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**To what extent does internationalization challenge the national education system of  
Azerbaijan?**

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**STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY**

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## **Abstract**

The rise of globalization fastened international cooperation among educational institutions which made international education a new phenomenon in the 21st century. Today, we see more and more people are striving to get international education abroad while universities also compete for international talents, grow the number of mobility programs, and develop international programs. However, international education brought some challenges for the national governments, more specifically the education system. In this paper, we aim to analyze the current challenges that development of international education created at the national, institutional, and international level, and propose relevant policy solutions in the context of national education in Azerbaijan.

**Keywords:** *internationalization of education, globalization, national education, foreign students, language, culture, national identity, local values, internationalized elites, quality, quality assurance, Higher Education Institutions, international ranking, challenges.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG – The Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

MoSE – Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan

TKTA – Education Quality Assurance Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Internationalization process in education system aims to incorporate global elements into national curricula and expanding the scope of educational institutions to a global level. The point of these practices and policies is to respond properly to the demands of globalization. Now almost all universities are being held by international standards, so it is inevitable for them to collaborate with other universities, acquire new practices, and implement widely accepted policies (De Wit, 2019). The factors that policymakers consider from the start of the internationalization process are the following: academic, economic, political, and sociocultural elements. Everyone is given a chance to improve their knowledge and expertise in their respective field and to be equipped with skills in a global world. That is the academic rationale behind internationalization. As for economic elements, with the help of international experts, high-quality education, and academic mobility students will become a driving force for economic development. Political reasons include having alert citizens with a wide worldview that will help government officials in times of crisis or any security threats. Last but not least, sociocultural elements are very vital in a highly globalized world where migration is all over. People need to have proper communication skills for peaceful coexistence in ethnically diversified societies. It is rather believed that political and economic reasons outweigh others, but academic and sociocultural factors are equally important. All these are reasons that push governments to start the internationalization process of education. In doing so, countries will improve their global image, increase their national competitiveness and develop human capital with relevant knowledge and expertise (Childress, 2009).

Throughout the years, internationalization has evolved to being a main part of national curricula and a key factor in the evaluation process of educational institutions.

Mobility plays a key role in partnerships between universities, exchange, and foreign language programs, involving international teachers, academic publications, and so forth (Knight & De Wit, 2018). Specifically, the Bologna Declaration has accelerated the process of internationalization serving as a good starting point for countries to integrate more elements of globalization. In addition, the ERASMUS+ has facilitated academic mobility in terms of education and training (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

With the growing influence of globalization, many countries accept and apply international standards in their education system to be competitive in a highly globalized world. Globalization is considered by some an extension of Western values, education system, and way of thinking. One of the main points of globalization is to increase interdependence between countries. Its effect can be seen in many spheres, such as politics, culture, and ecology, particularly in the economy which was the focal point at the very beginning (Knight, 2003). Despite its positive contribution, in a way, it affects national identity by limiting its scope and losing its importance. The young generation heavily infused with international ideas attaches less importance to local values (Robson, 2011). They generally feel they belong to an international community bigger than states. Having said this, it is no surprise some states refuse the idea of an international education system. It is considered a danger; a force that overrides their sovereignty (Jibeen & Khan, 2015).

With increased connectedness, governments feel obliged to respond to the requirements of a modern world. Competitiveness is a key concept here. To be competitive, educational institutions should be aligned with major trends and concepts ruling the international world. It would help them to foster their economic growth and in return, increase their national competitiveness. Especially, higher education institutions are ranked annually, and their score shows the inclusion of relevant studies and research into their curriculum. Simply put, their performance is measured based on whether they can

produce human capital equipped with innovative ideas (Tight, 2021). That is the one side of the argument in which many see higher education as an opportunity for growth. The other side is heavily concentrated on national ideas. Education has been considered a tool for decision-makers to instill national ideas in the new generation. Especially for younger people, it is necessary to grow up with nationalistic ideas, largely controlled by the state. This helps legitimize statehood and nation-states still sound rational to people. So, internationalization may hinder the formation of civic identity by promoting global concepts. However, treating internationalization as black or white does little justice to the complexity of the process. Human capital with global resources gained through an updated education system is a force of development and can be seen as a source for implementing national interests. In this way, the whole process of combining the national education system with international concepts is very much needed for its own sake (Churski, et al. 2017). That is a contradiction for many. While educational institutions serve as a driving force for globalization to spread knowledge, expertise, ideas, culture, and so on, they can be considered an impediment to nation formation.

This conflictual relationship leads to many challenges for policymakers. One of them is the English language being the lingua franca. Local students and staff have to be adapted to this new instructional language and they certainly need good training which means additional investment by the government. Another challenge is that Western universities operate as a branch in many developing countries. This, in turn, leads to undermining the importance of local universities and may slow down the process of internationalization as there are already Western institutions operating inside their country (Hammond, 2016). One can state that integration of national and international education is not easy. As stated above, it is very natural that governments want to build a civic identity around state-mandated history and culture. Therefore, they rightfully hesitate to the

internationalization of many spheres which may eventually undermine their sovereignty. Yet, it is inevitable that international elements will come to their countries, especially developing states where a strong national curriculum is nonexistent.

Azerbaijan is no exception among countries fully committed to internationalizing their education system. Since its independence, the government has carried out several reforms to modernize the whole system and respond to the demands of a globalized world. Due to ideology (planned economy) in the Soviet period, the government had to adopt new elements to accelerate the transition process. The Soviet education system was concentrating on strict state control, communist ideology, and organizational character which do not have any importance in a new world order. Therefore, the newly independent government had a crucial task to wholly transform the education system. Reforms started in 1999 mainly focusing on changing the structure of institutions and optimizing their performance. These sorts of documents have followed one another slowly but surely leaving behind the Soviet way of teaching and training and integrating European dimensions. During the transition, political and economic instability, the Nagorno-Karabakh war, lack of financial resources and other issues have got in the way of restricting the development of the education system, but the government has also received loans from the World Bank to start and proceed with reforms. These are typical challenges largely faced by developing countries during that period (Suleymanov, 2020).

Joining the Bologna Declaration in 2005 is a milestone in the Azerbaijani education system and indicates a continuing effort of the government to align with Europe. To fulfill the requirements of the declaration, policymakers adopted another set of reforms and proposed state programs for education seekers abroad for the year 2007-2015. Along with the Bologna Declaration, there are other positive steps towards the consolidation of national curricula with internationalization being the focal point. The government has increased its

funding for studying abroad projects currently having two ongoing programs for individuals pursuing bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees in high-ranking universities (Aliyeva, 2016).

In addition to state-funded initiatives to train highly qualified individuals, there are organizational changes within governmental institutions to meet the demands of the internationalization process. The Education Quality Assurance Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter - TKTA) is one of the public legal entities functioning under the Ministry of Science and Education (hereinafter - MoSE) of the Republic of Azerbaijan ([www.tkta.edu.az](http://www.tkta.edu.az)). The main responsibility of this organization is to officially recognize educational institutions in Azerbaijan. Besides accreditation, they independently assess the quality of education in secondary, higher, and additional educational programs. One of the main indicators of assessment is universally accepted educational standards. Any entity to be qualified for receiving accreditation must have internationalization elements within its operation. If they fail to internationalize their education system, the agency will not provide accreditation rightfully. The government has recently approved "Evaluation Criteria for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institution" and "Evaluation Criteria for Program Accreditation of Higher Education Institution" to check whether universities meet certain standards. Evaluation criteria is strategic development, quality assurance, training and teaching, research, management system, infrastructure, internationalization. Through accreditation, quality assurance mechanisms, admission of students and recognition of previous qualifications, educational programs, organization of education, teaching staff, student-oriented teaching, monitoring and updating of educational programs, career service and continuous communication system with graduates, scientific research strategy, research resources, scientific-research activities will also be examined (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/52566>).

This shows the extent to which the government attached importance to internationalization. All in all, the reorganization of the agency is an important step to improve the quality of education and shows the government's commitment to internationalization (AZERTAC, 2021).

