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## **RUSSIA AND AZERBAIJAN: ASPECTS OF COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION**

### RUSIA Y AZERBAIYÁN: ASPECTOS DE COOPERACIÓN EN MATERIA DE EDUCACIÓN

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#### ABSTRACT

Education is of vital importance because it empowers individuals with knowledge, fosters critical thinking, and serves as a foundation for personal and societal development. In this context, international collaboration is of great relevance because it fosters global understanding, cultural exchange, and the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices, ultimately contributing to the collective advancement and well-being of societies worldwide. Considering this, the goal of this investigation is to analyze the evolution of Russian-Azerbaijani relations in education matter. The analysis traces from the establishment of the Azerbaijan Republic in 1991 through the present day with some highlights of previous centuries. The multifaceted motivations, incentives, and objectives underlying Russian-Azerbaijani education cooperation through various lenses are also examined. It has been found that humanitarian cooperation programs have primarily governed cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Russia, and in general, numerous bilateral agreements and contracts regulate nearly all facets of humanitarian affairs between the countries. These include regularly updated cooperation plans between ministries. Ultimately, these structured educational partnerships have offered a consistent gateway for Russia and Azerbaijan to sustain constructive dialogue and connections even during periods of stressed relations.

#### Keywords:

Azerbaijan-Russian bilateral relations, foreign policy, education, humanitarian cooperation.

#### RESUMEN

La educación es de vital importancia porque empodera a las personas con conocimientos, fomenta el pensamiento crítico y sirve como base para el desarrollo personal y social. En este contexto, la colaboración internacional es de gran relevancia porque fomenta la comprensión global, el intercambio cultural y el intercambio de conocimientos, recursos y mejores prácticas, contribuyendo en última instancia al avance colectivo y el bienestar de las sociedades en todo el mundo. Considerando esto, el objetivo de esta investigación es analizar la evolución de las relaciones ruso-azerbaiyanas en materia educativa. El análisis abarca desde el establecimiento de la República de Azerbaiyán en 1991 hasta la actualidad, con algunos aspectos destacados de los siglos anteriores. También se examinan las motivaciones, incentivos y objetivos multifacéticos que subyacen a la cooperación educativa entre Rusia y Azerbaiyán a través de diversos lentes. Se ha descubierto que los programas de cooperación humanitaria han regido principalmente las relaciones culturales entre Azerbaiyán y Rusia y, en general, numerosos acuerdos y contratos bilaterales regulan casi todas las facetas de los asuntos humanitarios entre los países. Estos incluyen planes de cooperación entre ministerios que se actualizan periódicamente. En última instancia, estas asociaciones educativas estructuradas han ofrecido una puerta de entrada constante para que Rusia y Azerbaiyán mantengan un diálogo y conexiones constructivas incluso durante períodos de relaciones tensas.

#### Palabras clave:

Relaciones bilaterales entre Azerbaiyán y Rusia, política exterior, educación, cooperación humanitaria.

## INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan has deep historical traditions in relations with many countries of the world. For example, Azerbaijan participates in the Eastern Partnership initiative, a program intended to strengthen political, commercial, and economic connections between the European Union and six nations that were formerly part of the Soviet Union (Allahverdiyev & Mustafayev, 2023). Azerbaijan has also been engaged in military-technical cooperation with Turkey, where the two countries seeking to create a military-political union. The relationship has evolved over the years, and the two countries have intensified their interaction, particularly in the aftermath of the 4-day war and the Shusha Declaration (Guzaerov, 2023). In addition, within the framework of the "One Belt — One Road" project, Azerbaijan and China have been strengthening their economic cooperation. Azerbaijan is considered one of China's main cooperation partners in Eurasia, and the two countries have wide prospects for mutually beneficial cooperation in various areas (Musayev & Gasimov, 2023).

However, due to a common historical past, political, economic, and cultural relations connect Azerbaijan and Russia more deeply. According to Valiyev & Mamishova (2019) the discussions on the foreign policies of post-Soviet nations in relation to Russia have predominantly revolved around two prominent neorealist theories that outline how states make choices in forming alliances: 1) either by balancing threats through collaborative resistance or 2) by aligning strategically with the principal source of threat. Balancing entails the creation of alliances to counteract the main source of danger, while in the second case the position is aligning with the predominant peril. Nevertheless, the authors argue that the balancing-aligning dichotomy oversimplifies the case of Azerbaijan since the country serves as an example of an alternative model that extends beyond these two conventional options. This pattern was visible even in Azerbaijan's early years of sovereignty, particularly between 1991-2005. Although the Republic of Azerbaijan had already attained independent statehood and become a fully recognized entity under international law, it continued strengthening wide-ranging ties with many nations, building on historical traditions.

