

Patriotism and national identity in Uzbek female students abroad

Gulchehra Rahmanova^{1*}, Khulkaroy Davlatova², Nodira Egamberdiyeva³, Khayriniso Khusanova⁴, Makhamatjon Abduvaliyev⁵, Holiskhon Maksudova⁶

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Andijan, Uzbekistan; gulchehrabakieva@gmail.com (G.R.).

²Department of Theoretical Aspects of English Language, Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Andijan, Uzbekistan.

³Director of "Family and Women" Research Institute, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

⁴Department of Sociology, National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirza Ulugbek, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

⁵Department of English Language and Literature, Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Andijan, Uzbekistan.

⁶Department of Uzbek Language and Literature, Andijan Machine-building Institute, Andijan, Uzbekistan.

Abstract: In an increasingly globalized world, the tension between global citizenship and national identity has garnered significant academic interest. For Uzbek female students studying abroad, the intersection of national identity and international education presents unique challenges and opportunities. This study explores how participation in international programs influences the national identity and patriotic sentiments of these students, who are often seen as cultural custodians within Uzbek society. Drawing on theories of cultural identity, globalization, and educational sociology, this research examines how Uzbek female students navigate their sense of patriotism while engaging with diverse cultural environments abroad. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the study reveals that, despite challenges of cultural dislocation and identity negotiation, most students retain a strong connection to their homeland, with a clear intention to return and contribute to Uzbekistan's development. The findings highlight the dual role of social media as both a bridge to home and a source of global perspectives, shaping students' perceptions of national and global identities. The study concludes with policy recommendations for educational institutions and policymakers to foster environments that strengthen national identity and promote a sense of responsibility toward Uzbekistan, ensuring that international education supports the cultivation of globally aware yet culturally rooted future leaders. Additionally, recommendations are given to Uzbek female students studying abroad to help them maintain their cultural identity, adapt effectively to new environments, and leverage their international experiences for the benefit of Uzbekistan upon their return.

Keywords: *Cultural identity, Globalization, Higher education, International education, National identity, Patriotism.*

1. Introduction

In an era characterized by unprecedented global interconnectedness, education has become one of the most significant pathways through which individuals engage with the world. For young women from Uzbekistan, the pursuit of higher education in international programs offers opportunities for academic and personal growth, expanding their exposure to diverse cultures and ideologies. Yet, this experience also raises important questions about the impacts of international education on their national identity and patriotic sentiments. As globalization continues to reshape the world's educational landscape, more students than ever before are finding themselves balancing between their home country's cultural values and the cosmopolitan outlooks they encounter abroad [1].

Uzbekistan, a nation with diverse cultural backgrounds, officially designates the Uzbek language

as its sole state language. Russian, meanwhile, acts as a common language among the country's ethnic minority groups and is often spoken as a second native language. Nonetheless, following the country's declaration of independence, the prevalence of English has grown across various aspects of Uzbek society [2]. The integration of English into the educational system reflects broader global trends and underscores the growing importance of global citizenship alongside national pride [3].

This dynamic is particularly pronounced among female students, who often face additional societal expectations and cultural pressures when pursuing higher education abroad. In Uzbekistan, women are traditionally seen as the bearers of cultural heritage and are often expected to uphold national values within their families and communities [4]. Consequently, studying abroad can be viewed not only as an educational pursuit but also as a departure from these culturally defined roles. Female students are therefore navigating complex identity issues as they balance the desire for academic advancement with the need to retain a strong connection to their national identity and cultural roots [5].

The tension between globalization and national identity has been widely debated in academic circles, with scholars examining how exposure to global cultures affects individuals' perceptions of their own cultural heritage [6]. In the context of Uzbek female students, this tension is further complicated by societal norms that emphasize patriotism and loyalty to the nation-state.

In many cases, the experience of studying abroad creates both opportunities and challenges for identity retention. Students may experience cultural dislocation as they adapt to environments that prioritize individualism, independence, and diversity. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Uzbek female students maintain their sense of national identity abroad?
2. What specific challenges do they encounter in balancing national identity with global influences?
3. What are the future aspirations of Uzbek female students studying abroad, and how do these relate to their sense of national identity?

