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ACADEMIC MOBILITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: KAZAKHSTAN DIMENSION

Higher international education in international relations has acquired an important place and mode as an apparatus of soft power latterly. Situation of today the pandemic and the massive transition to a remote regime, give us enough reasons to consider many spheres of life in greater depth.

The purpose of the study in this article is to define the role of academic mobility as a soft power tool in the system of international relations on the basis of a survey of participants in academic mobility.

Methods and approaches. The methodological basis of the study was based on general theoretical framework, the principle of consistency and the Google Form Survey.

Results and findings: a survey was conducted among participants of academic mobility; trends in academic mobility was defined; the impact of the pandemic on traditional academic mobility was analyzed.

Conclusion and practical significance: The role of international higher education in international relations is shown through the use of academic mobility as a soft power tool. The analysis carried out in the article revealed that the topic of higher international education as one of the soft power apparatus for external policy strategies is at the beginning of its development trajectories in the theory of international relations. This study may be used to incorporate certain provisions into the Foreign Policy Strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Key words: soft power, international higher education, academic mobility, virtual academic mobility, Kazakhstan.

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Халықаралық қатынастар жүйесінің призмасындағы академиялық ұтқырлық: қазақстандық өлшем

Халықаралық қатынастардағы жоғары халықаралық білім беру соңғы жылдары жұмсақ күш құралы ретінде маңызды орынға және рөлге ие болуда. Пандемиямен байланысты бүгінгі шынайылық, қашықтық режиміне жаппай көшу бізге өміріміздің көптеген салаларын тереңірек талдауға негіз беруде.

Осы мақаладағы зерттеудің мақсаты академиялық ұтқырлыққа қатысушылардың сауалнамасы негізінде академиялық ұтқырлықтың халықаралық қатынастар жүйесіндегі жұмсақ күш құралы ретіндегі рөлін анықтау болып табылады.

Әдістері мен тәсілдері. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі жалпы теориялық әдістер, жүйелік принцип және Google form платформасының көмегімен жүргізілген сауалнама болды.

Нәтижелер мен қорытындылар: академиялық ұтқырлыққа қатысушылар арасында сауалнама жүргізілді; академиялық ұтқырлықтың даму үрдістері анықталды; пандемияның дәстүрлі академиялық ұтқырлықты дамытуға әсері талданды.

Қорытынды және тәжірибелік маңыздылығы: академиялық ұтқырлықты жұмсақ күш құралы ретінде пайдалану арқылы халықаралық қатынастар жүйесіндегі халықаралық жоғары білімнің рөлі көрсетілген. Мақалада жүргізілген талдау халықаралық жоғары білім беру тақырыбы жұмсақ күшті жүзеге асырудың құралдарының бірі ретінде қазіргі ғылымда қарқынды дамып келе жатқанын көрсетті. Осы зерттеудің Қазақстан Республикасының сыртқы саясат стратегиясына кейбір ережелерді енгізу үшін пайдаланылу мүмкіндігі жоғары.

Түйін сөздер: жұмсақ күш, халықаралық жоғары білім беру, академиялық ұтқырлық, виртуалды академиялық ұтқырлық, Қазақстан.

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Академическая мобильность через призму системы международных отношений: казахстанское измерение

Высшее международное образование в международных отношениях в последние годы приобретает важное место и роль в качестве инструмента мягкой силы. Сегодняшние реалии, связанные с пандемией, массовый переход на дистанционный режим дают нам основания для более глубокого анализа многих сфер жизнедеятельности.

Целью исследования в данной статье является определить на основе опроса участников академической мобильности роль академической мобильности в качестве инструмента мягкой силы в системе международных отношений.

Методы и подходы. Методологической базой исследования послужили общетеоретические методы, принцип системности и опрос с помощью платформы гугл форма.

Результаты и выводы: проведен опрос среди участников академической мобильности; выявлены тенденции развития академической мобильности; проанализировано влияние пандемии на развитие традиционной академической мобильности.

Заключение и практическая значимость: показана роль международного высшего образования в системе международных отношений, посредством использования академической мобильности в качестве инструмента мягкой силы. Проведенный в статье анализ показал, что тема международного высшего образования как одного из инструментов мягкой силы для реализации внешнеполитических стратегий находится в начале своего пути развития в теории международных отношений. Данное исследование может быть использовано для включения некоторых положений в Стратегию внешней политики Республики Казахстан.

Ключевые слова: мягкая сила, международное высшее образование, академическая мобильность, виртуальная академическая мобильность, Казахстан.

Introduction

The soft power of the State plays a crucial role in international relations. It brings a new vision and is one of the most appropriate means to accomplish the external policy objectives of any developed country. In today's rapidly changing world, soft power is becoming more and more strategic, especially for the new centers of power that Kazakhstan is playing in Central Asia.

The transformation of political thinking and globalization have given a powerful incentive to the conceptual elaboration of soft power in the theory of world politics. While mild-force effects were not previously seen as a serious instrument of foreign policy, today almost all states have realized their influence and have begun to study and introduce it into their policies (Mukan 2020:49). The term has been extensively mentioned not only in official documents, in statements by national leaders, but also in the media. A number of publications, dissertations and academic papers have been devoted to the study of this phenomenon.

