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INTRODUCTION

The post-Cold War period is *characterized* by a shift in world politics where soft power has become as important as military and economic power (Nye, 1990). Soft power has emerged as a crucial tool for pursuing national interests. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is defined as the capacity to attract and influence others without using coercion or financial incentives to achieve desired outcomes (Nye, 2008). By cultivating soft power, influencing others becomes more feasible through peaceful means rather than by using threats. One major source of soft power is *values*. To draw an analogy, if we wish to make friends, we are naturally drawn to those who exhibit good manners rather than to those who behave rudely. Similarly, a person's values shape how others perceive them. Political leaders use this principle of attraction by presenting themselves as servants of the people, aiming to win their hearts and secure electoral victories. To influence others, they must establish a positive image. In a similar manner, countries strive to enhance their image among international audiences, making country branding a vital component of soft power (Güneş, 2018).

The power of attraction is generally considered more effective than the use of force when it comes to influencing others, especially in efforts to create a positive national image. Many countries have integrated soft power strategies into their policies to strengthen their global standing. As Nye (1990) points out, the transition from traditional hard power tactics, such as military force, to soft power has also altered the actors in global politics. While states remain primary actors, non-state entities now play significant roles on the global stage. For example, transnational and multinational corporations wield considerable influence over the global economy, positioning them as key players in international affairs. Nye argues that as new actors emerge, new goals in global politics develop as well (Nye, 1990: 157). With increasing interdependence, nations now prioritize economic objectives over military ones. Additionally, the concept of national security has evolved, as economic threats are now viewed as critically important, while concerns over territorial integrity have lessened.

Several nations have effectively used soft power diplomacy to build a positive image. Japan, for instance, is recognized for its advancements in science and technology, which, alongside its development programs in Central Asia, have shaped its image as a friendly and peace-valuing nation (Y et al., 2018). Other than that, the popularity of Japanese pop-culture such as anime, manga, and pop music has attracted the government to implement cultural policy resulting in promoting “cool Japan” slogan which is used to soften anti-Japan perception and

to attain soft power (Iwabuchi, 2015; Otmazgin, 2012). Similarly, the "Korean Wave" phenomenon has played a crucial role in cultivating a positive image of South Korea, making it a vital part of the nation's soft power strategy. This cultural phenomenon has provided a valuable platform for the Korean government to promote Korean culture globally (Jang & Paik, 2012). Both Japan and Korea have successfully promoted their culture through entertainment, and it is a part of their soft power.

Moreover, soft power is frequently leveraged by many states to achieve economic objectives. There is a clear interrelation between soft power and economic growth. Recent studies indicate that while soft power relies on a nation's economic resources, it also serves as a crucial tool for boosting the national economy (Carminati, 2021). In essence, strategies based on attraction help improve a country's image abroad, potentially increasing tourism and fostering economic development. However, to sustain soft power, significant financial investment is necessary. Thus, soft power not only depends on economic resources but also positively contributes to national economic growth.

Reflecting on the experiences of Korea and Japan, Indonesia appears to have considerable potential in developing its own soft power. As an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands (Andréfouët et al., 2022) and more than 1,300 ethnic groups (Woodworth, 1989), Indonesia's cultural diversity and numerous tourist destinations offer a unique advantage. By promoting its cultural wealth and tourism potential, Indonesia can present a distinctive identity to the world and attract global interest. Efforts by the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemenlu), include establishing Indonesian Cultural Houses (Rumah Budaya Indonesia) in ten countries as a form of cultural diplomacy (Nidia, 2014; Rachman, 2015). These centres aim to enhance Indonesia's image and foster ties with international communities by offering direct learning experiences about Indonesia's history, language, and culture, alongside performances of traditional dances and music.

Regarding Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations, the engagement between these two predominantly Muslim nations extends across three main sectors: politics, economy, and socio-culture. Politically, both countries have made positive strides through several bilateral agreements and an increase in official visits between their governments (Azerbaijan Embassy in Indonesia, n.d.). Indonesia and Azerbaijan consistently support each other in international organizations like the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (President.az, 2016; Report News Agency, 2022). Azerbaijan has also

extended humanitarian aid to Indonesia during natural disasters (Report News Agency, 2021; Trend News Agency, 2018). Conversely, Indonesia has backed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Purwanto, 2018; Rajabova, 2013), demonstrating a positive dynamic in their bilateral relations.

Economic relations between the two nations have been largely dominated by Azerbaijan's energy exports to Indonesia. According to UN Comtrade statistics, in 2022, Azerbaijan's total exports to Indonesia amounted to 606 million USD, whereas Indonesia's exports to Azerbaijan reached only 3.64 million USD. This trade imbalance has prompted the Indonesian government to seek stronger economic engagement with Azerbaijan. The Indonesian Embassy in Baku has been actively working to attract Azerbaijani businesses, fostering greater collaboration with Indonesian entrepreneurs and promoting Indonesian products in Azerbaijan. To support this effort, the embassy organizes an annual business meeting that invites Azerbaijani entrepreneurs to the Trade Expo Indonesia, where they can engage with Indonesian companies and explore potential business opportunities (KBRI Baku, 2023c).

Additionally, the embassy leverages soft power diplomacy to enhance people-to-people relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan, which remain relatively underdeveloped despite positive governmental ties. The unfamiliarity between the two societies presents challenges, potentially affecting trade relations. To address this gap, the embassy prioritizes cultural promotion, hosting events that introduce Azerbaijani citizens to Indonesian culture through dance, music, and other cultural performances. These events often feature representatives from regional Indonesian governments promoting tourism, as well as entrepreneurs showcasing a variety of Indonesian products. Business meetings between Azerbaijani and Indonesian companies are also part of these events, facilitating potential business collaborations. These efforts not only aim to build stronger economic ties but also strive to create a positive image of Indonesia among Azerbaijani citizens.

The primary goal of promoting Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan is to enhance nation branding, which in turn supports Indonesian tourism and strengthens trade relations. While bilateral governmental relations have progressed positively, fostering stronger people-to-people connections remains essential. In the context of Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations, soft power diplomacy through cultural promotion has been actively developed. The Indonesian Embassy plays a key role, but it is not the only actor involved. The Centre of Indonesian Studies stands out as a crucial non-state actor, providing a platform to promote Indonesian culture, language,

and education. Unlike the Indonesian Cultural Houses established by the government in various countries, The Centre of Indonesian Studies was initiated by an Azerbaijani entity at the Azerbaijan University of Languages. This initiative marks a promising start for Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. It not only facilitates people-to-people exchanges and strengthens bilateral ties but also fosters a positive image of Indonesia through active collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy. As non-state actors, the CIS's experts, students, and alumni play a significant role in advancing soft power diplomacy. Initially, The Centre of Indonesian Studies served as a communication bridge between the two countries' institutions before the official establishment of the Indonesian Embassy in Baku.

The Centre of Indonesian Studies has undertaken various programs and projects to educate Azerbaijanis about Indonesia, a country that was relatively unfamiliar to them. The Centre of Indonesian Studies has produced numerous alumni who actively promote Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan through arts and cultural events. This effort has led to greater recognition of Indonesia among Azerbaijanis and a noticeable increase in Azerbaijani tourists visiting Indonesia. As a result, the CIS stands as a key non-state actor in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy efforts in Azerbaijan. This study analyses the practice of soft power diplomacy by Indonesia in Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on the contributions made by The Centre of Indonesian Studies to these efforts.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to thoroughly analyse the practice of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. This involves exploring the strategies and initiatives undertaken by the Indonesian government, particularly through its embassy in Baku, to enhance Indonesia's image and influence in Azerbaijan. The study aims to identify key events, cultural exchanges, and other diplomatic efforts that have contributed to building stronger bilateral ties, emphasizing how cultural diplomacy serves as a tool for nation branding, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting Indonesian values, culture, and products among Azerbaijanis.

Second, the study aims to evaluate the role of the Centre of Indonesian Studies at the Azerbaijan University of Languages in supporting the implementation of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy. This objective focuses on understanding how The Centre of Indonesian Studies acts as a non-state actor in promoting Indonesian culture, language, and education in Azerbaijan. By examining its programs, collaborations with the embassy, and the impact of its alumni, the research aims to demonstrate how The Centre of Indonesian Studies not only

facilitates cultural and educational exchanges but also strengthens people-to-people relations between the two countries. Through this comprehensive approach, the study intends to offer insights into how both state and non-state actors work collaboratively to enhance Indonesia's soft power influence in Azerbaijan.

Research Questions

This thesis discusses the implementation of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan and how does Indonesian Research Centre in Azerbaijan through its experts and alumni contribute to promoting Indonesia in Azerbaijan. In this case, there are two main research question of this study:

1. How does Indonesian government implement soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan?
2. How does The Centre of Indonesian Studies contribute to Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan?

Research Significance

The significance of this study lies in addressing existing gaps in academic literature concerning Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations, particularly in the context of Indonesia's diplomatic practices in Azerbaijan. By analysing the actors involved, this research sheds light on how Indonesia's soft power diplomacy is implemented, emphasizing the underexplored roles of non-state actors, such as The Centre of Indonesian Studies. This centre plays a crucial role in Indonesia's nation branding efforts in Azerbaijan, a subject that has not been thoroughly examined in previous studies. The findings not only contribute to a deeper understanding of Indonesia's diplomatic strategies but also highlight the significance of cultural and educational diplomacy in fostering bilateral ties and enhancing Indonesia's global image.

Research Scope and Limitations

This thesis explores Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan, involving both state and non-state actors. The Indonesian Embassy in Baku functions as the main state actor in these diplomatic efforts, acting as a crucial governmental entity. Meanwhile, The Centre of Indonesian Studies at Azerbaijan University of Languages represents the central non-state actor examined in this study. The research aims to provide a detailed understanding of Indonesia's soft power implementation in Azerbaijan by focusing on the strategies, activities, goals, and achievements of these two institutions from their establishment to the present.

The research scope is confined to key individuals within these institutions. At the Indonesian Embassy, the study focuses on the Indonesian Ambassador to Azerbaijan and the diplomat responsible for Information and Socio-Cultural Affairs. Meanwhile, at The Centre of Indonesian Studies, the founder, head, students, and alumni form the primary subjects of the analysis. This thesis emphasizes Indonesia's approach to soft power diplomacy, examining its methods and goals within the context of Azerbaijani engagement. The research presents the perspective of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, illustrating how soft power is utilized to foster relations. Notably, the actors in this diplomatic process include both Indonesian and Azerbaijani entities. Additionally, the study narrows its focus to cultural and educational dimensions of soft power, as these areas are pivotal in shaping bilateral relations.

Design and Structure

This thesis is structured into five comprehensive chapters, each addressing distinct yet interconnected aspects of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. It begins with an introduction that establishes the foundational understanding of soft power, emphasizing how states can leverage it to pursue diplomatic objectives. It also explores the relevance of soft power within the context of Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in Azerbaijan. Additionally, this chapter covers the background of the study, outlines the statement of the problem, defines the research objectives, and highlights the significance of the study. It further includes hypotheses, research methods, the scope and limitations, and finally, an overview of the thesis's design and structure.

The first chapter delves into a review of the existing literature, analysing three central themes: cultural diplomacy, educational institutions' roles in diplomacy, and public diplomacy's impact on nation branding. This chapter also presents the conceptual framework underpinning the study, which includes theories of soft power, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and nation branding. These concepts help frame the analysis of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts and how The Centre of Indonesian Studies has contributed to nation branding in Azerbaijan.

In the second chapter, the research methodology is detailed, outlining the type of research conducted, data collection techniques, respondent selection for interviews and surveys, the geographical location of the study, the period of research, and the process of data analysis. This chapter aims to provide clarity on the research design, ensuring transparency and reliability in how the data was gathered and interpreted.

The next three chapters present the research findings and discussions, offering an in-depth exploration of the bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains. It particularly focuses on the implementation of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan, examining how cultural and educational initiatives are employed as diplomatic tools. It also evaluates the role and impact of the Centre of Indonesian Studies at the Azerbaijan University of Languages in promoting Indonesian culture, language, and education, emphasizing its contribution as a significant non-state actor.

Finally, the thesis is concluded by summarizing the key findings and their implications for Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations. It provides recommendations for enhancing Indonesia's soft power strategies in Azerbaijan, identifying opportunities for deepening bilateral relations through cultural diplomacy. The conclusion also suggests avenues for further research, especially in exploring the evolving roles of educational institutions as non-state actors in soft power diplomacy. This chapter underscores the overall significance of the study, offering insights that could inform future diplomatic initiatives and strategies for both nations.

I CHAPTER. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several studies have been conducted on soft power diplomacy in the form of culture which is related to what discussed in this thesis. This chapter discusses some studies associated with actors in soft power diplomacy in the form of culture and educational institutions, Indonesia's approach on soft power diplomacy, and finally the implementation of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. It further discusses the theoretical framework used in this thesis which includes soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and nation branding.

1.1. Review of Related Literature

a. Cultural and Educational Institution as Soft Power Diplomacy Actor

Soft power has emerged as a rapidly growing and crucial element in the realm of international relations as countries seek to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. This approach includes various strategies, including cultural exchanges, educational programmes and humanitarian activities aimed at building trust and promoting national values internationally. Although states continue to be among the most influential players on the international arena, competition for soft power has become increasingly stronger as the stage has grown more crowded with other players involved (Nye, 2019). Explaining soft power, Nye notes that public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are considered as instruments for foreign policy to strengthen soft power (Nye, 1990). This opens an opportunity for non-state actors to work together with states within global stage. In line with this argument, Kim (2017) in defining the alternative concept of new public diplomacy concludes that governments increasingly engage non-state actors to achieve their foreign policy goals.

One of the most effective ways to exercise soft power lies in the use of cultural diplomacy, which plays a pivotal role in shaping national image and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Culture as one of the primary sources of soft power (Nye, 2008) plays significant role in enhancing countries' soft power which also contributes to increase their attractiveness and improve national image within global society. A study on power of culture in diplomacy by Kitsou (2013) provides a compelling case example from the United States, where effectively implementing cultural diplomacy is seen as a crucial means to improve America's national image and obtain the intended outcomes. He explains that despite the challenges it faced during the cold war era, the US government had established several American Houses in Germany which later into transformed to "German American Institute" as well as the United State-France

bi-national centre named the “Franco-American Institute” in Rennes, France. Such institutions were utilised as a platform to promote America’s national interests and share its democratic values with European community particularly in response to the expansion of communism.

The role of cultural institutions in soft power diplomacy is not limited to the United States; other countries have also utilized similar approaches to promote their national interests. Explaining the role of cultural institution as soft power diplomacy actor, Raymond & Ismirsyaf (2020) states that Italian government uses its cultural institution namely “*Instituto Italiano di Cultura*” as an instrument of soft power diplomacy in Indonesia. The study found that the centre uses three elements as a tool for soft power diplomacy in the effort of promoting Italian culture which includes language, arts, and education. Such centre effectively attracts Indonesian people’s interest to learn more about Italian culture.

During the pandemic period, the practice of soft power diplomacy faced significant challenges, especially in a face-to-face practice. Cultural institutions made an innovation in exercising its task in cultural diplomacy through distance. However, the crisis served as a catalyst for the acceleration and legitimization of digital diplomacy. There was a notable rise in the production and global consumption of digital culture, facilitating more reliable digital communication and diplomacy. Cultural institutions adapted by using online channels to enhance cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. Museums emerged as crucial non-state actors in cultural diplomacy, employing digital technology and new media to expand their reach across political and cultural boundaries (Grincheva, 2022). Similarly, countries like Germany, Italy, and Spain also shifted to digital diplomacy, leveraging social media to engage broader audiences and promote their cultures (Zguri et al., 2023). This initiative has further developed in the post-pandemic period.

Beyond cultural institutions, education also plays a central role in soft power strategies, serving as a medium to share values and ideas through cross-border exchanges. Education serves as a vital instrument of soft power that can help to share ideas and values of particular nation with other people through educational exchanges (Nye, 2004a). In discussing the role of education as both a source and tool in of soft power in international relations, Wojciuk et al. (2015) concludes that education may serve as a strategic instrument for strengthening soft power, exemplified by its role in nation-brand development in Finland and in aid for development in both Finland and China. Based on the cases in those two countries, the author identified three mechanisms used to build educational soft power in international relations: First, soft power is built by education as it brings core values such as modernization, equality,

good life, and competitiveness. Second, soft power is created by resources like internationalization and high-quality education. And lastly, education is used by states as a tool to accomplish policy objectives (Wojciuk et al., 2015, p. 314).

In this regard, educational exchanges emerge not only as a tool for fostering intercultural understanding but also as a means for nations to advance their foreign policy interests. The importance of education in diplomacy is further explained in Khan et al. (2020) who examine the impact of educational exchanges on diplomacy, it highlights how countries use them to enhance diplomatic relations, project their positive image, and promote culture to international society. Educational exchanges have a positive impact on the foreign policy of a country as they create opportunities and contribute to the growth of foreign policy in the recipient country that is the target of the exchange. The study illustrates China as among successful providers of educational scholarships for international students such as the United States with its Fulbright programme and the United Kingdom with its British Council. It explains that the Chinese government is employing non-governmental elements in public diplomacy in order to prevent misinterpretations of its national image. (Khan et al., 2020).

Moreover, valuable contribution of international students as actor in soft power diplomacy is further discussed by Arslan & Sezgin (2023) assuming that gaining the hearts and minds of foreign students could enhance a host country's soft power. Those international students could become para-diplomats for the host country to share a positive image of the country to their native people. In line with the assumption, Perilli (2018) presented a case example from the European Union's Erasmus programme. He points out that Erasmus is a soft power instrument for the EU assuming that the participants of the programme are most likely to be EU's informal ambassador for EU partner countries where they originate from. This initiative reflects the top-out Europeanization strategy of the EU seeking to export its norms and values to other nations through such scholarship programme. This strategy aims to promote long-term institutional integration, educational advancement, and interpersonal engagement (E. Mustafayev, 2022a).

