

**DEVELOPING THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY OF STUDENTS AND
ACADEMIC STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract:

This article analyses the theoretical foundations, structural components, development trends, and obstacles to implementing international academic mobility in higher education institutions in the context of globalisation. The article reveals the narrow and broad definitions of student academic mobility; its motivational-goal, cognitive, activity-based, and effective-reflexive structural components are described. The regulatory and legal mechanisms governing academic mobility in Uzbekistan — The Law on Education (2020), the Regulation on the Procedure for Academic Mobility (VMQ-436, 2021), and resolutions concerning the credit-module system have been analysed. The research findings indicate that financial barriers, a lack of foreign language proficiency, cultural adjustment issues, and administrative constraints significantly reduce student participation in international programmes. Drawing on the experience of Erasmus+ and similar programmes, practical recommendations for expanding academic mobility have been developed.

Keywords: Academic mobility, international student exchange, higher education, Bologna Process, Erasmus+, globalisation, quality of education, credit-module system, Uzbekistan.

International academic mobility is becoming an integral part of the modern higher education system. In the context of globalisation, the development of the knowledge economy, and the integration of cross-border education, students and academic staff are increasingly moving across borders. The opportunity for students and lecturers to study or teach at foreign universities has become not only an opportunity for individual development but also a strategic tool for ensuring the competitiveness of national education systems. Globally, the number of international students almost doubled between 2005 and 2015, exceeding 974,000 by 2015 (1; p. 1241). This indicator clearly confirms the relevance of the phenomenon of academic mobility. At the same time, mobility opportunities are not the same for all students: factors such as socio-economic status, gender, citizenship, stereotypes and the geography of education create inequalities in mobility (1; p. 1242). The Republic of Uzbekistan is also actively implementing reforms to align its education system with international standards. The 'Concept for the Development of Higher Education until 2030', adopted in 2019 (8), and the 2021 'Regulations on the Procedure for Academic Mobility' (9) have established academic mobility as one of the priority areas of state policy. However, a number of obstacles exist to the full implementation of these reforms in practice, and their systematic study holds significant scientific importance. The aim of this article is to identify the theoretical foundations and structural components of academic mobility, and to analyse the factors and barriers affecting its development, as well as to develop scientifically-founded recommendations for expanding academic mobility in the context of Uzbekistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY: The following methods were used in this research: an analytical-descriptive study of scientific literature; a comparative analysis of normative documents in Uzbek legislation; comparison of international experience (Erasmus+, ECTS, Fulbright) and the practice in Uzbekistan; determination of the structural model of academic mobility based on a systematic approach. As sources, Sakhieva et al. (12), Bilecen and Van Mol (1), Juškevičienė et al. (3) were used as a basis, as well as the research of Uzbek scholars — Mingboyeva (5; 6), Ruziyeva (11), Khimmataliyev and Usarboyeva

