Besides, this income differential between NU and other regional institutions in the country could be a potential cause of a 'brain drain' from the regions to Astana. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

NU is an elite university that promotes international standards and sets high requirements of admissions for students and of hiring for staff, while RSUs are locally oriented, standardised public institutions that operate within the limited resources provided by the central governor.

4.4 Data collection: methods and the process

4.4.1 Interviews as a method

Interviews are one of the most widely used tools in qualitative research and have been described as one of the most important sources of information in case studies (Yin, 2014). Qualitative interviews are suggested to provide a researcher with good opportunities to “rigorously examine narrative accounts of social world” and the possibility “to find realities” through the stories told by interviewees (Miller and Glassner, 2011, p.144).

Qualitative interviews are interactive, interpretative, responsive and flexible in their nature (Punch, 2009; King and Horrocks, 2010). Data generated through interviews are typically rich and interactive, allowing the researcher to learn about the world from the interviewee’s perspective, and this makes the interview a great instrument, in exploratory studies in particular. Its flexibility affords possibilities to generate new ideas and to deal with emerging themes.

Depending on how structured interviews are and what the research purpose is, interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. In my research I employed semi-structured interviews to allow more flexibility and variation during the interviewing process with an intention to probe for greater depth, in order to get rich and valuable data (Punch, 2009). This type of strategy during interviews provides the researcher more opportunities to explore as comprehensively as possible “all the factors that underpin participants’ answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs” (ibid, p.141). Thus, having main themes to be covered during the interview reflected in an interview schedule, I applied probing and following-up techniques as the interview went

along to get more detailed and extensive understanding and exploration of respondents' answers.

The utmost advantage of doing interviews in this study has been initially preconditioned with the purpose of this study to understand the phenomenon under exploration through RSUs staff perceptions and attitudes and get rich data for constructing contextual knowledge out of interviews. This can only be achieved through conversation and concurrent discussion of the topic during the interviews as interview is, in fact, a conversation with a definite purpose and objectives and with different roles for the researcher and participant, though both of them can be active in "shaping the discussion and constructing shared understanding" (Keegan and Ward, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p.14). Semi-structured interview questions that were developed from concepts discussed in the literature review chapter were considered as pre-set codes and allowed me to organise information emerging from interviews inductively by themes.

Another reason for conducting interviews in my study was a limited analytical data that can be grasped from the MoES policy documents due to no previous analysis of NU's effect undertaken. As such, policy documents analysis discussed below has been chosen mainly for complementing and triangulating the interview data. Considering a low research culture in the country, and with the purpose of ensuring full guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity for respondents, conducting focus-groups was not considered. Thus, answers to all four research questions posed in this thesis were predominantly sought with the help of interview responses of faculty and staff at RSUs, NU and MoES with data from policy documents complementing the data from interviews. This approach allowed me to determine to what extent discussion at a document level depicts the current relationship between the three, RSUs, NU and the MoES.

4.4.2 Documentary analysis

Documents both present and construct an essential part of the private and public records of individuals and institutions and in so doing provide an important cultural and contextual background to matters of interest. For research purposes, documents are used as a source of evidence that provides valuable narration at micro and macro levels (Fitzgerald, 2012). Historically, the use of documents in qualitative research was diminished by the emergence and increasing popularity of other forms of data collection methods such as interviews, surveys, observation (McCulloch, 2004). However, the value and informativeness of documents should not be minimised, because documentary analysis as a qualitative method enables the researcher to examine and interpret data that have been laid down in written texts so that meanings can be generated and understanding gained for the purpose of developing empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) and the interpretation of such knowledge.

The kinds of documents used for analysis vary greatly, depending on the aim and focus of the research as well as whether the intention is for the documents to be used as a separate source of data or in conjunction with other data. Most commonly, documentation is used in case study research as an important tool for triangulation (Punch, 2009; Yin, 2014), because the documents give a researcher the opportunity to check the trustworthiness of data.

Documents are not absolutely central in answering my research questions since my study is mainly concerned with the perceptions of the staff in the RSUs, NU and the Ministry of Education and these individuals' responses to the questions I put to them in the interviews are the main way to understand the case. However, I am also interested in examining the official governmental line (and documentary analysis of government

texts can complement what I learn from my interviews with Ministry officials), as well as the official viewpoint of universities in relation to their recent development of internationalisation and research. That is why documents constitute an important part of the analytical framework of this study for they provide “insight to how these institutions work and what values and practices guide decision-making” (Briggs et al, 2012, p.300).

For the purpose of analysis, one advantage of documents, noted by Creswell (2012), is their availability for analysis without needing to transcribe, in the way that interviews do. At the same time, McCulloch suggests getting “between lines to analyse their meaning and their deeper purpose” (p.1). That is why I intended not to stick to a particular protocol but focus on ‘reading between the lines’ to identify key themes in them that will complement the data derived from the interviews.

Creswell (2012) notes that the researcher should be careful when selecting which type of documents he/she selects for analysis as not all documents are complete or accurate. In my study, I mainly concentrated on current official governmental papers in relation to national higher education, such as policy documents, strategies and state programs. The key of them are President’s annual speeches, ‘Law on Education’ of 2007, ‘Law on Science’ of 2011, State Program for Education Development 2011-2020 and 2016-2019 with special attention given to the latter being the key reference for recent reforms, Strategic plans and reports of MoES, National Report on Education on Current State and Development of Education for 2015 and 2016, and other strategies and reports of MoES specifically on internationalisation and academic mobility. Studying these documents provided an advantage for mapping the government’s emphasis on NU and research universities, as well as an importance of enhancing internationalisation and research in the national HE. In addition, official documents issued by involved

universities in relation to their mission, strategies, plans and reports were also studied. The majority of key documents were collected before the fieldwork to build an idea of the context of recent research and internationalisation strategies and actual development on both state and institutional levels, as well as constructing relevant interview questions. This was helpful for following up and confirming nuances if required while interviewing. Some documents, if mentioned by interviewees, were also examined and used for analysis after the interviews during the fieldwork period. However, it should be emphasised here that interview transcripts were not referred to as 'documents' in this study.

To sum up, documentary research played a meaningful role in this study and contributed to answering the research questions in two main ways. First, documents were useful when setting the initial context of the drivers behind the development of internationalisation and research of three RSUs, the emphasis on NU at the state level, and NU's strategies for translating its experience with the rest of the institutions in the country. Secondly, documents were significantly applied for triangulating data generated from interviews.

4.4.3 Data collection: the process

The whole process of data collection was arranged in two parts. Part One took place in April 2017 at RSU 1 and RSU 2 with Part Two conducted at RSU3, NU and MoES between 3rd of July and 4th of September 2017, making in total four months for fieldwork. Overall, it was a bit complex to arrange interviews during the summer time of the year as many staff were away on holidays or other businesses. Arranging interviews at the MoES was the most difficult part of my data collection process. It was a period of state grants allocation for high school graduates at the MoES in July and half of the

August, which made it almost impossible to get an access to the Ministry, since allocation of grants is a highly confidential and sensitive process. Moreover, they experienced a technical error during the process, which created wrong lists and unhappy and frustrated crowds of school graduates and their parents, invading the Ministry and their staff. In addition to this, there was also an extensive budget inspection going on at the MoES at the time of my fieldwork, which even more complicated and decreased time efficiency of my data collection process. Moreover, access to the Ministry building with any type of gadgets is not allowed. There were severe leaks from different governmental organisations a couple of years ago, and the Agency for Civil Service decided to ban bringing any kind of gadgets into their buildings, both to staff and visitors. I could not straightforwardly take my laptop, audio-recorder and my smartphone with me. I would have had to have special permission to bring those with me which would have involved signing various permission request papers and getting even more signatures for approval from different people in charge within the state building.

On the other hand, it was straightforward to liaise and negotiate with the RSUs and NU in terms of inviting to take part in my interviews and arrange times. Except respondents being away at some point during my visit, they all said they would be eager and happy to participate in an interview and answer my questions. I initially aimed at conducting the same number of interviews in all three RSUs as they are structurally and organisationally similar to each other. However, one of the senior managers at RSU 2 whom I was going to interview was on business trip and unavailable. Unfortunately, I did not have much time to wait for him to arrive in a week's time. Less number of interviews at RSU 3 is also justified by the absence of relevant staff during my visit in July as it was annual leave time. Travelling second time a 800-kilometer distance was not possible due to time and finance constraints.

So, in total, I conducted eight interviews in RSU 1, seven interviews in RSU 2, six interviews in RSU 3, six interviews at NU, and two interviews at MoES. Interviewees were selected from the academic and administrative staff in charge of internationalisation and research. Academic staff were from different departments and school, representing both sciences and humanities, who had at least 6 years of work experience in the academia. Though age and gender of the interviewees were not critical in my study, an almost even representation of both male and female and younger and senior respondents were involved across all four sites. For the purpose of confidentiality, all interviewees are named by a letter code in the interview sequence in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Interviewees at each site and letter codes assigned to them

Site	Interviewees	Letter Code
RSU 1	1. Academic staff member, Faculty of Physics	A
	2. Academic staff member, Faculty of Pedagogy	B
	3. Academic staff member, Faculty of Psychology	C
	4. Administrative staff member, Research management	D
	5. Administrative staff member, International cooperation	E
	6. Senior management team member in charge of strategic planning and International cooperation	F
	7. Academic staff member, Faculty of Chemistry	G
	8. Director of Research Centre	H
RSU 2	1. Dean of the Faculty of Physical sciences	A

	2. Academic staff member, Faculty of History	B
	3. Academic staff member, Faculty of Mathematics	C
	4. Dean of the Faculty of Biological sciences	D
	5. Senior management team member in charge of research and international cooperation	E
	6. Academic staff member, Faculty of Chemistry	F
	7. Academic staff member, Faculty of Chemistry	G
RSU 3	1. Academic staff member, Faculty of Psychology	A
	2. Dean of the Faculty of Biological sciences	B
	3. Administrative staff member, Research management	C
	4. Academic staff member, Faculty of Engineering	D
	5. Academic staff member, Faculty of Pedagogy	E
	6. Senior management team member in charge of research international cooperation	F
NU	1. Senior management team member	A
	2. Senior management team member	B
	3. Administrative staff member in charge of NU experience sharing	C
	4. Senior management team member in charge of research, Graduate School of Education	D
	5. Administrative staff member, Office of the Provost	E
	6. Senior management team member in charge of projects, Graduate School of Education	F
MoES	1. Senior management team, Analytical Centre	A

	2. Senior management team, Analytical Centre	B
International consulting company	1. Senior program leader and program developer	

Source: Compiled by Author

Interview questions differed between sites according to the research questions that they were intended to help answer. So, in the RSUs questions were predominantly concerned with their recent internationalisation and research development, differentiation policies and any changes to their institutional organisation of those policies, their understanding of global practices and the notion of GRU/WCU with key questions in relation to their attitude(s) towards the government's emphasis on NU and the interrelationship between their university and NU. Moreover, the questions varied between participants at the RSUs according to their position and role. So, members of top management were asked questions of a strategic nature, middle administrative staff were asked questions related to administrative issues of internationalisation and research management, while questions for academic staff were in relation to their academic work and their personal experiences of recent reforms and any influence those reforms had on their academic work. Similarly, specific questions in relation to its role in the national HE system and its activities in sharing its experience with other institutions were asked at NU, while questions for MoES were concerned with the government's overview of recent reforms, differentiation of institutions, NU's role as a national project and its role as a regulator in establishing and coordinating relationships between NU and the RSUs.

Interviews took place in each site, in an office and confidential setting. All interviews were audio-recorded. I initially had concerns whether the participants would agree to be

audio-recorded or not, being aware of not significantly high research culture in the country. However, to my surprise, I had no issue with getting their consent for that, except only one interviewee who warned that she might not be willing to go for details depending on the question, unless the recorder was turned off. However, in the end, she did not have any concerns and the interview went without the need for switching off the recorder.

Other than these, as I was not able to talk to more people at MoES as planned, I sent an official letter to them by post with five key questions specifically related to differentiation policies that were under Ministry's prerogative. Since they responded officially on a paper with the reference to policy documents and their response is considered as an official document and is analysed as such within the documentary analysis applied in this thesis.

In addition to these interviews in Kazakhstan, I also managed to interview a member of the international consulting company in the UK that was recruited by NU and the MoES to prepare and deliver program for public universities across Kazakhstan to help them become more autonomous. Though this was not initially planned in my data collection procedure, it was a great advantage to be able to talk to this person and explore the program he was involved with which is of relevance to the topic of my study. This interview was conducted in English and audio-taped as well. The data collected in this interview contributed to the understanding of and added up to the broader picture of the phenomenon under exploration.

4.5 Data analysis

4.5.1 Approach to data analysis

The literature on methodology suggests that an approach to analysing data largely depends on whether the study takes a positivist, realist, constructivist, interpretativist or postmodern perspective (Creswell, 2012; Simons, 2009). These approaches are mainly differed by their attitude towards definition of truth and reality and how these are constructed (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). These attitudes then define how the research is undertaken, what methods does best job in generating data and how these data should be analysed to construct a reality. When doing so, different paradigm researchers either consider what they are studying independent of any feelings and perceptions (positivists) or define these as of utmost importance (interpretative constructionists). As far as this study is concerned, “how people view an objects or event, and the meaning they attribute to it is what is important” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p.27). Thus, when analysing data, interpretative constructionist logic was followed to construct understanding as per participants’ experiences and attitudes.

An approach to data analysis in case study research is considered to be rather diverse due to the nature of the research strategy, and this is one of the aspects of case study research that has not been much discussed (Yin, 2014; Swanborn, 2010; Simons, 2009). Initially, I considered possibility of using two other potential strategies for data analysis. These were conversational analysis to trace micro changes in interviews, such as variations in tone or instances of hesitation, and critical discourse analysis, by looking in detail at what is said and how it is said in relation to the precise context (Fairclough, 2013). Later on, at the stage of initial data coding, I had thoughts about probability of understanding my data through the concept of ‘field’ (Bourdieu and ‘organisational

fields', new institutionalism theory). This idea came from my attempts to conceptualise stratification between institutions and interinstitutional relations in a stratified higher education system. However, the final decision came during the analytical process itself when the conceptual ideas became through inducing the data.

Considering that "the ultimate goal of the case study is to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory" (Patton and Applebaum, 2003, p.67), and taking an interpretivist perspective, for the data from interviews and policy documents analysis to make sense, it was decided that applying in-depth thematic analysis would allow me to understand the effect of an elite university as a result of differentiation processes in both details and broader perspective to contribute to the general knowledge adding Kazakhstan's case.

As a method or a process, as per Boyatzis (1998), of encoding qualitative data, as the definition suggests, its key feature is based on constructing codes and themes to allow the researcher to describe, organize and interpret phenomenon that is being studied (ibid). Thematic analysis has been acknowledged for its broad spectrum of application in a vast number of domains, starting from lived experiences, individual behaviours and social world to communication, culture and practices and processes (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that this wide application of thematic analysis creates significant space for using it in a more unrestricted way as there seem to be no agreement on an explicit and prescribed procedure of conducting it.

At the same time, this flexibility of thematic analysis constitutes some criticism. The most apparent claims are there is a high risk of generating inconsistent and incoherent themes while analysing data, as well the disadvantage of thematic analysis for (Nowell et al, 2017) in comparison with other analytical strategies. In addition, the limited

literature that comprehensively unfolds all the aspects of thematic analysis and how to actually conduct it makes it disadvantageous too (ibid). However, Holloway and Todres (2003) argue that consistency and coherence are achieved through establishing clear and robust epistemological position within the study.

Using thematic analysis in my study is, firstly, preconditioned by its advantage in examining a phenomenon through the perspectives of different participants within a specific context (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, through focusing on perceptions of RSUs of state policies of differentiation, emphasis on NU and NU's perception of its role in the national system, I am searching for specific themes that would help to interpret the phenomenon in the context of Kazakhstan that might be a base for further contribution to existing theories or even create new perspectives through "generating unanticipated insights" (Nowell et al, 2017, p.2). Secondly, using thematic analysis in this study was also attractive by its applicability both inductively and deductively (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). For example, while my aim was to start looking inductively at responses of participants and move from precise issues they addressed to broader concepts, there were also pre-coded sets of themes that developed from literature review which I then searched in participants responses and documents, all in relation to different aspects of global and local, mass and elite institutional relationship. Thirdly, the choice of thematic analysis is based on the opportunities it provides for summarising and finalising rich data. Its structured phases in developing themes and further generating final report is helpful for a novice researcher to handle the data analysis process (King, 2004). And lastly, its flexibility and unboundedness to a specific theoretical framework looked attractive to me (Clarke and Braun, 2016) since my study is not tied to one particular concept but employs various theoretical lenses and

approaches to understanding of the phenomenon I am exploring in this study. How the actual analysis process was handled is discussed further below.

4.5.2 The process of data analysis

Data analysis consists of "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (Yin, 2014, p.109). Hence, the process of analysing the data that I undertook followed this directive and the analysis was done in several steps. Generally, analysis of the data started during the interviews. While talking to interviewees, I started making notes of issues that looked significant to pay attention for further exploration. To have a full picture of the data, I first transcribed all interviews verbatim rather than listening and transcribing only relevant parts. Besides, there was a benefit in transcribing the interviews on my own that contributed to better awareness and grasp of the data.

Transcription, coding and initial analysis were done in Russian/Kazakh, with the initial analysis then translated into English as needed for the purposes of writing my thesis. After transcribing finished, I started reading and re-reading the interview texts to see common patterns and storylines. I then constructed a 'pen portrait' of each interview which I then collated into a piece of summary which was done after each part of my fieldwork. I then put together summaries to give myself an overview of preliminary findings that the summary showed.

Classical thematic analysis process consists of six phases. Table 4.4 below outlines phases and the process of data analysis.

Table 4.4. Phases and process of thematic analysis

Phases	Process
1. Getting to know your data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke, 2008, p.87

The process of analysis of the rich data generated from the interviews was conducted both inductively and deductively through coding and analysing the participants' responses in relation to the four research questions. Initial overarching themes were identified following theories that were discussed in the literature review chapter. My intention was to make as much detailed sense of it as possible and build a logical and rational picture out of the data and construct a story. Besides, doing a preliminary pen portrait enables me to distinguish some explicit storylines that followed throughout the interviews in each party. Any themes that were not in line with the theories were categorised separately for further scrutiny. Through this further inductive analysis of participants' perceptions, some specific themes emerged with regards to issues around internationalisation and research, as well as interrelations between different types of

institutions. This allowed me to construct a broader conceptual ground that was not covered in the discussion of theories in Chapter 2. As a result, I had two groups of data, one in connection with concepts reviewed earlier, and the second is context-specific data that needed separate investigation. These themes then built a basis when grouping key findings and structuring the first drafts of the two chapters of findings.

The analysis of policy documents was mainly done inductively through uncovering the government's recent reforms aims behind differentiation and goals for enhancing internationalisation and research, as well as the emphasis on NU as a driver of national HE modernisation. These documents were also studied to examine the government's position towards the broader theme of 'global HE' and 'WCU', as well as how the government sees national HE in this. The same strategy was applied when examining strategic documents of the RSUs and NU to identify objectives and strategies towards internationalisation and research development, as well as collaboration and translating NU's international practices into the local context of the RSUs.

So, the construction of an overall story out of the rich data collected via interviews and policy documents was both theory-driven and data-driven (Boyatzis, 1998). Each of them was both challenging and beneficial in a way. While the challenge was constituted by the concerns of the risks of jeopardising validity and reliability of data, the advantage was in richness, clarity and comprehensiveness of the data generated.

4.6 Addressing the issues of validity and reliability

Achieving rigour in qualitative and interpretative research is a complex task. Morse et al (2002) indicate that rigour is achieved through "ensuring methodological coherence, sampling sufficiency, developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically, and theory development" (p.18). As such,

the two key issues of validity and reliability should constantly be taken into account throughout the research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), validity and reliability that go in line with the concept of trustworthiness comprise such aspects as credibility (internal validity) and transferability (external validity). As per Freebody (2003), these can be achieved:

... through ensuring the clarity and accuracy of the representations of the context of the research; the statement of the problem to be investigated; the ways in which the researcher gained access to the data; the assumptions of the participants; and understandings on the site about the researcher's role as a researcher. (Freebody, 2003, p.77)

Within this study, internal validity was maximised through thorough and systematic reference to existing literature on the theories and concepts studied and methodologies applied to construct solid knowledge and understanding of selected research strategies and design. These were carefully followed through initial pilot exploration of the field, careful sampling of case universities and interview participants, triangulation of interview data with policy documents, and structured data analysis procedures. Interviews in different settings involving academic and administrative staff from various positions, schools and departments at the three RSUs, as well as engaging NU and MoES as actors involved in the reform and strategy, with constant analysis of the relationship between the phenomenon and the context, also contributes towards the trustworthiness of the research and enhances its reliability and validity.

4.7 Ethical considerations

In this study, I considerably committed to the ethical guidelines set by British Education Research Association (BERA) (<https://www.bera.ac.uk>), particularly informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and minimising risk of harm to participants. By the time, when I applied for ethical approval at UCL in summer 2016, ethical guidelines in Kazakhstan were under consideration by the Kazakhstan Educational Research Association (KERA)

established by NU Graduate School of Education. I was not familiar with these guidelines, but I contacted the KERA office and requested their guidelines, if they were available, to familiarise myself and apply to my research if required. However, I was advised that they had not yet been developed but that work was in progress and the final document was planned to be published by November 2016. Since this was too late for me to obtain my ethical approval before setting off for pilot study in summer 2016 and owing to the fact that I was doing my doctoral research at UCL, I ought to and was advised to adhere to my home institution's ethical approval regulations. This was also indicated in my letters of invitations to participate in my study sent to universities' staff around Kazakhstan. As a note, at the time of the writing-up of this thesis in September 2018, there were no guidelines or any other information on the KERA website, except information on what KERA is. The website itself says it is under development (kera.nu.edu.kz).

I provided interview participants with a consent form, which included information on participation in the research, and stated that participation was confidential and anonymous, and they could withdraw consent at any time during the interview. The letter also discussed how data would be stored, and who would have access to such data. HEIs and participants' names were not identified, but coded. According to BERA guidelines, any information related to participants should not be disclosed during data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination. All data are kept on my personal laptop in password-locked files and no one other than I have access to them.

4.8 A pilot exploration of the field

For the purpose of testing my research ideas and thus having prior practical understanding of the field site, it was agreed with my supervisor that I would arrange a

pilot exploration of the research field in Kazakhstan over July-August 2016 and speak to several key people that I identified as possible respondents for my future data collection. By having preliminary discussions with these people, I also aimed at further crystallising my research questions and having the further reading shaped.

I conducted very informal, unstructured interviews with four people where I only had one question in mind, hoping to probe deeper depending on the topics and issues that might be raised by them. One was with someone from the Ministry of Education and Science, in charge of international cooperation; a second was with a rector of one of the state universities; the third and fourth were with two top managers of the NU. All of them were asked one main question: 'To what extent NU is having or has had so far any impact on internationalisation policy at the governmental level, and practices at the institutional level?'. All of them answered the question from their perspective as they saw the process. Though they did not observe internationalisation as a key strategy of the NU, they all acknowledged the fact that the changes in the higher education were taking place, and there was a significant role of NU here.

As a result of this exploration the focus of my research shifted slightly, and it became clear that within the government's intention to share NU's experience, interactions and collaboration have been continuingly happening with regional state universities. Consequently, there emerged a concern as to whether the initial proposed cases of national universities would provide good empirical data for answering the research questions. Thus, after undertaking a preliminary analysis of the four pilot conversations, it was decided that regional universities would present more suitable data. Since there is a noticeable development gap within the country between universities, which implies variety in their missions and visions, it was anticipated that this study would provide a

picture of internationalisation and research policies and practices in their current development and changing state specific to regionally located state universities in the context of the diversified and differentiated higher education system of Kazakhstan.

4.9 Presentation of findings

Since this study is concerned with different themes and theories, a dilemma arises as to how structure the findings. One initial perspective was presenting the data as a storyline of the three parties involved, the Ministry, NU and the RSUs, and trying to answer the research questions from their point of view with the aim of drawing a comprehensive picture out of the three stories. However, this form of structuring would not lead the reader to the research questions answers in an obvious way as themes intertwine and develop in a more complex way. Structuring by the four research questions and by the various theoretical lenses that were applied to interpret the research context did not prove to be ideal either, as there are different nuances that could not be covered explicitly by either theories or specific research questions. But these nuances could not to be ignored as they added to the main picture. Thus, the design that was finally chosen was structuring the findings through themes that were identified during the data analysis process. These themes were grouped into Chapters 5 and 6, according to their relevance and connectedness with each other and the logic that would lead the reader to the discussion of findings (Chapter 7) and Conclusion.

So, Chapter 5 gives an explanatory ground for how internationalisation and research are developed and what the drivers behind this development in RSUs are. It also discusses perceptions of RSUs of international practices and their applicability in the national and local settings, and how the 'global research university' concept is understood by RSUs and the government in the context of Kazakhstan's HE system.

Chapter 5 further lays a foundation to the themes discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the responses of RSUs to the governmental emphasis on NU and to what extent this influenced policies and practices at the RSUs. It discusses the RSUs' perceptions of the government's emphasis on Nazarbayev University, their current interrelations with NU and what various issues and challenges are involved in this. The RSUs' attitudes towards the role of the government in establishing relationships between mass and elite institutions in the national system will be discussed in Chapter 6 as well. It will also elaborate on how NU sees and understands its role in the national HE system, and what challenges and issues they face in fulfilling the task of becoming a GRU and modernising the national HE.

Then, in Chapter 7, the main discussion will be around the key question of whether an elite globalised university can build capacity for the national HE system in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

This chapter gave an account of the research methodology and methods applied to answer the four research questions of this study. A case study research with in-depth interviews and policy documents analysis was employed to understand the effect of an aspiring elite university on internationalisation and research policies and practices of three regional state universities. The contextual knowledge dependency of a case study research was put forward as a benefit for this study to get a deep understanding of specific contemporary phenomenon taking place in Kazakhstan and "to explore accounts of ... experiences, knowledges and activities of participants in place" (Miles, 2015, p.313).

Though there are three parties involved, RSUs, NU and the ministry in charge, the case proposed here is the introduction of NU as a policy measure and its anticipated effect on the public HE system with three parties discussed presented as sub-cases to give a phenomenon a meaningful interpretation. By presenting the three regional state universities as case universities in this study, this Chapter discussed their key characteristics and compared them with NU. Table 4.2 indicates the dramatic differences that exist between NU, an elite institution in many aspects, and the RSUs with respect to a number of key characteristics.

Through applying technics of thematic analysis, rich data obtained from interviews and policy documents were coded, categorized and structured into several main themes to draw a picture of the two main aspects of the possible effect of NU on the regional universities with an emphasis on global, national and local effects and how differentiation policies contributed to the national system of HE. Concepts discussed in the literature review chapter were also taken into consideration during the data analysis process.

Throughout the study, ethical account and guidelines from BERA were maintained.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIFFERENTIATING POLICIES AND PERCEPTION OF AN ELITE UNIVERSITY IN THE NATIONAL HE: DIFFERENT STORIES OF ONE ACCOUNT

Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to the findings and analysis of the data. They lay the basis for interpreting the main research focus of this thesis which is the effects of the introduction of an elite globalised university on other institutions in Kazakhstan.

