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Keywords: Educational Diplomacy, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Education, Qatar

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Education as Image-Building Tool: Observations from Qatar Higher Education



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Abstract

This paper attempts to illustrate how Qatar is employing the higher education as public diplomacy tool or in another terms executing the education to build its image. One of the key contributors in the soft power tools is education, which is carries many of the opportunities to build the image of the nation and promote its prestigious position, whether in the region or globally. The paper will elaborate through the observation the internal capabilities of Qatar and the educational environment which is supports the state's plans to build its reputation and boost its branding as a modern country and competitive state. The question of the paper is to observe the development of the soft power tools of Qatar. The methodological attitude in the paper is based on the authors observations and analysis, beside the available literature about the topic and the case of Qatar.

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Introduction

In the last couple of decades, the concept of the investment has developed horizontally and extended to many fields and areas of state's interests. The novel of investing in building the image and getting a prestigious reputation in the world is one of the key priorities as well. Therefore, by merging the two concepts will lead to absorbing the calculus of soft power (Wojciuk et al., 2015; Lee, 2015). The education as it's a core element of soft power, eagerly emerging in the past decades in more employing by the states, and the quality of the education its pushed its soft power (Tareva & Tarev, 2017; Wojciuk et al., 2015).

The education is very critical player in shaping the values, ethical principles, and making the people better, and even taking the position of the societies to higher levels, as well as education can provides an environment that supports the tolerance, coexistence, celebrate diversity, beside getting knowledge, and these factors are shapes a generation ahead (Wojciuk et al., 2015; Lee, 2015).

The role of education in the foreign policy increased in the past decades, mainly when its played a role as a source of main soft power instruments in the international relations, which is works to boost the position the country and elevate its prestigious ranking in many fields. That is forced many countries in Asia and Middle East to pay more attention since the late of last century to establish plans to make their utilized sources of soft power and the education was one of the key sources. The purpose of employing this source is to build their image in the world as modern countries thanks to the huge economic development and financial power (Wojciuk et al., 2015; Lee, 2015). And in this context, Qatar, the country that member in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was one of the leading countries and experiences in employing the education in building its image.

This paper will try to illustrates how Qatar is employed the education for building its image the last decades and what kind of credits Qatar's achieved by developing educational prestige, the article will be based on the observations and analysis of the Qatar's educational macro level performance and strategies,

mainly in image-building, Strengthen the connections, Culture and identity, its noteworthy that the education in this article does mean the higher education because its more espoused to the Internationalization and image building as will be elaborated.

Education, Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: An Outlook From The Literature

Soft power notion is well circulated in the last decades since its crafted by the American theorist Joseph Nye in the era of post-cold war (Nye, [2005](#)), when the conclusion was that the military force cannot be the only way to coerces the others, and making impact on the people (Khan et al., [2020](#)). According to his definitions, soft power means the ability of forming the inclination of the other parties by employing the power of culture, values, education, media and the things that cannot be classified with the military power (Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)). Therefore, the education is derived one of the key elements of the soft power, which is one of the core pillars of the state national capabilities (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)).

In the same area of concepts, the notion of public diplomacy is linked with the soft power (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)). While the hard military power is based on specific timeline, practicing public diplomacy as soft power tool is required long-term vision and patient to ripe the effects (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)). Measuring the impact of the culture and education as soft power instruments based on the ways of employing it specially in the exchange programs which is running within many years of experiences and building perceptions about a while country, including its values and culture, as well as getting the knowledge through the higher education programs (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#); Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)). The experience of the students who is travelling in purpose for studying starts with the country selection and educational institution until the post-graduation phase which is may extends to effects in the political relations and shaping the image of the country and circulating it among other people, which is reflects a sort of the public diplomacy (Lally, [2024](#); Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#); Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)).

While the governments and decision makers were aware about the importance of the educational diplomacy as effective instrument in soft power which is back from the employing of the colonial powers historically to persuade the locals and until now to serve the national interests (Peterson, [2014](#)), in the present, that is proved by plans of many countries in the world who are paying more attention to this tool, specially form Asian countries (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)).

In the plans of the nations, employing of the educational diplomacy is very common for the countries who are looking for foster their public diplomacy and soft power, specifically by creating exchange programs for the students which is increases the influence even in the long-term, and making enhancing the dialogue and understanding the other cultures and people norms, and that is by the way could boost the presence of the country in the perceptions and impact (Lo & Pan, [2021](#); Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#); Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)).

