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UNICAC PROJECT

National Recommendations for International Cooperation in Teaching, Learning and Research in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and China

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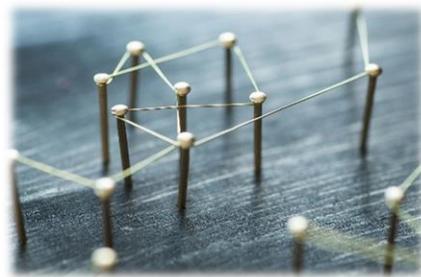


As part of the international Teaching, Learning and Research (TLR) development in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and China, all UNICAC University partners were requested to provide their national recommendations for international cooperation in teaching, learning and research activities.

The key questions for each UNICAC country (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China) were the following:

1. Higher Education System Context in your country
2. National Policies and Programs for the Internationalization of HEIs in your country
3. Internationalization of Universities in your country
4. Problems and Challenges in your country
5. National Recommendations and Conclusions from your country

Based on the partner contributions, the following recommendations were suggested.





National Recommendations for International Cooperation in Teaching/Learning/Research in Tajikistan

1. Higher Education System Context in Tajikistan

Higher Education in Tajikistan is in the phase of transition, after the soviet system of education and the adoption of the Bologna process. It has been 12 years since this transition period, however, meeting the standards of the European Higher Education in the HEIs in Tajikistan is a big question. There is a cultural and national context to be considered in any reforms for education. In this transition period, which is still ongoing, and the system is still in the developing phase universities facing some challenges like the trust of students, unlisted HEIs in any of the ranking agencies, absence of independent international accreditation, quality of education and its relevance, transparency, accessibility, and inclusiveness.

The main law outlining higher education is the Law on Higher and Professional Education of the Republic of Tajikistan (last edited in 2009)¹. The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted the Strategy for Development of Education in Tajikistan by 2030², which determines the purpose, objectives/goals, directions, instruments, and mechanisms for the development of the education system in the Republic of Tajikistan. The Strategy highlights the importance of higher education in the economic and social development of the country.

The government has started the necessary reforms, among which are the adoption of the three-cycle education system in HEIs and the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in 2004.

In the Republic of Tajikistan, access to higher education is open to every person who finishes a general secondary, primary professional or vocational school (VET).

Currently, higher education is divided into three levels: First level (Bachelor Studies), Second level (Master Studies), and Third level (PhD Studies).

¹ <https://www.maorif.tj/storage/Dokument's/6155af29bc8ee8337ec60493d661565d.pdf>

² <https://www.maorif.tj/storage/Dokument's/%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%93%D0%98%D0%AF%D2%B2%D0%9E/b1f1813e0654f705a506e718fd627bc8.pdf>



First level:

1. Bachelor studies – lasting for 4 years, carrying 240 ECTS

Second level:

1. Master Studies – lasting for 2 years, carrying 120 ECTS
2. Master of Applied Studies – lasting for 1 year and carrying 60 ECTS, designed for students who have received specialist diplomas from their previous Bachelor studies.

The third level of study includes Doctoral Academic Courses (PhD), including a minimum of 3 years of study or 120 ECTS.

In the field of medical sciences (studies of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine), integrated courses have a duration of 6 years and carry a minimum of 360 ECTS. Pharmacy studies also offer integrated courses that carry 300 ECTS (5 years of study).

For a population of nearly 10mln people, whereas more than 50% of the total population's average age is 30 years old, there are 44 HEIs, including 41 public and only 3 private universities. Private university establishment is a recent phenomenon in the region. Growing competition between universities and new trends in opening private universities will bring in the coming decade a challenge to recruit students. Recruiting of the students, and more profound marketing activities for the local universities have been paid attention to since the time of the National Testing Centre's establishment.

