

Exploring Educational Philanthropy in Azerbaijan: Charitable Giving Behaviors among the University Alumni

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Introduction

As a post-Soviet country, Azerbaijan maintains a higher education system focused on workforce creation (Tempus Programme 2010). Due to Azerbaijan's Soviet past, higher education is a tightly state-controlled endeavor mostly dependent on public funding and characterized by a growing share of private or semi-private institutions (Guliyev 2016; Pashayeva and Isakhanli 2016). Educational philanthropy at the individual level is a rather novel concept, given Azerbaijan's Soviet past, in which social relations centered on a collectivist economy (Hunter 1997). Azerbaijan presents an interesting case for studying educational philanthropy in an environment where individual giving behaviors are juxtaposed against collectivist social identities (Hatcher 2008; Jonynienė, Armenakyan, Dikčius, Gineikienė, and Urbonavičius 2014). With the recent initiatives that support per-capita financing of HEI's, educational philanthropy could provide alternatives to public funding mechanisms (Presidential Administration 2010). In this paper, we explore how alumni regard their experiences and their potential motivations to donate to their alma mater. The site of the research is a recently-founded comprehensive university with English-language degree programs located in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan was part of the U.S.S.R. for 72 years until the demise of this communist experiment in 1991 (Hunter 1997). During the Soviet era, Azerbaijani higher education was completely tuition-free, along with a provision of a monthly allowance to 70 percent of university students across the U.S.S.R. (Chankseliani 2013). Following independence, the Azerbaijani higher education system underwent reforms aimed at improving access to higher education; however, not much has changed (Petrov and Temple 2004). However, according to Iveta Silova, Mark S. Johnson, and Stephen P. Heyneman (2007), one of the few remarkable developments in Azerbaijani higher education has been the adoption of international policy trends of decentralization and privatization.

One emerging trend is the adoption of philanthropy and fundraising practices as a form of additional funding. In order to investigate motivations of alumni giving in Azerbaijan, we situate this study in the literature on alumni giving – mostly based on U.S. institutions – that emphasizes the importance of institutional identity and personal characteristics of donors to comprehensively approach alumni donations (Billings 2013; Drezner 2011). While the US context for alumni giving is very different in both length of time and social welfare state context, the vast majority of literature is from the US context. This study aims to explore Azerbaijani alumni's attitudes toward philanthropic giving through the lens of the organizational identification theory (Drezner and Huehls 2014). In doing so, we elucidate the prospects for educational philanthropy in the post-Soviet post-collectivist societies.

Setting the Context: Philanthropic Giving in Azerbaijan

According to the legislation, charitable activity in Azerbaijan is defined as “the development of charity work, voluntary social insurance, and other forms of social security” (Guluzade and Bourjaily 2009, 94). Compared to the American legal framework on philanthropy that is broad in scope and detailed, charitable ventures in Azerbaijan are faced with obstacles and ambiguity. In addition to equating charitable funds to NGOs, the legislation also “fails to establish any real incentives for either sponsorship or charitable activities” (Guluzade and Bourjaily 2009, 95) such as tax benefits. Despite such problems, philanthropy in Azerbaijan has been practiced since the late nineteenth century and is tightly linked to the oil boom (Wagner 2016). Due to the oil boom, some of the oil magnates became industrial philanthropists, much like the oil, steel, and railroad titans in the U.S. These philanthropists established charitable organizations such as Muslim Charitable Society, Caspian-Black Sea Oil Industrial and Trading Society, and Baku Jewish

Charitable Society (Wagner 2016). However, there have been very few educational philanthropy initiatives in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, philanthropic giving has been practiced inconsistently, and has not been characterized by systematic planning or careful spending as opposed to the well-established philanthropic organizations in the U.S. (Thelin and Trollinger 2014).

In addition to the industrial philanthropists, one of the most widespread forms of philanthropy in Azerbaijan, similar to almsgiving in the U.S., has been different forms of religious giving, known as Zakat and Sadaqah in Islam (Wagner 2016, 161). The Charities Aid Foundation ranks Azerbaijan as the one hundred twenty-sixth nation among 139 countries in its World Giving Index developed based on the data from the Gallup World Poll (“World Giving Index” 2017). From this data, we can infer that charitable giving is not a widely-practiced behavior among many Azerbaijanis.