Moreover, Azerbaijani students can enjoy ERASMUS+ projects and dual degree programs that their universities offer. To exemplify, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University (ASPU) and ADA University signed a dual degree program with George Washington University intending to train specialists in education management and IT management respectively. The content of classes is jointly prepared and taught by the academic staff of local universities and George Washington University. Baku Engineering University and Azerbaijan State Agrarian University have launched dual degree programs within the framework of "State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023" (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, n.d.). In total, there are 28 dual degree programs at Azerbaijani universities (retrieved from the MoSE). These academic collaborations foster research and development in respective fields and provide valuable opportunities. Besides, French-Azerbaijani University under Azerbaijan State Oil and Industrial University (ASOIU) and Italian-Azerbaijani University under ADA University are conscious efforts of the government to cement European ties, accelerate the integration process, and learn through shared experience (UFAZ, n.d.; ADA University, 2022). Throughout the last decades, the importance of global rankings of higher education universities has tremendously risen. Several universities have implemented an action plan to be included in rankings and improve their quality of education (Suleymanov, 2020)

As specified above, the main elements of internationalization are staff and student mobility, internationalization strategies, and university cooperation. The government and

educational institutions have so far attempted to include all elements into the national system. Yet some are more visible than others. First, when it comes to mobility, Azerbaijan experiences an upward trend in individuals studying abroad. As for incoming students, the number is considerably low. It is the part of government's strategy to involve Azerbaijani education seekers in top universities (<http://data.uis.unesco.org>). The recent data indicates a drastic increase in the number of people reaching out to the Agency to recognize their diplomas earned abroad while only 8,819 foreign students studying in Azerbaijani universities (Retrieved from MoSE).

Currently the government's efforts are concentrated towards increasing the number of people receiving high quality education. Second, through different sets of policies, policymakers try to increase the level of internationalization in national curricula. Their approach is rather ad-hoc. Third, universities have put an extra effort to start partnerships with high-level educational institutions to bring expertise to the country and learn through experience recently (Suleymanov, 2020).

Considering the above indicators, one can conclude that the internationalization process of education is at the initial stage with the main focus to send education seekers abroad while bringing global expertise through partnerships.

## **Methodology**

The study aims to find the main challenges observed in Azerbaijan during the internationalization of the national education system and later offer policies to overcome them. As this field is rather under-researched in Azerbaijan, the lack of necessary data is the main impediment to the development of research. Implementation of internationalization in national curricula is poorly studied and therefore, it somehow limits the progress of our research. If a strong literature review exists in the context of Azerbaijani national education, problems could be easily defined.

Therefore, the topic was analyzed via the application of qualitative research methods. Primary data and sources are mainly derived from in-depth interviews with appropriate experts in relevant fields.

Simultaneously, the literature review was appropriately conducted and information and data were collected via secondary sources as well. Secondary sources are accessed online. Thus, necessary scholarly articles, as well as reports on the education system of Azerbaijan prepared either on an international or national level were scrutinized. International reports were mainly acquired from UNESCO's database, while eligible national reports were obtained from the official web page of the MoSE. They helped research to evolve and served as a foundation to understand internationalization, their role in a globalized world, and possible challenges nations encounter. Moreover, a proper national legislative database was relatively examined to discover national goals.

Meanwhile, after having fruitful consultation with our supervisor from the relevant institution, we did a successful online meeting with the senior advisor of the Department of Science, Higher and Secondary Education of the the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (MoSE) to get the comprehensive expert review and be prepared for the upcoming interviews. Moreover, we had an expert meeting with the Assistant

Professor at School of Education at ADA University in order to clarify specific questions on the topic.

Six semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with key actors in the education sphere to get valuable insights and learn their perspective approaches on the issue as a first-hand account.

Our first interviewee was the Executive Vice Rector of ADA University.

Later we interviewed the Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (MoSE).

Then, the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the Education Quality Assurance Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (TKTA) was our third interviewee.

Also, we conducted in-depth interviews appropriately with the Rector of Mingachevir State University, the Vice-Rector of Azerbaijan Medical University and with the Vice-Rector for International Affairs of Khazar University.

Firstly, we prepare the necessary Consent Form and send it to interviewees via which we were successful to obtain their written approval to be interviewed. To save time and to be able to record the interviews, they were held digitally by the allowance of the abovementioned interviewees.

Upon the guidelines below-listed 7 interview questions were prepared beforehand and addressed to the experts during the interviews:

1. How would you define the main indicators of internationalization of a university?
2. What is the internationalization strategy in the education system of Azerbaijan?
3. How would you comment on the effect of global competitiveness among higher education institutions overseas on the development of HEIS of Azerbaijan?
4. How would you evaluate the role of internationalization in achieving quality teaching and learning?

5. What is the best way to integrate national education curricula with international dimensions?
6. What type of challenges or negative outcomes could be observed in education system of Azerbaijan as a result of internationalization?
7. How would you assess the argument that internationalization (especially education in English) is a threat to national language, national identity, as well as development of national education (research, textbooks, etc. in the national language)?

Interviews were semi-structured and aimed to define our scope, to get in-depth knowledge of internationalization strategy and their implementation, their impact on national curricula and main challenges that have been faced so far, capacity building at educational institutions, and their vision on prospects. Obtained primary data was comparatively analyzed through coding.

After specifying the main problems, solutions are presented respectively. Policies are based on real-life models that have been practiced elsewhere and proved themselves successful. In the end, options are evaluated through the required criteria to find the most suitable case in Azerbaijan. Following academic guidelines, we structured the current policy paper in below-mentioned 5 parts:

- **Introduction** - The first chapter describes the current situation in general. This chapter also includes methodology used to research this topic.
- **Problem description** – This second chapter contains 3 main and relevant sub-sections in order to properly classify the challenges encountered throughout research on internationalization of the education system of Azerbaijan.
- **Policy alternatives** – In this chapter we will propose appropriate alternatives to address the challenges indicated in the previous chapter.

- **Evaluation of Policy alternatives** – In the fourth chapter will evaluate the proposed policy alternatives based on Equity, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Feasibility, Flexibility.
- **Conclusion and Recommendations** – This is the last chapter wherein we proposed our final recommendations to relevant institutions to meet the challenges.

## Chapter 2

### Problem Description

The Azerbaijani government treats internationalization as a facilitator of their integration into Europe and highly regards the attempts to accelerate the consolidation of national curricula with international dimensions. As mentioned above, joining Bologna Declaration, dual degree programs, the ERASMUS project, the MEVLANA exchange program, and others show the government's commitment to this process and is considered a transition to the modern education system. The government has not proposed a single document dedicated to internationalization strategy. Instead, they have issued programs for studying abroad and supported universities to increase partnerships with top educational institutions. Through their funding, many individuals enjoyed a high level of education and brought their knowledge to the country as an agreement between the government and them was conditioned to return to their origin and stay for five years. The rationale behind these ad hoc programs is to learn global expertise and change national education with the hand of new graduates.

In addition, the "State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan" approved by the government in 2013 has highlighted the importance of internationalization and the role of technology to establish a competitive and competent national education system (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/27274>). This official document again indicates the government's position in the internationalization of education and stimulates universities to speed up the process and initiate agreements with high-ranking universities.

Although high importance is attached to having an education system that fully blends with European standards, there have been numerous challenges along the way that hinder their development. It is evident that internationalization has been a part of the education system only for the last two decades and has intensified since the 2010s through government policies and as a result of international pressure. As it is quite a new phenomenon, educational institutions, policymakers, students, and other actors involved in this process face difficulties along the way.

Based on interviews conducted with key specialists in the education sphere, the following challenges will be analyzed in depth in this chapter.

## **2.1. Institutional challenges**

### **2.1.1. The absence of a holistic approach to internationalize the education system of Azerbaijan**

As previously noted, the government aims to develop an education system mainly through state-funded programs and their main purpose is to increase the number of Azerbaijani students studying abroad and after graduation to utilize their abilities in government/private sectors. These are fully funded state programs that any qualified Azerbaijani citizen can enjoy. Focus areas for "State Program for the Education of Azerbaijani Youth in foreign countries in 2007-2015" (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/13001>) were bachelor's and master's degrees in high-ranking universities. Later, "The State Program for Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023" (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/41320>) was adopted specifically to engage Azerbaijani citizens in doctorate degrees in top universities. This program was followed by another, "The State Program for 2022-2026 for young people to study in prestigious higher education institutions of foreign countries" (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/50013>), to provide opportunities to individuals with bachelor's and master's degrees. These programs are aimed to contribute to the internationalization of national curricula, yet all are a part of the development program of education. They more or fewer lack guidelines on how to make use of the asset gained abroad (From personal communication with the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the TKTA, March 30, 2023). This is one of the institutional challenges observed so far.