The educational diplomacy is emerged as a result of the globalization and the increasing of the interaction between the countries in the different stages (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)), basically in trade and technologies (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)). Therefore, the connections increased and the took many layers, including the education. The education for the countries is an instrument to promote its power, and defending the interests of the states in a competitive world, and that is a ways that encourages the governments to pay attention to the grants and exchange programs (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

in employing the education instrument in the ground, the states are looking to the education as gateway to circulate the ideas and thoughts, and more than a educational experience, like Australia and Chine, who are believing that the education is like a product that could be sold and promote (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)). In these cases, the education is a way to get more attention about the reputation of the country and presence and the impact of the nation's strategically, through the cultural exchange and building social and economic relations (Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#); Khan et al., [2020](#)).

The globalization is a gateway to circulate the values, ideas, attitudes by breaking the boarders (Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)). And that is allows the cooperation in the political and economic understanding, and more

specifically in the microlevel by increase the interaction between the higher education level (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

For the universities, the educational diplomacy is sort of exchanging the knowledge and increase the exposure to more dimensions in the sphere. Nowadays, the widening of the technologies and sciences and experiences in the knowledge forces the nations to attract the skilled manpower and students, and allowing more engagement in the knowledge (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)).

Also, the ranking of the universities globally is one of the main concerns for the educational institutions, and that is a factors that guides the universities to attract the international students even through the educational diplomacy, and getting the credits in gaining the ranking, also that will be an attractive for the students to select specific educational institutions (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)).

Seeking for diversifying the educational environment is one of the key drivers to boost the cultural exchange plans, from macro perspective that is will affect the global trends (Khan et al., [2020](#)). In addition, dedicating scholarships supporting the futuristic plans of developing the cooperation with the other educational institutions. Through these strategies, a more role will be given for the individuals in the educational sphere and increase the communication between the people and therefore forming relations with the other counterparts (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

As the article stressed in the beginning, the notion of the soft power and public diplomacy is extended to many spheres and forms, directly or indirectly. In the educational sphere, the interference in the diplomacy by the international educational instruments is taking multi-layered approaches and new shifts in the international level through mobility and exchange projects (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#); Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)).

The nation state taking the education as one of its core tools in adopting the diplomatic roles in their scheme, and getting an exposure to the international society, and a primary way in sharing their soft power, including values, messages, and thoughts (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#); Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)),

When the colonialism came to an end, the education played an important role in preserving the power and leverage of the superpowers, by expanding their tools of influence and using the individuals to serve their interests (Khan et al., [2020](#)). And now In the current century, the world super powers, and therefore the ambitious countries, they have used the education as a core tool in serving in interests and executing their strategies in the global sphere (Khan et al., [2020](#)). As the analysis on this kind of arguments, they believe that scholars, students, experts, and any individual in the educational sphere can play a role in serving the interests of the nation and wear a diplomatic suit, and to push the macro political objectives of the state (Khan et al., [2020](#)), in the same context, it play a role in supporting the mutual relations and correct the understandings, dialogs, and form the reputation among people, and that is therefore can be a tool for image-building and branding the country (Khan et al., [2020](#)). For the tiny countries, its more demanding to employ the education in scoring a diplomatic and political points, mainly in fulfilling their interests and promoting their identity, as well as strengthen their presence in others nations perception (Khan et al., [2020](#)), and by following these plans, they are capable to by bypass their limited economic and financial abilities, or achieving what the hard power cannot achieve, in addition to breaking the barriers between nations and being an easy tool to make a huge developments in the public diplomacy domain (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

There are many functions and roles that relevant to employing the educational diplomacy in serving the political interests, according to Khan et al. ([2020](#)) elevating the level of the knowledge exchange and dialogue among the people, and seeking to building the image of the nation toward the others, as well as sponsoring the policies of the countries in the world positively. In the same time, for both, superpowers and small counties, the limitations of the sources, time, contexts, and political atmospheres affects the plans of employing the educating in public diplomacy, while it may least requirements than the hard power.

Through the educational diplomacy, the connections used to be stronger in many layers, including macro and micro levels. The educational diplomacy is supporting the circulation of the values, sharing experiences and the ethics of the profession and academic criterion like the trust, credibility and integrity and could allow more interaction between the educational partakers in a quit rhythm and impactful

(Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)). The exchange programs and practicing the educational diplomacy is a way to sharing the latest curricula, technologies and educational trends, between the entities and individuals, and attracts the companies to be more active in the educational process, and finding ways to employ the power of knowledge in practice from the theory, amid the very competitive and developed globalized world (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)).

