

Higher Education System in The Republic of Uzbekistan: Modern Trends and Developments



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ABSTRACT: The article discusses the international and domestic experience in the higher education development of the Republic of Uzbekistan, implementation of different education forms, reveals the recent trends and its analysis has been given. The urgent need to improve the existing educational process management system under new conditions has been stressed, with a special focus on using the financial independence granted recently to the republic's universities. The introduction of a progressive management in education is supposed to increase the competitiveness of universities and their investment attractiveness.

KEYWORDS: higher education, online learning, distance learning, quality of education, management, competitiveness, financial independence, profitability, economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the Republic of Uzbekistan has been implementing a new stage of profound transformations in all society spheres. Among the key areas is the liberalization and development of the economy and the social sphere. So, as a result of the implementation of a balanced and constructive foreign policy, the total volume of trade between Uzbekistan and the countries of Central Asia increased from \$ 2.6 billion in 2017 to almost \$7.5 billion in 2022, which brought the Central Asian region to third place among the largest economic partners of Uzbekistan after Russia (\$9.3 billion) and China (\$ 8.9) [1].

Dynamic processes are taking place in the system of higher education of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The number of domestic and foreign participants in the market of university educational services is rapidly growing. The course of the republic to further increase their academic and financial independence radically changes the working conditions, which requires effective efforts in the management system. At the same time, the main priorities remain increasing the competitiveness of specific universities and the education sector as a whole, further providing the sectors of the economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan with high-quality specialists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The world experience shows that the education system, including higher education one, actively participates in the country's economic development. So, Trokhimchuk A.V. notes that in the conditions of the modern economy, educational services have become the most demanded product, since today in the labor market "it is not an employee who is bought, but his qualifications, knowledge and skills" [2].

Today, education directly affects the formation of GDP, as it affects the quality of human capital and, as a result, the amount of income received from it. Moreover, Atakhanov R.A. emphasizes that, in general, education can be considered one of the factors of economic growth and technological progress [3].

Sharma R. argues that, relying on a person as the main capital of a modern economy, it is necessary to create conditions for the accumulation and updating of knowledge and skills, to focus on the implementation of the concept of lifelong education and the provision of equal access to higher education to all citizens of the country [4]. Thus, it is possible to change not only the attitude towards education among the younger generation, but also among employers, identify the need to create jobs for highly qualified workers and attract them to the domestic labor market.

An important tool for achieving the competitiveness of universities in Europe has become the use of distance education. Thus, the Hagen Correspondence University (Fernuniversität in Hagen) is the first and only public correspondence university in

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Germany specializing only in distance learning. The FernstudiumCheck.de - German portal publishes a ranking of the best educational institutions in Germany offering distance learning [5].

Leading experts from Jedium, a Microsoft partner company [6], conclude that in the modern world, online learning is beginning to really crowd out the face-to-face form of obtaining knowledge, and, in fact, is considered a logical continuation of distance learning, where the word "online" is only indicating the way in which knowledge is acquired and the connection between the teacher and the student.

All this explains the increased attention of states, in particular, the Republic of Uzbekistan, to the high development rates in the field of educational services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical and methodological foundations of the study are based on the conclusions and proposals of foreign and domestic researchers in the field of higher education. The methodological basis for avoiding the problems is the national concept for the development of higher education for the period up to 2030, government decisions on providing and expanding the economic and academic independence of national universities, materials and expert reports. In the course of the study, various methods were used: observation and collection of facts, modeling, the method of scientific abstractions, system analysis, set out in the works of domestic and foreign scientists.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.

The Republic of Uzbekistan is actively studying the experience of other countries to improve the efficiency of higher education, including the competitiveness of individual universities operating in the educational services market. First of all, the Concept for the development of higher education for the period up to 2030 was adopted, the contours of infrastructure development and specific tasks were defined. Particular attention is paid to the development and implementation of alternative types and forms of education.

Introduction of online education. In Uzbekistan, from the 2019-2020 academic year (before the start of the coronavirus pandemic), they began to conduct remotely online classes for students of the special correspondence department. The online learning platform itself was implemented by the Center for the Implementation of Electronic Education in Educational Institutions under the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education¹. The development of electronic textbooks for special correspondence education has begun. Distance learning was also planned to be introduced for correspondence and evening education forms at the universities [7].