The attempts to modernize the education system and integrate European dimensions have mainly focused on bachelor's and master's degrees and the doctorate has been

overlooked to a certain extent. Last decade the government launched a fully funded state program for education seekers for a doctorate. Individuals are granted scholarships and stipends during their study years. This is a huge investment considering the volume of finances. However, there is not any internal interaction with other high-ranking universities. The provisions of the Bologna Declaration have been implemented in bachelor's and master's, but the credit system still has not been applied to a doctorate. It is regulated by the National Academy of Science and the universities themselves. The structural changes to internationalize curricula and apply innovative methods are absent in doctorate degrees, as well. The state program will have a positive impact on the improvement of this academic degree. Simply put knowledge exchange between other universities and local ones is currently nonexistent. The state program is a big opportunity to modernize doctorate degrees with the help of newly graduated assets. Yet, it would be better to involve well-versed academic advisors in relevant fields and learn the whole structure, guidelines, and methodology through the live experience. There is relatively less finance involved in recruiting foreign academic staff who have more experience on hand to be shared (From personal communication with the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the TKTA, March 30, 2023). As the current level of teaching and training falls short of the demands of internationalization, it is natural to see these shortcomings.

State programs have an undeniable impact on the current level of the education system in a positive sense. Yet, they need structural changes as some sectors are overlooked and programs lack how to get the best out of their education abroad and apply their expertise inside the country.

### **2.1.2. Limited capacity of Azerbaijani HEIs to adapt to internalization**

It is no surprise that there is a language barrier for students and academic staff that prevent them to participate and enjoy the benefits of initiatives by the government. Although more opportunities, ERASMUS+, and joint degree programs are available now, there seems to be less involved in comparison with the number of options. The main reason for this tendency is largely explained by not knowing the local languages of partner universities. English is taught in all schools and is one of the main subjects in state admission exams to universities, but the overall level of proficiency is not enough to be qualified for ERASMUS+. Remedial English classes are not available in all universities not helping the situation. Both in secondary and higher schools, there should be a goal to increase the number of English language speakers. Every university has its structure and program. There is not any legal barrier hindering the Erasmus project. The main factor is to know the local language that they would be studying in receiving country. Turkey is also an option. The international cooperation department of each university should initiate and attract students for studying abroad. When people decide university for their bachelor's study, they will most probably pick universities that have access to Erasmus programs. It is a sign of high-quality education and opportunities given to students. There are Erasmus programs in almost all universities. It is a systematic process (From personal communication with the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the TKTA, March 30, 2023). There are SABAH groups in universities to apply innovative teaching methods, support student initiatives and develop a modern academic environment starting in 2014. Classes and exams in these groups are required to be held fully in English, but in practice, this rule is often not followed. The reason is still the same. Educational institutions lack academic staff prepared for teaching and developing materials in English (From personal communication with the Vice-Rector for International Affairs of Khazar University, May

2, 2023). This language barrier impedes the government to gain returns on their investments and efforts in the internationalization process (From personal communication with the Rector of Mingachevir State University, May 1, 2023)

In addition, having a low number of incoming students universities might indicate that universities have not performed well in promoting their joint degree programs abroad. Individuals who could not afford to study in highly developed countries can come to Azerbaijan, study here and receive two diplomas. This would result in influx of the foreign students to Azerbaijan and hence, rise in the revenue of the government. Programs to improve the education system are mainly concentrated on exporting human capital abroad and later using their knowledge and experience to reform institutions and upgrade them to a higher level. If there is a shift in the focus, there could be certain profit coming from the whole process to offset the spending on studying abroad programs. In comparison with the number of students studying abroad, the number of inbound students is much lower. Therefore, the government has not fully got returns on its investment in the internationalization of education. One of the purposes of internationalization is to improve Azerbaijan's soft power including high-quality study. To exemplify, in case any foreign student returns and become a high-ranking official because of the education received in Azerbaijan, this would help to create a good reputation for the country abroad. Otherwise, if a skilled specialist stays in Azerbaijan, that would be a win for Azerbaijan (From personal communication with the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the TKTA, March 30, 2023).

Considering shortcomings arising from the university incapacity in Azerbaijan, current evaluation criteria for accreditation can be a good start for educational institutions to reform themselves. That will help HEIs to create a roadmap for themselves and follow

steps to fully incorporate internationalization elements. Per the Education Quality Assurance Agency (TKTA) plan (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/52566>) which is ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance) affiliate, the accreditation process in HEIs will be completed within this year (APA, 2023).

## **2.2. Perception of the “Internationalization” of Education as a Threat to Local Values and the Society**

### **2.2.1. Threat to the Azerbaijani language**

Globalization has made international education more significant than any time in recent years. Nonetheless, it additionally presents difficulties like language and social obstructions, social discrimination, and worries about national identity and security. This section investigates the negative consequences of international schools on local education and society according to a worldwide point of view. Our point is to comprehend the potential dangers that might emerge at the national level.

One of the significant consequences of internationalized education is language and social boundaries that can emerge when students/pupils from various social foundations meet up in a classroom. Understudies who are not fluent in the predominant language of the education framework might find it hard to grasp the educational program and fail to take part in classroom conversations. Furthermore, language proficiency can be a crucial factor that impacts academic achievement, as students who are not proficient in the language of instruction may struggle to understand the curriculum, participate in classroom discussions, and develop the necessary skills to succeed academically (Han, 2012). Thus, it is fair to conclude that there is a positive correlation between the good command of English and academic achievement in the international education system.

Internationalization may likewise undermine local language in education through advancing prominent languages such as English, French, or Russian in the Azerbaijani case the focus on these languages is huge. The undermining of local language can bring with itself the deficiency of social identity and the underestimation of local values. In the field of education, the spread of English is often accompanied by the neglect or marginalization

of local languages and cultures, and the displacement of knowledge systems and epistemologies embedded in these cultures (Canagarajah, 2005) .

To further support the claim, Baker and Wright (2017) mention that, the use of English in international schools can be a source of alienation for students who feel disconnected from their cultural and linguistic heritage. The authors emphasize that international schools, which frequently focus on English as the essential language of guidance, can adversely affect understudies' social and cultural identity. We can easily assume that pupils who should generally come from local language foundations may feel separated from their social and phonetic legacy when they are supposed to learn and impart for the most part in English. Though the process is not caused just by international schools, it is most aroused by the intentions of local parents who think that the main priority of their children is to become internationalised for a better future. Thus, from the early development of the children parents systematically neglect to teach their children Azerbaijani language and focus on mainly English or Russian as means to provide better future opportunities in the work and educational path of their children (From personal communication with the expert at the School of Education of ADA University, April 28, 2023).

Moreover, as Altbach and Knight (2007) note, the internationalization of education has resulted in the promotion of English as the global language, often at the expense of local languages and cultures" This shows the advancement of English as the worldwide language can have adverse results for local networks and societies. It can undermine the situation with local languages and societies prompting the deficiency of social legacy and identity. Moreover, it can make a language obstruction for students who may not be fully capable of comprehending subjects in the classroom in English, making it challenging for them to improve their business potential for the future.

Furthermore, according to Le Ha (2013), the rise of international schools and English language instruction has not only led to a decrease in the importance of local languages but also to a decrease in the knowledge of them. We might further elaborate on the advancement of English as the worldwide language may have economic implications, especially in the context of higher education. English knowledge is almost always seen as a prerequisite for being admitted to the best universities and job vacancies, prompting a developing interest for English language training and certifications. This has prompted the expansion in the number of private language schools and certification programs, which can be costly and can cause new forms of social and financial imbalance in the society. Therefore, an equal English language teaching system should be implemented by the government, making it available to all students.

Last but not least, internationalization can likewise prompt the brain drain of talented local teachers, who might look for work in international schools or colleges where English or other predominant languages are the essential language of instruction. This can sabotage the current situation and future contribution of high-skilled local language educators, which can challenge the place of local languages in the education sector.

Overall, while internationalization can offer positive opportunities for diverse learning, joint effort, and access to vast resources, it is essential to know about the expected negative impacts on local languages and to do everything in range to alleviate their harm. As a matter of fact, internalization affecting local education in Azerbaijan did not just start with integration of local education with the emergence of globalization. It was way before when globalization started to dominate the world. On the contrary the Soviet system was against globalization and dictated a huge part of the world. During the Soviet era the education system was dominated by the Russian language. It was strictly mandatory for students to learn and write in Russian, especially for students living in cities. This would

lead to undermining of the local language into second degree, while promoting Russian as the dominant language in the society, which creates an imbalance in the society.

As one of our interviewed experts confirms it, if not properly controlled and educated, pupils and students are prone to get grouped among “their kind” against other kinds. For example, the current situation in Azerbaijan has been degraded by the educational division between Russian language-based and Azerbaijani language-based sectors. Even in the further periods of their lives people always tend to naturally gravitate towards, as it was mentioned before, “their own kind”. The division continues in the university, job and continues throughout every aspect of life in the society. This language barrier must be addressed and solved as means to preserve fairness and equity in the society (From personal communication with the expert at the School of Education of ADA University, April 28, 2023).