One of the key elements of encouraging the educational exchange programs that because of less costly than other ways. While the universities with the high ranking are keen to attract the students who are willing to pay in the return of taking the whole educational experience from overseas, and that is a trend that could be found in the developed countries (Peterson, [2014](#)).

Seeking for more varied backgrounds from the students, researchers and academics from the world, will increase the exposure to the different opportunities and backgrounds, and making more chances for academic networks (Peterson, [2014](#)).

The perceptions and attitudes of the people forms through the experiences and dealing with others. The education allows a networks of students to engage and sharing perceptions, thoughts, and culture. That is in a macro level will allows the people to increase their knowledge about the other countries and increase their cultural tolerance, which is based on a personal experience and getting more backgrounds about the world, They are playing the role of the diplomats and representative ambassadors of their countries (Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#); Khan et al., [2020](#)). The period that the students are spending in the other countries is more than classes and exams, but it's a whole cultural experiences that can be a higher asset for the people when they are going back to their countries and sharing their thoughts to their communities (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

The educational diplomacy is a way to convey the cultures to other countries by the students, researcher, academic networks, and that could lead to more understanding and absorbing of the foreign policies and cultural exchange (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

The decision makers could play a role in encouraging the students to be part of the diplomatic mission by being a representative of their cultures and promote their culture to other nations. As any nation celebrates for many occasions across the year, like the national, social, cultural, religious, and sport events, these are parts of attracting them to engage in the community, and being part of their integration with their peers. These are events that can expose them to the local and traditional culture and will allow them to see everything by their eyes, and therefore the transition of the cultural experience to the others will be more accurate, and most importantly it will be through the educational sphere (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)). The educational experience is an opportunity to circulate the different sides of any culture purely and directly without any spoils, and can build bridges with the other cultures in more broadly sides and can maintain for the long term (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)). The idea of exchanging the students globally is lined drastically on the assumptions of the positive impact, while in the advocacies of the soft power can judge that is for serving the national interest of the country, the long-term effects are empowers the globalization (Vaxevanidou, [2018](#)). Beside the financial factors of the mobility of the students and joining the exchange programs, the countries are ripping the brains and professional experiences (Arslan & Sezgin, [2026](#)). Despite the variety of reflecting of the public diplomacy as a sort of soft power, there are many other instruments could be classified in this category, like employing the traditional media platforms to promote the cultural heritages beside the schools and universities (Khan et al., [2020](#)). While the results are apparently in the educational sphere, there are also extensions of this wave to shaping the foreign policies, and shaping the perceptions and understandings toward other cultures (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

The experiences of the countries are differed in employing the educational diplomacy in building its image and reputation. According to Khan et al. ([2020](#)), Chinese students are playing a vital role in those success in the strategy through forming a positive perception about its culture and heritage, and thanks to Chinese students the culture and history of them are very circulated in the world (Khan et al., [2020](#)). The education can be employed to achieve many strategies, mainly the objectives which in parallel with the bond and ties that shaped via the education scholarships and projects, these bunches of students are playing a role in promoting the image of the countries internationally (Waithaka, & Maluki, [2016](#)). The mainstream

of student's mobility is very focal for the educational institutions, mainly for those are didn't prioritizing the education fees and high rankings or reputation (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

Assessments of the global education activity are always toward the long-term outcomes, including for the institutions, and societies or the educational structure and through evaluating the effect of the education in image-building (Khan et al., [2020](#)).

Qatar and image building through Higher Education

Qatar in its policies adopted many ways to empower its prestigious image in the world. Through the huge quantum leap in many fields after using Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) exports profits in the last decades, the country vision based on employing the politics, economy, sport, culture and education as well, to build its image in the world (Zeineddine, [2017](#)).

While in the political side, which is based on employing the preventive diplomacy through mediation and conflicts resolutions in the middle east and other parts in the world, Qatar succeeded to get the trust and credibility of the international community, and now its one of the key countries in managing medications and containing the tensions. In addition, through the sport, Qatar via hosting the mega sport events globally attracted the attention of the world, through this vision Qatar progressed in building a modern infrastructure, develop experiences in handling the big events, attracting the sport fans and elevate its tourism capabilities (Kamrava, [2011](#)).

In the educational level, Qatar through a macro comprehensive long-term plan, is doing many accomplishments in being a one of the key educational hubs in the region, which at the end serves the vision of the country in building its image and practicing public diplomacy.