In this connection, the authors revise the term "academic mobility" through the lens of soft power theory. One of the most important trends in recent years has been the evolution of the term from

a more traditional educational concept to a broader interpretation of mobility, which implies that not only students but also universities and educational programmes have become mobile. Knowledge and information have become mobile in the form of distance learning and virtual learning. This transformation can be seen in the organization and management of new models of universities, which go beyond the traditional understanding. One example of this phenomenon can be seen in the creation of regional educational "hubs" – such as "Knowledge City" in Dubai, "Education City" in Qatar and "Global School House" in Singapore. First of all, we need to understand the integration of higher education with the concept of soft power J. Nye. It was in 1990 that he justified and proposed the term soft power as the ability to influence others through finding allies, developing agendas, and achieving results through attractiveness and persuasion rather than force or payment (Nye 2004). In the modern world, soft power plays an important role, according to Joseph Nye, student exchanges help to create an attractive image of the country, thereby increasing the effect of receiving the desired outcome from the host country. The author notes that higher international education in the modern world in today's world order is focused on branding, ratings, competitiveness, in this

sense the concept of soft power has a great scope for further research. It has to be borne in mind that the effectiveness of soft power depends on the choice of methods, i.e. it is important to explore what is important and valuable to people at the moment: what they consider to be the priority of well-being, education, Transnational exchanges or intercultural programmes (Nye, 2006). The positive experience of participants in international education, as well as the development of intellectual, commercial and social relations, can contribute to the attractiveness of the nation, the reputation and the international prestige of the country.

Literature Review

International academic mobility has become a subject of study for a wide range of foreign scholars, particularly Western scholars. Thus, F. Altbach, H. de Wit, J. Knight propose to introduce the concept of “mutual power” when considering the concept of soft power for higher education (Knight 2014). The “mutual power” approach is based on the respective strengths of higher educational institutions and research institutes of countries and provides solutions and benefits for all participants. Also F. Altbach, H. de Wit, H. De Ridder-Simoens, in their research study the conceptual issues of the essence, typology and periodization of academic mobility (Altbach 2018); M. Green, J. Douglas, R. Edelstein, K. Koch, K. Lem (Van de Water 2008) consider international academic mobility at the national policy level; R. Bhandari, C. Robles and C. Farrugia (Bhandari 2018) analyze the dynamics of the global market for international students; M. Van Der Wende (2015), L. Verbik, B. Wechter, Marginson S (2007), J. Knight (2014), J. Sadlak, U. Teichler (Teichler 2017) (BEYOND 2010) examine trends and prospects in international academic mobility from a regional perspective; F. Altbach (2016) and Wanhua Ma (2015) discuss the dilemma: “brain drain” or “intelligence exchange”; B. Wechter, F. Muhe, F. Maiworm (Maiworm, 2015) determine the motivation of the subjects of the organization of international academic mobility and study strategies for recruiting foreign students to educational institutions.

In Russian science, the concept of soft power is being actively explored in various ways, and a kind of schools with opposing views on the concept have been formed. The importance of education as an instrument of influence in international relations is pointed out by such researchers as A. Torkunov, O.F. Rusakova, D. Kovba, M. Lebedeva, E. Panova, O.G. Leonova, S.O. Sergeev. Torkunov A. stresses

that higher education can become an innovative external policy apparatus in the context of the conceptual elaboration of soft power, and it is necessary to bear in mind that productiveness is evaluated only in the long term (Torkunov 2012). E. Panova proposes the dividing of soft power instruments into short-term and long-term ones. She would call it as “messaging” and include it to short-term media and international educational programmes are considered by the researcher as a long-term. (Panova 2011). O. Leonova defines Soft power as an experience that motivates and encourages action. The important thing, in our view, is that the researcher notes the soft power of each state, therefore its influence can be realized only in the process of political action or interaction through various instruments, including education (Leonova 2014).

The Urals School, led by Rusakova O.F. (Rusakova 2017) distinguishes three dimensions of the definition of soft power as a way of exercising power 1) attraction leading to consent or role model; 2) the ability to set a legitimate agenda, as well as a set of favourable rules and institutions; 3) the formation of preferences of population. The construction of the educational discourse, according to D. Kovba (Kovba 2016:182), is best related to the third dimension, because the impact has a long-term effect. The most interesting in this interpretation is that the authors have identified two directions of interaction of soft power of education that can take place in two directions: 1) education of representatives of elites, future leaders of other countries; 2) education of non-elite students, which, after completing their education and returning to their home country, start to appreciate the country of study favorably.