Therefore, in this paper, we take on a challenging task to understand how graduates of one university in Azerbaijan view educational philanthropy and how the university grapples with the alumni engagement and philanthropic giving to develop its endowment fund. By exploring the contemporary educational philanthropy practices in Azerbaijan through a study of a group of alumni of a local university, we conceptualize giving toward education within the specific Azerbaijani context.

Research Site: ADA University (ADAU)

This paper is at a single site, a local university in Baku, Azerbaijan. We selected ADAU as the research site because it aspires to the ideals of a Western-style university with the state-of-the-art facilities and curricula, along with maintaining a robust alumni network. ADAU is a relatively young state university operating under the auspices of the Ministry Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan since 2006 (ADA University 2016). Formerly known as Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, ADAU transformed into a comprehensive master’s level institution in 2014, granting degrees in international studies and public affairs, business, economics, engineering, and information technologies as well as education. Currently, the University has four schools, the School of Public and International Affairs, School of Information Technologies and Engineering, School of Business and School of Education offering a total of 12 degree programs and enrolls 2,300 students at bachelor’s and master’s levels (ADA University 2016). Tuition fees at ADAU are one of the highest in the country ranging between AZN 5,500 (approx. USD 3,100) and AZN 8,500 (approx. USD 4,700) (Guliyev 2016).

ADAU established its Alumni Relations Office (ARO) in 2012 (Personal Communication 2016). The University has approximately 380 graduates, as of

January 2017 (ADA University 2017). Representatives of the University including the ARO specialist believe alumni engagement is crucial for ADAU in order to fundraise, increase ADA’s brand, and career development for current students and alumni (Personal Communication 2016). The ADAU foundation’s first endowment campaign, “Heroes Tribute” began in 2016. The campaign’s premise was to raise funds for children of fallen soldiers during the armed clashes between the Armenia and Azerbaijan in April 2016. The foundation raised over AZN 1 mln. (approx. USD 560,000) within a month (ADA University Foundation 2016).

To explore the ADAU graduates’ attitudes and behaviors, we have utilized the following process questions to help us better understand our research problem (Maxwell 2013):

What, if anything, motivates a group of ADAU graduates to engage in alumni giving?

How, if at all, do a group of ADAU alumni’s perceptions of the university and educational philanthropy shape their giving behaviors?

Literature Review

Most of the research on philanthropic giving has been carried out in the U.S. and largely represents giving practices among wealthy White men (Drezner and Huehls 2014). Therefore, in this paper, we will attempt to find applications of these theories in the local Azerbaijani context. Regardless of the socioeconomic and racial background, a mixture of altruism and self-interest has been viewed as the major motives behind philanthropic giving and prosocial behaviors (Drezner and Huehls 2014). One of the most prominent theories combining altruistic motivations with egocentric interests is James Andreoni’s (1990) “warm glow.” He argues that even highly selfless gifts might have a certain personal benefit for the donor.

Another widely-cited concept in educational philanthropy is the social exchange theory. According to Noah Drezner (2009), social exchange theory helps to explicate the interdependent relationship between the alumna and her alma mater. Noah Drezner and Frances Huehls (2014) argue that “voluntary actions of individuals [...] are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring” (p. 6). Kathleen Kelly (2002) suggests that social exchange theory describes two-layered donor motivation, namely desire to elevate the common good and receive some form of private good in return. In doing so, social exchange theory underscores the importance of the mutual benefit.

We also conducted a search with keywords alumni, giving back, donation, philanthropy, post-Soviet, post-

communist, charitable giving to locate research literature relevant to the political and sociocultural context of our study. We did not find specific literature on philanthropic behaviors or perceptions of the graduates of higher education institutions located in the post-Soviet space. One study looks at how the alumni of international scholarship programs funded by the U.S. government in Moldova and Georgia are giving back to their communities upon their return from study abroad (Campbell 2016). A few studies explore charitable giving in Russia as a historically elite and politicized behavior (Dinello 1998; Brooks 2002; Khodorova 2006; Livshin and Weitz 2006).

