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MANAGEMENT**

**ALIGNMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION-FOCUSED UNDERGRADUATE
PROGRAMS WITH CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN GOVERNMENT BODIES IN
AZERBAIJAN**

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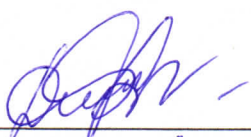
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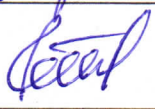
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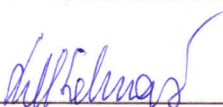
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Abstract

This capstone project explores the alignment between public administration-focused undergraduate programs offered by public universities and the career requirements of government bodies in Azerbaijan. Through a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews with recent graduates of the programs and representatives from government bodies, and reviews of relevant documents provided by a public university, the research identifies the gaps between skills and competencies obtained through the given education programs and job requirements in the government bodies. The key findings highlight a limited emphasis on practical skills, with the public administration-focused undergraduate programs placing greater focus on theoretical knowledge. Moreover, data analysis revealed misalignment between the Civil Service Exam operated by the State Examination Center and the learning outcomes of the programs. The research highlights the importance of integrating practice-based learning, stronger university-government collaboration, and improvement of the relevant programs in public universities. Recommendations include revising the content of the education programs to better reflect their relevance to the job requirements, incorporating internships and practice-based projects. The implications of this research are vital for bridging collaboration between the universities' relevant programs and the government bodies for enhancing a competent, career-ready public administration workforce in Azerbaijan. Based on the findings, we propose a website to be created, aiming to improve the collaboration between the undergraduate programs and careers in the government bodies. The website will provide an opportunity for the students of the undergraduate programs to gain practical experience through the internship programs, workshops, and different trainings, which will be organized by the government bodies.

Key words: public administration undergraduate programs and job requirements, Civil Service Exams in Azerbaijan, employment approaches of government bodies, curriculum development in universities in Azerbaijan

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**ALIGNMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION-FOCUSED UNDERGRADUATE
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AZERBAIJAN**

Chapter I

Higher education plays a key role in shaping a skilled workforce that supports the effective functioning of public institutions and contributes to national development (Cleary & Van Noy, 2014; Varona Cervantes & Cooper, 2020). When academic curricula misalign with labor market needs, especially in the field of public administration, graduates may struggle with employment readiness, reducing their ability to contribute meaningfully to public service (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Green & McIntosh, 2007). The World Bank (WB, 2024) emphasizes that aligning graduates' skills with the operational needs of the public sector is critical to improving the effectiveness and sustainability of public services.

In Azerbaijan, undergraduate programs such as "Public and Municipal Administration" are designed to equip students with knowledge of the unified system of governance and the interaction between state and local self-governance bodies (Azerbaijan State University of Economics [UNEC], 2025). According to the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (n.d.), higher education institutions are expected to align their academic programs with labor market demands, foster innovation, and prepare highly qualified specialists to ensure international competitiveness of the national education system and workforce. To achieve the mentioned objectives, the Ministry of *Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted the State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System (2019–2023)*, focusing on developing the curricula of higher education institutions and forming human capital via quality education.

This research aims to study the alignment between undergraduate public administration programs and career opportunities within Azerbaijan's government bodies, with a specific emphasis on central executive authorities (Dövlət Xidmətləri Portalı, 2024). To analyze this alignment, the study involved interviews with recent graduates, a university dean, faculty members, a public human resource professional, and a representative from the State Examination Center (SEC), as well as document analysis of relevant academic curricula. The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of the appropriateness of academic preparation for government employment requirements.

Statement of the Problem

In Azerbaijan, the State Examination Center (SEC) plays a central role in the recruitment process for government positions in the public sector (Azərbaycan Respublikası Dövlət İmtahan Mərkəzi publik hüquqi şəxsin Nizamnaməsi articles 1, 2, and 3). The SEC is responsible for conducting and overseeing competitive examinations that assess candidates' qualifications and readiness for various administrative roles, from leadership positions to specialized technical roles (State Examination Center [SEC], 2025). The recruitment framework is organized to ensure that candidates meet the educational and professional requirements relevant to their roles within government bodies. As outlined in Article 28 of the *Law on Civil Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan* (2000), the recruitment process for civil service positions consists of two stages: a standardized test examination and an interview. According to Article 28.3 and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2017), candidates for administrative roles must pass a standardized test to obtain a certificate that is valid for five years. Only those who hold a certificate are eligible to proceed to the interview stage (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Civil Service, 2000). These stages apply to Class A (administrative-leading) and Class B (administrative-

executive) civil service roles. The test examination assesses candidates through questions on four key topics: the Azerbaijani language, legislation, information technologies, and logical thinking, ensuring they possess the knowledge and skills required for government positions (State Examination Center [SEC], 2025).

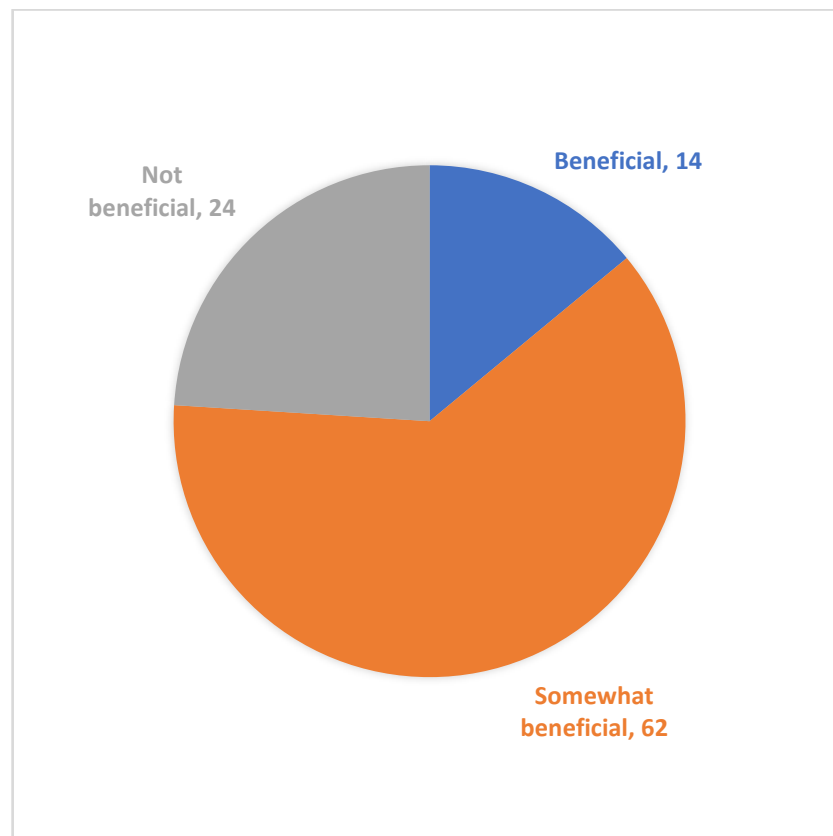
According to the *Statistical Yearbook on Civil Service Recruitment and Examinations*, in 2023, out of 16,200 candidates who took part in the civil service entrance exams conducted by the State Examination Center, only 4,709 candidates demonstrated successful results. Emphasizing the importance of university education, the State Examination Center noted that the candidates who passed the exams and received a certificate were mostly graduates of Baku State University, Azerbaijan State University of Economics, and Nakhchivan State University, which were ranked in the top three (State Examination Center [SEC], 2024).

Moreover, the preliminary survey results conducted for this research project reveal that a significant portion of respondents who graduated from public administration-focused programs feel underprepared for their current jobs (see Chart 1). The survey was conducted among people who graduated from public administration-focused programs of public universities in Baku, Azerbaijan, in the last five years. The participants were involved through the snowball sampling technique as we invited relevant candidates whom we already know and then they forwarded the survey to the relevant candidates they knew. The survey consisted of five questions related to the candidates' educational background and professional experience and their perceptions of the alignment between those two (Appendix A). The overall number of survey participants was 35, and 24% of them considered that the knowledge and competencies gained during their bachelor's degrees were not beneficial in their careers in the government bodies. Reportedly, 62% of respondents considered the same knowledge and competencies to be somewhat beneficial, while only 14% considered them

beneficial. This indicates a strong need for improving the alignment between academic programs and the skills required by employers of government bodies.

Chart 1

The Results of the Preliminary Survey



According to Amirova and Valiyev (2021) and Alakbarova (2024), a persistent mismatch exists between university curricula and labor market requirements in Azerbaijan. This gap is particularly evident in public administration, where graduates often lack soft skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, and communication (Amirova & Valiyev, 2021). According to AmCham (2024), broader labor market assessments highlight weak coordination between universities and employers in curriculum development, contributing to soft-skill gaps among university graduates.

