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Foreign universities in Uzbekistan and the tasks for Uzbek-Russian educational cooperation

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About seven years ago Uzbekistan switched to educational policy aimed at increasing tertiary education accessibility, level of internationalization and quality improvement [Troitsky, Yun, 2021] and therefore opened its higher education to foreign universities. Thanks to the growing purchasing power of the population [The World Bank, 2021a], the export of higher education services to Uzbekistan is becoming more attractive. Due to the country's population growth [The World Bank, 2021b], the demand for higher education there is guaranteed for at least 15-20 years.

Thus, getting the share in the market of higher education services in Uzbekistan becomes a strategic decision. And it is especially important for Russian universities, since in Russia, on the contrary, there is a decrease in the number of students [Form N VPO-1, 2022]. Therefore, Russian universities have intensified their efforts to strengthen their positions in Uzbekistan. Thus, it is necessary for Russian universities to assess the current situation at the higher education market in Uzbekistan and their key competitors.

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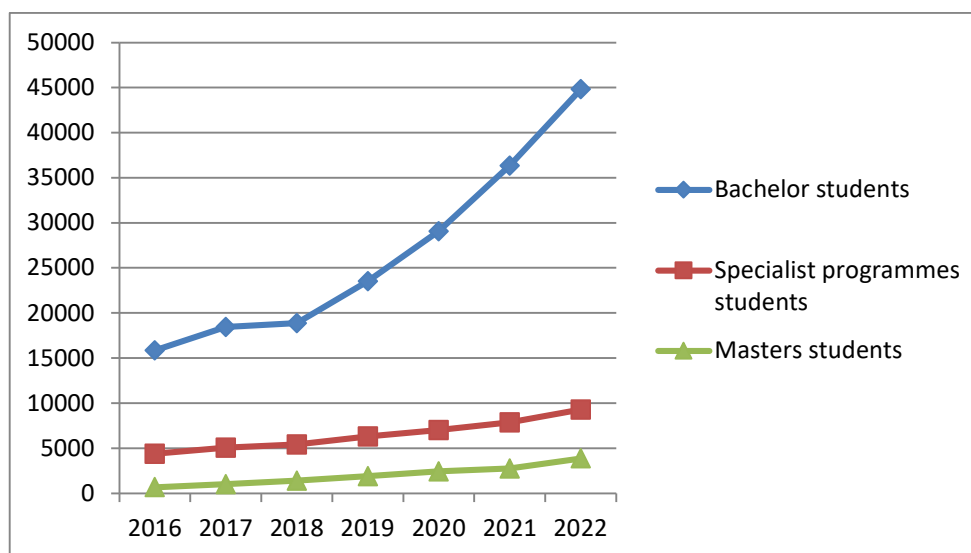
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Positions of Russian universities in Uzbekistan

The number of students from Uzbekistan studying at Russian universities has increased recently, largely due to the expansion of undergraduate enrollment (Graph 1 below).

Graph 1. Dynamics of the number of students from Uzbekistan in Russian universities by level of education, 2016-2022 [Form N VPO-1, 2022]



The majority of Uzbekistan students in Russian universities pay for their education. However, the quota for them is also increasing, giving them the right to study at Russian universities at the expense of the state budget of the Russian Federation. The quota provides for scholarships for such students, regardless of academic performance, but does not cover travel and accommodation expenses in Russia during their studies. Next year, the quota for citizens of Uzbekistan is planned to be expanded once again to 800 places [Novosyolova, 11.10.2022].

Table 1. Basis for education of students from Uzbekistan in Russian universities, 2016-2022 [Form N VPO-1, 2022]

Basis of education/ year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
at the expense of Russian budget	3 990	5 227	6 213	7 283	8305	10 056	11 387
paying fees themselves	16 965	19 328	19 470	24 454	30 227	36 941	44 612
total	20 955	24 555	25 683	31 737	38 532	46 997	55 999
in addition, students studying on the basis of international agreements or on a quota	1 271	1127	1 049	1 176	1488	1 674	693

The export of Russian higher education services to Uzbekistan occurs both by attracting citizens of Uzbekistan directly to Russian universities, and by creating the branches of Russian universities in Uzbekistan. The number of branches has been growing since 2019. Today there are 14 of them, where about 6 thousand people study. At least 7 more branches of Russian universities are planned to open in Uzbekistan soon [Sputnik Uzbekistan, 15.03.2022].