The universities in the country are offering all areas of study, where study areas are clustered in 5 groups³:

1. Natural and Technical
2. Economics and Geography
3. Philology, Pedagogy and Art
4. Social sciences and Law
5. Medicine, Biology and Sport

With the introduction of the National Testing Centre, higher education and enrolment in universities became more accessible and equal. However, still many talented school-leavers are in favour of continuing their education and getting a degree abroad, because of a lack of trust to get a proper education at home.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan is pushing the HEIs of the country in aligning the system to the European Higher Education Area system, to integrate, improve the quality of education, and offer a relevant education. Therefore, with the initiative of the Ministry of Education and

³ <https://stat.ntc.tj/Home/RPlan?page=13&Code=101>



Science of Tajikistan, with the financial support of the World Bank Group the Higher Education Project⁴ with a total budget of 15mIn USD is implementing from October 2015 till October 2022 at the universities of Tajikistan. The main direction is to develop mechanisms that improve and monitor the quality and labour market relevance of higher education. With this aim, the Ministry of Education has suggested focusing on European Higher Education as a case for study and best practices, mostly of involved of the partner universities are from Europe.

2. National Policies and Programs for the Internationalisation of HEIs in Tajikistan

Since the establishment of the modern Higher Education system in the country, unfortunately, there have not been foreseen any National policies, strategies or programs particularly directed towards internationalisation and fostering international cooperation. The overall Strategy for Education Development in Tajikistan by 2020 envisaged the international mobility of students and teachers. In the new Strategy for Education Development in Tajikistan by 2030⁵, there are no big changes actually, the internationalisation is brought only in one subparagraph, only mentioning that HEIs need to increase the numbers of international agreements and MoU, increasing the numbers of students and staff doing international mobility, designing joint programs, designing international degree programs, introducing dual-degree programs, focusing on new programs allowing graduates to be employed globally and mostly at an international organization, etc. Nothing specific and detailed is mentioned in the internationalisation subparagraph, which is only half a page long, neither not any regions nor priorities are considered. The new strategic document in terms of internationalisation aspects is much focused on adopting best practices and aligning the international standards of Higher Education, particularly European Higher Education Area, and great attention is paid to the international accreditation of the degree programs.

The only project promoting internationalisation, however, is not its main objective, is the Higher Education Project of the Ministry of Education and Science, funded by the World Bank Group (mentioned earlier). This is a 7-year project directed to aligning study programs to meet the requirements of the Bologna Process and making the study programs more relevant to the realities of the modern world. Thus, within almost 4 years of HEIs engaged in the implementation of these projects, the involved universities tightly cooperate with the EU universities, organizing incoming and outgoing mobility of the experts, staff and teachers.

⁴ <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P148291?lang=en>

⁵ <https://www.maorif.tj/storage/Dokument's/%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%93%D0%98%D0%AF%D2%B2%D0%9E/b1f1813e0654f705a506e718fd627bc8.pdf>



For talented students, there is a presidential scholarship “Durakhshandagon” to pursue higher education abroad. This scholarship has a special fund each year, and the scholarship holders after graduation asked to back home to work for the state development.

Further defining national policies, strategies, and priorities for the internationalisation of higher education, programs for developing internationalisation processes are needed.

3. Internationalisation of Universities in Tajikistan

The role of the EU and its programmes in the internationalisation of the Universities in Tajikistan is significant. The Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, and current Erasmus+ are the most spread internationalisation initiative projects for Tajikistan at an institutional level. In the last decade, the HEIs in Tajikistan have started to activate the internationalisation processes. However, the shift was happening slowly. In terms of institutional level, the only available programs were Erasmus Mundus and Tempus, and then individually participation of the staff and students in different scholarship programs funded by the USA, EU, China, Japan, etc. The universities in Tajikistan are very traditional. The bureaucratic system, unwritten different barriers and issues in allocating budgets making difficult for universities to achieve internationalisation plans. Universities to maintain their competitiveness, they need to develop internationalisation of higher education and widen the geographic links of the partner universities. Strategic Plan for Internationalisation, policies, priorities, and programs usually are absent from the whole document, outdated or very generic and limited, and most of the general strategy of development. Sequentially absence of a clear plan and priorities will lead a staff responsible for internationalisation in an unknown direction, low progress in internationalisation and low reputation, few projects and international activities, etc.