In the Kazakhstani academic space, Professor Bulekbayev S.B. notes that the drastic change in the system of higher education in Kazakhstan from a traditional system to a new one has led to a deterioration in the level of education, where the main problem is that national experiences in the education system are not reflected in international standards (Bulekbayev 2020a: 16). The Security Council expert under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Adilhanuly N. links international higher education to the elite. Here the concept of soft power through education can be clearly seen (Adilkhanuly 2014). According to the head of the Analytical Centre “Synergy” of the School of State and Public Policy and Law Kurmanguzhin R., for Kazakhstan it is necessary and possible to form and use its own soft power, realization of which is best possible in the process of international cooperation of Kazakhstan, primarily in the field of culture, education,

science, tourism and sports (Kurmanguzhin 2019). Researcher Janenova S. notes that a unique model-program “Bolashak” was created in Kazakhstan as a successful project in the field of international higher education, which can be used as a potential soft force (Janenova 2019). A group of scientists of the public foundation “Center of China Studies in Central Asia “Sinopsis” is studying soft influence of China on Kazakhstan, including active educational policy in the field of academic exchange (Myagkaya sila Kitaya v Kazstanahe, 2016.) It is also necessary to mention such researchers as Nurdauletova S. and Kuramaeva G. (Nurdauletova 2019).

When looking at international academic relations, it is particularly clear how much partnership in education affects relations between States. Modern technological capabilities, the acceleration of the Internet and the involvement of a large number of participants in this process characterized by complex linkages, give new challenges and functions to the education system. In this paradigm, education assumes the role of an intermediary for the cross-border exchange of human resources, expertise, experience, innovation, economics, technology and culture. The question arises as to the purposeful practical application and methodological justification of the integration of education into the soft power paradigm based on power and influence. In the XXI century, societies must respond to global challenges such as international terrorism, the crisis of State sovereignty, global demographic imbalances, mass migration, environmental disasters, climate change, the crisis of values and pandemics. The world is placed in an environment where there is no room for self-interest, for superiority and for domination. The new evidence is that no State can solve these global problems alone.

In this regard, the integration of soft power and higher international education gives us an opportunity to explore this phenomenon from a new perspective. The present-day conditions, where all are interdependent and problems require a non-standard solution, the higher education system is assuming a new role. The high demand for higher education, skilled workers, the increase in the country’s intellectual capital and the supply of various types and forms of international educational programmes are transforming the nature and structure of the educational space.

Moreover, in the context of global trends in higher education, academic mobility as an intrinsic module of higher international education integrates distance education technologies with traditional, which in turn is a good practice for the implementa-

tion of the principles of lifelong learning. This vision of mobility is reflected in today’s policies of many countries in the build-up of soft power geopolitically and economically.

Research methods

Research methods include general theoretical methods, institutional and systemic approaches, comparativeness, quantitative and qualitative methods. At a general theoretical level, foreign and domestic concepts of soft power were examined, the role and place of higher international education and academic mobility in the context of the theory of soft power were defined through an institutional approach, a systematic approach has made it possible to allocate the resources of the soft power of Kazakhstan, Comparativeness provides an opportunity to identify the conceptual features of the integration of soft power and academic mobility, comparing foreign and domestic experience, a survey of participants in academic mobility programmes was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods to identify problems and prospects in Kazakh higher education.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze in a comprehensive manner the international academic mobility of students as an instrument of soft power of the foreign policy of the state in an era of rapidly changing conditions and digitization. In order to achieve the objective of the study, the experience of participants in academic mobility programmes was studied, both in the traditional format and in virtual form, in order to develop the foundations of the Kazakh dimension of soft power through higher international education. The impact of the pandemic on traditional academic mobility was also analyzed.

Research questions: 1. What is soft power? Is academic mobility a soft power tool? 2. Why is the concept of soft power being actively studied in contemporary international relations? What are the advantages of developing the concept of soft power in foreign policy? 3. How to learn to apply the soft power concept? How do we learn how to use these resources? How do we create a programme for the development of the soft power of the State at the institutional level? 4. What are the prospects and priorities for the elaboration of virtual academic mobility? What are the side effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on traditional academic mobility? 5. How to integrate the soft power concept and academic mobility into the Strategy for Academic Mobility in the Republic of Kazakhstan?

Results

The analysis was based on a survey conducted within the framework of the dissertation to identify the attitudes of participants in academic mobility programmes towards the use of soft power through education, and to define the role of academic mobility in the implementation of interstate cooperation in the field of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

While in the United States, Europe and Russia scientific schools and centres have been formed to study the concept of soft power, in Kazakhstan interest in this topic has appeared in the last five years. It should be noted that research of soft power in the Republic of Kazakhstan is uncoordinated and localized. The provisions in this analysis also do not claim to have a comprehensive conceptual status. The authors try to identify trends and problems in the development of the concept of soft power in Kazakhstan through education, more precisely through international higher education – academic mobility.

According to Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index-2021, Kazakhstan ranked 75th, while in

2020 it ranked 58th. It should be noted here that 60 countries participated in the ranking in 2020 and 105 in 2021. In this regard, stable results can be reported. According to The Bloomberg Innovation Index-2020 in the Central Asian region in terms of the level of innovation development, Kazakhstan ranked 3rd behind India and Iran, in the overall innovation rating of Kazakhstan is in 77th place, with 28, 56 points.