This chapter presents the first series of findings which contribute to answering the four research questions. The theme of this chapter is specifically related to differentiation policies and the government's recent policies that puts high emphasis on the enhancement of research activities of HEIs. As such, Section 5.1 discusses reforms that are being implemented in the higher education governance in line with the emphasis on the experience of NU as an autonomous university. It also discusses changes in the organisational structure of public and private HEIs into non-commercial joint stock companies which is intended to 'untie' HEIs hands, especially public ones, letting them operate under less MoES supervision. This section also informs how these policies are perceived and interpreted by RSUs informing of any changes that have occurred in RSUs as a result of these policies.

Sections, 5.2 and 5.3 are presented as storylines, one of how the three RSUs perceive the government's emphasis on NU and how they see the current interrelations between NU and themselves, and the second of NU's discussion of how they perceive their role in the national HE system, as well as how they see interrelations with other HEIs. These

sections analyse various issues and challenges in the interaction between different categories of HEIs in the system, and the role of the government in establishing relationships between mass and elite institutions in the national system.

Section 5.4 then draws conclusions on the challenges of NU being a model and examines issues with translating its experience as a newly-established institution to the whole HE system. Section 5.4 is dedicated to the government's views NU as a project and interaction between HEIs, with further elaboration on the parties' responsibilities in the process of translating experience for the system modernisation as a whole.

5.1 Interpreting government's policy-level reference to NU's experience

5.1.1 Increasing institutional autonomy of HEIs

In 2015, President Nazarbayev proposed the 'Nation's Plan of 100 steps' as a response to increasing regional and global challenges (kisi.kz). This Plan addresses five institutional reforms: formation of a professional state apparatus; ensuring the rule of law; industrialisation and economic growth; identity and unity; and formation of the accountable state.

100 concrete steps are a response to global and internal challenges and, at the same time, the nation's plan to enter the thirty countries of developed countries under the new historical conditions. 100 concrete steps will give Kazakhstan such a safety margin that will confidently go through a difficult period of testing, Strategy-2050 and to strengthen Kazakhstan's statehood. The plan lays the fundamental transformations in society and the state, the main goal of which is the treatment of systemic diseases, and not the smoothing of their external symptoms. (Nazarbayev, 2015)

Within this document, step 78 states "Academic freedom of universities shall be gradually reinforced; the experience gained at Nazarbayev University shall be

considered. Private universities shall be transformed into non-profit entities; international experience shall be used” (Nation’s Plan, 2015). This is also reiterated as a significant action point in the State Program for Educational Development 2016-2019 (www.edu.gov.kz).

In fact, granting autonomy to HEIs started back in the 2000s, when the special status of ‘National University’ was given to Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Gumilyev Eurasian National University, identifying each of them as an “autonomous state institution of higher education” (egov.kz). A further seven universities were added to the list between 2000 and 2016. However, autonomy in those universities was not the same as was granted to NU, and those universities still report to the MoES. ‘Specific’ autonomy in line with a special legal framework, providing the university with greater institutional and financial autonomy, more budget funds and material support, was only given to NU in line with the best global practices, and intending to provide an elite institution in the context of Kazakhstan.

According to this purpose, MoES has developed a draft of the legal project that would be a foundation for translating NU’s experience within the scale of the national HE system. In particular, through these reforms, the government is aiming to increase social responsibility of HEIs for training specialists, the formation of a modern outlook of the younger generation and overall institutional operation. Through examining international practices of corporate governance, the government decided to promote a new form of partnership between the state and the private sector that should also facilitate integration of education, research and business, one of the key strategies indicated in the state programmes of development.

Within the process of promoting autonomy in universities, 28 public universities have set up observatory councils so far. One of the key duties that were assigned to these bodies is recruitment and selection of rectors which previously was overseen by the government and the MoES, a practice that can be traced back to Soviet times when rectors were appointed by the central government in Moscow to make sure they followed the ideology of the leadership (Froumin and Levshukov, 2016). According to MoES data, since 2016, rectors of 16 public universities were appointed on the basis of the new system of open competition. Members of such councils are representatives of the government, MoES, other public organisations, local authority bodies, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, and business and industry.

As autonomy is a completely new issue in the HE system of Kazakhstan, except to some extent the freedom given to design curricula, an international consulting company was recruited by NU and the MoES to prepare and deliver a programme for public universities across Kazakhstan to teach them what autonomy means and help them become more autonomous. According to an international member of this company who was directly involved in organising the programme, it ran for three years from 2014 with 75 rectors and vice-rectors in Year 1, trustees of the universities and senior people within the Ministry in Year 2, and deans and heads of departments in Year 3. The programme consisted of two parts, one taught for about 10 days in Kazakhstan at NU, and the second part in one of the NU's international strategic partners' campuses abroad. After a period of time, participants of the programme would come back together again, to share what they had learned and to give recommendations for adoption in their own universities, and recommendations for the ministry as to how they could approach the process.

Though this has been declared by the MoES in the revised State Program for Education Development 2016-2019 to be achieved by all public HEIs by 2019, there are still reforms under way and much more development is required in this direction:

Transforming HE in our culture is quite a complex issue. Not everyone is ready for it; there should be complex and thorough processes for changing the legal norms. There are universities that are ready for full academic freedom and autonomy, that have high potential and understanding, and there are also some institutions that sell diplomas. How would they use this freedom and how this influence in intellectual capacity-building of the nation?
(Interviewee A, MoES)

Furthermore, some relevant research on this topic suggests that public HEIs in the country are struggling with implementing principles of autonomy (Canning, 2017), and a wider change in the understanding of institutions and people's attitudes should have a positive effect (Sagintayeva et al, 2017).

5.1.2 Transforming public universities into non-commercial joint stock companies

Another key reform in line with above-mentioned strategies that would be an important condition for successful implementation of reforms directed to increasing academic and governance autonomy is transformation of the organisational and legal form of public universities into a non-commercial joint stock company type with 100% state ownership. The government is also anticipating transforming the private universities into non-commercial institutions, as per international practice. It is expected that changing to the new organisational and legal form implies creation of observatory councils, endowment funds, and annual public financial reporting. MoES states that this would allow universities to attract additional funds and investments for the development of their institutions, decreasing pressures on the state budget, and creating corporate bodies of

management which should provide institutions with more opportunities to be competitive in the context of global trends. As stated in the policy documents, these criteria have been based upon the methodology of QS World University Rankings. Though not identified anywhere exactly why QS is referred, in comparison with ARWU, where the key criteria are Nobel Prize winners among staff (20%) and alumni (20%) and research output by means of papers published (20%) and papers indexed (20%) (www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU-Methodology), the QS indicators such as teaching, research and international outlook (topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings/methodology) might be more attainable for Kazakhstani HEIs.

According to this reform that started in 2015, two universities have already changed to the new legal and organisational form of non-commercial joint-stock company: Satbayev University, which is the first university that was granted national research university status, and Atyrau University for oil and gas. Out of 130 universities operating in the 2017-2018 academic year, MoES confirmed that 68 are already functioning as non-commercial organisations, the majority of which are private universities. Amongst public universities, 28 institutions seem to have started the reorganizing process into non-commercial organisation status. RSUs' staff expressed their hope in interviews that this change will enable them to liaise more effectively with industry and business, allowing them build up their own startup firms and sell their research products:

The university's charter of the right for economic management does not allow it to fully deal with commercialisation. Even the university has possibilities and competent staff, equipment is not applied properly because the legal basis does not allow us to do so. In addition, we cannot establish start-up firms to offer technological and R&D services due to this. But if we change our status to non-commercial joint-stock company, it will be easier.
(Interviewee A, RSU 1)

Initial priority is given to 11 public universities that provide training of specialists within the SPIID 2015-2019 programme. Those have started transforming into the new legal and organisational form from 2017, with more public universities following from 2021 (primeminister.kz).

Organisationally, public HEIs, both national and state, function with the right to economic management under the central administration of the MoES with rectors determined as custodians of the university as a state property. With the provision of academic and governance autonomy to all public institutions and transforming them into non-commercial joint-stock company types is anticipated to boost social accountability of universities and develop transparency with annual financial reports. The research university and national research university that was established as a result function as a non-commercial joint-stock company type too with a 100% government share, except NU which functions under a separate legal framework. At the same time, despite the recent reforms on granting institutional autonomy to some of the public universities, the system is still being “heavily” regulated by the MoES (Sagintayeva et al, 2017, p.18).

5.1.3 Rationale behind differentiation policies

At the MoES level, diversity in HE is considered as a good practice that gives more choices and options for diverse categories of applicants and school leavers.

In general, HE should be diversified. There is no bad consequence in having a diversity of HEIs. This is how the whole world is moving. In US there are more than 4000 different colleges and universities of different types, and this gives a huge advantage to the US HE system. Everyone finds its own way to HE and a profession. Why should Kazakhstan not have such a system? We have about 130 HEIs, and they all should be different, some mono profile (narrow speciality), some just fulfilling the function of sustaining the nation's

intellectual level. For example, just Astana has 16 universities; seems many, but many of them are mono profile universities. If I am a school graduate I have a variety of choice. This is a general tendency in the world. (Interviewee A, MoES)

Emphasis on research and global standing was made throughout the interviews as key to the economic development of the nation, and to becoming a part of the global technological revolution as per President Nazarbayev's 'Kazakhstan-2050' Plan. Realising the crucial role of research universities in contributing to the national economy, the MoES puts a high emphasis on developing a few research universities through giving them more support in terms of resources and status. Taking into account global trends for a diversified system of HE, the MoES believes that Kazakhstan should also take this path, though accepting the fact that the national HE system has been slightly delayed in terms of such reforms and is just at the start of the process.

We analyse the tendencies in HE in the world, such as online learning, distance learning, open education platforms, that give unique opportunities to people, and Kazakhstan with its diversified HE is just at the start of the way. The role of universities has changed now from the centre of obtaining knowledge, specialist training for labour market, to centres of research. That is why Kazakhstan should have research universities, traditional teaching universities, academias, institutes. This is a global trend, moreover, slightly delayed. (Interviewee A, MoES)

Another reason behind differentiation of HEIs was the existence of too many multi-profile universities that train in too many specialisations, which has caused discussions in the government that good preparation of specialists cannot be done "in such a mess" (Interviewee B, MoES). By differentiating their missions, having a clear system of financing, and dividing institutions into those that only teach and those which can do research, the MoES also aims to have more mono-profile HEIs, and fewer research-

focused universities. Analysis of the change of the role of universities in the contemporary world has suggested to the national government that universities should be like centres of research that generate new knowledge, technologies and innovation.

However, an MoES interviewee's response below indicates that there does not seem to be much concentration on the initial classification and its criteria from the government's side or any discussion on differentiation as a policy, except attention towards 'Research University' and its promotion in the national system.

In 2012 we had an order about this, and in 2013 it was removed again. Now we have it in the Law on Education. This is done to explicitly divide institutions by what they can do. Those that can only teach and those that do research. Perhaps this was done to determine their missions, and also have a clear system of financing. OECD experts have expressed their scepticism about this classification. They suggest three types of HEIs, teaching-led institutions, research universities and institutions focused on local needs. They said that there are too many types and specifications, etc. The classification is actually not functioning because during our Independence time, there have been established too many multi-profile universities. Their number is greater than mono-profile institutions. (Interviewee B, MoES)

Due to this, no direct and clear mechanisms and procedures on guiding universities about the process of implementing or functioning within this classification was encountered during the analysis of policy documents. It is also unclear from the policy documents which of the existing universities are anticipated by the government to fall into the research university category or remain as a classic multi-profile university according to the classification. One of the MoES interviewees sounded dismissive about this policy, and made me think that he was trying to justify what has been suggested by the MoES:

... and that they have been classified; well, it happened, and there is nothing bad about it. If the state has not done so, the market would have done this instead, anyway. Another issue is whether there was a need for this classification or if the society was ready to do this itself; this is a totally different topic. (Interviewee A, MoES)

This is possibly due to the ongoing debate in relation to providing autonomy to HEIs emphasised throughout the HE system in the country. Initially, there was no clear-cut agreement on how much autonomy was actually meant to be provided to HEIs, and the then Ministry of Education and Science came under a wave of criticism that promoted autonomy was in fact a start of privatisation of HEIs and an intention to cut state budget funds allocated to institutions (zakon.kz). In fact, the ongoing debates on granting autonomy to public institutions brings up two perspectives. From the policy perspective, enhancing autonomy boosts universities' performance as well as improving their strategic behaviour (Maassen, Gornitzka and Fumasoli, 2017); on the other hand, it seems to raise questions and concerns over funding. For instance, very recent active discussions on this took place in India where the move to autonomy caused greater alarm for funding as well as fears that this might be the first step to privatisation of universities (timeshighereducation.com, 2018).

However, the MoES further clarified that the two key elements of autonomy aimed at were academic and governance, by giving more freedom to HEIs to structure their curriculum and change the governance by introducing various managing and observatory councils. The official reply to my letter sent to the MoES confirmed that at present there are no specific norms of approved criteria of HEIs classification, but the MoES also clarified that they are proposing some changes to the 'Law on Education' that would consider legal opportunities for enlarging academic and governance autonomy of HEIs that had been sent to the Parliament for discussion. At the time of

writing, these mentioned legal amendments have been accepted and approved at the Parliament and publicly issued. Thus, public universities in Kazakhstan are officially given academic and governance autonomy.

5.1.4 How differentiation policies are perceived by RSUs

The RSUs have made it clear that they are aware of the policies that are directed to accentuate differentiation of HEIs in the country at this stage. Staff have also expressed their awareness of drivers behind such policies and of the classification of HEIs emphasised in the Law on Education 2007 and State Program of Education Development 2011-2020. Throughout the interviews, participants showed their understanding of the policies aimed at increasing the research potential of the country that this policy pursues.

State Program of Education Development 2015-2019 was developed after taking into consideration all the issues we have in the education system. For us to become competitive, one of the tasks was to integrate education and research that is developing educational programs that are closely connected with science, and from this came an idea of establishing research universities. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

Along with that, staff expressed their acknowledgement of recent developments in line with this policy in RSUs through the creation of various Research Centres at their universities. RSUs' websites indicate that a number of Research Centres and laboratories in different subject areas have been created in recent years. These Centres mainly do research in issues that are regionally topical and important.

I understand that the main task is to increase research potential. And here RSUs and Research Centres should play an important role. We have created our own Research Centres. We establish contacts with international

partners and sign agreements through our centres. In this relation, our Research Centre does a great job. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

Besides, staff are informed of where their institution stands at present, and what they are aspiring to on the basis of their academic and research potential. So, while RSU 1 is clear that it will be positioning itself as a classic university as it is now offering more undergraduate programmes and to a lesser extent graduate education and research, RSU 2 and RSU 3, also both classic multi-profile universities, are working towards gaining research university status, taking into consideration their current potential in terms of both human and material base, future prospects and recent progress in research development.

According to the new classification, we will be a classic university. Of course, we do have ambitious aims to be a research university. We have all possibilities for that, developing research, various academic staff and researchers, more of Soviet education background, but we do invite young researchers as well. (Interviewee, D, RSU 1)

Our university, being one of the oldest universities in Kazakhstan, has its own history, traditions and reputation, and is much closer to the status of national universities than all other regional state universities. It goes without saying that we are not strong on all fields, for example IT, nano-, biotechnologies, but we try to improve the areas we are strong in, for example researching diabetes. Along with that we do not forget about some fields that we could potentially be strong at and could compete internationally; e.g. we have strong researchers who have practical skills and methodological foundations on molecular genetics, and even though we don't have the most modern lab equipment for conducting lab tests with comparison with, say, Nazarbayev University, we still try to support these fields, fund staff development, their international activities, participation in international conferences and seminars, invite foreign colleagues, and thus make efforts to achieve RU status. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

Discussing the differentiation policies in the country, one of the RSU staff also mentioned that the procedure for obtaining research university status largely depends on fulfilling state requirements, meaning that while universities have a goal to gain the status of research university, if they perform according to the MoES requirements, they get closer to achieving it.

The question is complex in fact. The situation is that, on the one hand, universities want to become research universities, make some steps towards that. Besides, there are MoES requirements that state that universities should gain positions in league tables by their research, staff, and through fulfilling these requirements, universities automatically step on the route of becoming a research university. (Interviewee G, RSU 2)

The importance of positioning in league tables is greatly emphasised in a number of state policy documents, and it is referred to as one of the important factors indicating how well the HE system is doing. As such one of the medium and long term goals specified in SPED 2016-2020 says: “two Kazakhstani universities listed in the rating of world’s best universities by 2020” (SPED, 2015). As everywhere else in the world, Kazakhstan’s government seems to be also “uncritically absorbed” by the international rankings as a “measure of quality” (Hazelkorn, 2017, p.6) and thus refers to them in the national HE policy-making. Hazelkorn (2017) also interestingly indicates that emerging economies use rankings to measure quality “when external quality assurance systems are weak or non-existent and/or as a gauge and/or symbol of global competitiveness and engagement in/with world science – all of which are applaudable goals” (p.8). This seems quite relevant in Kazakhstan’s context where there is no explicit explanation of the benefits of being positioned in rankings in the policy document, except indicating that positioning in rankings is a key indicator of university system improvement. Out of three RSUs, currently only RSU 2 is represented in the QS rankings in the 700+ position

(topuniversities.com). Out of three RSUs, only in one of the interviews at RSU 3 it was explicitly indicated that their university has a strategic aim of entering the world rankings.

Our main goal is to enter to top 800 in QS league table. We need to enhance our research indicator and number of international staff and students 5%. These indicators are included into each department's KPI. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Despite the explicit reference to rankings in the policy level and in institutional strategies, staff in other two RSUs were rather skeptical about the emphasised importance of rankings. According to them, the Ministry and universities should work towards quality rather than running after ranking indicators.

You know, to be competitive there should be international practices applied in local settings; however, these should not be done for mere ranking purposes, but for sustaining the quality. (Interviewee B, RSU 1)

Many respondents expressed their awareness of which strata their university is aiming at and expecting to achieve. However, throughout the interviews, no clear indication from individual staff of how in fact these policies affected their work could be identified, except the exaggerated requirement for publishing in non-zero impact journals and incentivising knowledge of English. These seem to be across-the-board demands set up by the MoES for all public universities irrespective of whether they are aspiring for research university status or not.

5.2 NU's role and its current position in the national system

5.2.1 NU's story: in pursuit of sustainability and global standing

According to Salmi (2009), there are three types of strategy in establishing WCUs that governments have taken recently: one is through supporting and upgrading a number

of selected institutions that have the potential for excellence; the second is merging existing institutions and building one WCU; lastly, building a WCU from scratch. While such Asian countries as China, Korea and Japan have selected the first approach (Buyun et al, 2013; Huang, 2015; Yonezawa, 2009), Kazakhstan decided to establish a totally new university that would be striving for world-class status (Nazarbayev, 2006). As a respondent from NU stated, when choosing a strategy for the new university build-up, the new WCU project that was intended to become a Harvard of Central Asia, several models were considered in discussion with various experts from the World Bank and potential strategic partners, that included establishing branches of several leading universities, working with a single strategic partner-university, and creating a knowledge city such as Education City in Qatar. But these models did not seem to give much opportunity for making a positive impact of reforming the national higher education which was one of the strategic goals.

In the end, the national experts' board came up with a new model of establishing a national university with the help of strategic partners who will be working under an agreement of providing services for setting up and assisting in maintaining separate schools and academic programs in each of them for a certain period of time with the subsequent goal of building up local capacity for NU to sustain itself after agreements come to an end.

(Interviewee B, NU)

Article 4 of the 'Law on the status of Nazarbayev University, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Nazarbayev Fund' states that "NU is an autonomous organization of education created for the purpose of carrying out educational activities, including additional education, scientific and (or) scientific and technical activities, the creation of a modern educational, scientific infrastructure and other activities in accordance with its charter". It further specifies that "the University is an experimental platform that

develops, monitors, studies, analyzes, tests, implements and implements innovative programs in the field of education and science”. Though this does not explicitly identify the scope of NU’s activity, in interviews with top management of NU it was made clear that NU is focused on becoming a global-level research university, gaining a reputation as a world-class university and reforming the national HE system through achieving global standing. This is also highlighted in point 8 of Article 3 of NU’s Charter as “the creation and development of the University infrastructure as a world-class research and education complex and ensuring its proper functioning” (NU Charter, 2014). Though NU’s website states its mission to become a global-level university, its President pointed out several times during the interview that NU is not about becoming global but world-class.

WCU not global, we certainly want to become a place where researchers want to come to; if we achieve that at that point then yes, we can say we are global university. Unfortunately, in a way, former Soviet countries are not known to be a point of attraction for researchers. (NU’s President)

Furthermore, while he confirmed that the terms ‘world-class university’ and ‘global university’ are almost interchangeable, he stated that NU aims to become globally recognised and competitive for being attractive for the best talents internationally, and at the point when NU becomes a place where researchers want to come to, it might be possible to say that it has reached the level to call itself a global university.

We started as a world-class university; it is interchangeable with global research university. We started a project to establish a university that can be globally recognised, competitive so that we can attract best talents internationally, so that is it in a nutshell, in a way. Internally we even don’t use the word global, the website has had issues in the past. (NU’s President)

According to NU's President, except for research-oriented staff, there are important factors such as setting up the whole environment, the ecosystem for a research university to develop, and this takes much more time than the NU sponsors, the government, might imagine. He admitted that often there are various challenges, usually of a technical nature, such as the procurement system, customs clearance, lack of direct providers of equipment due to Kazakhstan being a small market, and, most of all, sometimes ill-timed funding. Since the initial idea is creating a globally competitive university, NU agrees that it is more internationally oriented and focused on collaboration with international peers, international practices and standards. Though this is more in relation to research, it feels that there are more opportunities for promoting the university in an international educational arena.

Our initiation from the beginning was to focus on international standards, and work with international strategic partners. Since we wanted to become an international university and we are striving to become a global-level university, we are focused on international collaboration (Interviewee B, NU).

One of the major issues for NU on its way to become a global-level university is the internationalisation aspect. While having a high proportion of international staff (up to 80%), only 2% of the student body is international, which is described by Interviewee B as “upside down”.

I think we should become a world-known university that has its own name, brand, brand programs, not as everyone else, but the best and globally popular, be international, which is at the moment is upside down, i.e. 78% faculty is international, while having 22 international students out of 4000. (Interviewee B, NU)

Comparing NU with one of the newly-established universities in South Korea, which is a year older than NU, Interviewee B mentioned that their Korean competitor is doing

much better in recruiting international students since they offer a number of scholarships and grants for international students both from the government and private companies. However, for NU, the aim is to become independent of government funds, to put more resources and focus on research development, and become popular and attractive through this direction.

The fact that the student body is comprised of 90% Kazakh nationals makes it another issue of internal internationalisation for NU. Kazakhstan has always been proud of its multi-ethnicity. However, the issue of the Kazakh majority in the student body at NU arises from the initial application stage because very few representatives of other ethnic groups apply. This in turn is putting much pressure on NU from society and the government, and the university is seeking ways to rectify this situation through cooperation with the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, a presidentially appointed political consultative and advisory body.

At the same time, we have other issues to resolve, for example internal internationalisation. 90% of students are Kazakhs, and we have a low percentage of other nationalities who generally apply for NU. We are working with the Assembly of Nations of Kazakhstan. (Interviewee B, NU)

Moreover, in 2017 President Nazarbayev tasked NU with doubling the number of students to 8000 by 2025 with 25% international students (Interviewee B, NU). NU top management understands that this goal is too ambitious, but work towards its accomplishment has started, and additional funds were allocated by the government for the creation of more space for teaching and laboratories.

It has been mentioned during one of the interviews with NU's top management that the current management was hired more as project managers than academics, for the purpose of giving a start to the project. Commenting on the recent appointment of a new

provost, it was emphasised that while-transitioning from a conventional to a full university status, NU will need to have top managers who have more expertise in running the university as an academic institution, not a business project. As a result, there will soon be a new strategic plan coming for the next five years.

Our first 5 years strategy was to turn into a university. We are still not a full university; even our governance is corporate. A new strategy is being developed for a full pledged university, possibly we will have a rector with academic background who knows how to govern a university. Current people have all been needed for a transitional period, and our current task is to prepare our own staff. (Interviewee B, NU)

Becoming a successful and sustainable research university is an ambitious goal for a university that was established just seven years ago. This is what was made clear in the interviews with top management at NU.

Well, it takes time, probably much more time than our sponsors might imagine; it is one thing to run a teaching university, it is another one to have a research university. We are just now transitioning towards a more research university, if you look at our UG programs, I think we were quite successful in delivering those; on the teaching side, our graduates can hold themselves certainly internationally, internationally competitive, and they are best ambassadors, as they are now all over the world, but it is quite a different challenge to move towards research. (Interviewee A, NU)

Thus, NU's management accepts the need for time to gain its place at the global level and be able to present itself as a sustainable world-class research university, though at the national level, it seems to be satisfied with what it has achieved so far, both in terms of quality of graduates and sharing its experience with other institutions.

5.2.2 Perception of RSU staff of NU: timely project but isolated from others

Almost all staff interviewed at the three RSUs shared their strong feeling that NU functions on its own outside the system, as an Ivory Tower which is difficult to reach due to a variety of obstacles. The reason for this might be the lack of information about NU and its activities, as well as the government's emphasis on NU as being special. There does not seem to be a vision of NU standing within the system but apart from it and functioning in isolation from other HEIs. One interviewee put it as NU being "like a cocoon, where only the selected have access" (Interviewee A, RSU 3). Respondents shared their observation of the existing discourse within the academic community in the country, where NU exists as one dimension, while the rest of the system functions as another. The high emphasis of the government on NU makes RSU staff think that they have lower status than NU as an institutional meaning which makes it difficult and complicated for them to achieve any cooperation, so they tend not to initiate any contact unless they have private connections there.

There should be a clear strategy, which cannot be done at once. I don't blame the University itself; of course you need to have more time. Since we have more connection with other universities based on our personal contacts, perhaps we should have contacts with NU too so that we can have better interconnection. In addition, there could be some of our projects that could be of interest to them or lab equipment that we have could be used by them for mutual research. I am convinced that there is no clear strategy of NU on working with regional universities. At the moment NU is standing isolate; there is no cooperation. There have been no activities from either their or our side so far. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

At the same time, conveying that there is no particular collaboration between institutions, the discourse of excellence in relation to NU was noted in one of the respondent's reply.

The RSUs are very distant in many aspects, have low resources. I don't think we can become as excellent as NU. No collaboration, no sharing their experience, there is no program which allows RSUs to learn from them. I think they are too oriented towards the global arena, and aim to be globally recognised, and as to RSUs, I have a feeling that they say "it is your problem if you achieve our level or not". (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

Similarly, another respondent emphasised how distant NU is from the ordinary regional universities.

They seem to be so far from regional realities. They have their own 'life' there with their own framework, standards and rules. We have tight standards. They cannot understand the needs and possibilities of regional universities. (Interviewee A, RSU 3)

As well as:

There are real problems in real field. We need to share experience in this. But NU does not in the real field with real problems. It only needs elites. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

For better established collaboration between different types of HEIs, a strong emphasis on a standardised approach was made by many participants throughout the interviews.