Table 2. Branches of Russian universities in Uzbekistan

Branch name	Year of creation	Number of students	Areas of training / specialties
Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University in Tashkent	2006	372	Applied Mathematics and Computer Science Psychology
Branch of the Russian State University of Oil and Gas «Gubkin University» in Tashkent	2007	about 600	Oil and gas business Exploration technology Management Economics
Branch of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics in Tashkent	2011	1648	Economics
Branch of the National University of Science and Technology MISiS in Almalyk	2018	about 1000	Mining Metallurgy Automation of technological processes and production
Branch of the National Research Nuclear University MEPhI in Tashkent	2018	307	Nuclear Power and Thermal Physics Nuclear Physics and Technology Thermal Power Engineering and Heat Engineering Power Industry and Electrical Engineering
Branch of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) in Tashkent	2019	420	Law Business Informatics Management
Branch of the Russian State University of Physical Education, Sport, Youth and Tourism in Samarkand	2019	?	Sports activities
Branch of the Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology in Tashkent	2019	133	Chemical Technology Technosphere safety Materials Science and Technology

			Technology of artistic processing of materials
Branch of Astrakhan State Technical University in Tashkent region	2019	1331	Ecology and nature management Food of animal origin Aquatic bioresources and aquaculture Economics
Branch of the National Research University "MPEI" in Tashkent	2019	?	Thermal power engineering and heat engineering Power industry and electrical engineering Economics Management Control in technical systems Quality control
Branch of Herzen State Pedagogical University in Tashkent	2020 ¹	?	Teacher Education Psychological and pedagogical education Special (defectological) education Linguistics Psychology
Branch of the Russian State University of Cinematography (VGIK) in Tashkent	2021	about 150	Acting art Dramaturgy Cinematography Producing Film and television directing
Tashkent branch of Pirogov Russian National Research Medical University of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation	2021 ²	?	Neonatology Endocrinology Surgery Cardiology
Branch of Kazan Federal University in Jizzakh	2021 ³	?	Software engineering Pharmacy Information systems and technologies
Branch of St. Petersburg State University in Tashkent	2022 ⁴	-	-

¹ enrollment from 2021/2022 academic year

² enrollment was to be carried out from the 2022/2023 academic year, in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated July 1, 2021 No. PP-5169, but there is no data on it

³ enrollment from 2022/2023 academic year

⁴ enrollment from 2023/2024 academic year

Some branches, however, being officially established, do not actually function and / or do not have an official website that allows potential students to get in touch with them (e.g. the branch of the Russian State University of Physical Culture, Sports, Youth and Tourism in Samarkand or the branch of Kazan Federal University in Jizzakh). The official website of the MPEI branch in Tashkent does not have information about the possibility of studying in Uzbekistan, only at the head university, Russian branches and its branch in Dushanbe (Tajikistan).

The growing activity of Russian universities in Uzbekistan results from both the opportunities that have opened up and the requirements of the Russian authorities to increase the exports of higher education. Thus, in accordance with the priority project "Development of the export potential of the Russian education system", the number of foreigners receiving higher and secondary vocational education in Russia should reach 710 thousand people by 2025 [Passport of the priority project, 2017]. Later, the passport of the federal project "Export of Education" stated the goal of increasing the number of foreign students receiving higher education in Russia to 425 thousand people in 2024 [Passport of the federal project, 2018].

Competitors of Russian universities for Uzbek applicants

In 2019, Russia was the leader in the number of students from Uzbekistan studying abroad. It was followed by Kazakhstan and South Korea. However, since then, the directions of educational migration of Uzbek citizens have undergone some changes. For example, the popularity of universities in Kyrgyzstan has grown: already 35.6 thousand citizens of Uzbekistan studied at Kyrgyz universities in 2021.

Table 3. Ranking of countries by the number of foreign students from Uzbekistan, 2020 [UNESCO UIS, 2022; Form N VPO-1, 2022]

Receiving country	Number of students from Uzbekistan
Russia	38 532
Kazakhstan	26 130
Kyrgyzstan	14 538
South Korea	7 426
Latvia	1 717
Turkey	1 598
Ukraine	1 473
Japan	1 048
Germany	777
Poland	629
USA	546
United Kingdom	510
Belarus	432

Today, Russian universities are leading in the number of branches in Uzbekistan, universities in South Korea occupy the second place, in third place is taken by Indian universities. The largest branches of foreign universities in terms of the number of full-time students have been created by the University of Westminster (the UK), the Singapore Institute of Management and the Turin Polytechnic University (Italy) in Tashkent.