In addition to individual contributions from students, the role of educational institutions as non-state actors in diplomacy is also significant. Tunggal (2020) observes that Indonesia's Darussalam Gontor Modern Boarding School and Al Azhar University of Egypt play important roles in strengthening the relationship between these two Muslim countries through education. Both institutions are leading institutions in Islamic education in their countries that share the same Islamic values and ideology. It is the major reason of the rise of Indonesian students,

especially Gontor alumni, awarded a special scholarship by Al Azhar University, expecting that they can later spread Al Azhar Islamic moderate values to Indonesian society. Such exchange programme between the two countries shows a positive impact on the bilateral relations. The study has proven that education institution has important contribution in enhancing countries' relations.

b. Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy

In regards of Indonesian approach in soft power diplomacy, several studies have been conducted on the development of Indonesia's soft power practices in other states in the form of cultural and educational institutions as an actor that positively contributes to branding Indonesia. Chasdiana et al. (2019) studied the implementation of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in Japan through Indonesian Cultural House (Rumah Budaya Indonesia-RBI) during 2017 to 2019. The study shows that the cultural house had been conducting several events which involve Japanese society to learn more about Indonesian culture. It found that the cultural house is quite popular among Japanese public, and it contributed to the improvement of Indonesia's image in Japan. The study also resulted in the increase of the number of Japanese tourists visiting Indonesia in the mentioned period.

Furthermore, this positive reception of Indonesian culture is further underscored by additional research that examines the Indonesian Cultural House in Japan, as highlighted by Schlonsky & Damayanti (2022). The study aimed to explain how the cultural house has a significant impact on increasing positive impression of Indonesian culture among Japanese society. It provided a clearer explanation with precise evidence on how Japanese people impressed with Indonesian culture as they had joined various cultural programmes held by RBI in Japan. Despite the pandemic barrier in 2020, RBI has effectively enhanced Indonesia's cultural diplomacy activity in Japan which had positive result to the image of Indonesian culture among Japanese.

In addition to the findings in Japan, the significance of cultural houses in promoting Indonesia's image is also observed in other countries. Some studies also discussed Indonesian nation branding through cultural house approach which is exercised in Belgium (Nugroho et al., 2024) and South Korea (Putri, 2020). Indonesia Cultural House in Belgium has provided several programmes including RBI goes to school, Indonesian language programme, as well as traditional dance and music class. The study concluded that by optimising all programmes at the cultural house, the goal of promoting Indonesian culture in Belgium has been achieved well.

However, it did not provide a clear picture of the result on the effort of promoting Indonesia by the cultural house.

In contrast to the initiatives in Belgium, the Indonesian Cultural House (RBI) in South Korea adopts a distinctive focus on showcasing the diversity of Indonesian traditional houses and clothing. This approach aligns with the sister national park agreement between Indonesia's Pangrango Mount National Park and South Korea's Yumyeong National Park. In Korea, RBI is not the only actor in promoting Indonesia. As the result of the positive development of bilateral relations between the two Asian countries, other non-states actors such as Indonesian Korea Culture and Study (IKCS) and Indonesian studies centre at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies also play a vital role in Indonesian nation branding in Korea (Putri, 2020). This study provides a good analysis of Indonesia's soft diplomacy practices in South Korea, but it does not clearly discuss what contribution are made by the non-state actors.

Alongside these cultural initiatives, the Indonesian government further strengthens its soft power diplomacy through scholarship programs. Candy (2022) in her thesis analyses the reason why Indonesia use Darmasiswa scholarship as a soft power instrument towards Madagascar. She pointed out that there are three factors that drive Indonesian government granting scholarship to international students, in this case, Madagascar, which are cultural promotion, educational promotion, and tourism promotion. By giving scholarship to international students, Indonesia can promote its culture, encourage international students to study in Indonesia, and attract more tourist to come to Indonesia.

Moreover, Indonesia also leverages language as a means of soft power diplomacy through the "Bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing" (BIPA) or Indonesian Language for Foreigners program. A study conducted by Collins et al. (2020) examines the implementation of BIPA programme in Thailand in which it found that the programme has effectively contributed to promotion of Indonesian language and culture. It resulted in growing interest among Thai students to learn Indonesian language as it is important to prepare ASEAN Economic Community and increasing number of Thai tourists visting Indonesia.

Similarly, the role of language extends beyond Southeast Asia, as it also influences perceptions of Indonesia in Australia, Hill (2016) observed that teaching Indonesian language has positively impacted the perception of Indonesia among Australians. He pointed out that the greater one's understanding about Indonesia, the more inclined they are to view the society in positive way. Therefore, considering the significance of the geo-strategic and economic relationship between two neighbouring countries, as well as the potential "soft power"

advantages stemming from language programs, he argues that it would be advisable for the governments of both Australia and Indonesia to allocate resources towards Indonesian language support in Australia. This approach could serve as a means of addressing the warm perception that a majority of Australians hold towards their closest neighbour (Hill, 2016, p.12).

Indonesia has effectively harnessed digital diplomacy to enhance its soft power, particularly through the "Wonderful Indonesia" initiative. As discussed by Muhammad Fahrizal et al. (2022), this program leverages social media content to promote Indonesian culture to a broader audience, resulting in a significant increase in tourism from 2011 to 2019. The initiative utilizes the official website, www.indonesia.travel/id, and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, making its tourism offerings accessible to both domestic and international visitors (Muhammad Fahrizal et al., 2022).

This digital strategy is further complemented by paid promotions on travel websites such as TripAdvisor, Agoda, and Ctrip, as well as broadcasts on national Chinese television channels like CCTV, thereby increasing visibility and engagement with potential tourists. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has also collaborated with social media influencers to embed the "Wonderful Indonesia" brand within popular culture, enhancing its outreach and impact (Muhammad Fahrizal et al., 2022).

A specific example of successful digital engagement occurred during Indonesia's G20 Presidency in 2022, where interactive quizzes on the Instagram account @indonesia.g20 fostered significant audience participation (Agung & Intentilia, 2022). These quizzes not only encouraged followers to engage but also highlighted the effectiveness of interactive content in promoting cultural awareness. Overall, Indonesia's adoption of digital diplomacy, leveraging technological innovations and social media, supports its foreign policy objectives, including citizen protection, peace promotion, and economic cooperation, while enhancing its global image and fostering deeper connections with the international community (Triwibowo, 2023).

c. Soft Power Diplomacy of Indonesia in Azerbaijan

Among the studies accessed explaining Indonesia's soft power diplomacy practices in Azerbaijan is Cindy (2019) which studied the motivation behind Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in Azerbaijan through Wonderful Indonesia campaign in 2016 to 2017. The study found that Azerbaijani people are interested in Indonesian culture due to its distinctive characteristic compared to the culture in their neighbouring countries. The research is conducted in 2019;

therefore, it could not provide any information on the current development of Indonesia's cultural activity.

In addition to the insights provided by Cindy, another study conducted by Putera & Khairunnisa (2023) explain the role of Indonesian students in Azerbaijan in who act as a non-state actor of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy. It discussed that Indonesian students in Azerbaijan who are affiliated with Indonesian Student and Youth Association in Azerbaijan have a direct contribution in promoting Indonesia in Azerbaijan. Through their direct participation performing Indonesian cultural performances in several events and their collaboration with the Indonesia Studies Centre in teaching Indonesian language through conversation club, they play a vital role in soft power diplomacy effort. The study concluded Indonesian students in Azerbaijan are agent of culture and agent of peace that can represent a positive image of Indonesia to Azerbaijani society.

Moreover, these studies complement each other by illustrating different facets of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, highlighting both institutional efforts and grassroots involvement. Both studies above are qualitative research where the data is obtained through interview with officials from Indonesian Embassy in Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia as well study of literature from various sources including academic journals and online resources. By doing interview, they could comprehensively grasp the implementation of Indonesia's soft diplomacy in the form of culture and education. However, it is observed that both studies provide less understanding on the role and contribution of Indonesia Studies Centre in soft diplomacy efforts of Indonesia in Azerbaijan as the main case of this thesis.

Building on these findings, the latest study on Indonesia's soft power approach towards Azerbaijan is conducted by (Khairunnisa, 2024) outlining the importance of soft power in the form of cultural diplomacy in Azerbaijan. It revealed that using culture into Indonesia's diplomatic strategies in Azerbaijan is important for building a strong connection and trust between the two nations. It highlights the importance of culture in the bilateral relations. Unlike other studies on Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations, this research uses quantitative method which the data is obtained through survey and resulted a comprehensive explanation about cultural diplomacy practices of Indonesia in Azerbaijan from a general perspective.

In light of these insights, it is evident that further exploration is needed to fully understand the dynamics of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. To conclude, in the literature, there is still a lack of comprehension of Indonesia-Azerbaijan bilateral relations

especially in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy practices in Azerbaijan as there has been a scarcity on the study conducted on this subject. To fill this gap and broaden the insight on the bilateral relations, particularly on the implementation of soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan and the role of both state and non-state actors, this thesis observes that the contribution of Centre of Indonesian Studies to Indonesia's soft power in Azerbaijan needs a special attention. Although the practice of soft diplomacy of Indonesia in Azerbaijan is mostly carried out by the embassy as it can access more resources, the centre remains an important non-state actor in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan regardless how significant the contribution and the outcome.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

The term "soft power diplomacy" is rarely used in most of academic literature as an independent concept. It is often being associated with soft power, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. To avoid misconception about the terms, Mutsaka (2013) provide a good illustration of connection between them through this figure:

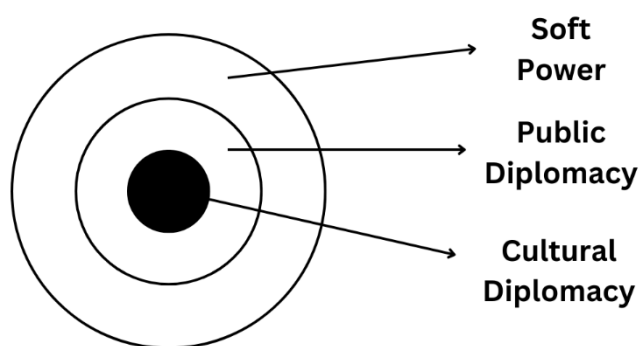


Figure 1.2.1 Soft Power Tools

This picture shows the relationship between soft power, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy reflecting that cultural diplomacy is a type of public diplomacy which is one of ways to wield soft power. In this thesis soft power diplomacy is used as a wide concept which comprises both public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy as well as nation branding. This section will discuss further about those concepts separately.

a. Soft Power

As the foundation of soft power diplomacy concept, it is important to understand the concept of soft power. Soft power as a concept is popularised by Joseph Nye in his work in 1990. Explaining power, he states that power is ability to influence others in order to get wanted results. He further states that power defined by politicians and diplomat is often associated with

the possession of particular resources. According to this definition, there are several factors that contribute to power and influence which include number of population, size of territory, natural resources, economic strength, military capabilities, and political stability (Nye, 1990. p. 154). By this, it is understood that power of a state is measured by their possession on these factors.

In this context, it is essential to examine how the understanding of power has evolved over time. Traditionally, as in the early of 20th century, power of a nation is mainly measured by its military strength as the period was characterized with competition of military capabilities among states during the world wars and the cold war. However, Nye argues that the definition of power is gradually shifting away from emphasizing on military force. In addition to that, geography, population, natural resources are becoming relatively less important due to the changing perspective and priorities in modern society in which the development of technology, education, and economic growth are increasingly gaining significance in international power (Nye, 1990. p. 154). This evolution led him to develop the concepts of hard power and soft power.

Expanding on this foundation, the two aspects of power as developed by Nye are distinct in how they gain power or the source of power. The source of hard power often refers to traditional concept of power in which focus on military and economic strength. Conversely, the soft power or what Nye mentions as “the second face of power” refers to “*the ability to affect other to obtain the outcomes one wants to through attraction rather than coercion or payment*” (Nye, 2008). These two types of power are connected because they both involve the ability to influence others and achieve desired outcomes.

To fully grasp the effectiveness of soft power, it is crucial to identify the foundational resources that contribute to its influence. The source of country’s soft power in accordance with Nye is primarily dependent on three key resources which are its culture, its political values and its foreign policy. These resources include the attractiveness of a country’s culture to other nations, the consistency of its political values both domestically and internationally, and the legitimacy of its foreign policies. These elements collectively contribute to a country’s ability to exert influence and shape perceptions in international arena (Nye, 2004a).

Building on this framework, the European Union (EU) strategically employs its political values as a vital source of soft power to cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships with other nations. By emphasizing democratic values and multilateral initiatives, the EU exemplifies the policy of Europeanisation, particularly during its enlargement process (E. Mustafayev, 2022b). Within the spectrum of soft power resources, culture emerges as a primary driver that

significantly influences a nation's global presence. According to Nye, culture can be defined as the collection of beliefs and behaviours that give a society its sense of meaning which also possesses numerous manifestations. He separates between high culture and popular culture. High culture encompasses art, literature, and education that interests elites as well as educated people while popular culture emphasises on entertainment such as music, movies, media, and other types of shows which reflect the interest of general population (Nye, 2004b). Both high and popular culture play crucial roles in shaping national identity and fostering international relations through cultural diplomacy.

While both forms of culture are important, high culture is often employed strategically as a means for nations to promote their cultural heritage and intellectual achievements on the global stage. In contrast to high culture, which tends to cater to a more elite audience, popular culture has emerged as a crucial instrument for cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of globalization. As example, institutions such as the Alliance Française and the Yunus Emre Institute employ high culture as a form of soft power, advancing language, literature, and the arts to cultivate mutual understanding and collaboration across nations (Eren, 2020).

On the other hand, popular culture has become a crucial instrument for cultural diplomacy, especially within the framework of globalisation. Pop culture has been used successfully by countries like Turkey to counteract negative perceptions caused by domestic political issues, thereby increasing their soft power (Donelli, 2019). The attractiveness of popular culture can transcend political boundaries, allowing for a more accessible and engaging relationship for international communities. This difference between high culture and popular culture shows how countries can use both type of culture to achieve their political goals and strengthen relations with other countries.

b. Public Diplomacy

The term “Public Diplomacy” as universally acknowledged by academicians in modern period was first coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965 stating that it concerns the impact of public opinion on the development and implementation of foreign policies. It includes parts of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacy, such as how governments shape public opinion in other countries, how private groups and interests in one country interact with those in another, how foreign affairs are reported and how that affects policy, how diplomats and foreign correspondents talk to each other, and how people from different cultures talk to each other (Snow & Cull, 2020).

Building on this foundational understanding, public diplomacy can be seen as a strategic tool for governments seeking to engage with foreign populations and promote their soft power. According to Nye, public diplomacy refers as a tool used by government in order to communicate with and attract the people of other countries, not only their governments. He emphasises that public diplomacy tries to bring resources that produce soft power to people's attention by broadcasting, supporting culture exports, organising exchanges, and other things. However, he claims that public diplomacy might lead to the opposite effect in which it cannot produce soft power if the content of the country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive to the audiences (Nye, 2008).

In contrast to traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy focuses on "winning hearts and minds," a phrase used by Rexhaj & Krasniqi (2013) to describe the efforts of governments, organizations, and individuals to disseminate messages and attract international audiences. They argue that this approach encompasses a variety of activities, including cultural exchanges, educational initiatives, media involvement, and public speaking events. These actions are designed to promote the values, interests, and policies of a state or organization while fostering a favourable perception among the international community.

In alignment with this understanding Leonard et al. (2002) identify several impacts that public diplomacy can achieve. First, getting people to know more about our country, making them think about it, changing their minds, and changing their negative views. Second, to make people appreciate our country more, to create positive views, and to get others to see global problems from the same point of view. Third, engaging people with our country which includes strengthening relations through different things like education reform and scientific cooperation, encouraging people to see us as a good place to visit, study, or do online learning; getting them to buy our products; and helping them understand and agree with our values. And lastly, influencing people, which means encouraging business to invest, public to support our position, and politicians to see us as a good partner.

Building on this framework, Jan Melissen defines the concept of the new public diplomacy, citing Paul Sharp's brief definition of public diplomacy as the process of building direct relationships with people in a country to further the goals and ideals of those being represented. This definition aligns with Hans Tuch's view of public diplomacy as the process by which a government communicates with foreign citizens to help them understand its ideas, ideals, institutions, culture, and national goals (Melissen, 2005. p. 11-12). Thus, it is clear that

public diplomacy is exercised by governments in direct relationships with foreign societies to achieve national and policy objectives, one of which is to strengthen a country's soft power.

c. Cultural Diplomacy

Understanding the universally accepted meaning of cultural diplomacy is difficult. As Ambassador Cyntia P. Schneider stated, it is "hard to define, but you'd know it if you saw it" (Schneider, 2006). She mentions cultural diplomacy as "the use of creative expression and exchanges of ideas, information, and people to increase mutual understanding". This argument is in line with Milton Cummings as the most referred definition in the study of cultural diplomacy. As cited by the UNESCO in its official page, he describes cultural diplomacy as the "exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (UNESCO, 2022). In a similar manner, the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in its web page defines the term as "a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond" (Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.). The offered definitions above emphasise the exchange of culture as the practice of cultural diplomacy and the aim that cultural diplomacy will to achieve which is to increase understanding between people and promote national interests.

