Azərbaycanda doktorantura təhsili şəraitinin yaxşılaşdırılmasına dair müqayisəli təhlil

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Annotasiya Bu araşdırmanın məqsədi Azərbaycanda elmi (elmlər doktoru) dərəcələrin mövcud vəziyyətini, çatışmayan cəhətlərini və təkmilləşmə yollarını, eyni zamanda milli tədqiqatçıların dünya arenasında təmsilolunma imkanlarını təhlil etməkdir. Nəticələr göstərdi ki, azərbaycanlı tədqiqatçılar dünya elminə inteqrasiya etməyə hazırdırlar, lakin çətinliklər çoxdur və ümumi prosedurlar dünya elminin standartlarına uyğun gəlmir. Məqalədə tədqiqatçıların universitetlərdən daha çox məsləhətçilərdən dəstək aldıqları qeyd olunur. Fəlsəfə doktoruluğuna namizədlər təlimatsız, müvafiq metodoloji biliklərə əsaslanmadan və universitetin təmin edə biləcəyi mənbələrdən yararlanmadan araşdırma aparmağa məcbur qalırlar. Təqaüdlər aşağı, təhsil haqqı yüksək olduğuna görə, demək olar ki, bütün tədqiqatçılar əlavə işlərdə çalışırlar. Bu da inkişaf prosesini mürəkkəbləşdirir və uzadır. Dövlət artıq müxtəlif proqramlar və islahatlar həyata keçirsə də, dəyişilməsi və üzərində işlənilməsi tələb edilən məqamlar çoxdur. Mövcud tədqiqat işi müxtəlif Avropa universitetlərinin bu sahədə olan təcrübə və strategiyalarından yararlanmağı tövsiyə edir.

Açar sözlər Doktorantura, fəlsəfə doktoru, ali təhsil, tədqiqat işi, tezis.

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Comparative research to ameliorate conditions of the tertiary education (Ph.D.) in Azerbaijan

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Abstract The aim of this study is to analyze the position of Ph.D. degrees in Azerbaijan, their shortcomings, and the ways in which they can be improved and how national researchers can take their place in the global arena. The data collection methods were document analysis, a survey, interviews, and quantitative analysis of their content. The results show that Azerbaijani researchers are willing to integrate into the world science; however, there are a lot of difficulties and pitfalls, and the general procedures do not correspond to the standards of world science. The study revealed that researchers get support much more from their advisors than their universities. Ph.D. candidates are pushed to conduct research without instructions, knowledge of appropriate methodologies, and resources from the universities. Considering the low scholarships and high education fees, almost all researchers have jobs, which makes the process more complicated and protracted. Although the government has already implemented various programs and reforms, there are still many aspects to work on. The current research recommends learning from different European universities' experiences and strategies in this field.

Keywords Doctorate, Ph.D., tertiary education, research work, thesis.

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Introduction

There are three steps in the Azerbaijani education system for higher education: Bachelor Studies, Master Studies, and Ph.D. Studies. Azerbaijan, like Russia and other republics of the former USSR, has two types of doctorate degrees: Doctor of Philosophy (in certain fields) and Doctor of Sciences degrees. "There is no equivalent of this «doctor of sciences» degree in the US academic system. It is roughly equivalent to Habilitation in Germany, France, Austria, and some other European countries." (Academic degree) Of all the universities in Azerbaijan, only Khazar University implements a Ph.D. as the highest degree in the joint program of Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Sciences. "A doctorate is the highest level of higher education and provides preparation of scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel and ensures raising the qualifications and scientific degrees. The rules for the establishment of Doctoral Candidacy and admission to Doctoral Candidacy were approved by decision №129 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 01, 2010." (Decision no. 129). The Ministry of Education and the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences are the main bodies responsible for doctoral programs. The Supreme Attestation Commission is responsible for delivering the doctoral diplomas. Higher education in Azerbaijan is provided at universities, institutes, academies, and conservatories.