NU is a timely, well-thought project that the country needs. Its feature is that it educates students with broad international skills, with a high level of English. We should be able to accept good programs. However, if we look at the programs, I think we should make them standardised. For example, what NU teaches and what we teach or what the Ministry has in the classification does not always coincide. (Interviewee D, RSU 2)

Though there was much doubt and scepticism with regards to paying much attention to one university, as shown in earlier quotes and below, the RSUs' staff, especially senior members, expressed their support for the idea of having such a university as NU in the

national system as this can create competition between public universities in the country for resources and state support. Though competing with NU might sound challenging in view of unequal resources opportunities, it was mentioned that through looking at NU practices other universities can improve their programmes and their quality.

I think that this kind of university creates competition among universities and students. It is good that we have NU as we will aspire to become like NU. The government has not established it just for fun; we need to look at how it works and try to achieve its level. The government is providing opportunities for us. (Interviewee F, RSU 1)

However, there is uncertainty among respondents as to whether the system can progress as a result of a single university.

Of course, we need such a university in the country, to be proud; however, I cannot say that just with the influence of one university the whole system gets improved. We now show to the world that we have NU, and the whole system works the same as NU. (Interviewee C, RSU 3)

In addition, one interviewee referred to the irrationality of having just one university with such a massive goal to have an effect considering the size of the country with 14 different regions and more than 130 different HEIs.

A university is an open system and it cannot develop on its own. In countries with big territories it is not correct to fund just one university. When Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, was established, the level of population was low. So, the government started pulling intellectual potential from other regions, and now Astana is on a different level and contributes to the development of the rest of the country, say in cultural perspective. Similarly, you cannot isolate the university from others. It must be a comprehensive approach by developing other universities and by that provide the potential for NU's development, for example in human resources. At the moment I don't think this is happening. (Interviewee E, RSU 2)

Generally, I observed how respondents were cautious at the beginning of the interview to express their opinions with regards to NU. This could be due to the overwhelming political context in the country and support given to NU. So, if initially they expressed their utmost support and understanding of the rationale of NU as a project, during the course of the interviews, more and more open and critical comments were explicitly shared with the researcher. Thus, having acknowledged that the role NU was anticipated to play for the country's and HE system's benefit, it was also strongly conveyed that comprehensiveness in addressing the current issues in HE and RSUs in particular might contribute to the overall system's quality improvement.

5.3 Interrelations between elite global and mass local systems in Kazakhstan

5.3.1 NU's story about their experience sharing

Many sharing activities have been designed towards building understanding and practice in academic excellence and curriculum development. NU has established different associations such as the Association of Librarians, the Registrar's office and Kazakh language teaching involving several local universities. In addition, a number of initiatives have been put in place by the Graduate School of Education in terms of school teacher training and research methodology training for local university staff. However, during interviews at the RSUs some of these activities were referred to as occasional (single) and not regular arrangements. Nonetheless, since the change of its Provost recently (2016), NU states that it has agreed to arrange a range of events, such as local university teachers shadowing classes at NU, curriculum development and department work, and organising NU professors to give lectures and seminars to other university students. Additionally, due to its transition to trilingual education, NU has been asked by the MoES to conduct English training courses for 4000 school subject teachers. NU

established an Educational Excellence Centre for this purpose and has started fulfilling this project.

As discussed in Section 5.1.1 of this Chapter, one of the foremost practices being promoted throughout the system that was emphasised in all interviews at NU is implementation of autonomy principles and change in the governing structure of HEIs.

We are doing a lot, we are changing the law on education, nine universities are given autonomy, we will be gradually teaching them, academic freedom is being established, the governance system is changing, many universities now have established board of trustees, managing and academic councils, nine universities were told to elect their rectors, some of them doing it as an experiment, not top down. This system of governance is taken from the NU model. Currently, several private universities are copying our model, library system, procedures for anti-plagiarism, cheating. Publications have increased, especially in English, with impact factor. (Interviewee B, NU)

This practice, however, was not identified by the RSUs as something that was proposed because of NU's creation but as a policy that was in place long before that.

But we cannot say that this practice came from NU; it was already known and practised. We all now have board of trustees, supervisory board. But as a technician, the best thing that can be translated is NU's resource base, though we have not lagged behind when winning grants from the government. And perhaps the external funding scheme. (Interviewee A, RSU 2)

Another significant platform for collaboration to note is the annual Eurasian Higher Education Leaders Forum (EHELFL) which has been functioning successfully since 2012. It "aims to bring together education experts and create a platform for dialogue to discuss the most recent issues in education" (NU EHELFL, nd). Schools and various departments that deal with academic and research-related issues at NU are involved in this event,

and organise discussions and plenary sessions within this forum. Local and international speakers from different universities in the country and abroad are invited to share experience and discuss thematic issues in the field of higher education. Each year, EHELF is dedicated to a specific theme. Since 2012, it has covered such topics as sustaining a university, leadership and management and graduate employability.

The main activity is currently done through the GSE and its EHELF. We have been conducting training programs for rectors and vice-rectors, deans, professors about autonomy, governing structure, academic freedom. I don't say that this has exactly been our influence, but since NU's creation, nine national universities have been given autonomy, though it is partial, but still they do have it. (Interviewee B, NU)

Extended quality enhancement workshops have been carried out by the Office of the Provost for public HEIs, which appears to be a point of pain for many universities since there are still issues of misunderstanding of the principle of autonomy, in particular with relation to the decision-making process, and personal and corporate responsibility of staff at all levels. On this point, issues with understanding and the readiness of the RSUs themselves were reiterated several times during interviews, namely that it is crucial for them to understand, accept, adjust and apply practices that they consider could be relevant and applicable within their context.

Many things can be adapted according their needs and demands. The main thing here is to understand and accept. For example, with the question of autonomy and academic freedom, to me many universities feel lost; they don't really understand the essence of it, why it is needed. This is first of all a personal and corporate responsibility, and decision-making issues. (Interviewee C, NU)

As the main goal of NU is to prepare globally competitive graduates, individuals I spoke to believe that an important effect of NU could also be through their graduates, as “they

have been trained within an international academic environment that nurtures them with necessary labour market skills, like argumentative evidence, critical thinking, and proficient knowledge of English” (Interviewee A, NU) and “can make influence since they come with their culture” (Interviewee B, MoES). Fifty five percent of the alumni have been employed both in local and international labour markets, while about 37% continued their studies (NU Career and Advising Centre, 2017). Eighty of the first two cohorts of graduates have got Bolashak scholarships for Master’s and PhD programs in 25 top universities in the world (Katsu, 2017).

Alongside this, throughout the interviews at NU, it was communicated with honesty that NU has not been doing enough in terms of collaboration with the local HEIs in relation to research, since they are in a transitional period and cannot consider themselves as a full university yet. Being at this stage of development, NU is focused on building its own research capacity before it can share its base and potential with others.

Research, I cannot say that we have done a lot on this direction, but there are some joint projects there. But we want to involve in this more. At the moment this is happening only at the level of local professors, who get research grants and do joint projects together with other universities’ staff.
(Interviewee B, NU)

NU is also aware of such nuances as level of funding, much more democratised processes, research priorities and laboratory opportunities that exist at NU, but other public universities lack. In its view, though being privileged in having outstanding (for Kazakhstan) political and financial support from the government, a seven-year period is not enough for a university to position itself sustainably.

Frankly speaking, we have been provided with unprecedented political and financial support, though we don’t want to sit and wait when this all finishes,

and we are on the way to becoming a self-sustaining university. We started accepting international students, we do not wave out/away tuition fees, but we do give them scholarship. Now we are trying to invite international PhD students as we are a research university. Currently, we are trying to use everything we are given to make a basis for a self-sustainable university.
(Interviewee B, NU)

In relation to some practical arrangements between RSUs and NU, there also seem to be a problem of incompatibility of academic mobility of students between RSUs and NU in place due to differences in academic calendar, per credit cost, disciplines taught, academic programmes, level of English. Low or limited knowledge of English at RSUs seem to be creating difficulties for international staff at NU to arrange collaborative research with RSUs. Some invited professors who are Kazakh nationals seem to be having some collaboration with researchers from other local universities.

Our Kazakh national professors do a lot in terms of cooperation, as they do not have a language or cultural barrier, while it is a bit difficult with international staff, since staff at local universities are not always good in English. (Interviewee C, NU)

However, at the same time, plans for better collaboration are in place together with the Department of HE and the Science Committee of the MoES. This respondent also mentioned that MoES seemed to have some working group in place in 2012-2013 jointly with 18 rectors from different HEIs to work out how NU's experience could be translated to other institutions. However, this did not seem to progress further with no known outcome or recommendations.

NU considers that one of the potentially beneficial contributions would be to involve their local staff who hold PhD degrees by seconding them to local universities to teach science subjects in English and co-supervise students there.

There is an idea that local staff who work in labs and the Technopark who hold PhD degrees could be trained through the GSE on methodology and can be then sent to local HEIs to teach related subject modules in English. They can be paid through the funds MoES provides to NU, and this could have a real effect. They could co-supervise their PhD students, could potentially be mentors, and would see the local level, could assist in improving it. They could also invite their co-supervising PhD student for a semester to NU. (Interviewee B, NU)

With the purpose of establishing the experience of sharing more systematically, a dedicated member of staff was appointed in April 2017. This member of staff, positioned as a coordinator, is now working on putting together ideas and initiatives of various Schools and Departments at NU for systemising the processes of collaboration with different national HEIs. One of the ideas is to create a separate platform dedicated for the experience of sharing, where interested HEIs could ask questions and discuss a range of related issues.

In addition, this member of staff is working on developing Conceptual notes as per NU's vision of how experience sharing would work, through generating relevant mechanisms, tools and documents. The document is being put together as a result of Roadmaps received from the HEIs as per the MoES's instructions, where universities indicated what areas are of concern and which practices they are interested in for NU to share its experience on. However, the postholder has expressed her concerns that NU's and MoES' vision of the procedure of experience sharing might not match, since there were no particular discussions with MoES as a result of weak communication between MoES and NU, which seems to be a concern.

In that document that I mentioned I think this will be reflected but I am not sure whether it will match what the Ministry wants and sees how this should

work. Because we have more than 120 universities, and it is a bit difficult for us. At the moment work is being prioritised with those 11 universities that are defined under the State Program of Industrial and Innovative Development (SPIID), nine universities that are given autonomy, medical universities. And we understand that mechanisms should be regulated. (Interviewee C, NU)

(When I followed up in September 2018, during the write-up of this thesis, about the progress of the Conceptual notes with the person in charge, she confirmed that the document has not been put together due to a lack of clarity as to what conceptual foundation should guide this procedure and how things should work in practice.)

On a few occasions, the MoES's initiatives with regards to NU's experience of sharing were communicated to NU itself at the last minute without advance discussion with NU. It was also commented that there is a firm understanding of the need for regulated mechanisms and joint collaborative efforts from all three parties in this matter. From its side, NU is hoping to work out clearly where more focus should be placed, for example, the current trends that are being accepted as policies such as transitioning to autonomy, the curriculum and teaching in English.

NU management has also confirmed that they want to assist in quality programs in English due to lack of specialists with good knowledge of English, both among teachers and students, conduct reviews, involving their professors who can act as visiting professors, and conduct some lectures and training for regional universities. Other than that, NU expects that any practices and structures could potentially be adopted by other HEIs. One of them is the Counselling Services for students that is reportedly functioning successfully at NU, while the majority of HEIs either lack such a facility, or it does not work properly.

Thus, there are some efforts made by NU to fulfil what it has been tasked in relation to modernising the HE system, but there is not much clarity as yet on what areas and activities were meant in the policies in terms of 'modernising'. It seems that NU GSE was determined to be in charge of defining those. Thus, all activities that are being established and proposed are NU's vision of what practices can be shared with the rest of the HEIs. Roadmaps created by RSUs throughout the country can be identified as a positive step towards establishing a joint system of collaboration for a shared goal of raising the quality of HE nationally. In any case, there is an understanding at NU that there must be some kind of standardisation made for their practices to be transferable to other public institutions in the country. Nevertheless, NU is confident that collaboration is gradually happening.

5.3.2 Translating NU's experience: RSUs' perspectives

In the State Programme for Education Development 2011-2020, the main policy document on education reform for now, NU is identified as the flagship of global education and research and, consequently, as one of the strong forces of the education system expected to share its experience with other institutions. It further specifies that "Universities implementing the experience of Nazarbayev University, starting in 2016, will develop a corresponding roadmap. Administration and university professors will be trained to work in the conditions of academic and managerial independence through appropriate professional development courses" (pp.62-63), as well as stipulating that the share of civil HEIs implementing NU's experience expected to be 50% by 2019. As a result, in 2016 all state universities were given instructions by the MoES to develop Roadmaps identifying specific areas they would wish NU to share its experience on.

According to NU, universities created their own roadmaps where they put forward the areas where they would like to see NU's experience incorporated.

If we look at their requests, they are interested in everything. We pointed out for ourselves such issues as academic quality, curriculum development, teaching and research methods, and administering and managing research projects, supervision of their Master and PhD degree students by our professors, since it is felt that they need to be more exposed to international research. We have analysed their documents, and created a template including the most often mentioned practices or areas other universities wanted to learn. In addition, there are memoranda, but we do not want any documents to be a top-down document where rectors of two institutions agreed, but we want it to be a working document. (Interviewee C, NU)

These Roadmaps differ from university to university, and cover almost all the areas of administrative, academic and research management. However, many of these are constructed around internationalisation and research. During the interviews, RSUs mentioned some of these to be admissions policies, increasing international cooperation and involvement in global research network, successful application for international research grants, measures to increase the effectiveness of publishing in international journals and working in a diverse learning society.

Searching for international contacts takes so much time and efforts, you know, especially now, when we have the requirement to publish in Scopus or Thomson. We need to look for journals that are in the database, translate the article into English, contact the publishers, etc. It would be great to have support and assistance from NU in this matter. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Research and international cooperation, how to manage research projects, how to be exposed to the international sphere in research and academic mobility would be the practices we would prefer to learn. I clearly see that we

can reach the level of international projects via NU only. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

According to interviewees, separate departments in RSUs have had an opportunity to visit NU and learn about their work, but not in a systematic way. Moreover, it does not seem to be possible to assess the effect or outcomes of such training.

We have set up a Roadmap and we were supposed to go there and see how they work; nothing been arranged yet. Some of the departments have been there and had informal trainings, in this view, I can say that NU is an open organisation and shares its experience. But we have not translated any elements or programs. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

NU's coordinator for experience translation confirmed that they will be working further on consolidating these roadmaps to come up with a holistic and coherent document to make it work for both sides. By the time the interview took place, and at a later stage when I followed up, the document was still under progress and not ready to be shared. I was informed that it will be available on NU's website.

I found it reasonable that RSU 2, which perceives itself as much higher than other RSUs and positions itself in line with national universities due to its history, traditions and reputation as well as its research potential, believes that the most helpful practice for them would be having the same level of financial and material resources as NU has, for them to become a fully-fledged research university. Nevertheless, on the way to transitioning towards the status of a 'Research University', the experience of NU has been mentioned to be interesting for this institution.

One of the greatest impediments to translating NU's practices to RSUs seems to be differences in the organisational and legal fields in which NU and RSUs operate. While NU has a special autonomous status and operates on the basis of special law, state

universities function on the basis of the right of operational control with a strong central governance. All HEIs, except NU, fulfil their operation under the state standards, that define specific academic programs and a sample curriculum. Some of the latter, developed in the Soviet period, are still being used. In addition to this, to date, HEIs operation is also determined by the State Programme for Education Development 2016-2019. It outlines the entire work, including strategies, development of research, internationalisation, finance and staffing.

NU has its own status, its own direction, programmes, and full opportunities. Public universities have defined state standards, and they work under those standards. Currently, NU via its own direction that was established is trying to implement best international practices, but we can only work under the programs that the Ministry approved. (Interviewee A, RSU 2)

According to the legal and corporate structure, they are a more complicated organisation. They have different organisations inside the big institution. They all have their own budget and legal status. We don't have such resources. We have different structure and system. It seems to me that we have a more simplified version, where we have separate departments that do relevant work for the whole university; schools are not burdened with different admin areas of work. (Interviewee C, RSU 3)

According to the RSUs, this fact limits their activity and does not give them much of the declared autonomy.

There are some issues. Due to the fact that we have the Ministry above us, we cannot use the declared autonomy in full, and instead of reinforcing research activities of the faculty or the university, we have to also fulfill the Ministry's requirements which creates additional workload, and so we do one and a half or twice the workload instead of normal hours. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

Moreover, this also makes it difficult for the state universities to translate NU's policies and practices, especially in research management.

There is no explicit collaboration as such in educational activity. This is due to difference in statuses, though in research activity we also have no collaboration. We would like to have that, but at the moment there is no established cooperation between our scholars. (Interviewee F, RSU 1)

Frankly speaking, no explicit influence or dominating effect from NU we have not yet noticed. The only thing is that our top managers have gone through the training program. NU offers different programs, radical changes – no. I cannot say that we have done something jointly or changed something as of its activity. None of the NU staff were in our university. We cannot say we have had any effect. We have great professors who could be invited or engaged into projects or working groups. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Staff also expressed the fact that they had high expectations of NU when it was established by the government as a national project with a fundamental strategy to modernise the national HE system.

I always thought that one of the forms of NU's work should be looking for strong sides of other universities in the country and then join all efforts and projects together. For example, they can read lectures in our university, we can offer them our labs, and they in turn include us in their projects. It should be live work. At the moment the system is overloaded with bureaucracy, and while you deal with compiling all those papers, all your desire is gone. (Interviewee D, RSU 2)

Though not much interrelations have yet been established between NU as an elite internationalised and RSUs as mass public institutions, both high expectations and scepticism of NU were noted throughout the interviews. What has been created as Roadmaps might, in fact, serve as a basis for further collaboration between NU and RSUs that would also help in rolling out some specific practices of NU to the entire public

HE system. However, the difference in legal framework, governance and resources level might still present some impediments in fully translating NU's experience as indicated by the interviews with RSU staff.

5.3.3 Cultural and organisational issues and challenges. Differences in mindset, attitudes and working environment in RSUs and NU

People's attitudes and the environment they work in have also been observed as crucial, since, according to respondents from NU, they have been arranging various arenas for sharing, though they do accept that these have been insufficient and there is much more to address, basically in research. However, staff at RSUs feel that these are not always compatible with practices and the environment at RSUs. After having participated in some training sessions at NU, RSUs' staff share their impressions with their peers at the main institutional and also departmental academic councils and meetings, and they do not always seem to be happy with what they learn from NU. Their main complaint is that the training seminars were not theoretically and methodologically strong.

My colleagues went there for staff development a couple of times, but they returned with disappointment. They often said that theoretical and methodological trainings organised at their department have at times been more effective and covered deeper issues than what they had at NU's workshops. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

Some respondents mentioned that they are not too encouraged to try those practices locally due to difference in the academic, financial and research environment at NU and at their own university. One interviewee from RSU 2 noted that at NU one can observe a kind of working chaos in labs that shows that researchers are actually doing something which is not always the case in RSUs. She said that labs are usually opened for delegations and guests when they visit RSUs just to demonstrate, which is not the

reality. It is felt that there should be widely focusing and covering events oriented towards changing the climate and environment within RSUs for the experience of sharing to go more effectively. The government's support and funds are vital for such objective.

NU also expressed its concern with regards to differences in attitudes and approaches to work. NU believes that it is more committed to a bottom-up approach with democratic principles of work, while other local public HEIs still function in a top-down ideology.

In addition, there are differences in approach, attitude. We have a bottom-up approach, and local universities still work on top-down system. (Interviewee C, NU)

On this note of the difference in the decision-making culture in elite research and other public institutions and the anticipated policy change to more collegial governance throughout the public HE system in Kazakhstan, it is also interesting, for example, to observe the opposite happening in the UK recently. According to Shattock (2017), in the last decade or so, traditional universities in the UK known for their research potential and whose principles were based on democratic modes of governance, seem to be manifesting a decrease in collegial decision making and moving to top-down decision-making systems which was more characteristic to former polytechnics or post-1992 universities. Despite the measures taken to change the governance system in public HE sector, there are still issues related to providing autonomy and establishing collegial decision-making system in Kazakhstan since MoES have not yet fully released the regulating ties and the declared freedom is mainly given in curriculum development only. Besides, there seem to be still limited understanding of the essence and fundamentality of this among public institutions.

There is a mindset moment arising too. They ask who should control the quality of their teaching; in our system it is considered to be taken for granted.

(Interviewee C, NU)

This is related to the fact that public university staff used to work in a centrally controlled system, while the NU system had initially been established on academic freedom and quality assurance principles, which has had an effect on how things are done. This might change with the policies and procedures being put in place for the introduction of autonomy principles in public HEIs, though more time and training would be required for the staff to fully understand the essence of autonomy and how it should work in HE.

Another big issue in RSUs, and in the HE system overall, is a frequent change of leadership. Regular academic and administrative staff on the ground expect much from the strategy and pathway the leadership takes, and they believe that much is dependent on that. However, the practice is that ministers and rectors change every two years on average, not allowing the leadership to thoroughly carry out some projects or developments. For example, at RSU 3, in the last six years there have been two changes of rector. Each of them has had their own understanding and vision of the university's development, and successively the university's direction changed from being called innovative to research to entrepreneurial (Interviewee C, RSU 3). However, it is not yet clear at this early stage whether this frequent change-over is now likely to be less of a problem with more universities appointing their own rectors.

5.3.4 RSUs' collaboration with other educational institutions

Since universities are interested in both the number and quality of student enrolments, much effort is being directed towards working with schools within the region. With the recent establishment of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools in all regions of Kazakhstan,

regional universities are keen to attract these high-calibre elite school graduates. As a result, RSUs are considering different options to offer to this group of applicants. Though there is a belief that NIS graduates are specifically taught to target NU, and they generally aim to study there or abroad, RSUs understand that NU cannot accept all of them. For example, for the summer of 2018, there is an expectation of 2000 NIS graduates, while NU has 700 places only for its Foundation year (NU, 2016). NU's direct admission is quite competitive, since there is not a specific number of places offered annually, contrasting with the Foundation year, and it depends on how many students from the Foundation year have failed and could not progress to undergraduate programmes. So, taking into consideration these factors, RSU 1, for example, is setting up an experimental platform in several programs that considers awarding a bachelor's degree in three years as per NU's system, instead of the normally recognised four years of study.

Meanwhile, RSU 2 is thoroughly exploring NIS's programme in order to see if NIS graduates could potentially be offered a direct entrance to the 2nd year of study through aligning the curriculum and skipping Year 1 of the Bachelor programmes there.

Currently we have the needs to work not with NU but more with NIS. Because in future, we want to accept them not to Year 1 but directly to Year 2, and thus we need to know more what programme they educate their pupils, and we had an extensive meeting about this the other day. We know that NU first accepts to Foundation and teach the students to Academic English. But if a student has a good level of English, he/she can enroll through direct admissions to Year 2. We are also exploring the opportunities to accept any applicant who has high scores and merits directly to Year 2. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

However, RSUs have concerns about the qualification level of their teaching staff, since NIS graduates are believed to have a much higher level of English, critical thinking and broader subject knowledge and are taught a different curriculum than in the mainstream secondary schools, while there are issues with fewer academic staff at RSUs with a good knowledge of English and many have been trained in a teacher education system inherited from Soviet times. In order to be able to teach these students, RSUs are considering various options starting from creating new programmes, new majors that could be of interest to them, as well as arranging staff development sessions for their teaching staff.

We work more with NIS because there are more graduates from them and not everyone will be accepted at NU, as there are limited places available. That is why we will be offering an experimental arena for these very graduates. If an applicant does not get a place at NU, they might come to us. And if our level, say in English, would not fit theirs, be weaker or lower, this would be shameful. And thus, we need to work in this direction. We need to explore their approaches, methods of teaching and learning and re-train our academic staff. (Interviewee F, RSU 1)

Thus, the data show that RSUs have established collaboration throughout HE with other HEIs in the country and secondary schools. Internal mobility of students and staff, joint publications and research projects, collaborative conferences and seminars are the activities that seem to be taking place regularly among different RSUs within and between regions. Thorough attention is paid to initiating some collaborative projects with NIS schools with the aim of providing competitive opportunities for their graduates and having more talented students.

5.4 Mission to reform: the state of things

5.4.1 *Too ambitious and challenging a goal for one newly-established university*

NU admits that there is still scepticism and neglect within the HE system and society with regards to NU, but as seven years have passed, it is certain that it has become a model for many HEIs in the country, and some specific practices and approaches are changing, for example, from teacher-centred to student-centred approach, implemented KPIs, and starting to monitor learning outcomes (Interviewee B). But there does not seem to be any available data on the change of these indicators in other institutions either on MoES reports or HEIs websites. At the same time, respondents from NU state that NU never presents itself as a teacher to the rest, and that the way they do things should not be considered as an ultimate and an absolute model for all the HEIs.

We are doing a lot to be a model, I can say we are a model already, and any practice of NU, the way how our structures work, can be translated to other HEIs. For example, in many universities there is no counselling services, even there is one it does not work properly. It is challenging for us, because not everyone admits us, there are too conservative, outdated persons, who don't want to admit us, but this will not stop us, we try to establish a dialogue and never present us as a teacher. (Interviewee B, NU)

Along with that, NU is aware of the importance of better and purposeful collaboration, “otherwise the wall between us will grow higher, and we become more isolated and apart from others” (Interviewee B, NU). Furthermore, NU expressed its commitment to not positioning itself higher than other HEIs and is far from presenting itself as a teacher, since it realises that it has been given the opportunities it possesses.

We understand and emphasise that it is our duty to share our experience. But we do not position ourselves higher than others because we realise that these opportunities were given to us. (Interviewee C, NU)

Initially, there were some negative impressions; other universities had such impressions and attitude towards NU, but with the time passing they see that we are open and ready to respond to their requests, and assist and cooperate, but we keep saying that we are far from putting ourselves in a teaching position; we are quite responsive. (Interviewee D, NU)

Interview data from NU suggests that NU's aim and objective to become a global-level research university and to reform the HE system in Kazakhstan is seen as being extremely challenging and over-ambitious. As explained by the respondents, this is mainly due to NU's young age as an institution and that it has not yet reached sustainable level. Along with this, the reason behind the challenge of the task might be due to NU being the only such university in the country, in comparison with other WCU projects in, for example, neighbouring China or UAE which has some similar characteristics of a country rich in oil and gas. WCU projects in these countries are not limited to supporting just one institution, but a group of existing universities with high research potential, allocating very substantial funds to enable them to become research universities and consequently appear in global rankings and be competitive globally.

Respondents from the RSUs agree that NU is on the way to becoming established as a university, and there needs to be more time for it to become a model for the rest of the national system. For this to happen, a solid theoretical, fundamental and methodological foundation should be established there. They understand why NU is being given this special status, and being put 'above' the rest, agreeing to the fact that investing in all the universities is impossible in the current economic climate in the country.