As an alternative concept, Nicholas J Cull argues that cultural diplomacy is a type of public diplomacy which is a way for a country to interact with the people of another country as part of its foreign policy (Cull, 2010) while Saaida (2023) claims that cultural diplomacy is a strategy of soft power. This supports the idea of interconnection between cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power. Cull further defines cultural diplomacy as an attempt by actors to control the global community by promoting cultural resources and achievements abroad as well as facilitating other cultures to share them (Cull, 2009). Summarising all concepts, Pajtinka offers a different approach on cultural diplomacy as a set of activities conducted directly by or in collaboration with a state's diplomatic authorities to promote its cultural policy interests abroad (Pajtinka, 2014).

In practice, cultural diplomacy is implemented through various activities with the exchange of culture between nations being the most common example. Long before the term was theorized in the contemporary period, the tradition of cultural exchange among political rulers and kingdoms as a form of diplomacy had been traced back thousands of years. Ancient monarchs presented valuable cultural items through their messengers as a way to build

relationships with other kingdoms (Zaharna, 2019. p. 119-120). This is similar to one of the forms of cultural diplomacy suggested by Cull (2010) referred to as “the prestige gift,” which represents the most exceptional aspects of one's society. This implies that a country’s popular culture is facilitated by its government for presentation on the global stage. The Korean Wave, for example, has been promoted and utilized by the Korean government to foreign audiences (Jang & Paik, 2012). Through its Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (KMCST), Korean government also provide financial aid to art academics to support the development of its artists (Lee, 2022).

The Korean case above reflected the development of cultural diplomacy in modern era. Thanks to the advancement of technology by which enable people to access different culture in various types such as music, film, art, literature, media and many more. It is now easier for state to engage with international citizens in its efforts to promote culture for the purpose of creating its positive image in global stage. For instance, Japan during the post war period utilised the Orient project by UNESCO as a cultural diplomacy strategy promoting its national interest which presents Japan as peace-oriented rather than having warlike behaviour (Huttunen, 2019). This phenomenon has allowed states and other actors to exercise cultural diplomacy in a broader range to promote its national values and achieve its goals.

d. Nation Branding

Nation branding as defined by Dinnie Keith is “the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2016). She offers a complex definition of a nation brand emphasizing the necessity of including national identity. A simpler concept presented by Tijani et al. (2024) states that nation branding involves “the creation and management of a nation’s image and products to promote various aspects of its identity”. Ying Fan proposes a new definition of nation branding as “a process by which a nation’s images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to enhance the country’s reputation among a target international audience” (Fan, 2010). This definition highlights the need to transform from “branding the nation” to “managing nation’s image” which clarifies what can and cannot be branded. To summarize, nation branding can be understood as an effort aimed at influencing and manage a nation's image among global audiences. It involves developing a unique and favourable image that represents the nation's cultural identity, values, and capabilities. Such public perception aims to attract foreign investment, promote tourism, and improve the nation's reputation globally.

Besides, there are some debates among studies arguing on the linkage between nation branding and other theories. Some argue that nation branding is a component and instrument in the development and implementation of soft power (Brilyanti, 2021; Felknerova, 2014; Gosling, 2021; Günek, 2018), some claim that it is associated with public diplomacy (Simonin, 2008; Szondi, 2008; Tecmen, 2018; Tóth, 2019), while some emphasize the intercorrelation between nation branding and cultural diplomacy (Hurn, 2016; Hurn & Tomalin, 2013; Papaioannou, 2022). This illustrates that there is an undeniable interrelationship between soft power, public diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy. All these concepts aim toward the same goal: promoting national interests related to enhancing a country's image within the international arena, using shared elements like culture to increase influence globally.

To conclude, soft power serves as the ultimate goal, while public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding are the strategies employed to achieve that goal. This correlation is reflected in the concept of soft power diplomacy.

These concepts are used in this thesis in order to understand how soft power diplomacy is implemented by Indonesia in its relations with Azerbaijan highlighting the significant contribution of non-state actor like Centre of Indonesian Studies in Azerbaijan. This effort aims to improve Indonesia's image among Azerbaijan citizen which might contribute to strengthening the bilateral relations in the process.

1.3. Hypothesis

Based on the literature and conceptual framework above, soft power diplomacy is implemented by state and non-state actors in order to achieve national goals such improving a country's reputation in the eyes of the global public and maintaining good relationship with other actors. This thesis entitled "Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy in Azerbaijan: A Study on the Centre of Indonesian Studies at Azerbaijan University of Languages" notes that the implementation of soft power diplomacy by Indonesia in its relationship with Azerbaijan is done by both state and non-state actors. As the state representative, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku is conducting a diplomatic mission maintaining and strengthening the bilateral relations with Azerbaijan through various efforts, including soft power diplomacy. Moreover, the contribution of non-state actors like Centre of Indonesian Studies at Azerbaijan University of Languages is worth special attention.

This thesis possesses twofold hypothesis. The first hypothesis posits that the "Indonesian government's implementation of soft power diplomacy through the establishment of cultural initiatives in Azerbaijan, particularly within educational and cultural frameworks,"

as the independent variable, is expected to lead to "enhanced positive perceptions and understanding of Indonesia among Azerbaijani society," as the dependent variable. This hypothesis is grounded in theories of soft power, which emphasise the role of cultural diplomacy in shaping national images and fostering positive international relationships.

The second hypothesis suggests that "the active involvement of non-state actors, specifically the alumni of the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) in promoting Indonesian culture and values in Azerbaijan," as the independent variable, will contribute to "strengthening Indonesia-Azerbaijan bilateral relations through increased cultural awareness and mutual understanding," as the dependent variable. This hypothesis is informed by theories of non-state actors' roles in cultural diplomacy, highlighting how grassroots cultural interactions can bolster a nation's soft power.

These hypotheses aim to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between Indonesia's soft power diplomacy initiatives, the CIS's contribution, and the resulting impact on bilateral relations, providing a scholarly foundation for the study that aligns with academic rigor and allows for empirical testing.

II CHAPTER. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Approach and Design

a. Overview of Qualitative Research

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan, focusing on the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) at Azerbaijan University of Languages. This approach is effective for exploring social values, cultural perceptions, and behavioural patterns, which are key elements in understanding soft power dynamics (Mack et al., 2005). By investigating the roles of non-state actors, such as CIS alumni, in cultural promotion, the study captures alumni experiences, cultural interactions, and their impact on Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations. It emphasizes the broader social and cultural dynamics that contribute to Indonesia's soft power efforts, extending beyond formal diplomatic engagements.

b. Descriptive Qualitative Research as the Chosen Method

The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to examine Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan, focusing on the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) at Azerbaijan University of Languages and its alumni. Through in-depth and semi-structured interviews, it aims to offer detailed insights into CIS activities and the roles of alumni in promoting Indonesian culture. This method captures cultural norms and interactions, crucial for understanding soft power strategies, by combining primary data from interviews with secondary sources like academic literature and official documents (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Mack et al., 2005).

The approach effectively demonstrates how CIS's language programs, cultural events, and educational initiatives contribute to Indonesia's soft power. It identifies patterns in alumni interactions, revealing both successes and challenges in cultural promotion. By integrating primary and secondary data, the study provides a thorough analysis of how CIS enhances Indonesia's international image, emphasizing education and culture as key drivers for strengthening global relations and mutual understanding (Halperin & Heath, 2012).

2.2. Data Collection Methods

This research utilizes both primary and secondary data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of CIS in Azerbaijan and the contributions of alumni in promoting Indonesian culture. The integration of both data types aims to provide a holistic view of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy.

a. Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection serves as the foundation of this research methodology, enabling the researcher to gather direct insights from relevant stakeholders involved in soft power diplomacy initiatives. The primary data were collected through two main methods: in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews, each designed to capture different aspects of the respondents' perspectives.

1 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are central to this study, providing detailed insights into the views of individuals involved with CIS and Indonesia's broader diplomatic efforts in Azerbaijan. The method focuses on a small group of key figures, including Prof. Habib Zarbaliyev and Ms. Laura Zarbaliyeva as the founder and the head of CIS, as well as officials from the Indonesian Embassy, such as H.E. Ambassador Hildi Hamid and Ms. Wanda Widya, the head of Information and Socio-Culture Affairs. Additionally, eleven alumni from the Indonesian Studies program were included, representing diverse professional backgrounds, which enriches the analysis of CIS programs and Indonesia-Azerbaijan relations.

2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews complement the in-depth interviews by allowing a blend of structured and unstructured questions, facilitating broader exploration of respondents' perspectives. This method is effective for gathering factual information and deeper insights into personal experiences and views (Halperin & Heath, 2012). The flexibility of this approach enables a comprehensive understanding of CIS's effectiveness in cultural diplomacy, capturing both quantitative and qualitative data.

b. Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data enriches and supports primary data findings, sourced from academic articles, books, journals, official documents, social media, and relevant websites. These sources provide context and validation for the interview results, offering historical background and a theoretical foundation to evaluate Indonesia's soft power strategy in Azerbaijan. By integrating secondary data with primary findings, the research creates a comprehensive analysis that connects individual experiences to broader trends in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy

2.3. Interview Process

The interview process was systematically designed to gather in-depth information regarding CIS's role in Azerbaijan and the contributions of its alumni. It involved several stages, including respondent selection, interview logistics, and documentation.

a. Selection of Interview Respondents

In selecting the interviewees for this study, a deliberate approach was adopted to ensure that the respondents were representative of various key stakeholders involved in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. The selection criteria focused on three main groups: founders and leaders of the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS), officials from the Indonesian Embassy in Baku, and alumni of the Indonesian Studies program at Azerbaijan University of Languages.

The founders and leaders of CIS, such as Prof. Habib Zerbaliyev and Ms. Laura Zerbaliyeva, were chosen for their critical roles in initiating and implementing cultural activities, providing firsthand insights into the centre's operations and challenges. Officials from the Indonesian Embassy, including the ambassador and the head of Information and Socio-Culture Affairs, were selected to gain perspectives on Indonesia's diplomatic strategies and collaboration with CIS. Additionally, eleven alumni were included to represent a diverse range of professional backgrounds and experiences, enriching the analysis with various viewpoints on the effectiveness of the programs offered by CIS and their contributions to promoting Indonesian culture.

Addressing potential biases is crucial in this research. For example, embassy officials might present overly positive views on Indonesia's soft power strategies due to their vested interests in promoting diplomatic relations. Likewise, alumni may share biased opinions influenced by their personal experiences within the program, potentially focusing more on the positives while downplaying challenges. Furthermore, respondents from CIS could also exhibit bias, as their connection to the centre may lead them to emphasize the successes of their programs while minimizing any shortcomings. To mitigate these biases, the study employed neutral and open-ended questions, encouraging respondents to provide comprehensive and balanced responses. This approach aimed to capture a wide array of perspectives, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy efforts in Azerbaijan.

b. Interview Format and Logistics

1 Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted primarily at two locations: the CIS office and the Indonesian Embassy in Baku, involving discussions with CIS leadership, the Indonesian Ambassador, and diplomats. This in-person approach offered significant advantages, such as capturing nuanced responses, including facial expressions, body language, and voice intonation, which added depth to the data collected. It also allowed the researcher to adapt follow-up questions effectively based on spontaneous responses, fostering a more open dialogue and better rapport with respondents. Conducting interviews in familiar environments led to richer, more authentic insights into participants' experiences, motivations, and challenges related to CIS programs and Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. While logistical challenges like scheduling and travel were encountered, the approach facilitated longer and more detailed conversations, proving highly effective in gathering comprehensive information from key stakeholders actively engaged in CIS initiatives and diplomatic activities.

2 Online Interviews

Online interviews were conducted to engage with respondents, particularly alumni based in various locations who were not easily accessible for in-person interviews. Platforms like Zoom and Google Forms enabled effective communication, allowing respondents to share their insights from different geographical settings. This format offered time and accessibility flexibility, facilitating participation from alumni with diverse backgrounds. However, online interviews posed challenges such as technical issues, unstable internet connections, and limited observation of non-verbal cues like body language. To address these issues, the researcher prepared thoroughly by testing the connection and equipment beforehand. While online interactions had some limitations in capturing nuanced responses, they effectively provided detailed data and ensured continuous data collection, covering perspectives that would have been missed due to logistical constraints.

c. Documentation and Transcription of Interviews

Interviews were meticulously documented through audio and video recordings, which were transcribed into text for analysis. The transcription process ensured accuracy, capturing details like pauses and tone shifts to provide deeper insights into respondents' perspectives. Data was analysed thematically, aligning with the research questions while preserving the integrity of the information.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis procedures integrate primary and secondary data while linking them to the established conceptual framework. The approach aims to understand the roles of CIS and its alumni in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan.

a. Linking Primary Data with the Conceptual Framework

The analysis begins by aligning primary data with the conceptual framework based on theories of soft power diplomacy, non-state actors, and cultural education strategies. This theoretical grounding helps interpret how CIS and its alumni promote Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan.

b. Coding and Categorization of Interview Data

The coding and categorization process is crucial in organizing qualitative data based on themes derived from interviews. It involves breaking down interview data into smaller units and identifying relevant themes, such as alumni roles in cultural promotion, collaboration between the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) and the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI), and challenges in soft power diplomacy. The coding process began with a review of interview transcripts to understand the issues raised by respondents. Data segments were then coded according to themes, like "CIS and KBRI collaboration" or "challenges in cultural diplomacy."

After coding, the data were categorized into broader categories, such as CIS's role in language education, cultural program impacts, and alumni strategies in promoting Indonesian culture. This categorization revealed patterns, like alumni engagement in art exhibitions, batik workshops, and culinary events that have boosted Azerbaijani interest in Indonesian culture. Moreover, the strong partnership between alumni and KBRI in organizing these programs highlights the effectiveness of collaborative efforts in expanding Indonesia's soft power.

c. Integration of Secondary Data with Interview Findings

Secondary data were integrated with interview findings to provide context and support for the primary analysis. Sources included academic articles, books, journals, news, official documents, and social media related to Indonesia's soft power strategy. This integration not only enriched the primary findings but also validated or contrasted the perspectives obtained from interviews. Additionally, secondary data offered insights into broader elements, such as Indonesia's cultural promotion policies and other programs. By comparing soft power strategies from other countries, the study was able to better assess the effectiveness of the Centre of

Indonesian Studies (CIS) programs and alumni collaboration in Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy efforts.

Integrating secondary data with interview findings enriches the analysis by providing context and supporting primary data. This integration helps validate perspectives from interviews and offers insights into broader elements of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of this research, especially in the context of qualitative data collection through in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The researcher aims to ensure that all stages of the research, from data collection to analysis, are conducted ethically and in accordance with scientific research standards. The ethical considerations applied in this study include measures to obtain informed consent, protect participants' rights and confidentiality, and ensure data privacy and security.

a. Ensuring Informed Consent

Informed consent was crucial, with participants receiving detailed information about the study's purpose and data usage. This process fostered trust, ensuring a comfortable environment for respondents to share information.

b. Data Privacy and Security

Data privacy and security measures were implemented to protect interview data. All digital files were stored securely, and sensitive information was presented anonymously to safeguard participants' identities.

2.6. Limitations of the Methodology

The methodology used in this study, which focuses on Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan through the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) and alumni contributions, follows a descriptive qualitative approach. While this approach offers deep insights into complex phenomena, it also presents certain limitations related to data collection and analysis, which must be acknowledged. This section outlines the main challenges encountered during the research process.

a. Limitations in Data Collection

Data collection for this research involved in-depth and semi-structured interviews with CIS founders, Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) officials, and alumni of the Indonesian Studies program in Azerbaijan. Scheduling conflicts and geographical constraints posed significant challenges, especially with KBRI officials' busy schedules and some alumni residing outside

Azerbaijan. To overcome these issues, online interviews via Zoom were conducted, although technical issues, like unstable internet connections, occasionally disrupted communication. Potential biases in responses were another limitation, as KBRI officials might have presented overly positive views, while alumni focused more on personal experiences. To ensure more objective results, neutral and open-ended questions were used, encouraging comprehensive and balanced responses from participants.

b. Limitations in Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study faced limitations due to the complex nature of Indonesia's soft power dynamics in Azerbaijan. Although the descriptive qualitative approach provided detailed insights, it could not fully generalize findings or establish direct causal relationships. Thematic analysis revealed key themes, but some subtle nuances were overlooked, introducing potential bias when connecting results to the conceptual framework. While qualitative data offered a strong contextual understanding of CIS and alumni roles, it was insufficient in measuring the overall impact of Indonesia's soft power. Consequently, this research is primarily exploratory, offering meaningful insights into cultural diplomacy but lacking statistical validation for broader generalizations, setting a foundation for future studies.

2.7. Summary of the Methodology

This study investigates Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan, focusing on the role of CIS and its alumni. It employs a descriptive qualitative approach, effective for exploring the complexities of cultural diplomacy. Data were gathered through interviews with CIS founders, KBRI officials, and alumni, complemented by secondary sources. Thematic analysis identified key themes, revealing how CIS and alumni contribute to Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. Despite limitations such as potential biases and limited generalizability, the methodology provides valuable insights into non-quantifiable cultural dynamics and highlights the importance of CIS in fostering cross-cultural ties. The integration of both primary and secondary data supports a comprehensive evaluation of Indonesia's soft power strategy in Azerbaijan.

III CHAPTER. INDONESIA-AZERBAIJAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

Indonesia recognized the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and it established the diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan in 1992. The bilateral relations had shown a significant development when Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Jakarta in 2004 after President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on the establishment of Azerbaijan embassy in Indonesia in 2003. As a reciprocal gesture, Indonesian opened its embassy in Baku in 2010 (Azerbaijan Embassy in Indonesia, n.d.). Although the establishment of diplomatic mission in both countries is still relatively young, the development of bilateral relations between the two countries has marked positive progress. Several high official visits and meetings have been conducted which resulted in various joint agreements. Furthermore, both countries share common views on both regional and international issues of mutual interests and engage in close cooperation in diplomacy at multilateral forums. The trends on the progress of bilateral relations in various fields comprising politics, economy, and socio-culture are explained further in this chapter.

