

THE IRANIAN EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY MODEL

Mehdi AFZALI

*Graduate student, Junior Research Associate,
Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Sergey RYAZANTSEV

*D.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member,
Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor, Director of the Institute of
Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
Head of the Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,
MGIMO-University, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Elena PISMENNAYA

*D.Sc. (Sociol.), Associate Professor,
Professor of the Finance University under the Government of
the Russian Federation, Leading Research Fellow of the Institute of
Socio-Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Tamara ROSTOVSKAYA

*D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor,
Deputy Director of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of
the Russian Academy of Sciences, Head of the Department of
Social Pedagogy and Youth Outreach, Russian State Social University
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the evolution of the educational model and trends of academic mobility in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). It analyzes the socio-demographic structure of the population, the dynamics of the number of young people, as well as the dynamics and composition of the country's school in the country. There is also

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an examination of the ways in which the process of emigration from Iran had evolved in the context of the country's socio-political history of the state in the 20th-21st centuries. Various levels of the Iranian education system are considered. The author examines the internationalization trends in higher education. The forms and trends of academic mobility, including exit and entry mobility, are delineated. In recent years, the visiting academic mobility of Iranian students has been targeted at the U.S., Turkey, Italy, Canada, and the UAE. There is a contemplation of the methods used for selecting Iranian students for studying abroad at the state budget's expense, which is based on a system of state quotas and fairly high requirements for applicants. Iranian students studying abroad receive an academic scholarship. Those who receive such a scholarship must pay a deposit before being issued

a final permit, and commit to returning to Iran after graduation and working for up to six years. Recently, increasing the number of foreign students in Iran has become one of the priorities of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

The admission of foreign students has presently become one of the most important tasks undertaken by universities. One way to attract more foreign students and compete for them is to raise the status of universities and the country. Iran is growing more attractive as a recipient of international students from certain neighboring countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and China). The role of academic mobility in the integration of Iran into the international educational and scientific space and the contribution of academic exchanges to the development of the national culture of Iran are emphasized.

KEYWORDS: *Iran, academic mobility, education system, foreign students, study abroad, student mobility.*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been an increased demand for higher education in the world: in 2000-2015, the number of students studying at higher educational institutions increased from 97 to 263 million people.¹ Moreover, the number of foreign students studying in other countries increased from 1.3 million in 1990 to 4.3 million in 2011.² Admission of foreign students to different tiers of educational institutions is considered as an important factor in the transformation of the higher education system, as well as a cultural, social, economic, and political factor in state development.

There is a mutual understanding of cultures in the world in the context of globalization, and scientific and cultural exchange is intensifying.³ A fairly effective tool for integrating countries into the international educational and scientific space is academic mobility, which the present authors consider both “the totality of attitudes and readiness to move (that is, the potential) and the actual geographical mobility (that is, academic migration) of both students and faculty in the educational and scientific system for the purposes of obtaining an education and advanced scientific and educa-

¹ See: “Reform and Innovation in Medical Education: Periodic Report of Vice Minister of Education of Iran,” 2 March, 2016, available at [<http://www.Dme.behdasht.gov.ir>] (in Persian).

² See: Ibidem.

³ See: M.R. Sarkarani, “Internationalization of Higher Education,” *Journal of Political and Economic Information*, No. 306, 2002, pp. 183-184 (in Persian).

tional training.”⁴ Academic mobility allows students to interact with the population of the host country, acquire new self-organization skills, and master both verbal and non-verbal communication. In addition, not only do foreign students need to adapt to the new environment in the host country, but local students must also adapt to the presence of foreigners.⁵

Academic mobility is the most common form of internationalization of education, which is the political aim of the leaders of the countries involved. By 2025, the number of foreign students will reach 8 million according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Russia and Iran are making a significant contribution to this process.⁶ The efficiency of cooperation between Russia and Iran in regard to ensuring academic mobility and recognition of foreign education and/or foreign qualifications is determined by the extent to which the actions of the Russian and Iranian parties and the resources utilized meet their priorities and allow to achieve their internal and external goals.