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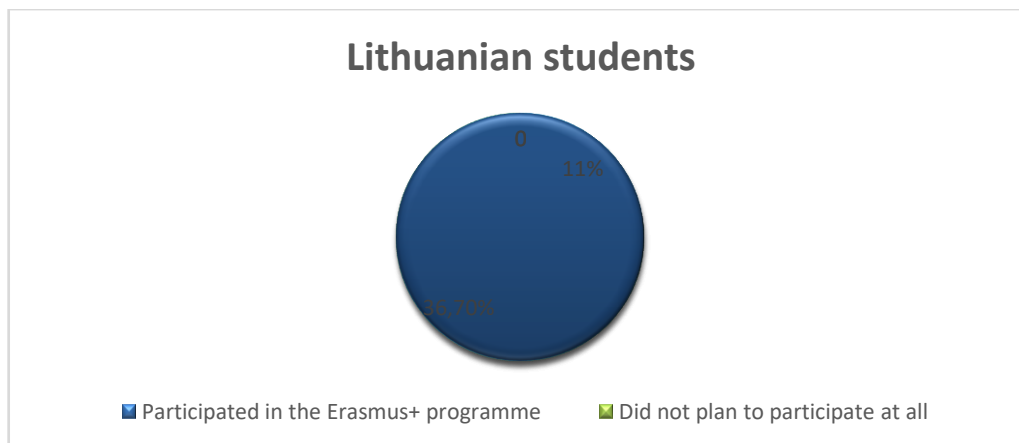
(14). In addition, the resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 436 (9) and No. 824 (10), the Law 'On Education' (7), and Resolution PQ-5847 (8) were analysed. Regarding the definition of academic mobility, Bogoslovsky, Pisareva and Tryapitsyna (2; p. 12) define academic mobility as the movement of students, teaching staff and administrative personnel from one university to another in order to exchange experiences and take advantage of opportunities not available at their own university. Sakhieva et al. (12; p. 257), on the other hand, define academic mobility in its narrow sense as studying at a foreign educational institution for a specified period; in a broad sense — explain it as an integrative characteristic, a dynamic state of an individual, realised as the potential for development in the context of the globalisation of education. According to the research by Juškevičienė et al. (3; p. 306), the factors that promote and restrict academic mobility are divided into four main categories: socio-cultural, legal-procedural, financial, and technological. This classification is used as a methodological basis for the analysis of barriers in this article. Bilecen and Van Mol (1; p. 1243), in their study of equity issues within international academic mobility, demonstrated that mobility can be not only an individual opportunity but also a factor that reinforces social inequalities. Their approach formed the basis for considering mobility from a broad social perspective in this study.

RESULTS: As a result of the research, academic mobility is interpreted as an integrative characteristic of an individual, and its four interrelated characteristic of an individual, and its four interrelated structural components are identified. The first component is the motivational-goal component, which includes the student's need to participate in mobility programmes, their intrinsic motives, goals, and value orientations. Scientific literature (12; p. 258) highlights that conscious and motivationally-driven activity is a key prerequisite for the formation of academic mobility as a stable personal quality. Therefore, it can be said that the real driving force behind mobility is not external incentives (grants, scholarships), but rather an internal aspiration for academic and professional growth. The second component is the cognitive component, which includes a student's knowledge and perceptions of academic mobility programmes, their conditions, opportunities, legal frameworks, and education systems. Research shows that a lack of information often leads to low participation rates (3; p. 308). Therefore, information transparency and advisory support are important factors in developing academic mobility. The third component is active, manifesting through the student's practical engagement in research, study, and professional activities. At this stage, mobility ceases to be a mere opportunity and becomes a genuine form of academic action (12; p. 259). The active component ensures the individual's adaptation to the new educational environment and the expansion of their academic competencies. The fourth component is the effective-reflective one, which involves analysing the outcomes of mobility, assessing personal and professional growth, and integrating new experiences (12; p. 260). Reflection manifests itself as a balancing mechanism for adapting to a changing educational environment. It is this very component that transforms mobility from a temporary experience into a sustainable factor for development. Thus, the proposed model allows for the interpretation of academic mobility not as a process, but as a systemic mechanism of personal engagement.

- Analysis of the barriers to academic mobility

Despite the availability of academic mobility opportunities, the level of actual participation remains relatively low. According to the results of a study by Juškevičienė et al. (3; p. 310) among Lithuanian students, only 11% of respondents had participated in the Erasmus+ programme, while 36.7% did not plan to participate at all. This indicates a significant gap between the opportunity and actual participation.

According to the study by Ximmataliyev and Usarboyeva (14; p. 155), 87% of respondents expressed a desire to participate in academic mobility, but practical participation is limited by various factors.



The analysis identified five main groups of barriers:

Socio-cultural barriers - fear of separation from family and loved ones, difficulties in cultural adaptation, 'culture shock', and insufficient competence in the foreign language. A lack of foreign language proficiency was found to lead to a decrease in self-confidence (3; p. 311).