Analysts of the preexisting assessments designate that it is crucial to elaborate a national brand, where soft power is the most preferred instrument. Soft power buildup brings all sorts of benefits to the state, people, institutions and businesses at different levels. A successful national brand, by creating a positive reputation, not only to attract resources from outside, but also to strengthen and enhance the reputation within the country. First of all, it is the consumption of domestic products and services, as well as a way to form a better attitude to their nation to which they belong and to retain a talented and creative population (Fig.1).

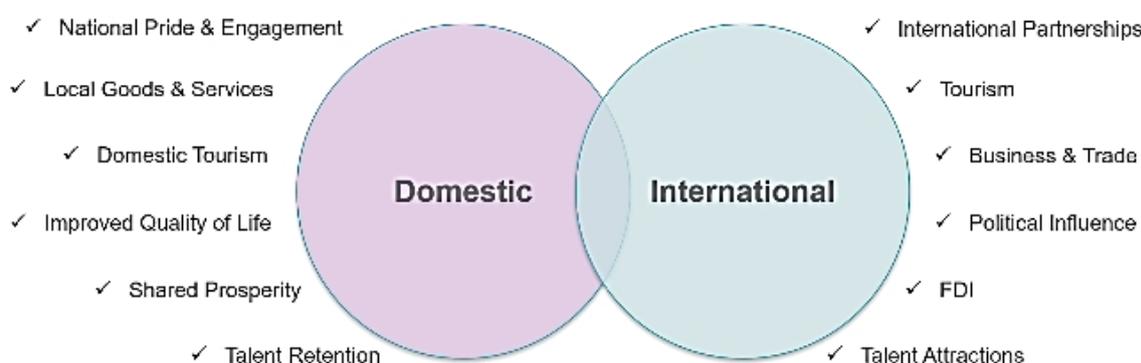


Figure 1 – Soft power advantages: domestic and international brand

Since it is difficult to track direct influence and soft power through education, it was important in this study to learn the views and experiences of participants in the process of international academic mobility. The evaluation of their contribution is considered in the form of quantitative and qualitative indicators. A total of 103 respondents from the academic environment, or almost 100 per cent of the target audience, responded to the survey. This group of people can also be called experts, as they are direct and indirect participants in international higher education. The questionnaire was sent to students, masters, doctoral students and teaching staff

of higher educational establishments of the Republic of Kazakhstan by a continuous method in which participation was on a voluntary basis.

Despite the fact that 103 out of a total of 2,694 Kazakh students who participated in the survey were from the external outgoing academic mobility programme in 2019, The sample can be considered representative of the gender-age ratio (Analytical report 2019:5).

Among the respondents, 20 per cent were men and 80 per cent were women, respectively, 50 per cent were aged 25-29, 27 per cent were aged 30-40 and 23 per cent were aged 40 or over. According to

the analytical report on the implementation of the principles of the Bologna process in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2019, men accounted for 29 per cent and women for 71 per cent.

The OECD Annual report “A View on Education, 2019” clearly distinguishes between the concepts of international and foreign student. An international student is a student who is a citizen of another country who has entered the country for an academic degree. A foreign student is a person who is a citizen of another country, but has been living in the country of study for a long time (residence permit). The analysis in this article is presented on credit academic mobility.

Discussion

The first set of questions aimed at identifying participation in academic mobility programmes

among those interviewed and general perceptions of international higher education. Some 70 per cent of those interviewed had gone to study outside Kazakhstan. An important part of the study was to find out what the respondents were most oriented to when choosing the academic mobility programme. The most important concern of respondents is the content of the education programme, directly the country where the university is located, the status of the university (Figure 1).

The most popular types of academic mobility programmes among respondents are workshops and internships, as evidenced by 31 per cent of the responses. According to the academic exchange programme, 27 per cent of the respondents left for a certain academic period. The responses on the state program «Bolashak», international project and grants were also distributed almost the same. (Figure 2).

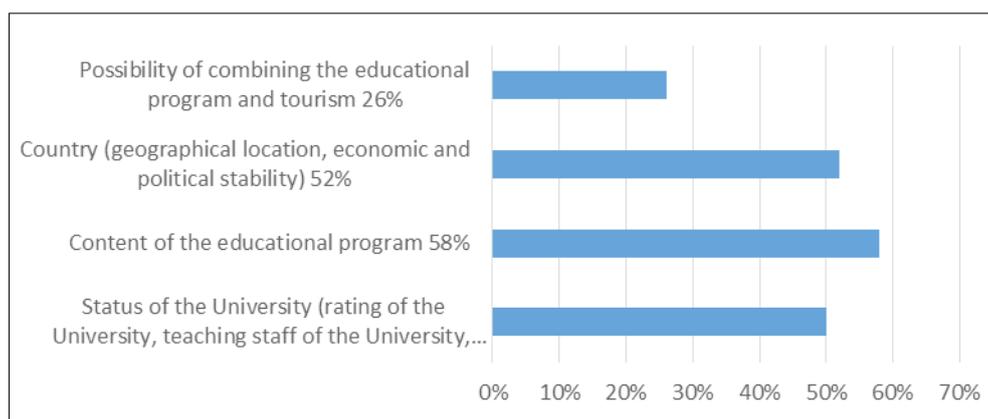


Figure 1 – When choosing the academic mobility program, what do you focus on more?