In comparison with EU universities, where faculty and teaching staff are mostly initiators of international partnerships or projects, and IRO are at most administratively positioned, universities in Tajikistan usually most of the tasks are coordinated from the IRO, and faculty as the initiator is barely involved. Talking further about the structure and management, very few universities have a separate vice-rectorate for internationalisation, e.g. at IET TSUC we had from 2018 to 2021, and beginning of 2022 vice-rector on research and international affairs is coordinated jointly, as in the other universities. At the faculty level, there are no internationalisation coordinators, even for vice-deans on academic affairs there is no responsibility for international affairs and mobility. Even in large universities with many faculties in different areas of studies, there is a centralized international relations department. Interesting fact that, here at IET TSUC, with approx. 5000 students, there are 4 full staff members, whereas sometimes bigger universities with 10000-15000 students have similarly 5-6 staff. Usually, most



international relations departments are focusing only on some areas, so many faculties are unevenly developed in terms of internationalisation, some faculties do not have any international activities at all.

4. Problems and Challenges

The absence of a centralised guiding document on Internationalisation from the ministry makes it difficult for the universities to promote any internationalisation initiatives few official documents might be referred to. However, in the last message of the Leader of the Nation, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rahmon focal points were on education, and internationalisation issues as well were touched. Quoting the Leader of the Nation “Nation building begins with education and care about education is the investment towards the human development and prosperous future of the state and motherland”⁶, and “it is important to promote learning of foreign languages, particularly Russian and English all departments and units of higher education institutions, as Tajikistan currently enjoys diplomatic relations 180 countries and so does trade and economic relations with 130 countries of the world”⁶. Soon after this message, the performance of the Ministry of Education and Science was evaluated as ineffective, and the Government sacked the Ministry cabinet. And recently appointed ministry promising reforms, in fact discussing possible new policies towards internationalisation.

Talking about the problems and challenges at the institutional level for higher education following key aspects can be mentioned:

- The issues of quality assurance for higher education;
- Capacities and resources in providing relevant higher education;
- Relatively low interest and engagement in STEM;
- Increasing number of students pursuing higher education abroad (mostly talented ones);
- Lack of professionals, including administrative and teaching staff at HEIs
- Absence of the universities of Tajikistan in global rankings;
- Absence of international accreditation;
- Difficulties in recruiting international students

Many other aspects can be mentioned-above, but they were considered accordingly to the national priorities brought in the Strategy for Education Development in Tajikistan by 2030 and of course focusing on the topic of the current paper – internationalisation of higher education. Continuing with the last-mentioned aspect, we can highlight the importance of creating an international campus and studying in a multicultural and multinational environment. The Erasmus+ programme and most of the EU

⁶ <http://prezident.tj/en/node/27419>



universities prioritize international at home and creating international classes, learning, and studying possibly from different cultures and nations. As long students studying in Tajikistan are limited within our national context won't lead to the future smooth integration in the globalized world, sequentially decreasing national competitiveness (meaning less competitive specialists in the global labour market, fewer international companies starting up from Tajikistan, etc) in the global economy market.

Observations and some interviews with the international students studying at universities of Tajikistan (applicants mostly coming from Uzbekistan) we could summarize that the attractiveness or the competitive advantages of the universities in Tajikistan is cheap education and lower entry requirements (e.g., in comparison with Uzbekistan). Meanwhile, building more different competitive advantages based on prestigious rankings and quality of education, universities need to develop outbound internationalisation with partner universities. This will allow the students, teachers and staff from the Tajikistan universities to experience international education, have relevant education, obtain and share new knowledge and train multicultural and multinational competencies.

The Internationalisation of the Universities in Tajikistan has begun since the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus projects time. Between the end of the Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, and starting of the new Erasmus+ programme (2014-2017y.) the number of projects and engagement of universities from Tajikistan has been reduced. As for mobility projects e.g., International credit mobility (ICM) KA107 has become inter-institutional between 2 organizations, which during Erasmus Mundus universities were invited in consortia. Many universities were not ready to hold direct communication, to be involved in project management, and had difficulties reaching partners and providing proper information. Lack of skilled international relations staff, lack of teaching and staff, students who can meet the minimum requirement, who are actually standing at the centre of the internationalisation. Another problem is about maintaining, strengthening, and widening existing partnerships. None everyone can offer mutually beneficial terms of cooperation, or assure transparency, equality, and fairness during the project implemented jointly with a partner. Building and earning the trust of one partner, proper and adequate project management and implementation could play a crucial role in widening the partnership network.