The process of internationalization of higher education plays an important role in the development of national education systems. Some Asian countries have adopted cross-border policies to satisfy the growing educational needs, including university development, teacher recruitment and placement, and the promotion of private sector’s participation in higher education through the establishment of private universities.⁷ Iran is also becoming increasingly involved in these processes.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Iran experienced a brain drain and emigration of elite social classes due to the 1905 reform that led to Iran’s constitutional revolution. Highly qualified specialists and highly qualified scientists were in demand during the reign of the Pahlavi monarchy due to the modernization of the country and the changing trends in socio-economic development. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, the main purpose of emigration was to obtain a degree, thus, many Iranians went to the United States for short visits, which included educational purposes and internships.

Although Iran was isolated from the world following the Islamic Revolution (1979), its borders were never closed for immigration and emigration, including educational migration. But after the transition from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic state in 1979, migration trends began to change.⁸ After the Islamic Revolution, Iran experienced socio-economic problems and lost much of its human capital, which was valuable for economic development. Arrests, confiscations, discrimination, religious conflicts began after the Iranian revolution, when many Iranians were forced to emigrate.⁹ Iran did not have enough specialists and infrastructure to educate undergraduate and graduate students domestically. Many emigrants, including those who emigrated for educational purposes, remained abroad for good, never returning to Iran.

Another wave of educational emigration from Iran occurred in 1980 during the Iran-Iraq conflict. This war has become a catalyst for the emigration of highly educated and intelligent people and youth to the neighboring and western countries. Additionally, soon after the war, many families

⁴ S.V. Ryazantsev, T.K. Rostovskaya, V.I. Skorobogatova, V.A. Bezverbnyi, “Mezhdunarodnaia akademicheskaia mobilnost v Rossii. Tendentsii, vidy, gosudarstvennoye stimulirovaniye,” *Ekonomika regiona*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2019, pp. 420-435.

⁵ See: O.V. Bubnovskaya, “Academic Mobility and the Problem of Educational Programs’ Continuity,” *Mezhdunarodnyi zhurnal eksperimentalnogo obrazovaniia*, No. 2, 2014, pp. 11-12.

⁶ See: “Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators,” OECD Publishing, available at [<https://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2017.pdf>].

⁷ See: P.G. Altbach, L. Reisberg, L.E. Rumbley, *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution*, UNESCO, Paris, 2009.

⁸ See: S. Hakimzadeh, “Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home,” *Migration Information Source*, 2006, available at [www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=424].

⁹ See: A.E. Torbat, “The Brain Drain from Iran to the United States,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2002, pp. 272-295.

emigrated due to political, social and economic issues.¹⁰ According to a World Bank report, the peak of emigration from Iran occurred in 1989-1993, when 2.2 million Iranians left the country. During 1988-1998, about 180,000 Iranians requested a Canadian work visa.

Migration trends changed during the reign of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). Many Iranians returned to the country. Their return was influenced by the policy focused on the development and attraction of investments to the country. First of all, Khatami was able to attract several wealthy Iranian families whose assets and companies were appropriated in the post-revolutionary period. The return of this category of migrants became an important event for Iran and, combined with the gradual stabilization of their socio-economic status within the country, it served as an incentive for mass return migration of members of the Iranian diaspora to Iran.

During the reign of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), emigration intensified due to Iran's confrontation with the U.S. and Israel, and because of Iran's refusal to cooperate in the process of nuclear program monitoring.¹¹ As stated in 2006, approximately 150,000-180,000 specialists and educated people emigrated abroad annually.¹² During this time, many Iranian students applied for admission to universities in the United States and Canada.