These questions underscore the importance of understanding the adaptive strategies these students use to retain their cultural roots, the unique challenges they face in foreign environments, and the dual influence of social media, which acts as both a connector to home and a gateway to new, often contrasting ideologies. Consequently, these students must navigate a nuanced landscape, balancing the desire to integrate globally with the need to stay connected to their roots.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to explore the adaptive strategies, experiences, and perceptions of Uzbek female students abroad, providing insights into identity negotiation in a globalized world. This research contributes to the broader discourse on globalization, identity, and cross-cultural adaptation with a specific focus on how female students from Uzbekistan navigate these complex dynamics.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study lies in the intersection of globalization theory, identity theory, and educational sociology, particularly as they pertain to education. Globalization, often defined as the increasing interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and populations, has profound implications for how individuals perceive their identity [6]. For students participating in international programs, exposure to diverse perspectives often prompts a re-evaluation of their own cultural and national identities. The concept of cultural hybridity, which posits that individuals can develop multiple, overlapping identities as they interact with global cultures, is particularly relevant to this discussion [7].

At the same time, theories of nationalism and patriotism provide a critical lens through which to examine how students maintain or reshape their national identity while studying abroad. Nationalism, defined by Gellner [8] as the political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent, often manifests in educational systems that prioritize the teaching of national history, culture, and values. For Uzbek students, who are educated in a system that emphasizes national pride and loyalty, the experience of studying in an international context can create a tension

between these ingrained values and the new global perspectives they encounter. However, as Yuval-Davis [9] argues, national identity is not static; it is continuously negotiated and redefined in response to changing social and political contexts.

Taking into account the importance of English in the world and its necessity in all spheres, the English language is taught in all educational institutions as a foreign or second language [10]. This recognition of English underscores the growing importance of global citizenship, especially among students who are engaged in international programs. The educational sociology framework further contributes to this discussion by examining how schools and universities, as social institutions, play a role in shaping identity. As Marginson [1] notes, international education institutions have a dual responsibility: to prepare students for global citizenship while also nurturing a connection to their national identity. For Uzbek female students, this balance is particularly important, as education abroad can often be seen as a departure from traditional societal roles, creating a need for greater institutional support in fostering a continued sense of national belonging.

2.1. Patriotism and National Identity Among Uzbek Female Students

For many Uzbek female students, studying abroad represents both an opportunity for personal growth and a challenge to their national identity. These students often leave home with a strong sense of pride in their national culture and heritage, instilled through years of education in a system that emphasizes national history, cultural values, and loyalty to the state [4]. However, as they immerse themselves in the globalized environments of international universities, they are exposed to new ideas, cultural practices, and political ideologies that may conflict with or challenge their previously held beliefs.

One of the key aspects of language planning in Uzbekistan is the promotion of English as a foreign language. English has gained significant importance as a global language of communication, commerce, and technology. In Uzbekistan, the government has recognized the importance of English proficiency for international communication and has implemented various policies to promote the learning of English as a foreign language [10]. These students often found themselves caught between two worlds: the global culture of their host country and the national culture of Uzbekistan. As one student remarked, "I feel proud to be Uzbek, but sometimes it's difficult to hold on to that pride when everything around me is so different" (Interviewee 1).

Despite these challenges, many Uzbek female students also reported that their time abroad ultimately deepened their sense of patriotism. For some, being away from home allowed them to gain a greater appreciation for their national culture and heritage. "When you're surrounded by people from all over the world, you start to realize what makes your own culture special," one student explained (Interviewee 2). This sentiment aligns with the concept of patriotic pride, which refers to a positive emotional attachment to one's country, often reinforced through cultural and historical awareness [11]. For these students, studying abroad provided an opportunity to reflect on their national identity in a global context, ultimately strengthening their connection to Uzbekistan.

3. Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach specifically designed to capture both broad trends and personal insights on identity and adaptation among Uzbek female students abroad. This approach integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences.

3.1. Quantitative Phase – Online Google Survey

An online Google survey was distributed to 40 Uzbek students studying in various countries, including Singapore, Russia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and others. The survey was designed to gather information on cultural adaptation, language proficiency, social media usage, and identity retention. By reaching students in various

countries, the survey provided a broad understanding of the common challenges and experiences that shape the students' sense of identity while living abroad.

3.2. Qualitative Phase – In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six students from the Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages, currently studying in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality at Amity University in Singapore. Each interview was designed to explore the emotional and psychological aspects of identity retention, cultural dislocation, and the influence of social media on their global and local perceptions. Notably, each interviewee expressed a desire to return to Uzbekistan after the exchange program, highlighting the enduring influence of their cultural roots. This sentiment underscores the students' deep-rooted national identity and commitment to contributing to Uzbekistan, despite their exposure to new cultural environments and opportunities abroad. The insights from these interviews provided a vivid understanding of the internal and external factors influencing their identity, highlighting the role of cultural ties, family expectations, and personal goals in shaping their global experiences.

