

## STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

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### **Abstract**

The internationalization of higher education has become a strategic priority for Uzbekistan, driven by national development goals and the need to integrate into the global academic community. This paper proposes a comprehensive set of strategies for advancing the internationalization of Uzbekistan's higher education system. Drawing on an analysis of the current state, challenges, and international best practices, the recommendations are structured around three core dimensions: policy and strategy, management mechanisms, and key development areas. The proposed strategies include the formulation of a long-term national road map, the establishment of a robust quality assurance system, the optimization of resource allocation, and targeted initiatives to enhance regional attractiveness and deepen international cooperation networks. The findings aim to provide a actionable framework for policymakers and higher education institutions to foster a more globally competitive and interconnected higher education sector in Uzbekistan.

### **Keywords**

internationalization of higher education; Uzbekistan higher education system; national development strategy; policy and governance; quality assurance mechanisms; institutional management; international academic cooperation; global integration; higher education competitiveness; resource optimization.

**Introduction:** Based on the preceding analysis of the developmental trajectory, current characteristics, and challenges facing the internationalization of higher education in Uzbekistan, and drawing on the experiences of China and other international partners, this section proposes a systematic set of strategic recommendations. These recommendations are structured into three interconnected dimensions: policy and strategy, management mechanisms, and key development areas. The goal is to provide a comprehensive and actionable roadmap for transforming Uzbekistan into a regional higher education hub.

### **Strategies and Recommendations**

## 1. Developing a Medium- to Long-Term Strategic Plan for the Internationalization of Higher Education

Uzbekistan requires a systematic, nationally-coordinated medium- to long-term strategy for the internationalization of higher education. This strategy must clearly define a national vision, set phased objectives, and outline implementation pathways. A primary strategic vision should be to position the country as a "Regional Higher Education Hub in Central Asia" and a "Center for Educational Cooperation among Turkic-speaking Nations." With over 2 million students enrolled in higher education across Central Asia, but with intra-regional student mobility below 1% , Uzbekistan, as the most populous nation in the region, possesses the necessary scale to become a regional educational leader.

In terms of target setting, quantifiable indicators should be established with 2030 as a mid-term milestone. Key targets should include: increasing the proportion of international students from the current 1.2% to 3%; expanding English-medium instruction programs from 400 to 600; growing the number of foreign university branches from over 30 to 40; and ensuring at least two Uzbek universities are ranked among the top 300 in the QS Asia University Rankings.

Regarding implementation mechanisms, it is recommended to establish an "Inter-ministerial Committee for the Internationalization of Higher Education." Led by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, and including participants from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Internal Affairs, this committee would convene regularly to address bottlenecks in policy implementation[1].

## 2. Constructing a Multi-Level Policy Support System

At the national level, it is recommended to revise the "Education Code" to include a dedicated chapter on the "Internationalization of Higher Education." This would provide a clear legal basis for the establishment of foreign branches, the recruitment of international students, and the employment of international faculty. Given that over 20 presidential decrees related to higher education reform have been issued between 2017 and 2024, these should be consolidated into a comprehensive "Law on the Promotion of Internationalization in Higher Education".

A differentiated approach should be applied to various types of higher education institutions:

**Research Universities:** Should focus on enhancing international research collaboration.

**Regional Comprehensive Universities:** Should concentrate on developing academic programs with a distinctive Central Asian focus.

Foreign Branches: Should serve as models and catalysts for best practices in internationalization.

Specialized Institutions: Should establish professional networks and alliances with international counterparts in their respective fields.

In terms of regional specialization, Tashkent should be developed as the national flagship for internationalization. Cities like Samarkand and Bukhara can leverage their rich historical and cultural heritage to develop "Cultural Heritage + International Education" niche programs. Meanwhile, regions such as Khorazm and Fergana can build on their agricultural strengths to develop international collaborative projects in areas like arid land agriculture. Currently, approximately 70% of all international students in Uzbekistan are concentrated in Tashkent, indicating significant potential for more balanced regional development[2].

### **Innovation in Management Mechanisms**

#### **1. Establishing a Quality Assurance System for Internationalization**

Drawing on the experience of China's "Quality Certification for Studying in China" program, which has certified over 300 HEIs since its launch in 2016, it is recommended that the State Inspectorate for Quality Control of Education in Uzbekistan lead the development of "Quality Certification Standards for International Student Education." The goal should be to complete the first round of certification for 20 universities that are major recipients of international students by 2028.

Addressing the issue that over 400 English-medium programs currently lack uniform quality standards, it is essential to establish an "International Program Accreditation System." This system should involve international experts in the evaluation process to ensure the international credibility of the certification outcomes.

Furthermore, the academic evaluation system should be reformed to incorporate core indicators such as SCI/SSCI publications, presentations at international conferences, and participation in international collaborative projects. In 2023, the number of SCI/SSCI papers published per 100 faculty members in Uzbekistan was approximately 8, significantly lower than in Kazakhstan (18) and the global average (25).