With the development of Internet technologies, the social conditions of emigration from Iran have changed. People actively use the Internet, satellite channels and social networks to make emigration-related decisions. They communicate with their compatriots abroad, watch and listen to the news, compare socio-economic conditions in different countries. Therefore, the socio-economic structure of emigration from Iran is changing: previously, emigration was available only to those with a high level of income, but now it has also become accessible to people with an average income.¹³

Socio-Demographic Aspect

The population of Iran in 2016 was about 80 million people. Figure 1 demonstrates the age and gender pyramid of the Iranian population. The country's population is quite young. The share of the population group aged 30 to 34 years (8.6 million people or about 11% of the country's population) is the most numerous. The second age bracket is 25-29 years of age, which accounts for about 10% of the country's population. The age bracket that encompasses people between 0 and 40 years of age numbers 54.9 million people. The share of people over the age of 90 accounts for only 0.01% of the country's population.¹⁴

Iranian Minister of Education Mohammad Bathaei stated in 2016 that there are 91,700 schools in Iran. The number of schools with tuition fees is 15,400. Currently, Iran has 13.4 million students, including kindergarten children under the age of six. Primary school from the first to fifth grades boasts the largest number of students—7.4 million people in 2015-2016. There are also 688,000 children in Iranian kindergartens. About 13,200 Iranian students study at foreign schools (see Table 1).

¹⁰ See: S. Hakimzadeh, op. cit.

¹¹ See: "Afzayesh-e panahandeguiy-e Iranian beh gharb (An Increase in the Number of Iranians Seeking Asylum in the West)", Mardomak, 2010, 12 Esfand 1388, available at [www.mardomak.us/news/Iranian_Refugee_Rate_Growth/].

¹² See: N. Karimi, S. Gharati, "Why Do Brains Drain? Brain Drain in Iran's Political Discourse," *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, Vol. 6 (2), 2013, p. 156, available at [http://cadaad.net/journal].

¹³ See: "220,000 Academics Leave Iran in One Year, Brain Drain Rising—Moin Warns," *Payvand News*, 2 May, 2001, available at [www.payvand.com/news/01/may/1010.html].

¹⁴ Statistical Center of Iran, available at [www.amar.org.ir].

