

ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract:

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' academic, professional, and personal development. As the demand for quality education continues to rise, ensuring the provision of high-quality higher education services has become paramount. This research article explores various strategies and implications for improving the quality of higher education services. It examines key factors influencing quality, explores innovative approaches to enhance teaching and learning, discusses the role of technology in quality improvement, and explores the significance of institutional support and governance. Additionally, this article addresses the importance of student engagement, faculty development, and quality assurance mechanisms in maintaining and enhancing the quality of higher education services. By shedding light on these critical aspects, this article aims to provide insights and recommendations for stakeholders involved in shaping the future of higher education.

Keywords: professional Skills and Knowledge, public-private partnerships, Bachelor's, gross enrollment rate, higher education

Introduction

Higher education, which takes place after secondary school, is provided by universities, colleges, and institutes of technology. There is a growing need for improvement strategies in higher education to meet global expectations of enhanced outcomes and ensure quality education. Some undergraduates face uncertainties and high dropout rates due to difficulties in coping with the higher education system. To address these concerns and adapt to a changing society, continuous educational change is crucial, focusing on improving teaching and student learning within universities. The participation of key individuals in

initiating, implementing, continuing, and evaluating educational changes is vital.

Institutions of higher education are recognizing the importance of promoting educational practices aligned with their objectives and being accountable to stakeholders. Higher education improvement strategies play a significant role in positioning these institutions towards achieving goals and delivering quality services. Numerous strategies exist, and this chapter specifically examines those aimed at improving teaching and learning in higher education. Examples include strategies for student retention, graduation rates, and laboratory teaching.

The objective of this chapter is to investigate higher education improvement strategies and evaluate their impact on teaching and learning. The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1) Identify higher education improvement strategies.
- 2) Critically analyze the evidence supporting the effectiveness of these strategies in improving teaching and learning.
- 3) Assess the effects of higher education improvement strategies in institutions.
- 4) Analyze the challenges associated with implementing these strategies.
- 5) Determine if additional improvements are necessary to enhance the adoption of more effective strategies for teaching and learning.
- 6) Make recommendations to improve higher education improvement strategies and facilitate effective teaching and learning in institutions of higher education.

Literature Review:

Higher education encompasses educational programs beyond the secondary level and is typically pursued at universities, university colleges, and other higher education institutions. This category also includes certain vocational schools and career colleges that grant academic degrees or professional certifications. While the distinction between educational and higher education institutions is not solely based on the level of degrees awarded, Bebedelis (2008) emphasizes that higher education is a process that aims to nurture and develop the inherent human values within individuals. This places an additional responsibility on higher education institutions to prepare students holistically, equipping them to contribute positively to society.

In the present competitive education system, higher education is predominantly offered by engineering colleges, arts and science institutions, and business schools. The higher education landscape is complex and diverse, comprising primarily of public sector institutions such as state universities and community colleges, which educate a significant majority of students. The benefits of higher education are manifold, including opportunities for advanced peer learning, practical field placements, expanded disciplinary knowledge, and specialization (Litten, 1980; Bynner et al., 2003). Perna (2003) highlights the private benefits of higher education, particularly the observed increase in earnings. However, economists in the twentieth century, such as Milton Friedman, Gary Becker, and Jacob Mincer, argued that education is also a public good that can drive technological progress at the national level by developing human capital and enhancing individual employability, thereby benefiting the overall economy (Bloom et al., 2007). The concept of "human capital" theory emerged as a means of understanding and quantifying the value of education for both individuals and society, emphasizing its public good nature.