In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, it became possible to get education in Belarusian and Russian universities in a remote format from anywhere in Uzbekistan. For these purposes, the Center for Distance Education in Uzbekistan, "Postupi.uz", helps to enter the faculties of distance learning in some programs of undergraduate and graduate programs [8].

As a result of studying the materials of foreign and domestic experts on the implementation of distance education, the practice of a number of universities in organizing this process, the author comes to a number of preliminary conclusions:

1. The introduction of distance education has become the imperative of the times and has become widespread with the onset of the Covid19 pandemic.
2. It was the introduction of online education during the coronavirus pandemic that gave impetus to the use of best practices, modern information and communication technologies.
3. In the higher education sector of the republic, along with the active development of international experience, its own practice has appeared.
4. For the national experts of Uzbekistan, a wide field of opportunities has been opened up for a critical assessment of the results of the implementation of online learning, as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

Extension of the university services market. In December 2021, a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan [9] was signed up, which confirmed the commitment of the republic to market reforms. The 35 universities, including the Tashkent State Transport University, which the author represents by this paper, have received academic and financial independence, and transformation offices have been opened here.

Universities independently decide now the procedure for the provision of paid services in empty buildings and structures, as well as the annual mileage limit for vehicles and requirements for their maintenance. At the same time, in our opinion, more important is the power to independently make decisions on such issues as:

¹ Now: Ministry for Higher education, Science and Innovation.

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- determination of the education fees on a paid-contract basis, taking into account the requirements of the education services market.
- attraction on a contract basis of domestic and foreign professors & teachers and specialists who may apply modern pedagogical technologies in the educational process and conduct scientific research.
- establishing, based on market conditions, the amount of salary and payments for foreign highly qualified specialists invited and involved in educational and scientific processes.
- development of standards for the professors and teachers' staff units;
- allocation of scholarships and grants for students at their own expense.
- direct purchase of educational and scientific literature, textbooks and teaching aids from international manufacturers having copyrights.
- **Postcovid period of development.** By the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, a significant weakening of the coronavirus pandemic gave new impetus to the development of the university sector of the republic, which makes it possible to identify a number of current trends in the system of higher education and its management:
 - First of all, the processes of market reforms have noticeably intensified. The capacity of the educational services market has also increased. Thus, the number of undergraduate and graduate students in 2017-2022 increased from 250,000 to 1,100,000, or by more than 4 times.
 - The number of universities is also rapidly growing in the country, which increased from 77 in 2017 to 209 at the beginning of 2023 [10], or almost by 3 times.
 - The structure and composition of participants in the educational services market is radically changing, where in 2017 all the universities (100%) were state-owned ones. Today, this share is already 54.5%, a share of non-state universities reached 31.1%, and the foreign universities branches composed 34.5%. The largest increase was recorded in the sector of non-state universities, and, according to our estimates, this process will increase due to the compression of the state universities share.

The country's leadership has set the task of opening at least one non-state university in each of the 12 districts of the republic. The geography of the university market is also dynamically developing due to the expansion of the structure of domestic universities. So, the Samarkand State University opened its branch in Jizzakh region, only in the Vabkent region of the Bukhara district there are branches of three universities from the capital city Tashkent. And an active work in this direction is carried out in all regions of Uzbekistan. As a result of geographic diversification, the previously dominant share of Tashkent among the universities of the republic decreased to 25%.

- Enrollment in the higher education of a country increased from 9 percent in 2015 to 38 percent in 2022 [11], this dynamic is in just line with global trends, for example, in a number of developed countries this figure reaches up to 80-90%.

Financial aspects of development. In February 2023, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation published a report on income and expenses of the 69 public universities in Uzbekistan [12]. As noted in the report, the total income of these universities amounted to 8, 77 trillion UzS (\$771,6 Mln.), and their expenses - 8, 03 trillion UzS (\$712,8 Mln.), which can indicate their profitability in general, while the total net profit amounted to 0,67 trillion UzS. (\$ 58,8 Mln.).²

The following funding sources were established:

- state budget funds (25% of total revenues).
- admissions for training on the contractual system (71.6%).
- Income from development funds (3.4%).

Market leaders' universities (TOP-5) with the highest revenues:

1. National University of Uzbekistan (UzS 435 billion).
2. Tashkent State Pedagogical University (UzS 371 billion).
3. Ferghana State University (UzS 368 billion).
4. Urgen State University (UzS 365 billion).
5. Samarkand State University (UzS 351 billion).