"Azerbaijan's education system is growing rapidly through integrative networks, especially since September 2005 when the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed a membership agreement with the European Higher Education Area in Norway.» (BSU, Khazar University, 2017, p.22). "Azerbaijan enjoyed a consistent economic growth; by 2013 the GDP of Azerbaijan increased 5 times compared to its 1995 level. In GDP the share of education expenditure is 3.2%, while the share of expenditure on higher education is 0.25%. Azerbaijani GDP (PPP) per capita was about 6,115 U$D in 2015." (Overview of the Higher Education System, Azerbaijan, p.8). After 5 years, the numbers are still the same, according to State Statistics:

State budgetary financing of science	**2013**	**2017**
expenditures for science from the state budget, in millions of Manats	117,0	109,8
in percent of GDP	0,2	0,2
in percent of state budget expenditures budget expenditures	0,6	0,6

According to the World Bank, in 2016, 17.083 percent of Azerbaijan's government expenditure was spent on tertiary education, a figure which is higher than that in Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (World Bank). According to the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic, over ten years (2007-2017) in all indicators (the number of institutions carrying out Ph.D. programs, students who have reached the end of Ph.D. programs, and numbers of students who have defended their dissertations), the figures almost doubled. However, the number of students who have successfully defended their dissertation (74) was still seven times lower than the number of students who reached the end of the program (529) in 2017.

Main indicators of Ph.D. (source: State Statistic Committee):

	2007	**2017**
Number of institutions carrying out Ph.D. program	96	117
Number of people studying on a Ph.D. program	1681	2168
Number of women studying on a Ph.D. program	565	1215
Number of students admitted to Ph.D. programs	452	455
Number of students who reached the end of a Ph.D. program	431	529
Number of graduates who defended a dissertation	31	74

Theory/Context

Admission for the Ph.D. level is under the control of each organization, institution or university, in 24 branches of science. Additionally, there are 135 professional doctorate programs. As soon as a candidate is accepted for this level s/he must find an adviser, select a topic and start a three-year (or four-year, if studying part-time) challenge. After admitting students, the organizations offer little support and all responsibilities fall on the candidate and his/her supervisor. Since 2010, several measures have been taken by the government in order to integrate Azerbaijani science into the international scientific community:

1. "Azerbaijan 2020: Vision of the Future" and the "National Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan";

2. Elimination of postgraduate course (aspirantura) in 2010;

3. The establishment of Azerbaijan Young Scientists, Post-Graduates and Masters Union (AYSPMU) (2003), the Science Development Foundation (2009), Republican Competition "Scientists of Tomorrow" (2011), The Knowledge Foundation (2014), Youth Foundation (2011);

4. "State Program on Education of Azerbaijani Youth Abroad in 2007-2015" exchange program (3558 students), as well as programs offered by Mevlana, Erasmus, Tempus, Horizon 2020, and the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan Republic within the framework of the State Program;

5. "State Program for increasing international competitiveness of the higher education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2019-2023" between the Ministry of Education and Clarivate Analytics ("Web of Science®")

6. Increasing the payment students receive for duties (2017) and increasing scholarships/ stipends (2019) for Ph.D. candidates;

7. Azerbaijan National Academy of Science and the government support young Ph.D. students (under 35) with discounted apartments;

From the table below, it is obvious that all aforementioned reforms are having positive effects; the number of Azerbaijani scientists' papers published in indexed journals has increased by 74 percent and the average age of people in science is decreasing.

Students studying a Ph.D. program in 2017 by age groups:

	including by age			
	under 30 years old	30-34	35-39	40 years and over
Total, person	1067	512	289	300
including attached to:				
Ministry of Education	668	216	162	187
National Academy of Sciences	197	125	46	49

Literature review: All universities give detailed information about the admission process for Ph.D. degrees on their websites. This information is taken from the website of both the Ministry of Education and the Cabinet of Ministers

of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The universities' websites, therefore, contain the same information and general rules.

Various decisions, bulletins, statistical tables, and laws passed by the government, ministries, and committees are used in this research paper. The study, therefore, can be considered quite reliable and valid. Several news portals have written about the Ph.D. admission process, education fees, but have only touched on the problems, stating nothing about future reforms.

Comprehensive research was conducted in English by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, Baku State University, and Khazar University in 2017. They considered topics such as the structure of doctoral education, doctoral candidates, thesis submission, and research excellence. They produced a detailed report, including information about all of the laws and reforms. However, this report lacks firstly Ph.D. students' views on the problems and secondly, detailed information about the implications of these problems. Professor and founder of Khazar University, Hamlet Isakhanli, mentioned some concrete problems that Azerbaijani Higher Education faces today, including endemic corruption and bribery, lack of academic freedom, a lack of autonomy, and absence of rector conferences in his article "Strengths and Weaknesses of Private Universities in a Transition Economy: a View from Azerbaijan" . This is useful work, but is, however, now outdated.