### **2.2.2. Growing inequality on the societal level**

Humans are social beings, and they prioritize acting as groups to defend and sustain themselves. Turns out social discrimination does not come just out of nowhere and become one of the main troubles of society. It starts at the early stages of human development, especially school years for children. There is an understanding among many low-income people that the international school system creates systematic social discrimination, and thus internationalized elites are detached from understanding the needs of the society. According to our inquiry which has been answered by the MoSE of Azerbaijan (2023), the data shows that there are 9 schools in which the education program is fully in English, 5 of which are private international schools such as Baku Oxford School, British School in Baku, The International School of Azerbaijan, and etc. In total there are 22 schools in which international programs such as IB Program, Cambridge Program are practiced. The number of full Russian language schools are 16.. Are we facing similar threats posed by the Russian

language in the Soviet period? There are many aspects to be addressed. In this part some issues emerging from the internationalization of education will be addressed and their relationship to each other will be evaluated.

The international education system, especially international schools, can create systematic social injustice in several ways. International education systems can likewise propagate existing socio-economic disparities by backing students from privileged backgrounds who can easily access educational resources due to their economic advantages, such as private coaches, test preparation centres, and international schools etc.. This might result in an absence of diversity and inclusivity from various socio-economical backgrounds in the international education system and in the long-term can be the basis of contribution to widening gaps between the socio-economic classes. According to the analysis (Liu et al, 2020) “Moderation analyses indicated that the relation between SES (social-economic status) and academic achievement gradually decreased in the past several decades; SES has a stronger correlation with language achievement (i.e., Chinese and English) than science/math achievement and general achievement.” It must be taken into consideration, the higher the command of English in a student means the higher level of soft skills. Thus, a student from a higher socio-economic background will likely continue getting better employment opportunities than of his/her lower class peers. Furthermore, Gaddis (2015) also supports the argument according to his study, as the results of his study suggest that even when credentials are held constant, college selectivity is a key factor in producing labor market inequalities, and that discrimination is a critical process that contributes to the disparities in access to highly rewarding careers.

Furthermore, international education systems may likewise reflect cultural inclinations and generalizations, which can prompt discrimination students from certain backgrounds. For instance, Western-based educational curricula might focus on the

investigation of Western history, writings, and culture, while ignoring or undermining the commitments of other cultures. In their article, Cohen & Lotan (2014) express the need to address the issue as, teachers need to become aware of their own cultural perspectives and biases, and develop culturally responsive approaches to instruction that acknowledge and build upon the experiences and backgrounds of all students, including those from historically marginalized groups. With reference to the interview with an expert it was concluded that even tutors and professors could unintentionally favor some students over others, as they identify in the same group of language or socio-economic background as they consider themselves from the same level of “intelligentsia” (From personal communication with the expert at the School of Education of ADA University, April 28, 2023). This also suggests that the issue is there and needs a solution as a means to integrate a policy into the education process.

In this part the project will focus on the consequences of internationalized elites emerged by the support of international education to the society will be addressed. International elites are often detached from the needs of society in a number of ways. Firstly, internationalized elites, who frequently come from wealthy foundations, are subject to get targeted by consumerist capitalism currently backed by neoliberal values, which in turn can make them miss the mark on comprehension of the cultural and social setting of the society and networks they are supposed to serve. In addition, the neoliberal imaginary sees education as a commodity, and in this market-driven world, schools are encouraged to compete with one another for students, teachers, funding, and status. This is a world that prizes individualism and competition over social justice and equity (Mundy, 2007). The society is usually run, ruled or to the least influenced by elites, which can cause a lack of consideration and resources allocated towards resolving local issues. Therefore, proper elite

schooling and education is considered as an important factor in the well-being of society (Weinberg, 1968).

Sassatelli R. (2013) addresses that consumer hedonism must be contained, which is promoted by negative aspects of freedom that liberalism firmly supports. All over the world elite youth are usually encouraged to focus on only individualistic and hedonistic ways of life which may prove dangerous when these individuals come into high-level government positions that require empathy towards citizens and collective thinking. Thus, the threats internationalization of education may pose to Azerbaijani youth is not always the education system itself which is considered effective. It could be the way of western student life, and what it offers to students such as the neoliberal hedonism, which also does not coincide with local values of Azerbaijan. By time, this may lead to the trust being broken between socio-economic classes, as lack of empathy from one side may result in anger and irritation from the other.

To further elaborate, internationalized elites might focus on worldwide issues and the requirements of international associations over the necessities of local networks. Elite international schools are key sites for reproducing and reinforcing the power of global elites. The globalization of elite education is, paradoxically, both a product of and a contributor to the spread of inequality in the world (Lee and Wright, 2016). This issue indicates the absence of sympathy and inability to address the necessities of local or potentially lower-class networks in the globalized education system, which may also contribute to the gap between socio-economic classes.

In addition, focusing primarily on the global level, internationalized elites might find themselves living in elite bubbles, where they are insulated from the experiences of local people and become more inclined towards western culture. As Siltaoja et al (2019) informs, the international school affects a culture of neo-colonialism, with a focus on

Western-based curricula and the promotion of English language proficiency. The result is often a lack of diversity and inclusivity in education. This might again prompt an absence of consciousness on the difficulties experienced by ordinary people and may cause an absence of commitment on the local level. Thus, internationalized elites may have limited exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences of the local community, which may also cause a narrow understanding of social issues and a lack of awareness of the needs of marginalized groups.

Another crucial point, sometimes internationalized individuals who play a crucial part in the society or the government may not be able to speak the local language or have a limited understanding of local customs and traditions. As Brehm & Silova (2012) argue, the international school system has contributed to the perpetuation of social inequality within and between countries by privileging Western-based curricula and the English language, thereby creating new forms of domination in education. This prompts a miscommunication and misconception among elites and the remaining part of the society. The issue could be one of the fundamental factors that create outrage towards the administering class who are unable to communicate in the local language appropriately.

Sadly, for more than 70 years of Soviet rule, the Communist Party has been imposing Russian language as a dominant language. According to Bilanluk (2005), the policy of bilingualism during soviet rule was mainly focused on improving Russian language at the expense of other local languages. Due to Soviet propaganda, the mindset is still engraved into people's brains, so that in order to become successful as a human being, one should sacrifice his/her own national identity, language in order to move higher in the societal ranks. It might be challenging for the government to impose Azerbaijani language as the ultimate dominant language among the ruling or elite class.

Finally, it is not so different in the current situation such as when kids, teenagers, young adults are in the process of fully grasping languages such as English, French, and etc., they become enthusiastic to adapt their culture as well, while ignoring their own local values, traditions at the expense of becoming one of the metropolitan people with the set of some other liberal values which are sugar coated as more civilized, more contemporary than their own local ones. In addition, the transition from Soviet mindset into globalist mindset could prove detrimental to society. The Soviet one undermined local language and values and when the same mindset is westernized, the level of underestimation of local values still might remain the same, because the society could not fully battle and get over the first mindset in order make a healthy transition into the next one. The former rule was too antagonistic against local values and language, while the unipolar western world became too mainstream to ignore in terms of career, knowledge, lifestyle, etc. When the toxic Soviet mindset evolves into a globalist perspective it still bears seeds of belittling second-class approach towards everything that is local. First of all our elite youth have to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of local culture and language, then consider itself fully capable of helping move the society forward. Thus, by solving the issue from the early educational level and by providing equal ground for pupils and students alike can alter the “The poor must stay poor and the rich must continue to stay rich” notion if the issue is addressed and its solution implemented properly.

To sum up, the detachment of internationalized elites from the needs of society can prompt an absence of trust between classes of the society and can increase existing social and financial disparities. Language barriers can be difficult for students who are not fully capable of comprehending the language of the education system. Those students who are not fluent in the predominant language might find it hard to figure out the educational program, or communicate with educators and classmates. This can bring about lower

educational accomplishment, higher dropout rates, and hindered opportunities for further education or employment. Furthermore, all mentioned issues caused by internationalization of education concern the government and therefore there is (and reasonably there should be) a lack of trust towards globalized students. Lack of national identity leads to national security issues where one day those globalized students who take higher positions in the government become too naïve to trust their global overlords over national interests and start to perceive themselves as part of the international elite rather than representatives of the people of their nation.

