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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract. This article examines international academic mobility and student exchange as elements of modern higher education. It focuses on Uzbekistan's educational cooperation with more than 45 countries, state and international grants, and statistical indicators from UNESCO and the National Statistics Committee. The study explores how exchange programmes, including Erasmus+, contribute to students' academic development, foreign language skills, intercultural communication, and career opportunities. It also considers challenges such as financial limitations, language barriers, cultural adaptation, and differences between educational systems. The article highlights the importance of institutional partnerships and government support in expanding access to international education and strengthening Uzbekistan's education system.

Keywords: International academic mobility, student exchange, higher education, Erasmus+, international cooperation, educational grants, intercultural communication, student development, academic partnerships, Uzbekistan

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются международная академическая мобильность и студенческий обмен как важные элементы современного высшего образования. Особое внимание уделяется образовательному сотрудничеству Узбекистана более чем с 45 странами, государственным и международным грантам, а также статистическим показателям UNESCO и Национального комитета по статистике. В исследовании анализируется влияние программ обмена, включая Erasmus+, на академическое развитие студентов, владение иностранными языками, межкультурную коммуникацию и будущие карьерные возможности. Также рассматриваются такие проблемы, как финансовые ограничения, языковые барьеры, культурная адаптация и различия между образовательными системами. В статье подчёркивается важность сотрудничества университетов и государственной поддержки для расширения возможностей международного образования и укрепления системы образования Узбекистана.

Ключевые слова: международная академическая мобильность, студенческий обмен, высшее образование, Erasmus+, международное сотрудничество, образовательные гранты, межкультурная коммуникация, развитие студентов, академическое партнёрство, Узбекистан.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the rapid development of the knowledge economy and digital technologies places new demands on higher education systems. Today, preparing competitive specialists for the national labor market cannot be imagined without integration into the international educational space. Student and faculty exchange programs, joint degree programs (2+2, 3+1), and fully funded international scholarships serve as key drivers in enhancing a nation's intellectual potential.

In recent years, reforming the higher education system and expanding cooperation with prestigious universities ranked in global league tables have become top priorities of state policy in Uzbekistan. In particular, structural reforms—such as the discontinuation of part-time (correspondence) education starting from the 2025/2026 academic year and heightened quality standards—have further increased young people's drive to pursue education based on international standards.

Research questions:

1. Mechanisms & Cooperation: What are the primary national and international frameworks (such as the "El-Yurt Umidi" Foundation and Erasmus+) facilitating student exchange and academic mobility between Uzbekistan and over 45 partner countries?

2. Financial & Organizational Conditions: How do the financial stipends, eligibility criteria, and post-study benefits compare across major global scholarship programs available to Uzbek youth?

3. Migration & Statistical Trends: What key shifts have occurred in the volume and geographical distribution of Uzbek students studying abroad between 2024 and 2026, particularly regarding the shift from neighboring CIS states to technologically advanced destinations?

4. Socio-Economic Impact: How does international educational mobility contribute to individual career advancement and long-term socio-economic development in Uzbekistan (transforming "brain drain" into "brain circulation")?

Literature Review and Methodology

This study employs systematic analysis, statistical grouping, comparative analysis, and content analysis. International Student Mobility (ISM) has emerged as a distinct and vital research area within modern educational sociology and economics:

American scholar Philip G. Altbach, in his seminal work Global Perspectives on Higher Education, analyzed mechanisms to transform academic mobility in developing nations from a "brain drain" risk into a "brain circulation" advantage.

Dutch researcher Hans de Wit and Canadian professor Jane Knight developed the theoretical foundations of the internationalization of higher education, scientifically demonstrating the positive impact of joint educational programs and credit mobility on academic quality.

Oxford University professor Simon Marginson conceptualized studying abroad as a process of "student self-formation," substantiating the economic value of international degrees in the global labor market.

In Uzbekistan, researchers from the Center for Research on the Development of Higher Educationand the Center for Economic Research and Reforms (including Nozimjon Ortikov) have conducted extensive analytical work on higher education coverage, academic mobility, and adapting international best practices to the national system.

Results and Discussion

Uzbekistan's International Educational Cooperation and National Mechanisms.

Currently, Uzbekistan cooperates with over 45 countries within the framework of official student exchange and academic mobility programs. This process is funded and coordinated through three primary channels:

The “El-Yurt Umidi” Foundation. Pursuant to Presidential Decree No. PF-77 of May 5, 2025, the foundation’s operations were further streamlined. Under this decree, candidates independently admitted on a grant basis to universities ranked in the TOP-100 and TOP-300 of global rankings (QS or THE) are awarded foundation scholarships without competitive exams. The foundation covers 100% of tuition, visa, medical insurance, airfare, and living expenses. In return, graduates commit to returning to Uzbekistan and working continuously for 5 years (for Bachelor’s and PhD graduates), 3 years (for Master’s graduates), or 2 years (for internship participants). According to official data, over 730 foundation fellows are currently studying at leading universities in the USA, the UK, Germany, Italy, Australia, and Malaysia.

The European Union and the Erasmus+ Program. Between 2015 and 2025, 98 higher education institutions in Uzbekistan actively participated in Erasmus+ projects. Specifically, over 3,000 students and faculty members participated in International Credit Mobility (ICM) exchanges at European universities, with Uzbekistan leading Central Asia by holding a 39% share during the 2021–2024 period. Furthermore, 127 Uzbek students have been awarded Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s scholarships.