Conceptual Framework

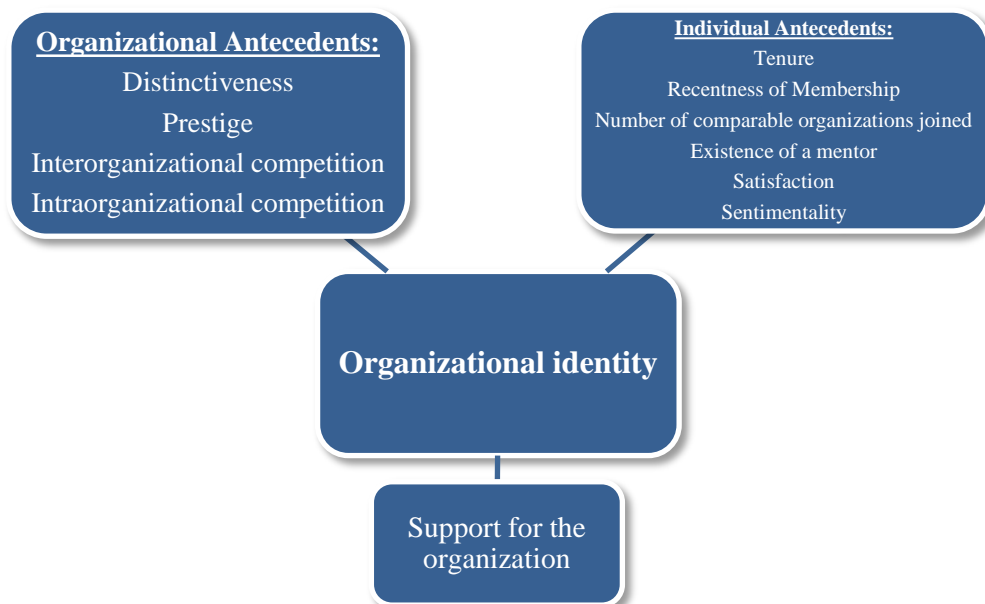
For the purposes of this study, we will utilize a concept emerging from the social identity theory, organizational identification. Developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), organizational identification views alumni's self-definition with the university as an identity factor. According to Mael and Ashforth (1992):

(1) College can be considered a holographic organization that is, one where members share common organization-wide identity and are less likely to experience competing demands from, say, department-level or occupational identities, and

(2) since alumni constitute a particularly critical source of support for colleges, alumni identification is likely to strongly affect the welfare of their respective alma maters. (104)

In doing so, the organizational identification theory proposes a model that represents an amalgam of individual and organizational antecedents that correlate with each other to produce an organizational identity (Drezner and Huehls 2014). Individual and organizational antecedents, illustrated in Figure 1, have been regarded as predictors of the level of identification with the organization and subsequent level of support toward the institution. According to Fred Mael and Blake Ashforth (1992), organizational antecedents that preclude identification are distinctiveness, prestige, interorganizational and intraorganizational competition, whereas individual antecedents can be summarized as tenure (years spent in an organization), recentness of membership, number of comparable organizations joined, existence of a mentor, satisfaction, and sentimentality. In this specific study, we will focus on the select number of organizational and personal constructs that are associated with the support for the organization.

FIGURE 1. CORRELATES OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION (ADAPTED FROM DREZNER 2009)



Data and Methods

Though most studies on philanthropic giving utilize quantitative methods, giving behaviors and perceptions of educational philanthropy are complex phenomena that require more nuanced exploration through qualitative methods (Drezner 2009). We utilize a mixed method approach through multiple methods (survey, interview, document analysis) to gain a better understanding of the phenomena and develop novel perspectives in our field (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). Taking this into account, mixed methods case study approach has allowed us to understand the specific context of the university situated within the larger Azerbaijani context through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Data and Instruments

In this mixed-methods study we have used an online questionnaire and conducted individual and focus group interviews with the graduates and representatives of the university. The 20-minute online survey containing 149 items was administered through Qualtrics and disseminated via email list serve, social media and other platforms to 320 graduates of the university as of October 2016. Most survey items require participants to rate different statements using a Likert-type scale. Prior to its launch, the survey instrument was piloted among Azerbaijani students to ensure that the questions are comprehensible and relatable to the alumni. The survey response rate is 27.19 percent with 87 individual responses overall. In addition to the online survey, one individual and one focus group in-person interviews lasting 30-40 minutes each with a total of three representatives of senior and mid-level management of the university were conducted in August 2016, using James Spradley's semi-structured interview protocol (Spradley 1979; Bogdan and Biklen 2007). The same technique was used to conduct the 30-60-minute in-depth individual and focus group interviews virtually (using Messenger and Skype) with 16 graduates of the university who took the online questionnaire prior to the interview. The in-depth interviews have been conducted as an insightful "conversation with a purpose" to probe further about alumni's perceptions of educational philanthropy and engagement with the university (Marshall and Rossman 2011, 101). Document analysis of the archival data such as the charter of the university as well as strategy documents concerning alumni engagement and

development of endowment fund informed our understanding of the specific localized context.