At the same time, respondents regret that regional universities do not get as much funding and support from the government as central universities do, and they feel that RSUs should not be ignored as they are the centre of knowledge production of the region they are located in, and that different collaborative and joint projects should be arranged for the RSUs to get involved in.

I do not fully support the idea of funding just one university. There should be more focus and support to regional universities, as they are the centre of knowledge for the whole region and they prepare the labour force for the whole region. And it is regions that develop the country. If we only pay attention to central cities, the regions will become devastated and degrade.

(Interviewee A, RSU 1)

I think there should not just one university funded in the country. There should be several such key universities in regions; there should be an adequate level of funding so that the university can purchase necessary equipment.

(Interviewee G, RSU 1)

Contradictory points were noted throughout the interviews at the RSUs, supporting the idea of having a university like NU at the same time as criticising much funding given to just one university, while the rest of the system needs much improvement. On the one hand, RSUs are trying to understand the rationale behind the creation of such a university and the importance of it for the national system as well as justifying the need for more time for NU to become sustainable. On the other hand, there are so many issues to be addressed in the entire system with RSUs coping with pressure from the exacting requirements of the government with reforms emerging on a regular basis and limited funding provided thorough implementation.

5.4.2 Interrelations between NU and the state (MoES)

According to the MoES, NU as a national project was established with an initial idea of creating a world class university, and as such it cannot be enclosed in national frameworks. The system needed “a kind of a wave that would cover the whole system with a positive trend” (Interviewee A, MoES). The same strategy was applied to the foundation of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools in the secondary school system, and Kasipkor Holdings aimed at the development and modernisation of technical and vocational education in the country. Interviewees indicated that the role of NU in sharing its experience has been referred to extensively in this and other state programmes. The two MoES staff I spoke to are quite positive about the project as an excellent point for development, and that Kazakhstan needs to have such a university that would point the whole system in the right direction and bring the national HE system to an international level.

However, the fact that NU does not report to the MoES seems to be causing a clash of ideas and principles of centralised governance at the MoES and autonomy at NU. Moreover, the status and legal standing of NU seems to be creating some tension, as NU neither reports to nor is accountable to the MoES, though budgetary funds are allocated through the MoES accounting structures. This was mentioned in three interviews out of five at NU. The main constraints are related to multiple time-consuming bureaucratic procedures that are common to the governmental apparatus that MoES is part of. This often slows down processes, especially with regards to getting documents agreed and signed in connection with money allocation and research grants. Unfavourable attitudes towards NU were also noted during unofficial conversations with some staff at the Ministry, when they mentioned NU as a project that was absorbing

massive budget funds with no visible results yet. This might not seem to be relevant in terms of ethics; however, no details of members of staff who conveyed this are indicated that could potentially cause harm.

5.4.3 Whose responsibility after all?

Throughout the interviews with all three parties, a strong message was noted of a lack of clarity as to whose responsibility or domain of accountability it is to facilitate interinstitutional collaboration. The analysis of policy documents showed that there is a vague and implicit account of the whole process of translating NU's experience to the rest of the system. Neither the State Programme for Education Development 2011-2020 and 2016-2019 (being the main policy document so far) nor the 'Law on the status of NU, NIS and Nazarbayev Fund' give point-by-point guidelines or set up procedures for public institutions to follow on this significant policy measure. All that are provided are different indicators of development in percentage terms that it is anticipated public HEIs will have achieved by 2020, according to strategic documents.

The only document that somewhat highlights sharing NU's experience with the other institutions is NU's own Strategy. It states that NU will "ensure that the lessons of NU's experience are transferred and understood by other universities, schools and research centers" (NU Strategy, 2013). This goal also highlights that "as the university establishes itself as a high-quality teaching and research institution, it must ensure that the lessons gained from NU's development are available to, and influence the development of, Kazakhstan's higher education system" (ibid, p.8), where it is identified that educational leadership will be done through EHELF and workshop trainings provided for public institutions in the country. However, as previous RSUs accounts showed, this does not seem to be acknowledged throughout the system as a measure that has any great effect

on RSUs' policies and practices, at least as yet. At the same time, NU is convinced that NU should not have much obligations on the process, though is open for collaboration and has been making efforts towards accomplishing it. And in relation to this, NU reiterates that it is far from positioning itself as 'a teacher'.

Alongside this, further analysis of documents, specifically SPED 2016-2019, showed that NU is not indicated as the responsible body for the anticipated result indicators, though the task of reforming the system through translating its experience is manifested in NU's Strategy.

The state program for Education Development mentions a lot about NU's experience and the percentage of HEIs that would have implemented NU's experience by 2019. HEIs are indicated as responsible for that process. ... interestingly, how they would be implementing it if NU is not there, and when they establish such strategic tasks, we know about that at a later stage. (Interviewee C, NU)

Interestingly, respondents at the MoES, conveyed that they are not confident of who is accountable for the process and how to measure it.

We talk a lot about sharing experience, but I don't know and have never heard exactly who is doing that, how this should be done, and whose prerogative this is. We have not explored this deeply and, to my mind, no one has measured this, though I know that there are also talks among universities about how they will translate NU's experience if the statuses and other things do not match. (Interviewee B, MoES)

RSUs tend to think that there should be a direct instruction from the MoES, and explicit initiatives from NU since it has unprecedented financial and political support from the government and was tasked to elevate the national HE system.

I think it won't hurt to have better coordination from the government. NU receives generous funding from the state budget, and perhaps government should oblige NU to work closely with some key regional universities, and then there could better connection, NU would search for local partner universities. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

The strong position of the interviewed RSUs' staff indicates that the government's role in encouraging better interrelations between NU and RSUs is crucial. In a heavily regulated, centralised governance system, RSUs feel that the government should create specific programmes and mechanisms for NU to establish better cooperation with RSUs and involve them in various projects.

Certainly, a colossal role. Defining educational strategy, missions, directions ... Government must determine the status of each institution, system of interrelations, directions of cooperation, of course after discussions. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

Government should not demand actions only from RSUs, but also from NU, and give more support to RSUs. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

At the same time, the MoES claims that the government should engage in as little interference as possible, and the system should be able to coordinate the process itself, taking into account OECD suggestions made in their recent national policies reviews (2017).

Well, MoES is the organ that is responsible for all the processes and policies in the Kazakh education system. According to OECD report 2017, experts insist on decreasing the role of MoES in governing HE. Universities should be governing themselves on their own. (Interviewee A, MoES)

This MoES' line, in fact, was also traced in some of the interviews at RSUs where there were respondents who were not keen on this kind of attitude and think that universities

should be more autonomous in identifying their own pathways for collaboration, and do not expect to be instructed from above (Interviewee A, RSU 1; Interviewee C, RSU 2).

One of the major issues noted throughout the interviews in relation to NU is a lack of information about it. A strong will to have better knowledge about and collaboration with NU was conveyed in all three RSUs.

Perhaps we do not get enough information about them, as this is a general issue throughout the country; many things arranged centrally, and things do not reach who they were supposed to reach. Like PhD grants are mostly taken by national universities while regional universities do not receive much. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

I can't say exactly, but I know they work on different standards. (Interviewee D, RSU 3)

Moreover, limited clarity on procedures or mechanisms for the universities to follow, along with lack of particular systematic efforts and initiatives expressed by either NU or RSUs, seems to be causing some impediment to building connections and establishing cooperation to achieve strategical goals set for NU and the entire HE system.

Legally, I am not sure how these things should be arranged, whose initiative it should be, whether we have rights to contact them with such proposals. Generally, there are some kinds of cooperation, but they are all one-time ones, and to establish them on a regular basis there should be policies and documents. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

At the same time, it was noted that there was some kind of underestimation of RSUs themselves in comparison with higher status national universities, and suspicion that RSUs might be ignored if NU had a choice between national universities and RSUs to have partnership with.

Well, you know NU has a special status. I think there should be a two-fold policy. NU is a leading university; it has everything special and they could ignore RSUs when they have partnership with international universities. And in this relation, there should be governmental coordination. And even in this case, I assume they will go for national universities as they have alike status, resources, and probably it would be easier. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

There should be some research projects done together; at the moment nothing. I even don't know who should arrange this cooperation. Even if we contact them, they may not want to work with us. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

Though there are strong, well-established regional cooperation frameworks within and between various institutions of secondary, technical and higher learning, and well-sustained collaboration between RSUs and national universities such as KazNU, ENU, KazNTU and KazNPU in Almaty and Astana, RSUs confirmed their obvious high expectations to initiate more collaborative efforts from higher status universities, including NU, such as “broad and extensive analysis and suggestions from them for the benefit of the whole HE system” (Interviewee G, RSU 1). Since these universities get a bigger share of funds for research, RSUs expect higher status universities to involve them in different projects and clusters.

We have different projects within the region in collaboration with local authorities and other regional institutions. These are of great importance and value for the region. Like this, national and NU should be initiating such clusters and projects. (Interviewee A, RSU 1)

Bigger universities have more resources, but they do their projects outside the country. Why not pull regional universities? Regional universities get less funds. They should not be doing things on their own only, but jointly with others. (Interviewee D, RSU 2)

The direct role of the government was also mentioned in connecting the researchers in the country. The idea of using NU or other leading universities as a base with more modern and new equipment and involving other researchers to work under joint research projects was suggested as a step to change the mindset to understand the value of these collaborations (Interviewee C, RSU 2).

In its turn, the MoES has expressed the point that there are two polar views around NU in the society, one of which is that NU is for the gifted and talented only, and serves as a separator; the other view is that NU is a flashlight, a model that the rest of the HEIs should follow. The MoES is aware of sceptics who claim that if given the same level of funding their institutions would be translating the experience of not just NU but any other leading international university.

There are lots of questions for sure. We should be starting from the schools and bring up talents for the universities, who can develop together with those talents. For this we need to improve the pre-school system, develop and implement current state programs. (Interviewee A, MoES)

Nonetheless, for capacity building throughout the system, efforts should be made in a holistic way. So, there is a question of finding a medium between these two polar judgements of being a separator or a flashlight. It should also be an agenda for the government and the HE sector to find ways not to cross the boundaries for this and other similar projects mentioned earlier, for those to avoid becoming closed elite systems that would separate society even more. Hence, continuous dialogue and joint resolution should be in place for the sake of NU's development as a sustainable university and the system's improvement as per the government's expectations. For the present, while being confident that the idea is right, and the processes are in place, the MoES believes that there should be a self-coordinating system for the experience of a well-off university

to be shared with other mass system institutions. Again, this might be possible with more autonomy and academic freedom facilitated and provided for public HEIs.

Thus, as data show, at the moment no clear mechanisms and procedures are established in terms of how the translation of NU's experience should happen. None of the three parties seem to explicitly understand and realise who should be coordinating the process, with RSUs expecting it from the MoES and NU, the MoES leaving it to HEIs to coordinate this between themselves, and NU reluctant to take that responsibility onto itself and being challenged by a two-fold ambitious task.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overall picture of what the policies of differentiation imply, how they are perceived and their effects on RSU staff's work. Though awareness of differentiation policies and drivers behind the emphasis towards developing research in HE has been noted, it has also been clearly conveyed by participants that no particular effect is observed in relation to their work so far.

The government does not particularly seem to emphasise classifying universities as research and teaching as a differentiation policy with the classification and criteria accepted just at a documentary level, with no further actions or processes of implementation being carried out or accentuated so far. However, within this policy, the government acknowledges the role of a research university, and sees the role of NU in the HE system largely in translating its experience in governance and academic autonomy. To enable this, public universities that function on the economic right for management are being changed into a non-commercial joint-stock company type with 100% state ownership, as well as introducing a board of trustees and various councils who will be engaged in governing the university collectively. By enabling more academic

and governance autonomy, the government seeks to encourage more social and financial accountability from universities, and at the same time lessen the burden on the state budget. Transforming legal and organisational forms of public universities and changing their governance pattern is also considered by the government to be a popular international practice which is also a part of the internationalisation policy the government is facilitating.

With regards to the interrelation between the three RSUs and NU, two storylines are observed. While the RSUs perceive NU as a timely project necessary for the national HE system, they do not feel it has had much effect on their work or institutional policies and practices, especially with regards to what this research is concerned with, i.e. internationalisation and research. The RSUs, though, would like to have more collaboration with NU in these aspects, including more support from both NU and the state.

NU's story informs us that significant efforts and activities are being arranged by NU in attempting to fulfil its task of sharing experience with the rest of the system. However, issues and challenges are also acknowledged due to differences in status, the legal framework universities operate in, and corporate approaches they are committed to.

Data also suggest that in a centralised governance system, the government's role is critical in furthering interrelations between NU as an elite and RSUs as mass institutions. Universities expect the government to establish policies and procedures for better and more effective interaction between HEIs. In relation to this, the MoES understands that considerable changes should be made to the operational structures of RSUs for them to be able to adopt some of NU's good practices. Regional state universities' functioning within the right of economic operation seems to be hindering them from fully carrying

out research and innovation functions, especially when it comes to commercialising research products. Thus, within this new classification, the government is also making attempts to transform these institutions' legal status to non-commercial joint-stock companies. Though this still does not decentralise them from the MoES, it would further enhance their autonomy and give them more opportunities for the commercialisation of their science outcomes, which should improve their research level too. However, it appears that there are still unresolved issues and decisions to be made as to whether all institutions are given autonomy, the readiness of the institutions themselves to work in an autonomous mode, and the extent of the academic and governance autonomy to be granted. As of now, very little clarity can be observed as per the financial autonomy of universities too.

Additionally, cultural issues, such as understanding in society of the need and importance of the transformation of the HE system, have been conveyed as complex. However, changes to the current legislation were accepted in Parliament in June 2018 that introduced academic and governance freedom which also considers changing legal and organisational forms of public and private institutions. This means that from 2019, along with extending academic freedom of universities, public HEIs will be free from being regulated as a state property that restricted their commercial activities and will be granted specific rights for them to act as commercial actors. This legal norm also puts greater emphasis on HEIs' accountability for their teaching and graduates' quality on the national labour market.

In general, the fact that NU as a national project is still in its very early stages could possibly explain the issues with less clear mechanisms and procedures in relation to interrelations between NU as an elite system and RSUs as a mass system of HE. This,

however, potentially leads to the impression of NU as an Ivory Tower in the national system for RSUs.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND RESEARCH IN THE HE SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN

Introduction

This chapter presents a general picture of the recent development of internationalisation and research in the national HE system in Kazakhstan by exploring the government's policies and reforms according to findings drawn from three RSUs, the MoES and policy documents. It also presents findings concerning how these arrangements are taking place at RSUs and their understanding of the drivers behind them. It covers perceptions of RSUs of international practices and their applicability in the national and local settings, and how the 'global research university' concept is understood by RSUs and the government in the context of Kazakhstan's HE system. Though this study does not pose an explicit question of how internationalisation and research is developing at RSUs and what are the drivers behind this development, this section is key to understanding whether emergence of an elite internationalised research university in the national HE system has any effect on the current policies and practices of internationalisation and research at RSUs.

6.1 National research emphasis and the drivers behind research development at RSUs

Since its Independence, Kazakhstan as an industrial country has been concentrating on developing its manufacturing industry capacity, and almost all national strategies have been stressing this pathway of development (Kazakhstan-2030, Kazakhstan-2050). The latest project is the State Programme for Industrial and Innovative Development (SPIID)

for 2015-2019 which was approved by Presidential Decree in August 2014 and represents a logical continuation of SPIID 2010-2014 (primeminister.kz, 2015). The Prime Minister's official website states that this programme is a part of the policy of Kazakhstan that reinforces development of the manufacturing industry with efforts and resources concentrated on a number of sectors, specialised in regions with a cluster approach and efficient sectoral regulation. The main goal of this programme is the stimulation of the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry, aimed at increasing labor productivity and expanding the volume of exports of processed goods (ibid).

Since the strategic policy documents of the government highlight the importance of research and development (R&D) and innovation-oriented activities for the diversification of the nation's economy, the research focus of RSUs has a direct relation to this priority. This is accentuated in the missions and strategic plans of all three RSUs:

To maintain the regional leadership in classical multidisciplinary education by way of implementing up-to-date quality standards, multilevel continuous education model, scientific research, training competitive specialists of new type, possessing fundamental knowledge, innovative approaches and research skills essential for scientific, educational and practical activities.
(RSU 2's Mission statement)

An emphasis on innovation and technologies was also mentioned in interviews with top managers of RSUs:

First of all, this is our mission in sustaining the leading role of the university in international HE spheres in training skilled workers for the innovative development of our country. Our region is one of the industrial ones that plays an important role, and thus we should meet its needs in preparing labour force. If we do not train skilled manpower, that will influence the national economy. Today, graduates should be competitive and competent both in the

local and global labour market. They should have innovative skills. And we need to be able to offer high-quality education. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

According to interview participants from the RSUs, there is a significant progress in research development throughout the HE system in the country. In recent years, there has been substantial allocation of funds for research through provision of different research grants for universities. There is a differentiation policy functioning as well, since central national universities get a bigger share of resources than regional ones.

The last five to six years there is a good progress towards developing research. Resources have been allocated towards fundamental research. Modern equipment has been purchased. Various research grants are now available through the government. There is competition for research grants. Several national research laboratories opened in the country on the basis of national and regional universities. Previously we had to go to Russia to make some lab tests or experiments due to the lack of relevant equipment; it was a very difficult time for research, staff resigned, some left the country. (Interviewee A, RSU 1)

Some respondents at the RSUs pointed out how research and its significance has been growing in their university and separate schools and departments with further implementation of their research results into the academic programmes. This has been identified as one of the factors for improving the quality of education.

With the reform of the research organisation in the country that requires universities to develop their research activity, they seem to be paying greater attention to increasing their research potential through involving staff from various research institutes.

Over the last five to six years the level of research in our department has increased enormously. We have recruited stronger researchers, enhanced the technical equipment supply. We have invited staff from research institutes, those people who can integrate their research and practical skills

into academic process. Otherwise, about 10-15 years ago research was done only when a person was writing his thesis. So, frankly speaking, the understanding of the importance of doing research came with difficulty. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

The majority of respondents in all three RSUs are convinced that the main driver of significant improvement of research is institutional strategy and initiative, though they have not ignored the fact that there is considerable attention to and support from the government along with the national strategy of industrial and innovative development of the nation.

Every year we have a certification process to prove that we have research potential. If there was not support from the university, scholars could not achieve much. Research grants are managed by the government, but all other arrangements are done by the university, because of its staff and research potential. And it's because of university support we are able to win state grants. The university's status and technical maintenance is very important. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

Hence, what has been clearly acknowledged throughout the interviews is a generally decent development of research in comparison with what was the situation ten years ago with indicative promotion from the government and significant institutional support.

6.1.1 Strong emphasis on high impact international publications

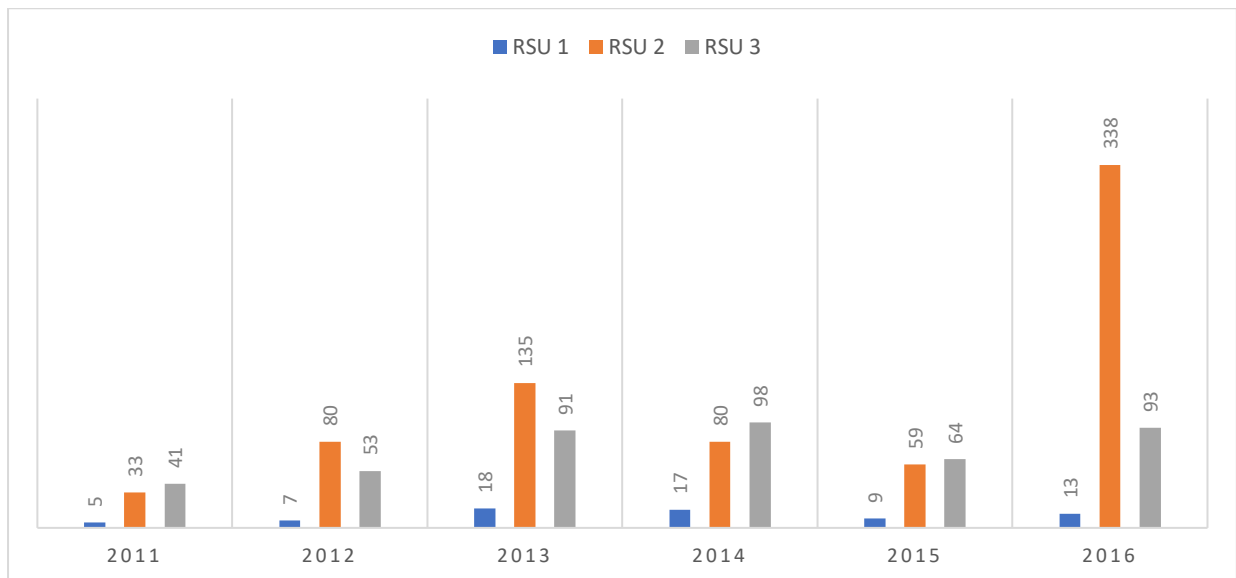
A major policy emphasised by the state in relation to research enhancement in the HE system, aimed at improving research indicators in the country, is the emphasis on the increase in publications in international journals. What is greatly accentuated is that publications must be in non-zero impact-factor journals registered particularly in Scopus and the Thomson-Reuters databases. The general perception of this requirement among respondents in all three RSUs seems positive since this increases quality and

standards of publications, though it was emphasised that the increase happened merely due to state requirements.

Well, publications have increased just because the state has tightened the regulations. Not because people want, but because the state demands. I am pleased that the state requires non-zero impact factor publications, so you can't just publish something. You have to meet the requirements, thus work up to the standards. I even know elderly professors who learned English so that they can write in English and translate. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

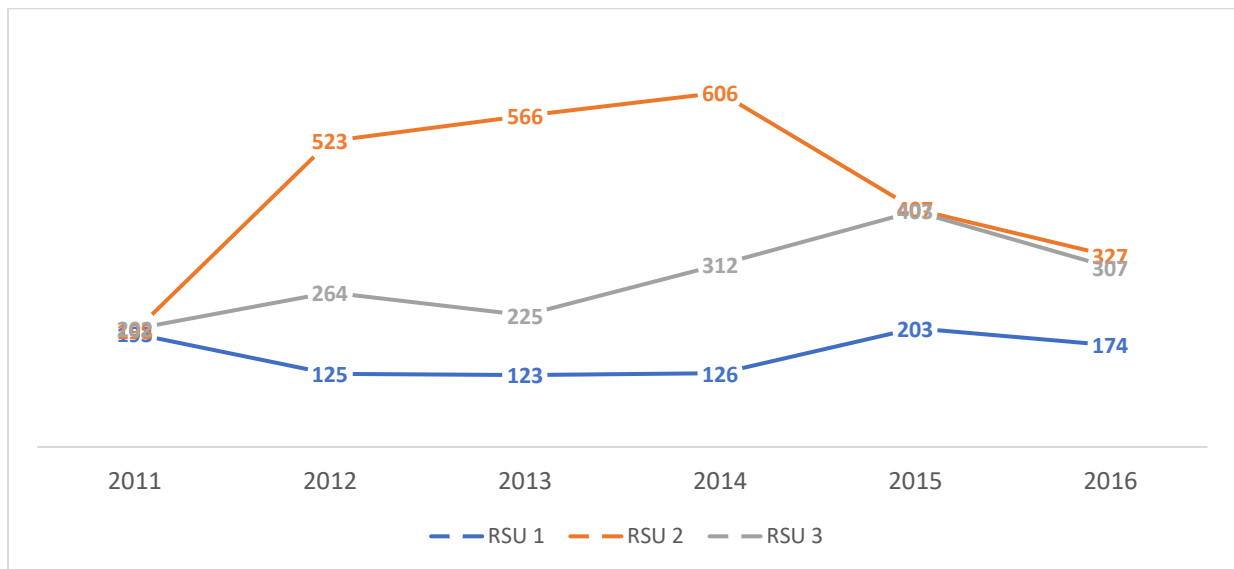
Figure 6.1 provides some statistical data on the number of publications in international journals in the three RSUs between 2011 and 2016.

Figure 6.1. Number of publications in international journals with impact-factor 2011-2016



In comparison, Figure 6.2 shows the number of publications in national science journals for the period of 2011-2016.

Figure 6.2. Number of publications in national science journals 2011-2016



One can notice that there is some annual variation in publications in all RSUs, with a remarkable increase of publications in international journals in RSU 2 in 2016 and a sustained increase in RSU 3 from 2013 onwards. While RSU 2 explained that they are putting significant emphasis on publications due to striving to obtain research university status, RSU 3 relate the increase to the state requirements to publish in non-zero international journals that came from 2012. RSU 1, in their turn, confirmed that they predominantly publish in Russian research journals that are not considered as having an impact factor by the state, and it was also emphasised in all three RSUs that promotion is given to articles published in international journals only. In both cases, the lower number of publications in RSU 1 might be due to the smaller size of the university, where there are 339 academic staff in comparison with the other two RSUs where there are 893 in RSU 2 and 526 in RSU3. To tackle the issue with increasing publications in international journals, RSU 1 appointed a designated member of staff to oversee and coordinate the process.

There is not much increase in publications, but we are working on improving this. And we have a strategy towards increasing publications. We have a

person now who has experience in publishing in Thompson and Scopus, so he conducts training seminars for staff. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

Though emphasis on international publications seems to be echoing as a positive measure by the interviewees, there is a concern about too much concentration placed by the government on publications with an impact factor, and this seems to be creating some nervousness and is not always supported by everyone.

We have a requirement to publish at least one article in Scopus and one in Thomson per year. So, we get nervous, though understand that this is necessary, and that it is a requirement of the Ministry of Education. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

Impact factor articles are too emphasised. PhD candidates have a requirement to have publications in order to be allowed for viva, so they do publish, they have to, but staff who already hold their degrees reluctantly deal with publishing articles. I can't say whether it is the case in big national universities, but in many regional universities this is how things are. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

The importance of international publications is understandably emphasised as one of the ways to increase internationalisation, especially when there is limited interest among international students and staff towards Kazakhstan that limits internationalisation opportunities. However, publishing in highly regarded international journals seems to be perceived by many respondents in all three RSUs as a complicated matter due to several factors. Firstly, there is the big issue of English knowledge amongst university staff. Articles are usually written in Russian and are then translated by relevant agencies. As a result, there is a translation agency business flourishing all over the country due to the high demand for English translation from university staff. Secondly, the high costs of publishing, taking into consideration the low salaries of staff throughout the HE system, hinders them from frequent publishing. Since they are required to

publish within a certain period of time, staff try to publish an article jointly with other colleagues to share the cost. It appears that due to requirements to publish once a year and considering that peer-reviewed articles take longer than that to be published, usually staff choose to target journals that charge fees. Staff get paid bonuses by their university according to the impact factor the article gains. However, if a member of staff does not publish within a defined period of time, he/she might lose some money from his/her salary (Interviewee B, RSU 3). Hence, the more active staff members are in research activity, the more opportunities in terms of pay and promotion they get.