The adoption of a quality excellence framework has become imperative for higher education institutions (HEIs) due to the influence of both global and national factors that are shaping the educational landscape (Brookes and Beckett, 2009). In countries like the USA and others, universities and colleges are consistently striving for higher standards amidst public scrutiny and financial constraints from various funding sources (Bandyopadhyay and Lichtman, 2007). Hussain et al. (2009), in their study of British evidence, found that various graduate groups emphasized the importance of quality variables in HE, further reinforcing the need for quality assurance. Chevalier (2014) underscores the significance of quality within the UK education system based on their research findings. Meanwhile, Gandhi (2015) argues that the changing educational landscape in India necessitates a shift in the approach to teaching, learning, and evaluation, emphasizing the importance of quality practices in HE.

Research Methodology:

Research Objective:

The objective of this research is to assess the current state of higher education in Uzbekistan, focusing on enrollment rates, regional disparities, course offerings,

infrastructure development, and policy initiatives. The research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities within the higher education system and provide recommendations for improvement.

Data Collection:

a) Quantitative Data:

- Obtain data on student enrollment in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan for the years 2001 and 2021 from the State Statistical Organization and the World Bank.
- Collect data on the gross enrollment rate (GER) for higher education in 2020, differentiating between men and women.
- Gather information on the number of applicants and admissions for Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in recent years.
- Acquire data on regional distribution of enrollments in higher education, including the number of applicants and admissions in different regions.

b) Qualitative Data:

- Conduct interviews or surveys with education officials, policymakers, and university administrators to gather insights on the challenges and opportunities in higher education.
- Review relevant government reports, policy documents, and resolutions related to higher education in Uzbekistan.
- Analyze academic literature and research studies on higher education in Uzbekistan to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Results and Discussions

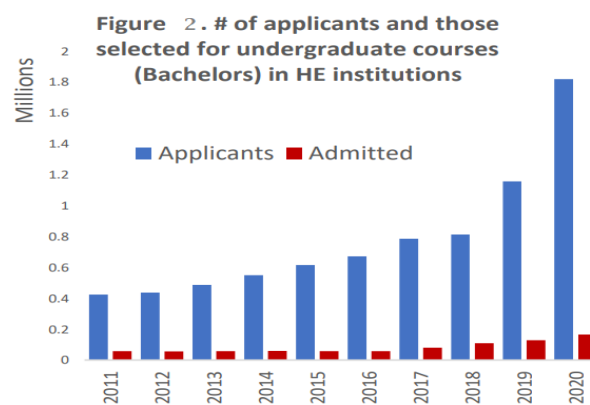
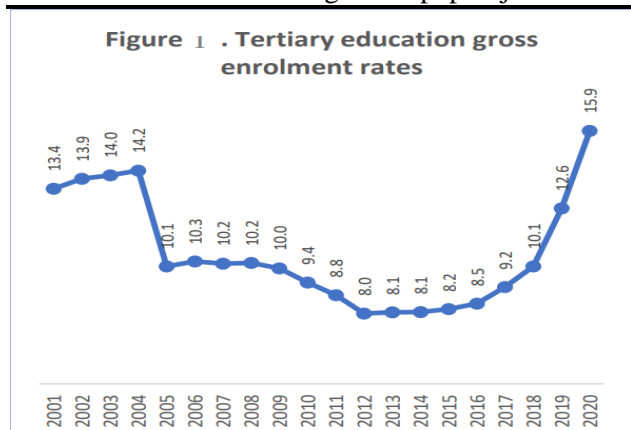
In 2021, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan reached approximately 571,500, which is a significant increase compared to the 183,000 students enrolled in 2001. According to data from the State Statistical Organization and the World Bank, the gross enrollment rate (GER) for higher education in 2020 was reported at 16 percent, with a slightly higher rate among men (16.9 percent) than women (14.9 percent). This marks a notable improvement from the 8 percent GER recorded in the 2011-12 period.

The demand for higher education in Uzbekistan has been on the rise, evident from the fact that the number of applicants for Bachelor's degree programs has quadrupled over the past two decades. However, the increase in admissions for undergraduate courses has only grown by 2.8 times. Consequently, the overall intake rate for higher education in 2021 remains below 10 percent. It is worth noting that the majority of the growth in higher education enrollment can be attributed to the rise in admissions for Bachelor's degree programs, while the increase in admissions for Master's degree programs has been relatively small.