Considering the SEC statistics (State Examination Center [SEC], 2024), preliminary survey findings, and recent research on skills mismatches in Azerbaijan's labor market (Amirova & Valiyev, 2021; Alakbarova, 2024; AmCham, 2024), this study is guided by the following assumptions:

1. There is a potential skills and competency misalignment between public administration programs and job requirements in government bodies in Azerbaijan.
2. The SEC civil service examination could better reflect the knowledge and competencies developed through undergraduate public administration education in Azerbaijan.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the alignment between public administration-focused undergraduate programs of public universities and the career requirements of government bodies in Azerbaijan from three aspects. Firstly, this alignment has been explored through the perceptions of graduates of public administration-focused undergraduate programs. Those graduates were the people who intended to work or already worked in the government bodies. Although referring to our preliminary data and SEC statistics, we assumed that graduates of the mentioned programs lack the skills and competencies to meet the career requirements in government bodies, and comprehensive research was necessary to approve or disapprove our assumptions. Secondly, the alignment between the graduates of public administration-focused undergraduate programs and the career requirements of government bodies in Azerbaijan has been explored through the SEC civil service exam. Therefore, we have endeavored to identify if the SEC civil service exam reflects the skills and competencies of the candidates who hold a bachelor's degree from public administration disciplines at Azerbaijani universities. Thirdly, the study aimed to

explore the above-mentioned alignment by identifying the key competencies that government bodies expect from job candidates to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. Additionally, the study provides some suggestions or recommendations on improving the curricula of public administration-focused undergraduate programs to meet the evolving career demands in government bodies in Azerbaijan.

Research questions

1. How are public administration-focused undergraduate programs aligned with the competencies required or expected by the government bodies in Azerbaijan?

SUB RQ1. How do recent graduates of public administration-focused undergraduate programs perceive the alignment of their academic programs with career requirements in government bodies in Azerbaijan?

SUB RQ2. What key competencies do government bodies in Azerbaijan expect from the job candidates to fulfill their job responsibilities?

2. How should the recruitment process be designed to reflect the skills of the graduates of public administration-focused programs?

Significance of the Study

This research will provide insights for curriculum development in higher education by identifying the specific gaps between skills and competencies gained through the given programs and employment requirements in government bodies. Therefore, the significance of this study underpins enhancing the educational relevance of public administration-focused programs in relation to career requirements in government bodies. The research will contribute to ensuring that higher educational institutions produce well-prepared graduates for career challenges in government bodies. This may also lead to the enhancement of career

opportunities for graduates while also increasing the overall performance and efficiency of government institutions.

Moreover, this research will contribute to the improvement of the candidate recruitment process for government bodies in Azerbaijan. In conclusion, this study will focus on graduates' perceptions, career requirements in government bodies, and the framework of public administration-focused programs, which make its findings essential for the improvement of the educational relevance of the given undergraduate programs and the development of government bodies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Alignment Challenges in Higher Education

In many countries, there is a gap between the curriculum of public administration programs and the requirements of the public sector (Hinna et al., 2019). This misalignment may result from the traditional or outdated educational models, minimal interaction between educational institutions and government bodies, or failure to meet the changing demands of the public sector. These gaps frequently result in graduates being inadequately prepared for the challenges of careers in government, ultimately limiting their professional success and affecting the functionality of public institutions (Silva & Garcia, 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions must engage in a persistent conversation with government bodies to ensure that academic programs remain relevant and coherent with shifting public sector priorities (Cleary & Van Noy, 2014).

Recent graduates of public administration-focused programs in Azerbaijan often experience a misalignment between their studies and the practical demands in government positions. Despite their education, the skills taught in universities are not aligned with the

demands of the public sector, leading to difficulties in employment or a mismatch in the career placements (Amirova & Valiyev, 2021).

Public Administration Education in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in reforming the public administration and educational systems in the last few decades. Remarkable reforms, such as reforms in higher education within the Bologna Process (Mustafayev et al., 2009), and reforms in civil service, such as implementing civil service exams, have been implemented (Dövlət qulluğu haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu, 2001). The change from a Soviet-era administrative system to a modern and evolved governance framework has required transformations to public administration-focused programs. Azerbaijan's educational system, particularly in the fields of government studies and public governance, has undergone several reforms to address these challenges.

Several universities in Azerbaijan now offer curricula focused on public administration, which include core courses such as law, management, ethics, and public policy for a holistic understanding of the public sector for students. However, discrepancies remain regarding the effectiveness of these programs in their alignment with the needs of government bodies in Azerbaijan (Amirova & Valiyev, 2021).

Demand for Public Administration Graduates in Azerbaijan

Government bodies in Azerbaijan are undergoing transformation to meet the challenges of economic restructuring, technological development, and geopolitical policy changes. However, despite the evolution, the government sector continues to encounter issues concerning management performance, accountability, and governance standards (Khalilov & Huseyn, 2022). As such, there is an increasing demand for public administration specialists who can meet the expectations for more effective and efficient performance in this sector.

Research on public administration employment trends in Azerbaijan indicates that while there is a demand for graduates in different government fields, the nature of employment often mirrors the need for certain skill sets and qualifications (World Bank, 2023). For instance, government agencies in Azerbaijan have a high demand for professionals who are well-educated and experienced in public policy analysis, governance, and human resources management. Furthermore, a more integrated model of government bodies to provide integrated services to people in Azerbaijan has generated an increased requirement for professionals who are capable of handling intergovernmental relations, social welfare programs, and project coordination (Mammadov, 2019).

Government Initiatives to Bridge the Gap

To minimize the issues in aligning public administration programs with career opportunities in government sectors, the Azerbaijani government has launched a series of initiatives aimed at bringing a modern approach to the public administration field and improving the quality of its civil service. The key reform was the creation of the State Service of Azerbaijan, which encourages professionalism and efficiency in the civil service. This initiative requires recruitment based on merit and competency, while also focusing on supporting professional development for public servants (Rahimli, 2017).

In addition, there have been continuous efforts to strengthen collaboration between educational institutions and government bodies in Azerbaijan. For instance, internships, development programs, and research projects have become more common, providing students with significant experience in government agencies. This collaboration aims to ensure that the theoretical knowledge being taught at universities can be used in practice and match the requirements of government services (Mammadov, 2019).

International Perspectives on Public Administration Education

The mismatch of public administration-focused programs with career options in government fields is not a unique challenge to Azerbaijan. Globally, there is increasing recognition of the significance of aligning education programs with public agencies' needs. For instance, countries including Canada and the UK have implemented professional development programs to align the match between the knowledge taught in academia and practical public administration skills. In these countries, public administration-focused programs have increasingly shifted towards a more practical approach, integrating policy analysis, management, and leadership into their curricula (Lopez-Littleton & Blessett, 2015).

Description of the Recruitment Processes in Civil Services

Countries employ various recruitment strategies, yet merit-based processes continue to serve as the foundation for professional civil services.

United States

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) oversees the posting of federal job announcements and establishes policies for hiring procedures across the government. In the standard Federal Application Process, the applicants are categorized into quality groups by the hiring agency. Only those in the top category are forwarded to the hiring official. The most qualified applications are reviewed by the hiring official, chosen, and interviewed, referring to the agency policy (OECD, 2018).

France

According to OECD (2018), in France, each ministry follows its own procedure, but competitions are typically organized in three phases designed to narrow down the pool of candidates. The initial phase involves reviewing the application form to verify that the candidate meets the required qualifications, such as diplomas or professional experience. The second phase usually involves a written test to determine which candidates will be eligible to

proceed with the selection process. Tests may consist, for instance, a written essay on a particular topic or a note. Qualified candidates can proceed with the process, and the final admission assessments typically include a panel interview.

Regarding post-Soviet countries, the civil servant recruitment process has remarkably transformed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet countries have implemented various reforms to enhance the efficacy of their public administration organizations. Implementing new designs in the recruitment processes is the central measure taken to rationalize the functions of the public administration sectors and balance merit-based approaches with each nation's administrative and cultural context (Baimenov & Liverakos, 2022).

Russia

The civil service recruitment process is not a shortcut in Russia. At the federal level, the recruitment process consists of strict competitive exams, which are implemented to assess various skills and knowledge to ensure that only rigorously prepared and best-suited candidates to the civil service requirements pass the exams. The exams assess the candidates from different aspects, such as technical knowledge and critical thinking skills. They are specifically designed to select candidates who can effectively utilize their knowledge alongside their field-specific knowledge. The interview phase is the next level in the recruitment process, crafted to assess the candidates' interpersonal or social skills to align with the civil service culture (Kumar, 2023).

Kazakhstan

According to the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs (ACS, 2024), the civil service recruitment process consists of two phases: *Testing for knowledge of legislation and state language*, and *interviewing*. The legislation and state

language proficiency knowledge tests are conducted through three distinct programs, designed to measure candidates' knowledge of the state language proficiency and legislation with relevant tests. The first program has been designed for A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-O-1, C-O-2, C-R-1, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-O-1, D-O-2, E-1, E-2 job position categories, the second program has been designed for B-5, B-6, C-4, C-5, C-O-3, C-O-4, C-O-5, C-O-6, C-R-2, C-R-3, C-R-4, D-4, D-5, D-O-3, D-O-4, D-O-5, D-O-6, D-R-1, D-R-2, D-R-3, E-3, E-R-1, E-R-2, E-R-3, E-G-1, E-G-2 job position categories, and the third program has been designed for C-R-5, D-R-4, D-R-5, E-4, E-5, E-R-4, E-R-5, E-G-3, E-G-4 job position categories. The evaluation of candidates' personal qualities for positions in Corps "B" involves tasks designed to determine their levels of *Stress resistance, Initiative, Responsibilities, Service consumer orientation and information, Integrity, Self-development, Efficiency, Cooperation and interaction, Activity management, Decision-making, Leadership, Strategic thinking, and Change management*. The testing process also involves questions, designed to assess confidence levels, with a reliability threshold of at least 50% for successfully passing the personal qualities assessment. The interview aims to evaluate the candidates' required professional qualifications and personal attributes. Applicants are also required to write an essay, completed in the presence of the commission's secretary, on a topic identified by the competition commission. Depending on the candidate's preference, this essay must be in either the state or the Russian language (Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs [ACS], 2024).