Our study also identified leaders with the largest net profits, as well as a number of universities with the largest losses (Table 1).

² \$1=11 335 UzS, according to the rate as of 15.03.2023

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Table 1. List of 5 universities with the largest net profits and 5 universities with the largest losses in the Republic of Uzbekistan, January-December 2022, in: billion soums, UzS.

	Top-5 universities with the largest net profits		Top-5 universities with the largest losses	
	Name of the university	Income	Name of the university	Losses
1	Tashkent state university	106,2	Samarkand state university	- 42,5
2	Namanghan state university	67,7	Karshi state university	- 28,3
3	Karakalpakh state university after Berdakh	54,4	Samarkand state institute for foreign languages	- 26,8
4	Gulistan state university	54	Ferghana polytechnic insitute	- 15,3
5	Navoiy state university	43,2	Nukus state pedagogic institute after Adjiniyaz	- 15,0

Source: compiled by the author based on the Report of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The study showed that 49 of the 69 state universities listed in the Report (71%) ended the 2022 financial year with a profit, and 20 of them with a loss. According to our estimates, about 140 universities remained outside the scope of the study, including some large state –owned one, like Tashkent law university under Ministry of justice, the University of world economy and diplomacy (Ministry of foreign affairs), Tashkent medical Academy (Ministry for Healthcare).

At the same time, the largest universities have entered the circle of study, which makes it possible to assume that the actual market volume may double at least in the new future , and taking into account the practical expansion of existing and the opening of new universities, it will significantly expand in the next 5 years.

Nevertheless we would welcome the first steps on developing financial and other statistics related to this market and its new trends. In its turn it could give real benchmarks for foreign partner universities and research institutions

It should be noted that the reforms initiated in this system are aimed at creating a competitive environment. We see that the involvement of the private sector in this process also contributes to the development of new approaches. These conditions create a broad base for a radically new situation, which is designed to accelerate the transition to market management mechanisms in this area.

In this regard, the author made an attempt to analyze the practice and ways to improve management, in particular the use of new forms of education. Thus, on the way to increasing its financial independence, the Tashkent State Transport University (TSTU), like other universities in Uzbekistan, primarily seeks to increase the volume of educational services provided. Thus the total number of students at TSTU increased from 14494 in 2020 to 16126 in 2022 (1.12 times).

On the one hand, there is a slight overall growth, at the same time a slight decrease (slowdown) in admission to the being traditional bachelor's and master's programs is to note. We estimate that the undergraduate and graduate admissions in 2023 will increase significantly as a number of conditions and requirements that were in effect in 2022 have been abolished recently.

At the same time, there is a diversification of the forms of education: for example, the number of students in the TSTU's correspondence department increased from 2767 to 7464, or by 2.71 times (Table 2). Nevertheless, the university develops such forms like "Second Specialty", "Special Correspondence", "Distance Education", which have become a good alternative to replenish profitability under current conditions. As a result, the share of new (alternative) forms of education by the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year amounted to 48.84%.

In our opinion, the above mentioned diversification leads to a real increase in the volume of educational services and contributes to the achieving the financial independence. On the other hand, this growth poses new challenges to improve the quality of education, as well as expand the material and technical base of the university, the classroom fund, its equipment, living conditions for students etc.

Table 2. Tashkent State Transport University (TSTU), by type of education, 2000-2022

Date	Number of students, total *	Including the forms of education				
		Master + undergraduate	Special correspondence	Second specialty	Correspon dence	distance learning .
01.09.2020	14494	11378	106	243	2767	-
01.09.2021	16519	11077		344	5098	-
01.09.2022	16126	10683			7464	412

Source: TSTU ³ data

³ The university was founded in 2020 as a result of the merger of the Tashkent Institute of Railway Engineers, the Tashkent Institute of Design, Construction and Operation of Highways, the Aviation Faculty of the Tashkent Technical University.

