

Damir Iskakov

damirisk.com

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AI entrepreneur and researcher with 3+ years building production systems — full-stack applications, multimodal pipelines, and RAG integrations. Co-Founder & CEO of Vetra AI; published researcher on AI-augmented founding (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18242188), mentored by Prof. Poh Kam Wong (NUS/MIT) and Geoffrey Moore (Stanford). Mentor across four tracks at nFactorial, Kazakhstan's leading CS school. Former Master of Sport and National Taekwondo Captain. Received an offer to join Higgsfield AI growth team (rejected with aim to pursue undergraduate education). Recognised among 10 under-20s making Kazakhstan globally famous (WeProject); 100 Startups of Central Asia (Digital Business).

Education

Nazarbayev University | BSc Computer Science (Astana, Kazakhstan) **September 2025 – Present**

- First-year coursework: Mathematical Analysis, Linear Algebra, Computer Science, Physics, Academic English.
- Clubs: IEEE Student Branch, Google Developers Club, NU Data Science Club.

Nazarbayev University | Foundation Year (Astana, Kazakhstan) **September 2024 – May 2025**

- Foundation Year/Foundation Year: Completed advanced coursework in Mathematics, Physics, Academic English, and Leadership.

National School Of Physics & Math (Almaty, Kazakhstan) **September 2021 – May 2024**

- GPA: 4.85/5.00; School Pride Award (top 5% of the class).
- Software Engineering Club founder; Isol Podcasts founder/interviewer; Mentor 300+ hours (Math, Physics, CS).

Yandex Lyceum | Python programming & Data Science **October 2021 – July 2023**

- Passed a nationwide, three-stage selection – 45/1000 accepted.
- Honor Graduate (top 3%) of the class for two consecutive years.

Veritas AI | Deep Dive AI + Finances Cohort **December 2023 – March 2024**

Research Scholar & Coder

- Completed selective global AI research program (4–6% acceptance rate), awarded full financial aid; Mentored by Stanford/Harvard alumni.
- Developed machine learning model for credit card approval and fraud risk detection, analyzing bias and prevention methods in banking.

Research

July 2026 (Upcoming)

Institute of Smart Systems and Artificial Intelligence (ISSAI) Summer Research Programme

Research Intern · Tracks 3 & 6: Audio-Visual Models and Software Engineering

- Gaining hands-on research experience alongside PhD students, with access to ISSAI's supercomputing infrastructure (H100 GPUs), Nazarbayev University Robotics Laboratories, and one-to-one mentorship from active AI researchers, data scientists, and software engineers
- Selected for the competitive ISSAI SRP 2026 among Bachelor's and Masters' degree applicants; programme brings together undergraduate, graduate, and PhD-level researchers from CS and Data Science backgrounds to collaborate on applied AI projects under NU faculty supervision.

Independent Research Paper

The Rise of the AI-Augmented Solo-Founder: Redefining Team Structures in Early-Stage Startups

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18242188>

- Conducting study on how AI reshapes early-stage team dynamics and founder decision-making.
- Interviewed 100+ founders from YC, StartX, and unicorn startups; research guided by Prof. Poh Kam Wong (MIT PhD, NUS Business School, top 2% most-cited researcher) and Geoffrey Moore (Stanford '67, author of Crossing the Chasm, 1M+ copies sold).
- Joined nFactorial Solo – a global accelerator for solo founders (100+ graduates) – as a mentor to observe how AI tools enable single-person startup growth in practice.

Professional Experience

Vetra AI

March 2024 – Present

Co-Founder & CEO

- Built a full-stack personal AI secretary that turns everyday messages into organized plans and tasks, acting as the invisible layer inside Telegram, WhatsApp, Gmail, Outlook, Asana, and Slack.
- Recognized among 100 Startups in Central Asia by Digital Business Magazine (2025).