Just before the pandemic, the activeness of the Tajik universities was growing, and the number of Capacity Building for Higher Education (CBHE) KA2, and ICM. The new world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges for the internationalisation processes, especially for unknown partner countries, and unknown universities finding new partners and establishing new partnerships has become much more difficult. And so, called "post-COVID" world without even proper economic recovery, immediately has been hit by political instabilities and "military operation" in Ukraine, which significantly affected the whole world, and again especially vulnerable, dependent, and developing countries from Central Asia. Distance, lack of air connections, and "extremely-high" travel costs made the Erasmus+ funding at this point insufficient to cover mobility expenses, which we are currently facing.



5. National Recommendations and Conclusions

Higher education in Tajikistan is still in a transition period, and the internationalisation of universities is in an undefined situation. The overall performance of the universities from Tajikistan, in comparison with the universities from the neighbouring countries, is poor, including in the Erasmus+ programme. It is clear, that students and alumni with international experience are much more competitive, creative, and autonomous, and will bring a real added value to the company or can be a founder. Universities need to train more people with relevant competencies, so they will work for nation-building and development. Therefore, this should be monitored and coordinated from the national level and further adopted by the universities. The following national recommendations can be considered:

1. The ministry of education and science of Tajikistan should define a national strategy for the internationalisation of higher education, policy, and priorities, which will support and promote universities to take internationalisation initiatives.
2. To achieve the national strategy for internationalisation of higher education design new programs and projects.
3. The Universities should draft a separate strategic plan for internationalisation, and yearly map out an action plan and follow-up. For the bigger universities, strategies should be developed at the faculty level.
4. The Universities should allocate a certain amount of budget for internationalisation, despite IRO staff, the teaching staff is responsible for attracting external funding.
5. The internationalisation management needs to be reviewed according to the size, and the number of faculties at the university. Centralized or decentralized management should be considered according to the university's needs. As most universities are centrally managing internationalisation, faculty coordinators should be appointed or should be added to the vice-deans on academic affairs functionality.

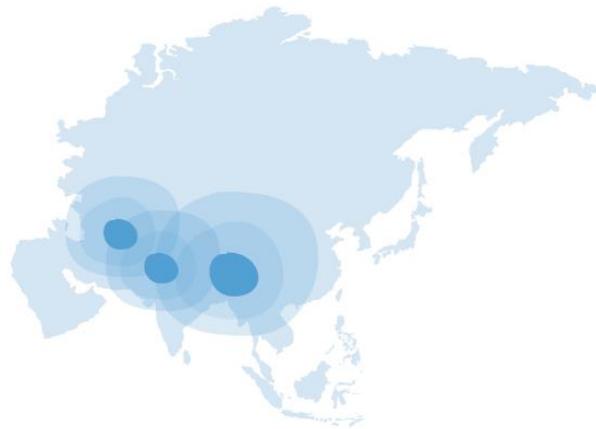
Compiled by Saidqosim Mukhtorov, the head of the international relations office, The Institute of Economy and Trade of TSUC, Khujand, Tajikistan

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3. Strategy for Education Development in Tajikistan by 2030, 2019
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5. Higher Education Project reports



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National Recommendations for International Cooperation in Teaching/Learning/Research in Uzbekistan

1. Higher Education System Context in Uzbekistan

Higher Education

The Uzbek higher education system consists of institutions, scientific and pedagogical establishments performing research work, and state body formations. According to the National Programme for Personnel Training, higher education builds on academic achievements of specialised secondary education (academic lyceum) and/or vocational education (vocational college) and includes two levels: Bachelor degree and Master degree.