For Qatar, education is very vital tool in forming the image of the state. Quality of education it's the driving pillar that guiding the reputation of the country and its educational institutions. In the global rankings, accreditations and recognition, the higher education institutions are keeping a very high positing in terms of fulfilling the quality of education requirements and providing an ideal environment for the students to attract them globally, and very importantly depending on long term because the effect of educational diplomacy to be appeared (Crist, [2015](#)).

Amid the regional competition in many fields, Qatar through attracting students by educational diplomacy is seeking to get prestigious position and build a reputation, experiences, and perceptions. As it follows these plans thorough the sport events, education play a important role in keeping a long-term effect with the individuals and exporting a whole experience for others, not just in the educational side but about the entire experience including the culture and identity.

Education for Qatar is a way for reflecting the modern infrastructure in the state and proving its praiseworthiness investments in education. A part of the educational experience of the students is exposing to the modern equipment's and latest knowledge which is provided by the intuitions, and that is very attractive for the students to chose the educational destination in the process of planning for studying abroad. Qatar by providing this enticing environment for the students and playing a role in their decision-making phase, mainly that the destination selection is key element in deciding the country and the institutions as the studies proves.

The higher education in Qatar provides diversity in the educational institutions and choices which is can be added to the factors for attracting the students and empower the plans for practicing the educational diplomacy. The individuals are shaping their perceptions about the country on the codes or buzzes, knowing about the level of education in any country is a way of attracting the attention to the level of investing in the education that country, and that is making the country and educational hub for the students, and the level of the advancement in education quality.

The educational exchange programs are not just for acquiring the knowledge and making complimentary procedures to express the interest in educational diplomacy, but its an opportunity for the countries to share their mutual principles and values to the others. They are working as representatives for

the country and carrying the culture and heritage of a nation, so thought the education the individuals not only came of getting knowledge, but to be ambassadors of their nations values (Yang, [2007](#)).

The educational atmosphere is allowing the students for networking and building friendships with their peers and therefore will support the cultural exchange between them. The cultural exchange including knowing the history, identity, language, and daily traditional habits in the nation. The power of the cultural exchange in the education is one of the fundamental experiences of the international students and plays a role in decision making process, even by choosing a destinations that compatible with the norms of the students or in evaluating the whole experience. The globalized world plays a role in robust the engagement and pushing the notion of global citizenship.

Through practicing the educational diplomacy, Qatar is succeeding to attract the skilled labor thorough integrating the students into the labor market. The educational institutions in Qatar are providing many of the opportunities to study in the university and colleges, as well as the exchange programs through the institutions. And that is enabling the policy makers in the country to attract the graduates and integrate them in the labor market, basically amid the huge need for the labor market for manpower to fulfill the needs and work on its vision.

In addition to hosting the key events in the region and conferences, sport tournaments, Qatar through the academic conferences is attracting the scholars and converting its position to a pivot for academic dialogue and debates. That is a systematic plan to convert Doha to one of attractive destination for hosting conferences that could build the image of Qatar by promoting its capabilities. As the academic know, the conferences do not contain only from sessions of discussions, but it includes a tours and opportunities to discover the country and its capabilities.

The educational institutions that built by Qatar were very attractive for the academic scholars around the world and the researchers to came and spend their academic career. As Qatar is hosting a very prominent universities mainly in Qatar foundation, like Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, Georgetown University in Qatar, Texas A&M University at Qatar, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, HEC Paris, Doha, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) and Northwestern University in Qatar, as well as the other specialized research institutions like Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, Qatar Computing Research Institute, and Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, these entities were very enticing for the scholars to run their professional career (Ahmed, [2018](#)).

Beside Qatar Foundation academic environment, Qatar University as the main government funded university is providing 10 colleges and more than 50 programs from many majors, are filling its lists with students with a huge portion of international students, and recruiting the scholars, academics, and experts to enroll in the universities.

Conclusion

Qatar is eagerly working on the education as public diplomacy as part of its grand strategy that integrates with the other fields, like sport, economy, culture, and media. This policy despite that requires a huge investments in building the infrastructure, installing technologies, and attracting the manpower, its very vital for shaping the image of the country mainly in the long-term, and keeping an image of the whole experience of the country beside getting the educational opportunity. The challenges for Qatar in keeping in the same pace for preserving the portion of students to attract them amid the competition with the other countries in the region, and developing the educational infrastructure continuously, facilitation of visa requirements and employing the other ways of the soft power tools.

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