Sample Population

The participants for the survey were sampled using the purposeful sampling (Creswell 2003). Considering this is a case study, we identified a list of current alumni via the mailing list with the help of the alumni relations office of the university. A large amount of the missing responses and low survey completion rate was most probably due to the length of the survey as most of the missing data appeared in the final sections of the questionnaire. The final survey sample (n=87) represents master- and bachelor-level graduates. The alumni interview sample (n=16) is comprised of six female and 10 male graduates of the university, all of whom were part of the same cohort. For the interviews with the management we approached one female and two male administrators (n=3), who are familiar with the work related to alumni engagement.

Variables

The variables pertaining to the constructs of the organizational identification theory were derived from the alumni survey items. Considering the individual correlates of the organizational identification theory, this study will focus on the following individual antecedent: tenure or time spent at ADAU (length of the degree, i.e. two-year master's, four- or five-year bachelor's), recentness of membership (time since graduation), satisfaction (overall satisfaction with the university), trust (rating of levels of trust in the institution), likelihood to give (rating of how likely alumni are to give money to ADAU) explain the relationship between individual correlates of organizational identification. Independent variables such as gender, cumulative GPA, monthly salary, and others are extracted from the online survey data to inform our understanding of alumni giving comprehensively.

Our sample is representative of gender with 53 percent female majority (see Table 1). The most common age of the alumni in our sample is close to 27 years old. On average, the alumni report cumulative GPA of about 3.30-3.49. The vast majority, 71 percent of graduates in our sample have received some type of scholarship to study at the University, however only 44 percent have been involved in a student organization at ADAU. Our sample reports overwhelmingly above average monthly salary. We present complete descriptive statistics of the sample in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Variable	Definition and metrics	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Gender (n=87)	Female = 1 Male = 0	0.53	0	1	-
Age (n=67)	Reported alumni age	26.84	20	39	4.46
CGPA (n=79)	Scale based on reported cumulative GPA 4.00 GPA = 9 3.80-3.99 GPA = 8 3.50-3.79 GPA = 7 3.30-3.49 GPA = 6 3.00-3.29 GPA = 5 2.50-2.99 GPA = 4 2.00-2.49 GPA = 3 1.50-1.99 GPA = 2 1.00-1.49 GPA = 1	6.09	3	9	1.35
Received scholarship during studies at ADAU (n=76)	Some type of scholarship = 1 No scholarship = 0	0.71	0	1	0.46
Involved in student organization during studies at ADAU (n=78)	Involved = 1 Not involved = 0	0.44	0	1	0.50
Monthly salary after graduation (n=69)	Likert-type scale Well above average = 5 Slightly above average = 4 As average = 3 Slightly below average = 2 Far below average = 1	3.99	1	5	1.16

Findings

We find that the graduates report high levels of overall satisfaction with their ADAU experience ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 0.68$) (see Table 2). In terms of recentness of membership, our sample reports mean value of 1.84 ($SD = 1.32$). Considering that the graduation years range from 2011 to 2016, the alumni in our sample are largely recent graduates. However, tenure or time spent at ADAU is relatively low ($M = 0.39$, $SD = 0.49$), meaning our sample is mostly represented by master-level alumni. Furthermore, we observe moderately high levels of trust in the institution ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.87$).