Figure 1

Age and Gender Structure of Iran's Population in 2016

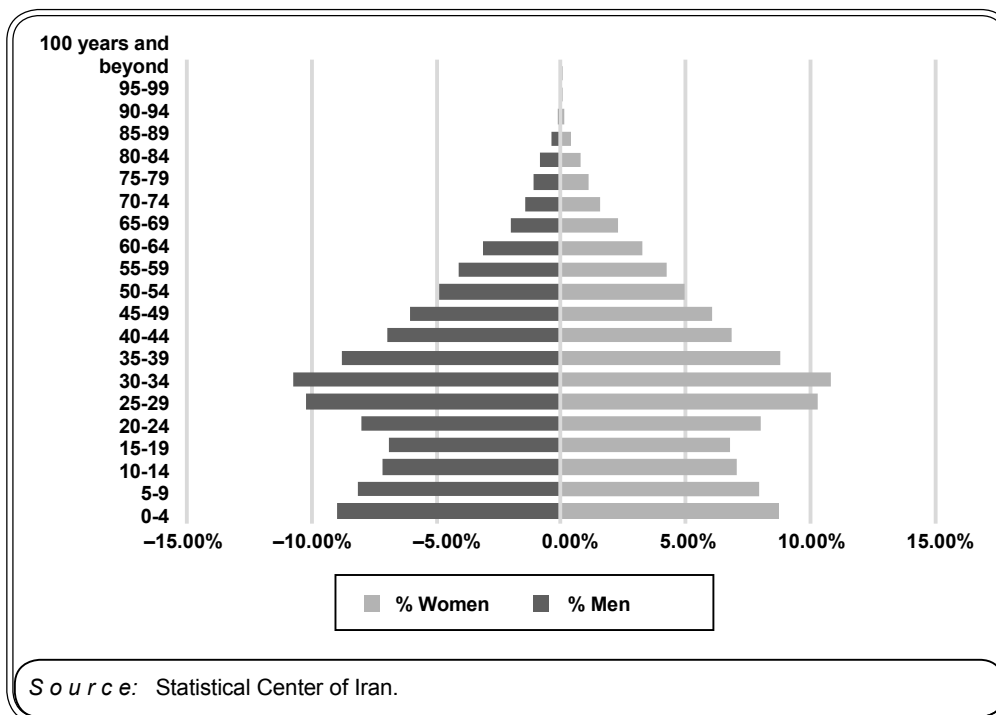


Table 1

Number of Students in Iran, 2015-2016

Education Level	Gender	Number (people)	Number of Iranians Studying Abroad (people)
Total	Boys	6,891,232	13,242
	Girls	6,504,307	
Kindergarten	Boys	349,748	0
	Girls	338,704	
Primary school (Grades 1-5)	Boys	3,819,488	7,756
	Girls	3,603,017	
Middle school (Grades 6-8)	Boys	1,591,299	3,115
	Girls	1,463,060	
High school (Grades 9-12)	Boys	1,130,697	2,371
	Girls	1,099,526	

Source: Statistical center of Iran.

Education System and Infrastructure in Iran

Currently, most students in Iran attend private universities. More than a third of all Iranian students attend the private Islamic Azad University (IAU), the country's largest university, which is one of the world's mega-universities. The university has many campuses in Iran and abroad (U.K., UAE, Lebanon, Afghanistan). Admission to Azad University is much easier to achieve than admission to public universities. At the same time, a rather high tuition fee is charged. The Iranian government controls the curriculum and the university administration system. Other private universities include Shahrood University of Medical Sciences and the University of Qom.¹⁵

In Iran, there are various universities with different goals, some of them under the control of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and some of them under the control of the Ministry of Health. In total, Iran has 903 universities of applied sciences and technology, as well as 530 Islamic Azad universities, which are universities with tuition fees. There are also 141 universities under the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, where the education is free, however you need to pass entrance exams to be accepted to these universities. In 2014, the number of students at these universities was about 3.8 million people, of which about 2 million were men and about 1.7 million were women. The IAU has 1.6 million students, while technical and vocational universities have 197,300 students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Number and Gender Makeup of Students at the Largest Iranian Universities in 2014 (people)

	Number of Universities	Women	Men	Total
Ministry of Science, Research and Technology	141	357,255	329,781	687,036
Payame-e Noor University	466	353,021	193,865	546,886
University of Applied Science and Technology	953	153,733	320,065	473,798
Non-private and non-public higher educational institutions	309	161,525	177,800	339,325
Islamic Azad University	530	637,317	912,753	1,550,070
Technical and Vocational University	170	60,418	136,887	197,305
Total		1,723,269	2,071,151	3,794,420

Source: Statistical Center of Iran.

In 2015-2016, the number of university students increased to 4.4 million, which comprised 2.4 million men and 2 million women. The largest group of students were baccalaureate students—2.6 million people (1.3 million men and women each). The smallest group was constituted by

¹⁵ Ibidem.

graduate students (78,000 people). The two most popular specializations in Iran are social research (2 million people) and engineering and technology (1.3 million people). The least popular are agriculture and veterinary science—only 188,600 students. For graduate students, the most popular are medical sciences and related spheres. There are more women (44,200) than men (33,800) among graduate students (see Table 3).¹⁶

According to UNESCO data, in 2014 Iran spent about 3% of GDP or 20% of government spending on all levels of education. This is a relatively high percentage compared with international statistics: in 2012, all governments in the world spent an average of 14.3% of government spending on education.