Over the first decades after its independence, Azerbaijan has demonstrated that despite being a very young, independent state with little experience developing foreign economic ties amid new global conditions, it possesses substantial economic potential. Though Azerbaijan faced domestic challenges in the early 1990s, including economic collapse, it managed to achieve meaningful successes in its foreign economic dealings, garnering strong

and reliable partners (Tugrul & Karimli, 2020). The country has radically transformed its economic foundations, attracted major foreign investments, and ensured a stable business climate for international economic partners – an important prerequisite for economic growth and strength (Akhmedov, 2020). During this time, in Azerbaijan has been enacted numerous laws to promote the expansion and bolstering of economic contacts, as evidenced by the many treaties and agreements sealed across all domains. Therefore, though possessing little historical experience as a modern independent state, Azerbaijan leveraged its inherent economic promise to forge critical partnerships and rewrite its economic story over the last years.

In general, Azerbaijan's economic contacts with many countries of the world, including Slavic ones, clearly demonstrate the country's ability to make a tangible contribution to the world economy through participation in the development of international economic relations. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the humanitarian sphere occupies a significant place in the system of international relations between Azerbaijan and many countries. The relationship among higher educational institutions, museums, theaters, concert halls, and specialized schools - all play an important role in establishing cultural contacts. In this regard, in the first years of independence, dozens of treaties and agreements were concluded not only at the government level, but also between organizations, institutions, and educational institutions, which created great opportunities for the development and strengthening of cultural relationships. This was also facilitated by repeatedly held events, such as cultural days, exhibitions, touring concerts, various joint projects, etc.

As Azerbaijan transitions to a market economy, the education sector is undergoing expansive growth and transformations in its status and importance. This has prompted reforms aimed at constructing a new education system, alongside improved legal governance of the sphere. Education represents one of the most critical arenas of human life and a core pillar of social development (Zhang et al., 2022). In terms of scale, education constitutes one of the largest and most far-reaching domains in the global economy. Currently, there is no other field engaging such a vast number of people concurrently (Johnson & Stearns, 2023). Furthermore, modern society features few other spheres witnessing such rapidly intensifying attention. Therefore, building up the education sector with regulatory restructuring and systematic upgrades has been vital for Azerbaijan, amidst its market economic shift, given education's centrality to human welfare and national progress (Ilyasov et al., 2023).

Having established the above, the objective of this research is to analyze the evolution of cooperation in the field of education between the states of Russia and Azerbaijan. For the above, a historical-logical approach was used, which allowed us to address this topic of great interest from the review of academic literature.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the system of modern international relations, formed as a result of the collapse of the USSR, the independent Republic of Azerbaijan occupies a special place due to its geographical position, which has turned the country into the geopolitical center of the South Caucasus with all the ensuing consequences. Azerbaijan has centuries-old traditions of national diplomacy. Both the ancient (Manna, Atropatena, Albania) and medieval (the states of the Shirvanshahs, Atabeks, Ak-Koyunlu, Safavids, Azerbaijani khanates of the 18th century) established and maintained diplomatic relations with many neighboring and distant eastern and western countries. Since the middle of the 15th century, the role of the foreign policy factor in the mutual rapprochement of Azerbaijan with European countries has been increasing. The Ak-Koyunlu state began to play an important role in the relations of the Near and Middle East with European countries. Thus, diplomatic ties between Ak-Koyunlu were expanded not only with Western European countries, but also with the Slavic countries of Eastern Europe - the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Poland, the Czech Republic, etc. (Mahmudov, 2001). Cooperation with these countries, especially with the Russian kingdom, continued during the existence of the Azerbaijani Safavid state in the 16th-17th centuries.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Azerbaijani diplomatic mission at the Paris Peace Conference managed to achieve *de facto* recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan by the Entente. On April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1920, the Azerbaijani parliament adopted a law on the establishment of diplomatic missions in several European countries, including Russia, Ukraine and other countries. One of the characteristic features of national diplomacy, both in the past and in the modern era, is the desire for stability and balance of interstate interests, while ensuring national interests and national security, fair resolution of emerging problems and contradictions, and the peaceful orientation of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the international arena.