Likelihood to give is above “Probably not” ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.68$). On the other hand, large majority of the alumni find donations to have an impact on university ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.57$). Similarly, the alumni report that it is important to donate ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.47$), important to volunteer ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.04$), other alumni should donate ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.03$), and other alumni should volunteer ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.04$). When it comes to future involvement, we observe high commitment to donate ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.99$) and even higher commitment to volunteer ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.02$) in our sample (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

Variable	Definition and metrics	Mean	Min	Max	SD
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
Satisfaction (n=70)	Likert-type Scale Very satisfied = 6 Satisfied = 5 Somewhat satisfied = 4 Somewhat dissatisfied = 3 Dissatisfied = 2 Very dissatisfied = 1	4.79	3	6	0.68
Recentness of membership (n=79)	Years from graduation	1.84	1	6	1.32
Tenure or time spent at ADAU (n=79)	Bachelor's = 1 Master's = 0	0.39	0	1	0.49
Trust in ADAU (n=70)	Likert-type Scale A great deal = 5 A lot = 4 A moderate amount = 3 A little = 2 None at all = 1	3.61	1	5	0.87
Likelihood to give (n=69)	Likert-type Scale Definitely yes = 4 Probably yes = 3 Probably not = 2 Definitely not = 1	2.78	1	4	0.68
Impact of donations to university (n=67)	All donations matter = 3 Only large donations matter = 2 Donations don't matter = 1	2.66	1	3	0.57
Important to donate money (n=66)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	3.44	1	6	1.15
Important to volunteer (n=65)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	3.90	1	6	1.04

Others should donate money (n=66)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	3.09	1	6	1.03
Others should volunteer (n=65)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	3.90	1	6	1.04
I will donate money (n=65)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	3.78	1	5	0.99
I will volunteer (n=65)	Likert-type Scale Strongly agree = 6 Agree = 5 Slightly agree = 4 Slightly disagree = 3 Disagree = 2 Strongly disagree = 1	4.09	2	6	1.02

Discussion

According to Mael and Ashforth's (1992) model, satisfaction can be achieved by "contributing suitably to the attainment of one's personal objectives" (p. 108), and thus, is positively correlated with organizational identity and consequently, support to the organization. Reported high satisfaction in our sample is consistently supported by alumni perspectives during interviews. When asked to describe ADAU to a person who does not have any information about the institution, most graduates used the following phrases: "Outstanding educational institution," "Home," or "Second home," "a place that promises the future," "high quality education," "university that strives to be better" (Personal Communications 2017). However, the majority of graduates mentioned the curriculum as one of the problems. One alumnus specifically notes, "We didn't have a set curriculum, and it became problematic for us. There were geography and literature classes, and they were meaningless" (Personal

Communication 2017). High satisfaction can also be explained by the recentness of membership and tenure or the time spent at ADAU. Like satisfaction, we observe moderately high levels of trust in the institution that can be interpreted as sentimentality. However, considerably low likelihood to give seems to suggest that the recentness of membership and low ability to give, evidenced by slightly above average income, are at play.

Nevertheless, highly-rated individual and organizational antecedents should lead to a strong organizational identity that is correlated with support for the organization (see Figure 1). Due to the limitations of our analysis, we turn to other variables to explain how such support can be manufactured. More than 70 percent of the alumni believe in the power of donations to make an impact on the institution (see Figure 2). In line with this, when asked about two most important reasons to give, the alumni mention "to help a student" and "to support faculty research", 53 and 28 times, respectively (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2. ADAU ALUMNI'S PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF DONATIONS ON UNIVERSITY