Together, the survey and interviews created a comprehensive view, blending statistical data with personal experiences to present a nuanced perspective on the complex dynamics of identity formation in a globalized environment.

4. Results and Discussion

The study collected data from 40 Uzbek female students studying abroad through a survey, providing insights into their experiences in balancing national identity and global exposure.

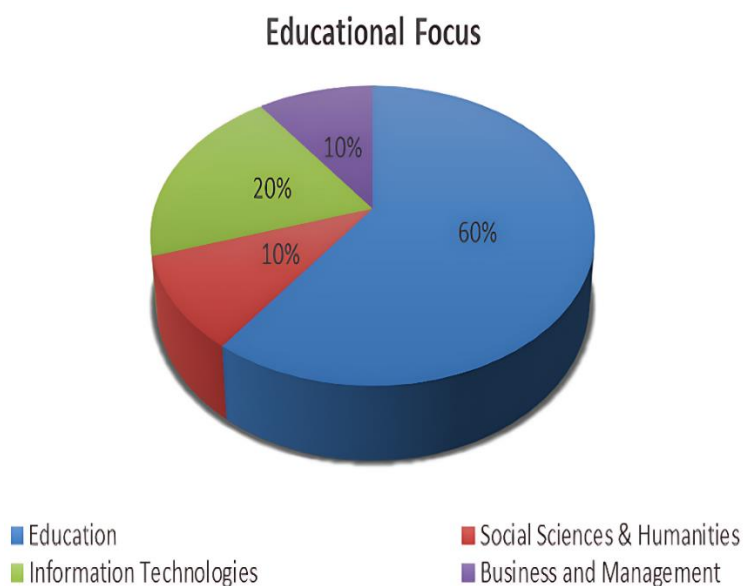


Figure 1.
Educational focus.

According to the survey results, 60% of the participants are pursuing education-related degrees, highlighting a strong inclination toward fields that promote social contribution and cultural engagement. This emphasis on education aligns with a focus on fostering social and cultural awareness, which can deepen their sense of national identity in a globalized environment. 20% of respondents are studying information technologies (IT), a field that is universally relevant and may provide these students with exposure to international practices and global perspectives. The study of IT encourages a

blend of local and global understanding, potentially enhancing adaptability in diverse cultural contexts. 10% of participants are focused on social sciences and humanities, areas that often involve exploring societal norms, human behavior, and cultural dynamics. These fields may further strengthen students' critical thinking regarding cultural values, contributing to a reinforced awareness of national identity amid global influences. The remaining 10% are enrolled in business and management programs, disciplines that emphasize global markets and international collaboration. This focus may inspire students to integrate global economic perspectives with a commitment to their national heritage. In general, these findings indicate that while students are pursuing a range of academic fields, a significant portion remains engaged in areas that emphasize both local and global cultural understanding, supporting the development of a nuanced sense of identity.

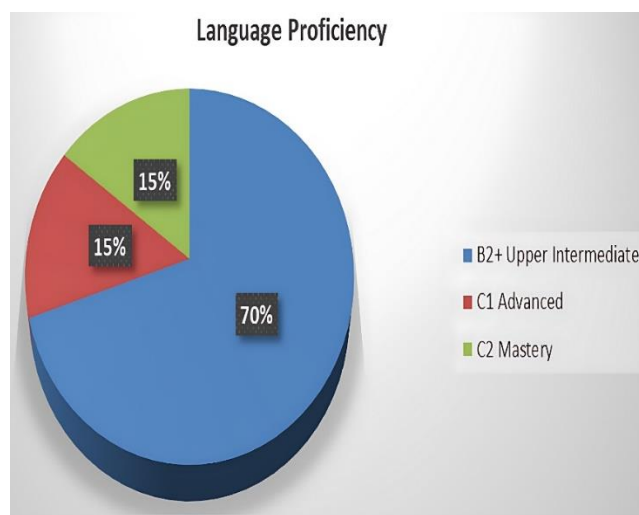


Figure 2.
Language proficiency.