For civil service positions, in Azerbaijan, the recruitment process is centralized, similar to Kazakhstan, and carried out by the State Examination Center (SEC). Civil Service Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2000) states that admission to the civil service in Azerbaijan is conducted based on competition, consisting of testing and interview stages. In the first stage, candidates must take a test designed to measure their knowledge of the

Azerbaijani language, legislation, information technologies, and logical thinking. The testing is divided into two categories: *BA* and *BB*. Type B of the exam has been designed for administrative executive positions, which involves Group BA and Group BB.

According to the State Examination Center (SEC) (2025), candidates must acquire the relevant passing scores of the subgroups of the *BA* and *BB* groups of administrative executive positions of the civil service in state bodies, to be eligible to participate in the interview stage to get the job positions. In the second stage, the candidates take part in the interview process. According to the Rule for interviewing to hold a civil service position (2017), the interview aims to determine the candidate's suitability for the vacant position. The interview commission, formed by the state body, which needs an employee or employees, includes one representative of the State Examination Center (SEC), and one independent expert. Accordingly, they evaluate the suitability of the candidate for the vacant position based on the following criteria: *knowledge level, professional training, general outlook, and qualities necessary for the vacant position, including the candidate's emotional stability, responsibility, purposefulness, honesty, self-criticism, penetration, analysis, and communication skills.*

Theoretical framework

The main goal of public administration education is to prepare students for careers in government by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to promote social welfare and manage public resources effectively. This discipline incorporates elements of economics, political science, management, and law as an interdisciplinary field. Over time, public administration education has evolved to meet the changing demands of governance and management in the public sector, placing increasing importance on a variety of skills, including leadership, decision-making, and technical expertise in public policy and governance fields (Edwards et al., 2012).

In the context of employment in government fields, it is vital to ensure that public administration-focused programs equip students with both theoretical and practical skills that are in an alignment with the needs of governmental institutions. Such correspondence ensures that graduates are not only prepared to be employed but also capable of performing their roles effectively (Bromell, 2010).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the alignment between public administration-focused programs and career demands in government bodies in Azerbaijan is still considered a work in progress. Despite significant reforms such as reforms in higher education within the Bologna Process (Mustafayev et al., 2009), and reforms in civil service, such as civil service exams, in the public sector (Dövlət qulluğu haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu, 2001), challenges remain in ensuring that public administration programs are effective in preparing graduates to meet the demands of the Azerbaijani government effectively. Bridging this gap will require improved collaboration between higher education institutions and government sectors, along with an investigation of currently used curricula to verify that they are aligned with the evolving needs of the public sector. As Azerbaijan continues to modernize the public sector institutions, matching the educational programs with career demands in the government bodies will play a vital role in enhancing governance efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

Gaps in the literature

In the relevant literature, the alignment of undergraduate public administration programs with career requirements in government bodies is examined from various aspects, however, there are some gaps in the Azerbaijani context. In our research, one of our focus points is on studying recent graduates' perceptions about the alignment between the

educational programs and requirements of job positions in governmental bodies, however, there is no research on this phenomenon in the Azerbaijani context. This gap in perceiving how well graduates feel about the role of their education for the workforce in Azerbaijan's government sector needs to be addressed. Additionally, despite certain competencies expected by the public sector are mentioned, there is a lack of studies that specify these competencies for Azerbaijan's context. The recruitment in Azerbaijan's civil service regarding how well they are in an alignment with the skills and qualifications taught in public administration programs is also not sufficiently explored.

Another gap lies in the effectiveness of the partnership between higher education institutions and government bodies in Azerbaijan, particularly in terms of internships and job placements, which are significant to match academic programs with government sector requirements. There is also another need for deeper study regarding the effect of Azerbaijan's government sector demands on the need for the design and content of the public administration curriculum. Addressing these gaps could result in valuable information for enhancing the alignment between public educational institutions and public sector needs in Azerbaijan.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this research, the use of a qualitative research approach has been adopted since it was assumed to be effective in capturing details of the level of alignment between the academic programs and employment requirements in the government bodies. The reason for choosing the qualitative approach is in the understanding of the processes and meanings of the phenomena rather than counting the variables (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Besides, qualitative research is convenient in terms of data collection and analysis since the researcher can adapt to other emerging themes and findings (Patton, 2015). This is important for a study

that focuses on the interaction between education practices and employment requirements that are constantly changing. The qualitative data have been collected through semi-structured interviews and document reviews.

Research Design

Since we were curious about the perceptions of the graduates of public administration disciplines, which may involve subjective opinions of the study participants, our approach towards this research aligns with the interpretivism paradigm. The interpretivist approach aids the researcher in describing reality through the participants' assumptions and beliefs (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Moreover, this research is best suited for an interpretive study because it allows the author to expose what degree skills and competencies gained through academic programs satisfy the expectations of the government bodies in Azerbaijan.

Target Population

The target population in research refers to all individuals or organizations the researcher aims to study to address the research questions (Creswell, 2012). Specifically for this research, the target population comprises graduates of the bachelor's programs in public administration disciplines of the Azerbaijani state universities. This group also includes stakeholders like the dean, and a professor of a public administration faculty from one of the public universities, an HR representative from the ministry involved in the government recruitment process, and a professional from the State Examination Center (SEC), mainly in charge of designing the state examinations for government positions.

Sampling Method

Sampling, as defined by Creswell (2012), is the process of selecting individuals from the population to represent the entire group being studied. This research uses a purposive

sampling technique, which is mostly appropriate for qualitative research since it focuses on certain people whose experiences are of interest to the research objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposive sampling permits to include the key informants such as the dean, a professional from the SEC, and the HR manager, since their viewpoint regarding the correspondence between the curricula at the chosen academic level and people's employment expectations is valuable. Moreover, for interviewing the graduate students of the public administration-focused programs, we used the convenience sampling method.

Sample Size

Both convenience and purposive sampling have been applied to identify at least ten participants: five graduates with a bachelor's degree, one dean, two course instructors, one professional from the State Examination Center, and one Human Resources representative.

Convenience sampling was applied to recruit five recent graduates of the relevant program, and it had been selected based on the availability and willingness of the participants. While dean, two course instructors, one professional from the State Examination Center, and one Human Resources representative were deliberately selected based on their institutional roles.

Qualitative studies typically use small sample sizes, as the focus is on collecting in-depth information rather than broad generalizations. Data collection continues until data saturation is achieved, meaning no new themes emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Maruyama and Ryan (2014) emphasize that the strength of qualitative research lies in the depth of analysis, compensating for its smaller scope.

Setting

The participants' context has been investigated across four sites related to their education and workplace establishments. First, we interviewed graduates of public administration disciplines in educational centers that prepare them for civil service examinations. These centers form a link between students' education and governmental employment and hence play a very vital role for the participants, as much as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted about the importance of transitional contexts. Second, to get a better understanding of the curriculum and academic aims of these programs, the dean and an instructor of the public administration faculty have been interviewed at one of the state universities. Lastly, professional contexts covered an HR representative of a ministry and a relevant professional from the SEC.

Recruitment

To recruit participants, bachelor's degree graduates were identified through the exam preparation center and contacted via e-mail, which included a cover letter explaining the study's aims and voluntary participation (see Appendix G). This aligns with Creswell's (2012) suggestion that in accessing a specific population, the use of formal networks is appropriate. To recruit students from educational centers, the researcher collaborated with course directors, who helped to distribute recruitment letters to their students. Invitation letters were also mailed to the dean and an instructor of a public administration program, a professional from the SEC, and an HR representative from a ministry, asking for their voluntary participation (see Appendix G). Such specific recruitment tactics make it possible to obtain access to people with immediate involvement in public administration education and government employment, which is in line with Schutt (2012), who calls for institutional affiliation in participant recruitment.

Sources of Data

Up to this point in the study, the alignment of public-administration-focused undergraduate programs with career opportunities in government bodies in Azerbaijan is addressed. To explore this topic, primary data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, have been applied. These tools have been used to comprehensively identify the perspectives and experiences of the main stakeholders.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the main cornerstone of the data collection strategy that enables the exploration of the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in public administration education and the field. This approach is suited to qualitative research for providing flexibility to learn from participants' responses while maintaining a structured framework that is aligned with the objectives of the study.

The study has included interviews with ten participants to probe deeper into diverse perspectives. To guide these interviews, the interview protocols (see Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F) have been used, encompassing 8-10 open-ended questions to elicit comprehensive responses. The questions have included themes such as how academic curricula are aligned with job requirements, skill gaps among graduates, and the recruitment process for government bodies.

The interviews have been conducted either virtually or in person, focusing on participant preferences and considerations. Each session has been audio-recorded with consent allowed by participants to ensure accuracy in the transcription and analysis.

Document Analysis

To complement the outcomes from interviews, the research has conducted document analysis to provide a contextual foundation and validate findings. The analysis has focused

on two main categories, including academic curriculum and government documentation. Academic materials have included program syllabi upon availability, course descriptions, and learning outcomes of the public administration disciplines, while government documentation includes SEC examination samples and guidelines, job descriptions, and competency frameworks in the government bodies. The analysis of the documents has focused on a coding framework, which is aligned with the research questions for the study, leading to the identification of patterns, gaps, and areas in alignment between academic programs and professional requirements.