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Conclusions and Proposals. We recognize that the period of higher education development to be studied is relatively short, since it began in 2017 and gained rapid development only in 2021. At the same time, we should take into consideration its high dynamics and scale, and so we do believe this study is relevant, which allows us to identify a number of additional trends in the field of the republic's higher education, as following ones:

- The diversification of the education main forms revealed on the example of the TSTU is noted in the system of higher education as a whole. We see an increase in the "bachelor's + master's" system. The correspondence education is actively developing, such forms of education as "Second Specialty", "Distance Education" are being introduced, the share of new (alternative) forms of education in a number of republic's universities exceeded 50% by the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year;
- new market conditions create an expanded supply market to meet the existing high payable demand. The existence of paid education on a par with education funded by the state, as well as the emerging correspondence form, on the one hand, lead to an increase in the level of the people's education, since it becomes possible to get higher education for those who previously did not have access to it [13].
- international experts note a gradual increase in the share of paid and distance education (by 15% over the past 25 years), we see that the national trends in the development of higher education in Uzbekistan are in line with these international processes;
- among the drivers of the process, the moral and psychological factor should be singled out. Thus, as a result of the stigmatization of people without a diploma, who are not personally motivated to study, the goal has finally appeared - "getting a higher education" in order to avoid social differentiation and falling into a lower class[14], which is confirmed among the main students motivations at the Uzbek universities.

Based on the studied materials, we made an attempt to analyze the today's trends in the development of higher education in the republic (Table 3).

Table 3. Analysis of trends in the accelerated growth in the number of universities in the educational services market of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -They started work to introduce advanced technologies, prepare new various training materials and programs; -Improved technical base of universities, their departments, other divisions; - Increasing qualifications and skills of teaching staff through the development of new technologies and international exchanges; - There is an expansion of the financial capabilities of an university due to the diversification of types and new volumes of services; - Work began on developing own training programs, inviting specialists, including foreign ones; - Opportunities and possibility of independently setting tariffs for education and payment of the teaching staff; -Large potential to benefit from the international professionals and exchange programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Weak technical equipment of the university departments and teaching staff; - Low quality of the Internet and mobile communications in general, access to the local network, i.e. from the regions of the republic; - Low competence of some teachers in the use of ICT; -Insufficient development of distance education forms; - Insufficient competitiveness of some teaching staff; - A low proportion of teachers having an academic degree in the total number, including those with knowledge of a foreign language; - Lack of integration of universities and business; - Insufficient number of specialties with teaching in English (other foreign language); - Lack of marketing skills, analysis of the market for the provision of paid services.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Achieving competitiveness for individual teachers and the university as a whole; -Achievement of financial and academic independence of market entities; - Entering the international market of educational services; - Growth of education of labor resources of the republic; - Improving the qualifications and quality of personnel training; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition between universities for competent and highly skilled staff, the flow of qualified personnel and the strengthening (weakening) of some at the expense of others; - price struggle (war) between universities; - Insufficient development of new methods (adaptation) of management and regulation of dynamic processes in the higher education market;

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- Synergy effect for sectors of the economy and society as a whole; - High social effect for the individuals and society as a whole.	- The lack (absence) of a reliable information and statistical base on universities in the new conditions with a predominant number of private universities; - Quality of planning, forecasting, formation of a long-term development strategy for higher education system
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Source: the table was compiled by author on the basis of the materials studied.

The problem analysis (Weaknesses section) shows that there is a lot of work to be done to really improve the quality of the educational process, which should increase the attractiveness for foreign students. In our opinion, it will also be necessary to rethink the role and functions, management methods of the newly reformed Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation under the new conditions of activity.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

1. Taking into account the trends in the market of higher education services, the authority for financial and academic independence will be granted in stages to an increasing number of the marker entities.
2. These circumstances will push the republic's universities to systematic work to increase their competitiveness, the formation of a reliable system focused on improving the quality of education to monitor this process and meet international standards.
3. The priority areas may be:
 - formation and development of the competitive advantages by each individual university, its structures and personnel;
 - creation of a developed material and technical base, equipped by a sufficient and promising classroom and laboratory fund, furniture and equipment;
 - systematic work on the selection (starting with students), use and promotion of the professors, teaching and scientific staff of universities.

Participation in international rankings will increase the investment attractiveness of an university for foreign students, primarily from the countries of Central Asia and other countries, as well as India, China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Cuba. So, in October 2022, the TSTU has get the status of "reporter" in the World University Rankings - 2023, awarded by the prestigious UK Times Higher Education rating agency [15]. Thus, the 10 universities of Uzbekistan have recently joined the 18 universities within the above mentioned ranking in order to join the competition for the entering the TOP-1000 of the world.

There is also a need to study experience in developing business incubators in other countries, like India. Thus, with the assistance of KOICA, business incubators are being opened throughout the country within the framework of the project "Stimulation of the business incubation system in Uzbekistan".

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