
17 Uzbekistan

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17.1 UZBEKISTAN NATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Uzbekistan is a lower-middle-income country (World Bank, n.d.-a) with a population of more than 33 million people (Wolrdmeters, n.d.). It is a doubly landlocked country located in Central Asia. It shares borders with Afghanistan to the south, Turkmenistan to the southwest, Tajikistan to the southeast, Kazakhstan to the north, and Kyrgyzstan to the northeast. Uzbekistan is made up of twelve provinces and the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan located in the northwest part of the country. Uzbekistan is a member of many international organizations, including the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) since 1992.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union affected Uzbekistan, producing challenges similar to other post-Soviet republics, such as the dependence of its market on the socialist republics, economic resource scarcity, and the transition to a market economy. Uzbekistan transitioned gradually to a market economy (Ruziev, Ghosh, & Dow, 2007). Because of this, Uzbekistan's economy was more resilient to external shocks than other post-Soviet countries. Specifically, during the early period of transition, Uzbekistan experienced lower output loss compared to other transition economies, followed by positive and steady economic growth. This performance is known in the literature as the "Uzbek Puzzle" (Pomfret, 2000). Researchers (Pomfret, 2000; Ruziev et al., 2007) argue that several factors, such as specialization in agriculture, for example, being the seventh-largest producer of cotton in the world; natural resource endowment, including being the world's seventh-

largest producer of gold; and the centralized management of the economy, help to explain the puzzle.

Uzbekistan's slow approach helped to facilitate industrialization and ensured economic growth. During the Soviet period and the first years of independence, agriculture and services were the primary sectors of the economy, whereas industry was a poorly developed sector (Ruziev et al., 2007). Currently, services and industry are the main contributors to the gross domestic product (GDP). For instance, in 2017, services contributed about 48.5 percent, agriculture about 17.9 percent, and industry about 33.7 percent of the country's GDP (CIA, n.d.-b). There has been an increase in the GDP between 1990 (13,361 billion USD) and 2016 (81.847 billion USD), followed by a significant fall between 2017 (81.779 billion USD) and 2019 (57.921 billion USD) (World Bank, n.d.-c).

Although the pragmatic and gradual approach to transition produced many economic and political benefits, it also produced some disadvantages. In terms of the management of some sectors of the economy, Uzbekistan did not reject centralized planning in favor of decentralized planning. Hence, Uzbekistan has been dedicated to implanting market-oriented reforms (e.g., privatization) only in some sectors (e.g., small-scale enterprise and retail sectors). The government has maintained "complete control over the 'commanding heights of the economy,' including the HE sector as well as the transport, communications and media industries and the financial, agricultural and extractive sectors" (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2020). Currently, the government is working on developing and implementing comprehensive market-oriented reforms so that its institutions will be able to operate in the global commercial environment (Asian Development Bank, 2010).

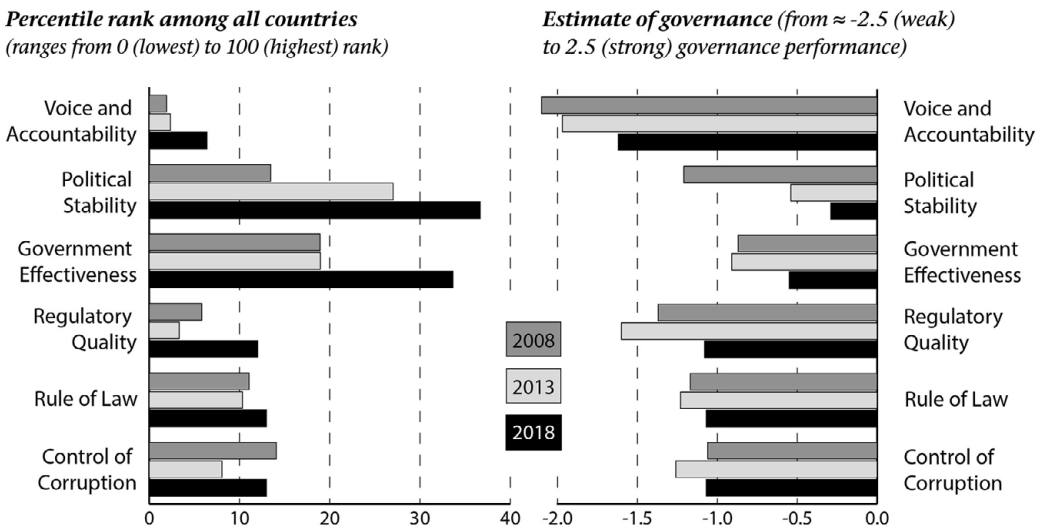
Although, since independence, the education sector of Uzbekistan has also faced challenges, human capital development is a high priority item on the national agenda. Public spending on education decreased from 7.284 percent to 5.281 percent of GDP between 2013 and 2017 (World Bank, n.d.-c). There was a need for horizontal and vertical changes in the structure of education in Uzbekistan. The government implemented several initiatives to promote human capital development. Examples of such initiatives include the National Program for Personnel Training (NPPT) in 1997, the National Program for Basic Education Development (NPBED) in 2004, and the Welfare Improvement Strategy Paper (WISP) in 2007.