Currently, the activities of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the field of foreign policy and international relations are built considering national interests in accordance with specific realities and norms of international law. The basis of

the country's foreign policy is the principles of peaceful coexistence and good neighborliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas. Moreover, the foreign policy principles of the Republic of Azerbaijan are based on generally accepted international legal norms, the UN Charter, and OSCE principles, which reject the use of force in resolving interstate and international disputes. Azerbaijan's relations with international and regional organizations are built based on mutual obligations, responsibility, and readiness to cooperate in the name of universal security.

The basic principles of national diplomacy, which were defined by the national leader of the Azerbaijani people H.A. Aliyev, fully meet the national interests of the state and are implemented by the current President of the country I.H. Aliyev in a balanced foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, distinguished by realism and pragmatism. It is thanks to this foreign policy that over the last decade Azerbaijan has entered the sphere of economic and political interests of the leading states of the world, acquired firm guarantees of its independence, and established civilized relations with all countries of the world. Currently, Azerbaijan occupies a worthy place in the world community, which proves the respectful attitude of almost all developed countries and authoritative international organizations towards the initiatives of the state. Being a full-fledged subject of international politics, Azerbaijan is a member of the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, Organization of the Islamic Conference, CIS, GUAM, BSEC and other authoritative international regional and interregional organizations. In addition, within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program, the Republic of Azerbaijan actively cooperates with the leading military-political organization in the world - NATO.

The origins of Azerbaijani-Russian relations are rooted in the deep past. According to the testimony of Arab travelers of the 9th-10th centuries, Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Khordadbeq, Masudi and others, Slavic merchants descended the Volga and traded with the countries of the Caucasus. In turn, Azerbaijani merchants made long trips to the lands of the Eastern Slavs. In general, it was the merchants, being a kind of diplomatic envoys, who played an important role in establishing trade, economic, political and cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Rus'. It should also be noted that the Azerbaijani state of the Shirvanshahs was one of the first in the East to establish diplomatic relations with the Russian state (Liaman, 2021).

In the 60s of the 15th century diplomatic relations were established between another Azerbaijani state Ak-Koyunlu and the Moscow state, and an exchange of embassies

took place. Shirvanshah Farrukh Yassar sent the first embassy known to us from Azerbaijan to the Moscow state, headed by Hasan Bey, in 1465 (Mahmudov, 2001). Hasan Bey's embassy was the first step in establishing official political and trade relations with the Moscow state. The embassy of Shirvanshah Farrukh Yassar paved the way for sending various envoys to the Muscovite state in subsequent years and for equipping reciprocal embassies. A year later, Ivan III sent a return embassy to Shemakha, headed by Vasily Papin, who presented the Shirvanshah with gifts and letters from the king about alliance and friendship. This was the first embassy of the Russian state to the countries of the East.

In general, the established friendly relations between both states in the future largely ensured the security of the southern borders of the Russian state and the northern borders of Shirvan. Azerbaijani-Russian relations received their further development in the 16th century, especially during the reign of Tsar Ivan IV, who sought to establish close ties with the Safavid state and intensify trade relations with the East through the Volga-Caspian waterway. In 1563, a trade agreement was concluded between Moscow and Shirvan "for the benefit of both nations, to maintain good agreement." During the 17th century, diplomatic relations between the Safavid and Russian states continued to be maintained, embassies were exchanged, and trips of Russian and Azerbaijani merchants became more frequent. But in the 18th century, under the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II, the military-political expansion of the Russian Empire in the southern direction intensified (Iskenderova, 2023). Nevertheless, trade and economic relations between some Azerbaijani khanates and Russia were not interrupted. Therefore, for example, in 1787, an embassy of the Kuban Khanate consisting of 12 people, headed by M. Veliyev, arrived in St. Petersburg with a request to accept this Khanate under the protection of Russia.