All in all, none of the articles published previously have mentioned the problems in tertiary education today, the reasons for its shortcomings, or suggestions on how these problems can be solved.

Methodology

Why do almost more than half of the Ph.D. candidates fail to defend their thesis in time? Why do some researchers drop out of their programs in the middle of their education? What are the pitfalls that lead to poor outcomes in tertiary education? The research hypothesis is that although there have been some reforms in higher education institutions and scientific organizations, implemented the Cabinet of Ministers in 2010, this sphere is still transitioning from the old Soviet education system to the Bologna system ("Plan of activities on implementation of the requirements of Bologna Declaration in the higher education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2006-2010" was adopted in 2005).

This paper examines how the quality of research dissertations can be enhanced, and what can be done to do to help Ph.D. candidates successfully craft, defend, and present their work, not only locally, but also internationally. This research focuses on making suggestions to increase the status of Azerbaijani Ph.D. degrees in European countries and to eliminate certain problems. The methodology involved comparing the Azerbaijani defense procedure with that in Euro-

pean Universities, conducting a survey among Ph.D. candidates, and conducting interviews with advisors and heads of the Offices of Doctoral Studies.

A survey with twenty questions was designed to gather information about whether Ph.D. candidates were satisfied with the procedures, specifically, how they felt about levels of preparation, planning, critical thinking, and dedication, and their views on this level of education in Azerbaijan, etc. The survey, therefore, included multiple questions on their admission, advisors, institutions, and their dissertation. The survey included closed questions, employing 5-point Likert-type scales, but also open-ended questions, prompting free-text responses. The survey was written in Azerbaijani using Google Forms and participants answered the questions online. It was launched in March 2019 and there were sixty-five participants. All respondents participated voluntarily and were given a written information sheet about the research. No personal questions were asked, and anonymity was ensured.

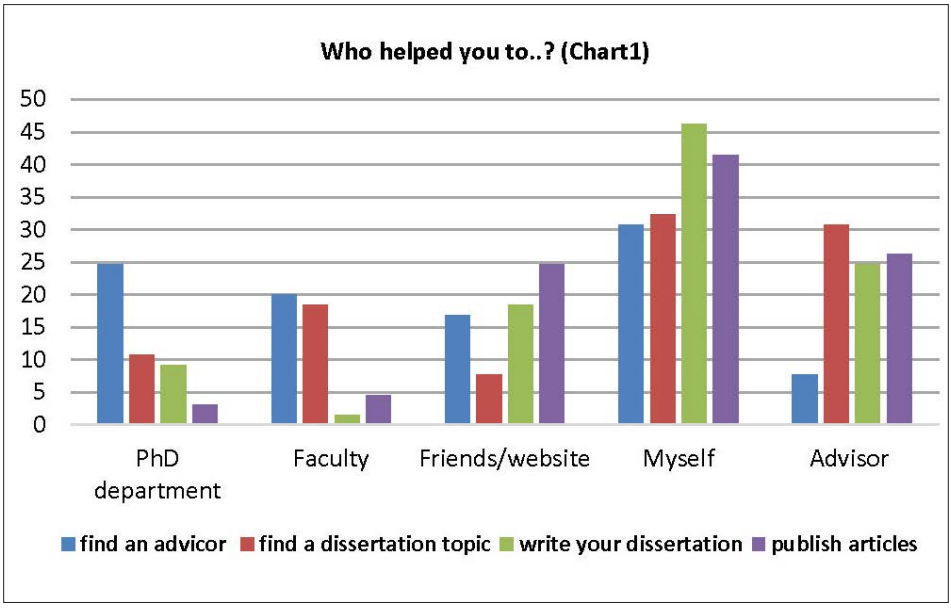
Three workers of Doctoral Studies in various fields were interviewed with the following questions:

1. How do you evaluate the highest level of education in Azerbaijan today?
2. What are the main obstacles and barriers that only small numbers of researchers can overcome?
3. What are the solutions can help improve research?