### **2.3. Lack of international recognition of HEIs in Azerbaijan**

The rise of technology, innovations, and digitalization fastened the globalization process and led to making the world more connected and interdependent in the past decades. Globalization enabled most of the industries to enter international markets and offer their services and products globally. This fact affected the Higher Education Institutions in two ways. Firstly, the universities must provide high quality education for its graduates to become competitive in the globalized knowledge economy. Secondly, the HEIs should build an internationally recognized brand to strategically position themselves in the international education, research, and innovation field (Hammond, 2018). After the second World War the international relations between governments were intensified which caused the increase of cooperation among universities worldwide. During those times the HEIs were more focused on cooperation such as student and staff mobility. However, after the 1990s a shift towards international competition among universities and research institutes were observed in the development of HEIs globally (WIT, 2019). The international competition involves competition for students, scholars, research, reputation, quality and so on in the global knowledge economy. However, the rise of global competitiveness doesn't put an end to international or national cooperation. To become globally competitive, the universities should cooperate at the national as well as international level. For example, in the European Union the HEIs are encouraged to cooperate with each other via initiatives such as European Higher Education Area, European Research Area, Erasmus+ program and so on within their boundaries. In this way, the EU stimulates cooperation between the higher education institutions to increase their global competitiveness (Wende, 2014). Nowadays, it has become very challenging to gain global competitiveness without national and/or international cooperation. Choosing a national strategy plays an important role in making the national higher education system globally

competitive. Therefore, governments face a challenge to choose a strategy in cooperation and competition at the national and international level aligned to their needs and capacity. Additionally, the internationalization efforts of the HEIs differ from each other due to unbalanced resources such as an import-oriented type, import and export-oriented type, and export-oriented type. Import-oriented internationalization relies on import of highly professional personnel from abroad that applies to developing countries mainly. This policy causes issues such as brain drain and loss of national identity in the country. Import and export-oriented type of internationalization in higher education aims to find a balance in the global knowledge economy. In this way most of the universities choose English as the medium of instruction, develop new programs, and then export their competitive products and services in the global markets. The challenge here is that sometimes citizens of a country cannot find a common language to think and communicate. The export-oriented model focuses on the provision of higher education globally in the English language by attracting foreign students overseas and opening local branches in developing countries. In turn, it challenges quality assurance and makes the universities more commercial oriented. Transnational education emerged as a new phenomenon out of export-oriented internationalization strategy. Consequently, many western universities started opening local campuses in Asian countries (Hammond, 2016). By opening local campuses in developing countries, the HEIs from Anglosphere aims to compete for the top talents, meaning students, scholars, and staff in the region. Thus, the national universities end up competing with the local branches of well-known universities in the national context. Additionally, the global competition for highly skilled human resources has been one of the main reasons in the export strategy of international students and scholars recently due to the demographic crisis in the developed countries. More recently, the European countries' competition for highly skilled manpower has increased to fill the gaps in the labor market

and knowledge economy. The global competition for human resources affects the national economies twofold. On one hand, it causes brain drain, flow of ideas, research, and innovation in developing countries. On the other hand, the rising number of migrants creates a threat for national identity formation in the host countries.

In addition, in the globalized knowledge economy international rankings and reputation of HEIs have been referred to as the main indicator of global competitiveness. The national governments are making significant investment to increase competitiveness of their higher education institutions globally and move higher in the international rankings. However, most of the rankings are led by numerical indicators rather than quality. In most cases, the universities are ranked according to the number of international students, scholars, publications, employment rate of the graduates etc. (Wit, 2019). More importantly, the global rankings see the process as a “whole” rather than providing a customized approach. For example, during evaluation of the international rankings the learning outcomes, research and teaching in various fields, development of education programs usually are not taken into consideration. The global rankings pay special attention to the vertical differentiation, prestige, and reputation but not to the improvement of educational programs at the institutional level. During our interview with a representative of ADA University he pointed out that Azerbaijani universities are challenged by the evaluation criteria of the global university rankings due to the structural and biased barriers (From personal communication with the Executive Vice Rector of ADA University, March 28, 2023). For example, he stated some of the global rankings ask about relations with the employers and their opinion about our university which may produce subjective and misguided results. Most of the well-known rankings such as QS University Ranking, Times Higher Education Rankings put a lot of weight on income of alumni and published articles in the international journals. In Azerbaijan, the income of alumni is low compared to the

developed countries due to the economical differences. Furthermore, the interviewee mentioned that publishing articles in international journals is also a challenge for small universities as they have a limited number of professors. Most of the well-known international journals publish articles in English, and not every professor can produce articles in English in Azerbaijan. Therefore, the journals have been dominated by universities located in the Anglosphere which creates unfair global competition among the HEIs.

The competition between HEIs is also about quality and status. In economic means, competition is defined by prices of the goods and services delivered; therefore, a price war is observed among the market actors. However, when it comes to global competition in higher education, we can notice that price is not playing a major role here. For example, if we look at the tuition fees of the universities in the US, high tuition fees are not related to the reputation of the universities. In the global competition, quality plays a more important role than tuition fees. In this regard, the HEIs compete for quality which is difficult to assess without experience. Recently, the quality of higher education is determined with “status”. When the universities compete for resources, they consider this resource will add additional value to their “status” globally. For example, hiring a professor with an internationally recognized publication matters more for HEIs rather than hiring one without any publication (Musselin, 2018). The main challenge for developing countries in this regard is that the local universities struggle to boost their quality, capacity and status due to the lack of sufficient resources.

To sum up this chapter has analyzed institutional, societal, and international recognition challenges of internationalization of the education system in Azerbaijan. The institutional challenges include lack of holistic approach to internationalization of the education system and capacity building issues. Meanwhile, the societal challenges are

focused on issues regarding national language preservation and raising inequality in getting high quality international education based on income level. About international recognition, this part discusses challenges of Azerbaijani universities in moving forward in the international rankings and gaining reputation.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Policy Alternatives**

In the previous chapter several challenges regarding internationalization of the education system in Azerbaijan were introduced and analyzed. In this chapter, different policy alternatives aligned to the mentioned challenges will be introduced based on the primary data collected, existing experience, and the best international practices. Furthermore, introducing monetary incentives, attracting more international students, educating kids from the early ages about local culture and language, teaching international students Azerbaijani language, introducing citizenship education, and training local teachers to tackle relevant societal challenges, developing international marketing strategy for HEIs, and introduction of customized state support program for chosen HEIs are the suggested policy alternatives.

### **3.1. Policy alternatives to address government's approach to internationalization of education system of Azerbaijan**

State-sponsored programs to send education seekers abroad for studies aim to generate a more educated population who will eventually drive economic growth and bring technological innovation. This is considered a good start to the internationalization of the education system. However, it may have undesirable consequences for the government. Individuals who graduated from top universities can choose to stay there instead of moving to their origin country (Zheng & Kapoor, 2021). One can say that in the case of Azerbaijan, it is avoidable as the contract between students and the government is based on agreeing to return and work for at least five years. In the short term, they can minimize the emigration of highly educated people, yet it is inevitable. The developed countries offer better economic prospects, high living standards, and more room for personal growth. It is a phase that almost all developing countries pass.

The Chinese government has a long history of arranging study-abroad scholarships to adapt the country to world standards. Propelled by globalization, policymakers have realized that they need to be more open to the world if they want to achieve a high level of economic development and prosperity. Yet, most of the Chinese graduates who were granted scholarships have chosen to stay in the Western world, and the government has failed to attract those people to their country. Especially, in the 1980s and 1990s, the brain drain was quite severe and the efforts of policymakers to involve them in the development of the country were in vain. Once the state shifted to privatization and liberalization, they started to experience an upward trend in returning graduates to China. The research conducted to examine sources of the brain drain indicates that the low level

of salaries, the absence of research organizations, and fewer job opportunities have caused emigration (Zheng & Kapoor, 2021).

### **3.1.1. Introducing Monetary incentives**

The government has tried to mitigate the ongoing trend of losing skilled individuals in many ways. One of them is monetary incentives. The government has started to provide research grants to scientists and equip them with research centers to run their studies. Currently, there are many initiatives, including the Changjiang Scholars Programme, and the Hundred Talents Programme to attract people to boost the country's research potential. Through these grants, they become more competitive in terms of salary.

In addition to this sort of program, the government has funded their top universities to engage well-versed Chinese scholars in their education system. As recruiting them is costly, they have devoted more than a billion yuan to educational institutions (Zweig & Rosen, 2003).

### **3.1.2. Attracting international students through scholarships and grants**

Another way the government deals with brain drain is that they have changed their approach. Now they focus on receiving more international students than sending students abroad. The first phase of the internationalization strategy is to attract students as much as possible and then, make internationalization happen through their presence. To achieve this the government has paid special attention to incorporating the national curriculum with Western one while retaining the Chinese core elements. Also, they have seen the importance of recruiting international staff to learn through their experience. The vibrant international academic is a way to receive more students. To highlight its significance, the government has made a target for them to reach half a million students by

2020 (Lin, 2019). The governments generally can increase the number of international studies through scholarships and grants.