The beginning of the 19th century was marked by the conquest of Northern Azerbaijan by Russia because of two Russian-Iranian wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828. This allowed Russia to significantly strengthen its military-political presence in the Caucasus and control almost the entire vast Caspian region. Subsequently, already in the second half of the 19th century, the rapid economic development of the country and the presence of huge oil reserves led to the transformation of Baku into the main fuel base of the Russian Empire, and after that in the end of April 1920 Azerbaijan was occupied by the Soviet Union. During the period of Azerbaijan's entry into the USSR, the republic supplied the highest grades of oil, various types of petroleum products, non-ferrous and ferrous metallurgy products, high-quality oil equipment, electrical appliances,

and electrical equipment, air conditioners, electronic and radio engineering products, a wide range of light industry goods, as well as various types of products Agriculture (Jabbarov, 2022).

After Azerbaijan gained full independence at the end of 1991, Azerbaijani-Russian relations entered a qualitatively new stage of their development. After the return of Heydar Aliyev to the leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan in June 1993, Azerbaijan took consistent steps to resolve all the problems that interfered with the normal development of relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, in his first speech as speaker of parliament, Heydar Aliyev said that Azerbaijan must establish relations with all countries, including its northern neighbor Russia, based on the principles of equal cooperation. Thus, at the beginning of September 1993, during the visit of Heydar Aliyev, who exercised the powers of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to Moscow, extensive discussions were held on the comprehensive development of Azerbaijani-Russian interstate relations.

Consequently, since the second half of 1993 Azerbaijan began to pursue a foreign policy that opened the way for the dynamic development of relations with Russia. After this, the Republic of Azerbaijan confirmed its position with concrete steps. In the "Contract of the Century", signed on September 20, 1994, and in subsequent oil contracts, the corresponding share was allocated to the Russian oil company LUKOIL; the decision to transport the country's oil along the Baku-Novorossiysk route and its successful implementation was a manifestation of Azerbaijan's determination to expand friendly neighborly relations, relations based on mutually beneficial principles. In the subsequent period, Azerbaijan, in the course of its foreign policy, attached special importance to the development of interstate relations with Russia. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1997, during the official visit of President Heydar Aliyev to Moscow, an agreement on friendship, cooperation, and mutual security was signed between Azerbaijan and Russia. This document created a broad legal basis for raising bilateral relations to a high level following the national interests of both states.

The official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Azerbaijan on January 9-10, 2001 became a new stage in the development of Azerbaijani-Russian relations. This was the first visit of the Russian President to Azerbaijan since independence. Russia's objective assessment of the current geopolitical realities and the need to develop relations with Azerbaijan on an equal basis not only corresponded to the national interests of both states but also stimulated the beginning of a new stage in relations. In the subsequent period, a large number of bilateral documents were signed between the two countries and important

steps were taken to implement them. In this course of events, humanitarian cooperation between the two countries continued to expand (Ibrahimova, 2018). Thus, over the years of independence in the field of education, which is the basis of society, mutual activity has reached its highest level. In both countries, the importance attached to educational policies, citizen education, and the right to education is aimed at the development of society.

After the restoration of state independence of Azerbaijan in 1991, effective cooperation in the field of education began to expand with many countries of the world, including the Russian Federation. The purposefully pursued political course by the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, aimed at strengthening bilateral relations, contributed to the development of cultural ties, including in the field of education. Following the visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev to Russia in March 1995, agreements were signed between the two countries covering all areas, including education. On July 25th, 1995, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Russian Federation signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of certification of highly qualified scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel, and in November 1995, an agreement on the creation of a scientific and technical space. This agreement, among other areas, created a legal basis for restoring ties in the field of education. The parties agreed to implement the provisions of the Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation, signed on June 6, 1995, regarding the exchange of educational documents, as well as the mutual recognition of academic degrees and academic titles (Bayramov, 2013).

Already on April 11th, 1997, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Russian Federation signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of mutual recognition of educational documents, academic degrees, and academic titles. The agreement on cooperation in trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural spheres, signed on June 13th, 1997, contributed to the establishment of cooperation with Moscow in various fields, including education and student exchange. In 1997 and 1998, following intergovernmental agreements, 74 students were sent from Azerbaijan to study at various universities in the Russian Federation. Also, during 1997-1999, more than 140 young Azerbaijanis were sent to study at Moscow universities in various specialties (Akhmedov, 2001). In subsequent years, bilateral relations in the field of education continue growing. These ties were especially strengthened by mutual visits of heads of state.

As stated, the education cooperation between the two nations partially stemmed from their presidents' efforts.