In research, we do not have the capacity to independently earn money; if there is only government support, staff do something, usually very little. There are lots of staff who have defended their theses and are sitting quietly, because it is very expensive to conduct research and publish in journals. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

It is also to be noted that 'hysteria' with increasing publications has resulted in many researchers publishing in fake journals that were in Elsevier or Scopus databases at the time researchers published, but later, during regular clean-up procedures, were removed from the databases together with Kazakhstani researchers' articles. This happened twice in 2016 and recently in January 2018. In fact, according to kapital.kz, Kazakhstan ranks number one in the number of articles excluded from the citation database of Scopus between 2013 and 2017 (kapital.kz, accessed in August 2018). In relation to this one of the participants mentioned that:

What is free takes one and a half to two years to be published. What is charged is very expensive, so we publish as a group of authors. We understand that it is a long process of peer review, plus reputation and name is important for journals. Sometimes journals get expelled from those databases. (Interviewee C, RSU 2)

On this account, the recent European research funders' Plan S initiative demanding to shift from fee-paying science journals to open-access platforms could potentially provide wider opportunities and motivation for Kazakhstan's researchers too in publishing their articles without being concerned by the high fees of prestigious impact-factor journals (*THE*, September 7, 2018). In any case, currently in the country's HE there is an evident focus on quantity rather than quality which puts additional pressure on academic staff and researchers.

6.1.2 More applied research and commercialisation; less fundamental research

Having acknowledged the reform and policies directed to research development in the national HE system, almost all research staff whom I spoke to, expressed their concern over the government's rather differential approach to funding. Prioritised attention to applied scientific research while almost ignoring fundamental research due to the policies on developing technology and innovation-intensive activities seems to be of concern for many scholars and researchers. As a result of such emphasis, it seems to be the case that fundamental researchers have fewer opportunities to win state grants whereas far more funds are allocated to applied research projects.

... surely there is more support from the government towards research; however, they are more focused on commercialisation. I understand that there should be some result of research but there is no applied research without fundamental. Very low attention to fundamental research. When a fundamental researcher applies for a research grant, he usually does not get it since there is no final practical result of it. So, this is the challenge of today. And this is a state policy. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

Quite often during the interviews, practices were closely related to state policy, especially the State Programme for Education Development 2011-2020 as the main

current document that defines policy in education, as well as few other such as ‘Law on Science’ of 2011 and ‘Law on Innovative Activity’ of 2012, discussed in Chapter 3.

Now the tendency is that research is valued and funded. MoES now provide various grants and funds, World Bank, through competition we get grants, do research, write articles, involve master’s and doctoral students. This is what classic research looks like. However, the rules are changing; every year fundamental research is being ignored, and instead more attention is paid to applied science, so that the results can be then used or applied somewhere, preferably in industry. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

At the same time, on several occasions, departments that deal with research and commercialisation in RSUs have identified that the connection with industries is not fully established yet due to the lack of interest of industries themselves or their unwillingness to disclose or share classified information about their technologies.

What the government wants from us is to take our technologies and offer those to the industries so that they can start working in a new manner. However, no one thinks about whether someone needs these ‘new’ technologies. Industries are also closed, they do not let researchers in, they do not show what their processes are, they do not share their secrets and issues. This bit is also complicated. In most cases, industries are not ready to take responsibility. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

The issue of connecting universities and industries, though, is one of the top priorities for the government, and even with the necessary government support and legal promotion, there are still significant impediments for the universities to fully engage with the industries to further-university research and innovation.

6.1.3 Lack of motivation and low pay for staff to do research

Along with this, due to insufficient funding schemes and support from the government, there generally seem to be fewer staff interested in doing research in Kazakhstan.

The problem of many CIS countries, including Kazakhstan, is that research is done for the sake of research only, i.e. all the research is done and is filed somewhere on the shelves. Researchers get grants, do some research, publish articles, get some rewards from the government, and that is it. What is happening in industries, what their needs are, is not really interesting for researchers. (Interviewee C, RSU 3)

Staff should be trained; at the moment I cannot see many researchers interested in what they are doing, they do it just for the money. Even if we buy modern equipment, we need staff who can work on those, send them to international internships, put money into staff development. University should be interested in this and fund such activities. We do work on this direction and try to send staff to different internships. However, we don't always have enough finance to cover those. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

Moreover, lack of motivation and competition between staff seems to be another big issue that prevents research from flourishing at RSUs.

For research improvement we don't seem to have much motivation, pay for this is very low, we get some advanced payment for having a degree, so many staff get degrees but then do not do any research because it is too expensive and there is very little paid by the state. In Kazakhstan, once you get a degree, staff think that is it, nothing further is done for further development of skills and competence. Very little competition between staff. And this is the picture you will see in all the regional universities in the country. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

In addition, there seem to be various other challenges that academic staff face in research organisation and management, such as low salaries and high workload.

Objectively, not really great progress. What the government talks about are generally just words. Very low salary, staff work in two jobs, and they don't have no time for research. Huge challenges before academic staff when they have to both teach and are required to do some research, publication in journals with high impact factor. (Interviewee H, RSU 1)

On this account, Kuzhabekova and Ruby (2018) concluded that the government is pushing faculty to engage in more research without acknowledging that faculty also has teaching and administrative duties. The authors also noted that there are two kinds of incentive systems for academic staff in Kazakhstan: one for teaching at the university level, and the other for research at the national level. The two seems to be creating conflict, because while the first encourages faculty to increase their teaching load, the second favours greater involvement in research. Moreover, Kuzhabekova and Ruby (2018) note that due to the fact that “faculty working conditions, such as access to library resources, equipment, and consumables, have not changed as a result of the policy, the academic environment does not enable greater productivity” (pp.278-279).

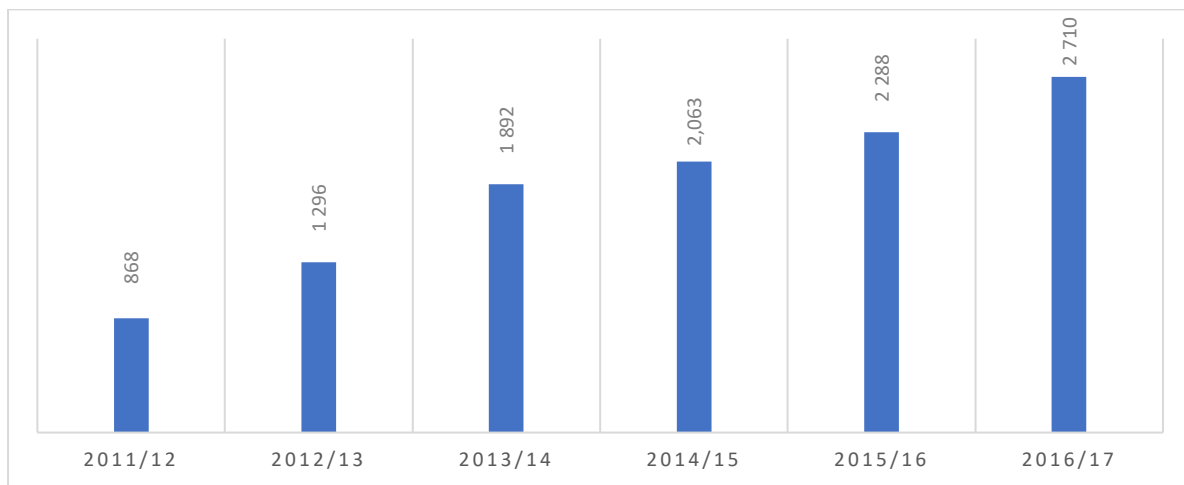
Thus, along with the appreciation of the policies promoted by the government towards research improvement overall, there are important factors, issues and concerns that need to be addressed more thoroughly both at university and government level, as what is in place so far is not enough to motivate staff to engage with research to the degree demanded by the state.

6.1.4 Graduate education provision at RSUs

Though there seems to be a certain degree of progress in research development in terms of increase in funding (though data on this could not be obtained) and publications, graduate education provision at RSUs, which is one of the important factors for developing research, leaves much to be desired. The lion's share of grants for doctoral

education is allocated to national universities. According to the data of the Ministry of National Economy, out of 2,710 doctoral students in 2016-2017, 2,092 (77%) study in Almaty and Astana. Very few RSUs within the country are given this opportunity by the government, though there is an increase in the number of places allocated to graduates taught and research education overall in the country as shown in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3. Number of doctoral students 2011-2016.



Sources: Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Committee on Statistics (MNERK) (2014-2015) www.stat.gov.kz

Even though de jure RSUs can apply for the right to train doctoral students, there are various bureaucratic constraints that hinder RSUs from obtaining a license to deliver PhD degree programmes. To be able to apply for a grant allocation from the state, the university should first have its programme internationally accredited, which in turn requires having graduates, but with no grants allocated previously and consequently no graduation occurring, RSUs have no chance to even apply for grants. This brings to the mind the Kafkasque perspective meaning absurdity of the bureaucracy level. Similarly, there seem to be gaps in the procedures that are for now overlooked by the state and although, according to staff, these have been conveyed to the MoES, there is no change

in the mechanisms so far. As a result, RSUs wonder how one can talk about an increase in graduate research education in the regions.

6.1.5 The younger generation uninterested in research

Throughout the interviews in the three RSUs, one of the concerns in research development in the HE system in the country was identified as a problem of attracting the younger generation to research at a regional level.

There is also very little done to attract the younger generation to research and science. If there is no financial support provided, staff will not be involved in research. There are some incentives from the university part, but it is not enough, not at high level, and does not cover all expenses. (Interviewee H, RSU 1)

Besides, we do not always have staff interested in research. This comes with school graduates; they are not too keen on doing research. They would rather work in an administrative job in national companies for better salary. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

The same issue was noted rather critically in relation to the development of graduate education at RSUs too. As was shown in the previous section with relation to graduate enrolment numbers, the bulk of them are generally distributed to centrally located national universities. This seems to be causing a huge issue with a brain drain of junior researchers who prefer to work in the national universities located in the central cities of Astana and Almaty. As one of the interviewees pointed out, the reason for this is low financial incentives as “young graduates do not want to remain in the RSUs due to low salary”.

It is very difficult for us to keep staff, professors, because of different salary level, and in national universities the coefficient of payment is higher. Young

academic staff and researchers are also not too keen on coming to the regions as career prospects are better and more opportunities in central universities. (Interviewee F, RSU 1)

However, there seem to be another issue with attracting young researchers to regions. Among all three regions, region one, where RSU 1 is located, is known for its bad ecology due to huge industrial plants. One of the top management interviewees at RSU 1 has, actually, mentioned that despite high salaries and social benefits offered these are very often turned down due to the ecological problem of the region.

We try to accentuate on the quality and open up the potential of regional universities. Many leave because of ecology. I invited PhD graduates and offered them very good conditions, but they do not want to come because of ecology, though we have enough potential. (Interviewee F, RSU 1)

This issue of attracting the young generation (and not only) into scientific research seems to be taking place in many places. For example, in the UK, recent research shows that there are a number of policy- and funding-related factors both at national and institutional levels, such as increasing competition, shrinking funding and lack of or limited support, that result in early career academics “abandoning academia” (Locke, Freeman and Rose, 2018, p.63). In Russia, the problem with attracting young researchers is related to low incomes in academia as well as poor conditions, insufficient infrastructure for research and bureaucratisation of processes (Karpov et al, 2015). Low attractiveness of research is leading to the ageing of science academics in Russia, and seems to be a problem in Kazakhstan too. In addition, the changing relationship between academics and their institutions (Musselin, 2012) and the weakening of academic freedom in research due to governance reforms and the dominance of managers over academics (Deem et al, 2007) are points of discussion in the literature in relation to why the academic profession is becoming more unpopular.

In any case, these and other factors seem to be associated with the reluctance of younger generation to be engaged with academic research. In the Kazakhstan's context, there seem to be not enough incentives in place to attract students starting from their undergraduate studies towards graduate education and a research perspective with decent financial incentives at the RSUs, despite the importance of research enhancement for economic diversity is much emphasised by the government.

Summary of main points

The data show that in the last five to six years research development has been prioritised both at state and institutional level. The government has introduced grant funding for institutional research which respondents have acknowledged as a favourable measure for research development in the country and their institutions. At the same time, various issues and challenges exist. These include an emphasis on commercialisation which gives priority to applied science rather than fundamental research, pressure to publish in international journals with a high impact factor and insufficient resources. Moreover, more funds are allocated to centrally located national universities both for research grants and graduate education which undermines RSUs' capacity for R&D. Little attention is paid to attracting young researchers has also been indicated as one of the issues in further advancing research capacity in the country. In summary, though there is some improvement in research development due to state policies, there are still issues to be addressed within the context of regional state universities.

6.2 Internationalisation at RSUs

In 2007, the OECD and the World Bank recommended for Kazakhstan that "the strategy of internationalisation should become the basic principle of the overall strategic planning for higher education in the country" (OECD, 2007). According to this view, the general

policy discourse with regards to internationalisation in the country is predominantly related to improving the quality of the HE system and is considered by the government as one of the important factors for national HE improvement (MoES, 2012). As such, one of the key objectives of the State Program for Education Development 2016-2019 is the modernisation of higher education within the context of global trends with extensive focus put on integration with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (SPED, 2016).

Omirbayev, the former Director of the HE department at the MoES, claims that internationalisation in the context of Kazakhstan implies “increasing the effectiveness of educational and research activities and meet international quality standards of educational services” (2015, p.7). The anticipation is that this would be achieved through mobility of students and staff, various joint educational programmes, joint research and science projects, cooperation in the field of assessing the quality of education, and the creation of international universities (MoES, 2016).

Following this line, internationalisation activities at RSUs are constructed on the basis of both ‘abroad’ and ‘at home’ elements, such as staff participation in international conferences and seminars, internal and external mobility of home students, incoming mobility of international students through exchange programmes and academic study, increase of programmes taught in English, publishing in international journals, and maintaining international quality assurance requirements. Respondents indicated that in the recent five to six years this kind of activity has increased significantly, and both staff and students have a lot more opportunities to travel abroad within various internships programmes, to take part in various international conferences and visit a range of international universities.

Geographical location of our country between Europe and Asia presupposes us to be integrated with global practices. One cannot be isolated within its borders only. Kazakhstan is an open state where all kinds of contacts and collaboration is praised. I can state that since 2011 there has been quite active enhancement of international activities. We see that the state is interested in developing it as well as there is a rise in interest from international organisations. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

International collaboration opportunities are also established through various international organisations like German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the British Council, as well as via membership of different university associations. These were especially mentioned by respondents as one of the substantial means of cooperation with their international peers. Though progress in international cooperation between departments' work in establishing contacts and networks with international HEIs was noted, respondents observed that there is still a lot to be achieved in this area.

Throughout the interviews, it has been suggested that establishing contacts and cooperation with leading universities in American and Western European countries is not straightforward due to limited knowledge of English, and little or limited knowledge of RSUs overseas. Thus, collaboration is predominantly arranged with Eastern European (especially former post-Soviet countries which speak Russian) or other Russian-speaking neighbouring countries.

Currently, we develop and keep contacts with the near abroad, mostly with Russia. I believe that cooperation with countries that are far abroad should be a priority of the young generation, who brought up on the policy of multilingual education. It is easier for them as they speak English. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

According to RSUs' International Departments, a number of international cooperation agreements were signed; however, to the question of whether there are any particular

projects being undertaken within these agreements, they could not answer. On account of the different memoranda and agreements with international partners, it was mentioned by the international participant who has also been involved in British Council projects in internationalisation in Kazakhstan, that many of those are signed for the sake of having them per se, and these agreements do not often work in reality.

The other issue is that universities in Kazakhstan say that they have 56 partnerships with international universities, and when you ask what has happened as a result of signing the MoUs, nothing, we still have discussions.
(International respondent)

Thus, although the departments in charge of international cooperation are active in searching for different collaborative partnerships and establishing contacts with overseas institutions, not all of them seem to be productive and are there simply to depict significant quantitative evidence, generally, for the purpose of reporting.

6.2.1 Academic mobility: increase in inbound and outbound student mobility

One of the key indicators of internationalisation identified in official reports and strategies of the MoES is academic mobility of both staff and students. Strategy for Academic Mobility 2011-2020, the level of inbound mobility of international students is expected to reach 20%, with 20% of national students to be mobile by 2020 (MoES, 2012). The document that was issued as the result of the Third Forum of the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2012 promotes mobility within EHEA and abroad. Unfortunately, no reports were found in MoES and the Centre for Bologna Process and Academic Mobility websites on the current state and progress of academic mobility of students as per the above strategy. However, in October 2018, I managed to talk over the phone to the Department in charge of academic mobility at the Centre for Bologna Process and Academic Mobility who clarified that this strategy has now been considered by MoES to

be too ambitious and is no longer for implementation. Academic mobility in the country is now regulated by one of the MoES orders dated from 2008 which only specifies the procedure on sending students abroad for exchange programs without indicating specific numbers to be reached. I was told that a proper report is being prepared to show the picture of academic mobility in the country. For the present, data from one of the recent speeches of the Minister of Education and Science, Mr Yerlan Sagadieyv, provides an indication of inbound mobility of international students which currently seems to be standing at about 2.5% of student intake:

Now there is a trend – countries are fighting for students, so that they study in their universities. We have 2.5 percent of foreign students and the plan is to increase their number to 10 percent. Another 50 thousand students we would like to attract higher education in Kazakhstan education is here. In fact, we believe in this policy, and if 50 thousand Kazakhstani students go abroad, then 50 thousand international students should come to Kazakhstan.
(tengrinews.kz)

In line with this governmental goal, student mobility is also important for RSUs as one of the criteria for successful positioning in national and international rankings (Interviewee C, RSU 1). According to my interviewees, there has been significant progress in both internal and external student mobility in the last two to three years.

For me, one of the main and key points of the recent internationalisation activities is the emphasis given to students' mobility which is developing rapidly, and I am happy for that. We have been sending about 10% of the number of students from our department, and I see that this kind of program is very influential. Students disseminate information among themselves and this creates a very good effect. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

Interest among students in mobility programmes has been indicated as a growing and positive trend too when students learn foreign languages on their own, take international

language tests and by this facilitate a quicker application process for exchange programmes.

More and more students come with their IELTS certificates; thus, they know about mobility programs. Annually, we send about 40-50 students. Even parents are more aware of the need to know English. There is no radical or global change, but there is a definite tendency towards internationalisation.

(Interviewee F, RSU 3)

As Table 6.1 and 6.2 show, there is some fluctuation in domestic student mobility with a modest increase in the last three years in RSU 2. However, the ratio of mobile students as a share of overall students looks very low, with maximum indicators achieved in RSU 1 in 2014, in RSU 2 in 2015 and 2016, and in RSU 3 in 2015. At the same time, no continuous increase can be observed in RSU 1 and 3 where numbers fluctuate over the period of 2011-2016, except RSU 2 which shows steady growth. Although it should be acknowledged that at different periods there is a positive rise in numbers in all RSUs.

Table 6.1. Outbound mobility of undergraduate students

	RSU1		RSU 2		RSU 3	
	Number of mobile undergraduate students	Percentage of mobile undergraduate students as a share of overall number of undergraduate students	Number of mobile undergraduate students	Percentage of mobile undergraduate students as a share of overall number of undergraduate students	Number of mobile undergraduate students	Percentage of mobile undergraduate students as a share of overall number of undergraduate students
2011	21	0.3%	40	0.2%	21	0.7%
2012	34	0.6%	44	0.3%	60	1%
2013	26	0.6%	40	0.3%	32	0.8%
2014	58	1.5%	96	0.3%	38	0.9
2015	38	1%	98	1%	41	1.1%
2016	56	1.4%	98	1%	34	0.8%

Source: Compiled by Author from RSU data

Table 6.2. Outbound mobility of Master's and PhD students

	RSU1		RSU 2		RSU 3	
	Number of mobile Master's and PhD students	Percentage of mobile Master's and PhD students as a share of overall number of Master's and PhD students	Number of mobile Master's and PhD students	Percentage of mobile Master's and PhD students as a share of overall number of Master's and PhD students	Number of mobile Master's and PhD students	Percentage of mobile Master's and PhD students as a share of overall number of Master's and PhD students
2011	0	0	16	12.3%	14	0.6%
2012	0	0	14	12.4%	18	0.8%
2013	2	0.6%	9	13.5%	21	1%
2014	11	2.7%	10	17.9%	11	0.6%
2015	2	0.6%	13	21.8%	7	0.5%
2016	5	1.6%	14	16.3%	10	0.7%

Source: Compiled by Author from RSU data

In relation to no mobility in 2011 and 2012, RSU 1 clarified that there was lack of clarity from the side of MoES in terms of the procedures on how to organise and manage the mobility program. So, it took the university two years to set up all the procedures with the help of the receiving international partners. The same issue seemed to have taken place with arranging staff mobility too. Generally, the issue of ineffective communication from the side of MoES was mentioned in a number of occasions, especially when new regulations or rules are sent top-down.

When mobility has just started, we did not know the system of how to arrange this. MoES did not tell us explicitly how do deal with it, and when they required the indicators, every HEIs did what they could. That is why the early mobility was low quality. Unsystematic. We then came up to what we have now together with our receiving partners. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

At the same time, there does not seem to be an issue with the mobility between universities within Kazakhstan. Public universities have established a mutual system of internal mobility between themselves and this appears to be working well. However,

respondents have expressed the view that there are insufficient opportunities for the external mobility of students, due to scarce resources allocated by the state budget.

We try to spend budget money as effective as possible sending as many students as possible through our established contacts. The Ministry emphasises the number of mobility per money they allocate, but we send many more because we agree with our partners not to charge tuition.

(Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Thus, universities have to consider international scholarships that could cover all the costs for their students. The European Union's Erasmus Mundus programme has been acknowledged as one of the current important opportunities provided for student external mobility.

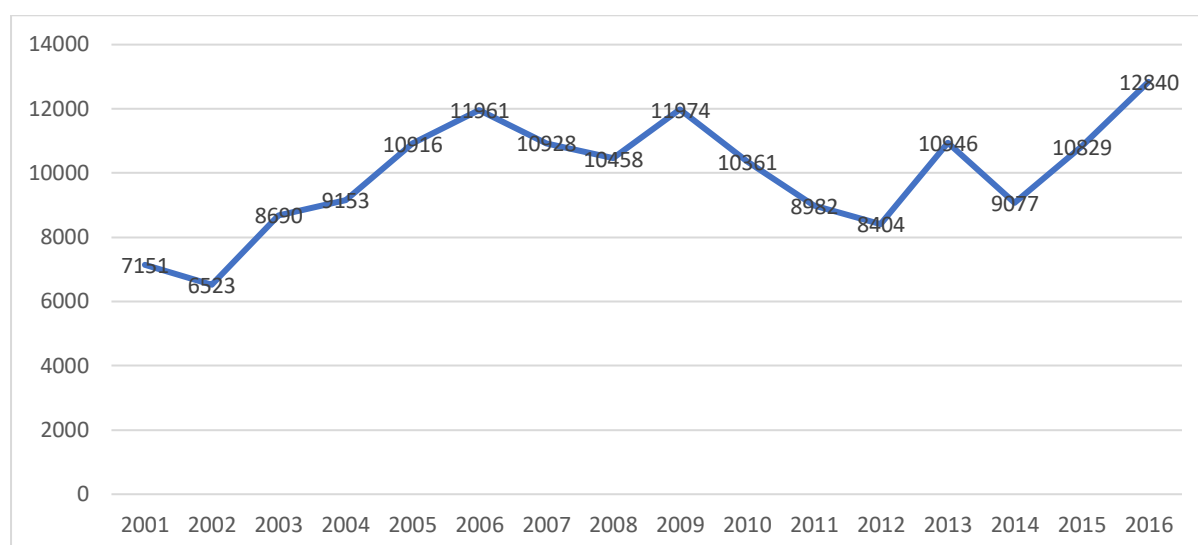
There is a slightly increased dynamic of mobility in general. There is no issue with internal mobility, but external mobility is organised through Erasmus only, though while we are in the same Bologna Process, we very often have issues with ECTS when calculating the hours. (Interviewee C, RSU 1)

The overall impression of academic mobility in the country suggests domestic student mobility at all academic levels; undergraduates and postgraduates are prioritised and more opportunities and funding are allocated to students and less to staff. Similarly, data on student mobility at the MoES and institution level were more available than for staff.

6.2.2 International students at RSUs

According to MoES data, over the past 15 years the number of international students has varied but is now almost twice what it was (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. The number of international students in the country in 2001-2016



Source: MoES, 2016

Most of the foreign student body study is arranged on the basis of intergovernmental agreements with the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (MoES, 2016). Since 2010, grants have been awarded to ethnic Kazakhs who are citizens of Mongolia.

International students are divided into those who study academic programmes and those who come on exchange programmes for one or two semesters. Table 6.3 shows the number of international students studying academic programmes. International students are mainly from countries that are geographically reasonably close, such as Russia, neighbouring Central Asian and Eastern European countries, India, Pakistan, China and Mongolia.

Table 6.3. Number of international students on academic programmes

	RSU1		RSU 2		RSU 3	
	International students	Percentage of international	International students	Percentage of international	International students	Percentage of international

		students as a share of overall number of students		students as a share of overall number of students		students as a share of overall number of students
2011	225	3.1%	43	0.2%	58	1.9%
2012	254	4.7%	65	0.3%	96	1.6%
2013	261	5.8%	87	0.45%	62	1.56%
2014	199	5%	98	0.5%	103	2.4%
2015	190	5.3%	109	0.55%	79	2.1%
2016	173	4.3%	121	0.6%	95	2.2%

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

As shown in the Table 6.3, there is some definite increase in the number of international students in the last 2-3 years in comparison with numbers in 2011-2012 in RSU 2 and RSU 3 with obvious decrease in RSU 1 in the same period. Similar to outbound mobility of local students, the ratio of international students as a share of overall students is still low. It should also be noted that most the international student body in RSU 1 and 3 consist of Kazakh ethnic people who are of Chinese and Mongolian nationality.

Kazakhstan is very interested in international students; there are different education fairs being organised in Kazakhstan. Recently, one was in Central Asia, the next round will cover China, Pakistan and India. The majority of our international students are ethnic Kazakhs who live on the territory of Russia, China and Mongolia. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

At the same time, the number of international students who come to the three RSUs on exchange programs for one or two semesters is small, less than 1% of the share of overall number of students (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4. Number of international students on exchange programmes for one or two semesters

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
RSU 1	0	9	5	5	21	51
RSU 2	45	49	52	55	58	58
RSU 3	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

Generally, there is a critical issue with inbound mobility in all RSUs. In RSU 3 there was no international student on exchange program over these five years. International students mainly come to study on academic programs and, as indicated earlier on this section, they are mostly from neighbouring countries; besides, they are usually ethnic Kazakhs. On the other hand, RSU 1 and 2 were to some extent attractive for international students on exchange programmes between 2011 and 2014, with a significant increase in the numbers in 2015 and 2016. This might be due to activation of promotion events at the governmental level with a range of inter-governmental agreements put in place. As interviewee F from RSU 3 mentioned above, the MoES and the Centre for International Programs have been organising ‘Kazakhstan Education’ fairs in different neighbouring countries for the last two to three years. However, I was not told why RSU 3 did not have any international students on exchange programmes. In any case, the number of international students remains at a low level, comprising not more than 1.5-2% nationally (MoES, 2016).

6.2.3 Academic mobility: opportunities for staff

For the last five to six years, respondents have acknowledged the increased attention paid nationally and institutionally to academic mobility for university staff.