3.1. Bilateral Relations in Politics

The growing bilateral relationship is rooted in historical connections, notably President Sukarno's visit to the Azerbaijan SSR in 1956 (KBRI Baku, n.d.). This visit not only established diplomatic ties but also fostered goodwill and a commitment to collaboration, laying the groundwork for future cooperation across multiple domains. Despite Azerbaijan's status as part of the Soviet Union at that time, Sukarno's engagement highlighted Indonesia's intention to build relationships in the region. The momentum generated by this early interaction proved beneficial in the years that followed, especially after Azerbaijan gained independence, allowing both nations to continue strengthening their partnership.

Thus, Sukarno's visit is not merely a historical event; it represents a significant turning point that initiated a trajectory of mutual support and partnership, reinforcing the notion that diplomatic relations can flourish even before formal recognition. The momentum generated by this visit has been instrumental in shaping the ongoing diplomatic dialogue and collaboration between the two countries today. The continuity of political goodwill between Indonesia and Azerbaijan can be observed through the efforts of both countries to strengthen diplomatic relations and cooperation across various fields. After Azerbaijan gained independence from the Soviet Union, Indonesia promptly recognized Azerbaijan's sovereignty and established formal diplomatic relations. This action reflects Indonesia's goodwill and commitment to continuing

the relationship that had been initiated during Sukarno's visit to the Azerbaijan SSR (Baidlowi & Pradana, 2022)

In light of this historical context, Indonesia and Azerbaijan have also fostered a collaborative partnership within international and multilateral forums, actively supporting each other in organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Report News Agency, 2022). Their cooperation is reflected in joint efforts to address global challenges, enhance mutual interests, and promote peace. Indonesia and Azerbaijan have established a collaborative relationship within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), focusing on various common interests, including political unity, cultural exchanges, and economic development. This partnership is particularly evident in the support expressed by Azerbaijani youth for their government's initiatives, which underscores the importance of Indonesian contributions to OIC activities. The collaboration between the two nations reflects their shared commitment to address issues faced by the Muslim community globally, fostering solidarity among member states (AZERTAC, 2022). Additionally, Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) underscores their commitment to uphold principles established during the Bandung Conference, aiming for a unified response to contemporary issues (Anthoni, 2019).

Building on this foundation, the relationship between the two countries in the political area has shown positive progress. Following the establishment of diplomatic missions, Indonesia and Azerbaijan have organized various official meetings. Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) and Policy Planning Dialogues (PPD) were held in Baku and Jakarta, attended by high officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of both countries (KBRI Baku, n.d.).

This cordial relationship is also evident at the parliamentary level, exemplified by the formation of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation between the People's Representative Council of Indonesia (DPR RI) and the Azerbaijan Parliament (Mili Majlis) in October 2020 (KBRI Baku, n.d.). Since then, several official visits between the two parliaments have been organized in the last few years (BKSAP DPR RI, n.d.). The two countries have also signed several Memorandum of Understanding and joint declarations in various areas, further solidifying their cooperation.

The cooperation between the parliaments of Indonesia and Azerbaijan has the potential to significantly impact bilateral relations at the legislative level. Firstly, this initiative can enhance mutual understanding and communication between the two nations, fostering the exchange of information and best practices in policymaking. Additionally, such collaboration may lead to agreements and treaties that support shared interests in areas such as economy, education, and culture. By promoting dialogue between their legislative bodies, both countries can establish a stronger foundation for future cooperation.

Apart from this, as secular democratic countries, Indonesia and Azerbaijan are both committed to uphold values of democracy in their countries. Representative from both countries have exchanged visits to monitor the electoral procedures in each state. Former Indonesian Vice President, Jusuf Kalla, accompanied by his Centrist Asia Pacific Democrats International (CAPDI) visited Azerbaijan in 2016 to observe the presidential elections in the state (Anjaiah, 2016; Azertac, 2013). Reciprocally, in 2024, a member of Azerbaijan Milli Majlis, Aliabbas Salahzade, came to Indonesia to check the country's preparation for the election and evaluate the level of people's participation in the election (The Milli Majlis, 2024). This gesture signifies that Indonesia and Azerbaijan have cultivated a foundation of mutual trust aimed at promoting democratic principles, guaranteeing free and fair elections, and building confidence in the electoral process.

Thus, to conclude, since the beginning of diplomatic relations establishment, both Indonesia and Azerbaijan have enjoyed the amicable relationship in several political aspects. The foundation of this friendly relationship has been built even long before the official arrangement was established, and it indicates that an even deeper connection may develop in the future.

3.2. Bilateral Relations in Economy

An analysis of Indonesia's export-import trends over the past five years reveals several important patterns. In September 2024, Indonesia's export value reached US\$22.08 billion, reflecting a decrease of 5.80 percent compared to August 2024. Meanwhile, imports in the same month amounted to US\$18.82 billion, down 8.91 percent from the previous month (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024a)

From January to September 2024, China remained the largest export destination, with a value of US\$42,531.5 million, followed by the United States and India. The main commodities exported to China include iron and steel, mineral fuels, as well as nickel and related products.

On the import side, consumer goods, raw materials, and capital goods showed variations in their contributions to total imports. Raw materials accounted for the largest share, contributing 73.00 percent of total imports (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024a).

Negara Tujuan	Nilai FOB (juta US\$)					Perubahan (%)			Peran thd total ekspor Nonmigas Jan-Sep 2024 (%)
	Sep 2023*	Agt 2024	Sep 2024*	Jan-Sep 2023*	Jan-Sep 2024*	y-on-y	m-to-m	c-to-c	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
ASEAN	3.489,4	4.010,1	3.913,5	33.756,3	32.641,4	12,15	-2,41	-3,30	18,02
1. Singapura	625,5	617,6	657,9	6.458,9	5.353,0	5,17	6,53	-17,12	2,95
2. Malaysia	788,9	931,3	936,1	7.886,6	7.487,2	18,67	0,51	-5,06	4,13
3. Thailand	417,9	526,9	453,2	4.240,2	4.157,1	8,45	-13,98	-1,96	2,29
ASEAN Lainnya	1.657,1	1.934,3	1.866,3	15.170,6	15.644,1	12,62	-3,52	3,12	8,65
Uni Eropa	1.330,5	1.535,3	1.556,2	12.624,7	12.878,6	16,96	1,36	2,01	7,11
4. Jerman	165,7	225,9	195,4	1.987,2	1.744,8	17,89	-13,52	-12,20	0,96
5. Belanda	348,0	403,9	478,0	2.764,1	3.404,8	37,38	18,36	23,18	1,88
6. Italia	152,3	199,5	233,3	1.728,8	1.777,6	53,21	16,93	2,82	0,98
Uni Eropa Lainnya	664,5	706,0	649,5	6.144,6	5.951,4	-2,28	-8,00	-3,15	3,29
Negara Utama Lainnya	11.371,3	13.206,4	12.104,9	105.174,9	106.215,2	6,45	-8,34	0,99	58,64
7. Tiongkok	5.163,7	5.327,6	5.345,9	45.376,8	42.531,5	3,53	0,34	-6,27	23,48
8. Jepang	1.350,2	1.800,7	1.549,7	14.332,2	14.185,7	14,78	-13,94	-1,02	7,83
9. Amerika Serikat	1.834,0	2.607,6	2.216,4	17.400,3	19.168,4	20,85	-15,00	10,16	10,58
10. India	1.499,9	1.586,9	1.384,2	14.570,0	15.302,9	-7,71	-12,77	5,03	8,45
11. Australia	267,9	427,2	382,0	2.185,3	3.515,6	42,57	-10,59	60,88	1,94
12. Korea Selatan	688,5	930,5	691,4	6.315,7	6.841,5	0,42	-25,70	8,32	3,78
13. Taiwan	567,1	525,9	535,3	4.994,6	4.669,6	-5,62	1,78	-6,51	2,58
Total 13 Negara Tujuan	13.869,6	16.111,5	15.058,8	130.240,7	130.139,7	8,57	-6,53	-0,08	71,83
Lainnya	5.470,2	6.125,2	5.853,0	50.211,7	51.012,2	7,00	-4,44	1,59	28,17
Total Ekspor Non-migas	19.339,8	22.236,7	20.911,8	180.452,4	181.151,9	8,13	-5,96	0,39	100,00

Figure 3.2.1. Value of Indonesia's Non-oil and Gas Exports by Country of Destination, January-September 2024

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has experienced fluctuations in trade volume, largely influenced by the hydrocarbon sector. In April 2024, hydrocarbon production saw a year-on-year (yoy) decline of 3%, primarily due to a 4.8% drop in crude oil production, despite a 3% increase in natural gas extraction during the same period (Ramazanov, 2024).

In terms of trade trends, Azerbaijan's exports have decreased, while imports have surged significantly, rising by 38.3% yoy in April 2024, driven by substantial public investments. As a result, the trade surplus narrowed to 12% of GDP for the January-April 2024 period, down from 13.3% in the first quarter (Ramazanov, 2024).

External factors, such as global oil price fluctuations and OPEC+ policies, have also impacted Azerbaijan's oil production and exports. Azerbaijan has committed to maintaining its current production levels until the end of 2025 as part of the OPEC+ agreement (Ramazanov, 2024).

The economic implications of reduced energy exports alongside increased imports have led to a tighter trade surplus for Azerbaijan. However, the non-hydrocarbon sector has demonstrated robust growth, with activity in this area rising by 10.7% yoy in April 2024.

While the tightening trade surplus resulting from reduced energy exports and increased imports presents challenges for Azerbaijan, the robust growth in the non-hydrocarbon sector, which rose by 10.7% year-on-year in April 2024, highlights the resilience of the economy. This resilience is particularly significant given that energy remains a key sector and strategic advantage for Azerbaijan. The country's heavy reliance on hydrocarbon revenues, especially from oil and gas, positions it as a crucial player in European energy security and underscores the ongoing importance of this sector in driving national income and attracting investments.

Energy is regarded as a key sector and a strategic advantage for Azerbaijan, given the country's heavy reliance on revenue from hydrocarbon exports, particularly oil and gas. The oil and gas industry plays a dominant role in Azerbaijan's economy, serving as the primary source of national income. This reliance also positions Azerbaijan as a crucial player in ensuring energy security for Europe, as it functions as an international hub for energy transportation (Rzayev & Aliyev, 2023). There are several reasons why energy, particularly oil and gas, stands as a dominant sector and a strategic asset for Azerbaijan. The country's vast reserves of oil and gas have attracted significant investments, which have served as a primary driver of economic growth, especially in the post-independence period (F. Mustafayev et al., 2022). These abundant domestic reserves ensure energy security and form the backbone of Azerbaijan's foreign trade. Additionally, revenues from hydrocarbon exports have become a key contributor to the country's GDP, particularly after the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline began operations in 2005 (F. Mustafayev et al., 2022).

The significance of Azerbaijan's abundant domestic reserves not only ensures energy security but also plays a crucial role in its foreign trade, particularly as revenues from hydrocarbon exports have become a key contributor to the country's GDP. This economic strength has fostered essential relations between Azerbaijan and Indonesia, with notable progress in trade over the last five years, primarily dominated by the energy sector, which has favoured Azerbaijan as an energy-rich country.

The economic aspect has thus far been an essential part of the two countries' relations. The trade between Indonesia and Azerbaijan has shown a considerable progress in the last five years. However, the trade is dominated by energy sector which is more favourable to Azerbaijan as an energy rich country. Other than trade, the bilateral cooperation in the energy sector has

also been enhanced further. In 2021, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in energy sector between Ministry of Energy of Indonesia and Azerbaijan was signed on energy cooperation. Both agreed to collaborate in the development of oil and gas as well as renewable energy in the future (Kementerian ESDM, 2021).

In addition to the significant progress made in trade, particularly in the energy sector, the ongoing development of oil, gas, and renewable energy in Azerbaijan further bolsters bilateral economic relations and highlights the strategic importance of energy cooperation between the two nations.

The development of oil, gas, and renewable energy in Azerbaijan offers significant advantages for bilateral economic relations and energy sector cooperation. Azerbaijan's substantial oil and gas reserves position the country as a key player in the global energy market, enabling it to use energy as a tool for economic diplomacy to strengthen bilateral ties and attract foreign investment (Gojaeva et al., 2024). Focusing on renewable energy development further enhances Azerbaijan's international image as a nation committed to sustainability and carbon emission reduction. This aligns with global efforts to combat climate change, improving Azerbaijan's standing in international negotiations and fostering multilateral cooperation.

Moreover, investments in renewable energy create opportunities for international collaboration and foreign direct investment, contributing to economic growth and diversification. Projects like the construction of wind and solar power plants with international partners illustrate how economic diplomacy can attract foreign technology and capital (Gojaeva et al., 2024).

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has imported raw materials and ready-made products such as palm oil, wood, soap, instant coffee, and snacks from Indonesia. However, the total value of Indonesian export to Azerbaijan is still far behind Azerbaijan energy export in the last 2 years. This indicates that the trade balance between two countries is thus far dominated by Azerbaijan oil and gas export.

The trade imbalance between Indonesia and Azerbaijan arises from Azerbaijan's reliance on energy exports, particularly oil and gas, which limits the diversity of traded goods. Azerbaijan benefits from its hydrocarbon exports, while Indonesia primarily exports non-energy products like palm oil, textiles, and paper to Azerbaijan. This imbalance reflects Azerbaijan's energy-dominated economy, shaping a trade dynamic where Indonesia acts more as an importer without competing in the energy sector. As a result, Azerbaijan's trade strategy

focuses on maintaining its role as an energy supplier rather than diversifying imports (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.)



Figure 3.2.2. Export Comparison between Indonesia and Azerbaijan in 2022

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

In response to this trade imbalance, Indonesian government through its embassy made several efforts in increasing Indonesian export quantity to Azerbaijan. It offers to bridge the communication between entrepreneurs from both countries. Participating in trade event such as “Caspian Agro and Interfood Azerbaijan” in Baku, for instance, Indonesian entrepreneurs were facilitated to engage with Azerbaijani businessmen to explore and identify business prospects related to non-oil products in which Indonesia possesses significant potential (KBRI Baku, 2024a). Furthermore, business meetings were held annually in the last few years intended to attract Azerbaijan entrepreneurs to participate in “Trade Expo Indonesia” which provide opportunities for Azerbaijani companies to observe business potential from Indonesian companies (KBRI Baku, 2021g, 2022a, 2023c, 2024a). As a result, representatives from Azerbaijan companies participated in the expo and met with Indonesian businessmen. Additionally, in the last few years, official visits and business meetings were organised to several cities such as Ganja, Mingachevir, Nakhchivan, Sabirabad, Imishli, Qusar, and Sumgayit to observe business opportunities (KBRI Baku, 2021a, 2021d, 2021b, 2021e, 2022b, 2022c). This initiative is projected to raise Indonesia's export value, which remains considerably lower than Azerbaijan's.

3.3. Bilateral Relations in Socio-Culture

Besides economy and politics, Indonesia and Azerbaijan have also taken some approaches in socio-cultural field. In 1996, Azerbaijan "Sindo-ryu and Pencak Silat' Federation was established (Pencak Silat Federation of Azerbaijan, n.d.) and in 2017 Azerbaijan hosts European Pencak Silat Championship which participated by 120 martial artists from 11 countries (Azertac, 2017). Pencak Silat is a traditional martial art from Indonesian origin. It is not only a form of sport or an art of self-defence, but rather an art that has traditional and cultural values of Indonesia. Pencak Silat has also been recognized as UNSECO intangible world cultural heritage in 2019 (The Jakarta Post, 2019).

In social sector, a trend on the development of bilateral cooperation in governmental level is demonstrated by the agreement on cooperation in the provision of progressive state services between Minister of State Apparatus Utilization and Bureaucratic Reform of Indonesia (Menpan RB) and State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan which was signed in 2017 (ASAN Xidmət, 2017). This agreement allows Indonesia to learn from Azerbaijan in implementing public service model by ASAN Service in several cities in Indonesia including the capital, Jakarta. As a result of this implementation, Indonesia has successfully built 207 Public Service Mall (MPP) as a replica of Azerbaijan ASAN Service (HUMAS MENPANRB, 2014). Visits between Indonesian minister and head of Azerbaijan state agency as well as representative from Indonesian local government have also been conducted for further advancement of public service in Indonesia (ASAN Xidmət, 2024; Shahin, 2024; Sinambela, 2023). This cooperation marks a positive progress in the bilateral relations which leads to a successful result.

Furthermore, both countries have engaged further in education sector. Azerbaijan started earlier by establishing Indonesia Studies Program in 2006 followed by the creation of Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) in 2010 at Azerbaijan University of Languages, just a year prior to the official opening of the Indonesian embassy in Baku (Azerbaijan University of Languages, n.d.-b; Zarbaliyeva, 2014). The CIS plays a broader role by connecting scholars, students, and the public from both nations. It offers access to educational materials, Indonesian language classes, and cultural insights, making it a bridge for mutual understanding. This engagement not only supports university education but also helps enhance bilateral relations by fostering long-term cooperation in education and cultural exchange (Azerbaijan University of Languages, n.d.-b).

In addition, several students from this centre have actively participated in promoting Indonesia in Azerbaijan through events organized by Indonesian embassy in Azerbaijan. They have become an important non-state actor of Indonesian soft power diplomacy approach in Azerbaijan. Centre of Indonesian Studies and its engagement in Indonesian soft power diplomacy will be explained deeper in the chapter 5 of this thesis.