It is also important to notice the relevance of the Baku Slavic University uniquely catalyzed bilateral education ties, which emerge due to Azerbaijan's president order on June 13th, 2000, which transformed Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute of Russian Language and Literature name after the M.F. Akhundov into the now known Baku Slavic University. According to the agreements reached between the leading universities of Russia and the Baku Slavic University, students and teachers at the university can continue their education and improve their qualifications at Russian universities. Baku Slavic University is a member of several Russian public organizations, including the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature, and the Educational and Methodological Association of Russian Universities at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in the specialties "Regional Studies" and "International Relations" (Pivovarov, 2012).

One of the significant documents that takes the format of social cooperation to a new level is the Declaration of Friendship and Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, which was approved on July 3rd, 2008, by the heads of state I. Aliyev and D. Medvedev in Baku. In accordance with the Declaration, the following areas of interaction are defined:

- based on the historically significant role of the communities of the two peoples in Azerbaijan and Russia, create favorable conditions for the comprehensive development of the Azerbaijani and Russian diasporas in the field of language, culture, religion, and everyday life.
- to promote the progress of diverse relationships between youth and student organizations, scientific and cultural spheres at the interstate level.
- in order to maintain and expand humanitarian ties between countries, provide full support in the matter of creating and popularizing departments of the Azerbaijani language, history, literature, etc. in leading Russian universities with the active support of the Azerbaijani side.
- with active government support, promote the implementation of comprehensive activities of the branches of Moscow State University M.V. Lomonosov in the city of Baku, as well as the Azerbaijan State Economic University in the city of Derbent (Aliyev & Putin, 2008).

Despite the rich and capacious legacy of the Soviet era in the history of the Azerbaijani people, Azerbaijan today is an independent republic in which only Azerbaijani is the official state language, but at the same time in this country, they continue to respect the Russian language and pursue a policy of preserving and popularizing it among the population of the country as the most promising at the

foreign language level. Nevertheless, the priority of the language over others is also determined by the number of educational institutions capable of teaching the Russian language at a high level in Azerbaijan. Thus, from the moment of the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan to the present day, there have been more than 300 schools, 18 universities, and 38 secondary specialized educational institutions in the country. It should also be noted that until 2007, the Baku branch of the Academy of Law and Management, the Baku branch of the South Russian Humanitarian Institute, the Baku branch of the Moscow State Open University, the branch of the Dagestan State University, the branch of the St. Petersburg Institute of Foreign Economic Relations, Economics and Law operated on the territory of Azerbaijan until 2007 etc. (Ragimov, 2018).

The Baku Slavic University plays an important role in strengthening relations with the Slavic countries of both the CIS and Eastern Europe. Within the walls of this one of the leading universities in the country, highly qualified specialists in Slavic studies of a wide profile are trained, who know not only languages and literature, but also economics, geography, the political system, and the culture of Slavic countries. This university performs not only educational, but also cultural and educational functions, and serves the development of comprehensive ties between Azerbaijan and the entire Slavic world. The BSU faculties train personnel in many specialties: specialists in international relations, Azerbaijani and Russian philology, teachers of Russian language and literature for Azerbaijani schools, translators from Slavic languages, regionalists - specialists in many aspects of Russia, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Greece. Moreover, huge attention is paid to training specialists of other countries, including Russian. Thus, in 2002, out of 2.5 thousand students, 1,700 were Russian specialists, philologists, teachers, and translators. In addition, the master's program at this university provides training in four specialties related to Russian studies.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized the frequent meetings of national leader Heydar Aliyev with representatives of the Russian diaspora, his concern for education in the Russian language, and Russian culture in general in the Republic. Even today, the President of the country, Ilham Aliyev, provides full support to educational and cultural institutions with Russian as the language of instruction, and the preservation and development of the traditions of Russian spirituality in the country. On the initiative and with the support of the President of the country, several educational, cultural, social, and sports programs are being implemented, among which, from the point of view of civic and multicultural education of schoolchildren, we would

like to especially emphasize the project "Let's get to know our country." As part of this project, cultural and educational tours to the regions of Azerbaijan are organized for high school students, where they get acquainted with architectural monuments, museums, and other attractions, and receive information about the culture and historical heritage of the peoples of Azerbaijan.