#### **2. Optimizing Resource Allocation for Internationalization**

It is recommended to establish a "Special Fund for the Internationalization of Higher Education," aiming for an annual budget of 500 billion UZS by 2028 to support internationalization projects in 30 HEIs. This approach is inspired by models such as Jiangsu Province's 50 million CNY annual special fund for provincial-level Sino-foreign cooperative education programs and Kazakhstan's

"Bolashak" presidential scholarship, which funds approximately 1,000 students for overseas study annually.

To address the current low proportion of international faculty, a dual-pronged strategy is proposed:

**International Faculty Recruitment Plan:** Introduce "Uzbekistan International Chair Professor" positions to increase the share of international faculty to 3% by 2030.

**Local Faculty Internationalization Plan:** Expand the "El-yurt Umidi" fellowship program to raise the proportion of faculty with overseas doctoral degrees from 1.4% to 4% by 2030.

Given the limited level of international research collaboration, a "Seed Fund for International Research Collaboration" should be established. This fund would support 50-80 projects annually and facilitate the development of 5-8 international joint laboratories in areas of national strength. As of the end of 2024, Uzbekistan participated in only 12 EU "Horizon Europe" projects, compared to 58 from Kazakhstan[3].

### **Strategies for Key Development Areas**

#### **1. Enhancing the Regional Attractiveness of Uzbekistan's Higher Education**

To develop distinctive academic offerings, an international master's program in "Central Asian Studies" could be established at Samarkand State University. The objective would be to create 2-3 such flagship programs by 2028, each with an annual intake of up to 200 international students. Similarly, a program on "Sustainable Development of Arid Agriculture" at Tashkent State Agrarian University could address a global challenge relevant to approximately 40% of the world's arable land across 120 countries. Furthermore, efforts to promote the "Turkic Universities Union" should be intensified, aiming to facilitate an annual exchange of over 1,000 students by 2028.

In creating a higher education hub, the experience of Qatar's Education City should be considered. It is recommended to plan and develop an "International University City" in Tashkent. By 2030, this cluster should aim to host 10-15 foreign university branches, with a combined student body of 15,000-20,000, and host over 30 international academic conferences annually.

Regarding language and cultural promotion, the network of "Alisher Navoi Language and Culture Centers" should be expanded to 20 countries by 2030, with a cumulative total of over 50,000 trainees. Concurrently, an online Uzbek language learning platform should be developed. With 35 million native speakers, the platform should aim to register over 100,000 users by 2026[4].

#### **2. Deepening International Cooperation Networks**

Priority should be given to strengthening educational ties with neighboring countries:

Russia: Deepen collaboration to increase the number of Russian university branches in Uzbekistan from 12 to 15 by 2028.

Central Asian Neighbors: Promote the establishment of a "Central Asian Higher Education Area," aiming to increase intra-regional student mobility from approximately 10,000 to 40,000 by 2030.

Turkey: Enhance cooperation to increase the number of Uzbek students in Turkey from 2,500 to 4,000 by 2028.

Strategic expansion of partnerships with key Asian nations is also crucial:

South Korea: Increase the number of Uzbek students in South Korea from 3,500 to 5,000 by 2028.

China: Increase the number of Uzbek students in China from 1,800 to 3,500 by 2028.

Finally, a gradual establishment of a global partner network is needed:

Europe: Increase the number of Uzbek students in Germany from 2,300 to 3,000 by 2028.

USA: Increase the number of Uzbek students in the U.S. from 300 to 800 by 2028, and attract over 500 European and American students annually through summer schools in Uzbekistan.

### 3. Strengthening Institutional Capacity for Internationalization

To build English-medium instruction capacity, it is estimated that less than 10% of current faculty possess a CEFR C1 level or higher. A dedicated "English-Medium Instruction Curriculum Development Fund" should be established. The targets are to increase English-medium programs to 600 by 2028, raise the proportion of faculty capable of teaching fully in English to 25% by 2030, and train over 500 English teachers annually.

For professional development of international office staff, it is noted that only 28 out of 78 state universities currently have an independent international office. It is recommended to send 50 administrators abroad annually for professional development, with the goal of establishing an international office in every state university by 2028.

To elevate the level of research collaboration, the current rate of internationally co-authored papers is 38%, below Kazakhstan's 51%. The aforementioned "Seed Fund for International Research Collaboration" is critical here, with the aims of increasing the proportion of internationally co-authored papers to 45% by 2028 and establishing 8-10 international joint laboratories by 2030[5].

### Conclusion:

Overall, the strategic recommendations proposed in this paper emphasize systematicity, actionability, and goal-orientation, aiming to provide a clear action framework for Uzbek policymakers and higher education institutions. Through the coordinated advancement of policy guidance, mechanism innovation, and breakthroughs in key areas, Uzbekistan has the potential to significantly enhance the international competitiveness and regional influence of its higher education within the next decade, ultimately achieving a strategic transformation from a recipient of education to a regional educational hub. These recommendations focus not only on increasing quantitative indicators but also emphasize the organic integration of quality assurance, distinctive development, and capacity building, reflecting a profound understanding of the essence of higher education internationalization.

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