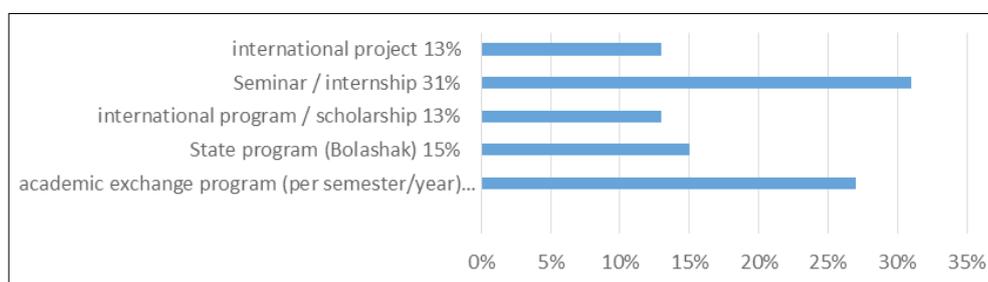


Figure 2 – Please indicate the academic mobility program you have studied on

The most common problems for 33 per cent of respondents were substantive ones, namely credit rescheduling, program content, etc. Resource problems are of concern to 32 per cent of respondents. Twenty-seven per cent of departees had problems

with registration and organization, and 21 per cent had language barriers. In our research, we are interested in the fact that 6 per cent have experienced discrimination based on national or ethnic origin. It is encouraging to note that 10 per cent have

experienced no difficulties and have successfully completed academic mobility programmes.

The final questions in the first set of questions were aimed at identifying an understanding of the purpose of academic mobility. The majority of respondents (61 per cent) noted the desired result as a contingency to perceive education in the chosen field of area. For the option of increasing knowledge, developing knowledge in different cultural areas – 58%, 50% see the goal of academic mobility in improving the language level, 40% say that the goal is to have access to recognized knowledge centres, where the leading scientific schools are formed. There were answer options that linked the goal of academic mobility to increasing the level of language proficiency, and unfortunately only 1% linked the goal to the advancement of Kazakh science abroad.

Eighty-seven per cent of those surveyed were able to reach out to new partners during the period of the academic mobility programme and to continue to communicate after their arrival back.

Results on the first section

The first set of questions dealt with general issues of academic mobility. Despite the fact that the question was “cold” without any explanation, some respondents asked for clarification of the very concept of “academic mobility”, moreover some of them being members of international education programmes had no idea of the concept of “academic mobility”.

Kazakhstan joined the Bologna process in 2010, but problems of a content plan are still present today. In this regard, advantages and challenges should be noted.

The Bologna system made it possible to combine knowledge: one could become a bachelor in one specialty and could graduate a master’s degree in another. The inconvenient and wasteful system of second higher education currently in use will disappear; it is expected that the majority of employees will be formed from bachelors and the intellectual elite from masters. The bachelor’s degree will thus meet the increased demand for higher education; a two-tier education system is best suited to the present time, when knowledge tends to become rapidly obsolete. The new education system provides for «lifelong» education, consisting of additional education programmes for graduates; academic mobility offers great opportunities and advantages in supplementing knowledge in other higher education institutions, especially abroad.

The following problems have arisen in Kazakhstani higher education:

First, the new knowledge assessment system is not credible. To a large extent, it is not correct, ambiguous or objective; this means that, as a result of the introduction of a test system for recording and verifying knowledge in the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in particular the Unified National Testing (UNT), Many of the graduates are not able to relate theoretical positions to actual reality, write competently, think logically and express their thoughts freely.

Secondly, the role of humanitarian education is minimized, in other words, the importance of worldview disciplines is underestimated, while the humanities are known to teach people to understand and express themselves, to understand others and to communicate with them, to understand other cultures and eras, to understand the goals of mankind and their place in history, and to consciously build their personality in creative interaction with other individuals and cultures.

Thirdly, in our view, it is necessary to address the problem of preserving and developing the strengths of higher vocational education. This means that traditionally, in the Soviet and Kazakh systems, one of the leading areas has been the scientific component, i.e., higher education has been regarded as the integrity of education, upbringing and the involvement of students in research activities. This was due to the fact that graduates were awarded not only an academic degree, but also a qualification (Bulekbayev 2020b).

In this bloc, 6 per cent had an inequality problem. While only 6 per cent of the respondents indicated that such problems had been encountered, the reality is that inequality is a reality today. Başak Bilecen & Christof Van Mol, having studied inequality in the content of higher education internationalization, identify a number of levels of inequality. New data indicate a growing disparity in academic achievement, depending on factors such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, social status, health status, position, country or place of birth, and country or place of residence (Başak Bilecen 2017).