Ontario University has Early Researchers Award (ERA) program to attract researchers to spur innovation within the country. The researcher is granted a maximum of CAD 100,000 (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/early-researcher-awards>) This sort of initiative makes the way for the country to become a research hub and to be home for the best and bright people.

### **3.1.3 Stimulating professional development of administrative and teaching staff for capacity building at HEIs through pedagogical training**

Academic and administrative staff are backbone of internationalization of curriculum. They are the main force to bring positive change and globalize educational institutions. They should have the relevant expertise to drive internationalization. Considering this factor, providing training to educators and administrative staff to meet the standards of international curricula is generally a top priority of university administration. Their professional development would speed up the process and create an inviting environment for foreign students (Gonzales-Bonilla et al., 2020). According to key experts in the education sphere, the current institutional capacity in Azerbaijani HEIs does not match the administration's goals to embed internationalization into their organization. Therefore, professional support for those people is a must. If they did not possess global skills, it would make no sense to have an international curriculum.

In similar cases, universities have created programs that continuously provide pedagogical, as well as language training to educators. One of them is Défi International initiated by the University of Bordeaux. They aim to prepare educators to teach

international schools by focusing on intercultural, language, and pedagogical aspects. Through the training courses, participants become more confident teaching their discipline in English in a multicultural environment. The training first starts with the importance of the English language and properly using them in classes, highlighting the importance of intonation, pronunciation, and student profiles. Then, they are assigned tasks for interactive classes and need to perform a lecture based on newly acquired skills. They have a chance to participate in simulations as an observer as much as possible and always receive progress on each step from experienced academic staff (University of Bordeaux, n.d.). More than 300 individuals have enjoyed this opportunity so far.

Another attempt to equip teaching staff with relevant linguistic and field skills is the Teaching Academic through English (TACE) program at the University of Jyväskylä. The training serves a similar purpose that has been stated before, to improve the language level of teachers, engage them in simulations and provide feedback on their performance (University of Jyväskylä, n.d.). Through these programs, participants become more skilled to teach their expertise in the English language and can apply new pedagogical learning to their classes. They can lead more student-oriented lessons to meet the standards of global education.

### **3.2. Policy alternatives on mitigating threats to local values and the society**

Internationalization of education has many advantages, including expanded admittance to vast amounts of educational opportunities and being able to perceive different viewpoints. However, as we have already discussed in previous chapters, it additionally comes with some set of challenges for the society as well, such as the advancement of predominant languages and cultures can prompt discrimination towards local speakers, while the disintegration of local languages and cultures can bring forth the deficiency of cultural identity. To address these difficulties, policymakers from all over the planet and Azerbaijan alike are investigating various policy alternatives aimed at alleviating, tackling, and further improving the harms caused by internationalization of education to the society. In this section we will analyse some policy options that have been implemented in some countries which have gained success. We will unfold three countries; New Zealand, Canada, and Singapore, where in each case the local language is or once was in the danger of getting overpowered by more dominant languages or cultures.

#### **3.2.1. The New Zealand Case**

The Ka Hikitia strategy was introduced in 2008 by the government of New Zealand to make an improvement on the academic achievements of Maori students. This is a set of guidelines for culturally responsive education in New Zealand, with an emphasis on working and educational results of Maori students. (Ministry of Education, 2013). The procedure underlines the significance of focusing on the cultural identity, language, and expects to guarantee that all Maori students can take part and make progress in education. Here are some of the examples of focus areas included in the guidelines that could be useful implemented in Azerbaijan. The guidelines focus on improving the national educational program for early learning for children, which highlights the significance of Maori language. It also supports the early education of the language being taught at the household.

For this purpose, the government provides information which supports parents to understand the benefit of early learning, how and where it can be accessed, and the different types of early learning available, such as essential and optional education. This does not exclude early teaching of English. Thus, the system successfully emphasizes on the importance of local culture and language while educating the younger generation with English for them not to become detached from international education and overall international perspective (Ministry of Education, 2013).

### **3.2.2. The Canada Case**

Canada is a country with two official languages, English and French. Therefore, it has a decent viewpoint on the language issue in the international school system. The Canadian government is focused on advancing bilingualism and providing trainings in both English and French languages.

One of the options initiated by the Canadian government to promote bilingualism with the help of the Official Languages Act. The Act orders the federal government to offer any types of services to the general population in both English and French. Additionally, it expects from every government establishment, including schools, to offer services and speak with general society in both languages. In this way, all central government-subsidized schools in Canada give training in both English and French.

Additionally, a few regions in Canada have explicit strategies with regards to the education of language. For example, the British Columbia International Student Program involves a strategy that requires all students, including international ones, to gain access to English language courses. The courses are intended to assist students with further developing their English language capability so they can partake completely in Canadian networks and classrooms (Department of Justice Canada, 1985).

To sum up, as a country Canada came up with several strategies and approaches to advance bilingualism and backing language schooling for international students. These strategies plan to address the language barriers that might emerge in worldwide training and guarantee that all students have equivalent chances to succeed. Mukan et al (2017) imply that, the implementation of policies aimed at promoting the maintenance and development of minority languages in schools can facilitate the development of these languages and help to mitigate the negative effects of linguistic hegemony and globalization on local cultures and identities. These programs could be the gateway where Azerbaijan might want to start implementing bilingual education for international students, thus by promoting Azerbaijani language for internationals, locals could benefit from this by learning additional languages as well. This program could help in demolishing the language barrier in the Azerbaijani society from both globalized and local perspectives.

### **3.2.3. The Singapore Case**

According to Dr. Ahmadov (2023), Singapore is one of the countries which has successfully implemented programs to tackle issues that arise from internationalization of education. Singapore has become a global multi-cultural country which also requires taking serious steps towards alleviating the negative effects of internationalization. It is not a secret that internationalization of education means more foreign students, and more foreign students mean more contribution to the national GDP. From this approach it must be emphasized that the Azerbaijani government should not hinder internationalization as means to protect national identity of its citizens, instead it must find a perfect balance in order to get economic benefits of internationalization.

The Singaporean government has been involved with citizenship education for decades now. This has been done to ensure the erosion of national identity and cultural values. According to Sim (2005), “The overriding priority has been the promotion of

economic growth, perceived to be inextricably linked to national survival. The state intervenes not only to promote economic development but also to improve social conditions and in constructing national identity”. This type of education could be useful in overcoming the national identity complex from mental, cultural and linguistic prisms in Azerbaijan as well.

Another Singaporean approach is to train teachers in a way to ensure the quality of education for low-status students/pupils. Teacher education can involve training teachers on how they can better support students from a lower socio-economic background, and to be sensitive to their particular circumstances and how they impact student behavior and performance. While such sensitivity is already present in some teachers on the ground, it is not an obvious or natural inclination for many others as teachers are still trained and held to the primary role of raising their students’ grades (Gophinathan and Loh, 2023). This could be an effective way in making balance between socio-economic classes in the field of education. By adapting this approach Azerbaijan could overcome its socio-economic disparities in terms of education.

### **3.3. Increasing international reputation of Azerbaijani universities**

To meet the requirements of a globalized knowledge economy and have a strategic position in the internationally competitive education market Azerbaijani universities need to follow international standards and guidelines. Having international accreditation, being a part of internationally recognized associations, and meeting the ESG framework play an important role in increasing the international reputation of a university globally. There are successful cases from Japan and Australia that managed to internationalize their national education system in a short time and become famous study abroad destinations. For example, Japan introduced the Top Global University Project in which the government provides customized support for the universities who have potential to be a globally recognized education and research center. The main mission of the project is to increase the number of Japanese universities represented in the top 100 global rankings. Meanwhile, the project aims to increase the number of international faculty, outgoing mobile students, programs taught in English, the ratio of international students, number courses taught in English etc. (The Global University Project, 2023). The results show that the number of international students studying at Japanese universities doubled since the start of the project, reaching up to 73,536 currently compared to 36,545 people in 2013. There are 5 Japanese universities among the top 100 globally ranked universities.