All three promised to talk sincerely if their anonymity would be ensured. According to them, unfortunately, the main obstacle is active corruption and bribery in this field. People who need a higher status but do not have time pay for research and use writing services, paying for written work. The best solution is to use the electronic submission for written work and increase the payment Ph.D. students receive for performing duties.

Personal interviews with several advisors, professors, and instructors shed some light on this field from different angles. According to two professors, persistent, hardworking, and deserving candidates can gain admission to programs, study, conduct valuable research and defend their thesis, perhaps even presenting it internationally. The main factor in achieving this is the researcher's competence, not the government, organizations, or advisors.

The limitations of the present study include the fact that the findings cannot be generalized since this investigation concerns only one education level and due to the limited time, it was possible to contact only a limited number of experts and advisors. The number of survey respondents was also limited and, therefore, may not reflect the attitudes of a broader segment of Azerbaijani researchers who are not regular users of the Internet or are not followers of social media. That is why it cannot be stated with certainty that the results apply to everyone taking a Ph.D.

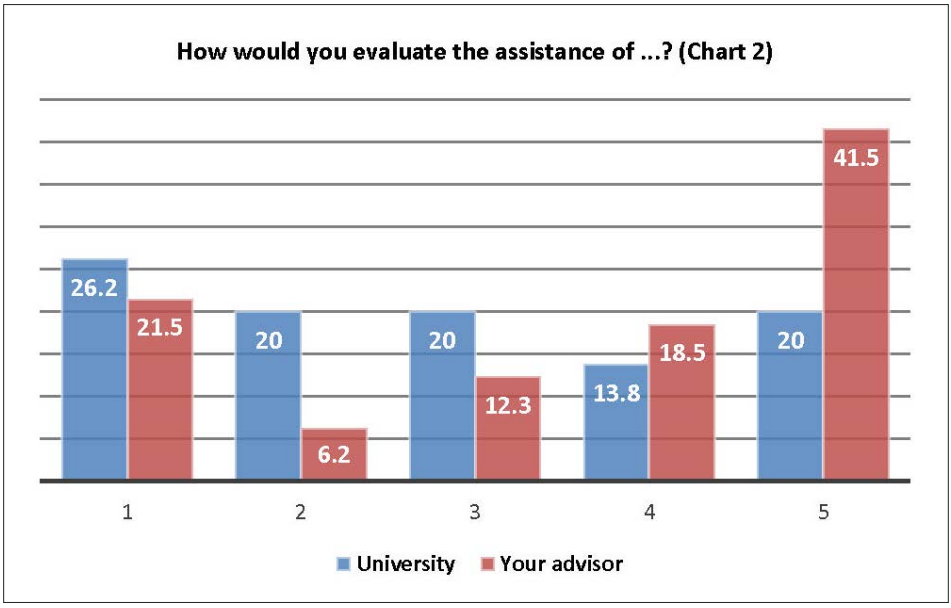


Findings

This paper focuses on Ph.D. candidates. Thus, a survey was administered to collect original data revealing researchers' views and basic needs. Conducted nonprobability sampling was a suitable method for gathering data that measures support from advisors and universities for these Ph.D. students. The questions were not mandatory, so there are variations in response numbers, as shown in the tables.

Most of the respondents were researchers who have completed the period of education but could not defend their dissertation (46%). Others are still working on their research (20%), and 4,6% have dropped out of their program. The main reasons that forced them to drop out of their education were difficulties in combining work with research (26% of respondents) and the complicated, long, and tiring procedure of defending a dissertation (26% of respondents). Only 19 out of 65 respondents have defended their dissertation, and this took around 6-7 years. Regarding the admissions process, almost half of the respondents (48%) felt that this was fair.