International academic mobility and its associated inequalities transcend the borders of the State, thereby acquiring international, global status. The problem lies in the heterogeneity and interpretation of those who participate in academic mobility. Moreover, according to the United Nations World Social Report, 70 per cent of the world’s population is affected by inequality. Academic mobility is closely related to international migration, which in

turn is noted in the report as a “powerful symbol of global inequality” (The *World Social Report*, 2020).

Mittelmeier and Cohen published a study on the growth of Sinophobia after Covid-19, examining 65,000 Twitter reports of foreign students between January and April 2020. COVID-19 has often led to increased hostility towards foreign students, especially from China or East Asia, as evidenced by reports of increased discrimination against foreign students on campuses and overseas (Mittelmeier 2020).

Since the start of the pandemic, the University of California, Berkeley Center for Higher Education Studies has collected data from universities in the United States on the impact of COVID-19 on foreign students. The study was based on a survey of 22,519 students and 7,690 doctoral students. According to the survey, one in four foreign learners expressed concern about intimidating, hostile or abusive behaviour during the pandemic. Moreover, 27 per cent of foreign students interviewed said that they had personally experienced such cases during the pandemic. This percentage ranges from 22 per cent to 30 per cent among students from China, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The authors note that the evidence suggests that some of the negative behaviours were specifically related to the origin of the pandemic. In addition, 28 per cent of the af-

ected students stated that the problem had reduced the likelihood that they would complete their study programme in the United States.

The second set of questions focuses on the pandemic and the transformation of traditional academic mobility into virtual academic mobility. Virtual academic mobility programmes were offered to 34 per cent of respondents and 66 per cent did not. The main reason for choosing virtual academic mobility in 32 per cent of respondents was the COVID-19 pandemic. Personal problems amounted to 10 per cent, and respondents also indicated as answers: financial, residence in another country, refresher training, combining with work or study, as well as health. The next question was whether the planned academic mobility program had to be abandoned in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. The question confirmed the reasons for the choice of virtual academic mobility and amounted to 32 per cent.

An alternative traditional way of participating in the academic mobility programme in view of the pandemic was provided by only 24 per cent of those surveyed. It was either a completely virtual form or a hybrid.

In assessing the impact of the pandemic on traditional/physical academic mobility, 39 per cent of respondents indicated that it was very significant (Figure 3)

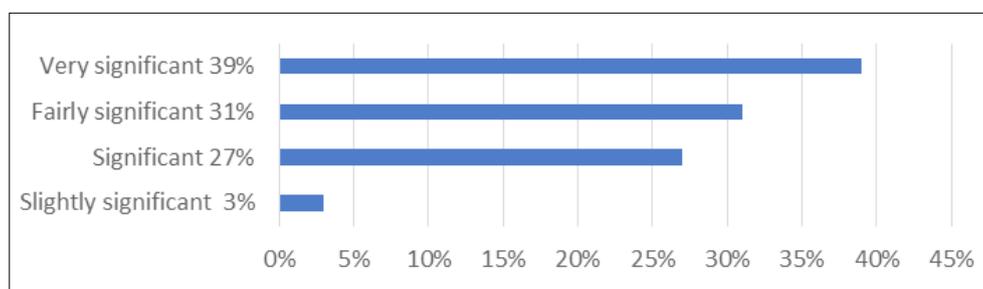


Figure 3 – How do you assess the impact of the pandemic on traditional / physical academic mobility?

The last three issues of the section concerned the level of international relations. 56 per cent of respondents noted that virtual academic mobility is partially supported by the state, while 20 per cent indicate that it is not supported at all, and 18 per cent found it difficult to answer.

Interestingly, the answers to the question of whether virtual academic mobility will affect interstate relations are interesting. Here, the opinion of the respondents was diametrically opposed, for the answer will make a significant difference – 37 per

cent, a small amount – 40 per cent, and a fairly significant – 18 per cent.

The uncertain prospects for virtual academic mobility are seen by 39 per cent of those surveyed as significant – 25 per cent, small – 18 per cent and favourable – 17 per cent.

Results on the second section

March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed COVID-19 a pandemic that

affected all countries, almost every family. International education, one of the areas that has fully experienced all the changes, the limitations of the pandemic. It was necessary to act in complete chaos, with rapidly changing news and many changing attitudes. Alan Ingram gives a precise description of the global event as a “destructive transformation of the world and the ways of its perception and reflection”. It is “something that marks a break, a shift or a bifurcation in how things work and how they function”. It is a phenomenon that challenges the established ways of existence in the world” (Ingram 2019:11).

Everything that was ordinary and simple, like getting visas and flights, became uncertain, impossible. Many students hung in uncertainty, and even more major providers of international education, such as the Erasmus program, US universities, and China have taken a wait-and-see attitude, not offering an alternative to foreign students.

The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that higher international education must work closely with public policy. Foreign students were invisible elements of society, while COVID-19 demonstrated an understanding of their importance for economic and social development.