Similarly, in 2018, the Centre of Azerbaijani Culture was established in Indonesia on the initiative of the rector of Azerbaijan University of Languages, Kamal Abdulla. The centre was established in University of Indonesia, located in the main library of the university. It serves as a home for Azerbaijani cultural promotion and facilitates exchange program for the students and teachers. It has a great meeting hall where special events such as “Days of Azerbaijani Culture”, cultural exhibitions, and intellectual seminars are held (Azerbaijan University of Languages, n.d.-a). This initiative opens more opportunity for mutual understanding between Indonesia and Azerbaijan as well as strengthening bilateral relations in cultural and education field.

Student exchange is also practiced through scholarship programs that both countries offer. Such program has attracted many students from Indonesia and Azerbaijan to study in the respective countries. For instance, Indonesian government annually offers scholarships such as Darmasiswa and KNB Scholarships by Indonesian Ministry of Education (Darmasiswa, n.d.; KNB Scholarship, n.d.), as well as the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (IACS) by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ayudiana, 2023). Likewise, Azerbaijan government offers a special scholarship under Heydar Aliyev Foundation for students from OIC and NAM member states which include Indonesia (Azertac, 2023). A number of students from both countries have enjoyed the opportunity to study in the respective countries through such scholarship programs. Such scholarship programs may foster mutual understanding and respect between the two nations.

In regards of cooperation in education sector, Indonesian universities are actively seeking collaboration with Azerbaijani universities to enhance educational opportunities and promote academic exchange. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, for instance, is exploring potential collaborations with Azerbaijani universities, focusing on education and research. This partnership aims to provide Azerbaijani students with opportunities to study in Indonesia, promoting cultural exchange and academic enrichment. Potential areas of collaboration include joint research programs and student exchange initiatives, enhancing the educational experience for students from both countries. Such cooperation will not only deepen understanding of each

nation's culture but also strengthen bilateral ties Baku (KBRI Baku, 2024h). This initiative highlights Indonesia's commitment to fostering international educational partnerships.

Not only that, UNISMA (Universitas Islam Malang) and Khazar University have committed to collaboration by signing a memorandum of understanding in 2017 which then renewed in 2023 to enhance educational cooperation. This partnership aims to create more opportunities for Azerbaijani students to study in Indonesia, promoting academic exchange and cross-cultural understanding. Joint programs, research initiatives, and exchange opportunities are expected to benefit students from both universities, ultimately strengthening the educational ties between Indonesia and Azerbaijan Baku (KBRI Baku, 2023e; Khazar University, 2018).

Another important fact about cultural aspect is cultural promotion event such as “Indonesian Cultural Festival” which was held in Baku in four consecutive years from 2016 to 2019 and similar cultural events which were held in Baku and other cities in the post pandemic period. The event aims to promote Indonesian art and culture to Azerbaijan people and has successfully attracted many local citizens to learn more about Indonesia and its culture. Moreover, Indonesian products were also exhibited during the events, allowing audiences especially entrepreneurs to get acquaintance with the goods and see any business potential. Such cultural diplomacy has positive impact on Indonesia’s national branding in which can enhance country’s reputation in Azerbaijan (Baiq, 2021). A more comprehensive information on such events will be explained in a special chapter dedicated to the implementation of soft power diplomacy of Indonesia in Azerbaijan as a part of this thesis.

The cumulative impact of these events strengthened Indonesia’s cultural presence in Azerbaijan. The festivals played a vital role in diplomacy by positioning Indonesia as more than an economic partner highlighting its artistic and cultural wealth on the international stage. Through these initiatives, Indonesia successfully built bridges, ensuring that mutual respect and cooperation flourished between the two countries.

By establishing a strong cultural presence through various festivals, Indonesia enhanced its diplomatic ties while strategically employing cultural activities to improve its international image. This approach drew greater interest from foreign audiences, boosting tourism and promoting a positive perception of Indonesia’s heritage. In this context, culture became a strategic tool not just for diplomacy but also for building a more attractive and relatable national brand on the global stage.

This strategy proved effective, as evidenced by a notable increase in Azerbaijani tourists visiting Indonesia post-pandemic. For instance, according to data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency, Azerbaijani tourist numbers rose from 717 in 2022 to 1,823 in 2023, reaching 1,867 by August 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024b). The figures indicate a growing interest in experiencing Indonesia's culture firsthand, with expectations for further growth by the end of the year, surpassing the previous years' trends.

These cultural activities serve as a powerful strategy for enhancing Indonesia's global brand by showcasing its diverse heritage, which not only promotes cultural identity but also stimulates tourism interest. By highlighting traditional arts, cuisine, and performances, these events create a compelling image that draws international attention and encourages direct engagement with Indonesian traditions (Rosadi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, cultural initiatives play a critical role as instruments of soft power, acting as a form of cultural diplomacy that strengthens bilateral relations and fosters mutual understanding with other nations. Through these cultural exchanges, Indonesia builds communication bridges, enhancing appreciation for its values and traditions abroad. Such engagements contribute to long-term diplomatic relationships, paving the way for sustained goodwill and collaboration (Rosadi et al., 2022).

On the economic front, cultural promotion significantly impacts the tourism sector, driving higher visitor numbers, contributing to economic growth, and creating job opportunities. The resulting increase in tourism revenue supports infrastructure and service development, further improving the overall tourism experience. This integrated strategy not only benefits Indonesia's international diplomacy efforts but also supports economic development domestically and internationally, using culture as a means of both engagement and growth (Rosadi et al., 2022).

IV CHAPTER. IMPLEMENTATION OF INDONESIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY IN AZERBAIJAN

4.1. Soft Power Diplomacy Through Cultural Festivals

The Indonesian Embassy in Baku has effectively utilized soft power diplomacy to enhance bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, primarily through cultural events that promote Indonesia's rich heritage. These efforts have spanned both the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods, each phase reflecting different strategic approaches to engaging Azerbaijani audiences. By leveraging arts, music, dance, cuisine, and educational exchanges, the embassy has successfully built bridges and strengthened mutual understanding, positioning Indonesia as a significant cultural partner in Azerbaijan.

a. Pre-Pandemic Indonesian Cultural Festival (ICF) 2016-2019

From 2016 to 2019, the Indonesian Cultural Festival (ICF) in Baku emerged as a key platform for cultural diplomacy, organized by the Indonesian Embassy in Azerbaijan. The festivals provided a multi-dimensional showcase of Indonesian arts, music, dance, and culinary heritage. Performances like the *Angklung* ensemble and Saman dance, as well as *Batik* displays, gave Azerbaijani attendees a deep appreciation of Indonesian traditions. These immersive cultural experiences reflected Indonesia's commitment to building goodwill through soft power (Gibbons, 2016)

The event in 2016 is the first cultural event that held by the embassy that focused on introducing Indonesian cultural elements to a broader Azerbaijani audience. It was attended by locals, foreign diplomats, and the Indonesian diaspora, creating a foundation for cultural exchange. Each subsequent festival built upon the previous year's success. In 2017 and 2018, the events expanded by offering interactive workshops and joint activities, helping to foster people-to-people connections and mutual appreciation between the two nations (Cindyara, 2018).

The 2019 edition of the festival added a culinary component, allowing participants to explore Indonesian cuisine. This addition further deepened cultural ties, reflecting the importance of food as a medium of diplomacy. The recurring nature of the festivals projected Indonesia as a culturally rich and diverse country, aligning with the principles of soft power diplomacy by fostering positive perceptions of the nation abroad (Sinaga, 2019). Beyond cultural enrichment, these festivals served strategic purposes. They facilitated cooperation in

education, with increased interest in Indonesian scholarships among Azerbaijani students. The events also promoted tourism, encouraging Azerbaijanis to explore Indonesia. These interactions laid a framework for long-term diplomatic relations, enabling collaborations not only in culture but also in trade, education, and tourism.

b. Reigniting Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy Amidst Pandemic Recovery (2021)

In 2021, as global restrictions eased following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku worked diligently to reignite cultural diplomacy throughout Azerbaijan. On July 29, 2021, a notable cultural event was organized in Mingachevir, featuring a series of traditional Indonesian dance performances. The event highlighted the Puspanjali Dance from Bali, the iconic Ondel-Ondel from Betawi, and the Randai from West Sumatra. These performances were delivered by Indonesian students currently studying in Azerbaijan, alongside Azerbaijani alumni who had received Indonesian government scholarships like Darmasiswa and the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship. The dancers captivated the audience with their energetic and refined movements, providing an engaging look at Indonesia's rich cultural heritage (KBRI Baku, 2021f).

The venue itself was adorned with Indonesian-themed decorations, showcasing traditional products such as *Batik*, *Songket*, *Tenun*, and musical instruments like *Angklung* and mini-Gamelan. The event also featured a display of Indonesian cuisine, offering popular dishes such as nasi goreng and satay for attendees to enjoy. This immersive experience not only brought Indonesian culture to life but also enhanced diplomatic ties by encouraging Azerbaijani visitors to explore Indonesia further. Azerbaijani business representatives expressed their admiration for the performances and voiced a stronger interest in Indonesian culture and tourism.

Following this success, on October 22, 2021, the embassy hosted a similar event in Nakhchivan, aiming to broaden Indonesia's cultural influence beyond the capital. The event featured performances of the *Wiranata Dance* from Bali, *Randai*, and the *Sajojo Dance* from Papua, involving Indonesian students and embassy staff, as well as local dignitaries, including representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. Beyond dance performances, the event included a screening of the film *Layla Majnun*, which linked Azerbaijani and Indonesian narratives. This cultural activity was particularly significant as it marked the 880th anniversary of Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi, whose work inspired the film. Attendees were also treated to Indonesian coffee and instant noodles, further enhancing

their cultural experience. The success of these events underscored the embassy's efforts to strengthen cultural ties, encouraging more frequent interactions between the two countries and fostering a deeper mutual understanding (KBRI Baku, 2021c).

c. Commemorating 30 Years of Diplomatic Relations: A Year of Indonesian Cultural Celebrations in Azerbaijan (2022)

To celebrate three decades of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan, a series of cultural initiatives were organized throughout the year, highlighting the strong and enduring partnership between the two nations. In 2022, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku continued to intensify its cultural diplomacy efforts in Azerbaijan through various significant events, beginning with the Indonesian Day in Sumgayit, held on July 17, 2022, where hundreds of visitors flocked to Nasimi Park to enjoy traditional Indonesian music and dances. The event featured lively performances of traditional dances and music brought to life by the embassy staff and Azerbaijani alumni of Indonesian arts and culture scholarships and a musician from Yogyakarta. Visitors also had the opportunity to savour traditional Indonesian snacks, further enhancing the cultural experience (KBRI Baku, 2022d).

The momentum of cultural diplomacy continued with the Indonesian Traditional Music and Dance Showcase at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory on October 3, 2022. This event left a lasting impression on Azerbaijani music students as they witnessed the harmonious blend of *Angklung*, *Sape*, and *Talempong* during the performance. The event also showcased traditional Indonesian dances, performed by Indonesian dancer alumni from ISI Yogyakarta. The conservatory students, studying instruments like piano, violin, and harp, expressed keen interest in trying out the Indonesian musical instruments for the first time, highlighting the uniqueness of the cultural exchange (KBRI Baku, 2022e).

On October 6, 2022, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku held a diplomatic reception for the first time after the covid pandemic to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan, coinciding with the 77th Indonesian Independence Day. The event was attended by around 250 guests, including foreign diplomatic representatives, Azerbaijani government officials, academics, entrepreneurs, journalists, members of the Indonesian community, and Friends of Indonesia. The event's guest of honour was Mr. Inam Karimov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Agriculture, who represented the Azerbaijani government. (KBRI Baku, 2022j).

The celebration featured captivating performances of Indonesian music and dance. Traditional musical pieces were performed by a musician from Indonesia, in collaboration with embassy staff, using instruments like the *Angklung*, *Talempong*, and *Sape*. Additionally, some traditional dances were performed by Azerbaijani alumni of Indonesian scholarships and embassy staff, showcasing the vibrant diversity of Indonesian culture. The event also included exhibitions of *Batik*, *Songket*, traditional clothing, and Indonesian crafts, along with photo displays documenting 30 years of bilateral relations. Guests were treated to Indonesian cuisine, concluding with group performances of *Gemu Famire* and *Sajojo*, fostering an engaging and memorable cultural exchange (KBRI Baku, 2022j).

The cultural series reached its peak with the Indonesian Day in Baku, held on November 19, 2022, at Fountain Square. Despite the chilly November weather, hundreds of attendees gathered to witness the performances of Indonesian traditional music and dance. The event featured Indonesian dances accompanied by a traditional musical ensemble and a live band, creating a lively and festive atmosphere. The event not only highlighted traditional performances but also offered a wide variety of Indonesian cuisine. An interactive quiz about Indonesia, consular services for visa applications, and a crafts exhibition further enriched the event. Attendees actively participated in the festivities, with many joining in the final dance session bringing the event to a joyous close (KBRI Baku, 2022i).

The cultural engagements of 2022 culminated with the Indonesian Cultural Night at Ganja State Philharmonic Hall on November 26, 2022. The event attracted a large audience, who were mesmerized by the impressive performances of traditional Indonesian music and dance. The rousing applause from the audience marked a successful promotion of Indonesia's cultural heritage, further solidifying the country's soft power presence in Azerbaijan. Through these well-coordinated events, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku effectively used cultural diplomacy to foster stronger bilateral ties, promote mutual understanding, and leave a lasting impact on Azerbaijani society (KBRI Baku, 2022f).

d. Reviving Cultural Connections: Indonesia's Interactive Engagements in Azerbaijan (2023)

The 'Experience Indonesia' cultural event in Gabala, held on June 17, 2023, offered a captivating display of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. The event featured a variety of traditional Indonesian dances, performed with vibrancy and grace, allowing the audience to experience the diversity and dynamism of Indonesian arts. The event was further enriched by musical performances that included traditional songs from both Indonesia and Azerbaijan,

played using iconic Indonesian instruments like *Angklung*, *Talempong*, and *Sape*, which added a distinctive cultural resonance to the celebration (KBRI Baku, 2023d).

A notable highlight of the event was the demonstration of Pencak Silat, Indonesia's traditional martial art, performed by an Indonesian student currently studying in Azerbaijan. The martial art's fluid yet powerful movements fascinated the audience, providing them with an insight into Indonesia's martial arts tradition, which is as much a part of its cultural identity as dance and music. The interactive element of the event encouraged selected participants to try playing the traditional instruments, offering a hands-on experience that deepened their appreciation of Indonesian culture (KBRI Baku, 2023d).

The audience's enthusiasm was evident throughout the event, as they not only enjoyed the performances but actively participated in the activities. The positive response from the attendees underscored the effectiveness of this cultural diplomacy initiative, which not only showcased Indonesia's cultural richness but also fostered closer ties between Indonesia and Azerbaijan (KBRI Baku, 2023d).

e. Elevating Indonesia-Azerbaijan Relations: A Year of Cultural Showcases and Collaborative Diplomacy (2024)

In 2024, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku launched a series of vibrant cultural diplomacy efforts across Azerbaijan, making significant strides in promoting Indonesia's cultural and economic presence. The year began with "Adventure Indonesia" in Sheki, held on January 27, 2024. This cultural event was a dynamic platform to introduce Indonesian arts, culinary specialties, and tourism to the local community. Visitors experienced a range of traditional Indonesian dances and a performance of the martial art *Pencak Silat*. Traditional music was a highlight, with instruments like the *Angklung*, *Talempong*, and *Sape* creating a captivating blend of both Indonesian and Azerbaijani songs. This event marked a significant milestone as the first comprehensive cultural promotion in Sheki, demonstrating the Indonesian Embassy's commitment to expanding cultural outreach in different Azerbaijani cities (KBRI Baku, 2024f).

In mid-2024, the Indonesian Embassy supported Indonesian artists participating in the "Sheki Silk Road International Music Festival" on July 5, 2024. As an annual cultural event hosted by the Azerbaijan Composers' Union, this festival brought together diverse musical and dance performances from several countries, including Indonesia, Russia, and India. Indonesia's

delegation, represented by the Hamdani Music Group and Mila Art Dance from Yogyakarta, impressed the audience with a rich display of traditional music and dance. They used various traditional instruments, such as the *Sasando*, *Angklung*, *Talempong*, *Kendang*, and *Suling*. The festival, inaugurated by Mayor Usubov, received high praise from the audience, fostering greater interest in Indonesian arts. The Indonesian performers were honoured with special tokens of appreciation from the local government, reflecting Sheki's admiration for Indonesia's cultural diversity and rich traditions (KBRI Baku, 2024b).

Continuing its cultural endeavours, the Indonesian Embassy organized *Adventure Indonesia* in Baku's Winter Park on July 7, 2024. This event attracted a large crowd, with hundreds of visitors drawn to the cultural showcases, traditional music, and vibrant dance performances. The event highlighted Indonesia's culinary richness, with food stalls offering a variety of Indonesian delicacies, including *Klepon*, *Pisang Molen*, *Lumpia*, *Martabak Telor* as well as popular Indonesian beverage like *Es Kopyor*. The embassy strategically used this event not only to promote Indonesia's cultural heritage but also to introduce tourism opportunities to Azerbaijani citizens. A special booth provided information about Indonesian tourist destinations and visa procedures, aiming to encourage more Azerbaijani visitors to explore Indonesia's landscapes and traditions. This successful event reinforced Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in Baku, demonstrating a holistic approach to soft power by blending arts, food, tourism, and interactive engagement (KBRI Baku, 2024g).