I think that there is a positive dynamic, not much but still, we observe it. Our staff had trips to places far and near and consequently established contacts with a number of scholars there who then were invited to give lectures in our university, discuss some research projects and share ideas. It was an interesting experience. It was not just a one-time visit, we still have good relationship with these colleagues and continue working with them. We have not had such factors in previous years, so yes, there is dynamics of development here. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

Table 6.5 provides some statistics regarding the local staff mobility in RSUs. As shown, there was a continuous increase in all three RSUs in the first three years with some fluctuation in numbers in the last three years except RSU 2. It was clarified by RSUs that the level of internationalisation at RSUs showed prominent progress over period of 2011-2013 due to the start of the promotion of internationalisation on policy level since 2011.

Table 6.5. Outbound staff mobility

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
RSU 1	39	41	51	45	47	18
RSU 2	57	61	73	76	81	98
RSU 3	64	78	85	82	87	82

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

Overall, with academic mobility numbers both for students and staff, the data provided in this thesis do not seem to give a greater picture of increase since it covers the last five to six years when the emphasis and funding on mobility commenced. A dramatic change in numbers might possibly be more obvious if compared with the previous five years, as respondents indicated during the interviews.

In 2010, the government introduced a quota for specific categories of applicants, such as civil servants, academic and teaching staff from national HEIs, and applicants from rural areas, to study abroad through the Bolashak Scholarship. This was implemented in line with government policies to increase the development of human capital and provision of access to continuous education (CIP, 2016). There was no specification of applicants before, and any university graduate could apply within the specified majors provided that they met programme requirements. As the main issue for such applicants was insufficient level of English, the IELTS requirement for applicants from HEIs was lowered to 4.0 (previously this was a minimum of 6.0). If successful, applicants from this category were granted two-year English training courses abroad before their main academic study. There is evidence of a slight increase in the number of staff across the three RSUs who have studied overseas as a result of this change (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6. Domestic academic staff with international diploma

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
RSU 1	0	0	0	1	2	2
RSU 2	0	1	4	2	7	3
RSU 3	7	6	7	9	5	5

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

However, as shown in Table 6.6, there is not much progress with staff with international diploma in the RSUs. In comparison with the total number of academic staff the proportion of staff educated abroad in the last five years is critically low. This could be related to a range of factors that were discussed in Section 5.2.5 with regards to low infrastructure and the low salaries that RSUs can offer to attract the younger generation with international diplomas, as well as in relation to a lack of motivation of existing staff (Section 5.2.3).

6.2.4 International staff at RSUs

An observable increase in the number of visiting international academic staff and lecturers was identified throughout the interviews in three RSUs. With high state emphasis on an increase in the level of internationalisation, university respondents mentioned that they noticed significant progress in the activity of the international department's work. They seem to be working purposefully in establishing contacts with different universities overseas. If previously most of the collaboration happened with Eastern European and Central Asian countries, today, as per respondents in charge of international cooperation, a number of academics from the UK, the US and other Western European countries have been visiting RSUs. These visits are acknowledged by respondents as highly valuable, interesting and influential for the local staff development and moving forward.

This is a good practice, and we are making attempts too for having international members of staff. There is an evident gap between level of local and international staff. When we have visiting professors, this gives us huge experience. Young scholars get so enthusiastic, impressed and encouraged when they attend lectures and seminars of international visiting professors.

Involving international researchers in local research is quite important. However, RSUs cannot always afford expensive professors. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

Table 6.7 provides some data on the number of international scholars who visited RSUs for conference and seminars, as well as being specifically invited for giving lectures and conducting masterclasses (as per interviewees).

Table 6.7. Number of visiting international academic staff and lecturers

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
RSU 1	17	16	15	20	11	20
RSU 2	24	29	26	41	20	15
RSU 3	No data available	55	50	57	35	41

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

As seen, there is no explicit dynamic growth in international recruitment which has been clarified by the respondents in charge of international cooperation that any numbers in relation to internationalisation is largely dependent on the budget received from the government. In this relation, in all three RSUs it has been noted that annual funding is available for inviting foreign academic peers to conduct lectures and seminars.

Every year we were funded significantly to invite international scholars which helped us a lot to establish personal contacts between professors. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

However, funds seem to be still insufficient to do this on a frequent basis as well as having international staff on full-time employment at RSUs.

Inviting experts from far abroad is difficult and expensive, since we are aware that levels of expenses for travelling from Russia compared to from US is different. Moreover, there is an issue with knowledge of English and very few scholars in Kazakhstani universities know English at the level necessary for communicating with English-speaking colleagues. So, we mostly collaborate with Russia, Kyrgyzia, etc. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Table 6.8 shows the share of overall budget of RSUs spent on internationalisation which despite some increase, looks quite low in RSU 1 and 2. Such spending again depends on the strategy every RSU takes. While RSU 2 seems to focus more on research productivity, RSU 3 puts an emphasis on the mobility of students and staff. It was indicated earlier in this thesis that RSU 1 has had challenging times with frequent changes of leadership; it seems likely that this has had a negative impact on RSU 1's progress in both internationalisation and research activity levels.

Table 6.8. Share of the budget for internationalisation out of the main budget

Universities	Years					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
RSU 1	0%	0%	0%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
RSU 2	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%
RSU 3	1.8%	4.8%	5%	7.8%	5.3%	3.2%

Source: Compiled by Author from data provided by RSUs

The continuous devaluation of the national currency might be one of issues for decreasing of the internationalisation numbers in RSUs as the budget is calculated in Kazakhstan's tenge, while for recruiting international staff calculations are normally

made in US dollars. When inviting international lecturers, universities try to arrange as many different events as possible for staff and students in the short period of time foreign academic staff visit their universities.

The university invited staff from abroad from its own pocket. Since our budget is low, not always did they accept our invitation. Our resources are not enough, so we invite for some conference and try to cover as much as possible. For example, we invite one professor from abroad and try to engage him as many activities as possible while he is here. This is a problem in all the regional universities. You know, we have will but no possibilities.
(Interviewee D, RSU 1)

The number of permanently recruited international staff, however, is very low in all three RSUs.

At the moment we have very few foreign staff and they work at a distance as we cannot afford to have them full-time based at the university permanently. Out of 550, we only have 12 staff registered. There are lots of issues with recruiting international staff, first of all finance. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

This situation seems to differ from that in some private universities such as KIMEP and KBTU, created in the 2000s as an attempt to establish internationally recognised universities (Ruby, 2017) as these are non-state universities with higher budget and tuition fees per student.

6.2.5 Constraints and barriers for enhancing internationalisation

Almost all respondents agree that internationalisation in Kazakhstan is of level that leaves much to be desired. An interviewee from the MoES stated that this is related to several factors, such as geographical location, which is not attractive for international staff and students, the severe winter climate, the underdeveloped infrastructure of HEIs

such as laboratories and student dormitories, and low or limited knowledge of English throughout the HEIs and society. Another interviewee from the MoES pointed out that the fact that there are few opportunities for research in the country also plays its role in holding back internationalisation through attracting international researchers. He said that during their tour to some top universities in the US, before the opening of NU, a senior researcher at one of the top US universities asked what kind of research opportunities he would have if he agreed to work at NU.

One of the elements for successful internationalisation along with a well-constructed strategy is agreed to be a decent level of financial resources (Damme, 2001), which is quite scarce in the context of Kazakhstan's HE. It can be argued that more resourced institutions have more opportunities and a higher degree of internationalisation, both at home and abroad. At the same time, an international professional who was involved in internationalisation projects in Kazakhstan states that there are many ways Kazakhstan can gain a sustainable internationalisation level.

In terms of strong and sustainable internationalisation, I would advocate that the strongest model is when one university in Kazakhstan forms a partnership with another university in another country. And they exchange students, they exchange staff, they do research together, and there are many different ways of doing that. The strongest university partnerships that are perhaps start in a small way, and more people get to know them and join them, and they go deeper down the university, and more broadly across subject. (International respondent)

Nevertheless, there are many issues that are of concern for RSUs in terms of further improvement of internationalisation level. For example:

... limited access to databases, limited knowledge of the methods of international publications, language barrier though the university is

establishing English courses on a half-fee for staff to learn English.
(Interviewee A, RSU 1)

We know and research a lot ourselves too, but our weakness was in the low degree of mastering ICT which we have improved a lot now. The second weakness is the low knowledge of English, but there is also a huge amount of work done in this direction. (Interviewee A, RSU 3)

As indicated, the issue of limited knowledge of English and ICT is acknowledged as major factors in improving the internationalisation level of RSUs. Moreover, the level of resources seems to be creating a significant impediment to more efficient internationalisation in terms of sending more staff and students, inviting more international students and academics and publishing more articles in international journals. For now, RSUs seek involvement in projects and schemes that do not require large funding from their side. At the same time, not much success in attracting funding from overseas sources seems to have been achieved, except inter-governmentally agreed Tempus and Erasmus projects.

6.3 Policy internationalisation, promoting global/international practices and applicability of these in the RSUs' context

One of the ways of global diffusion into the local settings can be observed through policy convergence in the higher education systems. Adopting globalising models has been a widespread tendency for different national governments for the purpose of enhancing global competitiveness in the era of the knowledge economy (King, 2010). Governments' aspirations to create world-class' universities are also one example of policy internationalisation or model adoption (ibid).

The HE policy in Kazakhstan has been directed at developing education in accordance with world standards, improving its quality and integrating into the international scientific

and educational space (Omirbayev, 2015). The State Program for Education Development 2016-2019 defined the goal for HE as “achieving high degree of quality of education that meets the requirements of labour market, tasks of industrial and innovative development of the nation and personality and converging with the best global practices in HE” (SPED, 2016). However, there has been a sceptical attitude noted throughout the interviews towards the adoption of global/international models and standards in the national context. For example, below is a strong criticism of international practices as a force that ruins the national mindset.

You need to have your own national feature, and not take everything international, as we usually do. You know, like in the patchwork, when you gather little parts and try to make it holistic, one cannot expect it to be strong enough. Practices should be monolithic, built towards the needs and demands of local people. Of course, there are positive sides and good practices should be explored. However, foreign stuff destroys national mentality. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

One of the most significant and major standards that has been implemented in the country after Independence and is being considered by the government as a crucial step and achievement towards integration with the European Education Arena is the Bologna Process (MoES, 2010).

6.3.1 The ‘Evil of Bologna’

Almost every academic respondent expressed an unfavourable attitude towards the Bologna principles implemented in the national HE, with great agitation expressed towards a reform that has not been introduced thoughtfully.

Well actually, the word ‘standard’ seems to be like a box which means limited. Sometimes I doubt about world standards, because not always what has

been successful abroad can fit our reality. You cannot take one standard and just fit it into somewhere else. We have done a lot of such mistakes before. For example, the credit system (ECTS) that is an international standard has various models in various systems. The model that we chose and implemented has not been accepted totally positive in our system. (Interviewee D, RSU 2)

The major concern of the respondents was the abolition of the previous research degrees of *Candidate and Doctor of Sciences* that was established under the Soviet system and their awarding policy with the fully transition to Bachelor-Master-PhD cycle, while in Russia, for example, they have kept both systems.

For example, there is a big emphasis on PhD doctors, and in several years when there is no Doctor of Sciences left, who will be supervising PhD students? We should not have refused from the previous system of training of Candidate and Doctor of Sciences as did Kyrgystan and Russia when accepting Bologna system. We could have it run together. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

As per another respondent, policy makers should have been aware that implementing the Bologna Process did not mean fully copying its principles but adjusting and redesigning it in a local, interpretative way. One of the major issues in relation to how Bologna principles were accepted in Kazakhstan that was mentioned several times during interviews with academic staff in all three RSUs is found in procedures adopted towards training doctoral students in RSUs.

Since signing the Bologna Declaration, we have had various issues. For example, training PhD students is now only done in national universities; very few regional universities have this opportunity, but we don't, despite the availability of relevant academic staff and professors to prepare PhD students, since we have had several administrative issues along the application process. (Interviewee B, RSU 3)

Though the process of transferring to a new degree system seems to have been implemented despite considerable disagreement from the universities' staff throughout the country, some respondents expressed their support of the Bologna principles and the three-tier degree system.

Change to Bologna process was extremely painful; many staff were against of it. Lots of academic staff who were doing their Candidate or Doctorate study did not manage to have their vivas on time, thus did not get their degrees they had been working for years. But Bologna was a rational step, a step forward. We are developing, we have good Master's and PhD students, and this is good. (Interviewee A, RSU 3)

While it has been over eight years since the first Bologna Declaration was signed and Kazakhstan accepted its principles, overall it does not seem to be fully accepted in the academic society's mind and the attitude of the majority in the HE system in the country does not appear to be in favour of it.

6.3.2 Staff resistance to international trends in education

There was a concern expressed in some interviews that staff were not always ready for or keen on innovation and change. This was noted by senior administrative staff who believe that academic staff are sometimes pessimistic towards anything that changes their routine. This could be due to such factors as low motivation, low trust in the state support, the current state of the system and a sense of hopelessness that changes would bring any betterment as a result. Besides, a major issue that is being endured not only by RSUs but by the system overall is people's mindset (Yergebekov and Temirbekova, 2012). It was mentioned during several interviews in all three RSUs that they still encounter problems in staff understanding the importance and need for internationalisation and research.

The problem is in staff understanding; they just do not understand why we need publications in foreign journals when we are successfully doing it locally. This is often related to elderly staff. Yes, we know that there are quite high-status journals locally, but publishing in international journals is today's demand and we cannot ignore it. Besides, the degree of internationalisation considerably depends on international publications. (Interviewee E, RSU 1)

This is often experienced with elderly staff who were educated according to Soviet norms and values and are still committed to them. Due to their age, this category of staff has usually no or limited knowledge of English and faces great challenges in learning it for the purpose of either teaching their subject in English or publishing in international journals.

We are gradually implementing some international practices. A special emphasis is given to teaching in English. But we have elderly staff, Soviet-trained professors who experience difficulties. They don't always seem to be ready for such changes. We keep sending staff to various staff development courses and seminars. Some are very keen and are developing their levels, but I cannot say that we 100% teach in English. Younger staff do this with pleasure, but older staff are not keen for such changes. (Interviewee D, RSU 1)

There is still some resistance among a small percentage of both administrative and academic staff, which is I think is mainly because of little or no knowledge of foreign language. Quite often their attitude is built on the judgement that we are not worse than anyone else, that there is nothing to learn from them, and that this is a waste of time and money, a bit narrow outlook, you know. But fortunately, more and more staff have more contemporary views, especially younger generation staff, who learn new things, learn English. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

However, what all respondents agree on is that any globalising or international models and standards should not be merely copied, but adapted and adjusted to the local

contexts, which does not always seem to be the case. It needs to be considered at a policy-making level that what is effective in one country is not always feasible in another, and that many effective global 'western' policies have appeared from those countries' domestic concerns (King, 2010). Thus, any global policies and practices should be re-considered in relation to local needs and the effectiveness of the domestic issues at the time.

The possibility of one-size-fits-all was strongly criticised by one member of staff who thought that anything global is too vague and unclear, and there should be a focus on developing what is valuable for the Kazakh national identity.

The notion of global standards is so vague. Jvaneckii (a Russian writer and satirist) once said "let's move the country to global-level and world-class standards that no one has actually seen". Everything is different. Even Bologna in different European countries is delivered differently. Let's keep the best of our system. The problem is that we are too critical of local and not too much to international. There is no concrete universal; there should be diversity. Why should we want to throw away Kazakh nationalism? We should keep to ourselves what is significant and valuable to us. (Interviewee F, RSU 2)

Interestingly, people's and society's outlook and mindset were indicated as one of the important factors for implementing global practices in the local context.

Global practices, and not all of them but some of the separate ones, need to be constructed and reflected through the prism of society's consciousness, people's mindset. This needs time and so much effort. Even the regions within the country are different. For example, we have more similarities with Russia, but this does not mean that their practices would perfectly fit our system. (Interviewee A, RSU 3)

Generally, applicability of international practices in the regional context in the country seems to be related to and differs from region to region. For example, as stated below, those regions that are industrial have more potential and background to implement international practices of research and internationalisation due to huge plants and factories in comparison to some regions that have less to offer to the country's economic well-being.

Our region is a giving, a donor region, as a powerful industrial region, and, as such, it should have a powerful research university in the region that could work jointly with those industries, to do research and innovation, commercialising results, and with that contribute to the development of the region and the country. These practices are feasible if there is some background for that. We do have great minds, but they lack some skills and competence in English, for example. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

In summary, respondents understand that global/international practices are generally acceptable, if reasonably applied after careful consideration and adjustment within the national context. At the same time, more pessimism was observed in answers rather than support. It seemed that the majority of replies were based on previous less successful attempts of the government to implement some international practices in Kazakhstan's HE system, particularly in relation to introducing principles of the Bologna Declaration.

6.4 How 'Global Research University' is understood in the context of Kazakhstan

The term 'global research university' first appeared in President N. Nazarbayev's speech in 2006 that conveyed the idea of establishing a new university as an institution that would become a global-level research university in line with the goal of entering the 30 top economies in the world by 2050 (Nazarbayev, 2006). However, the analysis of other

policy documents in relation to HE has shown that the term 'global research university' has not been explicitly emphasised in them. The discourse of 'research university' which originated in policy documents is mainly discussed in the national context without direct naming GRU.

This might be the reason behind an indefinite understanding of the notion of 'global research university' or 'world-class university' among the respondents. Most of the respondents in all three parties, i.e. RSUs, NU and MoES, agree that the notion of GRU is a bit vague, and not easily describable. At the same time, several respondents expressed a somewhat idealistic view of a university that can be called global or world-class.

This is a university where students want to study, and researchers want to do their research; the university that has its own brand programs, star researchers, and is globally popular and competitive. (Interviewee G, RSU 1)

In my understanding, world-class university is definitely a research university with great infrastructure, concentration of scholars, attractive academic programs, diplomas that are accepted everywhere, has teams of bold professors who work with Master's and PhD students, internationalised and have huge funds. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

At the same time, a strong connection with collaboration and engagement with the wider educational society was reiterated as an important characteristic typical of a global level university.

Pragmatically, this university should have harmony of education and science. Secondly, it should have a research school with a clear science route. Thirdly, this university should have wide educational and research contacts, not to mention a high standard of equipment and resources, funds.

It should also be a centre of culture. It should also have good collaboration with other levels of education, i.e. everything should be balanced within one university. (Interviewee B, RSU 2)

Throughout the participants' answers, it has been noted that there are issues and concerns with regards to resources in the national HE system that respondents are sure an institution that claims to be GRU/WCU does not have.

Their staff should not have to worry about some routine or logistical, technical issues, social problems. (Interviewee D, RSU 3).

In fact, the lack of resources was quite frequently indicated by the majority of interviewees in all three RSUs as one of the utmost problems of the entire national HE system, especially in the HEIs in the regions of the country. It was even noted that sometimes there is deficit of printing paper. In relation to the context of Kazakhstan, interviewees expressed their feelings of doubt and scepticism as to whether there is a possibility or feasibility of achieving the standing of a global research university by any of the national HEIs. The reason for this is largely due to the scarce level of financial resources.

Naturally, the US that uses 60% of world's gross product can afford to fund their HE system; Kazakhstan does not have such level of revenues and gross product, to allocate huge funds into education, at least at the level of several universities, such as UCL, in Britain. The same situation is with Russia; the whole budget of Russia is equal to a budget or gross product of one Chinese province. This is not the government's fault. This is an issue of economic position. And our economic position does not allow competition even with the Central European states. That is why tasks should be adequate. (Interviewee C, RSU 3)

Along with the insufficiency of funds, there was an opinion that the HE system in its current form has very little potential for building a university that could become world-class.

I think Kazakhstan is not yet at the stage of development to have a WCU. It is too ambitious, we should be more realistic. As a conservative body, education cannot be radically changed in a short period of time. We need years before we can claim that we can also develop a WCU. There should at least be some background for reaching the level of current WCUs, but I can see none. There must be substantial allocation of funds into human capital, resources and infrastructure. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

Another major issue in relation to this was mentioned as the high level of corruption in the country and lack of competence of top managers who allocate and spend budget money inefficiently.

The state is undoubtedly trying to improve HE, but you know the level of corruption in Kazakhstan the larger part of allocated money does not reach destinations, and this is well known country-wise. Another issue is an ineffective spending of money; even when money reached the destination, they are not always effectively applied. For example, I saw occasions when funds were spent on doubtful projects. (Interviewee F, RSU 3)

In contrast, the governmental line somewhat differs from the RSUs' perception, and the MoES has a strong belief in the idea of a GRU in Kazakhstan.

Why not? We could not even think about independent Kazakhstan 25 years ago, but it is real; such projects like flying to the outer space, Internet or a cell phone were absurd some time ago. Of course, being a realist, but at the same time optimist, perhaps in some years, a GRU would become a real in Kazakhstan. (Interviewee A, MoES)

As the data suggest, in the understanding of RSU staff, Kazakhstan's HE system lacks the resources and background for promoting the development of a GRU. The current economic situation and ongoing national currency devaluation appears to be a difficult issue facing a research university that could be globally competitive. Still, even if there are sufficient resources available for it, respondents suppose that not many universities in the country have the potential to grow and be able to achieve global visibility, except, possibly, the two major universities KazNU and NU. For example, the state of research development and low level of internationalisation of the HE system in the country gives limited chances to regionally located public universities to achieve this level with the amount of funds they get from the government.

Conclusion

This analysis of data generated from interviews conducted in the RSUs and the MoES provides an analytical picture of how internationalisation and research has developed over the last five to six years and what the drivers are behind this development. It also depicts RSUs' staff perceptions of international standards and how they understand the notion of a global research university.

In general, despite some variations in all data sets in three RSUs, the data show that there is some degree of development in internationalisation and research throughout the three RSUs. It was conveyed by respondents that significant emphasis on research and internationalisation has been made on a governmental level over the last five to six years and, as a result, these have developed to some extent institutionally. Respondents understand and believe that the driver behind this initiative is to become competitive in the global educational arena in view of the national strategy to enter the top 30 competitive nations in the world.

As with many post-Soviet countries, internationalisation in Kazakhstan is a significant matter due to the country's unattractiveness because of its geopolitical, economic and cultural factors. Due to this, internationalisation activities are, generally, constructed around academic mobility of staff and students where outbound mobility dominates the inbound indicators. Many issues in developing internationalisation are related to insufficient funds and the low material base of HEIs. Furthermore, the low level of English knowledge and ICT were also noted throughout all interviews as a major hindrance towards the growth of internationalisation.

Considerable emphasis is placed on research in line with the national industrial and innovative development strategy—which puts stress on the integration of education, research and industry. Along with this policy, the commercialisation of research is prioritised with greater attention and funding given to applied rather than fundamental research. A grant funding allocation for research from the government and various other programmes that promote development of research has been noted by staff in the RSUs as a valuable step, and this has increased interest towards doing research amongst staff. However, there are issues with the research organisation in the country, such as the heavy emphasis on publications in international journals with an impact factor that pressurises staff, taking into account the high costs of publications and low salaries of academic staff nationwide. Insufficient efforts to attract the younger generation towards research as well as the low understanding of elderly or Soviet-trained academics to accept the need for internationalisation are also expressed as big challenges for institutional research development. With regards to 'Soviet' mind and beliefs, Fimyar and Kurakbayev's (2015) conclusion sounds relevant to what was expressed by interviewees in my case: "In the discourses of the national teachers and administrators, 'Soviet' is used as an imaginary quality standard, somewhat similar to a universal golden

standard, against which anticipated changes, for example the introduction of the new curriculum (which will reduce the number of contact hours in mathematics and sciences), are compared and fiercely opposed” (p.98).

In summary, since RSUs are public HEIs that report to MoES, their internationalisation and research practices go in line with the main state policies that require certain outcomes of internationalisation activities in the form of academic mobility of staff and students, and of research productivity in the form of non-zero international publications and commercialisation of research outcome. Despite some considerable progress in both practices as per numbers provided in this chapter, there are also salient issues and challenges that need to be addressed both nationally and institutionally for the better or more effective internationalisation in Kazakhstani HE system. But what is key here is that these policies and practices of RSUs are arranged in response to state policies and institutional strategies. There is very little collaboration on this matter between NU and RSUs though, as I argued previously, the government and universities could have focused on transmitting such practices in view of NU being a highly internationalised research university. For the present, it feels that strategies on experience sharing are more discourse-based than outcome-driven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Through interviewing academic and administrative staff in three RSUs, NU and the government, and by undertaking analysis of policy documents, I have attempted to understand the effects of the introduction of the new elite globalised university on the policies and practices of internationalisation and research in the three regional state universities in Kazakhstan. I proposed exploring the case of the introduction of NU as a policy measure and its anticipated effect on the public HE system by addressing the following four research questions:

1. How are regional state universities in Kazakhstan responding to the government's commitment to Nazarbayev University (NU)?
2. How do regional state university staff perceive the relationship between their university and NU?
3. How does NU perceive its role in the national HE system?
4. What is the government's role in integrating global practices of research and internationalisation at NU within the context of the regional state universities?

This chapter will discuss and attempt to give answers to the research questions in two broad perspectives in connection to the concepts I explored in the literature review and the data generated from the interviews and policy documents.

- Behind the differentiation policies, WCU policy logic and stratification caused by directive state policies

- Institutional cooperation aimed at capacity building for the national HE system with an emphasis on interplay between global, national and local forces and interaction between elite and mass HEIs in relation to internationalisation and research policies and practices

First, I will discuss the government's emphasis on differentiation of HEIs through interpreting the introduction of the new classification as well as the government's policy logic on building a WCU within the national HE system. Secondly, while addressing interrelations between NU as an elite globalised university and RSUs as mass local institutions, I will elaborate an interplay between global aspirations, national policies and local contexts. In particular, I will discuss how global, national and local forces are connected and what tensions exist between them, specifically in the context of establishing a WCU in Kazakhstan's national HE system. Finally, I will present a discussion on what is the effect of having an internationally oriented university in the national HE landscape on internationalisation and research policies and practices of public institutions and examine what the government's role is in this process.

7.1 Interpretation of the differentiation policies in Kazakhstan's HE and government's emphasis on NU

Research Question One: How are regional state universities in Kazakhstan responding to the government's commitment to Nazarbayev University (NU)?

And:

Research Question Three: How does NU perceive its role in the national HE system?

In this section I will attempt to answer Research Questions One and Three by focusing on how the new classification of HEIs can be interpreted and what it actually implies for

the national system, leading to the issue of the emphasis given to a WCU by the government and the differentiating effect of such accentuation. As argued in Chapter 2, such directive differentiating state policies lead to inevitable stratification of institutions which in Kazakhstan's case seem to have been reinforced with the establishment of NU as a differentiating and internationalising measure. Stratification in this context is largely caused by inequalities of resources allocated between the new elite institution and other mass public HE institutions, despite the policy rhetoric accentuating the need for research development in the whole university sector in the country.