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- Top 15/300+ startups at Astana Hub Startup Garage Accelerator Program (3-month International Accelerator, guided by mentors from YC and StartX alumni).
- Selected for international accelerators: Gwangju Technopark (South Korea) and Hero Training (Silicon Valley, Draper University collaboration).
- Established partnerships with UK startup Runa (\$200M valuation) to advance AI pilots.
- Secured \$200K in tech credits (Google, OpenAI, Microsoft, Cloudflare) and a \$800K pre-seed investment offer from an international VC fund (declined to pursue undergraduate education).

Featured in national media [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#), [\[3\]](#), [\[4\]](#), [\[5\]](#), [\[6\]](#), [\[7\]](#), [\[8\]](#).

nFactorial

November 2025 – Present

Mentor/ Speaker

- Led the Higgsfield Growth track on aggressive growth tactics, metrics & ROI, automation & scale (Higgsfield AI – first unicorn from Kazakhstan, top 25 AI Startup in the world, fastest-scaling GenAI startup, \$400M+ ARR). Later received an offer to join Higgsfield AI growth team (declined to pursue undergraduate education).
- Led the LLM Engineering track, 4 workshops and lectures, covering Video and photo generation using open source models and APIs, covering fal.ai, replicate, hugging face.
- Led the nFactorial Solo track for solo founders in AI, guiding participants from early-stage idea validation to interviews, MVP design, go-to-market strategy, and first sales.
- Led the Generative AI track, teaching image and video generation plus no-code workflows in n8n with integrations into core business tools.

BlueBots (Duke & Yale student startup)

August 2025 – Present

Growth & Innovation Lead

- Launched early pilot programs that expanded product adoption and positioned the startup for VC fundraising, refining long-term growth strategy.
- Formed partnerships with investors and top-tier researchers, improving AI product reliability and academic validation across multiple testing cycles.

OyLab Startup Battles / Seven Studio Acceleration

August 2025 – Present

Co-Founder / Strategic Advisor

- Transformed OyLab Startup Battles from once-a-quarter 1-day events into Seven Studio, a 7-week incubator + accelerator combining startup mentorship with college admissions guidance, with mentors from Stanford, Ivy League, Duke, Cambridge, HKU, Stanford Central Asia Hub, YC companies, and KPMG.
- Building Central Asia's largest youth startup ecosystem, expected to launch Spring 2026 with 2,800+ high school participants and an elite mentorship network spanning Silicon Valley to Asia; secured partnerships with Yandex, KPMG, Higgsfield, Eurasian Startup Hub, Silkroad Innovation Hub, and top university advisors.

BCC Invest JSC

June – August 2024

Software Engineer Intern

- Selected as the first high-school intern at a leading investment firm and Top-3 Kazakhstan bank subsidiary serving 380K+ users.
- Built and deployed an analytics dashboard for a major app update, visualizing client trading activity and purchasing trends to support internal decision-making.
- Integrated an AI-powered chatbot module (intent classification + smart replies), improving response accuracy and support speed for customer inquiries.

RatingKZ

October 2023 – February 2024

Co-Founder

- Developed a nationwide platform helping students and parents find, compare, and review educational centers across Kazakhstan. Built verified rating and review systems, integrated Google Maps search, and designed comparison dashboards for transparency and accessibility.
- Graduated from Jas Ventures AI Accelerator (Top 10 of 70 startups) and earned 2nd place out of 30 teams at the American Space & MakerSpace STEM Incubation Program, strengthening product and community reach. [\[1\]](#)

Upraze

September 2021 – May 2023

Founder

- Developed a web platform providing mock exams and interactive preparation tools for applicants to competitive STEM high schools; 500+ students

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- Digitized 1,000+ official exam questions and built an automated testing system with instant feedback and analytics.

Kazakh-British Technical University

June – August 2022

Admission Officer Assistant

- Reviewed over 6,000 applications, verifying official documents for accuracy and completeness.
- Managed daily operations by opening and closing the admissions office and addressing applicant inquiries.

Sports

Master of Sport in Taekwondo (Kazakhstan)

2013 – 2023

- Captain, Kazakhstan National Taekwondo Team; World Championship 4x medalist; Asian Tournaments 6x champion

Languages

- Kazakh — Native | Russian — Native | English — C1 | German — B1