Data collection

The data collection process for this study focuses on systematic and replicable procedures. Each step has been planned and documented accordingly to ensure consistency in the research design and data collection. The process initially started with the recruitment of participants for the interviews. A sampling strategy was purposive sampling to identify individuals who have relevant backgrounds. Before the interview, the participant provided consent through which they confirmed their understanding regarding objectives, their voluntary participation, and the possibility of withdrawing at any time.

For the document analysis, requests for restricted documents would be acquired through official channels. This comprehensive process for data collection that combines interview depth with document analysis provides a vital foundation for discussing the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that, in qualitative research, data analysis must be done simultaneously with data collection. Flick (2014) highlights a similar view by

arguing that the data analysis process is illustrated as classifying and interpreting narrative or visual material to state implicit and explicit dimensions and structures to make meaning in the data and what is characterized in it (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Predominantly, data analysis intends to comprehend the data illustrated as text and images. It entails dividing the data into segments, disassembling them (like peeling onion layers), and assembling them again (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Through the data analysis process, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), we have transcribed the recorded interviews, collected from the participants, in every detail, and coded the data utilizing many categories. This helped us to identify and express data models (visual representations) and themes from the participants' perspective. Throughout the data analysis process, the data, categorically and chronologically, has been organized, reviewed again and again, and coded continually. A catalog of main concepts that emerged has been described (Merriam, 1988, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The coding process of the collected data has been done manually using paper, sticky notes, and highlighters. Throughout the data analysis process, the following steps, suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), have been taken: 1. *Organizing and preparing the data*. Doing this, we have transcribed the recorded interviews and field notes, collected from the participants, in every detail, cleaning and forming the data into various types. 2. *Reading or looking at all the data*. This has contributed to a common sense of the data and a chance to reflect on its general idea. 3. *Coding the data*. The coding process involves organizing the data by bracketing text sections or parts and identifying a word to indicate a category (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It covers taking the gathered textual data, putting the sentences into segments or paragraphs, and dividing them into categories. Then each category is labeled with a term. 4. *Generating a description and*

themes. By doing this, we have utilized the coding process to create a description of the location or people, categories, or themes for the data analysis. 5. *Representing the description and themes*. This involves carrying forward how the description and themes are considered to be demonstrated in the qualitative narrative. A narrative passage has been used to present the findings of the data analysis. This can be a discussion mentioning a sequence of occurrences, a thorough discussion of many themes (completed with subthemes, particular illustrations, numerous perspectives from individuals, and quotations), or a discussion with interlinking themes. For this purpose, we have also used visuals, figures, or tables to supply the discussion.

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight trustworthiness as the most crucial element of research, regardless of whether someone directly conducts a study or uses another researcher's work in his or her study. It refers to validity, reliability, and ethical concerns in research. It is proposed that qualitative researchers, in any given study, should use at least two of the eight suggested verification approaches (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Anfara et al., 2002).

Perceptions and explanations openly understood by readers, specialists, and other researchers must be supplied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The approaches suggested to assess research quality and trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, as cited in Anfara et al., 2002).

Credibility

Credibility is identified as a key component in the sustainability of the internal validity of the study. It backs the appropriate illustration and identification of the research

participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure the credibility of the study, the three validity strategies we have used are *triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking*.

Triangulation

Triangulation is one of the widely acknowledged approaches for raising the internal validity of research. It is mostly hooked to navigation or land surveying, where two or three measurement points contribute to pinpointing a location. The four varieties of triangulation are: employing multiple methods, using numerous data sources, including multiple researchers, or applying various theories to validate obtained results (Denzin, 1978, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In our study, we have utilized “*using numerous data sources*”, which is one of the four varieties of data triangulation. Referring to this triangulation variety, we have used two data sources, including interviews and document analysis procedures, to validate the findings of the study.

Peer debriefing

Throughout the peer debriefing process, the manuscript is checked by peers well-informed of the topic and the methodology. Then, they make their suggestions available on the paper. Such a review can be done by a colleague who is deeply informed of the study or who is not aware enough about the topic. An earnest peer debriefing would involve requesting a colleague to verify an allotment of the raw data to assess, based on the data, the credibility of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We have invited one of our peers to review the manuscript of the study. That person wrote a thesis for her master’s degree and graduated from the Master of Arts in Education Management (MAEM) program at the ADA University with a high GPA score.

Transferability

This strategy is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a study are applicable in different situations. To enable readers to transfer the findings to other situations or settings, the researcher should provide a rich, thick description of the participants or setting. The responsibility to determine applicability falls more on the person trying to implement the findings in a different condition rather than on the initial researcher. The preliminary researcher does not have a grasp of the contexts where transferability may be relevant, whereas those using the findings have that insight and interact with it ardently (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure transferability or generalizability in our research, we have described the context thoroughly.

Study Limitations

The possible limitations of this study have been presented as follows:

1. This study has not touched on the content, structure, and other possible details of the 2nd phase of the SEC examination (interview phase) and has only explored the 1st phase, which was about the standardized test exam. Therefore, it has limited insights into the effectiveness of the SEC examination.
2. The study has been conducted only in one educational setting to understand how public administration-focused undergraduate programs are established. This means the data we have collected is less likely to depict a general picture of the Azerbaijani higher education system regarding the given undergraduate programs.
3. Considering the interviewing process has included only one hiring person from one ministry, the collected data is less likely to apply to all the government bodies. More

precisely, in the hiring process, each state entity may have specific expectations for its future employees.

Ethical Issues

The data collection process for this study has only been launched after the approval of the research proposal, and we have stuck to BERA guidelines for ethical research (British Educational Research Association, 2024). Once the research proposal has been approved, we sent letters to the educational settings (a university, a ministry, and the SEC) to receive permission to conduct interviews in those settings.

The recruitment process continued with the candidates who made clear their intention to participate in the study via text message or email. Once we had possible candidates, we sent a consent form via email to be signed by those candidates. The consent form included information about the study, the researchers' responsibilities during the data collection process, and in each step of the study, till the end, such as maintaining the participants' confidentiality. Moreover, the study participants have been reminded about the voluntary nature of their participation, which means that they hold the right to withdraw from participating in this study.

During the interviews, the interviewers have created a friendly atmosphere to make the participants feel comfortable with the process. The participants have been reminded that they can refuse to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable responding. When starting the onsite interviews, the interviewers have asked for the participants' oral consent to record their voices. Once the data collection process has been concluded, the transcribing process of audio recordings has started. While transcribing the interviews, the participants' identities have been anonymized by changing their names into pseudonyms.

The transcripts have been saved in coded word processing software to ensure the protection of the collected data. The next stage was the data analysis, and the findings from the data have been written as a research paper. The findings have also been used to suggest a Capstone project. Moreover, the participants can be provided with a short report involving the study findings upon their request.

Chapter 4: Findings

The main focus of this research was to explore the alignment between careers in governmental bodies and public administration-focused bachelor's programs in Azerbaijan. To collect the data, we conducted one-to-one interviews with the people who graduated from the public administration discipline in the last five years with an interest in a career in government bodies, the SEC representative, the HR representative from a ministry, the public administration faculty dean, and two professors of that faculty. The interviewees who graduated from the public administration-focused programs studied at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Baku State University, and the Azerbaijan State University of Economics. We also reviewed some official documents that the same faculty administration presented. This chapter aims to present the findings from the interviews and the document reviews.

The current study was conducted within the frame of the following research questions:

1. How are public administration-focused undergraduate programs aligned with the competencies required or expected by the government bodies in Azerbaijan?

SUB RQ1. How do recent graduates of public administration-focused undergraduate programs perceive the alignment of their studies with career requirements in government bodies in Azerbaijan?

SUB RQ2. What key competencies do government bodies in Azerbaijan expect from job candidates to fulfill their job responsibilities?

2. How should the recruitment process be designed to reflect the skills of the graduates of public administration-focused programs?

While the interviews aimed to answer the research questions, they also shed light on the two assumptions we made before. Those assumptions are listed as follows:

1. There is a potential skills and competency misalignment between public administration programs and job requirements in government bodies in Azerbaijan.
2. The SEC civil service examination could better reflect the knowledge and competencies developed through undergraduate public administration education in Azerbaijan.

Themes

This research study explores the multifaceted issues contributing to the alignment between university graduates' skills/competencies and the evolving demands of careers in the government bodies in Azerbaijan. We retrieved four main themes and eight sub-themes from the collected data. Theme 1 addresses the misalignment between graduates' skills/competencies and career requirements, focusing on both the theoretical-practical gap and the pervasive skill deficiencies among the graduates of public administration-focused bachelor's programs. In response to these challenges, Theme 2 highlights the need for the improvement of the mentioned academic programs, emphasizing the enhancement of program delivery methods, curriculum development, and the integration of modern technologies into teaching practices. Furthermore, Theme 3 involves existing recruitment process gaps, particularly the limitations of the current recruitment system led by the State Examination Center (SEC) and the change toward competency-based hiring. Finally, Theme

4 focuses on collaboration between government bodies and universities that offer public administration programs, emphasizing the importance of strategic partnerships and the role of internships and practical training in preparing students for real-world professional environments. Overall, these themes provide a comprehensive framework by analyzing and addressing key issues in graduate employability and educational reform.