Iran boasts a fairly high level of literacy by regional standards, and compared to countries with the same level of socio-economic development, it has a very educated society. The adult literacy rate in the country in 2013 was 84.6% (85% worldwide and 78% in neighboring Arab countries).¹⁷ The literacy rate among young people aged 15-24 was 98% in 2015. According to UNESCO, school enrollment in Iran in 2015 was 89.2%, while in neighboring Pakistan it was only 44.5%.

In 2015, 99.1% of preschoolers who had reached the primary school age went on to attend primary school. It is a very high share of enrollment compared to other Western Asian countries. In 2014, the number of schoolchildren who completed elementary school (5 years of education) equaled 97.5% of the corresponding age group.

Iran's education policy is approved and monitored by a number of bodies, including parliament, the cabinet of ministers and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, a body appointed by the Supreme Leader of Iran. The implementation of Iran's educational policies is monitored by the provincial authorities and district offices.

Enrollment in Iran's public universities is based on the Konkoor entrance exam. Many private universities also use this exam to select applicants. Azad University conducts its own entrance exam, which is very similar to the Konkoor.

The Konkoor exam is held annually in June; it is a comprehensive exam lasting 4.5 hours with multiple choice questions. The exam tests the students' knowledge of the Persian language and literature, history, a foreign language and mathematics. Applicants who fail may retake the exam annually without restrictions. The best students usually enter the engineering and medical specialties. There is a separate Konkoor exam to enroll in graduate programs.

There are several levels of degrees awarded in Iran:

- College (Kardani) 72-78 credit hours over 2 years;
- Bachelor's degree (Karshenasi) at least 130 credit hours, 4 years;
- Master's degree (Karshenasi-Arshad Napayvasteh) 28-45 credit hours, 2 years;
- Doctor of Philosophy ("Doctor") 12-36 credit hours, 3-6 years;
- Professional degrees (Doctor or "Karshenasi-Arshad Payvasteh"), 6-7 years.

Applicants who pass the Konkoor exam after secondary school (12 years of study) with the highest exam score (1-1,000 students on average), have the right to immediately apply for six-year studies at the university, without taking the bachelor's exams and entrance exams to the master's degree program.

¹⁶ Statistical Center of Iran, available at [www.amar.org.ir].

¹⁷ See: "Adult and Youth Literacy," UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015, available at [http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/fs32-2015-literacy.pdf].

Table 3

Number and Socio-Demographic Makeup of University Students in Iran, 2015-2016 (people)

	Total			College (Kardani) (2-3 Years)			Baccalaureate Students			Master's Degree Students			Graduate Students			Doctoral Students		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total	341,039	145,155	195,884	132,784	63,197	69,587	163,116	63,294	99,822	43,113	17,579	25,534	0	0	0	2,026	1,085	941
Medicine	247,468	85,623	161,845	10,495	7,360	3,135	126,782	34,374	92,408	19,190	6,007	13,183	69,108	28,051	41,057	21,893	9,831	12,062
Social sciences	2,003,593	944,848	1,058,745	319,657	193,143	126,514	1,230,942	517,632	713,310	410,990	207,748	203,242	0	0	0	42,004	26,325	15,679
Fundamental sciences	255,056	79,150	175,906	262	63	199	173,655	51,640	122,015	63,916	20,350	43,566	0	0	0	17,223	7,097	10,126
Engineering and technology	1,312,595	1,003,774	308,821	346,078	295,658	50,420	750,372	546,207	204,165	196,098	146,490	49,608	0	0	0	20,047	15,419	4,628
Agriculture and veterinary science	188,632	87,274	101,358	13,069	10,695	2,374	113,199	44,847	68,352	41,459	19,054	22,405	8,907	5,765	3,142	11,998	6,913	5,085
Art	188,632	87,274	101,358	13,069	10,695	2,374	113,199	44,847	68,352	41,459	19,054	22,405	8,907	5,765	3,142	11,998	6,913	5,085

Source: Statistical Center of Iran.