According to Technavio (Higher Education M-learning Market by Type and Geography – Forecast and Analysis 2021-2025), the global distance learning market by 2024 will be \$248 billion. In addition, online learning is one of the most proved topics in higher education, ranging from scientists sharing best practices to master’s and doctoral theses at the moment.

Virtual activity has become important for all activities before and after enrolment in universities. This includes online learning, virtual campus tours, virtual open-door days and more.

Thus, certain conclusions can be drawn. The focus has shifted from cross-border movements of people to cross-border flows of data, information and knowledge. The move to a virtual space has increased the inclusiveness, accessibility, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of international education, but new challenges have also emerged with regard to digital equality, data security and confidentiality. Problems which the higher education system itself cannot solve without the assistance of the state.

The final section is devoted directly to the identification of the soft power of international higher education.

According to the survey, 48 respondents consider European countries to be the most active in

implementing and promoting academic mobility programmes. Almost the same number for United States universities – 20 people and 18 people noted activity among universities in China and Korea.

About 42 per cent of respondents have moderate government support for academic mobility programs, while 35 per cent believe that this support is weak.

Our next question was to find out what kind of support is given to academic mobility programmes and to what end are provided by national governments. The majority (57 per cent) believe that one of the main goals is to attract specialists. 45 per cent believe that countries pursue economic goals, 41 per cent promote image policy, and 26 per cent of respondents indicate political goals.

More than half of those surveyed agree that academic mobility strengthens friendly relations between countries, develops business contacts, promotes cooperation between countries, and creates a common educational space.

Seventy-four per cent of those travelling under academic mobility programmes agreed that the sending State should take preventive measures through active academic mobility programmes. Also, more than half of 56 per cent of respondents indicated that the economic goals of academic mobility in the host State were still a priority.

The development of an educational programme and an academic mobility programme is one way of promoting the culture and values of the host state. This was reported by seventy-five per cent of respondents.

The worldwide trend towards academic mobility as an alternative tool for rearranging states on a global scale is supported by 77 per cent of respondents. So, they see this as a huge resource in this direction.

It was interesting to know the problems that arise in the implementation of academic mobility in the current conditions among the Kazakh academic environment. The main problem is, of course, financial, i.e. the lack of resources for participation in the programme as well as during the stay in the host country.

The most important challenge in realizing academic mobility today is the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities around the world were unprepared for the new realities, and for this reason there was for some time a complete or partial suspension of academic mobility programmes. For example, mobility under the Erasmus+ program was suspended as many countries were quarantined and online mobil-

ity was not included in this program. The pandemic has also revealed that there is a lack of technical expertise and gadgets to participate fully in a virtual environment.

Problems at the university level were noted: rescheduling of credits, weak international cooperation of universities of Kazakhstan, lack of transparency in the selection of candidates, bureaucracy, corruption. At the national level, respondents do not feel supported or given due attention.

An important part of the survey was to identify the prospects for developing academic mobility in the current context seen by respondents. Almost half of 45 per cent of respondents indicate the development of virtual academic mobility. 28 per cent of respondents are sure that academic mobility will be transformed. For the development of traditional model is 22 per cent. Of course, due to events related to COVID-19, 4 per cent are pessimistic and noted a decline or decline in academic mobility (Figure 4).

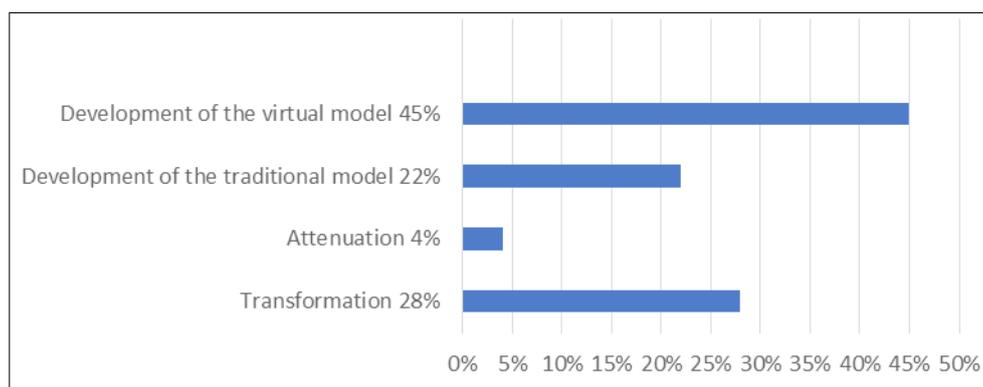


Figure 4 – What prospects do you see for the development of academic mobility in modern conditions?

Results on the third section

First of all, we would like to point out that respondents aged 25-29, that is, the young active population of the country, are aimed at going abroad and obtaining higher education in the leading educational centres of the world. They are most concerned with the content of education and the resolution of financial problems. The questions of the third section, aimed at a critical vision of international education as a whole, were problematic and incomprehensible. A group of scientists studying the formation of political culture draw attention to the fact that in Kazakhstan young people make up a significant part (40 per cent) of the working -age active population (Baisultanova 2020). These figures are alarming and give some ideas for reasoning.