The list of the main themes and their sub-themes is as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1

Themes and Sub-themes from Qualitative Data Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1. Misalignment between the Graduates' Skills/Competencies and Career Requirements	1. Misalignment between Theory and Practice	There is a gap between academic knowledge provided by universities and the practical skills needed in the workplace.
	2. Skill Deficiencies Among Graduates	Graduates often lack essential soft and technical skills required by government bodies, affecting job readiness.
2. Improvement of the Programs	1. Curriculum Improvement	Updating course content and structure to reflect current career demands in government bodies.
	2. Involving Modern Technologies	Integrating digital tools, software, and technological advancements into educational programs.
3. Recruitment Process Gaps	1. Competency-Based Recruitment	Emphasizing skills and competencies in recruitment rather than solely relying on theoretical academic knowledge.

	2. Challenges of the SEC Recruitment System	Difficulties and inefficiencies in the centralized recruitment process managed by the State Examination Center.
4. Collaboration between the Universities and Government Bodies	1. Strengthening the Connection between the Universities and the Government	Enhancing dialogue and strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and government bodies.
	2. Practical Exposure through Internships and Training	Providing students with real-world experience through structured internships and professional training.

Theme 1. Misalignment between the Graduates' Skills/Competencies and Career

Requirements

Sub-theme 1. Misalignment between Theory and Practice; Sub-theme 2. Skill Deficiencies Among Graduates. The first theme and its sub-themes have been retrieved from the interviews with the SEC professional, HR representative of a ministry, and the graduates of the public administration programs. According to the SEC representative, although the theoretical foundations are solid, applicants often lack real-world practical experience. Internships, mentorships, and practical assignments are needed. This interviewee noted the following points: “Tez-tez görürük ki, namizədlər qiymətləndirmə mərhələlərində analitik düşüncə və qərar qəbul etmə ilə bağlı çətinliklər yaşayırlar.” [We often see that candidates have difficulty with analytical thinking and decision-making during the stages of assessment.]

“Tədris proqramları dövlət siyasəti barədə ümumi anlayış verir, lakin bir çox məzunların kifayət qədər praktiki idarəetmə bilikləri yoxdur. Çoxsaylı potensial işçilərin güclü nəzəri bilikləri var, lakin yumşaq bacarıqlardan, o cümlədən ünsiyyət, komanda işi və uyğunlaşma bacarıqlarından məhrumdurlar.” [The curricula provide a general understanding of public

policy, but many graduates do not have enough practical administrative knowledge. Many potential employees have strong theoretical knowledge but lack soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and adaptability.]

The HR representative from the ministry identified significant competency gaps among applicants, particularly in analytical thinking and foreign language proficiency. Many candidates struggle to evaluate complex issues or communicate effectively in international contexts. These findings reflect a disconnect between the academic preparation offered by universities and the expectations of government employers, highlighting a misalignment with expected soft and technical skills. The HR professional noted: “Dövlət vəzifələrinə müraciət edən namizədlər arasında ən çox rast gəlinən kompetensiya boşluqları analitik düşüncə və xarici dil bilikləridir.” [The most common competency gaps among candidates applying for government positions are analytical thinking and foreign language proficiency.]

This finding echoes Amirova and Valiyev (2021), who highlight a widespread mismatch between university graduates’ competencies and labor market expectations in Azerbaijan.

Theme 2. Improvement of the Programs

Sub-theme 1. Curriculum Improvement; Sub-theme 2. Involving Modern Technologies. While it is clear that every higher educational program needs to be improved from time to time, the study participants addressed specific points that could help the public administration programs to better align with the career requirements in the government bodies. One of the important aspects the interviewees touched on was improving the curriculum in the first place. The participants raised concerns about the overly theoretical nature of university programs. The HR representative from the ministry expressed concern that universities tend to emphasize theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical learning.

“Bir çox universitetlər əsasən nəzəri biliklərə fokuslanır və liderlik, analitik düşüncə və problem həll etmə bacarıqlarına yetərincə diqqət yetirmirlər.” [Many universities primarily focus on theoretical knowledge and do not emphasize leadership, analytical thinking, and problem-solving.]

This aligns with findings by Silva and Garcia (2019), who argue that traditional academic models in many countries fail to prepare students for the evolving needs of the public sector.

Moreover, the research participants who graduated from the public administration-focused programs emphasized that new courses should be included in the educational programs, and technology should be utilized more while delivering the courses. The next excerpts are from the interviews with the graduates of the given programs: “Tədris programına ünsiyyət bacarıqları dərsləri daxil edilməsini istərdim. Həmçinin mövcud dərslərin daha praktiki şəkildə keçilməsi və real situasiyalar üzərindən müzakirəli şəkildə təşkil olunması çox gözəl olardı.” [I would like communication skills courses to be included in the curriculum. It would also be great if the existing courses were delivered in a more practical way and organized through discussions based on real-life situations.]

“Məncə dünya universitetlərinin praktikaları öyrənilməli və bizim universitetlərdə hər tərəfli tətbiq edilməlidir. Eyni zamanda sürətlə dəyişən dövlət və ictimai münasibətlər dərinədən təhlil edilməli və Sovet dövründən qalma modellər tədris edilməməlidir.” [In my opinion, the best practices of international universities should be studied and comprehensively applied in our universities. At the same time, the rapidly changing nature of state and public relations should be thoroughly analyzed, and outdated Soviet-era models should no longer be taught.]

“Tədrisin təşkilinin elektronlaşdırılmasını, online vasitələrin daha çox istifadə olunmasını istəyirəm. Həmçinin tələbələrin İKT bacarıqlarının inkişafına da xüsusi diqqət yetirilməsini

arzu edirəm.” [I would like the organization of education to be more digitalized and for online tools to be used more extensively. I also wish greater attention would be given to the development of students' ICT skills.]

On the other hand, the Dean of the faculty noted that the curriculum has already been updated to adapt to the new reforms. “Məsələn, hökumət dövlət qulluğunda rəqəmsallaşdırma ilə bağlı yeni islahatlar tətbiq etdikdə, biz dərhal tədris proqramımızı uyğunlaşdıraraq müvafiq alət və yanaşmaları daxil etdik.” [For example, when the government introduced new reforms in civil service digitalization, we quickly adapted our curriculum to include relevant tools and approaches.]

The Dean also added that the educational programs for the public administration discipline already involve practice-based learning, saying the following:

Biz tədris proqramımıza siyasət laboratoriyaları, situasiya təhlilləri, simulyasiyalar və layihəsaslı öyrənmə üsullarını inteqrasiya edirik. Liderlik modullarımız isə adətən seminarlar, təlimlər və rol oynama məşğələlərini əhatə edir. Rəqəmsal idarəetmə sahəsində isə biz tələbələri Azərbaycanda tətbiq olunan e-hökumət alətləri və rəqəmsal innovasiya layihələri ilə tanış etmək üçün milli platformalarla əməkdaşlıq edirik. Həmçinin, nazirliklərdən və İKT sektorundan mütəxəssisləri tələbələrlə birbaşa ünsiyyətə cəlb edirik.

[We integrate policy labs, case studies, simulations, and project-based learning into the curriculum. Our leadership modules often include workshops, seminars, and role-play exercises. When it comes to digital governance, we work with national platforms to expose students to e-government tools and digital innovation projects happening in Azerbaijan. We also invite experts from ministries and the ICT sector to engage with students directly.]

Additionally, the professors of the public administration faculty emphasized that some of the courses should be excluded from the higher educational programs by saying:

...o fənnlərin içərisində elə fənnlər tədris olunur ki, o fənnlərin tədrisinə ehtiyac yoxdur. Məsələn, birinci sinifdən 11-ci sinfə kimi Azərbaycan tarixi keçilir. Bu Azərbaycan tarixi elə keçilməlidir ki, onun universitetdə keçilməsinə ehtiyac olmasın. Uşaq öz tarixini yaxşı bilməlidir. Ancaq, onun yenidən universitetdə tədris olunmasına, mənə elə gəlir ki, ehtiyac yoxdur.

[Some subjects are being taught that are not really necessary. For example, Azerbaijani history is taught continuously from the first to the eleventh grade. It should be taught in such a way that there is no need to study it again at university. A student should know their national history well, but in my opinion, repeating the same subject at the university level is unnecessary.]

“Məsələn, dövlət idarəçiliyi ixtisaslarında tələbəyə loqarifma, koşə teoremi, laqranş teoremi lazımdır? Ehtiyac yoxdur bunlara. Tələbə yüklənir və dövlət qulluğu imtahanına gedəndə görür ki, onun qarşısındakı suallar tamam başqa suallardır.” [For example, do students in public administration programs need to study logarithms, the cosine theorem, or Lagrange’s theorem? There is no real need for these. Students become overwhelmed, and when they sit for the civil service exam, they find that the questions they face are entirely different from what they studied.]

The SEC representative also agreed that some important updates on the curriculum of the public administration-focused programs are needed by expressing the following thoughts: “Siyasətin təhlili, büdcə alətləri və elektron hökumət sistemlərinin tədris proqramına inteqrasiyası məzunların hazırlığını artırır.” [Integrating policy analysis, budgeting tools, and e-government systems into the curriculum would enhance graduates' preparedness.]