Additionally, the Australian government also managed to implement successful internationalization policies since the 1970s and become one of the famous study abroad destinations. In the 1970s the government reviewed the current internationalization of the education system and decided to abolish university fees including for the international students. Later on, a new phase of the international student recruitment began on the basis of aid (sponsorship) in which the international students were required to pay only a third of the tuition fees while the rest was subsidized by the Australian government. After a while,

the government realized that education is something that can be an export good and decided to put a minimum fee on students coming from abroad to study in the country (Wit and Adams, 2010). After that the government started to support the development of the infrastructure of HEIs, faculty, recruitment of international students, improving curricula, student experiences and so on. In the beginning of the 90s, there was a strong commitment from the government to internationalize the education sector in the country and receive international students. In the following, a roadmap on recruitment of the international students, transnational programs were created, and entrepreneurial spirit emerged. As the education market was getting highly competitive the Australian Ministry of Education created Australian Education International a sub entity that is responsible for promotion of tertiary education in Australia globally via several offices in the various parts of the world. The creation of AEI contributed to building good branding of international education in Australia.

Another successful practice of attracting international students into the country was the initiation of partnerships between public and private entities in the recruitment of international students. Commercial companies started to support universities in Australia to recruit international students. On the other hand, the International Development Program (IDP) of Australian universities contributed to the development of international education in the country. The main focus of IDP is recruitment of international students, English language testing in partnership with IELTS, and management of international aid projects. The worldwide activities of the IDP helped the local universities to build an internationally recognized brand.

To sum up, in this chapter the policy alternatives aligned to tackle the challenges mentioned in the previous chapter were introduced and the best international practices analyzed.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Evaluation of Policy Alternatives**

In this chapter the suggested policy alternatives will be evaluated based on five factors, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, feasibility, and flexibility. This evaluation will decide the recommendations to the case of Azerbaijan.

#### **4.1 Evaluation of policy alternatives to address institutional challenges**

The first solution has based on the Chinese model of alleviating the results of brain drain. It consists of two parts: monetary incentive to compete with Western high salaries and to attract international students to balance the level of brain drain. In the following paragraphs, the solutions will be analyzed to determine how suitable they are to the current challenges.

##### **4.1.1. Introducing Monetary Incentives**

**Effectiveness:** Having research facilities for scientists with a background in learning and teaching in the Western world would speed up the process of internationalization. It also helps to generate highly skilled individuals internally without the need of sending them abroad.

**Efficiency:** Research grants and recruiting highly experienced academic staff would be very costly. However, it would benefit the whole society. Unlike the government's top-down policies, it is a bottom-up process of internationalization and stimulating its progress of incorporating Western elements into the curricula.

Equity: Only a minor percentage of people who received a Western education and have rich backgrounds could enjoy such grants and receive high salaries.

Flexibility: Research facilities usually serve one area and academic staff have generally expertise in certain spheres. So, it is not flexible in terms of using these elements in other areas of education.

Feasibility: Given the government funds to study abroad programs currently, these monetary incentives do not seem feasible. At later stages of the internationalization process, once the duration of state-sponsored programs ends, it would become more practical to work on the engagement of more international students.

#### **4.1.2. Attracting foreign students through scholarships and research grants**

Effectiveness: Having more international students would offset government spending on study abroad programs and other educational investments. Through incoming students, universities would have a global environment. Currently, there are more than 10 dual degree programs, so it would be easier for educational institutions to attract foreign students. In this way, other universities also have incentives to initiate more partnerships with Western universities.

Efficiency: To attract more international students, Azerbaijani universities need to have major structural changes inside. Academic staff should have the proper training to teach global trends and engage in fruitful discussions with students. It would be costly to achieve this. Yet, since the Ministry of Education has accepted new laws on accreditation, universities must undertake training and reforms.

Equity: Each university capable of receiving international students can enjoy having international students on its campus.

Flexibility: Attracting more international students would only benefit educational spheres.

Feasibility: To attract more students, there should be proper marketing abroad and universities should meet global standards. Currently, marketing is not effective, and the accreditation process has not started. So, this policy can be feasible only after having a proper promotion of dual degree programs and partnerships and an accreditation process.

#### **4.1.3. Stimulating professional development of administrative and teaching staff for capacity building at HEIs through pedagogical training**

Effectiveness: Having trained for the academic community would speed up the process of internationalization. While incorporating international elements into our national curricula, local people will receive proper training and improve their pedagogical abilities to lead multicultural classes.

Efficiency: Training would be costly as highly experienced experts in the education sphere need to be involved in the process. However, once the teaching staff possesses global skills, it would help the university to rise in global rankings, hence they would receive more foreign students. Also, after some time HEIs would not need to recruit foreign experts for training. Local staff would be experienced enough to pass knowledge to the next generations.

Equity: Each teacher can enjoy professional support provided by institutions. Some faculties can be overlooked depending on their relevance in a global world. Yet, everyone can enjoy courses on linguistic skills.

Flexibility: Training appears to benefit educational spheres only.

Feasibility: The policy is currently feasible. MoE education can invite guest professors to involve them in training. Also, universities can reach out to each other, which have more experience in teaching classes in English and have comparatively more English-based faculties. The existence of new evaluation criteria for accreditation will also push universities to commence training for teaching staff and improve their skills on the relevant subject.

## **4.2. Mitigating threats to local values and the society**

This section will gather best practices aimed at solving societal issues, which will be used to achieve the final phase of recommendations from the previous policy alternatives section. This section also will bring forward some suggestions that have been proposed by local experts in the field of education in Azerbaijan.

At first, we must acknowledge that there is not one perfect option. All options have its pros and cons in terms of 3Es; effectiveness, efficiency and equity. In terms of society, almost all policy alternatives focus on equity. Where every pupil or student is supposed to get involved in the process. However, the more feasible, efficient and effective the option is, the more likely it gets a chance to be considered in governmental decision-making.

Secondly, as an expert stressed the importance of the Azerbaijani language in the interview, we should not only focus on just tackling and preventing harms of internationalization of education, on the contrary we should look for a policy which will turn these challenges into mutual benefits. For example, by the help of internationalization, Azerbaijani culture, language could get more attention and recognition by foreigners inside and outside the country (From personal communication with the expert at the School of Education of ADA University, April 28, 2023).

In this regard, the Rector of Mingachevir State University advised that, when it comes to protecting local values, the main priority has to be set by learning Azerbaijani language for the citizens of Azerbaijan (May 1, 2023). In addition, our culture and values should be extended into the international arena. English teachers should become double-sensitive in preaching our culture and language. Local heritage should be taught and included in homework in English for pupils to become ready to promote our values on the

international level. The advice seems very feasible and efficient. With some minor changes in the curriculum and briefly informing educators at schools could prove effective.

Another effective approach could be applying early-teaching to children and informing parents about the importance of local linguistic and cultural values initiated by the Ka Hikitia system. This could prove very effective as the system focuses on children from a very young age. This is a great period of learning and acquiring new languages. Learning both Azerbaijani and English alongside other languages could prove very effective. However, the government should allocate resources to fulfill this early language education. On the least level, if parents get guided properly into teaching their kids local language, this could be very feasible at the same time. This option must be considered.

On the other hand, the Canadian approach, if implemented, might prove costly to the Azerbaijani government. As it focuses on bilingualism, which should not be a big deal for Azerbaijan. However, there are some minority language regions, such as Talish, Lazgi and etc. the government might want to consider in order to protect local-minority cultures and languages from extinction. Another Canadian approach is integrating foreign students into the country by teaching them the language used countrywide. Which could be costly but it could earn lots of prestige to Azerbaijan as more international people learn Azerbaijani language. This policy cannot be considered effective for now, because, there are still a few international students studying in Azerbaijan, however, in the future if more international students are encouraged to do so it could prove very effective.

Lastly, Azerbaijan should focus on integrating Singaporean citizenship education as well. In this regard, students should get taught to fully comprehend and acquire national identity. This could prove very effective yet costly. Another approach from the Singaporean government is also costly but might be too useful. As the teachers get trained in order to be fully capable to teach and understand students of low-class families. In terms of education

the government should not let capitalism fully take over the system and favor some pupils over the others. To solve this equity issue, the government should allocate as many resources as possible to ensure a similar quality of education towards every student.

To conclude this part with a citation from the Rector of Mingachevir State University (May 1, 2023), “A well-educated citizen without national identity is useless.” The Azerbaijani government has been working on alleviating negative effects of internationalization on language and culture for years now. However, it could certainly do more to promote Azerbaijani language as a dominant and driving force of the society. Without the language and culture the society will stop functioning properly. Before-mentioned recommendations should get involved in one set of rules or policies, as listed from the cheapest to the most expensive and implemented starting from the less costly to the highest accordingly.