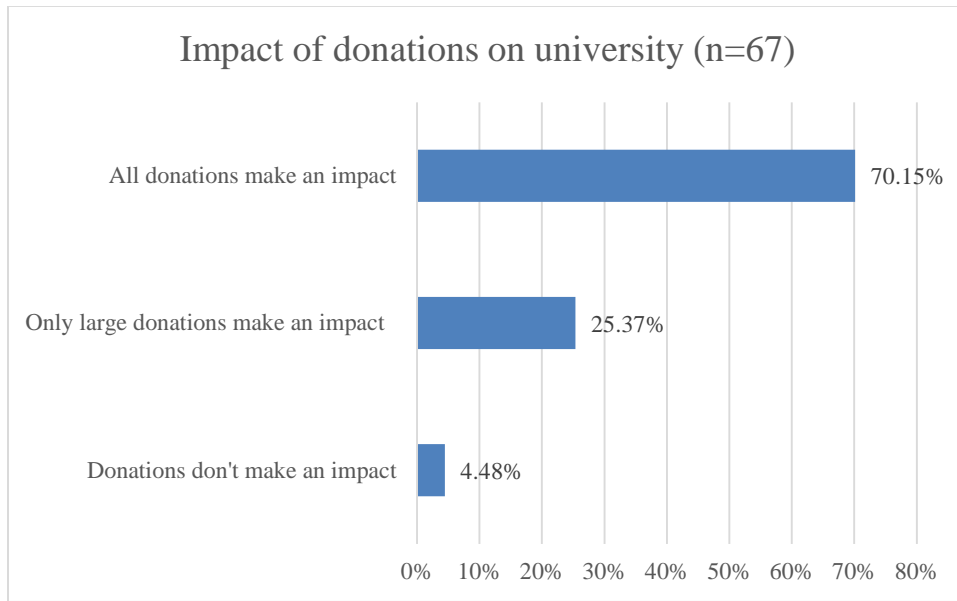
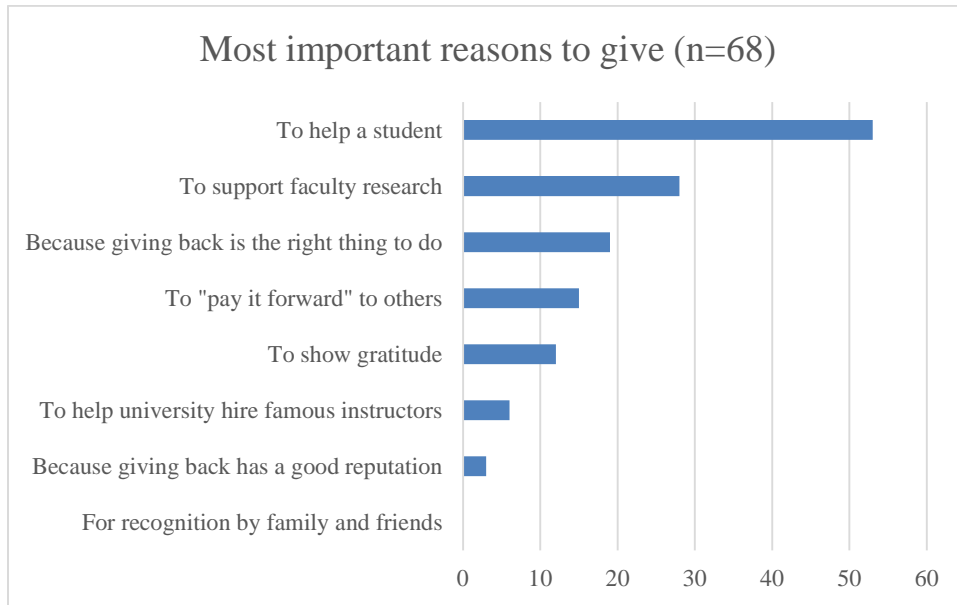


FIGURE 3. MOST CITED IMPORTANT REASONS TO GIVE BY THE ADAU ALUMNI



These two pieces of evidence suggest that the alumni have positive perceptions of philanthropy that supports educational institutions and causes. To further this argument, we compare alumni's perceptions of voluntary and monetary donations. Literature suggests that the willingness to give should be conditioned by a mutual benefit where the alumnus(a) receives some form of extrinsic or intrinsic gain from donating either time or money to the institution (Drezner and Huehls 2014, 2). Results from our survey suggest that the

alumni attach more value to volunteering, that is, time donations in comparison with monetary donations (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). This claim is further substantiated by the highly ranked commitment to volunteer ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.02$) as opposed to relatively lower commitment to donate money ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.99$), when asked to reflect on future (see Table 2; see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