Chart shows that 70% of respondents have an Upper Intermediate (B2+) level of language proficiency, which allows them to communicate effectively in social and academic settings. This level of proficiency enables them to adapt and integrate into foreign societies while still maintaining strong ties to their native language and culture for personal interactions. Additionally, 15% of students are at an Advanced (C1) level, indicating a higher degree of linguistic capability that likely aids them in engaging more deeply with complex academic and social topics in the host country. These students may find it easier to navigate language challenges and build connections within their new environment. Another 15% of respondents have reached the Mastery (C2) level, showcasing their near-native fluency. This level allows for seamless communication, granting these students the ability to fully participate in academic and professional contexts without language as a barrier. The presence of C2 speakers highlights a portion of the student population that has effectively mastered the host country's language, which can enhance their overall integration experience. This distribution of language proficiency levels demonstrates the varying degrees of adaptability among students, with language skills playing a crucial role in how they balance integration into foreign societies while preserving their cultural identity.

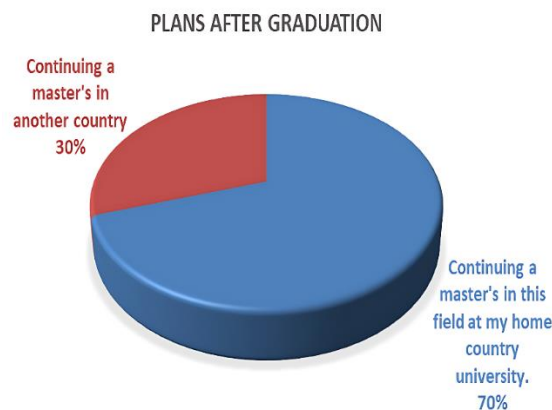


Figure 3.
Plans after graduation.

According to the data, 70% of participants plan to continue their master's studies in their field at a university in their home country, while 30% are considering pursuing a master's degree in another country. This indicates that most students prefer to strengthen their academic and professional ties within their homeland, reflecting a commitment to local development and familiarity. However, a significant minority are inclined toward further international exposure, which suggests a pursuit of diverse educational and cultural experiences abroad.



Figure 4.
Free time activities.

When asked about how they spend their free time, the largest group of participants (40%) reported that they engage in activities like reading books or watching cinema. This preference for intellectually stimulating and culturally enriching activities may reflect a desire among students to stay mentally engaged outside their academic responsibilities, providing both a form of entertainment and a comforting escape as they navigate life in a foreign country. Another significant portion, 30%, stated that they enjoy walking in fresh air. This activity likely serves as a means of relaxation and stress relief, helping students adjust to new environments and maintain a healthy routine, which could resemble habits they had back home. Smaller groups, each representing 10% of participants, chose sports, doing homework, and meeting with Uzbek friends as their preferred free-time activities. Engaging in sports and meeting with fellow Uzbek students could represent efforts to sustain social and physical well-being, while doing homework suggests that a portion of students dedicates their free time to academic tasks, perhaps due to the demanding nature of their studies. These varied choices highlight how

students balance personal interests, academic responsibilities, and social interactions, adapting to their host environments while retaining aspects of their familiar routines and cultural practices.

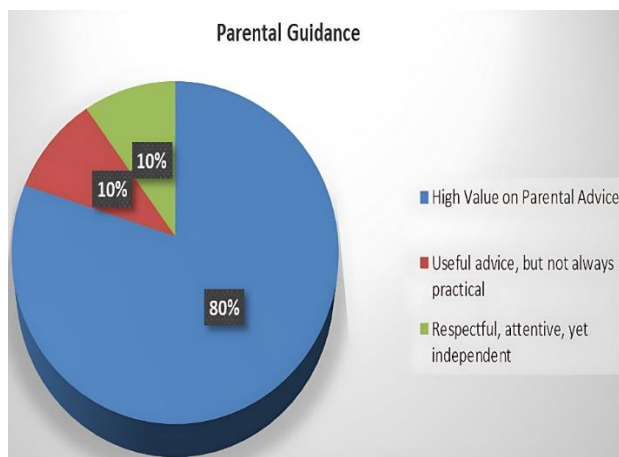


Figure 5.
Cultural dislocation and parental guidance.