1. South Korea

Large Korean community lives in Uzbekistan (more than 200 thousand people) which contributes to strengthening ties between the countries. With the direct assistance of the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), which opened its office in Uzbekistan in 1995, more than 1,300 citizens of Uzbekistan were able to undergo professional training in the Republic of Korea. The CIAT scholarship program is especially popular, which covers the cost of living and traveling, as well as studying at Korean universities for citizens of Uzbekistan. However, the scholarship can only be awarded to civil servants or research associates of a public university with a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, citizens of Uzbekistan may take advantage of the Korean Government Scholarship Programme (KGSP), which also covers tuition fees, travel and living expenses while studying at a Korean university.

In 2014, Inha University opened its branch in Tashkent, which became the first foreign university in Uzbekistan that trains IT specialists according to international standards. Today, it has over 1,000 students in IT, Engineering and Logistics programs taught entirely in English. The best students can count on grants from a number of companies, where they are then employed for 5 years. Bucheon University, opened in 2018 in Tashkent, offers educational programs in Engineering, Architecture and Design, Natural Sciences, Humanities and Arts.

In 2018, another South Korean university began operating in Tashkent, the Yeosu Technical Institute, which provides training in a wide range of training areas, including Economics, Pedagogy, Philology, etc. In 2022, about 12 thousand people studied there, most of whom received education part-time. In 2019, it was renamed as Kimyo International University in Tashkent (TMUK). Today the latter offers a wide range of programs in 28 undergraduate specialties and 20 master's specialties, including such areas as Economics, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture, General Medicine and Dentistry, Painting, Design, Pedagogy and Philology. In addition, they have already opened their own branches in Namangan and Samarkand.

Many Korean branches offer applicants the opportunity to study one or two years in the university in Korea, however, there is no publicly available data on how many of students from Uzbekistan actually go to South Korea under such programs.

2. India

The country has a wide system of higher education with more than a thousand universities. Uzbekistan is developing cooperation with India in information technology and communications. Indian universities appeared in Uzbekistan not long ago. In 2019, the first branch of a private Indian university, Sharda University Uzbekistan, was opened in Andijan. It provides higher education in Engineering, Management, and English. Teaching is conducted in English. All the students are to pay tuition fees, but the talented ones may get a scholarship to study at the university. There are about 400 students. Amity University is another private Indian university that established its branch in Uzbekistan in 2019. The branch is located in Tashkent, where about 750 students are trained in IT. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the first enrollment was held at the branch of Sambram Institute of Technology in Jizzakh. Training is carried out in IT specialties, and it is also possible to get an MBA degree there.

Following the meeting of the intergovernmental commission in 2022, it was planned to open three more branches of Indian universities in Uzbekistan – those of Glocal, LNCT, Integral [UZReport, 29.07.2022].

In addition, Uzbek students are covered by the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC), which allows 25 Uzbek students to receive grants annually to take courses in a wide range of areas, including online courses.

3. The United Kingdom

The number of Uzbek citizens who receive higher education directly in the UK is very small (Table 4). The limiting factors are high tuition fees and living costs in the country, which are not comparable to the incomes of most families in Uzbekistan. In addition, the limiting factors are high entrance requirements for applicants, including requirements for the level of English proficiency.

Table 4. Number of citizens of Uzbekistan, receiving tertiary education in the UK, 2000-2020 [UNESCO UIS, 2022]

Year	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2019	2020
Number of students	195	136	165	147	131	186	139	173	198	156	297	510

In this regard, the British side is much more successful in exporting higher education services to Uzbekistan in the form of branches. Westminster International University in Tashkent (WUIT) was established as the first branch of foreign universities in Uzbekistan back in 2002. About 3600 students are trained there nowadays. The main areas of training in the branch include Economics and Management, which are taught in English. Due to the prestige of British higher education,

Westminster International University can afford to charge very high tuition fees. In the 2022/2023 academic year, it was almost \$3,000 per year [Westminster International University in Tashkent, 2022].

4. Singapore

In 2008, a branch of the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) was established in Tashkent. It provides training in Management, Banking, Accounting, Marketing, Mass Communications, Information Technology, and Biotechnology. Today, more than 2200 students receive higher education in it.

5. Italy

Traditionally, few citizens of Uzbekistan go to study in Italy, but the number of such students has grown several dozen times since the early 2000s, which is more likely due to rising income levels in Uzbekistan itself than to the increased attractiveness of Italian higher education.