Theme 3. Recruitment Process Gaps

Sub-theme 1. Competency-Based Recruitment; Sub-theme 2. Challenges of the SEC Recruitment System. While discussing the SEC civil service exams, a variety of aspects were mentioned by the participants in terms of changing and improving the current recruitment system. The SEC representative shared the following thoughts on the improvement of the examination process: “Məzunları daha yaxşı qiymətləndirmək üçün imtahanlar, real dövlət işi situasiyalarını əks etdirən simulyasiyalar və ya tapşırıqlardan ibarət ola bilər. Lakin imtahan məzmunu qismən real iş tapşırıqlarına əsaslanır lakin daha çox tətbiqi və situasiya əsaslı qiymətləndirmələri nəzərdən keçirmək lazımdır.” [To better evaluate graduates, exams could consist of simulations or tasks that mirror real government work scenarios. However, the exam content is partly based on real job tasks, but there is room to consider more applied and case-based evaluations.]

The challenges of the recruitment process are shared by the participants who graduated from the given programs and the professors of the same programs. While one of the former students of the public administration-focused programs mentioned that they needed to go to an educational center to prepare for the exam, the other interviewee talked about the difficulties in choosing appropriate educational material to prepare for the exam. One interesting statement on the current recruitment system was as follows: “Mən tələbələrin müvafiq hökumət qurumlarına rəsmi göndərişlərə əsasən yerləşdirilməsini istəyirəm, hazırkı prosedurdakı kimi DİM imtahanı ilə deyil.” [I want a placement of students in relevant government institutions based on official referrals, not with any SEC exams like the current procedure.]

The participants who graduated from the public administration faculty also addressed some issues and challenges that the candidates possibly face during the recruitment process. Those issues and challenges include nepotism and a lack of transparency in civil service

interviews, according to the following excerpts: “Toplanan ballarla onlar işə düzəlmək olmur. İşə düzəlmək üçün mütləq kimsə tapşırmalıdır, himayədarın olmalıdır.” [With the points collected, it is not possible to get a job. In order to get a job, someone must recommend you; you need to have a patron.]

“Dövlət qulluğunda məzun imtahan verib gəlir və onu işə götürmək üçün müsahibədən keçirirlər. Lakin, müsahibə keçirilsə də, əvvəldən məlum olur ki, həmin namizədi işə götürməyəcəklər. Buna görə də, müsahibələri daha şəffaf şəkildə keçirmək vacibdir.” [In civil service, graduates take an exam and come for an interview to be hired. However, even though the interview is conducted, it is already known in advance that the candidate will not be hired. Therefore, it is important to conduct these interviews transparently.]

Theme 4. Collaboration between the Universities and Government Bodies

Sub-theme 1. Strengthening the Connection between the Universities and Government Bodies; Sub-theme 2. Practical Exposure through Internships and Training. The last theme and sub-themes mainly consider the recommendations on how to more deeply connect the universities that offer public administration-focused programs and the government bodies in Azerbaijan. In this manner, the SEC representative suggested the following statement by addressing the misalignment between the skills that the public administration discipline provides and the skills required for a career in the government bodies: “Internship programs or mentorships could limit the gap between education and practical skills.”

The HR professional called for stronger ties between academia and public institutions, suggesting more interaction would benefit students and government alike. “Artan qarşılıqlı əlaqə tələbələrin praktiki bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirəcək, dövlət sektoru işlərinə dair anlayışlarını dərinləşdirəcək və hökumət işlərinə olan baxışlarını dəyişdirəcək.” [Increased

interaction will enhance students' practical skills, deepen their understanding of public sector work, and reshape their perceptions of government jobs.]

“Tələbələrlə erkən əlaqə yaratmaq məzun olmadan əvvəl onların arasından motivasiyalı və istedadlı şəxsləri müəyyən etməyə və cəlb etməyə hökumət orqanlarına imkan verəcək...”

[Early engagement with students allows government bodies to identify and attract motivated and talented individuals before they graduate...]

Similar concerns were raised in a position paper by the American Chamber of Commerce in Azerbaijan (AmCham, 2023), which highlighted weak coordination between universities and employers as a key reason for skills mismatch in Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the Dean of the public administration faculty talked about the current situation in terms of the collaboration between the university and the government bodies by expressing the following sentences: “Bizim tələbələrimizi təcrübə keçmək üçün qəbul edən çoxsaylı dövlət qurumları ilə rəsmi sazişlərimiz mövcuddur.” [We have formal agreements with numerous public bodies that host our students for internships.]

“Bunlar yalnız müşahidə xarakterli deyil, həqiqi layihələrdə fəal iştirak etməyi əhatə edir.” [These are not just observational, as they involve active participation in real projects.]

Finally, we reviewed documents which provided by one of the public universities which offer public administration-focused programs. The findings retrieved from the document, where all the major and technical subjects were listed, can be considered surprising when compared to the findings from the interviews. As such, a communication skills course is included in the public administration programs in Azerbaijani and in English, namely “Business and academic communication in the Azerbaijani language” and “Business and academic communication in English”. However, all parties in the interview process mentioned that the graduates of public administration programs lack communication skills.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The findings of this research study provide substantial insight into the alignment between public administration-focused bachelor's programs and the skill/competency requirements of governmental bodies in Azerbaijan. All primary research questions have been addressed effectively through qualitative interviews with graduates, academic staff (dean and professors), and representatives from government bodies (an HR representative from a ministry and a SEC representative).

The current study confirms a misalignment between the academic preparation offered by public administration-focused programs and the practical competencies expected by employers in the government bodies, thereby affirming the first assumption of the researchers. The collected data revealed that graduates often lack crucial soft skills such as communication and practical administrative abilities, despite having a strong theoretical foundation from their bachelor's degrees. This gap between theory and practice underscores the need for enhanced practical training and curricular reforms.

The perspectives of the SEC representative and the HR professional also confirm that government bodies expect a broader set of skills and competencies, particularly analytical thinking, communication, leadership, and digital literacy, which fully answer the second sub-research question (Sub-RQ2). The first sub-research question (Sub-RQ1) is answered through graduates' answers, which reflect their dissatisfaction with the practical applicability of their studies and a desire for relevant, updated course content that mirrors international best practices.

Regarding the current recruitment process, participants, particularly graduates of public administration programs, voiced concerns about the SEC examination system, citing issues with its transparency and fairness. These findings of this research also validate the

second assumption, indicating that the SEC civil service examination does not sufficiently reflect the competencies developed during their university education. Moreover, the final research question about recruitment design is also addressed, with recommendations emphasizing competency-based evaluations, involvement of real-world simulations, and greater university-government collaboration. In conclusion, the collected data not only answer the research questions but also support the initial assumptions, painting a clear picture of opportunities and challenges for better alignment between public administration discipline students' academic preparation and employment in government bodies. Therefore, strategic reforms in curriculum design and institutional collaboration are crucial aspects for bridging this divide.

Chapter 6: Final Product

Based on the findings of this capstone project, we propose a comprehensive set of policy recommendations and academic reforms aimed at improving the alignment between public affairs-focused undergraduate programs and the career requirements within Azerbaijan's government sectors. These recommendations are organized into three main action areas: program improvement, university-government collaboration, and alignment of testing criteria.

Modernization of Public Administration Programs

The study discussed a significant disconnect between the theoretical knowledge provided by universities and the practical competencies expected by government recruiters. Many graduates reported that their academic preparation did not fully support their job responsibilities. To solve this, public administration programs should involve applied components, including case-based learning, problem-solving practical workshops, and communication skill development. Furthermore, aligning core subjects with the competency

framework used in the State Examination Center (SEC) testing exams, which focus on logic, legislation, and information technology, will guarantee better opportunities for civil service roles.

Additionally, universities should apply modules on public ethics, leadership, and digital governance—skills increasingly demanded in modern public service. Revising the content of bachelor programs in consultation with public sector stakeholders will have an effective academic environment that meets government expectations.

Enhancing Collaboration Between Universities and Government Agencies

The research indicated limited structured cooperation between academia and government bodies. Despite internships and exam preparation courses existing, their scope and impact are not sufficient. Formal collaboration should be established to develop internships, co-designed curricula, and research or policy projects. Ministries and public institutions can appoint liaison officers to coordinate with academic departments, ensuring a feedback loop on graduate performance and gaps in skills.

Moreover, guest lectures and training sessions conducted by civil service professionals can enrich the academic knowledge and provide students with insights into government operations for practical engagement. Creating advisory boards composed of both academic and government representatives can improve decision-making related to program enhancement and its relevancy.

Integrating with SEC Recruitment and Evaluation

Our analysis of the SEC civil service examination and interview processes indicated a gap between academic learning outcomes and employment standards. To address this gap, institutions should map their program learning goals against the requirements tested in the civil service exams. Faculty enhancement programs should be introduced to familiarize

instructors with SEC criteria and recruitment trends in the public fields. In turn, the SEC could offer annual reports or feedback to universities discussing common weaknesses among candidates, creating a constructive improvement system.

Furthermore, government bodies and the SEC could consider expanding assessment methods to include performance-based tasks or situational judgment cases, resulting in better assessment of communication and decision-making in the public sector sphere.

Benchmark: Alignment of Public Administration Programs with Government Careers

In Azerbaijan, curricula partially align with the practical needs of public sector roles. While there is growing recognition of this gap, current programs still lack sufficient applied modules like case-based learning or digital governance.