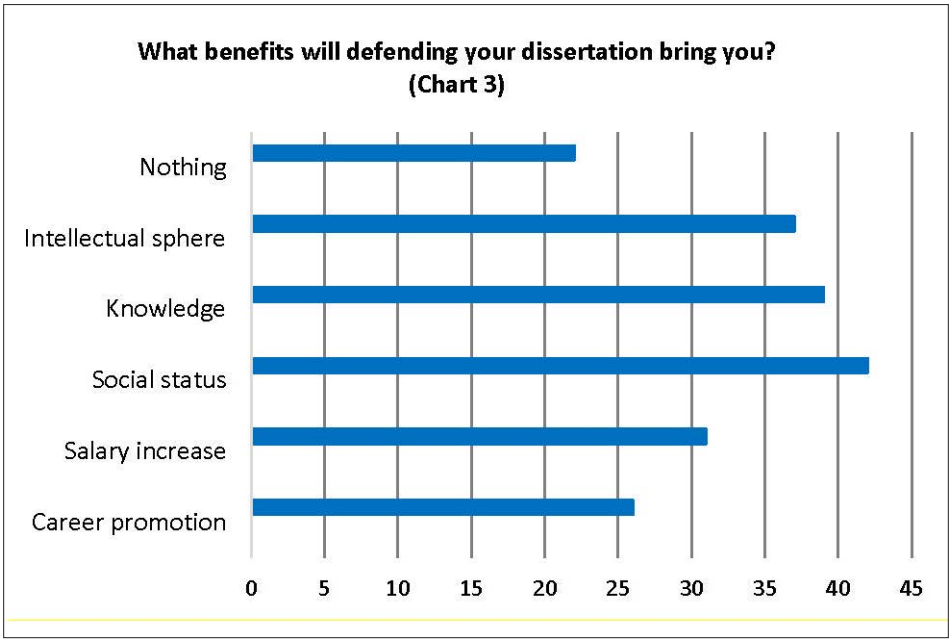
Chart 1 shows that researchers themselves tend to take an active part in the selection of the advisor, thesis topic, developing their writing style, publishing articles abroad, and participating in foreign conferences, which can be considered a positive thing and an indication of independence.



Of particular interest were researchers' answers concerning the level of advisors' and universities' help. Respondents think that advisors help much more than universities. Unfortunately, none of the respondents said that they had got a part-time teaching position in higher education institutions or academic organizations with the approval of supervisors/ advisors.

Researchers expressed willingness in expanding exchange programs (63%), attending compulsory "academic writing" and "research methodology" classes (59%), and eliminating some exams (39%)., It is pertinent to mention at this juncture that there are several mandatory courses, including 1. philosophy (for independent dissertation researchers only), 2. computer science, 3. English language, 4. Azerbaijani language (for foreigners only), 5. The student's major, 6. compliance exam (or a complimentary subject). Admittedly, most of these are not implemented or financed (neither the course nor the exam) by the universities. There are insufficient exchange programs at Azerbaijani universities compared to European universities, as there are fewer resources for implementing joint degrees or establishing exchange programs. Furthermore, it is almost always university employees who take part in the limited exchange programs that are available; they are usually out of reach for Ph.D. students.

Regarding the resources researchers use, respondents indicated that they mainly use published articles and papers (71%) and online library resources (70%) in English (77%) and Russian (59%). They conduct analysis of books



(63%), translate (60%) and conduct experiments (39%). 22 respondents out of 65 were disappointed with the process of studying a Ph.D. in Azerbaijan. Only 9 Ph.D. candidates think that their research will make a useful contribution to world knowledge.

Chart 3 illustrates the main reasons for candidates give for wishing to complete their research. The main factor is "Social status" as can be seen (42%).

There was one open-ended question in the survey, which yielded interesting answers. Coding and categorizing these answers yielded the following table.

With the help of our countrymen, the Azerbaijani Network of Academics (ANA) was established recently to support of Azerbaijani scholars in America. "ANA fulfills a special mission to streamline academic work on Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis in America to serve both the community and the US society in general serving as an intellectual focal point for the community's development, promoting Azerbaijan/is related research and acting as a platform to strengthen scientific bridge with academia in Azerbaijan" (ANA). The ANA will organize its first academic symposium on June 17-18, 2019 at George Washington University, and the participation of US-based Azerbaijani researchers will be highly valued.