7.1.1 Encapsulating 'Research University' within the national HE system through the new classification

Through analysis of interview data and policy documents it has been concluded that there is very little discussion about the new classification and procedures on how to categorise the HEIs. The new classification with defined criteria of different HEIs in the national HE system seems to be ceased as a point of referral as an official document. At this point, there is no explicit definition nor criteria for each category in any existing policy or legal documents that have replaced the officially approved classification with defined criteria of different HEIs. The only definition can be found for the 'Research University' category which is identified in Article 10 of the Law on Science 2011. Other HEIs that also fulfil research activity along with teaching are not specified in the categories but are only mentioned within the generic term of 'higher education institutions'. What seems clear is that the categorisation of HEIs that was first mentioned in the 2007 version of the Law on Education was not discussed or elaborated broadly at the policy level, with no specific criteria defined until 2015 when the then Minister of Education attempted to officially approve these criteria for defining different categories

of HEIs. With those official documents being approved and becoming void twice, it just looks like a formal attempt to legally describe different HEIs with the emphasis on 'Research' and 'National Research University' that were further emphasised as a new category of HEI in the Law on Science in 2011. Any other categories are, in fact, not specified in any other legal documents, except in the Law on Education 2007 where HEI categories are listed without specific definitions. Consequently, the aim of the government behind this classification can primarily be considered as a policy measure to encapsulate a research scope within the national HE system, but with no specific work or processes on the other categories like academia or institute, though specifics of these institutions might be legally stated in their statute.

Thus, what these findings tell us in terms of the differentiation story in Kazakhstan is largely based on two perspectives. Firstly, as most of the existing research in the field acknowledged the idea of diversity and differentiation based on the re-structuring of HE due to expansion and massification (Altbach, 2000; Meek et al, 200; Douglass, 2005), differentiation in Kazakhstan has also been dictated by the expansion of HE after Independence and by the growth of private providers. Secondly, what seems clear is that differentiation policies are largely dictated by a rhetoric of universal globalisation and the benefits of a knowledge economy (Dakka, 2015) and the global challenges faced by national systems (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009). The importance of research promoted by league tables is another drive behind national governments striving to create and support research universities (Hazelkorn, 2011; 2012). This largely explains the Kazakhstan government's emphasis on encapsulating the notion of the 'Research University' in policy documents, while it gives an impression of a de-jure differentiation from other categories of HEIs which exist only on paper. Moreover, it is not clear from the policy documents how research universities will be developed further from the

existing institutions. So far, there are two universities with research status: Satbayev University in Almaty, that was briefly discussed in Chapter 4 on Kazakhstan's HE background, and NU in Astana. In addition, no clarity was found in relation to what the government expects from the regional state universities. Are they anticipated to work in the same pattern or would they be encouraged to develop as research universities with more autonomy and funding provided, focused not only on regional needs but also in the areas that are at a national scale? These questions might be addressed in future research.

Along with the new classification, throughout this study the emphasis put on NU by the government as an elite research university established with its specific aims was addressed. Thus, the aim of Research Question One is to understand how other universities perceive this emphasis and role of NU in the national HE system that is reinforced by the government.

NU as an elite internationalised university dictated by the state policy as 'a tool for benchmarking' (Hazelkorn, 2012) seems to be presenting both hope and tensions to the rest of the system. On the one hand, NU as a national project is considered as a necessary step to integrate some of the best international practices within the national HE system. Such an internationalised research university is thought to create competition among universities and serve as a benchmark to aspire to in the national HE system. On the other hand, NU's level of resources and internationalisation was often criticised in view of less funding for the rest of the system. Regional universities feel disadvantaged while they represent the leading institution of their region and train the main body of the labour force for the region's needs. NU's leaning on international staff rather than seeking local talents was one of the criticisms conveyed. This, in fact,

is not a problem just for Kazakhstan; as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, such criticism prevails in many emerging economies (Cremonini et al, 2013). While there is an aspirational claim as to the role of a WCU in national HE, there is very little evidence internationally of such benefits, whereas there are risks of disintegration for the rest of the system (Hou et al, 2012). Moreover, the idea of funding a single university with the aim of improving the quality of the entire system was not much supported in view of the vast size of Kazakhstan, whereas developing a flagship institution in each region and providing them the level of funding similar to NU's was seen as a desirable alternative goal.

At the same time, the possibility of a GRU in the Kazakhstani context is accepted with more scepticism than enthusiasm due to several factors, the foremost of which is related to the core of GRU status – research. As conceptualised by many scholars, the nature of a GRU is constructed around cutting-edge research, technology and innovation with accompanying facilities and resources (Mohrman et al, 2008) as well as a significant global role and presence (Marginson, 2012). However, despite active mission-differentiating policies emphasising the idea of a 'Research University' in the system, the fact that Kazakhstan's HE was more oriented to teaching and specialist training in the past, rather than scientific research, means that the idea of having a GRU in the context of national HE in the country looks challenging. Thus, having previously had a limited research background is seen by RSUs to be the main impediment to achieving a global standing in university research. Moreover, other specifications articulated by scholars, such as high level of internationalisation, meritocracy, academic freedom and democratic governance (Altbach and Salmi, 2011), are also crucial for the development of a GRU, and all of this takes time and effort. However, out of all 130 universities in the country, hopes (albeit modest ones) are in place for two major institutions, KazNU and

Nazarbayev University, that are better resourced and equipped as well as having a higher concentration of researchers, to become globally competitive.

Though NU was clear about any positive changes in the system resulting from their activities in experience sharing, it expressed how challenging the mission is that it is expected to fulfil. With its priority being to become a sustainable university that does not depend only on state funds, NU has clearly stated its principal goal to become a world-class research university with the aim of establishing itself as a 'Harvard' of Central Asia. Though NU presents one of its contributions as a 'social lift' perspective for the younger generation, it leaves it to its stakeholders to determine NU's role in the national HE system and society more broadly.

With regards to presenting NU to the rest of the sector as a model, it has been reiterated that this could be expected to fuel competition between HEIs for resources and by this encourage other institutions to improve their standards. This has been discussed in the Literature review chapter as homogenisation as a result of imposed state policies (pp.64-69). Specifically, it was theorised how changes in the environment (at the macro policy level) affect dynamics within institutions (Frolich et al, 2013), as well as how organisations and their environment interact and influence each other, emphasising "the idea of mutual influencing" and how resources are crucial for the organisation's survival and effective functioning (van Vught, 1996, p.52). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the term 'institutional isomorphism', when institutions have to adjust to the presence of more successful institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), might serve as a basis for further understanding how institutions interact in the current policy imperative of presenting NU as a model. However, for this to happen, the study suggests that there should be similar environments and conditions across the HEIs, so that common

practices can be adopted. As suggested by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Diogo (2015), despite coercive attempts towards convergence of policies and practices within the national HE environment, differences in other factors, such as institutional and professional norms and values, need to be taken into account for the idea of presenting a more successful institution as a model and translating experience to occur. Thus, in the case of Kazakhstan, the task of translating NU's practices is somewhat complicated for RSUs due to very large differences in the conditions of their operation. While the government has taken steps to provide autonomy for public universities, other HEIs do not enjoy anything like the same level of resources and political support as does NU. Thus, the question is whether the requirement to translate NU's practices and present it as a benchmark to the rest of the sector is realistic.

This leads to the question of stratification of institutions in the national HE system as a result of supporting few institutions at the expense of other institutions which will also cover Research Question Three which is important to understand the standing of NU as a unique institution in the national HE context. NU's interpretation of its role in the national HE system also explains how the different type of HEIs interact.

7.1.2 Stratification as a result of differentiating and internationalising measures: flashlight or separator?

One of the major issues that differentiating HEIs by their mission and funding inevitably creates is vertical stratification between them. In fact, stratification in the HE literature is significantly referred to in the sense of social inequality of access to HE and participation in the labour market. In my study, I refer to stratification in the way the government treats different HEIs with the assumption that stratification in the Kazakhstani HE system seems to become reinforced with the establishment of NU causing mainly inequality of

resources. Similarly, Courtois (2017) states that stratification happens as a result of a state policy in order to encourage selected institutions to become internationally competent (p.299). However, this kind of stratification that is much related to the performance-based approach that many governments use in allocating funding to universities is criticised due to inequalities or the “institutional Matthew effect” that such an approach creates (Jeon and Kim, 2017). The debates are, in fact, mainly about the observation that stratification brings more inequality between institutions, making the gap between them even wider (Beerkens, 2013; Jongbloed and Lepori, 2015).

In Kazakhstan, stratification among HEIs is evident in relation to their geographical location. With the emphasis on research and the new categorisation of HEIs, as well as the setting up of NU, an argument can be constructed that stratification is moving towards a single university at one end and all the rest in the system at the other end. This kind of stratification of unequal opportunities and resources can also be depicted as one between elite and mass, between globally-oriented and locally-oriented institutions. The stratified approach of the state seems to be of much concern in the system, where the system is governed centrally and HEIs do not have a background of being institutionally autonomous.

Here, stratification caused by inequalities of resources raises the question of excellence versus equity, though it seems well grounded that governments should be predisposed towards excellence due to the global hegemony of competition and global positioning (Deem, Mok and Lukas, 2008; Ishikawa, 2009). However, there is also a danger of creating more marginalised institutions while the elites prosper (Halfmann and Leydesdorff, 2010). Such a scenario might be highly probable in the Kazakhstani case

where institutions located regionally already suffer from insufficient financial and human resources while being pressurised by various state performance-based requirements.

For the present, a high level of resources that is scarcely allocated to the rest of the system and political support for NU seem to be creating two polar views about NU in the HE sector. While one part accepts it as a benchmark or flashlight to follow, the other part is critical about its elitist system and highlighted importance for the national HE sector. According to this latter part, NU, like other elite educational institutions in the secondary school system, is available only to the selected few, and divides society. On this issue, Kehm's (2013) question "will concentration of research in a few universities while most of the others might evolve into teaching-only institutions also improve overall systems' performance?" (p.106) sounds very relevant to the case under study. In Kazakhstan's case it can possibly be further asked whether the pursuit of excellence at this state and stage of HE development is justified when putting already scarce resources into a single university could create a danger of marginalising already struggling regional universities. The two polar views of a separator and a flashlight, with the majority being sceptical of NU, will probably continue and it is too early to judge conclusively the success of NU in the modernisation of the HE system in the country.

7.2 Interplay between global aspirations, national policies and local context

Research Question Two: How do regional state university staff perceive the relationship between their university and NU?

Following the question of how diversifying HEIs in the country through the new classification and the government's emphasis on NU is interpreted by RSUs, Research Question Two is also concerned with the foundation of a 'global research university' in Kazakhstan's context. But, the fundamental aim of Research Question Two is to

understand the interrelations between NU, as an elite globalised university, and RSUs, as mass local institutions. As discussed in Chapter 2, the major concept this interrelation seeks to understand is the interplay between global, national and local forces as well as the interaction between different status institutions.

7.2.1 How global processes re-shaped the national HE system

First, I would like to interpret the policies directed towards developing research universities through the globalisation paradigm and neoliberal rationale that have precipitated the importance of knowledge for national innovative development. In fact, it can be argued that globalisation processes present much greater tension in young, unestablished, underdeveloped states with their complex and challenging nature. As such, neoliberal values of globalisation at the beginning of the 1990s had an immense impact on the then young Kazakhstan that had just obtained its independence from the Soviet command economy. Thus, the two major processes came together: on the one hand, establishing an independent state; and on the other hand, the challenges of globalisation and integration with the international community. The vision of the country's leadership has thus emphasised global challenges throughout the national strategies it proposed to the people since the Kazakhstan-2030 programme in 1997. While it prioritised establishing nationality and gaining recognition in the world, the latest Kazakhstan-2050 programme has greatly emphasised the strategy of sustaining its place in the global arena as a rightful member, contributing to global security (strategy2050.kz/en/). These efforts can be observed in the latest events of Kazakhstan's chairing of the UN's Security Council in January 2018 and mediating peace talks (e.g. between Ukraine and Russia in 2015 and between the Syrian government and the opposition in 2017).

Similarly, in higher education, with the acceptance of the neoliberal economic route, various attempted reforms aimed at forming the national HE system in the new reality and integrating it into the global education arena (Khairullina et al, 2016). Though economic values of neoliberalism, such as the introduction of a private HE sector and a fee-paid system, took wider prominence in higher education in the very initial period of independence, there were also concerns over preserving the quality and standards of an education system that was set up during the Soviet legacy while (re)forming the national education system in the country, as in many other former Soviet republics (Chapman et al, 2005).

One way to cope with the emerging global challenges as addressed by President Nazarbayev in this strategy is the national education, science, and innovation system where he states that "to become a developed and competitive country, we should first become a highly-educated nation" (Nazarbayev, 2012). It is in this document that the universities were called upon to develop research functions for conducting applied scientific research in addition to modernising their curricula and teaching methods.

We can fully participate in large-scale international research projects. This will enable us to integrate the efforts of our scientists with the foreign research community in strategic innovation areas. Our goal is to become part of the global technological revolution. (Nazarbayev, 2012)

At the same time, with the widely acknowledged concept of the value of universities and their research activity, in the national perspective, with the establishment of an institution like NU, the government is placing high expectations on it to improve the quality of the entire HE system that had been allowed to run its course after Independence.

So, Kazakhstan has sought to have research universities for the dual reason of entering the global arena and have an effective national HE system (Beall, 2016; Marginson,

2011). Effectiveness in relation to the local context as per state documents is presented as “increasing the competitiveness of national education, developing human capital, and providing quality education for the sustainable growth of the national economy” (SPED, 2015). At the same time, the policy documents’ discourse is not too promotive of global ideas, but mindfully constructed from the perspective of national well-being. Any reference to global standards or challenges seems to be implying the development of national systems for national benefit.

7.2.2 ‘Glonacal’ – interpreting connections and tensions between global, national and local within Kazakhstan’s HE context

When applying Marginson and Rhoades’s (2002) glonacal heuristic in this study, the two perspectives were constantly intertwined. One is interpreting the question through the lens of NU as an institution that has been established by the national government with a high presence of internationalised elements in its operation, considered to reach global visibility and tasked to have an effect on local universities. For example, analysing WCUs in China through the lenses of the glonacal heuristic, Kim et al’s (2018) research is carried out within the context of the universities that are in the WCU project. There, they argue that global and local interact in a complex way, providing the basis for glocalisation, i.e. “global with local characteristics” (p.94). In my study, there was a strong attitude of the majority of respondents to the NU as a ‘not-yet-global’ university but more as an elite inter/national institution. Though there were criticisms of the wide use of rankings, NU’s absence from league tables was one of the key issues for RSU staff’s refusal to accept it as a global WCU. As such, NU is not yet considered as a WCU, but is more seen as a nationalised project that could possibly be of benefit in terms of its human resource capacity for the country in the future.

A second perspective is obtained by discussing the questions under study through the glonacal framework in a system-wise perspective. From this systemic point of view, it is relevant to interpret glonacal as a globalising policy of local actors within the national scale or for the national benefit. Marginson and Rhodes (2002) pointed out that “we see universities as increasingly global actors, extending their influence internationally. They are globally, nationally, and locally implicated” (p.288).

However, an issue I would like to emphasise here is that the interplay between global, national and local forces within the system might depend on the extent to which the system itself is integrated with or exposed to global processes. Kim et al (2018) refer to building WCU itself as globalisation in a non-Western country’s context where they explore how building WCUs is rendered in the national and local settings. Considering China’s position in the global arena, the scale of its policies and duration of the WCU projects directed to building capacity and advancing its higher education, global and local forces, to my mind, have a different effect than in Kazakhstan where the scale is far less than the active Chinese efforts. Thus, institutions in Kazakhstan are locally and nationally embedded rather than globally active, at least for the present.

Regional universities were originally established as per specification of each region and are tailored as per the region’s needs. Thus, regional universities obviously are more locally oriented. At the same time, another feature drawn from the RSUs’ data is that there is a strong national idea along with a regional focus. This could be explained by the strong competition between local universities in the country, be it national or regional as per the typology used in the country. With the active promotion of quality assurance and a national rankings system in Kazakhstan since 2008 (nkaoko.kz), HEIs are striving to enhance their competitiveness which is taken into consideration when allocating state

funds per student. National rankings seem to be becoming more and more popular among the population who predominantly value obtaining HE qualifications in the country.

Hence, when discussing the questions of global standards and practices being introduced in the national HE system, a twofold message has been concluded. One is that good practices from around the world should undoubtedly be explored and learned from. However, secondly, what was conveyed throughout the interviews is a degree of criticism about borrowing from other countries; what is favoured is rather accentuating the national and local specification of the HE system and the country. Consequently, at this stage of Kazakhstan's HE development, there is limited glocal symbiosis, as per Francois's (2015) framework within regional universities with a less active global dimension and more dominant local foci. Similarly, within the national HE context, interactions and intersections between global and local forces, as per Marginson and Rhodes' (2002) framework, cannot be observed as something manifest.

As for the inter-institutional interrelations between RSUs and NU, for now, there is very little collaboration in place. Apart from single recruitment visits from NU and public universities' top management training conducted by NU and international partners on autonomy, there do not seem to be other collaborative activities in place. With respect to this study's focus on policies and practices of internationalisation and research, both parties have confirmed that there are very few projects that have been and/or are being done due to personal connection between staff.

While internationalisation has been identified as something that can be done as an institutional initiative and governmental policy, the will to collaborate in joint research and research projects was clearly conveyed and hoped for by RSUs. At the same time,

RSUs have not concealed their regret that the high expectations of NU have not yet come to life; further regret to describe NU as isolated from the system was even suggested by one of the respondents who felt that NU might not be interested in real problems in the field of regions and regional universities as NU is perceived to be aimed at elites.

A major hindrance for more effective cooperation between institutions is caused by differences in legal, organisational and financial statutes of NU as an elite autonomous university and RSUs as mass public universities. NU enjoys greater political and financial support from the government, while not directly reporting to the MoES, whereas RSUs are tightly regulated by the central governmental body and can only operate under approved MoES state standards. Although by the time of data collection there were efforts in place to grant public universities some degree of institutional autonomy and a number of them have already been changing their governing structure, public universities have not yet fully provided for themselves, let alone accepted the concept of autonomy.

In the understanding of local RSUs, internationalisation and international activities are highly dependent on the level of resources, and on the understanding and mindset of human agency. Even with sufficient resources, enhancing internationalisation and research with more international publications is thought to be dependent on staff attitudes to international, usually novel to local context, practices. This was more conveyed by interviewees in relation to elderly academic staff. Thus, with more policies on increasing the attractiveness of research among the younger generation who are thought to be more exposed to internationalisation and knowledge of English due to emphasis on trilingual education at schools, implementing international practices and

improving the level of internationalisation could potentially progress even more significantly.

Thus, despite the government's efforts to increase the global exposure of the national system, the interplay between global, national and local forces in a country-wide or systemic context is not yet quite explicitly observable at this stage of HE development. However, with more autonomy provided to HEIs as per NU's experience, which is perceived to give more freedom to HEIs in relation to their academic governance and financial operation, universities are expected to extend their entrepreneurial and research activities, react in a timely fashion to changes in local and global markets, as well as prepare graduates with competitive skills in the context of the new economy (MoES, 2018). As autonomy is also perceived to enhance competition between universities, with state requirements to increase research activity with international publications, this could expose universities to more global collaboration where NU could become a significant 'flashlight' for the rest. At the moment, it is rather early and somewhat unclear how differently organised and managed institutions could possibly collaborate in this way where procedures and mechanisms for interaction between NU and RSUs are yet to be established.

So, while there is this effort and grand national plans, at this stage the extent of interaction is limited due to several factors and issues. The major one is that NU and RSUs function in two different systems, with different background and resources, principles of work and mission, which makes it more than a little challenging for all three parties – state, NU and RSUs – to effectively construct procedures for the one shared goal of advancing the HE system in Kazakhstan. Though the intention seems reasonable, scepticism prevails as to whether one university can have any effect on the

system overall. Thus, despite the theories that suggest the institutional paradox of homogeneity between more and less successful institutions, collaboration is dependent on how similar or different organisationally institutions are (Coombe, 2015). Additionally, a macro-level governance system that sets out a clear strategy and procedures of translating the experience, in Kazakhstan's case, seems also to be important (ibid).

7.2.3 The OECD as a global player and its role in the national policies

Another nuance in relation to the glonacal framework, emphasised by Marginson and Rhoades (2002), is an active, though not overwhelming, role of international organisations, such as the World Bank, OECD and others, which influence how national governments frame their policies through setting up benchmarks for achieving a knowledge economy.

Having a goal of integrating with the global arena and becoming one of the top 30 most competitive countries in the world, Kazakhstan has a strong reference to OECD countries' indicators as benchmarks to achieve in many sectors of the social, economic and political life of the country. Besides, the importance of implementing a number of OECD standards and principles in the country has been pointed out by President Nazarbayev in the Kazakhstan-2050 strategy (strategy2050.kz/en, nd.). This is principally followed in the education sector (Science Committee, 2017). As a result, OECD has carried out two reviews of national policies of HE in Kazakhstan. The first was done in 2007, which was continuously referred to by respondents during both interviews at the MoES with the strong justification of policies in relation to recommendations made by the OECD Review (Interviews A and B, MoES).

The second review, more relevant to this study, was published when the data collection was taking place for this thesis in July 2017. This review analysed and discussed the

current state of the HE system in six areas with recommendations for improvement. The areas covered are quality, access and equity, internationalisation, integration of education, research and industry, financing and governance in HE. Though this was a generic review, OECD addressed several issues that are of relevance to the topic under study, NU's experience of sharing with the rest of the system in particular.

The overall tenor of the review in relation to NU indicates strong scepticism from OECD as to whether "this excellence can be shared in a way that benefits the entire system of higher education" (p.21). Concerns OECD expressed are related to the lion's share of the budget that is consumed by NU, which in their view "carries substantial risks" considering the low level of the state budget allocated to the HE that is reduced by costs directed for supporting NU (OECD, 2017, p.21).

For its part, Nazarbayev University is clearly too expensive to be a scalable model for other universities in Kazakhstan. Moreover, given the limitations on the current public education budget, the university generates significant opportunity costs for the rest of the system. (OECD, 2017, p.250)

And:

... while it is widely hoped that the contributions of Nazarbayev University will significantly benefit the entire educational system, it is also clearly acknowledged that its financial model cannot be replicated in other places. (OECD, 2017, p.249)

Along with this, the OECD is not clear whether "developing this university will successfully benefit other universities in ways that are financially feasible" (p.250) Stating this, the OECD recommends that any further resources "should be focused on improving the general quality of the entire system" (p.21). Appreciating a strong reference of the MoES to OECD recommendations in HE, it would be interesting to examine further if and how the sceptical attitude of the OECD towards the emphasis on

NU for national HE development is manifested in future national HE policies in Kazakhstan. This could be another aspect I would be interested to examine in my future research.

7.3 What, if any, is the effect of having the internationally oriented university in the national HE landscape on internationalisation and research policies and practices?

Research Question Four: What is the government's role in integrating global practices of research and internationalisation at NU within the context of the regional state universities?

The data suggest that there are substantial issues with internationalisation and research at RSUs which can be projected as a case in the public HE system overall. It seems that these issues should be addressed and dealt with in a comprehensive way at a national level in the way the government is, in fact, trying to do. The major issues are the low or limited knowledge of English across the board in the HE system, apart from a handful of internationally established and oriented private institutions, such as KIMEP, KBTU, Suleiman Demirel University and some other private universities. Though there seem to be various other problems, the key one is perceived to be the insufficiency of financial resources that are required for conducting internationalisation activities more in terms of the number and in effectiveness.

However, institutionally, understanding and support for staff for more active involvement in and enhancing internationalisation seem occasionally to impede the process. While at times this is related to the age and Soviet legacy of academic staff, more often it is related to the rejection of the idea that everything global or international is better than national. As such, a pervasive criticism of an indiscriminately favourable attitude to

international practices at the level of policy makers was perceived in the interviews at the regional universities. This was predominantly related to the inappropriateness of the principles of the Bologna Process in the HE system that was held to be well founded within the Soviet legacy system.

Moreover, Kazakhstan's geographical location is seen as a considerable disadvantage for enhancing internationalisation in the mode in which it has developed in the Western and South-East Asia regions. For instance, with low attractiveness of Kazakhstani HEIs for international staff and students, there seems to be less hope for increasing inbound mobility. Moreover, the knowledge and speaking of English is not ubiquitous, not only in the HE sector but in the country overall, which makes Kazakhstan less attractive for English-speaking staff and students from overseas. However, Kazakhstan is potentially of interest for Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and others, for Kazakh nationals who reside in China and Mongolia, as well as for Indian and Pakistani nationals for medical education. The government is aware of this and has been working in this direction with active promotion of Kazakhstani HE by organising Education Fairs in the last couple of years (Interviewee F, RSU 3).

In turn, according to MoES statistics, outbound mobility is increasing dynamically, and more and more students go abroad for HE. As the Centre for International Education website indicates, the number of international scholarships and grants for school graduates has increased in the last couple of years (bolashak.gov.kz). For example, China provided 14,000 scholarships for Kazakhstani students, while 67,000 Kazakhstani students study in Russia with local scholarships there (tengrinews.kz, July 2018). This clearly indicates that Kazakhstan is intensively involved in globalising processes.

However, for increasing the level of internationalisation, activities other than academic mobility should be accentuated even more. For example, Kazakhstan's HE could focus more on international cooperation in research and, by this, improve its research capacity too. The core national strategic document to date, 'Kazakhstan-2050', defining the pathway for the national development to be in the 30 most competitive countries in the world and the basis for policies in many key areas, could be taken as a starting point for internationalisation development in Kazakhstan. As an international respondent rightly emphasised during his interview, for the country to feature in the top 30 economically competitive nations in the world, there needs to be much more trade and much more connection between Kazakhstan and the rest of the world. Within this strategy, there might be greater opportunities for HEIs to have more collaboration with other institutions overseas. However, institutions should concentrate on the quality of that cooperation and not the quantity, as matters stand currently, since sustainable collaboration more often starts between departments and schools of institutions, potentially further engaging the whole institution. As data confirmed, recent progress has very much to do with purposeful state policies. So, greater governmental support and targeted policies would potentially help here too.

Quite often, respondents' scepticism regarding translating NU's practices were based on their preconceived opinion of the absolute necessity of financial resources required for implementing international standards and practices, whereas there was felt to be insufficient level of public spending on the rest of the 'ordinary' public HEIs in the country. This might sound reasonable, considering the cost of inviting international staff, recruiting international students, purchasing modern laboratory equipment and generating publications in international journals. However, a recent working paper of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the Institute of Education states that the level of

funding does not correlate much with how universities are positioned in international league tables (Usher and Ramos, 2018). Looking at total expenditure per student in nine countries whose universities are represented in the top 200 Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the authors found that over the last 10 years spending per student in ARWU and non-ARWU universities was not very different and the growth of per student funding was roughly at an equal level across the board with periodic rises and falls in student expenditure. It should be noted that this conclusion was not the case in Germany and Switzerland where there has been and continues to be a significant gap between ARWU and non-ARWU institutional indicators. Another major question the authors try to answer is whether the level of funding improves the research output. Their comparative analysis suggested that these two are not correlated and that increased funding does not imply improvement in publication rates or the impact of those publications (ibid, p.22). Moreover, some institutions that have had a decline in per student expenditure have shown an increase in publications. This was the case with ranking positions too: more funding did not automatically result in an improvement in rankings position. Thus, they concluded that attention should be paid to the way finances are spent and institutions managed.