Azerbaijan offers internships, but their reach and impact are inconsistent. There's no mandate or standard framework to ensure their effectiveness. However, **Estonia, Singapore, and Canada** mandate public service internships within ministries and municipalities (see Table 2).

Table 2

Benchmark Table: International Comparison

Benchmark Area	Azerbaijan (Current)	Estonia	Singapore	Canada
Curriculum Integration with Government Needs	Partial; lacks hands-on and applied modules	Strong alignment: Digital governance, ethics, and policy analysis are embedded	Curriculum co-developed with Civil Service College	Strong integration via NASPAA-accredited programs and co-op terms
Internship & Practicum Opportunities	Limited in scope and access	Mandatory internships in	Structured internship through Public	Extensive co-op/internship programs with

		ministries and local gov	Service Leadership Program	provincial/federal bodies
Collaboration with Government Agencies	Ad hoc cooperation; no formal liaison	Formal collaboration with the State Chancellery	Institutionalized partnerships with ministries	Advisory boards include civil servants; joint research projects are common
Involvement in Civil Service Exams/Hiring Criteria	Limited mapping to SEC exam standards	Academic outputs mapped to civil service competencies	Civil Service College oversees both education and career progression	Programs aligned with federal/provincial hiring frameworks
Skill Development Focus	Lacks focus on communication, leadership, and digital skills	Strong digital literacy and project management training	Leadership, ethics, and innovation are core to training	Emphasis on problem-solving, diversity management, and communication
Feedback Mechanism from Government to Universities	Largely absent	Regular feedback via public sector liaison units	Performance evaluations inform academic revisions	Government-university policy dialogue and talent reports
Professional Pathway Programs	Not well-structured	Civil service fast-tracks for top graduates	Scholarship-to-service pipeline (PSC Scholars)	Public Service Entrance Exam; recruitment pipelines from MPA programs

Our final product as an initiative is the website (www.intern.gov.az), which serves as a centralized platform for students or recent graduates from public administration-focused programs. Through this platform, graduates or students in this field can connect with internships, training, and opportunities in the public sector. This tool plays a significant role in aligning the gap between academic preparation and the requirements of government

services. By providing students with access to practical experience, it supports the development of both practical and interpersonal skills with civil service expectations. With consistent feedback mechanisms, the platform can serve as an essential driver in fostering the public administration talent growth process.

Conclusion

The proposed end product suggests a roadmap for improving the employability of public administration graduates in Azerbaijan. By addressing program gaps, enhancing institutional collaborations, and aligning academic outputs with recruitment requirements, Azerbaijan can have a more successful, responsive, and effective public sector workforce. Execution of these strategies not only supports national development goals but also encourages students to transition confidently into government careers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Preliminary Survey

Dövlət idarəetməsi ixtisaslarından məzun olmuş şəxslərin bakalavr təhsili ilə bağlı məmnunluq sorğusu

Bu sorğu Azərbaycanda ali məktəblərin dövlət idarəetməsi ixtisasları üzrə bakalavr proqramlarının nazirliklər və dövlət agentliklərinin vakansiya tələblərinə nə dərəcədə uyğun kadrlar yetişdirməsini araşdırmaq məqsədilə aparılır. Sorğu ilkin məlumat əldə etmək xarakteri daşıyır və anonim şəkildə aparılır. Sorğuda iştirakınız üçün öncədən təşəkkürlər.

1. Təhsil aldığınız ixtisas (*Yalnız bir variantı işarələyin.*)

- Dövlət və bələdiyyə idarəetməsi
- Dövlət və ictimai münasibətlər

2. Hazırda işlədiyiniz iş bakalavr təhsilinizə nə dərəcədə uyğundur? (*Yalnız bir variantı işarələyin.*)

- Tam uyğundur
- Qismən uyğundur
- Heç uyğun deyil

3. Hazırkı işim: (*Yalnız bir variantı işarələyin.*)

- nazirliklər, onlara tabe qurumlar və dövlət agentlikləri ilə bağlıdır.
- nazirliklər, onlara tabe qurumlar və dövlət agentlikləri ilə bağlı deyil.

4. Şəxsi təcrübənizə əsasən cavablayın: Nazirliklər, onlara tabe qurumlar və dövlət agentliklərində iş tapmaq istərkən hansı maneə(lər) ortaya çıxır? (*Müvafiq olanların hamısını seçin.*)

- Vakansiyaların olmaması və ya az olması
- Vakansiya tələblərinə uyğun bilik/ təcrübənin olmaması və ya azlığı
- Maaş gözləntilərinin qarşılanmaması
- Dövlət qulluğu müsabiqəsinin imtahan mərhələsindən keçə bilməmək
- Dövlət qulluğu müsabiqəsinin müsahibə mərhələsindən keçə bilməmək
- Heç bir maneə yoxdur
- Mən nazirliklər, onlara tabe qurumlar və dövlət agentliklərində işləmək istəmirəm
- Digər: _____

5. Əgər hazırki işiniz nazirliklər, onlara tabe qurumlar və dövlət agentlikləri ilə bağlıdırsa bakalavr təhsilinizin qazandırdığı bilik və bacarıqlar işinizdə sizə nə qədər fayda verir? (*Yalnız bir oval işarələyin.*)

- heç bir faydası yoxdur
- az faydalıdır
- faydalıdır
- tam faydalıdır

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for interviewing graduates of the bachelor's programs in public administration disciplines of the Azerbaijani state universities

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Dear participant, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am *Solmaz Jahangirova* - a graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts in Education Management at ADA University.

Purpose:

I am working (with four of my groupmates) on a Capstone Project for our graduation. The research project's focal point is the "*Alignment of Public Administration-focused Undergraduate Programs with Career Opportunities in Government Bodies in Azerbaijan*" with a special interest in your beliefs (philosophy) and approaches regarding the topic.

Our research does not seek to evaluate a certain approach to the issue. We want to learn the scope of the alignment between the programs and the job opportunities and how educational settings can enhance the alignment.

Procedures:

The interview is presumed to take 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Confidentiality:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer or answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Identifying information, such as the participant's name

and workplace, will be removed during analysis. Only reviewers bound by confidentiality will access the data. Responses will be coded without direct identifiers, ensuring anonymity.

Findings will be synthesized into a paper for our Capstone Project. As every precaution will be taken to protect participant privacy, the research poses no risk to participants. While administrative or political pressure may exist, involuntary participation is discouraged. Your decision to opt out will remain confidential. However, your voluntary participation offers a chance for self-reflection and sharing your concerns within or beyond the university.

Dialogue:

Questions for interviewing the graduates of public administration programs in the last five years:

1. What program and university did you graduate from?
2. What courses did you take during your program?
3. How did you prepare for the civil service exam?
4. What challenges did you face during your exam preparation period?
5. Do you work or have you worked for a government body?
6. What skills and competencies do you use in your current job that you gained through your undergraduate degree?
7. What skills and competencies would you like to be taught in your undergraduate degree?
8. What improvements would you suggest to universities to ensure better job prospects for public administration graduates?

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our questions. Before we leave, is there anything we have not covered, or anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview session. The information we discussed will be very useful in helping us evaluate the process. The recorded interview will be anonymized and utilized only for research purposes.

APPENDIX C

Interview questions for interviewing the dean of a public administration school from one of the state universities in Azerbaijan

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Dear participant, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am *Aydan Mammadzada* - a graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts in Education Management at ADA University.

Purpose:

I am working (with four of my groupmates) on a Capstone Project for our graduation. The research project's focal point is the "*Alignment of Public Administration-focused Undergraduate Programs with Career Opportunities in Government Bodies in Azerbaijan,*" with a special interest in your beliefs (philosophy) and approaches regarding the topic.

Our research does not seek to evaluate a certain approach to the issue. We want to learn the scope of the alignment between the programs and the job opportunities, and how educational settings can enhance the alignment.

Procedures:

The interview is presumed to take 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Confidentiality:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer or answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Identifying information, such as the participant's name and workplace, will be removed during analysis. Only reviewers bound by confidentiality will access the data. Responses will be coded without direct identifiers, ensuring anonymity.

Findings will be synthesized into a paper for our Capstone Project. As every precaution will be taken to protect participant privacy, the research poses no risk to participants. While administrative or political pressure may exist, involuntary participation is discouraged. Your decision to opt out will remain confidential. However, your voluntary participation offers a chance for self-reflection and sharing your concerns within or beyond the university.

Dialogue:

Interview Questions

1. Could you start by giving us an overview of the Public Administration undergraduate programs offered at your faculty?
2. What core competencies do students develop throughout their studies?
3. Speaking of real-world applications, how do you ensure students develop key skills like policy analysis, leadership, and digital governance?
4. How do you keep the program aligned with the evolving needs of public institutions in Azerbaijan?
5. Do you collaborate directly with government agencies to design or revise the curriculum?
6. What kinds of careers do your graduates typically pursue?
7. Do students have opportunities to intern or train with government institutions?

8. "What advice would you give to students who aspire to build successful careers in Azerbaijan's public administration?"

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our questions. Before we leave, is there anything we have not covered, or anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview session. The information we discussed will be very useful in helping us evaluate the process. The recorded interview will be anonymized and utilized only for research purposes.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol for interviewing university professors

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Dear participant, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am *Ramil Mammadov* - a graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts in Education Management at ADA University.