4.2. Soft Power Diplomacy in Azerbaijani Educational Institutions

a. ADA University International Festival

The ADA University International Festival is one of the key platforms where the Indonesian Embassy in Baku has successfully implemented soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijani educational institutions. Annual participation of Indonesia in this festival, provides a unique opportunity to introduce Indonesian culture to students, fostering mutual understanding and cultural appreciation between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. The embassy actively engaged students by showcasing traditional Indonesian arts, crafts, dances and music. With participation from several countries, the Indonesian booth stood out with its display of cultural artifacts such as *Batik*, *Wayang*, and *Songket*, along with popular Indonesian products, snacks, and beverages. The engaging atmosphere at the booth, enriched with cultural quizzes and souvenirs, drew enthusiastic responses from students who were keen to explore Indonesia's

cultural diversity. The interaction extended to trying traditional clothing and accessories, creating a personal connection with Indonesian culture. (KBRI Baku, 2021e, 2022h).

The 11th and 12th ADA University International Festival continued this momentum, featuring live performances with the *Angklung* as part of the music and dance showcase. Students were encouraged to play the *Angklung*, fostering a deeper appreciation of Indonesian musical traditions. The embassy's focus on creating interactive experiences helped reinforce positive perceptions of Indonesia among Azerbaijani students. Indonesian tourism destinations were also introduced, sparking interest among students and visitors to explore Indonesia in the future (KBRI Baku, 2023a, 2024d).

b. International Bazar at British School in Baku

The International Bazar events at the British School in Baku have consistently served as effective platforms for the Indonesian Embassy in Baku to implement soft power diplomacy, specifically targeting younger audiences within Azerbaijani schools. These events allow for interactive engagement with students, showcasing Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage. During the event, the embassy promoted various Indonesian cultural ornaments, traditional foods, and promotional materials. Visitors enjoyed Indonesian snacks and coffee. The interactive nature of the event, including opportunities for visitors to try on traditional clothing and sample Indonesian delicacies, created a welcoming and immersive experience, reflecting Indonesia's efforts to promote mutual understanding and cultural appreciation. The display also highlighted Indonesia's tourism potential, presenting information about must-visit destinations in Indonesia, along with visa application details for prospective travellers. The embassy's booth attracted significant interest, underscoring the appeal of Indonesian culture among the attendees, who were eager to experience it firsthand (KBRI Baku, 2022g, 2023b, 2024c).

c. Dunya School and European Azerbaijan School

The participation of Indonesia in cultural festivals at various schools in Baku, Azerbaijan, represents a strategic effort by the Indonesian Embassy in Baku to implement soft power diplomacy through education. At the "Cultural Diversity" event held at Dunya School, a wide array of Indonesian cultural products, including traditional crafts and attire, successfully captured the attention of students. Additionally, two Indonesian students studying at Dunya School added to the excitement by performing traditional Indonesian dances. Their lively and engaging performance not only showcased the richness of Indonesian culture but also created a deeper cultural connection among the students (KBRI Baku, 2023f).

The soft power initiative continued at the European Azerbaijan School, where Indonesia's presence was equally impactful. The festival was filled with enthusiasm, as students actively participated in learning and performing the popular "*Gemu Famire*" dance together. This interactive approach allowed students to experience Indonesian culture directly, fostering a sense of joy and cultural understanding (KBRI Baku, 2023f).

Through these events, the Indonesian Embassy in Baku has effectively used cultural engagement as a means of fostering stronger ties with Azerbaijani students. By actively involving students in dance performances and cultural exhibitions, the embassy not only promotes Indonesia's cultural heritage but also reinforces its diplomatic presence in Azerbaijan. This approach to cultural diplomacy, focused on direct engagement in educational settings, has proven to be an effective strategy for building mutual appreciation and understanding, aligning well with Indonesia's broader soft power objectives in the region.

d. SABIS Sun International School

The participation of Indonesia in the "International Day" at SABIS SUN International School, marked a significant step in the implementation of soft power diplomacy by the Indonesian Embassy in Baku. This annual event aims to introduce the diversity of arts and cultures from various countries to students, teachers, and parents. Indonesia's involvement in the event offered an opportunity to promote its traditional arts, music, dance, and cuisine to the Azerbaijani community. It was the first time Indonesia participated in this event, reflecting the country's increasing efforts to enhance cultural diplomacy in Azerbaijan.

The first day of the event began with one of the classes at SABIS SUN International School wearing traditional Dayak attire and performing an Indonesian dance. This immersive experience allowed students to engage directly with Indonesian culture, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of its traditions. The next day, Indonesia presented a series of musical performances and traditional dances, captivating the audience with renditions of songs from Indonesia and Azerbaijan using *Angklung* and *Sape* instruments. The dance performances showcased the vibrant diversity of Indonesian arts (KBRI Baku, 2024e).

Adding to the cultural showcase, Indonesia also introduced its traditional culinary delights. Visitors enjoyed Indonesian snacks along with a variety of Indonesian beverages. The diverse range of food attracted positive reactions from the attendees, creating an interactive and lively atmosphere at the event (KBRI Baku, 2024e).

4.3. Soft Power Diplomacy through Social Media Platforms

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled many countries, including Indonesia, to shift from traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy. Prior to the pandemic, cultural diplomacy was often hindered by face-to-face interactions limited by geographical factors. However, with travel restrictions and social distancing, countries began adopting digital platforms to introduce their cultures (Bjola & Manor, 2022). In Azerbaijan, the use of social media, particularly Instagram, has increased, providing Indonesia with an opportunity to promote its culture and establish connections with the local community (Triwibowo, 2023). The Indonesian Embassy in Baku has leveraged social media as a promotional tool and a new form of digital diplomacy. This strategy prioritizes the use of the Azerbaijani language in content to enhance relevance and audience engagement. A concrete example is seen in the Wonderful Indonesia campaign translated into Azerbaijani language, which was uploaded on Instagram feed, attracting local audiences and demonstrating how Indonesia can navigate the international relations landscape in the post-pandemic era.

4.4. The Role of Indonesian Students in Azerbaijan in Soft Power Diplomacy

Indonesian students in Azerbaijan play a pivotal role in promoting Indonesia's culture, acting as non-state agents of cultural diplomacy, particularly within university settings. They actively engage in performances, showcasing traditional arts, music, and dances, introducing local audiences to the richness of Indonesian heritage (Putera & Khairunnisa, 2023). These activities not only foster cultural awareness but also enhance bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

Beyond cultural promotion, these students, associated with Indonesian Student and Youth Association in Azerbaijan (P3I Azerbaijan), contribute to public diplomacy by sharing their life experiences and information about scholarship opportunities in Azerbaijan through social media. Their efforts encourage Indonesian students to study in Azerbaijan further strengthening educational and cultural ties. This dual engagement helps create a dynamic relationship between both countries, using education and culture as vehicles to deepen mutual understanding and collaboration. (Putera & Khairunnisa, 2023)

The activities of P3I Azerbaijan also contribute significantly to advancing Indonesia's soft power diplomacy through various cultural events at Khazar University. The "Indonesian Day" event, held at Khazar University in 2017 and 2023 showcased the pivotal role of Indonesian students in Azerbaijan in advancing Indonesia's soft power diplomacy. Organized by Khazar University's International Office with support from the Indonesian Embassy in Baku

and Indonesian students, the event was aimed at promoting a broader understanding of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage among the Azerbaijani community. The event was attended by students from various countries, faculty members, and university staff, highlighting its broad appeal and the effectiveness of student-driven diplomatic efforts (Khazar University, 2017, 2023).

During the event, Indonesian students played a central role by delivering presentations about Indonesia, its diverse traditions, and unique cultural characteristics. Their presentations were not limited to verbal descriptions; they also incorporated a Pencak Silat martial arts performance, a traditional Indonesian art form that blends culture, skill, and history. This combination of information and live demonstration provided a dynamic, engaging experience that allowed attendees to gain a deeper appreciation of Indonesia's culture beyond textbooks and lectures.

The enthusiastic response from participants underscored the impact of Indonesian students as informal cultural ambassadors. Attendees actively engaged in a general knowledge quiz about Indonesia, further reflecting their growing interest and curiosity. This interactive session, led by the students, not only served as an educational opportunity but also fostered a sense of camaraderie and intercultural exchange among participants from different backgrounds.

Indonesian students in Azerbaijan also play a pivotal role in promoting Indonesia's culture beyond specific events like the "Indonesian Culture Day" at Khazar University. Together with students from 60 countries, they act as non-state agents of cultural diplomacy, particularly within university settings, engaging actively in cultural exhibition that showcases traditional music, dances, and national cuisine (Khazar University, 2024; Khodijah, 2024). By participating in such event, P3I Azerbaijan helps build cultural awareness and foster people-to-people connections. These efforts enhance Indonesia's image as a diverse and culturally rich nation, promoting goodwill and mutual understanding between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

Such cultural exchanges support Indonesia's diplomatic goals by creating informal yet impactful platforms for dialogue, strengthening bilateral relations beyond formal state interactions. Through P3I Azerbaijan's initiatives, cultural diplomacy aligns with broader diplomatic strategies, encouraging collaboration in education, tourism, and the arts. These activities demonstrate the potential of grassroots cultural movements in solidifying international partnerships while promoting Indonesia's identity on the global stage.

The collaboration between Indonesian students and the Indonesian Embassy in Baku in cultural events like “Experience Indonesia” and “Adventure Indonesia” is crucial for promoting Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan (KBRI Baku, 2023d, 2024g). This partnership not only showcases Indonesian culture but also strengthens ties between the two countries via public diplomacy. Therefore, the involvement of students in local cultural events is vital for enhancing cross-cultural understanding. Through these efforts, they act as effective non-state actors in soft power diplomacy, reinforcing bilateral relationships between the two nations.

However, Indonesian students in Azerbaijan face several challenges in their participation as cultural diplomats. The limited number of Indonesian students in the country, which restricts their ability to form a strong community and engage collectively in cultural activities. Additionally, language barriers can hinder effective communication with the local population, making it difficult to share and promote Indonesian culture fully. Cultural differences may also pose challenges in understanding and integrating into local customs.

Despite these obstacles, the small number of Indonesian students presents a unique opportunity for them to serve as cultural ambassadors. Each student has the potential to make a meaningful impact by actively participating in local events, teaching the Indonesian language, and introducing the rich diversity of Indonesian arts and cuisine (Putera & Khairunnisa, 2023). Their individual efforts can foster a deeper appreciation for Indonesian culture among Azerbaijanis, promoting mutual understanding and strengthening bilateral ties between the two nations.

4.5. Long Term Impact of Indonesia’s Soft Power Diplomacy

The Vision for Indonesia 2045 is a strategic outlook that encompasses Indonesia's aspirations to become a sovereign, advanced, just, and prosperous nation in the face of global challenges (Kementerian PPN/Bapenas, 2019). In the context of soft power diplomacy, this vision serves as a framework to enhance Indonesia's cultural influence and values at the international level, including in Azerbaijan. Through four main pillars—human development, sustainable economy, equitable development, and national resilience—Indonesia is committed to building stronger relationships with partner countries. This vision also emphasizes the importance of education, technology, and culture as tools to strengthen Indonesia's position in the global arena (Kementerian PPN/Bapenas, 2019). Therefore, the long-term vision of Indonesia 2045 serves as a framework for soft power diplomacy in fostering positive image of Indonesia in Azerbaijan, strengthening bilateral cooperation, and establishing more effective communication channels between the two countries.

Soft power diplomacy holds significant potential to impact Indonesia's image and its bilateral relations with Azerbaijan in a long term. Through a focus on culture, education, and humanitarian values, Indonesia can establish a reputation as a nation that is not only attractive but also committed to international cooperation and sustainable development. By promoting Indonesian culture through programs initiated by the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS), Indonesia aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of its cultural heritage and values.

Over time, the positive impacts of this soft power diplomacy can lead to stronger bilateral relationships. As Azerbaijani society becomes more familiar with and appreciates Indonesian culture, they will be more open to pursuing cooperation in various fields, including economy, education, and tourism. This relationship can strengthen mutual understanding between the two countries, creating more effective channels of communication and reducing the potential for conflict or misunderstanding. In the long run, consistent and targeted efforts in soft power diplomacy can establish a solid foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation, enhancing Indonesia's image while also contributing to regional stability and peace.

V CHAPTER. CONTRIBUTION OF CENTRE OF INDONESIAN STUDIES IN SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY

5.1. Understanding the Centre of Indonesian Studies

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS), established in 2010 through collaboration between the Azerbaijan University of Languages and the Indonesian Embassy in Iran, a year before Indonesian Embassy in Baku was officially open. It serves as a vital platform for strengthening educational ties between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. It offers essential resources, such as Indonesian-language books and modern teaching tools, while promoting cultural learning through traditional arts classes. Partnerships with Indonesian universities foster academic exchanges and provide Azerbaijani students with scholarships, enabling study and research opportunities in Indonesia. (Azerbaijan University of Languages, n.d.-b)

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) at Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL) was built as part of a strategic initiative to introduce and promote Indonesian language and culture globally. The background of its establishment is rooted in Indonesia's commitment to strengthening diplomatic relations through education and cultural exchange. The CIS aims to serve as a bridge between Indonesia and Azerbaijan, providing comprehensive information on Indonesian traditions, arts, and social values. The founding of the centre aligns with Indonesia's cultural diplomacy policy, which emphasizes the importance of enhancing intercultural understanding as the foundation for more robust and sustainable bilateral relations between the two nations.

The primary goal of the CIS is to become a leading centre for cultural and academic exchange in Azerbaijan. The centre focuses on introducing Indonesian culture and language through educational programs and community engagement activities, such as language courses, seminars, and cultural training. CIS strives to create an inclusive environment where Azerbaijani students and the broader community can explore and appreciate the richness of Indonesian culture, ranging from traditional arts to modern social practices. Through these activities, the CIS aims not only to disseminate knowledge about Indonesia but also to foster a deeper appreciation for Indonesia's diverse culture and values, reflecting the spirit of unity and tolerance. (Azerbaijan University of Languages, n.d.-b)

a. Its Programs and Activities

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) has actively conducted a variety of programs and activities aimed at promoting Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan. These programs include seminars, training sessions, and Indonesian language courses, along with cultural activities such as dance classes, traditional *Angklung* music training, *Batik*-making workshops, and Indonesian speech practices. These courses attract significant interest from both students and the general public, employing interactive teaching methods that use digital materials and provide opportunities for participants to engage directly with native Indonesian speakers. The language courses not only enhance participants' linguistic abilities but also offer insights into the communication norms and cultural values that are intrinsic to the everyday use of the Indonesian language. The trainings and workshops are designed to provide Azerbaijani participants with practical insights into Indonesian arts and crafts, fostering a more authentic understanding of Indonesian culture.

Such activities aim to build stronger emotional connections between participants and instructors, while also encouraging greater appreciation for Indonesia's arts and heritage among the Azerbaijani community. Through these initiatives, the CIS hopes to create informal ambassadors for Indonesia in Azerbaijan, who can share their experiences and knowledge of Indonesian culture with their surroundings. Furthermore, to comprehend the impact of these programs, the author conducted interview towards 11 Indonesian Studies alumni who have experienced the programs.

Based on the interview, many alumni shared that these activities deepened their understanding of Indonesian culture and language. The training provided by the CIS, especially in traditional arts, not only helped the students appreciate Indonesian heritage but also enabled them to actively participate in events like the International Cultural Festival (ICF) and Indonesian Day, where they showcased the skills, they learned.

The educational programs offered by the CIS have significantly impacted the promotion of Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan. An alumnus, who graduated in 2012, emphasized that the CIS provided a comprehensive education about Indonesian language, history, and culture, which helped foster cultural awareness among the students. The involvement of experienced professor and instructors was often highlighted as instrumental in guiding students' learning journeys and effectively transferring knowledge about Indonesian culture and arts.

Moreover, the CIS has played a crucial role in supporting its alumni by offering opportunities to learn Indonesian language and culture. An alumnus graduated in 2012 mentioned that the language and cultural knowledge she gained at the centre enabled her to actively engage in Indonesian cultural events both during her student years and later as an administrative staff member at the Indonesian Embassy in Baku. Similarly, another alumnus who is currently working abroad highlighted that the CIS's language courses helped her communicate effectively in Indonesian, enriching her overall experience while studying in Indonesia under the Darmasiswa scholarship program.

The success of the CIS is also reflected in its ability to send students to Indonesia on scholarships such as Darmasiswa, BSBI, and KNB. With over 103 undergraduate and 22 postgraduate alumni, the centre has developed a significant pool of Azerbaijani individuals who are proficient in Indonesian and possess a deep understanding of its culture. For instance, a 2017 graduate who participated in multiple scholarship programs, including BSBI and KNB, confirmed that such scholarships not only enhanced her language skills but also made her a competent promoter of Indonesia in Azerbaijan. She actively participated in cultural events, taught Indonesian dances, and engaged in conversations about Indonesian culture with her family, friends, and colleagues, thus broadening the cultural exchange between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

b. The Role of the Centre for its Students

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) has played a significant role in supporting students by providing comprehensive knowledge about Indonesia. The competent professor and instructors at the centre, were frequently mentioned by alumni as key figures in delivering in-depth lessons on Indonesia's history, politics, language, and culture. This guidance was appreciated by a 2012 IS alumni who emphasized that the instructors not only taught language skills but also cultural nuances through activities like role-play and translation exercises, which enhanced her understanding of Indonesian society.

The CIS's language courses were a pivotal aspect of its support for alumni, equipping them with strong Indonesian language skills. For example, one of 2018 IS graduate mentioned that about 90% of his knowledge of Indonesia was acquired at CIS, thanks to the language training provided there. A 2021 alumnus also highlighted the role of these language lessons in enabling her to communicate confidently upon arriving in Indonesia for her studies.