This is exactly the field of activity where the state must be actively involved, with some work and support for each traveller in the face of unusual challenges. To take preventive measures on active programmes on the part of states and higher educational establishments in order to protect and preserve the intellectual capital of Kazakhstan.

The survey confirmed the problem of the imbalance of foreign students on a global scale, that

is viewed in the expansion of academic mobility. That is, most of the programs are offered by the US, England, Germany, that entails the Westernization of international higher education (Van Der Wende, 2015). Whereas the basic idea of internationalizing education is to develop international education in equal conditions for all countries. This subsequently entails an uneven “brain circulation”, financial and investment flows, and the development of education, science, and the economy.

The weak involvement of the state in supporting academic mobility programmes was noted by respondents. Indeed, this phenomenon can be seen in the low level of state funding, the small number of intergovernmental agreements, the imperfect legal and regulations of these programmes and the secrecy of information.

The pandemic has been a catalyst for many problems, including education. Academic mobility has suffered the most, with thousands of students, undergraduates, doctoral students and scientists hanging in uncertainty. Internships and academic exchanges were disrupted as planned, while adequate facilities were not provided in return. This is a great field for research that requires quick solutions at both the university and state levels.

Conclusion

In sum, therefore, the role and increasing attention to academic mobility in international relations and in modern higher education are due to a number of factors. The analysis conducted in the article revealed that the topic of higher education as a module of the build-up of soft power in modern science has progressive backward development. The methodology of international relations is undergoing a transformative phase. International and political scientists have been seeking for a new methodology and new approaches latterly. One such challenge is research into the integration of education and international relations through the theory of soft power.

If education is seen as a facet of public diplomacy, there is a coherent tendency to promote national values and to export education in order to influence public awareness and build a favourable image of the country. This is also expressed in the concepts “the struggle for minds”, “the brain drains”. This order of affairs in world practice takes on a cultural and civilizational orientation, thus in the complex structure of the world order, education can be used as an appropriate means and a competitive advantage in achieving global leadership.

Moreover, the development of academic mobility has gone beyond education and acquired new challenges and functions in addressing both local and strategic cross-country issues. Academic mobility is taking on new meanings and forms through the lens of soft power. Education services are becoming a kind of tool, a mechanism or a resource that can play a political role that can regulate and influence state attitudes and positions.

However, despite all these problems, it can be said that the something has moved and Kazakhstan’s interests are currently focused on the strategic goal of moving Kazakhstan into the 30-th category of developed countries. Moreover, investments in soft power do not bring immediate results, but has an effect on the process. The application of soft-power theory to a country raises both theoretical and practical questions that need to be addressed.

Al-Farabi teachings in Kazakhstan may be a feature of the use of higher education as a soft power tool. For kazakhstani society, the cultural memory of the Kazakh people and its spiritual, moral and intellectual development, the creativity of Abu Nasr al-Farabi is a historic example of the way in which reason should relate to the natural world and society. In this context, soft power can be inherently interpreted as reasonable power.

It is a power, that is, that every human being is capable of contemplating and thinking, of carrying

out intellectual activities for the benefit of society. Here, the main idea is to activate this intelligence, wisdom through education. Al-Farabi notes that not only the individual’s efforts are needed, but also the State’s involvement.

Thus, by summing up the results of this study, it is possible to make a statement about the need to define the significance of soft power in the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an economic and humanitarian measure of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy. Domestic soft power can be based on values such as accessibility, transparency, quality, social stability, inter-ethnic and interfaith harmony, innovative education, etc. It will also give impetus to the establishment of research centres to study theoretical and practical aspects of soft power in Kazakhstan. It would also be advisable to develop a plan to increase the soft power of Kazakhstan, which would define resources and their mechanisms for their implementation, as well as to minimize the threats and challenges associated with the brain drain of Kazakh youth. As is well known, the attractiveness of foreign education does not always benefit the country, and more competitive graduates of various programmes attract material benefits and good conditions for creative work abroad. In this connection, there is an increasing need to address the problems of social and other conditions for developing the potential of young people in Kazakhstan.

This problem is of particular urgency at the present time, when Kazakhstan is implementing a policy of quality and accessible education, introducing world standards of education and creating world-class scientific and educational structures. For example, Nazarbayev University, a time-demanding program «Bolashak», thanks to which the country received thousands of young highly educated and competitive specialists of international level. The image of the world-class system of intellectual schools and vocational colleges is being enhanced.

The definition of a promising model for the development of education in Kazakhstan focuses on the “Knowledge Society”, which emphasizes that Kazakhstan’s development model is based on highly educated human capital. It aims to create a highly intellectual nation, a fully developed human being.

In our view, the integration of Kazakhstan into the international educational space will continue to develop, while soft power tools in the form of academic mobility will contribute to improve the image of our country, the competitiveness of higher education in Kazakhstan on the world market and, above all, a smooth dialogue in the sphere of international interaction and cooperation.

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