Uzbekistan has witnessed a significant increase in the number of students pursuing higher education, with the enrollment rate showing positive growth. However, there is still a considerable gap between the demand for higher education and the number of available spots, particularly in Master's degree programs. Addressing this disparity and improving access to quality education at the postgraduate level should be a focus for further development of the higher education system in Uzbekistan.

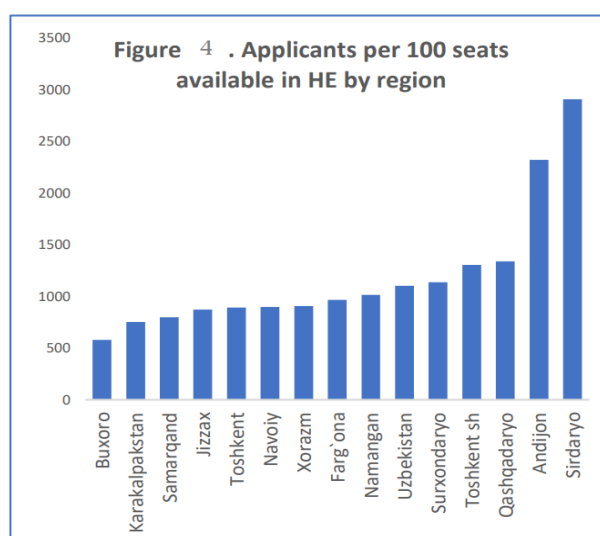
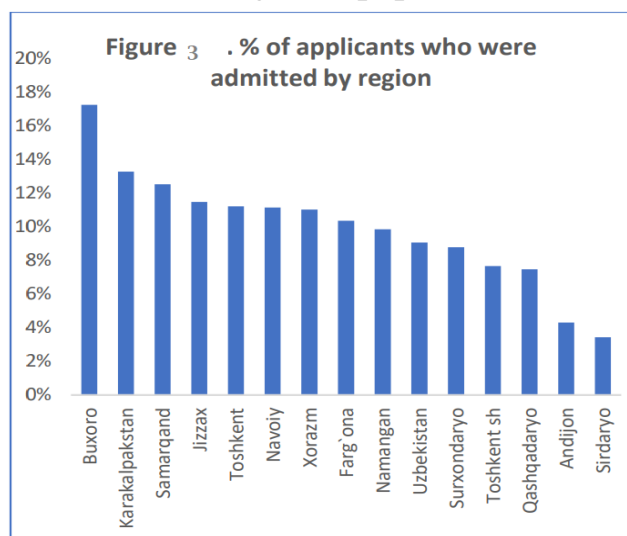
The distribution of students in higher education in Uzbekistan shows that 48 percent are enrolled in humanities, while an additional 10 percent are pursuing social sciences such as economics and law. A smaller proportion, only a fourth of the students, are studying production and technical courses. Approximately 7 percent of students are pursuing Bachelor's or Master's degrees in medical and related fields. The recent increase in overall enrollment can be attributed to the expansion of spaces in humanities-related courses.

When considering equity issues in higher education, it is important to examine the data related to gender and regional disparities in enrollment. The enrollment of girls in higher education remains lower than that of boys, with boys/men accounting for 55 percent of all students in 2021. This is a decline from 64 percent in 2011. However, the share of women in higher education has increased from 36 percent in 2011 to 55 percent in 2021.



When analyzing the regional distribution of enrollments in higher education (HE) in Uzbekistan, significant diversity becomes apparent. Tashkent city, despite comprising less than 6 percent of the country's 18-19-year-old population, accounted for approximately 35 percent of HE applicants and 30 percent of those who were admitted to Bachelor's courses in universities in 2021. Conversely, Kashkadarya, which represents 11 percent of the relevant population, only had 5.5 percent of the total HE applicants and 4.6 percent of those admitted to HEIs.