Ex-minister Mikayil Jabbarov found that the main problem in the field of Master and Ph.D. degrees concerned finance. At the XXI Republican Scientific Conference of doctoral students and young researchers, Jabbarov said: "Currently, the

Question – **What would be your advice to advance this field?**						
Focus group-PhD graduates, Ph.D. candidates, and Ph.D. dropouts		Number **(almost 40 responses)**	Online questions - **Google Form**	Location - **Azerbaijan**	Date - **March 10-30, 2019**	**No personal questions; Anonymity was ensured**
By	**Ways to improve**	**Fields to add**		**Fields to eliminate**		**Financing**
University	Admission must be fair; Second foreign adviser; Support from the university for field and practical research; Selection of valuable themes in the world; Strong control over adviser's work by the Ministry of education; Defense process should be much easier.	One-year practical education (academic writing and social research methods); Compulsory teaching hours.		Final exams; English is not important for all PhDs (like Azerbaijan language and literature).		Elimination of education fee; Free of charge article publication; Financial support for IELTS exams.
Government	Up-to-date materials in local libraries; Standard of living should be raised; Simplifying of documentation procedures.	Access to international databases; At least one-semester exchange program (joint doctoral programs).		Artificial barriers; Abolish the Supreme Attestation Commission.		Monthly scholarship (up to 1000 AZN); Support for PhDs from outside the capital (e.g., e.g. with accommodation); Financial support for international conferences.

main problem with doctoral and master's studies in Azerbaijan is that preparation of academic staff in the universities is not carried out at the expense of the state, but at the expense of higher education institutions themselves". According to him, this approach creates a basis for some negative phenomena observed in recent years and does not fully reflect the priorities of state policy. (Report.az, 2017). In practice, higher education systems are mostly financed by the state budget, and by tuition fees.

The current Minister of Education, Jeyhun Bayramov, drew attention to the fact that there are no Doctors of Science under the age of 30rather, doctors of science over the age of 63dominate. "At the moment, the Ministry of Education is

working to improve the education process in doctoral studies, its structure in accordance with the requirements of European education standards," said Mr. Bayramov (Azerbaijan vision, 2019).

Politicians, such as Member of the Milli Majlis Committee on Science and Education Sona Aliyeva, AYSPMU chairman Ilgar Orujov, and ANAS Ph.D. department chief Omar Gulalov strongly praise the current situation of researchers and talk about the positive developments in Azerbaijani science.

Tuition fees are an important issue to consider. Ph.D. fees range from 2,400 to 4,000 AZN year. Regarding the scholarships, doctoral candidates studying full-time and benefitting from free of charge education receive a state allowance of 120 AZN a month. However, to take an example, at Baku State University, 90% of doctoral candidates are charged the full tuition fees and only 10% of candidates benefit from free tuition. "No other research allowance/grants are available. The majority of doctoral candidates work to cover their living/research expenses (i.e. at least 50% of doctoral candidates). It is widely recognized that doctoral programs tend to be self-funded." (BSU, Khazar University, 2016). There are also dire economic prospects after graduation: the level of wages for graduates of doctoral programs is a significant issue (graduates earn only 30 AZN more having gained their degree). Salaries for supervisors and teaching staff are also low (40 AZN/month for one Ph.D. candidate).

Discussion

The data collected from the survey and interviews strongly indicate that nowadays there are plenty of young people who would like to conduct a range of research projects and to contribute to world science. Although admission can be considered fair and impartial, studying at the Ph.D. level and, in particular, the documentation and defense processes are complicated and not always impartial. Almost every researcher complains about bureaucracy. To apply for the first discussion of the dissertation at an institution, the Ph.D. candidate must collect twelve various sealed, signed, and confirmed documents at ASAN services (Bulletin, p.56). This process slows science, education, and enterprise, and hinders the processes of assessing and evaluating information, critical thinking, and the skillfulness of the researchers, as they are constantly busy with documentation.

The second and biggest problem concerns finance. Ph.D. students often have low incomes and expensive commitments: publishing articles, participation in conferences abroad, exams, purchasing books, conducting experiments, collecting data, and editing and printing the dissertation. All these commitments, and the many others required to complete a Ph.D., scare the young and financially dependent researchers off. It is, therefore, no wonder that some respondents sug-

gested monthly scholarships of up to 1000 AZN for Ph.D. students in the survey.

It appears that there are limited institutions that support and assist their researchers with access to online databases. Some universities organize conferences and give their researchers the opportunity to attend for free, but that is all. "According to the Accreditation Committee laws, if there is penalty criminal offense, plagiarism of higher education documents, discrimination, bribery or broken the professional code of ethics rules, then advisors and researchers are punished and dismissed from their position or dissolves the decisions of the dissertation councils" (Bulletin, p. 18). As a result, the universities themselves never get penalized and they do not focus on improving the quality of research.