Table 5. Number of citizens of Uzbekistan, receiving tertiary education in Italy, 2000-2020 [UNESCO UIS, 2022]

Year	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2019	2020
Number of students	1	4	14	58	45	62	90	155	207	333	352	248

Since Italian diplomas are widely recognized within the European Higher Education Area, Italian higher education may be attractive to Uzbek citizens in terms of the ratio between the price, quality and prestige. The establishment of branches in Uzbekistan in this case can serve as a fairly effective strategy, but nowadays there are only two of them.

A branch of Turin Polytechnic University was established in Tashkent in 2009. Today more than 2,100 students study there getting tertiary education in IT, Engineering, Management, Architecture and Design. Training is conducted in English. The branch of the University of Pisa in Tashkent held its first admission to the program in General Geology in 2022/2023 academic year. 55 students were enrolled then. Teaching is also conducted in English, and the final two years of study are expected to take place in Italy.

In addition, branches of universities from other countries operate in Tashkent: Japan (Japan Digital University in Tashkent since 2020), Malaysia (Binary International University in Urgench since 2020), Turkey (branch of the Turkish University of Economics and Technology in Tashkent - TOBB ETÜ Tashkent since 2020).

Recommendations for Russian universities

Most branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan have been created so far by Russian universities. Due to the increase in the number of applicants, fierce competition in higher education market in Uzbekistan has not been observed yet. However considering gradual displacement of the Russian language by English, it can be assumed that in the medium and long term, branches of Russian universities are likely to compete with each other for Uzbek applicants. Thus, the quality of student training, the ratio of price and quality in the branches of Russian universities, the availability of additional opportunities (scholarships, internships, etc.) will matter.

Foreign competitors of Russian universities in Uzbekistan offer mainly training in IT, Economics and Management, Architecture and Design, as well as English. Thus, the competition for Uzbek applicants in these niches is relatively high, so Russian universities should focus on unoccupied or underdeveloped niches in the market of higher education services in Uzbekistan. These are, first of all, training in Natural Sciences, Physics and Mathematics as well as Biology, Geology, Chemistry. It is also possible for Russian branches to offer both fundamental training (for future researchers) and applied training (for a wide range of applicants). Due to recent fast industrial development in Uzbekistan, the demand for engineers is growing in its labor market. Specialized Russian universities should consider opening branches in Uzbekistan with training in Mechanical Engineering. There are also relatively few medical universities in the country, and medical specialties are not yet offered by any foreign branch, except for the planned branch of Pirogov Russian National Research Medical University. Therefore, medical specialties represent a relatively free niche in the market of higher education services in Uzbekistan, which Russian universities may occupy.

In addition, branches of Russian universities can provide training in Russian language and Russian literature. It may be in demand by the Russian-speaking part of the population, including graduates of Russian schools, as well as applicants planning to enter Russian universities and their branches. Branches of Russian universities may also be more active in offering additional educational services, including preparation courses for admission to branches and Russian universities, especially in Russian language, Natural Sciences, Physics, Mathematics, possibly in IT. An illustrative example is MGIMO, which, shortly after launching its branch, opened lyceum classes with training according to the program of Russian secondary general education [Izvestiya, 09.09.2022]. At the same time, the university got the opportunity to select the most talented applicants and facilitate their admission to MGIMO in Moscow or Tashkent.

Taking into account the growth of Russian investment in the economy of Uzbekistan [Sputnik, 27.12.2022], an increase in demand for employees for new enterprises may be expected. It may be worthwhile for the branches of Russian universities to cooperate with such enterprises and train specialists for them. For Russian branches it will provide an opportunity to attract additional applicants, for enterprises – to train specialists they need with knowledge of both languages and

employed at least for the duration of the contract. If such a graduate is not ready to work at the enterprise that paid for his or her training, the graduate undertakes to pay the amount spent on this training, which partly covers the risks that the branch and the enterprise take on.

Geographically most branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan are concentrated in Tashkent, only separate branches are present in Samarkand, Andijan, Jizzakh, Namangan. Since the majority of Russian-speaking population of Uzbekistan lives in the capital, establishing branches of Russian universities outside of Tashkent is risky. However, Russian universities may consider opening branches in Namangan, Samarkand, Andijan, Fergana, Bukhara, Urgench, as well as in large cities of Karakalpakstan, where Russian language is used and where since 2018 industrial zones are developed [UNIDO, n.a.], – in Nukus, Qoʻnirat, Beruniy, Moynaq, or Xojeli, for example.

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