Purpose:

I am working (with four of my groupmates) on a Capstone Project for our graduation. The research project's focal point is the "*Alignment of Public Administration-focused Undergraduate Programs with Career Opportunities in Government Bodies in Azerbaijan*" with a special interest in your beliefs (philosophy) and approaches regarding the topic.

Our research does not seek to evaluate a certain approach to the issue. We want to learn the scope of the alignment between the programs and the job opportunities and how educational settings can enhance the alignment.

Procedures:

The interview is presumed to take 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Confidentiality:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer or answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Identifying information, such as the participant's name

and workplace, will be removed during analysis. Only reviewers bound by confidentiality will access the data. Responses will be coded without direct identifiers, ensuring anonymity.

Findings will be synthesized into a paper for our Capstone Project. As every precaution will be taken to protect participant privacy, the research poses no risk to participants. While administrative or political pressure may exist, involuntary participation is discouraged. Your decision to opt out will remain confidential. However, your voluntary participation offers a chance for self-reflection and sharing your concerns within or beyond the university.

Dialogue:

Questions for interviewing university professors

1. Can you share your teaching experience in Public Administration programs? (E.g., How long have you been teaching in such programs?)
2. What specific areas of Public Administration are you specialized in, and how does your expertise influence your teaching and research?
3. Which courses do you currently teach, and how do you think they align with the evolving demands of public administration career opportunities?
4. In your view, what are the most critical skills or competencies that graduates need to thrive in public administration or public service roles?
5. How would you describe the current state of collaboration between universities and government bodies in shaping Public Administration education? Are there any notable successes or challenges?
6. What trends have you observed in the career trajectories of your graduates?

7. Which areas of the curriculum do you think need improvement regarding the alignment with the public administration job requirements?
8. How well do undergraduate public administration programs adapt to changes in public administration priorities and needs?
9. What mechanisms or feedback systems are in place to ensure the curriculum remains relevant to the needs of public administration employers and practitioners?
10. What specific changes or initiatives would you recommend to better align Public Administration programs with emerging career opportunities and challenges in the field?
11. Recent statistics reveal that, in 2023, only 4,709 out of 16,200 civil service exam candidates passed. What factors, do you think, influence the number of applicants and the low pass rate? What challenges or advantages might be affecting these results?"

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our questions. Before we leave, is there anything we have not covered, or anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview session. The information we discussed will be very useful in helping us evaluate the process. The recorded interview will be anonymized and utilized only for research purposes.

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for interviewing an HR representative of a ministry

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Dear participant, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am *Saad Hasanova* - a graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts in Education Management at ADA University.

Purpose:

I am working (with four of my groupmates) on a Capstone Project for our graduation. The research project's focal point is the "*Alignment of Public Administration-focused Undergraduate Programs with Career Opportunities in Government Bodies in Azerbaijan*" with a special interest in your beliefs (philosophy) and approaches regarding the topic.

Our research does not seek to evaluate a certain approach to the issue. We want to learn the scope of the alignment between the programs and the job opportunities, and how educational settings can enhance the alignment.

Procedures:

The interview is presumed to take 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Consent:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline or answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Identifying information, such as the participant's name and

workplace, will be removed during analysis. Only reviewers bound by confidentiality will access the data. Responses will be coded without direct identifiers, ensuring anonymity.

Findings will be synthesized into a paper for our Capstone Project. As every precaution will be taken to protect participant privacy, the research poses no risk to participants. While administrative or political pressure may exist, involuntary participation is discouraged. Your decision to opt-out will remain confidential. However, your voluntary participation offers a chance for self-reflection and sharing your concerns within or beyond the university.

Interview Questions:

Section 1: Hiring Process and Job Requirements

1. Can you describe the typical hiring process for government positions in your organization? What steps are involved, and how are candidates evaluated?
2. How does your organization determine the job requirements for various roles? Are there any external standards or guidelines you follow?
3. How do you usually announce or open vacancies? What platforms or methods do you use to recruit candidates?

Section 2: Candidate Alignment and Competency Evaluation

4. To what extent do you think candidates applying for jobs in your organization align with the job requirements in terms of skills, knowledge, and experience?
5. To what extent do you think the curricula of Azerbaijani universities align with the actual needs and responsibilities of roles in government organizations?

6. What are the key competencies, skills, and personal characteristics you expect from candidates applying for government positions? (Follow-up question) Are there specific eligibility criteria or formal requirements that outline these expectations?
7. How do you assess whether a candidate possesses the required skills and competencies for your organization?

Section 3: Competency Gaps and Training

9. Based on your experience, what are the most common competency gaps among candidates applying for government positions?
10. Are there any training programs or professional development initiatives provided by your organization to address knowledge and skill gaps of new hires?

Section 4: Trends, Recommendations, and Supporting Data

11. While recruiting candidates from various universities, have you observed any trends or differences regarding how well public administration programs prepare graduates for government careers?
12. What recommendations would you suggest to improve the recruitment process so it better reflects the skills and competencies of recent university graduates?"
13. In your opinion, how could improved communication and collaboration between government bodies and universities enhance the recruitment process?
14. Is there any documentation, such as job descriptions, recruitment criteria, or evaluation forms from past recruitment processes, that you can share with us for data analysis?

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our questions. Before we leave, is there anything we have not covered, or anything you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview session. The information we discussed will be very useful in helping us evaluate the process. The recorded interview will be anonymized and utilized only for research purposes.

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol for interviewing a professional from the State Examination Center (SEC)

Interview Protocol

Institution: State Examination Center (DİM)

Interviewer: Aysel Allahverdiyeva

Location: Online

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Aysel Allahverdiyeva, and I am conducting research on how undergraduate programs in Public Administration and related fields align with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for careers in Azerbaijan's public sector. Your insights are highly valuable in understanding the existing gaps and opportunities for reform.

The interview will take approximately 30–45 minutes. With your permission, I may take notes or record the session for accuracy. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research and reporting purposes.

Section 1: Compatibility of Undergraduate Programs with Government Sector

Requirements

Q1. To what extent are undergraduate programs in Public Administration and Public Affairs aligned with the current needs and expectations of government bodies in Azerbaijan?

Q2. Do these curricula adequately prepare students to enter the public sector? Why or why not?

Q3. How does the State Examination Center assess whether graduates have the knowledge and skills needed for public service roles?

Q4. What gaps or deficiencies do you commonly observe in applicants, whether in terms of technical knowledge, soft skills, or other competencies?

Section 2: Challenges Faced by Graduates

Q5. Based on DIM's experience with applicants, what are the primary challenges that graduates of public administration programs face when entering public service?

Q6. Have you observed a mismatch between graduates' expectations of public employment and the actual demands of the job? If so, could you provide some examples?

Section 3: Recruitment Process and Suggestions for Improvement

Q7. Does the current public service recruitment process accurately reflect and evaluate the skills and knowledge of Public Administration graduates?

Q8. How might the entrance examinations or hiring procedures be improved to better assess the competencies of these graduates?

Q9. What reforms or innovations would you recommend to ensure Public Administration graduates are better prepared for roles in government institutions?

Closing

Thank you once again for your time and valuable input. Your responses will contribute significantly to understanding how we can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Public Administration education in preparing future civil servants.

APPENDIX G

Interview Consent Form

Dear Participant,

This is an invitation to participate in an interview for a capstone project study. Your much-valued participation will contribute to the creation of knowledge about the nature of the alignment of undergraduate programs with job opportunities in government bodies in Azerbaijan. It will help higher education institutions support faculty in their teaching. This study is conducted by *Aydan Mammadzada, Aysel Allahverdiyeva, Ramil Mammadov, Saad Hasanova, and Solmaz Jahangirova* under the supervision of *Dr. U. Mikayilova*. The interview, depending on how long your responses are, will last approximately 60 minutes. In addition, you will be asked to share relevant documents with the researcher.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may say no or answer only the questions you feel comfortable answering. Any direct identification information, such as your name and workplace, will be removed from the data when the responses are analyzed. Only the reviewers who agree to the terms of confidentiality will have access to the data as they review the data analysis. The data codes will have no direct identification information, and the reviewers will not see your name. After your responses are analyzed and built into themes, they will be compiled into a paper as part of our *capstone project* research study.

All the possible measures will be taken to keep participant identity private, this study poses no risk to the individuals. Participants may feel unnecessary pressure to partake in this study because of administrative or other pressures. However, this type of involuntary participation is completely discouraged as it violates the participants' rights. Therefore, your decision not to participate will not be disclosed to anyone. However, your voluntary

participation will benefit you through self-reflection and sharing your voice and concerns regarding the topic.

Although every attempt will be made to protect participant confidentiality, some distinguishing answers may reveal participant identity. Your responses or decision whether or not to answer some questions will not affect your job position or status as a faculty member or a student. At any point, you may withdraw from the study as a participant. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact *Ramil Mammadov* at (+994 55) 763 26 13. If you have any concerns regarding your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, *ADA University, School of Education* at (+994 12) 437 32 35/ 437 32 36; *Ahmadbey Aghaoglu str. 61, Baku, Azerbaijan, AZ1008*.

Thank you for participating!

Consent: I agree to participate in this study. In addition, by signing below, I agree to allow my responses to be audio-recorded for the research purposes of this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____