Translating the research and internationalisation practices of NU is probably seen as difficult to accomplish, since both indicators are low, and major state policies are required for both of these to be developed. Moreover, the research culture in the country should be transformed according to international standards with core elements such as transparency, ethics, freedom, independence, and anti-plagiarism implemented if the government wants to have international level research in Kazakhstan. These questions were also raised in an open letter to the President, Parliament and the Government of Kazakhstan prepared by the Kazakh doctoral students Association in the UK, of which I

am a member. This letter was sent through the Embassy of Kazakhstan in the UK to the President's Administration and Prime-Minister's Office in July 2018 with a reply received from the President's Administration to indicate that the initiatives of the PhD Association in the UK will be fully supported and any required assistance provided. This indication of support for young researchers from the management of the country is an important sign for the future of research in Kazakhstan.

Altogether, policies like the ones directed to introducing institutional autonomy in national HEIs, as is the case for NU, seem to be taking place system-wise with greater emphasis and focus from the state, involving required legal changes being made for the successful application. However, it should also be considered that NU did not gain its autonomy to present it as something for others to learn, but it is something that was provided by the government. Moreover, workshops and training session were provided by an external foreign agency recruited by NU as per the MoES's request and conducted at NU locally and other NU's partners' campuses abroad. So, basically, autonomy principles were taught theoretically at NU with practical examples of universities abroad. At the moment, there are still issues to be addressed and things to learn both for the universities and the Ministry. The general message conveyed during the interviews is that the system and institutions themselves are not fully prepared to be fully autonomous from the state, though the opposite criticism of less autonomy provided was discussed too.

Understandably, not every university will become internationally recognised for a number of reasons, especially in Kazakhstan. However, RSUs' claim that provision of better resources is linked to higher performance might make sense. Better funding might at least give more potential and ambitiousness through challenging their strategies and

achieving results that could lead to better standing, more importantly nationally and consequently internationally. With the current level and time and resources required, perhaps it is rational to focus on collaboration with the same developing HE systems with the medium of English, possibly with neighbouring China. As one respondent said, “with emphasised importance of league tables, everyone wants to collaborate with universities in the top 200, while universities in the top 200 want to have partnership with universities in the top 200 only”. As one of the main issues seems to be the lack of or limited competence in English, especially of older and Soviet-trained academic staff, a solution to this would be attracting more young researchers and promoting the value of research, starting from high schools with further emphasis during undergraduate study. As for now, there is fairly good progress in terms of involving graduate students in Master’s degree programmes in various research projects which is also a state requirement when applying for a research grant.

In any case, for such practices typical of globally-oriented institutions like NU, such as internationalisation and research, to be translated to the rest of the sector, state-coordinated actions would potentially bring more efficiency, especially in centrally-governed education systems where institutional autonomy has yet to come to fruition.

Since Kazakhstan’s HE is a centrally governed body, the government’s role was perceived as pivotal for integration of any policies and practices that are expected to run across the board. This is especially emphasised by RSUs within the framework of NU’s mission of reforming the entire HE sector and translating its experience to other institutions. With regards to reforms at the early stage of education system establishment in Kazakhstan, Kuzhabekova et al (2017) states that when suggesting policies, “the government’s role was often limited to setting the agenda, assigning

responsibilities, and determining the deadlines” (p.354), with more practical implementation left to educational organisation itself. Though this might be understandable at the developing period after Independence, it looks that the government holds the same vision and leaves it for universities to coordinate the procedure among themselves. The MoES justifies this approach in line with OECD recommendations to lessen interference with institutions and loosen regulations. This might be reasonable provided that HE institutions had longer experience of operating autonomously. With new legal changes approved for granting institutional autonomy to public universities, it would be interesting to explore if things will change.

Though there is some significant progress in internationalisation and research throughout the system, there are still many issues that need attention and more focused state policies. While in internationalisation these are related to inbound mobility numbers of international students and staff and low knowledge of English, in research this is more to do with the predominant emphasis on applied research and commercialisation as well as the overwhelming pressure to publish in international, high-impact journals. What is concerning is the overall picture in the HE and science system in the country where the value of fundamental research is decreasing as it takes more time, there is no direct revenue from it and it is not easily applicable from the economic point of view. At the same time, it appears that applied research is not completely established, and much research that is topical and popular in the world might not be of interest and applicability for Kazakhstan. Hence, a conclusion derived from interviews manifests that a sole emphasis on applied scientific research and commercialisation is not particularly helpful and might not be beneficial in improving the value and culture of research overall in the national education and science system.

In conclusion, based on the data interpreted through a number of lenses, it can be concluded that while some findings in relation to differentiation and stratification within the national HE system in Kazakhstan can be understood with reference to the literature explored in Chapter 2 of this thesis, some were of a specifically contextual nature, opening up further perspectives and at times challenging existing understandings. As such, while organisational institutionalism proposed to understand interrelations between institutions posits that organisations are likely to adopt similar practices and perspectives, i.e. to be 'isomorphic' with others in the same field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; van Vught, 1996), the findings presented here suggest that interactions between the elite globalised and mass local institutions and the state in the case of Kazakhstan seem to be complex and unestablished due to differences in organisational and legal character as well as cultural and professional norms and values (cf. Diogo et al, 2015).

Furthermore, the interplay between the global, national and local is based on both connections and tensions between these forces in contrast to the theoretical approaches that propose symbiosis (Francois, 2015) and dynamic mutual and collaborative interaction (Margionson & Rhoades, 2002). I have suggested that the Soviet legacy in Kazakhstan and the insufficiently internationalised level of its higher education system might explain existing tensions and limited dynamics of mutual interplay between global and local forces. At the same time, the two approaches have contributed towards understanding the case under study, suggesting new perspectives to be explored in future research.

CONCLUSION

Can an elite globalised university build capacity for the national HE system?

In a centralised governance system, for the WCU project to work effectively for the sake of improving the system quality, there should be a clear joint vision and understanding among all the actors in the system, on the principles, mechanisms and processes by which the work should be undertaken. At the moment in Kazakhstan, there is RSUs' will for cooperation, the government's vision of NU as a model for HE reform and NU's understanding of this 'challenging task', but there is little mutual effort in place for one common goal from all three involved parties – the government, NU and RSUs. In addition, while understanding that reforming the HE system is one of its main strategic goals, NU believes that overseeing the process of sharing experience is not its responsibility, and that it should be the government which brings things together. The same attitude has been observed at the RSUs, where they expect the government to arrange mechanisms and procedures for the RSUs to follow. Along with that, the different status of NU as an autonomous organisation of education, and its consequent non-accountability to the MoES, and RSUs being under the regulation of the MoES makes the process both clumsy and operationally challenging. DiMaggio and Powel (1983) state that "strategies that are rational for individual organisations may not be rational if adopted by large numbers" (p.148). However, as they suggest, strategies that are normatively accepted have a higher level of being accepted and implemented. Hence, a holistic approach when pursuing such a nationwide strategy of modernising the HE system could be effective in a broader context of the HE system in the country.

At the moment, neither outcomes nor the timescale of when they are to be reached is clear as well as felt by the researcher that the entire strategy is too enthusiastic and

challenging to be achieved at the current state of things in the national HE system. This leads to the idea that the strategy sounds more like a discourse of intent than something which can realistically be achieved with clear mileposts. There are different stories that RSUs and NU convey about their interactions to date, though the latter confirmed that interaction with RSUs has not yet been put in place in full. Any current arrangements were said to be lacking a systematic nature, though more activities were claimed to be in the process of being set up. Thus, NU's effect might be more locally observable within Astana through various indicators such as graduates and cooperation with local institutions and enterprises, but for now very few seem to be expressed at the national scale. At the same time, there is no agreed or established understanding of how transfer is to be evaluated. When the policy makers have come with the idea of translating NU's experience, they seem to have missed the practical part of it. NU itself was established as per practices overseas, mainly copying US model of a research university; however, it should be noted that the US system is unique and perhaps only works in the US context.

However, with both sides having a strong desire to cooperate, I think there should be thoroughly constructed and systematic efforts from the government for the achievement of the task of reforming and modernising the HE system with the help of NU. This conclusion drawn from the data I collected echoes with the OECD's latest summary of the policies behind NU as a model for the rest of the HE system.

Furthermore, the OECD review team had trouble identifying concrete instances of how the Nazarbayev University model has been used to make substantial improvements at other universities in Kazakhstan. This calls into question whether the significant investments that are being made in the new university are generating the benefits that might be expected of them. (OECD, 2017, p.249)

This is consonant with my argument that RSUs should be given more attention and resources as well, to increase their ability to transfer some best practices of NU as well as for elevating the quality of the national HE system. At this point, another question arises of the availability of resources and the government's further policies on generating more funds for the entire system to benefit and work towards the national goals.

Nevertheless, as one of the interviewees mentioned, in countries with vast territories like Kazakhstan, it is quite doubtful that one university can have a significant effect on the entire system. Even with the greatest support NU might receive from the government, provided that continues or NU becomes sustainable enough to reach a global level, respondents feel that having one GRU is not enough and, for the national HE system to become effective, much more attention should be given throughout the system to regional public HEIs. A regionally-specific focus pulling together the strongest universities in each region with an emphasis on the region's specification could possibly improve the quality of both teaching and research in the entire system.

Discourse, not effect?

The use of the terms 'world-class' and 'excellence' in HE policy discourse was originally fuelled by the aspirational and ambitious wills of nation states. During the five interviews conducted at NU, I could not trace any explicit expression from interviewed staff as to whether this strategy is at all possible or whether NU will focus on its development only. It was clearly stated that its aim is to become a sustainable university which in a way implies that it will be focused on its own development as global recognition is not easily achieved. Moreover, as one of the interviewees stated, "as a conservative body, education cannot be radically changed in a short period of time" (Interviewee F, RSU 3), which can also be applied to NU as a project.

So, the question is to what extent the emphasis on a new university that has not yet become sustainable itself as a model for HE system reform, be it optimistic and aspirational, is realistic and achievable in the current Kazakhstani HE realities. Perhaps it would be more reasonable to just focus on its establishment as an international research university, as for now it seems that NU is being thrice-challenged simultaneously: to become sustainable, to become a global research university and to reform the national HE system. This aspirational rhetoric could also imply government's efforts to justify the level of funding being allocated to one university while there are various serious issues that should be addressed in the entire system, especially in state universities in the regions that constitute the bulk of HE in the country. The whole discourse around creating and maintaining NU sounds more like aspirational optimism. Or perhaps the discourse should be made explicit: planning first to achieve some international standing and then disseminating its experience and sharing it with other public universities. In any event, the government does not indicate explicit timelines for achieving the goal set for NU and the rest of the sector, which makes the strategy sound more of a rhetoric than a realistic outcome. However, this kind of discourse seems quite natural for the country where many strategies and national policies are of a similar nature.

Kazakhstan's strategy to have an elite university that would become a world-class research university and reform the entire HE system in the country appears to be challenging indeed for a single university that is in its very early stage of establishment and thus still transitioning to become a full-fledged university. Carrying out such a massive ambitious task might work in a more collaborative and efficient way provided a group of universities would be involved which would have the same privileges and resources and work towards the same goal. There has been a criticism of supporting

just one university within the system among the majority of the RSUs' respondents in light of the state of HE which leaves much to be desired. Such criticism has also been traced in the literature, the main idea of which is the possibility of creating inequalities and widening the gap between selected and other mass institutions by concentrating resources in few selected institutions (Cremonini et al, 2014; Kehm, 2014). This, in turn, fuels stratification between universities, causing a winner-takes-it-all situation where peripheral institutions that get fewer resources lag behind in their development. Stratification itself might not be unfavourable in established systems, where markets and competition are stronger, such as in the US, Japan and other dominant nation states. However, this study argues that stratification in centrally governed, unestablished systems like in Kazakhstan might work differently with quite different effects and outcomes that would not be beneficial for the system. Even in Southeast Asian countries that are more advanced than Kazakhstan, there is a danger of unbalanced development of the HE system where the governments have made an increased emphasis on having at least one world-class university at the expense of the whole HE system development. The key message that international scholars are conveying is the rationality of "balancing development effectively so that the whole system improves" (Marginson, 2018). Moreover, other groups of scholars recommend taking local needs as much into account as global aims and paying attention to distributing knowledge to local users for the national well-being (Wagner, 2018). Here, priority should be given to system benefits rather than preference given to developing a single institution while the rest suffers from the lack of sufficient resources.

To some extent, Kazakhstan is trying to address the problems in its education system through extensive reforms at all levels of education: in the school system through an NIS project in charge of curriculum change in schools; in the technical and vocational

system through the national holding Kasipkor responsible for facilitating integrated development and improvement of technical and vocational education (http://kasipkor.kz/?page_id=361&lang=en); and in HE through NU tasked to modernise the entire HE system and bring it up to international standards. However, in comparison with HE, in schools and vocational education, there is some kind of integrated system put in place for the more effective attainment of objectives and goals. For instance, there is a chain of NIS schools in every region working with local schools and some kind of holistic approach can also be observed in technical and vocational education too where Holding Kasipkor establishes specific programmes in different colleges throughout the country. In HE, NU is one institution that is being singled out to become a WCU with expectations to roll its experience out to the entire system. Considering how much national budget share it consumes, the task of building capacity for the national HE sounds reasonable. However, the question arises whether one university will have such a capacity itself to fulfil the ambitious aspirations of the government and national policy makers. In any event, with the current situation where NU seems to be more focused on its own development, which is reasonable, and with the general perception of it standing isolated from the rest of the system, the effect might not be as significant as the government claims and expects. So, would it be more rational to focus on a whole-system approach in the HE system rather than on one WCU-to-be institution?

Recommendations

In this section, I outline some recommendations for policy makers on the basis of the empirical evidence gathered during this research. These are mainly system-level recommendations due to the major question asked: can an elite globalised university build capacity for national HE?

One, the most obvious, recommendation that was reiterated throughout this thesis is based on the lack of coherence in the procedures and mechanisms for bringing the strategies into effect. Though there are clear goals and aspirations, there is very little understanding of how things would work in practice. This creates some kind of lack of shared understanding between parties involved where each side pushes the responsibility further from itself. When there are clear guidelines, procedures and mechanisms, there will be better vision of the desired outcome. Hence, rather than focusing only on 'what' should be done, all parties should also collaboratively work towards 'how' things should be done.

However, from a broader perspective, with no intention of criticising the idea of having a WCU in the country, there are two issues of concern here. One is the strategy itself which sounds too ambitious, and the second is the scantiness of available resources in all senses in the entire system. With regards to both accounts, it was questioned throughout the thesis whether Kazakhstan has a background and capacity for having such an expensive project in the HE system where the public spending share is only 0.5% of GDP. It is clear that the large proportion of what is allocated to NU is done at the expense of other public institutions, depriving already less advantaged HEIs in the regions of the country. As discussed earlier in Chapter 7, this kind of stratification does not bring any benefit to emerging systems.

It seems more reasonable for Kazakhstan, given that it has a low ranking in innovation and knowledge production in the world, to employ a more holistic approach to its HE and research system where a leading and promising institution in each region is supported and funded forming a potential group of research universities in the country, especially when the majority of regions are industrially active. Hence, if aspirations are

more realistic based on the realities of Kazakhstan, they might entail less scepticism and more optimism towards a positive future of the HE system.

As a final remark, on 5 October 2018, in his annual address to the people of Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev suggested that there is a need “on the basis of the existing educational infrastructure to create a new regional university, following the example of Nazarbayev University” (Nazarbayev, 2018). President Nazarbayev also stated that the government should concentrate on the consolidation of existing universities, leaving only HEIs with high potential to improve the quality of HE. A key element in this suggestion is that this new university will be regionally located. Considering what was discussed throughout this thesis, what is suggested by the country leadership might serve as a starting point towards focusing on university education potential in the regional sense and a reasonable foundation for further improvement of HE and university research system in Kazakhstan.

Significance of the study and contribution to the knowledge

The significance of this research can be outlined at theoretical, empirical, and policy levels in the following ways.

At the theoretical level, perhaps the key contribution is the development of an understanding of stratification of HEIs through the relationship of elite research universities and mass regional universities. By the discussion of different approaches and lenses to explore the phenomenon, an important intention was to provide an understanding of how and to what extent an elite research university with global aspirations influences the development of the HE system, in an emerging economy like that found in Kazakhstan. By concentrating on differences of status and outlook of the selected institutions, this study contributes to an understanding of the conditions, not

just in Kazakhstan, for a university that aspires to be global to build capacity in the national HE system. In addition to a perspective that analyses connections and tensions between local, national and global forces, other factors taken from new institutionalism, such as the importance of the environment in which HEIs operate and their dependency on the regulator in a centralised governance system where autonomy is yet to be fully established, have been highlighted as critical for the inter-institutional collaboration between elite and mass institutions that have different organisational and cultural structures, approaches and values.

In addition, this research suggests that the question of what a world-class university is, that was posed by scholars at the rise of the WCU concept some two decades ago, has still not yet been answered. Consequently, a global conceptualisation of a WCU by international policy brokers is accepted by national governments as a ready-to-use formula with little national contextualisation. This research suggests that there is a need for contextualisation of the WCU concept at the national HE scale with careful consideration given to design and implementation of a nation's own 'world-class' university/ies with culturally-specific characteristics that work within their home context. In doing so, as suggested by this study, connections and tensions between the global, the national and the local should be considered.

Empirically, this research provides understanding of the HE context in Kazakhstan in several ways. First, it provides information about the current stage of policy shifts in the HE system through the voices of regionally located institutions, where these shifts seem to happen in response to those policy pressures. Secondly, it brings to attention various issues in the HE system in relation to these policy shifts that should be addressed by educationists and national policy makers. As such, this study highlights that the national

government's attempt to create an elite globalised university seems to fuel stratification of institutions and resource inequality between different status institutions rather than facilitating collaboration across the national HE system. Thirdly, this research contributes to the very limited scholarly debate on Kazakhstan's way of establishing a 'world-class university' and the 'pursuit of excellence' within its specific context of a centralised system with Soviet legacy. Besides, this study also suggests that Kazakhstan's attempts to create a globally visible institution which is in its very early stage as well as the country's emerging geopolitical and economic status stipulates the extent to which its global aspirations have influence on its local HE agency activities.

Further to this, at a policy level, this research draws national policy makers' attention to several key issues in relation to the differentiation of HEIs that are little discussed at a policy level but need more systematic investigation, as well as to interactions between different types of HEIs that should be organised if a shared aim is to be pursued. A policy level contribution of this study also comes with its system-level recommendations that conclude that overemphasis on and overfunding of one or a few universities at the expense of the rest of the system might lead to unbalanced development between different types of institutions. Informing policy makers at both national and international levels that directive state policies fuel stratification and can create a system where a WCU might become a 'separator', whereas in a comprehensive approach where all parties are engaged, WCU could serve as a 'flashlight', would contribute to the overall debates on the question of excellence versus equity in HE.

Limitations and future research focus

One of the major limitations of the study was an issue with statistical data at RSUs. It was either reluctance of RSUs to provide data or simply data not having been collated.

This hindered construction of a rigorous picture of the progress internationalisation at the RSUs.

Another potential limitation of this study is that it was conducted in the first seven to eight years of operation of NU in the national HE system in Kazakhstan, which might possibly call into question the rationale for examining its effect due to a demand for more time for such projects to bring observable results. Thus, it might be worth exploring the effect of NU on the system of higher education, as expected by the government, in the longer term or as a longitudinal study.

Another issue that has slightly challenged the study was found during the fieldwork with the unavailability of some of the staff in charge at the Ministry of Education and Science to participate in my interviews. Since just two people were interviewed, more efforts had to be made towards retrieving data from MoES policy documents that occasionally were vague and overly descriptive.

This study has focused on internationalisation and research, and future exploration of other aspects, such as a possible change in the curriculum, a merit-based approach, and academic honesty highly promoted by NU and claimed to be transmitted across the system, might be of significant value. Future research might also be worthwhile in investigating more RSUs throughout the country for the purpose of doing a generalisation involving a quantitative survey and other statistical data, which could not be done in this study due to time and resource restrictions. This is also related to unveiling the stories of the three parties in full, but only partially as far as data collection allowed. Though a case study is a good method for understanding the phenomenon in view of the aim this research posed, to capture specific nuances that are known to

insiders to the system but which they are reluctant to disclose in interviews, methods such as observation would be helpful for future understanding.

It would also be worth exploring the effect of NU from the perspective of the ten universities that have been selected by the government in the framework of the State Program for Industrial and Innovative Development to work closely with NU in designing a new curriculum for selected engineering majors (SPIID 2015-2019). This programme has been under the process of implementation during this study's period and exploration was not feasible.

Furthermore, while this study strove to explore the effect of NU as an elite globalised university in the national HE system in Kazakhstan from the point of view of differentiation policies, it used the theories of differentiation and diversity as a background to understand the rationale behind policies of categorising universities in the country with an emphasis on the research university and the establishment of NU as such. Thus, this research could serve as a starting point to further explore differentiation and diversity in the Kazakhstani HE sector in greater depth with more attention paid to and questions posed on stratification of HEIs in view of debates on research grants allocation, questions of equity and excellence in the national HE system that have not yet been explored.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE (RSUs)

Research Name: The effect of NU, as an "elite university", on policies and practices in the field of internationalisation and research of three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

Brief Description: Many governments are increasingly focusing on higher education systems and investing public funds in a limited number of universities in an effort to improve the quality of their higher education systems in general. As a result, in some countries there is a trend towards the creation of "elite" universities that have a high research potential and level of internationalisation.

Aim: This research is aimed at understanding the implications of differentiation of types of HEIs in Kazakhstan by looking at the effect of NU, as an 'elite' university, on policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional universities in the country, and the responses of these regional universities to this phenomenon. The particular focus is on 1) how the government's differentiation policies and its emphasis on the elite university is perceived and responded to by regional state universities; 2) what the actual rationales and drives behind the three regional universities' policies and practices of internationalisation and research are; 3) what the interaction in relation to internationalisation and research between NU and regional universities is and how these are carried/developed; 4) and finally, how critical is the government's role in promoting internationalisation and research policies in regional state universities.

Respondents: university staff responsible for internationalisation and the development of science and research

* Questions may vary depending on the position and role of the interviewee.

1. General issues

1.1 What is your position and area of responsibility?

1.2 How long have you been working at this university?

2. According to the Program for the Development of Education for 2011-2020, a new classification of higher education institutions in the country was proposed. Does this new policy affect your university? If so, how and what areas of work? If not, why not?

3. One of the new developments highlighted by the government is the creation of a new university, which should become a world-class research university. Nazarbayev University (NU) is entrusted with the government to become a leader in the field of higher education reform and transmit its experience to the rest of the universities in the country. Can you clarify what changes / events, if any, have occurred at your university / higher education system as a result of the work of NU?
4. What areas do you think other universities could potentially develop in collaboration with or study with NU? Why?
5. In accordance with the government policy and the strategy of NU, the latter must transmit its experience to other universities, while promoting the development of academic and research excellence in accordance with international standards. Therefore, was the focus on policies and practices in the field of internationalisation and research at your university? If so, how did this affect you in your work or field?
6. How important is internationalisation for your university and higher education in general, and why?
7. To what extent is the development of research and science emphasised in your institution?
8. How do you think internationalisation is developed in your university and in higher education in Kazakhstan in general?
9. What can you say about the development of research at your university? To what extent, in which areas and why?
10. What are the main rationale, vision and strategy of internationalisation and research of your university and why?
11. How has your internationalisation and research strategy and practice changed in the last 5-6 years?
12. Do you think that the nature of internationalisation in Kazakhstan has changed in the last 5-6 years?
13. Have you had any cooperation / interaction with NU? If so, what is available? If not, why not?
14. If yes, are these collaborations / interactions initiated by institutions?
15. How critical / important is the central government (the role of the state) for such cooperation / interaction?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (NU)

Research Name: The effect of NU, as an "elite university", on policies and practices in the field of internationalisation and research of three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

Brief Description: Many governments are increasingly focusing on higher education systems and investing public funds in a limited number of universities in an effort to improve the quality of their higher education systems in general. As a result, in some countries there is a trend towards the creation of "elite" universities that have a high research potential and level of internationalisation.

Aim: This research is aimed at understanding the implications of differentiation of types of HEIs in Kazakhstan by looking at the effect of NU, as an 'elite' university, on policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional universities in the country, and the responses of these regional universities to this phenomenon. The particular focus is on 1) how the government's differentiation policies and its emphasis on the elite university is perceived and responded to by regional state universities; 2) what the actual rationales and drives behind the three regional universities' policies and practices of internationalisation and research are; 3) what the interaction in relation to internationalisation and research between NU and regional universities is and how these are carried/developed; 4) and finally, how critical is the government's role in promoting internationalisation and research policies in regional state universities.

Respondents: university top and middle management staff responsible for NU's experience sharing

* Questions may vary depending on the position and role of the interviewee.

1. What is your mission and strategy to achieve it?
2. Are there any challenges of becoming global research university?
3. Are there any national or local complexities or peculiarities that makes it easy or difficult to achieve global standing?

4. Since you want to become a global research university, does it mean you are more oriented towards international or local collaboration and why?
5. How do you think you can translate your experience to the rest of the HE?
6. How the interaction with other HEIs is established?
7. What are the areas (exact practices) that you think or aim to translate to the rest of the system?
8. How critical is government's role in establishing inter-institutional collaboration with regional state universities?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE (MoES)

Research Name: The effect of NU, as an "elite university", on policies and practices in the field of internationalisation and research of three regional state universities in Kazakhstan.

Brief Description: Many governments are increasingly focusing on higher education systems and investing public funds in a limited number of universities in an effort to improve the quality of their higher education systems in general. As a result, in some countries there is a trend towards the creation of "elite" universities that have a high research potential and level of internationalisation.

Aim: This research is aimed at understanding the implications of differentiation of types of HEIs in Kazakhstan by looking at the effect of NU, as an 'elite' university, on policies and practices of internationalisation and research in three regional universities in the country, and the responses of these regional universities to this phenomenon. The particular focus is on 1) how the government's differentiation policies and its emphasis on the elite university is perceived and responded to by regional state universities; 2) what the actual rationales and drives behind the three regional universities' policies and practices of internationalisation and research are; 3) what the interaction in relation to internationalisation and research between NU and regional universities is and how these are carried/developed; 4) and finally, how critical is the government's role in promoting internationalisation and research policies in regional state universities.

Respondents: MoES staff responsible for higher education.

* Questions may vary depending on the position and role of the interviewee.

1. What is the reason behind the stratification of HEIs in the country? How does the system benefit from the diversity of HEIs?

2. What is the role of research universities introduced according to the new classification?

3. Why there is an emphasis towards improvement of the system through research development?
4. How internationalised the HE system is? Are there any challenges in developing internationalisation?
5. What are the aim of the new classification in relation to RSUs?
6. What is the role of NU in modernising HE in its current state?
7. What are the main NU practices that are planned to be translated to the rest of HEIs?
Why?
8. What is the strategy/plan for putting this in practice? What are the steps (procedures) for NU to translate its experience to other HEIs?
9. How do you think the task of becoming global research university can be achieved?
How can/will NU's position be sustained for the benefit of the whole system?
10. What is government's role in this strategy?