Transition to a market economy also required sociopolitical reforms. Uzbekistan moved from a single-party system to a multiparty system and replaced communist ideology with a national ideology. According to its

constitution, Uzbekistan is a secular, unitary, and presidential constitutional republic whereby the president is the head of state. Uzbekistan’s government is divided into three branches: a legislature (Oliy Majilis), an executive (the Cabinet of Ministers), and a judiciary (Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, and Higher Economic Court). In the literature, the interpretations of politics in Uzbekistan are mixed (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). Some sources (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan) characterize Uzbekistan as a democratic country, whereas the others describe it as an authoritarian state (CIA, n.d.-c; Shmitz, 2020). Thus, it seems that Uzbekistan is still debating its political liberalization.

The governing context according to the World Bank’s Governance Indicators project is as follows: across the set of indicators, the country scores low, all below the 37th percentile. The voice and accountability indicator in 2018 is at the 6th percentile. The country has made notable progress on political stability and government effectiveness in the ten years between 2008 and 2018, improving from less than the 20th percentile for both to close to the 35th percentile. Its control of corruption and rule of law are both low and remain unchanged after ten years. Uzbekistan is not included in the World Economic Forum’s competitiveness indicators (Figure 17.1).

Figure 17.1 Worldwide governance indicators for Uzbekistan



Shape and Structure of Higher Education

The foundations of the higher education system in Uzbekistan were laid before becoming part of the Soviet Union. In 1918, Turkistan National University was established. Similar to other former Soviet Republics, the system was revamped to meet the highly centralized system of the Soviet Union. The higher education institutions mainly focused on producing a highly qualified workforce to meet the demands of the Soviet economy. As a result, the higher education sector was comprised mainly of forty specialized institutes, with a focus on specific fields such as agriculture, medicine, and three comprehensive universities, offering a wider range of disciplines (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). The majority of institutions were located in the country's major cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Nukus.

After gaining its independence in 1991, Uzbekistan introduced reforms to the higher education system to shift from a centralized economy to a market-based economy. In 1992, Uzbekistan enacted the Law on Education. Part of this policy reform shifted the cost of education from the government to students and parents. The government introduced a dual-track tuition policy. Students can either win a government-funded merit-based scholarship or pay tuition fees. Although there were private higher education institutions in the 1990s, they were not able to obtain an official license. To date, all higher education institutions are publicly owned (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2020).

The country has gone through both vertical and horizontal changes in the structure of its HEIs. Generally speaking, the HE system is comprised of three types of institutes: universities, institutes, and academies. Universities offer a wide range of bachelor's and master's programs, as well as professional training programs. Academies also offer two-level programs but with a focus on specific fields and are mainly responsible for conducting top graduate studies, making their status more superior compared to universities and institutes. Institutes offer bachelor's, master's, and postgraduate programs in specific fields. They focus on producing various specialists in different fields such as agriculture and law. In 2017, the government introduced an interim level of education, which is PhD degree, between master's degree and *Doktor Nauk* (Doctor of Science).

There are thirty-two universities (twenty public universities and their six regional branches, and six branches of foreign universities), six academies, and forty-four institutes (thirty-six public institutes and their seven regional branches), and one branch of foreign University (European Commission, 2017b). In 2019, an American University, Webster University, received a

decree from the president of Uzbekistan to operate jointly with the Ministry of Higher and Specialized Education. The HEIs in Uzbekistan can also be classified into six types: comprehensive universities, specialized universities, institutes, regional branches of domestic HEIs with the purpose to improve access in the regions, academies, and branches of foreign HEIs (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). Regional HEIs do not offer doctoral studies programs.

Since its independence and the introduction of reforms and programs above, the number of HEIs and students has increased significantly. For instance, there was an increase in the number of institutions from 43 to 78 and full-time students from 180,000 to 250,000 between 1989 and 2015 (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). There are three modes of learning available in the country: full-time and part-time learning, distance learning, and evening learning.