Bilateral Intergovernmental and Regional Programs. Active exchanges are maintained with the USA via FLEX (for high school students), Global UGRAD (for undergraduates), and Fulbright (for graduate students and researchers); within the Organization of Turkic States through the Mevlana and Orhunprograms; and with CIS countries through joint faculties.

Financial and Organizational Terms of Prestigious International Grants.

Scholarships awarded by foreign governments and international foundations not only waive tuition fees but also provide monthly stipends to ensure a decent standard of living:

Country/ Region	Main Grant Program	Monthly Stipend Amount	Additional Benefits & Conditions
European Union	Erasmus Mundus (Master’s)	**€1,400** (all expenses included)	Study in 2–3 European countries, 100% coverage of visa and tuition fees.
Japan	MEXT (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD)	**¥117,000 – ¥145,000** (~$750–$950)	Free airfare, tuition fees, and a 1-year Japanese language course
South Korea	GKS (KGSP) (All degree levels)	**₩900,000 – ₩1,000,000**(~$650–$750)	Airfare, tuition fees, health insurance, and a 1-year Korean language course.

Country/ Region	Main Grant Program	Monthly Stipend Amount	Additional Benefits & Conditions
Hungary	Stipendium Hungaricum (All degree levels)	**43,700 HUF (140,000+ HUF** for PhD)	Free dormitory accommodation (or 40,000 HUF housing allowance) and visa-free travel within the Schengen area.
Turkey	Türkiye Bursları (All degree levels)	**3,500 – 6,500 TL** (depending on degree level)	Free dormitory accommodation, 2 meals a day, airfare, and a 1-year Turkish language course.
USA	Fulbright (Master's) / Global UGRAD	**$1,500 – $2,500+** (depending on the city)	Full tuition, textbooks, airfare, accommodation, and health insurance.
Germany	DAAD (Master's and PhD)	**€934 – €1,300**	Free tuition (at public universities), travel expenses, and health insurance covered.
United Kingdom	Chevening (1-year Master's)	**£1,300 – £1,600** (higher in London)	Tuition fees, visa, airfare, and additional networking event expenses covered

Selection Criteria: Most scholarships require a minimum academic GPA of 80% or higher, an international language proficiency certificate (IELTS 6.0–7.0 or TOEFL iBT 80–95+), a compelling Statement of Purpose outlining future career goals, recommendation letters, and demonstrated extracurricular engagement. Applications are typically submitted 8 to 11 months prior to the start of the academic year.

Statistical Indicators and Migration Dynamics.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), between 2017 and 2023, the number of Uzbek students studying abroad quadrupled, surpassing 150,500 individuals. The country's outbound mobility ratio stands at approximately 12%, meaning 12 out of every 100 Uzbek tertiary students are pursuing education abroad

According to short-term border crossing data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan:

• In 2024: 35,900 citizens traveled abroad for education;

• In 2025: 28,954 citizens traveled abroad (including 6,498 to Russia, 6,039 to Tajikistan, 4,648 to Kyrgyzstan, 3,513 to South Korea, and 2,496 to Turkey);

• In January–September 2026: 16,522 citizens departed for educational purposes. During this 9-month period, the leading destination shares were distributed as follows: Russia (23.3% — 3,847 students),

Kyrgyzstan (17.0% — 2,809), South Korea (12.8% — 2,118), Turkey (11.0% — 1,818), China (7.6% — 1,248), Kazakhstan (6.7% — 1,112), Tajikistan (5.5% — 904), and the United Kingdom (4.7% — 784).

These figures highlight two major trends: first, the outflow of students to neighboring countries is declining due to the expansion of foreign university branches and private HEIs within Uzbekistan; second, the share of students choosing technologically advanced, distant destinations—such as **South Korea, Turkey, China, the UK, and Germany**—is steadily growing.

Socio-Economic Benefits of Studying Abroad.

Pursuing higher education abroad generates substantial added value not only for individual career trajectories but also for the national economy:

1. **Practical and Innovative Competencies:** Curricula at universities in developed countries are closely integrated with research centers and industry. Students are legally permitted to work up to 20 hours per week during semesters and complete internships at global corporations.

2. **Post-Study Work Opportunities:** Countries such as the UK, Germany, the USA, South Korea, and Australia grant international graduates post-study work visas lasting from 1 to 3 years. This enables young professionals to gain international work experience before returning home as highly qualified specialists.

3. **Cultural and Linguistic Capital:** Living in an international environment fosters fluency in multiple foreign languages, develops intercultural communication soft skills, and builds a global professional network.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, educational exchange and international scholarships serve as the most effective bridge for Uzbek youth to master global scientific and technological advancements. Statistical evidence confirms that students are increasingly prioritizing quality, grant-funded educational pathways. To further enhance the effectiveness of this process, the following measures are recommended:

• Align foreign language instruction (particularly English, German, Korean, and Japanese) in domestic higher education institutions with international certification standards;

• Establish dedicated advisory centers (International Grant Offices) at every university to assist students in preparing competitive applications for international scholarships and academic mobility programs;

• Further refine mechanisms for integrating returning graduates' knowledge and international experience into strategic sectors of the national economy and research institutes.

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