Data from the chart shows that 80% of participants highly value advice from their parents, even while living abroad. This underscores the enduring importance of traditional values and family connections in shaping these students' sense of identity. Despite the pressures of adapting to a new culture, many students retain strong ties to their cultural roots, seeking guidance from family members. Meanwhile, 10% of participants view parental advice as useful but not always practical, indicating an awareness that certain traditional perspectives may not fully align with their experiences abroad. Another 10% of students respect and listen to their parents' advice but maintain their independence by prioritizing their own opinions. This reflects a balanced approach, as these students navigate the tension between honoring family values and asserting personal autonomy.

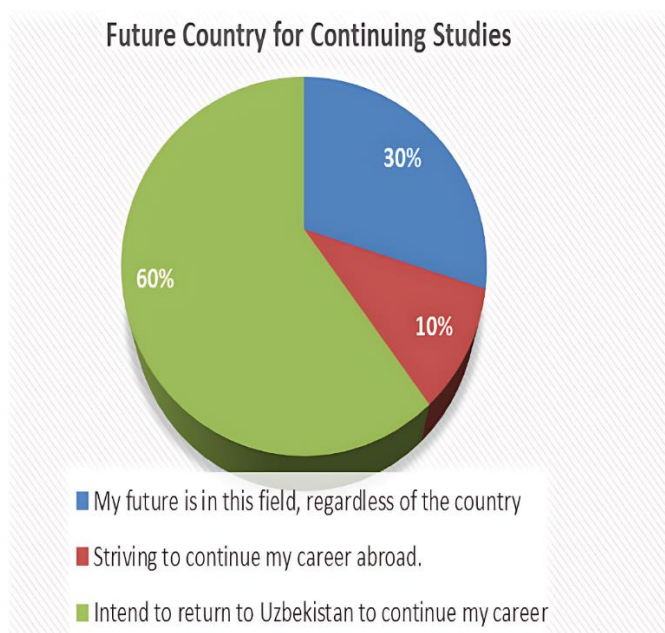


Figure 6.
Future country for continuing studies.

According to the data, 60% of the participants expressed a clear intent to return to Uzbekistan to continue their careers, indicating a strong connection to their homeland and a desire to contribute to their country's development. Meanwhile, 30% reported that their future is defined more by their field of study than the country in which they pursue it, suggesting flexibility and a focus on career goals over location. A smaller portion, 10%, conveyed a preference for continuing their careers abroad, demonstrating aspirations to gain further international experience. This distribution reflects diverse career motivations among Uzbek female students studying abroad, ranging from a strong inclination to return home to an openness to global opportunities.

4.1. Interpretation of Research Questions

This study examined how Uzbek female students studying abroad maintain their national identity, the challenges they face in balancing this identity with global influences, and the role of social media in shaping their perceptions. The findings provide insights into each research question as follows:

4.1.1. How do Uzbek Female Students Studying Abroad Maintain a Sense of National Identity?

The results indicate that a strong attachment to Uzbekistan remains prevalent among the students. Despite being exposed to diverse cultures and global perspectives, many students expressed a clear desire to return home after completing their studies, particularly those in short-term exchange programs. This intent to return highlights the depth of their connection to their homeland. The students reported that maintaining cultural practices, staying in contact with family members, and celebrating Uzbek traditions while abroad helped them retain their national identity. These actions provided a sense of stability and continuity, reinforcing their cultural values and identity despite the influence of foreign environments.

4.1.2. What Specific Challenges do these Students Face in Balancing National Identity with Global Exposure?

According to the survey and interview data, students encounter several challenges while adapting to the cultures of their host countries. A notable challenge is cultural dislocation, where students feel a disconnect from their own culture as they strive to integrate into new environments. This dislocation is often intensified by contrasting social norms; for instance, adapting to the individualistic values in many Western countries contrasts sharply with the collectivist values ingrained in Uzbek society. Language barriers also pose a difficulty for some students, impacting their ability to fully engage in academic and social interactions. Additionally, the students expressed feeling the need to serve as representatives of Uzbek culture, which added pressure to uphold their cultural identity in a way that aligns with societal expectations from home. This dual responsibility of integrating globally while maintaining a national identity proves to be complex and demanding.

4.1.3. What are the Future Aspirations of Uzbek Female Students Studying Abroad, and How Do These Relate to Their Sense of National Identity?