Higher Education Governing Context

Given the centralized management described in the first section, the approach to governance in the HE sector can be described as top-down and centralized (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018; Weidman & Yoder, 2010). The structure of the HE system is multilayered in terms of accountability, resulting in the duplication of administrative control and limiting the capacity of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MHSSE) to manage the HE system (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018; Weidman & Yoder, 2010). The Cabinet of Ministers is the supreme governing body in the HE system that is in charge of key decisions (e.g., state educational standards, funding, accreditation, licensing). As for the MHSSE, it plays a complementary role (e.g., supervision, guidance, organization of the academic year). Also, the capacity of the MHSSE is weakened by the fact that HEIs can be accountable to other ministries or state committees similar to the ministerial structure during the Soviet era (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). As a result, seventy-eight HEIs are regulated by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education (MHSSE), whereas twenty-seven institutes are supervised by other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). As for branches of foreign HEIs, they operate as public-private partnerships and still have some degree of ministerial oversight and direction.

17.2 GOVERNING BODY PROFILE

Governance Overview

As mentioned above, Uzbekistan's approach to governance in the HE system can be characterized as top-down and centralized. The governance of the HE

system is exercised by the following bodies: the Cabinet of Ministers, the MHSSE, the rector, the Academic Board, and the Boards of Trustees.

The Cabinet of Ministers is the supreme governing body in the HE system. It is responsible for the implementation of state education-related policies and setting the procedures for attestation, accreditation, licensing, student transfer, institution rankings, staff in-service training, staff recruitment, and evaluation. In addition, it appoints rectors of the state HEIs and determines the templates of education documents (e.g., diploma) and the procedures for issuing education documents. The Cabinet of Ministers is accountable to the president of the state and Oliy Majilis.

The MHSSE is the highest governing body that manages the HE system. It has the capacity to develop and implement state education-related policies. It is responsible for the organization, coordination, and methodological guidance of the educational process and student assessment procedures. Also, it participates in the development of regulatory legal acts and submits proposals on the appointment of rectors to the Cabinet of Ministers. The MHSSE is accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers.

The rector is the highest official of the HEI. The rector of the state HEI is appointed solely at the discretion of the Cabinet of Ministers, whereas the rector of the non-state institution is appointed by a founder or founders. The rector is responsible for the organization of the education process, as well as for controlling and guiding academic lyceums or professional colleges (technical and vocational education) established under the institution. The rector issues decrees and orders, hires and dismisses employees, recommends candidates for promotion, directs and regulates the work of departments and schools, and determines the structure of a University. The rector is not allowed to work part-time in other organizations.

Body Structure

The Academic Board and the Board of Trustees are advising bodies of the HEI. They are established at every HEI regardless of its type of ownership. The boards are not legal entities and carry out their activities on a voluntary basis. They are responsible for the consideration of key management issues and the quality of education.

Membership and Appointment Process

The membership and appointment process of the Academic Board and the Board of Trustees are regulated by the respective charters of the institution.

In terms of composition, it includes the rector, the rector deputies, leading scholars and experts of Uzbekistan and foreign countries, heads of educational and scientific units, as well as institutions and organizations (academic lyceums and professional colleges) established under the HEI.

Regarding the composition of the Board of Trustees, it includes the representatives of founding shareholders, local authorities, line ministries and institutions, other educational institutions, enterprises and organizations, public organizations, foundations, and sponsors. The composition of the Board of the state HEI is approved by the ministry and institutions that have the HEI in their jurisdiction. As for the composition of the Board of the non-state HEI, it is approved by the founders of the HEI. The Board of the institution can be dismissed by the decision of line ministry or institution.

Interestingly, as outlined in the state regulation on the Board of Trustees, the composition of the Board shall be approved by the respective ministry or institution, or founding shareholders, whereas the composition of the Academic Board seems to be approved by the HEI.

Chair Appointment Process

The chair of the Academic Board is the rector by default, whereas the chair of the Board of Trustees is elected at the first meeting of the board, which is chaired by the rector. The state regulation of the Board of Trustees does not specify procedures for chair appointments. This process as well as the term of office of both chairs (Academic Board and the Board of Trustees) are regulated by the respective charter of the institution.

Board Accountability

It is difficult to identify the accountability of both boards, as state regulations appear not to provide clear descriptions of the relationship between the rector, the Academic Board, and the Board of Trustees (World Bank, 2014). However, given that both boards' are consultive bodies, it seems that they are accountable to the rector. According to the World Bank (2014), these boards do not have real authority in the decision-making process. The rector who is elected at the discretion of the Cabinet of Ministers (at state HEIs) or founders (at non-state HEIs) has final decision-making authority in the institution.