The opportunity to engage in traditional Indonesian dance and music lessons was another key component of the CIS's offerings. An alumnus who has participated in various scholarship programs, for example, described how she actively participated in traditional dance workshops and later shared her experiences by teaching these dances to others in Azerbaijan. Similarly, an alumnus who is now working in Bali expressed that learning *Angklung* and Indonesian dance at CIS deepened her connection to Indonesian culture, helping her become an advocate for cultural exchange between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, the CIS's efforts to provide scholarships for studying in Indonesia were highly appreciated by the alumni. Many alumni mentioned the importance of scholarships like Darmasiswa, BSBI, and KNB, which were facilitated by CIS. For instance, two notable alumni working at Indonesian embassy noted that these scholarships were crucial in their deeper engagement with Indonesia, allowing them to experience the country's culture firsthand and contributing to their personal and professional growth. A 2017 alumnus, who participated in multiple scholarship programs, described how these experiences enriched her understanding of Indonesia and prepared her to promote the country more effectively upon returning to Azerbaijan.

c. The Alumni as CIS's Biggest Achievement

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) has significantly contributed to promoting Indonesia in Azerbaijan, with its alumni serving as its most significant achievements. Currently, the CIS has produced 103 undergraduate and 22 postgraduate alumni who actively participate in promoting Indonesian culture and knowledge in Azerbaijan. Many of these alumni have received scholarships to study in Indonesia, including Darmasiswa, BSBI, and KNB programs. These opportunities not only improved their language skills but also deepened their understanding of Indonesian culture and society.

A substantial number of these alumni have achieved proficiency in the Indonesian language, a key asset in their roles as cultural promoters. For instance, An Indonesian Studies alumni graduated in 2012 mentioned that his experience with the Darmasiswa and KNB programs allowed him to communicate fluently in Indonesian, which has been beneficial in his work at the Indonesian Embassy in Baku. Similarly, other alumni from the same class emphasized that her language skills and cultural knowledge gained through CIS courses enabled her to participate actively in various Indonesian cultural events and work effectively at the embassy.

Some of the Indonesian Studies (IS) alumni have used their language and cultural expertise to secure roles at the Indonesian Embassy in Baku. For example, one of the 2011 graduate, who received a scholarship to study in Indonesia, later became a staff member at the embassy and continued to engage in cultural promotion activities. This involvement reflects the alumni's role as public diplomacy agents, strengthening the bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

In addition to their work at the embassy, these alumni also contribute to cultural events in Azerbaijan, often sharing their experiences with family and friends to further spread awareness of Indonesia. A 2019 alumnus, who participated in all three major scholarships, actively promotes Indonesian culture through educational and cultural events, demonstrating the long-lasting impact of CIS's efforts. These collective efforts underscore the success of CIS in cultivating a dedicated group of individuals who not only understand Indonesia but are committed to promoting it in Azerbaijan.

d. CIS Collaboration with Indonesian Universities

Collaboration with Indonesian universities and educational institutions plays a significant role in the development and implementation of CIS's programs. Universities in Indonesia, such as Universitas Negeri Malang (UNM) and Universitas Islam Malang (UNISMA), actively support the CIS by providing experienced Indonesian language instructors as well as Indonesian Language Online Seminars. This connection is formed on an individual basis between educators and the CIS, allowing for academic interactions between the two countries. While there is no formal, structured collaboration between the CIS and the Indonesian government or universities, these informal relationships still play a vital role in supporting the CIS's efforts to authentically teach Indonesian language and culture in Azerbaijan.

The collaboration between the CIS and Indonesian universities primarily focuses on developing relevant curricula and providing competent teaching staff. Through these partnerships, the CIS ensures that the quality of language and cultural instruction aligns with Indonesian educational standards. Furthermore, this cooperation offers opportunities for Indonesian students to interact with Azerbaijani students, creating a broader cultural exchange that enriches cross-cultural understanding in both countries. This relationship reflects a collaborative spirit that supports the CIS's long-term goal of effectively introducing and promoting Indonesia abroad.

Looking ahead, the CIS plans to expand its programs and activities, including increasing the frequency of language courses and seminars, as well as adding more types of cultural training. By introducing initiatives that cater to the evolving interests and needs of Azerbaijani students, the CIS aims to create more engaging and beneficial programs for the local community. These efforts are also expected to strengthen academic and cultural ties between Indonesia and Azerbaijan, establishing the CIS as a leading centre recognized for its success in promoting Indonesian culture and language internationally.

In conclusion, the Centre of Indonesian Studies at Azerbaijan University of Languages represents an important initiative in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy efforts. With a clear background, focused objectives, and well-structured programs and collaborations, the CIS serves as a central hub for introducing Indonesian culture and language in Azerbaijan. By continuously strengthening its programs and expanding its collaborations, the CIS can significantly contribute to building deeper and more meaningful bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan through education and cultural exchange.

5.2. Roles of Alumni in Soft Power Diplomacy

The involvement of Indonesian Studies alumni in promoting Indonesia has proven to be a crucial element of Indonesia's public diplomacy, especially in strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. Acting as non-state actors, these alumni fulfil dual roles: they serve both as cultural ambassadors and as educational bridges between the two countries. This dual function is vital in fostering mutual understanding, filling information gaps, and improving Indonesia's positive image in Azerbaijan through education- and culture-based approaches. By participating in Indonesia's public diplomacy, IS alumni not only enhance cultural awareness but also contribute significantly to the educational ties between the two nations, thus showcasing the broader impact of civil society in international relations.

The interviews with 11 alumni of the Indonesian Studies Program at Azerbaijan University of Languages (ADU) revealed their crucial roles in supporting Indonesia's soft power diplomacy. The alumni have varied backgrounds, with different years of graduation and current professions, but they share a common commitment to promoting Indonesian culture in Azerbaijan.

a. Direct Involvement of Indonesian Studies Alumni in Cultural Promotion

The active participation of Indonesian Studies (IS) alumni in promoting Indonesian culture is evident through various events, such as cultural festivals, exhibitions, and workshops

organized by the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Azerbaijan. These events often feature traditional Indonesian dance performances, *Batik* arts demonstrations, music, and culinary exhibitions, offering a comprehensive glimpse into Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage. For example, IS alumni when they were students frequently perform traditional dances like the Indang Dance and Piring Dance, which help introduce Azerbaijani audiences to the richness of Indonesian traditions. An alumna who studied Indonesian dances through BSBI scholarship taught her IS colleagues these dances after she returned to Azerbaijan. Events like Indonesian Day, for example, have featured alumni performing traditional dances such as Indang, Enggang, and Jaipong, along with musical performances using traditional instruments like *Angklung* and *Talempong*. Another alumna who is now engaging in call service sector, actively took part in such events, often leading dance performances and sharing her knowledge of Indonesian culture with local audiences. Similarly, other senior alumni graduated in 2011 and 2012 were involved in similar activities, showcasing traditional costumes and performing arts at embassy events. Such engagements not only popularize Indonesian arts and culture but also establish deeper emotional ties and cross-cultural understanding between Azerbaijanis and Indonesians, making alumni effective agents of intercultural diplomacy.

Collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy has been a pivotal component of the cultural promotion initiatives led by IS alumni. The Embassy supports various cultural events that involve alumni, thereby providing them with opportunities to serve as intermediaries between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. Activities like the Indonesian Cultural Festival (ICF), Indonesia's Independence Day celebrations, and tourism exhibitions in Azerbaijan are instrumental in showcasing Indonesian culture, cuisine, and products. Alumni who return to Azerbaijan often play significant roles as facilitators in these events, acting as dancers, singers, or hosts. Their presence in Embassy-led initiatives exemplifies the effectiveness of leveraging alumni networks in cultural diplomacy, as it expands the outreach of Indonesia's soft power while building lasting relationships based on shared cultural experiences.

b. Indonesian Studies Alumni as Public Diplomacy Actors in Azerbaijan

In addition to cultural activities, Indonesian Studies (IS) alumni are also actively involved in promoting educational opportunities in Indonesia to Azerbaijani society. As part of their public diplomacy efforts, alumni regularly share information about various scholarship programs like Darmasiswa, BSBI, and KNB with prospective students in Azerbaijan. By detailing the application processes, eligibility criteria, and academic experiences at Indonesian universities such as Gadjah Mada University and Padjadjaran University, alumni help build

trust and increase interest in Indonesian education among Azerbaijani students. This trust-building not only enhances the reputation of Indonesian universities but also strengthens Indonesia's image as a high-quality educational destination, positioning it as a preferred choice for Azerbaijani students seeking overseas studies.

IS alumni's role as non-state actors extends beyond the realms of culture and education to include tourism promotion in Azerbaijan. By sharing personal stories from their time in Indonesia, alumni generate greater interest in popular tourist destinations like Bali, Lombok, and Yogyakarta. As exemplified by one of 2019 alumni, she often shares her experiences and knowledge of Indonesia with Azerbaijani friends and colleagues, thus raising awareness of Indonesia's cultural heritage. This informal engagement creates a personal connection and deepens interest in Indonesia among Azerbaijani citizens. Similarly, a senior alumna who graduated in 2012 uses social media and personal interactions to introduce Indonesian tourist destinations, culture, and hospitality to his Azerbaijani network, indirectly contributing to increased tourism interest. Their narratives often include personal anecdotes and vivid descriptions of the landscapes, culture, and warmth of the Indonesian people, making these stories more relatable and appealing to Azerbaijani audiences. This direct participation enables the alumni to act as effective ambassadors of Indonesian culture, fostering a positive perception of Indonesia among Azerbaijani citizens. Additionally, alumni frequently share photos and videos of their travels across Indonesia on social media, effectively utilizing digital platforms to increase Azerbaijani interest in Indonesian tourism. Through these promotional efforts, alumni significantly contribute to boosting tourist arrivals from Azerbaijan to Indonesia, thereby strengthening not only cultural ties but also economic relations between the two countries.

The consistent involvement of IS alumni in public diplomacy showcases the importance of civil society's role in fostering bilateral relations. By actively participating in cultural activities, collaborating with the Indonesian Embassy, and promoting education and tourism, alumni help create a more profound understanding and closer ties between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. This approach highlights how informal ambassadors, like IS alumni, can enhance diplomatic relations through personal and emotional connections, emphasizing the significance of grassroots diplomacy in building sustainable international relationships. These efforts further illustrate that civil society, when effectively engaged, can play a central role in shaping public perceptions and driving diplomatic efforts beyond formal governmental interactions.

Azerbaijan University of Languages alumni who have pursued education majoring Indonesian Studies (IS) and participated in various scholarship programs in Indonesia play an indispensable role as bridges in enhancing educational relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. These alumni serve as key figures in introducing the Indonesian education system, including its curriculum, teaching methodologies, and academic culture, to Azerbaijani society. Equipped with extensive knowledge and direct experience, alumni provide accurate and relevant information to Azerbaijani students interested in studying in Indonesia. This process not only creates a better understanding of the opportunities offered by Indonesian education but also strengthens educational ties between the two countries.

Moreover, alumni act as facilitators and speakers in various events at the centre, providing detailed information about Indonesian universities, the programs they offer, and the benefits of participating in scholarships like Darmasiswa, BSBI and KNB. Their involvement in such events offers Azerbaijani students a clearer and more practical understanding of the Indonesian education system, helping them make informed decisions about their study options. Alumni play a vital role in raising awareness about educational opportunities in Indonesia and motivating Azerbaijani students to pursue further studies abroad, showcasing how education can be a powerful tool in diplomacy and international relations.

The extensive experience of IS alumni within the Indonesian education system allows them to facilitate student exchanges and academic collaborations between universities in both countries. Alumni often serve as intermediaries in communication between universities in Indonesia and Azerbaijan, assisting in the establishment of student exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and academic conferences. Some alumni have also initiated training programs for lecturers and researchers from both nations, aimed at deepening knowledge and improving academic competencies. These collaborative efforts enrich the academic environments in both countries and strengthen ties between educational institutions, thereby laying the groundwork for sustainable international academic partnerships.

c. Alumni's role in Promoting Education in Indonesia

Through a more strategic collaborative approach, the positive outcomes of IS alumni's role as educational bridges are evident in the growing interest of Azerbaijani students in pursuing studies in Indonesia. Each year, an increasing number of Azerbaijani students participate in Indonesian government-sponsored scholarships, such as Darmasiswa, BSBI and KNB. Alumni who have successfully completed these programs often serve as role models for prospective students, demonstrating that studying in Indonesia offers not only academic

benefits but also broader career opportunities across various fields. They share insights about the challenges they faced during the selection process and their academic journeys, providing practical solutions that help future applicants better prepare for similar experiences.

In terms of promoting education, IS alumni also leverage social media as an effective tool to introduce Indonesian education to Azerbaijani society. Alumni frequently post stories, photos, and videos about their experiences while studying in Indonesia, including visits to historical sites, participation in academic activities, and interactions with local students. This approach not only broadens the reach of information about Indonesian education but also establishes more personal connections between people from both countries. By utilizing social media platforms, alumni are able to engage with a broader audience, attracting more Azerbaijani students to consider Indonesia as an appealing educational destination.

IS alumni have also played a significant role in integrating Indonesian teaching methods and educational approaches into Azerbaijan's education system. Inspired by project-based and participatory teaching methods they encountered in Indonesia; many alumni have attempted to incorporate these practices into the local curriculum in Azerbaijan. This integration not only enhances the quality of education in Azerbaijan but also creates opportunities for the exchange of ideas and best practices between the two countries, further solidifying the educational relationship.

In some instances, IS alumni who have pursued careers in government or diplomacy have contributed to the development of educational policies that support bilateral relations with Indonesia. These alumni assist in designing policies that facilitate student exchanges and academic cooperation with Indonesian universities. Their involvement indicates that IS alumni are not only agents of change at the community level but also play a role in institutional developments, enabling them to create broader impacts on educational relations between the two countries.

The involvement of IS alumni in social and cultural activities organized by KBRI Baku and the Centre of Indonesian Studies further emphasizes their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. Alumni actively participate in events celebrating Indonesian holidays, arts and culture exhibitions, and culinary festivals in Azerbaijan. Their participation introduces Indonesian culture to Azerbaijani society while fostering stronger emotional ties between the two nations, ultimately contributing to more sustainable educational collaboration.

The role of IS alumni extends beyond immediate educational exchanges to fostering long-term bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. By maintaining connections with their Indonesian alma maters, alumni facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration between educational institutions in both countries. This continuous engagement leads to sustained interest in student exchanges, collaborative research projects, and joint academic programs. Additionally, alumni actively organize reunions, discussions, and cultural events that bring together Azerbaijani alumni and Indonesian graduates working in Azerbaijan. These gatherings strengthen personal connections, create professional opportunities, and promote cross-cultural understanding, ensuring that educational exchanges remain vibrant and mutually beneficial over time.

The long-term impact of IS alumni's involvement in strengthening educational ties is also visible in the reciprocal interest of Indonesian students in learning about Azerbaijan. Alumni have facilitated study tours and short-term exchange programs that allow Indonesian students to visit Azerbaijan and gain insights into Azerbaijani culture, language, and educational practices. This bidirectional exchange is crucial for fostering a comprehensive understanding and mutual respect between the two nations, further solidifying bilateral ties at both the educational and diplomatic levels.

Moreover, alumni's engagement in educational reform within Azerbaijan demonstrates their commitment to sustainable change. They are often invited to contribute to educational policy development, particularly in areas where Indonesian experiences offer valuable lessons. Alumni have shared insights on inclusive education models, vocational training programs, and strategies for improving student engagement—fields where Indonesia has made significant progress. By integrating these insights into Azerbaijan's education system, alumni contribute to creating a more dynamic and inclusive educational landscape, showcasing the transformative power of international educational exchanges.

5.3. Collaboration between the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS), the Indonesian Embassy, and Alumni

The collaboration between the Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS), the Indonesian Embassy in Baku, and alumni has been a key driver in promoting Indonesian culture and fostering bilateral relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. The 11 alumni interviewed shared a unified perspective on the importance of this collaboration, emphasizing how their experiences with CIS and the embassy shaped their roles as cultural ambassadors. For many alumni, the CIS provided the initial foundation of their understanding of Indonesia, offering

structured programs that not only focused on language acquisition but also introduced them to Indonesian traditions, arts, and diplomacy. This connection was further strengthened through workshops, cultural events, and language courses that enhanced their competencies. Two alumni, who graduated in 2018 and 2021, highlighted that this educational foundation was critical in enabling them to engage more effectively in cultural diplomacy efforts led by the embassy.

The role of the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) was seen as equally pivotal by the alumni. The embassy not only facilitated events like Indonesian Day, cultural exhibitions, and seminars but also provided opportunities for alumni to actively participate and showcase their knowledge and skills. For instance, two alumni who are now working in museum and marketing fields recalled their involvement in events such as the International Cultural Festival (ICF) and other embassy-led initiatives. During these events, they performed traditional Indonesian dances, delivered speeches in Indonesian, and interacted with local Azerbaijani attendees. This collaboration between CIS's educational programs and the embassy's cultural events allowed alumni to apply what they had learned in real-life settings, reinforcing their roles as non-state actors in public diplomacy.

Furthermore, the alumni underscored the continuous partnership between CIS, the embassy, and themselves, particularly in promoting Indonesian culture beyond formal events. They frequently engage in informal cultural promotion through personal networks, social media, and public talks, often organized or supported by both the CIS and the embassy. This multi-layered partnership is seen as crucial by two alumni who graduated in 2012 and 2019, who view the combined efforts as a comprehensive strategy that not only strengthens cultural diplomacy but also opens doors for future educational and professional exchanges between the two countries.

Additionally, alumni play a vital role in bridging gaps between Indonesian institutions and Azerbaijani students, acting as mediators in educational collaborations. Two CIS alumni from 2017 and 2019 have facilitated connections between Azerbaijani universities and Indonesian academic institutions, often leveraging their networks within the embassy and CIS. This continuous collaboration reflects the broader strategic goals of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy, where the CIS, the embassy, and alumni work together to promote a positive image of Indonesia, encourage mutual understanding, and enhance diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

This synergy has proven to be a key component in promoting Indonesia's soft power diplomacy abroad. The collaboration primarily focuses on fostering cultural understanding and educational exchanges, both of which significantly contribute to strengthening Indonesia's global image. The partnership between CIS and the Indonesian Embassy is essential for implementing effective strategies to increase public awareness and interest in Indonesian culture, language, and education in host countries like Azerbaijan. Both the embassy and CIS bring unique perspectives and roles to this initiative, making their collaboration indispensable for achieving sustainable outcomes.