According to survey data, the future aspirations of Uzbek female students studying abroad demonstrate a nuanced relationship between their global experiences and national identity. A significant majority, 60%, intend to return to Uzbekistan to continue their careers, reflecting a strong attachment to their homeland and a desire to contribute to its growth and development. Furthermore, 70% of these students expressed a preference to pursue a master's degree at a university in Uzbekistan rather than abroad, underscoring a patriotic motivation that aligns with their professional goals. For the remaining students, who either plan to stay abroad for career advancement (10%) or are flexible about where they work as long as it aligns with their field (30%), there is an evident pursuit of gaining specialized knowledge and skills internationally. Their motivation to stay abroad temporarily appears driven by a desire to acquire expertise that they can eventually bring back to Uzbekistan. These aspirations reveal a harmonious blend of global ambition and national loyalty. Rather than diminishing their connection to Uzbekistan, exposure to international education seems to strengthen their commitment to contribute to

their country's future, suggesting that their time abroad ultimately reinforces their sense of national identity and dedication to their homeland.

4.2. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Uzbek female students balancing national identity and global exposure, certain limitations should be acknowledged.

- The sample consisted of 40 Uzbek female students studying abroad in various countries. Although the sample provides a snapshot of the challenges and adaptive strategies of these students, the findings may not be fully representative of all Uzbek students studying internationally or of those in other academic fields. Future studies with a larger and more diverse sample could offer a broader perspective on the experiences of Uzbek students in different cultural and educational contexts.
- This research exclusively examined female students, as they often play a unique cultural role within Uzbek society. However, this focus limits the generalizability of the findings to male or gender-diverse students, who may experience different challenges and adaptive strategies. Expanding the scope to include other demographic groups could enrich the understanding of national identity negotiation across the spectrum of Uzbek students abroad.
- The students surveyed were from a limited range of host countries, such as Singapore, Russia, and the United States, each with distinct cultural norms and social structures. Cultural variation across host countries could have different impacts on students' adaptation processes and identity retention. Future studies might compare experiences across diverse regions to examine how specific host cultures influence students' identity retention and integration.

This study captures a specific moment in students' academic journeys, particularly for those on one-year exchange programs. The short-term nature of some students' stays abroad might influence their perceptions of national identity differently than those in longer programs. A longitudinal approach could offer deeper insights into how extended exposure to foreign cultures affects students' identity and adaptation strategies over time.

4.3. Recommendations for Educational Institutions and Policymakers

To effectively balance global exposure with national identity for Uzbek female students studying abroad, educational institutions and policymakers can implement the following strategies:

- Educational institutions hosting Uzbek students should provide culturally inclusive programs that encourage the preservation of students' cultural identities while facilitating cross-cultural understanding. Orientation sessions, cultural exchange programs, and community-building activities that celebrate Uzbek culture can help students feel more connected to their homeland. Institutions could also establish mentoring programs pairing Uzbek students with other international or local students to share experiences and gain insights into cultural adaptation;
- Policymakers and universities can collaborate to build support networks for students both in their host countries and within Uzbekistan. Support networks that include cultural clubs, alumni associations, and social media groups provide students with a community to navigate challenges of cultural dislocation and maintain a connection to home. Additionally, establishing student associations focused on Uzbek culture within international universities can provide students with a sense of community and continuity;
- Given social media's influence on student identity, institutions can use these platforms to promote content that reinforces Uzbek values and national pride. Universities and government bodies could create online resources that share cultural events, language resources, and historical content to support students' connection to Uzbekistan. Encouraging students to engage with these resources can counterbalance the potential for identity conflict when exposed to contrasting global perspectives online;

- Encouraging short-term and exchange programs can provide students with international experience while minimizing the risk of cultural dislocation often associated with long-term stays. Policymakers could develop re-entry programs for students returning to Uzbekistan after studying abroad, helping them reintegrate and apply their international education within local contexts. Re-entry workshops and career counseling focused on leveraging global skills for national development can be highly beneficial;
- Curriculum and program designs in both host institutions and within Uzbekistan can emphasize the importance of giving back to one's homeland. Courses or modules that connect global learning with local challenges can foster a sense of responsibility in students. Educational policymakers in Uzbekistan could create scholarships or incentives for students who return to contribute to national projects or initiatives in education, healthcare, or public administration, linking academic achievements abroad with Uzbekistan's growth;
- To fully understand the influence of international education on national identity, policymakers and academic institutions should sponsor longitudinal studies that track students' cultural and professional reintegration into Uzbek society. Insights from these studies could inform the development of targeted policies that address the evolving identity needs of future students