Iran's Higher Education System

Currently, higher education in Iran includes the following types of institutions:

- by specialization: general or comprehensive; specialized (visual arts, technology, medicine);
- by affiliation: public or private;
- according to the training system: full-time or distance learning (for example, Payam-e Noor University).

There are also technical institutions in Iran that are not universities, but still belong to the higher education system.

In 1977, there were 16 universities in Iran with a student population of 154,300. In the late 1980s, the Iranian government revised its stance on private universities due to a population explosion, and in 1988, allowed private universities to apply for state registration and certification of professional universities with the Iranian Ministry of Education.

Many Iranian universities occupy the highest positions, and engineering universities have a good reputation among them. Tehran University is one of the best universities in the world, ranked in the Times (by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)) between the 301st and 400th places. Amirkabir Technical University ranks between the 401st and 500th places. The Sharif University of Technology currently ranks between the 501st and 600th places.¹⁸

The Islamic Azad University has the largest number of students studying in undergraduate (786,000), graduate schools (827,000) and undertaking doctoral studies (26,000), respectively. Most specialized graduate students study at the free universities of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran (59,000). The largest number of College-level (Kardani) students are studying at the University of Applied Science and Technology (263,000) (see Table 4).

Table 4

Number of Students Studying at Various Types of Universities in Iran in 2014 (people)

	Specialist Degree (2-3 Years)	Bachelor's Degree Students	Master's Degree Students	Graduate Students	Doctoral Students	Total
Ministry of Science, Research and Technology	3,324	427,483	193,511	3,666	59,052	687,036
Payam-e Noor University	2	500,089	45,107	0	1,688	546,886
University of Applied Science and Technology	263,305	210,442	51	0	0	473,798
Non-commercial and non-public higher educational institutions	56,828	213,440	66,867	0	2,190	339,325
Islamic Azad University	258,832	785,486	427,000	26,074	52,678	1,550,070
Technical and Vocational University	157,933	39,372	0	0	0	197,305

Source: Statistical Center of Iran.

¹⁸ See: "Times Higher Education," *QS World University Rankings*, 2018, available at [<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings>].

Outgoing Academic Mobility: Iranian Students Studying Abroad

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2016 there were 52,300 Iranian students abroad, of which 41% studied in graduate schools; 43%—in master's level programs; 16%—at the undergraduate level. The engineering specialty was the most popular among Iranians studying abroad, preferred by 53% of the students. The main study destinations for Iranian students are the U.S., Turkey, Italy, Canada and the UAE.¹⁹ Russia is not yet one of the leading countries for teaching Iranian students, despite all the declarations of geopolitical partnership and economic cooperation.

The Iranian Ministry of Education coordinates and supervises Iranian students' studies abroad.²⁰ Iranian nationals applying for education abroad at the expense of state funds must meet the following requirements:

- first of all, to believe in Islam and other religions recognized by the government, to be loyal to the political system of Iran and the Constitution;
- secondly, to be pious, that is, not to be a member of any party, atheist or militant groups;
- thirdly, to be under 26 years of age (for a bachelor's degree), or under 29 for doctoral studies;
- fourthly, in the selection of applicants among men who apply to continue their studies abroad, with all other conditions being equal, priority is given to married applicants.

The process of selecting Iranian students to study abroad is based on a system of state quotas and fairly high requirements for applicants. There is an "exchange" that accumulates applicant data, the central council selects and evaluates candidates based on several criteria, including entrance examination grades and knowledge of a foreign language. The main conditions for Iranians to obtain a scholarship to study at universities abroad are admission to a university recognized by the Iranian Ministry of Education.

Iranian students studying abroad are provided with an academic disbursement, which includes a scholarship, spending on teaching aids, medical checkups, visa payments, subsistence allowances (including for the spouse and children), reimbursement of expenses for traveling home and back (once during the training), as well as the cost of school attendance for the children.²¹ The amount of the scholarship is determined annually by the Iranian Ministry of Education and approved by the Iranian Government. To determine academic payments, annual studies of the average cost of student life abroad are conducted. According to the conditions, Iranian students who received a scholarship to study abroad must pay a deposit before being issued a final permit, and commit to returning to Iran after graduation and working for up to six years. Thus, Iranian authorities regulate the return of educational migrants to the country.