In comparison to their population shares in higher education, young individuals from Samarkhand, Ferghana, Andijan, Namangan, Surkhandarya, and Tashkent region (excluding Kashkadarya) were underrepresented among both applicants and those admitted. Conversely, a higher proportion of young people from Bukhara, Khorezm, Karakalpakstan, Jizzakh, and Navoiy were admitted to HEIs when considering their population shares.



Over the past decade, the number of national higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan has more than doubled, reaching a current total of 152. This figure includes 27 branches of foreign higher education institutions and 18 non-state national institutions. In 2018, 10 HEIs transitioned to a self-financing mode.

According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MOHSSE), significant developments have occurred in terms of course offerings and student capacity. Between 2018 and 2021, 268 new courses were introduced at the Bachelor's level, creating additional opportunities for students. Moreover, the number of available seats in existing courses increased by 10 percent by 2021, resulting in more admissions.

To improve the infrastructure of HEIs, renovation work has been consistently carried out. In 2019, renovation activities were undertaken in 60 HEIs, followed by 37 HEIs in 2020, and 85 HEIs in 2021.

The Cabinet of Ministers' resolution (#241, March 27, 2018) focuses on enhancing the licensing procedure for non-state educational services, with the aim of promoting greater involvement of the private sector in higher education. The President's Decree (UP-5847, October 2021), which approves the development concept of the Republic of Uzbekistan's higher education system until 2030, sets a target of having 35 non-state higher education institutions (HEIs) and 45 HEIs offering foreign programs by 2030.

Furthermore, the President's Decree (UP 6108, November 2020) on Measures to Develop the Spheres of Education, Upbringing, and Science emphasizes the establishment of at least one non-state HEI in each region, including through public-private partnerships (PPPs). This initiative aims to create a competitive environment in higher education and expand its accessibility.

The availability of a National Qualification Framework (NQF) for higher education is a significant development. The NQF, established by the Council for the Development of Professional Skills and Knowledge, was introduced on May 15, 2020 (PD-4939, December 31, 2020). Additionally, a Network Qualifications Framework, governed by the Network Council on Professional Qualifications and Knowledge, was implemented on the same date (287 CMR, May 15, 2020, PD-4, December 31, 2020).

Revisions to higher education curricula and professional standards were approved on May 15, 2020 (287 CMR, December 31, 2020, PD-4939). Furthermore, a revised assessment and certification mechanism for higher education was endorsed in September 2021 (616 CMR, December 31, 2020, PD-4939), indicating a commitment to improving the evaluation and certification processes within the higher education system.

Limitations:

Recognize potential limitations of the research, such as data availability and reliability, sample size and representativeness of qualitative data, and the dynamic nature of the higher education landscape. Acknowledge any potential biases and limitations when interpreting the results.

Conclusion:

Despite recent efforts to expand the number of courses and available seats, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education remains relatively low compared to countries with a similar lower-middle-income status. Many young people in Uzbekistan find themselves in the NEET category, indicating they are not engaged in education, employment, or training. The overall provision of higher education in the country remains inadequate, despite the progress made by non-state and foreign providers.

A government study highlights a concerning fact that over 1,500 schools in Uzbekistan fail to send a single student to higher education. This underscores the regional disparities in access to higher education, with certain areas facing significant challenges in providing opportunities for their youth. Moreover, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have limited access to higher education, as it is primarily accessible to those from well-to-do families. The availability of student loans from commercial banks and scholarships and stipends is also limited in the country.

There is a need for further improvement in the quality and relevance of the higher education courses offered. While there has been an increase in the number of spaces, it has mainly been in social sciences or humanities fields, with limited growth in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses and seats for young people.

Language constraints pose a limitation on access to the latest international literature in many subjects. Additionally, the employability of higher education graduates in international job markets requires significant improvement, as institutions from Uzbekistan rank low in international university rankings.

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