Legal and procedural barriers - the complexity of document formalisation, uncertainties in credit recognition, and the competitiveness of the selection process. Political factors, including the Brexit process, have also affected mobility indicators (3; p. 312).

Financial barriers - insufficient scholarships and high living costs. Financial factors have been identified in studies as the most significant limiting factor (14; p. 156).

Technological and environmental barriers include the lack of adequate digital infrastructure and the ineffective use of virtual mobility mechanisms. Although the virtual format expanded during the COVID-19 period, it could not fully replace traditional mobility (3; p. 313).

Stereotypical barriers for girls - it means that some parents do not let their girls study in abroad even though their daughters had a full potential. It is mostly because of the following two stereotypes: "Girls' behavior may change in a negative side when they go to foreign countries" and "Studying abroad can be dangerous for girls in terms of safety and without control of their parents".

The analysis shows that the barriers are multifaceted, and overcoming them requires a complex institutional approach.

- Regulatory and legal framework for academic mobility in Uzbekistan

The analysis conducted by Ruziyeva (11; p. 431) showed that the regulatory framework regulating academic mobility in Uzbekistan consists of the following main documents:

Firstly, Article 4 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" (7) provides for international cooperation, openness and academic exchanges as the main principles of the education system; Article 9 defines the creation of conditions for the mobility of students in the field of higher education as a direction of state policy.

Secondly, the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-5847 (8) — "Concept for the development of the higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030" — identifies the development of academic mobility as one of the main strategic goals and is aimed at developing mobility programs at the inter-university, national and international levels.

Thirdly, the "Regulations on the Procedure for Implementing Academic Mobility of Students and Teachers of Higher Education Institutions", approved by Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. VMQ-436 (9). This document defines the forms, terms, assessment and credit recognition system of internal and international mobility. According to the Regulation, students can study at a target university for 1 semester to 1 year, and the accumulated credits can be recognized by the base university.

In addition, Resolution No. VMQ-824 (10) — "Procedure for the Introduction of a Credit-Module System in Higher Education" — allows for the adaptation of curricula, unification of assessment criteria and the creation of a base of mutually recognized credits. Starting from the 2020/2021 academic year, the credit-module system is being gradually introduced in all state universities. Mingboyeva (5; p. 1386) notes that internal academic mobility is also seen as an important tool for reducing corruption risks and creating favorable conditions for students in higher education in Uzbekistan. The results of the study show that as a result of the widespread introduction of internal academic mobility programs, the number of complaints about transferring studies has significantly decreased.

- International experience and comparative analysis

Mingbayeva (4; p. 14) studied the experience of European countries in developing academic mobility and identified the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), diploma supplement and double diploma mechanisms as tools for developing academic mobility. The ECTS system appeared in 1988 as part of the Erasmus program and is currently used in more than 1,062 European universities. The Erasmus+ program is a program funded by the European Union that allows Uzbek students to study for short periods at European universities (15). Since 2014, Uzbek universities have been actively participating in this program. In addition, Uzbekistan also implements state-funded academic mobility programs through the El-yurt Umidi Foundation. According to statistics in late 2025, El-yurt Umidi foundation approved 277 total quotas in 2nd Open Selection: 105 for bachelor's degree, 122 for master's degree and 50 for doctoral studies. International experience shows that for academic mobility to be truly effective, universities must work on the basis of trusting cooperation (17; p. 460). That is, they must have a common goal, harmonize their curricula, and jointly monitor the quality of education. Then, even if students study in another country, they will not lose their knowledge, but, on the contrary, will be enriched with new experience. The two-stage education system created within the framework of the Bologna Process — bachelor's and master's degrees, programs based on learning outcomes, and a diploma supplement system — serves precisely this purpose (18). This system facilitates the international recognition of diplomas and expands the opportunities for students to study or work abroad. Today, these principles are being gradually introduced in Uzbekistan. This is an important step towards improving the quality of the national education system, entering the international arena, and training competitive personnel.