Multiculturalism in the country is one of the priorities of state policy. The Service of the State Advisor on Interethnic Issues, Issues of Multiculturalism and Religion of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been created. By decree of the President of the Republic, 2016 was declared the year of multiculturalism, and within the framework of this year, a number of events were held in schools and universities across the country to study the multinational culture and folk traditions of Azerbaijan, to develop among young people a sense of tolerance, civic identity and social responsibility. Today, state and public organizations make a significant contribution to the process of shaping an individual with a tolerant consciousness and a sense of ethnic pluralism, capable of navigating a multicultural and multi-religious environment (Gadzhev, 2017, p. 239). Issues of multiculturalism are the direct sphere of activity of the Baku International Center for Multiculturalism under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic. The Center supports the work of cultural and educational organizations of the nationalities inhabiting the Republic and initiates and conducts diverse scientific and educational events. In many universities of the Republic and foreign countries, the Center has organized the teaching of courses "Azerbaijani multiculturalism" and "Introduction to multiculturalism".

In the modern period, in the educational system of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Russian language functions from four perspectives: 1) as a language of instruction; 2) as one of the main subjects in educational institutions with Russian as the language of instruction; 3) as one of the foreign languages in schools and universities with Azerbaijani as the language of instruction; 4) as a language of classroom and extracurricular communication. We also note that in educational institutions of Azerbaijan, a fairly large number of foreign students also receive education in Russian. As is known, several trends are observed in the teaching of Russian literature in the CIS countries: teaching Russian literature as an independent subject adapted to local conditions, as part of a general course in world literature, in the traditional form according to Russian programs and textbooks. In Azerbaijan, in departments of secondary schools with Russian and Azerbaijani languages of instruction, Russian literature is taught as part of the general course "Literature".

The following political and socio-cultural factors contribute to the active functioning of the Russian language in the education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan:

- constitution and legislation defining the equal legal status of the languages of all peoples inhabiting the Republic.
- the traditional tolerant attitude of the Azerbaijani people and political elite towards the Russian language as the language of great culture, literature, scientific and spiritual tradition.
- market needs to preserve the language of a country with enormous economic potential and advanced technologies.
- awareness of the importance of knowing the official language of the country with which Azerbaijan actively cooperates and where there is a large Azerbaijani diaspora.
- the presence of a historically established Russian-language educational infrastructure, scientific and methodological base and personnel potential.

Considering the above, after being elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2003, Ilham Aliyev began to decisively advance the policy laid on very strong and durable soil. During the presidency of Ilham Aliyev, a balanced, mutually beneficial partnership policy based on national interests continued, and at the same time, foreign policy was based on pragmatic and rational principles. Undoubtedly, among these principles, the leading place was occupied by non-resistance to any state, deepening cooperation with neighboring states, and transforming our republic into a space of intercivilizational dialogue (Guliyeva, 2022, p. 338).

Then, as we have noted, Azerbaijan and Russia have collaborated across various areas, including actively building educational ties. The main aspects include Azerbaijan offering Russian as a widely-spoken secondary language and the two sides organizing academic exchange programs to bolster cultural bridges. Additionally, both countries have undertaken joint educational initiatives such as the development of institutes in Azerbaijan and generally promoting Russian language curricula and bilingual offerings in Azerbaijani schools. Azerbaijan has also backed the internationalization of its higher education, seeking to draw international students including from Russia (Suleymanov & Akundov, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

Cross-cultural partnerships have the potential to address diverse shared challenges faced by schools and universities internationally, through exchanging creative solutions

and technical capabilities. In an interconnected world, quality education that prepares engaged global citizens transcends national borders, while educational inequality anywhere impacts everywhere. Therefore, global cooperation to enhance education access and excellence for all students is instrumental for positive progress.

In this sense, educational cooperation has formed a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship between Russia and Azerbaijan. As Azerbaijan has prioritized the national development of its education sector, partnering with Russia has represented a strategic opportunity to participate in international initiatives, exchange best practices, and build cultural bridges. Specific realms of collaboration include academic exchanges, joint research projects, and university partnerships to enable student and faculty mobility. Multiple active agreements and programs facilitate such cooperation in areas like teacher training, curriculum development, and study abroad.

These educational linkages both reflect and advance closer social, economic, and political ties between the two countries. For Azerbaijan, engagement with multilateral partners like Russia aligns with its national objectives to transform education through global cooperation. Furthermore, the substantial foundations around educational collaboration provide momentum for Russia and Azerbaijan to continue strengthening their academic ties. This represents a win-win domain of partnership that leverages shared cultural heritage while also preparing youth, faculty, and institutions to succeed in an interconnected world.

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