### **4.3. Increasing international reputation of Azerbaijani universities**

Considering the successful practices from Japan and Australia that managed to reach successful results in internationalization of their education system Azerbaijan also can benefit from these practices. Azerbaijani government has been implementing successful policies and state programs at the national level aimed at development of the higher education system internationally. The two state programs covering 2007-2015, 2022-2026 years on supporting Azerbaijani citizens to study abroad with the government scholarships, and the state program covering 2019-2023 years on the development of international competitiveness of higher education systems in Azerbaijan are the examples of these programs. Even though there is continuous support at the national level we can notice the local universities in Azerbaijan are not willing or capable of preparing an internationalization strategy and implementing it. Considering the Top Global University Project in Japan, Azerbaijani government also needs to provide customized support for the chosen potential universities to gain an international reputation and meet international standards. According to QS Universities Rankings, two Azerbaijani universities (University of Economics, and Baku State University) entered the top 1000-1200 in global rankings. This fact shows that the mentioned universities have potential to move forward in the global university rankings and become a study abroad destination in the region. During our interview with the representative of Khazar University (May 2, 2023), he also pointed out that the local universities lack envisioned strategy, guidelines, and staff to grow internationally. Therefore, there is a need from the government side to support the potential universities by providing customized support. As a result of our conversations with key experts in the field international education it is revealed out that there is a serious lack of joint research, English programs, international staff, modern curricula, mobility opportunities, international accreditation, and organization of scientific conferences etc. in

Azerbaijani universities which are crucially important factors to build and an internationally recognized education brand. For example, the representative of Mingachevir State University (May 1, 2023) stated that joint research papers with the faculty of well known universities, organization of high-level scientific conferences, and international accreditation by prestigious organizations play a vital role in the internationalization of an education institution (From personal communication, May 4, 2023). Even though a lot of work has been done in the accreditation of local universities at the national level most of the universities either are not willing or interested in getting international accreditations and taking an active role in the global education associations. To tackle these challenges Azerbaijan needs to initiate a state program aimed to provide customized support for potential universities to meet the requirements of international competition in the field of education and move forward in the global rankings. In addition, taking into account the successful international student recruitment policies and practices from Australia, Azerbaijan higher education sector can take the advantage of similar policies. It is a fact that most of the universities in Azerbaijan do not have an international marketing campaign or strategy to grab attention of potential international students. Most of the international marketing campaigns are being conducted by the MoSE via Study in Azerbaijan portal. The universities themselves also should be interested in promotion of their international programs rather than relying on only general promotions on the Study in Azerbaijan portal. Therefore, the Study in Azerbaijan portal should be rebranded in accordance with the modern trends and the local universities should be encouraged to prepare their own international marketing campaigns and take ownership in its implementation which should include scholarships by the universities as well.

In general, from an effectiveness and efficiency perspective, initiation of a state program to provide customized support to national universities and improving international

marketing campaigns will definitely help them to move forward in the global rankings even though it might be costly in the beginning. The policy will be effective as the universities will gain international reputation and become competitive internationally, the other local universities will be able to benefit from this experience as well. It may cause high costs in the beginning, however considering the long term benefits of the programs the costs will be returned back in the long run. Also, the costs will not be only laid down on the government and can be shared with involved universities. From the equity perspective it might not be possible to apply these policies for all the universities in the short run considering their willingness and potential. From the flexibility perspective the state program should not be too flexible as it needs to meet the international standards. However, some organizational changes can be aligned to the needs of the selected universities. The improving international campaign strategy is flexible and can be customized easily. From the perspective of feasibility, both of the policies can be implemented by efficient and effective allocation resources.

After proposition and evaluation of the policy options mentioned above 3 of them has been chosen as the best alternatives such as *attracting more international students, implementing a customized state program, Ka Hikitia strategy* based on five criterias of efficiency, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, and feasibility.

<b>Policy Alternatives</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>Equity</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
Introducing Monetary incentives	▲	▲			
Attracting international students	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Stimulating capacity building at HEIs	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
The British Columbia International Student Program: integration of foreign students			▲	▲	▲
Ka Hikitia Strategy	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Citizenship Education	▲		▲		▲
Educating tutors to assist lower-class pupils	▲	▲	▲		▲
Customized state support program on the development of HEIs internationally	▲	▲		▲	▲
Developing international marketing strategy	▲	▲		▲	▲

To conclude, in this chapter several policy alternatives were introduced in response to institutional, societal, and international recognition challenges in internationalization of

the education system in Azerbaijan. The policies are following: introducing monetary incentives for graduates of highly qualified universities, attracting more international students, improving teaching Azerbaijani for children at the early ages, teaching internationals Azerbaijani, introduction of citizenship education, and training local teachers to tackle the societal challenges in the country. Based on the evaluation of the policy alternatives 3 of them, *attracting more international students, implementing a customized state program, and the Ka Hikitia strategy* are considered as the best ones in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, and feasibility.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to reveal how internationalization challenges the education system in Azerbaijan by reviewing the existing documents, analyzing conducted policies, interpreting the legal documents, interviewing the field experts, and proposing policy alternatives based on the best international practices which fit the current situation in the country. According to the documents, studies reviewed and interviews conducted it was found out that the challenges can be categorized in 3 dimensions such as institutional, societal, and international reputation challenges. Firstly, the research revealed that HEIs in Azerbaijan face institutional challenges such as lack of holistic approach to internationalization and their limited capacity to meet the demands of globalization. In the following, the societal challenges such as threat to Azerbaijani language and growing inequality on the societal level are addressed as major issues associated with development of international education in the country. Finally, the local HEIs experience lack of international reputation, recognition and struggle to move forward in the international rankings due to rising international competition among universities and research centers globally. Although Azerbaijani government has been implementing state programs on studying abroad to support HEIs in improving their academic staff and increasing international competitiveness, there is still a need for more support from the government side in the development of the higher education system in terms of internationalization.

In response to the mentioned challenges, several policy options have been proposed considering the international best practices and insights from the expert interviews. Firstly, to address the institutional challenges such as lack of holistic approach and capacity limitations attracting more international students and encouraging the Azerbaijani

graduates (local researchers and scientists) of well-known international universities have been introduced. Secondly, to tackle the societal challenges such as threat to national language and disparity in access to international education policy options such as improving teaching Azerbaijani for children at the early ages, teaching internationals Azerbaijani, introduction of citizenship education, and training local teachers to tackle the societal challenges in the country were suggested referring the best practices from the developed countries. Finally, to fill the gaps in the international recognition of Azerbaijani HEIs, introduction of customized state support programs on international development of local HEIs and development of international marketing strategy for the local universities have been proposed as respective policy options.

Additionally, the introduced policy options have been evaluated based on the 5 factors such as efficiency, effectiveness, equity, flexibility, and feasibility. According to the evaluation results 3 policy alternatives such as *attracting more international students, implementing a customized state program, and following the Ka Hikitia strategy* have been chosen as the best ones even though the other policy options are also considered quite implementable.

To sum up, the ultimate aim of this capstone was analyze the main existing challenges of Azerbaijani education system in terms of internationalization by reviewing previously conducted studies, reviewing existing documents, evaluating the current and previously implemented policies and proposing alternative policy options by assessing the international best practices and taking into account inputs from the expert interviews.

### **Recommendations**

- Creation of funds for the establishment of research centers (MoSE)
- Increasing the number of scholarships and grants to receive more international students (MoSE)

- Conducting pedagogical trainings to teaching staff to improve their knowledge on their expertise (HEIs)
- Inclusion of Teaching Academic through English programs into teacher's trainings (HEIs)
- Following Ka Hikitia strategy of New Zealand as an important criterion on the societal level, to help the Ministry of Science and Education advancing a national strategy on arranging and promoting early education for children in the local as well as international languages while also guiding parents about the importance of education of local languages and cultures in Azerbaijan.
- Establishment of a high level intergovernmental working group between the responsible public organisations (Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Education of Singapore) of Singapore and Azerbaijan in the field of education with regards to the integration of citizenship education to the curricula and acquiring training for educators for improving their teaching skills/methods in relation to the lower-class pupils and students. Upon achieving success in cooperation taking the case to the Parliament of Azerbaijan for the approval of the new legislation.
- Establishment of a working group at the MoSE to prepare a state program aimed at providing customized support for the potential HEIs to grow internationally (Education Quality Assurance Agency (TKTA), Institute of Education, newly established agency of higher education should be involved);
- Preparation of international marketing strategy of the local HEIs in Azerbaijan (for MoSE, potential HEIs);
- Rebranding Study in Azerbaijan portal (for MoSE, local HEIs);

- Creation of national scholarships for students to go on mobility and gain international experience (MoSE, HEIs);
- Provision of local scholarships by the universities for incoming international students (for local HEIs);
- Supporting local faculty to conduct joint research with the faculty of globally well-known universities (for Ministry of Science and Education (MoSE), National Academy of Sciences, local HEIs, research institutions)

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