DISCUSSION: The research findings indicate the necessity of interpreting academic mobility not merely as an individual educational opportunity, but as a systemic mechanism for ensuring social equity and qualitatively transforming the higher education system (16; p. 60). At the same time, a significant gap persists between the existing theoretical and legal foundations and the actual practical outcomes. This situation signifies the need for a profound analysis of academic mobility, not only at a normative level but also within its institutional and social contexts. Research by Bilecen and Van Mol (1; p. 1245) indicates that inequalities in the process of international academic mobility are not limited to opportunities for participation. According to the authors, the experience of mobility itself can create new social disparities. In particular, the weakening of local social networks while studying abroad, as well as the problems of non-full recognition of qualifications and experience, complicate the graduates' professional integration. Thus, the positive outcomes of mobility do not arise automatically; they are directly dependent on an individual's social capital, the level of institutional support, and the characteristics of the national labour market. In the context of Uzbekistan, as Ruziyeva (11; p. 432) notes, although the establishment of a normative and legal framework is an important factor, it is not a sufficient condition for the effective functioning of academic mobility. The full and quality implementation of the credit-module system in all higher education institutions, the practical strengthening of mechanisms for the mutual recognition of credits and diplomas, and measures such as the systematic strengthening of English language preparation and the expansion of financial support are emerging as key prerequisites for real transformation. In this process, the decisive factor is not the existence of normative documents, but rather

their degree of practical implementation. The trends identified in the study by Juškevičienė et al. (3; p. 314) are also relevant to the context of Uzbekistan. Although students highly valued academic mobility as a means of gaining cultural experience, developing language skills, and increasing independence, they rated its role in enhancing competitiveness in the job market relatively lower. This discrepancy suggests that there is a lack of sufficient information and explanation regarding the long-term professional outcomes of mobility. Therefore, strengthening the link between mobility outcomes and the labour market, as well as popularising the graduate experience, is a key challenge. In the case of virtual academic mobility, conflicting trends are also observed. A study by Juškevičienė et al. (3; p. 315) found that the level of interest in virtual exchange ($M=3.82$) was lower compared to traditional physical mobility. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual mobility was widely used as an alternative mechanism and expanded opportunities for digital collaboration. In the future, blended mobility models — integrating short-term physical attendance with a virtual component — could allow for the development of mobility in a more inclusive and economically sustainable form. The findings of a study by Urinova (13; p. 3) on the implementation of a learner-centred approach in higher education in Uzbekistan highlight the issue of institutional readiness for academic mobility. The lack of adequate digital infrastructure and traditional teacher-centred pedagogical practices hinder the development of students as independent and autonomous learners. In fact, the key prerequisite for the success of academic mobility is an individual who is capable of managing their own learning trajectory, is an independent decision-maker, and can adapt quickly to a new environment. From this perspective, the development of mobility is intrinsically linked not only to the expansion of external exchange programmes but also to an internal pedagogical transformation.

Overall, the discussion findings indicate the need for a three-tiered, comprehensive approach to effectively develop academic mobility: individual (motivation and competencies), institutional (credit recognition, digital infrastructure), and political-economic (funding and international cooperation) (3; p. 317). Only when these levels are harmonised can academic mobility become a real mechanism that enhances the quality of education and strengthens social equity.

CONCLUSION: Academic mobility is not just an exchange of education for students and academic staff, but a means of enhancing the international competitiveness of the national education system, a strategic tool that accelerates scientific and technological transfer and strengthens cultural integration (17; p. 470). From this point of view, supporting academic mobility as a priority at the level of state policy, regularly monitoring its outcomes, and systematically integrating advanced international experience remains a crucial prerequisite for the development of higher education in Uzbekistan.

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