Scope of Work

The Academic Board and the Board of Trustees operate in accordance with the legislation and respective charters of the institutions approved by line ministry or institution.

The Board of Trustees has the authority to develop and to submit proposals for amendments and additions to the regulation of the board and for the development of the institution. Also, it has the capacity to participate in the discussion of the institution's plans, programs, and other documents, and to manage the board's fund.

Unlike the Board of Trustees, the Academic Board seems to have no specific state regulation that outlines its scope of work. The Academic Board makes decisions on the organization of the educational and research activities. It has the capacity to solicit for the conferment of academic titles and degrees (e.g., PhD degrees), to discuss scientific and methodological reports, and to recommend scholarly works for publication. Also, the board has the authority to make decisions on teacher in-service training and cooperation with partner institutions. The decisions of the Academic Board come into effect upon the rector's approval.

The Case of Tashkent University of Information Technologies named after Muhammad Al-Khwarizmi (TUIT)

As an example, the governing process at Tashkent University of Information Technologies named after Muhammad Al-Khwarizmi (TUIT) is described in this section. The description stems from the official website of the University and respective documents (e.g., charter).

The rector is the highest official of the HEI and is appointed by the Cabinet of Ministry. The rector is responsible for the University's activities and property, as well as the internal affairs of the University. The rector represents the University and signs contracts on behalf of the University, issues order, hires and dismisses employees, determines the institutional structure, sets the tasks for units and approves their regulations, and regulates the economic, academic, and research activities of the University.

The Academic Board is an advising body of TUIT established in accordance with the Regulation on Higher Education. The main goals of this body are to implement state programs and enhance the educational and research processes of the institution. It is comprises the rector (the chair), vice-rectors, local and foreign scholars and experts, heads of schools and departments, as

well as institutions affiliated with the University (e.g., academic lyceum). It may also include representatives of line institutions, trade union organizations, and local and foreign HEIs. Other members (e.g., students and faculty members) are elected by secret ballot at the general meeting (conference). At the beginning of each academic year, new members are elected if previous members are expelled for various reasons. The composition of the board is approved by the rector. The number of members is regulated by the University's charter.

The Board of Trustees is an advisory body of TUIT established by the decision of the Academic Board in 2002 in accordance with respective legislation. The main goals of the Board are to assist in the statutory activities of the University, provide advice on the urgent problems related to the University's development, and ensure the competitiveness of the institution locally and globally. In terms of composition, the Board includes the rector, the representatives of legislative and executive authorities, the media, public organizations, legal entities, as well as citizens who have a desire to become a member of the Board. All members have equal rights and responsibilities and work on a voluntary basis. The chair of the Board is elected. The chair appointment process, as well as term of office of the Board, is not specified in the charter.

Commentary

Uzbekistan's approach to its transition to a market economy is more or less similar to other post-Socialist republics. Uzbekistan, like other republics, has prioritized the role of human capital in the development of its economy. Unlike some post-Soviet republics (e.g., Russia), Uzbekistan decided not to immediately reject centralized planning in favor of a market-based economy (Ruziev et al., 2007). The State has played a key role in the development of Uzbekistan. Although this decision and favorable economic conditions (cotton and gold) helped Uzbekistan show a good performance during the early period of transition (Pomfret, 2000), these factors have limited the capacity of institutions, including HEIs, to operate in a global commercial environment (ADB, 2010). Currently, Uzbekistan has become dedicated to developing and implementing comprehensive market-oriented reforms in all sectors (ADB, 2010; Ruziev et al., 2007).

Uzbekistan introduced a range of policies to reform its HE system such as Law on Education, NPPT, NPBED, and WISP. These policies have resulted in the transition to the three-cycle HE system, the diversification of the HE

landscape (e.g., state, private, and foreign HEIs), and the introduction of tuition fee programs. However, Uzbekistan's centralized management model makes the current structure of HE management rigidly tied to the needs of the labor market (Ruzieva & Burkhanov, 2020). For instance, universities do not have the authority to develop and implement curricula. Also, governance-related policies implemented in the HE system in Uzbekistan seem to be implemented partially.

Governance bodies such as the Academic Board and the Board of Trustees seem to have less authority than their counterparts in the European Higher Education Area. According to the World Bank (2014), these bodies "should be accorded greater authority to set a greater share of the curriculum within the University or HEI . . . to differentiate themselves from other HEIs and to respond to evolving local needs and demand" (p. 90). Thus, the governance structure of the HE system also requires further comprehensive reforms.