4.4. Recommendations for Uzbek Female Students Studying Abroad

One of the significant challenges facing Uzbekistan is the retention of talent and the reintegration of students who have pursued higher education abroad. While international education equips students with valuable skills, knowledge, and global perspectives, it is crucial for these students to consider how they can apply what they have learned in service of their home country. There is a growing concern that many students, once exposed to opportunities abroad, may be inclined to remain in their host countries, contributing to a "brain drain" that can deprive Uzbekistan of the expertise needed for its development [12]. To mitigate this, it is important to encourage Uzbek students studying abroad, particularly women, to return home and use their skills to contribute to the social, economic, and cultural growth of Uzbekistan. Here are some recommendations for these students:

- While studying abroad, students should actively maintain connections with their homeland. This could involve staying informed about developments in Uzbekistan, participating in cultural and professional networks that support Uzbek nationals abroad, and keeping in contact with academic and professional institutions at home. By staying connected, students are more likely to feel a sense of responsibility toward their country's future;
- Students should be encouraged to think about how their education and experiences abroad can be applied to the challenges facing Uzbekistan. Whether in fields like technology, education, healthcare, or governance, students can identify areas where their expertise could make a meaningful impact. Developing a clear plan for how they will contribute to Uzbekistan's development upon their return can make the transition home more purposeful and fulfilling;
- Many countries have vibrant Uzbek communities and diaspora organizations that can provide support, networking opportunities, and pathways for students to stay connected to their cultural roots. Involvement in these communities can help students bridge the gap between their international experiences and their national identity, encouraging them to view their time abroad as preparation for future contributions to Uzbekistan;
- The Uzbek government, as well as non-governmental organizations, often offer programs and incentives to encourage students to return home and apply their knowledge. These programs may include grants for starting businesses, career development support, and opportunities to work in key sectors that are crucial to Uzbekistan's modernization. By taking advantage of these opportunities, students can transition smoothly into the workforce and actively contribute to national growth;
- Education abroad should not dilute a student's sense of national identity but rather enrich their

understanding of how their culture fits into the global context. Educational institutions and mentors should encourage students to take pride in their Uzbek heritage and instill a sense of responsibility to give back to their country. For many students, the opportunity to make a significant impact at home can be more rewarding than remaining abroad, where their contributions may be less directly tied to their cultural identity;

- Upon returning to Uzbekistan, students are often in a unique position to become leaders in their fields. Their international education and global perspective give them an edge in implementing innovative solutions to local challenges. Returning home provides an opportunity to take on leadership roles in shaping the future of Uzbekistan, contributing to its development and modernization while promoting national values and culture.
- By focusing on these strategies, Uzbek female students can help to counter the effects of "brain drain" and ensure that their international education serves not only their personal growth but also the advancement of their home country. Through their contributions, they can play a vital role in the continued progress of Uzbekistan, helping to build a society that benefits from both traditional values and global innovation.

5. Conclusion

As globalization reshapes the educational landscape, the experiences of Uzbek female students in international programs reveal the intricate relationship between global engagement and national identity. While studying abroad presents challenges to maintaining a strong sense of national identity, it also provides opportunities for students to deepen their cultural pride and patriotism. For many of these students, international education acts not as a threat to their identity, but rather as a platform for reflecting on and reinforcing their connection to Uzbekistan's heritage.

The insights gathered in this study suggest that Uzbek female students navigate complex cultural dynamics by maintaining a dual sense of belonging—one rooted in their national values and another shaped by global exposure. Despite the challenges of cultural dislocation and adaptation, most students demonstrate a strong desire to return home, bringing with them a broadened worldview and skills that can benefit Uzbekistan's development. Encouraging these students to reintegrate and apply their knowledge to Uzbekistan's progress is essential for minimizing the risk of brain drain and fostering a new generation of globally aware but deeply patriotic leaders.

By creating environments that honor both global engagement and national pride, educational institutions, governments, and non-governmental organizations can play a crucial role in helping these students realize their potential. Upon returning, these students can contribute directly to sectors such as education, healthcare, technology, and governance, influencing the modernization and growth of their homeland. Promoting a sense of responsibility and commitment toward Uzbekistan emphasizes the impact they can have, equipped with global perspectives yet grounded in their cultural identity.

As globalization continues to expand access to international education, future research is needed to examine the long-term effects of studying abroad on national identity, particularly among students from nations like Uzbekistan, where cultural values are integral to educational and social life. Ensuring that international education serves to strengthen, rather than weaken, national identity will be pivotal in sustaining a strong sense of patriotism among Uzbek students as they navigate the globalized world.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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