Inbound Academic Mobility: Foreign Students Studying in Iran

Iran is increasingly attracting and educating foreign students at its national universities. In recent years, attracting foreign students has become one of the priorities of the Ministry of Science,

¹⁹ See: "Adult and Youth Literacy."

²⁰ See: Ministry of Science and Research Technology of Iran, see [<https://www.msrt.ir/en/>].

²¹ See: *Ibidem*.

Research and Technology of Iran. “The ministry is trying to double the number of foreign students in Iran and pave the way for expanding international academic cooperation,” Minister Mohammad Farhadi stated in 2017.²²

Hossein Salar Moghadam, Deputy Minister of Science and Research, informed that there are 55,000 foreign students studying in the country, including 27,000 students studying under the supervision of the Ministry. About 2,500 foreigners study at the medical and dental faculties of Iranian universities. Meanwhile, UNESCO data indicate that a significantly smaller number of foreign students study in Iran—18,700 (see Table 5). Such significant differences are due to the fact that most students actually study at universities that are not under the ministry’s supervision. Foreign students are often study Islam; their studies take place at religious universities or schools.²³

Table 5

Academic Mobility and the Dynamics of the Number of Foreign Students in Iran

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Iranians studying abroad	51,552	49,457	50,819	51,134	52,307	50,392
Dynamics in the number of foreign students in Iran	4,512	7,057	11,288	—	18,698	—
<i>S o u r c e:</i> UNESCO Statistics Institute.						

Approximately 50% of foreign students study humanities (including Farsi), 30% study technical and engineering courses, 17% study medical sciences, 3% are art students. Most foreign students have come to Iran from the neighboring Islamic countries (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, and Turkey). Students from regions of the world that are novel for Iran have also appeared: European countries (Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine), Asian states (China, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam), South Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan), the countries of America (Canada, Mexico, the U.S.), African countries (Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan) and Australia (see Table 6). According to the officials, Iran is ready to accept more students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Although the admission of foreign students has become one of the most important tasks of Iranian universities, the Iranian higher education system is now faced with growing competition in the international educational service market increasingly more often. Foreign students have a wide range of choice of countries and specialties, they have become more demanding to the quality of education and life in the country of choice, and are interested in the economic, social, cultural and political conditions of the countries of destination. According to researchers, raising the status and ranking of both universities and the country in general is a currently important aspect of successful competition for foreign students. Also, an equally important competitive advantage is the status and comfort of foreign students in the country of study.

About 84% of foreign students in Iran study through scholarships and grants, so they have either not experienced any particular difficulties in financing their lives, or financial difficulties were not their primary problem in the country of study.

²² See: “Iran Economy Newsletter,” available at [http://ireconomy.ir/fa/page/23711/بذج+اب+م+ع+س+مل+پ+د+ی+ج+راخ+ن+ای+و+ج+ش+ن+اد.html] (in Persian).

²³ See: Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran.

Countries of Destination for Iranian Students and Countries of Origin of Foreign Students Studying in Iran in 2016

Countries Where Iranian Students Study	Number of People	Countries of Origin of Foreign Students Studying in Iran	Number of People
U.S.	11,455	Afghanistan	13,797
Turkey	5,661	Iraq	2,314
Italy	3,935	Syria	633
Canada	3,735	Lebanon	468
UAE	2,297	Pakistan	189
Australia	2,258	China	163
Great Britain	1,522	Tajikistan	139
India	1,459	Yemen	109
France	1,415	India	98
Malaysia	1,313	Turkey	88
Austria	1,232	Azerbaijan	72
Sweden	1,226	Nigeria	47
Hungary	1,116	Palestine	44
Belarus	866	Italy	37
Finland	607	Bahrain	30

Source: UNESCO Statistics Institute.