The analysis of surveys and interviews confirms that there is a lot of room for improvement and development and that there is a need for some novel reforms Ph.D. process in Azerbaijan. Although Azerbaijan has advanced a lot compared to some other countries in the region, the government should still monitor the situation.

Conclusion/ Implications

The present study strongly supports the concept that the government and the Ministry of Education should work on improving the resources and conditions of the researchers. Unfortunately, it is hard to say the same about the universities. For five years, universities have applied antiplagiarism programs which is the only new step towards improving research ethics and eliminating fraud and plagiarism in research. Based on European experience in this area, the government, ministry, and organizations (institutions) should support their researchers with the following:

- Almost all institutions in Azerbaijan have the same requirements for students wishing to pursue a Ph.D.: a master's degree, at least two articles, passing exams in philosophy, English and the student's major. After that, the commission can either interview the future researcher or blindly select candidates. To eliminate prejudice, favoritism and any biases, it would be advised to implement admission through the State Examination Center of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- To eliminate long and tiring documentation procedures, it would be better to do them all through ASAN services and the long process the defense would be electronic and transparent.
- All procedures should be implemented through a unified electronic information system and every Ph.D. candidate should have personal access to the blackboard. That will help them to learn about any announcements, tasks, grades, courses, and would allow them to participate in discussions, upload assignments, etc.

• Most Ph.D. students face difficulties with writing. Institutions should allocate half-semester courses on social research methods and academic writing, either in the universities or doctorate schools (which should be created by the government). These courses will teach students how to structure, define, and present their research ideas in writing and how to manage a project. As an example, Granada University in Spain opened its School of Doctorates for this purpose.

• In Azerbaijan, it is extremely rare to encounter any researcher with two advisers, whilst in Europe, this is quite common. Organizations should introduce Ph.D. candidates to foreign advisers from partner universities. With double the support, it would be much easier to conduct the research and gain a deep understanding of the theory and methodology necessary for the dissertation.

• Most universities should help with the topic selection and should have a database of relevant research topics. This would prevent overlaps in topics and would encourage researchers to work on novel topics. Only limited organizations, such as the Institute of Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi presents approved topics and topics already being studied online.

• Almost no universities provide access to the international databases of articles and resources like SCOPUS, JSTOR, EBSCO, etc. which reduces the quality and integration of local dissertations. Not having access to international journals and lacking the skills to use a variety of search engines and tools online create difficulties for Ph.D. students in completing their research. At the same time, local scientific journals should improve their quality and aim for global recognition.

• During their three years of study, the Ph.D. candidate should publish at least five articles, should participate in three conferences with his/her thesis, and should take the doctoral examination in three subjects. Additionally, it would be beneficial to add compulsory teaching hours at universities during the third year to improve Ph.D. students' teaching skills. If universities in Azerbaijan cooperate and exchange their Ph.D. students for teaching purposes, they will certainly benefit from it and develop.

• Some concrete steps should be taken in order to participate in science internationally. Even the requirements for writing style should be changed. Either APA or Chicago style should be used for referencing, and papers should include a research statement with objectives and sub-questions, a literature review, an abstract, data collection strategies, details about sampling, instruments, and fieldwork, and students should also make contingency plans.

• Finally, the programs should have a comprehensive and modern evaluation system, as in the European Doctoral Programs Association. "There is an urgent need for Azerbaijani universities to revise the rules and content of organizing doctoral studies… especially in ensuring science and research provisions in relevance with EU standards, to fulfill the students' mobility – one of the basic pro-

visions of the Bologna process.» (Khazar University, 2017, p.4)

On December 10, 2018, the "Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on additional measures to improve the attestation of scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel in the Republic of Azerbaijan" was given. This order has raised expectations. Within two months, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences will prepare and submit a proposal on improving scientific research. It is hoped, that some of the abovementioned suggestions will be taken into consideration, although for more detailed proposals, a group of Ph.D. candidates should be surveyed.

Overall, this data suggests that there are a lot of innovations and reforms that should be applied to the Ph.D. level education as soon as possible. Only after that can Azerbaijan science join in taking its worthy place on the global stage in the sphere of education.

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