FIGURE 4. ADAU ALUMNI'S PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

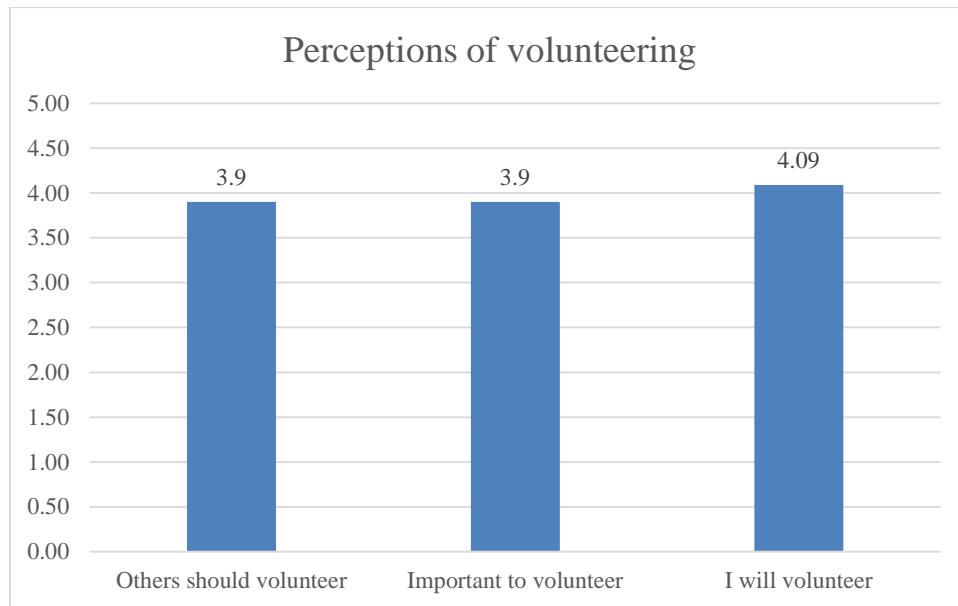
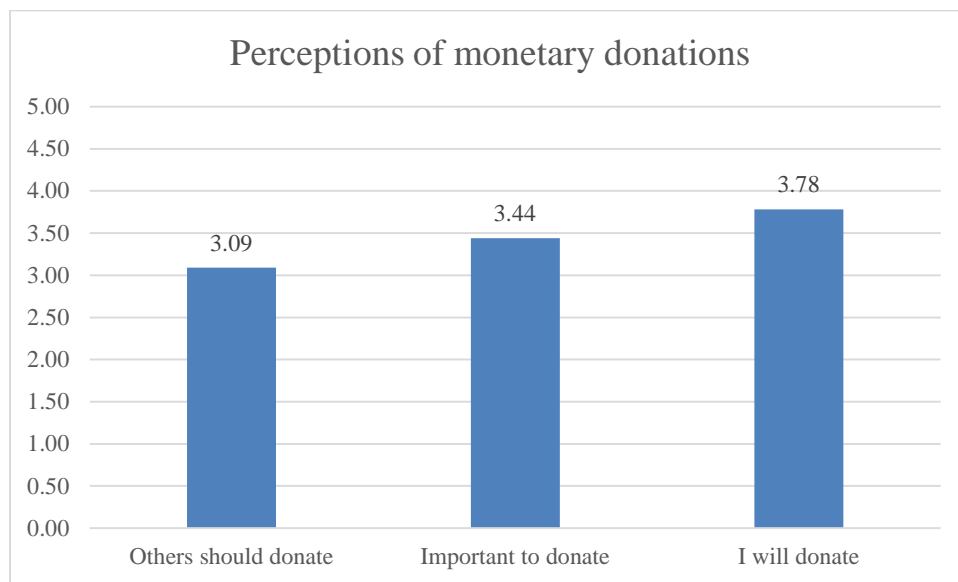


FIGURE 5. ADAU ALUMNI'S PERCEPTIONS OF MONETARY DONATIONS



In other words, while there is not strong willingness to give financially among the alumni, they express strong desire to volunteer. This stark difference between the monetary donation and volunteering constructs points to the distinction between likelihood to give and ability to give. Because our sample is largely comprised of recent alumni, it is not surprising that they would not have any disposable income to donate. However, considering the highly-ranked volunteering constructs, ADAU should continue their alumni engagement and outreach to be able to convert these reported

perceptions of giving and other philanthropic behaviors into monetary donations in the future.

Further Implications and Conclusion

Better understanding of alumni motivation, engagement, and attitudes opens avenues for further research on specific constructs of satisfaction, loyalty and trust toward alma mater, responsibility to give, etc. as future areas of investigation. A major implication of the educational philanthropy research in Azerbaijan is

to provide alternatives to public funding mechanisms. Moreover, it raises questions about highly-contested education policy debate of public versus private good of the role higher education in a relatively young post-collectivist society such as Azerbaijan.

We discuss the historical and sociocultural context of philanthropy in Azerbaijan and attempt to apply concepts of alumni giving, originating from the U.S., to the case of ADA University. Through this mixed methods study, we aim to inform the literature on philanthropy in emerging democracies in the post-Soviet space. Considering current policy debates around higher education financing in Azerbaijan, this research study has implications for policy makers, university administrators and education researchers.

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