Based on a 2015 study, out of 95 foreign students studying at the universities of Tehran, Mashhad, Shahid Beheshti, Tarbiat Modarres, Imam Khomeini, Qazvin and Mashhad Medical University, 88% mentioned average relations between Iranian students and themselves, while others said that relations and connections with Iranians are very poor, 81% of them believe that the Iranians (the Iranian society) discriminated against them, 78% believe that they were mainly discriminated against by Iranian students, and 58% believe that they were mainly discriminated against by Iranian professors.²⁴ According to one of research studies, 99 out of 200 foreign students admitted that they felt discriminated against by professors. The most interesting is that students of different nationalities felt the same discrimination in relation to themselves.²⁵

Most foreign students have a stable educational situation, 80% of them have never failed a single exam, and 66% completed their studies on time. About 13% of students called their poor command of Farsi an obstacle to their success, although they noted that they have studied Farsi prior to beginning their course; those who believed that they had problems in learning, attributed them to

²⁴ See: M. Teymouri, M. Sorkhabi, "Living Condition of Foreign Students in Public Universities of Iran in 2014-2015," *Journal of Iranian Higher Education Association*, 7th year, Vol. 2, Spring 2015 (in Persian).

²⁵ See: S. Marginson et al., *International Student Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

language and motivational issues, and in addition, named professors' inability to explain the subject matter and the difficulty of the subjects as the reasons.²⁶

For the most part, foreign students feel safe in Iran. Those who did not feel safe associate their insecurity with insufficient knowledge of Farsi. They felt less secure outside the university, where they were mainly insulted, robbed or mocked by poor people in the streets. Other studies have also shown that language plays an important role in teaching foreign students.²⁷

Conclusion

Currently, the idea that universities in developed and developing countries can improve the quality of education and the conditions of their functioning by stimulating international cooperation is gaining widespread acceptance. It is recognized that internationalization of higher education is an effective reform mechanism.²⁸ From an economic point of view, the internationalization of higher education helps to develop national economy.

- First and foremost, this is due to the fact that the rate of exchange of scientific developments and knowledge is increasing.
- Secondly, it promotes the exchange of experience and economic connections.
- Thirdly, it stimulates industrial development and the growth of gross national income.²⁹

As far as the cultural aspect is concerned, the most important function of the internationalization of higher education is the expansion and dissemination of the values of national culture in the international arena. The use of academic exchanges to develop national culture is a priority in certain states' foreign policy and their international activity. This concept is often referred to in a diplomatic memorandum of understanding between governments.³⁰ The internationalization of higher education and the expansion of academic exchanges are also accompanied by academic and social development, an increase in the sphere of social experience and cultural knowledge of students and scientists from different countries and cultures.³¹ It is no coincidence that Iran and Iranian universities have recently prioritized their policies aimed to attract foreign students.³²

²⁶ See: S. Marginson *et al.*, *op. cit.*

²⁷ See: F. Maringe, N. Foskett, "Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education," *Theoretical, Strategic and Management Perspectives*, 2010.

²⁸ See: D. Glauco, P. Case, "Rethinking the Internationalization Agenda in UK Higher Education," *Journal of Further Higher Education*, Vol. 27 (4), 2003, pp. 383-398.

²⁹ See: N. Fazeli, "Globalization and Higher Education: A View of Global Trend of Reform in Higher Education and Higher Education in Iran," *Higher Education*, 2016, available at [www.farhangshenasi.com], 25 October, 2017 (in Persian).

³⁰ See: H. de Wit, *Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States and Europe*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2002.

³¹ See: N. Fazeli, *op. cit.*

³² See: E. Hazelkorn, *The Impact of Global Rankings on Higher Education Research and the Production of Knowledge*, Dublin Institute of Technology, 2009.