From the embassy's perspective, KBRI acts as Indonesia's primary representative in Azerbaijan, tasked with enhancing bilateral relations, promoting cultural diplomacy, and supporting Indonesian citizens abroad. Its role in soft power diplomacy involves creating platforms for cultural exchange through events such as festivals, music performances, and exhibitions. By working closely with CIS, the embassy seeks to maximize outreach efforts by engaging local communities, students, and academic circles. The embassy provides logistical support, resources, and funding to CIS, ensuring that cultural promotion programs run smoothly and effectively reach wider audiences.

However, KBRI faces several challenges in optimizing its collaboration with CIS, particularly in terms of limited financial resources and logistical constraints. Despite initiating many programs, maintaining consistent communication with CIS can be challenging due to differing priorities and operational limitations. For instance, KBRI often prioritizes diplomatic agendas and national events, while CIS focuses more on educational activities that require different approaches and timelines. To address these challenges, strengthening coordination and holding regular meetings between KBRI and CIS is essential to align objectives, share resources, and develop joint programs that cater to both diplomatic and educational needs.

Conversely, CIS's primary mission is to educate local students about Indonesian culture, language, and history while facilitating student exchanges and academic collaborations. As a major educational hub, CIS promotes Indonesia's soft power at the local level by organizing Indonesian language courses, seminars, and cultural activities such as *Batik* workshops and traditional dance performances. However, it frequently relies on embassy support for acquiring teaching materials, promoting events, and providing guest speakers from Indonesia.

Despite this collaboration, CIS faces significant challenges in achieving its goals, primarily due to limited funding and teaching staff shortages. CIS often depends on local resources and volunteers, including students enrolled in its programs. Additionally,

communication barriers with KBRI sometimes hinder program execution or cause delays in implementation. Improving communication and collaboration with KBRI is crucial for CIS, particularly in planning and executing cross-sectoral programs.

A notable example of effective synergy between KBRI and CIS is the annual cultural events that actively involve students and local communities in Azerbaijan. Events like Indonesian cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and national day celebrations not only introduce Indonesian culture but also foster emotional connections between the people of Azerbaijan and Indonesia. KBRI typically acts as the main organizer, while CIS contributes by mobilizing students, providing educational content, and supplying volunteers to ensure the events run smoothly.

In addition to cultural activities, CIS and KBRI also collaborate in promoting educational scholarship programs in Azerbaijan. Through joint outreach efforts, KBRI and CIS have successfully increased public interest in studying in Indonesia through programs like Darmasiswa, BSBI, and KNB scholarships. This collaboration has enabled more Azerbaijani students to pursue higher education in Indonesia, strengthening bilateral relations in the field of education. These scholarships not only serve as educational promotion tools but also as vital bridges that enhance personal connections between students from both countries.

Collaboration also includes academic exchanges involving faculty and researchers from both nations. In recent years, several academic visits facilitated by KBRI and CIS have aimed to boost research collaboration and develop more inclusive curricula in both countries. However, these collaborative agreements still require more intensive support to ensure optimal and sustainable outcomes. Given CIS's strategic role in cultural diplomacy, increasing synergy with KBRI becomes critical. Regular coordination meetings improved digital communication, and resource sharing could facilitate faster and more effective information dissemination. Such steps would enable a more dynamic and adaptive partnership, ultimately strengthening Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan.

5.4. Challenges Possessed by the Centre of Indonesian Studies

Since its inception, the CIS has aimed to serve as an essential bridge for Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan through academic, cultural, and educational collaborations. However, over the years, the CIS has encountered numerous challenges that have impacted its efforts to effectively promote Indonesian cultural diplomacy.

a. Limited Resources

One of the most significant challenges faced by the CIS is the limited resources, both in terms of funding and competent teaching personnel. Although the CIS collaborates with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Baku, the financial and human resource support provided has been insufficient. In its early years, the CIS merely received education material donation from the Indonesian Embassy in Iran, prior to the establishment of KBRI Baku. However, after KBRI Baku was established, such support from the embassy was reduced, forcing the CIS to operate on minimal resources. The main funding of the centre is from the university's budget. This limitation hinders the implementation of larger cultural and educational programs and affects the development of innovative teaching methods and cultural events.

The lack of qualified teaching staff is also a major challenge for the CIS. Only few teachers at the Indonesian studies program are alumni of Indonesian universities and some may not always have strong Indonesian studies backgrounds, potentially affecting their ability to teach the Indonesian language and culture effectively. Additionally, the absence of full-time instructors from Indonesia who are specifically assigned to the CIS impacts the quality of education offered at the centre. This issue is further exacerbated by the lack of training opportunities for local instructors to enhance their capacity to teach Indonesian language and culture using more effective methods.

b. Decline in Interest

On the other hand, there has been a decline in the interest among Azerbaijani society to enrol in Indonesian studies programs over recent years. Based on interviews with CIS management, one of the primary reasons for this declining interest is the uncertain job prospects for graduates of CIS programs. Many CIS alumni struggle to find relevant employment, leading potential students to hesitate when choosing to pursue studies at the centre. Additionally, stereotypes and misconceptions about Indonesia among the Azerbaijani population also pose challenges that need to be addressed by the CIS. These misconceptions can influence prospective students' decisions about studying at the CIS and contribute to a lack of deeper interest in Indonesian language and culture.

c. Limited Collaboration

Another barrier to the development of soft power diplomacy through the CIS is the limited collaboration between the CIS and educational institutions in Indonesia. Although several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed between the CIS and some

Indonesian universities, the implementation of these agreements remains minimal. Many of the collaborative programs have been limited to ceremonial events or online activities, making bilateral educational relations less effective. The lack of frequent visits by Indonesian academics to the CIS, or vice versa, indicates that academic relations between the two countries remain sporadic and poorly integrated.

d. Lack of Consistent Communication and Coordination

Another significant challenge for the CIS in fulfilling its mission is the lack of consistent communication and coordination with KBRI Baku. In its early years, the collaboration between the CIS and KBRI Baku was relatively strong, with joint events such as cultural festivals, celebrations of Indonesian national holidays, and student exchange programs. However, over time, this collaboration has weakened, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited the organization of in-person events. The reduced frequency of cultural and educational events involving CIS students has led to a decline in public exposure to Indonesia, resulting in decreased interest in CIS programs.

e. Technological Limitation

The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted the CIS's operations. Cultural activities, which are the primary means of introducing Indonesia to Azerbaijani society, had to be halted or moved online. The technological limitations and unequal access to the internet in Azerbaijan posed additional challenges in conducting online activities initiated by the CIS. As a result, the effectiveness of the CIS's cultural diplomacy efforts decreased significantly during the pandemic, making it a major challenge to regain public interest in Indonesia after the pandemic.

5.5. Strategic Recommendations for Increasing the Centre's Effectiveness

Despite various challenges, the CIS still has the potential to be a major player in Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in Azerbaijan. With a more strategic approach and greater support from the Indonesian government and KBRI Baku, the CIS can play a more significant role in promoting culture, education, and stronger international relations between Indonesia and Azerbaijan. The CIS's success in fulfilling its mission depends not only on internal efforts but also on collaboration with various related parties, including the government, academics, and civil society in both countries.

Given the strategic importance of CIS as an actor in soft power diplomacy, it is crucial to develop more effective strategies that strengthen their function as diplomatic channels.

Insights gained from interviews with CIS founder and leader highlight the challenges faced and offer recommendations to enhance CIS's role in advancing Indonesia's soft power diplomacy globally.

a. Enhancing collaboration with Indonesian Embassy in Baku

One of the most important recommendations for strengthening soft power diplomacy through CIS is to enhance collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Baku (KBRI Baku) in host countries. Embassies can act as facilitators, supporting CIS activities by providing logistical assistance, funding, and promotional efforts. A clear framework for cooperation needs to be established, which includes regular meetings, joint event planning, and consistent communication channels between CIS and KBRI Baku. By doing so, the embassy can help CIS organize cultural events such as festivals, traditional dance performances, and Indonesian culinary workshops—events that have proven to be effective in attracting foreign audiences and fostering greater cultural understanding. Enhanced coordination with the embassy would also help CIS overcome challenges related to limited resources, as embassies can play a more proactive role in securing funding from government and non-government sources, including local sponsors, multinational corporations, and international organizations interested in cultural exchange. Moreover, the embassy can effectively promote CIS' programs by leveraging their established networks, media contacts, and public relations expertise to reach a wider audience. This not only boosts the visibility of Indonesian culture but also positions CIS as key players in Indonesia's diplomatic strategy abroad.

b. Maximizing the Use Technology

In today's digital era, CIS should maximize the use of technology to expand Indonesia's soft power outreach. Leveraging digital platforms such as social media, webinars, and online learning can effectively introduce Indonesian culture, language, and knowledge to a broader audience. Offering online courses in Indonesian language, interactive cultural workshops, and lectures on contemporary issues in Indonesia could captivate younger generations in host countries. Furthermore, organizing virtual events like film festivals, art exhibitions, and seminars can reinforce CIS's role as a more accessible cultural bridge. This use of technology allows CIS to overcome geographical limitations, making it possible to reach a wider audience. For example, an online Indonesian film festival could attract interest not only from students but also from the general public interested in Indonesian arts and cinema.

c. Increasing Alumni Network

The alumni network of CIS is a valuable asset in developing soft power diplomacy. Alumni who have completed their studies at CIS or in Indonesia possess firsthand experiences that they can share with their local communities. By leveraging this network, CIS can increase the effectiveness of their programs through testimonials, inspirational stories, and active participation in cultural and educational promotion activities. CIS should establish more active alumni forums where alumni can share experiences, ideas, and initiatives for promoting Indonesia in Azerbaijan. Additionally, alumni can act as informal ambassadors for Indonesia in sectors such as education, business, and culture. Collaborating with alumni in organizing cultural events or conferences adds significant value to Indonesia's sustained soft power promotion.

d. Developing Collaboration with Other Educational Institutions

To enhance their impact, CIS needs to develop closer collaborations with local educational institutions in Azerbaijan. Such partnerships could include student exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and the organization of seminars or workshops involving faculty from both countries. By fostering stronger ties with local universities, CIS can expand their program offerings and attract more local students to learn about Indonesia. This collaboration could also involve co-developed courses that are recognized by local educational institutions, ensuring broader recognition of the credentials offered by CIS. Additionally, inviting guest lecturers from Indonesia could improve the quality of instruction and strengthen academic ties between Indonesia and the host country. These efforts would help create a more robust and sustainable academic relationship between the two nations.

The development of soft power diplomacy strategies through Indonesian Studies Centres abroad involves enhancing collaboration with Indonesian Embassy, utilizing digital technology, strengthening alumni networks, and building partnerships with local educational institutions. By implementing these strategies, CIS can function more effectively as instruments of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy on the international stage. A more holistic strategy would not only promote Indonesia but also build stronger relations between Indonesia and the countries hosting these study centres. This comprehensive approach, based on collaboration, innovation, and adaptability, is crucial to ensuring the long-term success of Indonesian Studies Centres in advancing Indonesia's soft power diplomacy across the globe.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study underscore Indonesia's soft power diplomacy implementation in Azerbaijan, focusing on both state and non-state actors like the Centre of Indonesian Studies. The Indonesian government, through its embassy in Baku, has primarily utilized cultural diplomacy to promote Indonesia's image, leveraging various events such as the Indonesian Cultural Festival and Indonesian Day. These efforts have effectively engaged local communities, showcasing Indonesia's rich traditions, cuisine, and arts. Meanwhile, the Centre of Indonesian Studies has played a vital role as a non-state actor, facilitating educational exchanges and promoting Indonesian culture through its programs. The collaboration between the embassy and the centre has been pivotal, reinforcing Indonesia's soft power diplomacy through comprehensive strategies involving educational, cultural, and public diplomacy approaches.

The centre's activities, including language courses, cultural workshops, and student exchanges, have significantly contributed to Indonesia's nation branding efforts. Alumni of the centre have emerged as informal cultural ambassadors, actively promoting Indonesian culture within Azerbaijan. Their roles extend beyond formal events, as they often engage in personal and professional networks to foster mutual understanding and interest in Indonesia. This illustrates how non-state actors can be effectively integrated into a country's diplomatic strategy to enhance bilateral relations.

The Centre of Indonesian Studies (CIS) in Azerbaijan faces multiple challenges that hinder its effectiveness in promoting Indonesian cultural diplomacy. One significant issue is the limited funding and availability of competent teaching staff, which restricts the centre's ability to offer high-quality programs and expand its activities. The declining interest among Azerbaijani students in Indonesian studies also poses a problem, partly driven by the lack of clear career prospects for graduates. This trend is further exacerbated by limited collaboration between the CIS and Indonesian educational institutions, which constrains opportunities for exchange and knowledge sharing. Moreover, inconsistent communication between the CIS and the Indonesian Embassy weakens coordinated efforts to promote Indonesian culture and education. Technological limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted the centre's ability to transition effectively to online formats, negatively affecting outreach and engagement.

To overcome these challenges, strategic improvements are necessary to bolster the effectiveness of CIS. Strengthening partnerships with the Indonesian Embassy and ensuring better coordination between both entities is a key step to aligning their priorities and maximizing resources. Additionally, leveraging digital technology to enhance program delivery and outreach, especially in light of recent disruptions, is crucial. The development of a robust alumni network can also help increase interest in Indonesian studies by showcasing the value of these programs for career opportunities. Furthermore, fostering partnerships with local Azerbaijani educational institutions can expand the centre's reach and promote deeper cultural understanding. These strategic steps, when implemented effectively, can enhance the role of CIS as a vital component of Indonesia's soft power diplomacy, ensuring a more sustained and impactful presence in Azerbaijan.

For future research, it would be beneficial to explore the perspectives of Azerbaijani participants in Indonesia's cultural and educational programs. Understanding their experiences can provide deeper insights into how soft power diplomacy impacts public perceptions. Additionally, examining similar soft power initiatives by other countries in Azerbaijan could offer a comparative analysis, highlighting best practices and potential areas for improvement in Indonesia's strategy. Expanding the research scope to include economic and technological cooperation as part of soft power diplomacy could also offer a more comprehensive understanding of bilateral relations. Finally, a longitudinal study tracking the long-term impact of Indonesia's soft power efforts in Azerbaijan would help assess the sustainability and evolution of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

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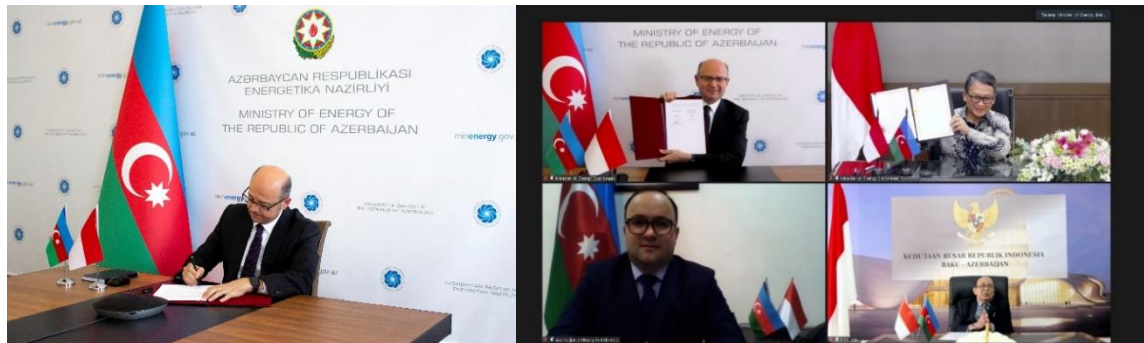
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APPENDIX 1.
EVENT DOCUMENTATION



Delegation of Indonesian Parliament at 14th Plenary Session Asian Parliamentary Assembly in Baku.

Source: DPR RI Media



Signing of MoU between Ministry of Energy of Indonesia and Azerbaijan

Source: Azerbaijan Ministry of Energy



2017 European Pencak Silat Championship in Baku

Source: Azertac



The Signing of an Action Plan for Accelerating Public Services in Indonesia at the MENPANRB Office

Source: Kementerian PAN RB



The Signing of MoU Between Khazar University and UNISMA in 2017 and 2023

Source: Khazar University Website and Social Media Account



Indonesia Cultural Festival 2016-2019

Source: Azertac, Azernews, Antaranews



Indonesian Cultural Events in Mingachevir and Nakhchivan

Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Website



Cultural Events in Commemorating 30 Years of Diplomatic Relations

Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Website



Experience Indonesia in Gabala 2023
 Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Social Media Account



Adventure Indonesia and Silk Road International Music Festival
 Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Website



Indonesia in ADA University Annual International Festival
 Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Website



Annual International Bazar at British School in Baku
 Source: Indonesian Embassy's Documentation



"International Day" at SABIS Sun International School
 Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Website



**Indonesia represented in Dunya School and European
Azerbaijan School Cultural Festivals**

Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Social Media
Account



**Instagram Content of Indonesian Embassy
(@indonesiainbaku)**

Source: Indonesian Embassy Official Social Media Account



"Indonesian Day" at Khazar University in 2017 and 2023
 Source: Khazar University Official Website



"International Culture Day" at Khazar University in 2023
 Source: Khazar University Official Website



IS Students Participated in Indonesian Cultural Festival

Source: report.az, Azernews, Azertac, Merah Putih