The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education's (MHSSE) responsibility is to organize the academic year, including the length of the semesters, examination periods and academic holidays. The academic year starts on September 2nd and lasts until the end of June. It is divided into two semesters with holidays ranging from 10 to 12 weeks:

- 1st semester - from early September to late January;
- 2nd semester - from the beginning of February to the end of June, although the duration of the semester can vary depending on the status of the HEIs or on the study programme.

First level - Bachelor programme

This basic higher education provides fundamental knowledge in one of the branches of higher education for a minimum period of study of four years. Upon completion of the Bachelor programme, graduates are awarded Bachelor degree and a state diploma (in Uzbek: Bakalavr), which entitles them to start professional activity or to continue studies at Master level.

Second level - Master programme

This level of higher education provides knowledge in specific areas and lasts for at least two years after the Bachelor degree. Master programme graduates are awarded a state diploma (in Uzbek: Magistr), which entitles them to work in the relevant professional areas or to continue education in postgraduate education establishments. [1]



Postgraduate education

Postgraduate education is relevant to higher educational and scientific organizations.

Postgraduate education provides the training of scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel with a scientific degree on the basis of basic doctoral studies, doctoral studies and independent research, which provides for an in-depth study of the specialty and conducting scientific research in order to prepare and defend a doctoral dissertation.

Basic doctoral studies are a form of postgraduate education in the field of scientific and scientific-pedagogical specialties of the highest qualification. For applicants for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) a full-time course is offered.

Doctoral studies are a form of postgraduate education in the field of scientific and scientific-pedagogical specialties of the highest qualification. For applicants for the degree of Doctor of Science (DSc) a full-time course is offered.

Independent research course is a form of postgraduate education in the field of scientific and scientific-pedagogical specialties of the highest qualification. For applicants for the scientific degrees of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Doctor of Science (DSc) a part-time course is offered.

The procedure for training scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel, awarding scientific degrees and academic titles, as well as the specifics of obtaining postgraduate education in military, medical and other educational organizations are determined by law.

The duration of postgraduate education is determined by law. [8]

Full-time postgraduate course usually takes 3 years.

2. National Policies and Programs for the Internationalization of HEIs in Uzbekistan

On October 8, 2019, the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan “Concept of Development of Higher Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030” was approved. This concept clearly states that at least 10 universities of Uzbekistan should have an international rating [11]. Currently, higher education institutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan are trying to obtain an international status on the initiative of the government of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The internationalization of higher education is also considered as an important tool in ensuring the economic stability of Uzbekistan. In the context of large-scale reforms in higher education, it reflects the peculiarities of internationalization of higher education. [2]



Since 2017, sharp attention has been paid to the development of the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The “Strategy of Actions has been developed for five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021”. This strategy outlines the priority areas for the comprehensive development of the country. In this strategy, great attention is paid to further development of higher education. In the state program “Year of dialogue with the people and human interests of the “Strategy of Actions” the most priority task to join the “Declaration of Bologna” was included in the agenda. [15] At present, the internationalization of higher education is given serious importance at the level of state policy in Uzbekistan. Prospective measures for further development of the higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan have been developed. In particular, the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures for the further development of the higher education system” PD-2909 of April 20, 2017, was signed. Establishing close cooperation with the leading scientific and educational institutions of the world to further improvement and development of the higher education system is appointed as the main task for each higher educational institution of Uzbekistan. As well as the issues of implementation of advanced pedagogical technologies, educational programs and educational-methodological materials based on international educational standards into the educational process are emphasized. [2]

Taking into account the requirements of the time, the Republic of Uzbekistan has begun to implement other principles in higher education. It was emphasized the importance of further development of cooperation with foreign countries in higher education. In accordance with this cooperation, agreements were signed with foreign countries to open foreign higher education institutions and branches in the Republic of Uzbekistan. As a result, the campus branches of foreign higher education institutions began their activities in Uzbekistan. From 1991 to 2016, 7 foreign universities were established in Uzbekistan. International cooperation in the field of higher education has become one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This, in turn, led to further development of the process of internationalization of higher education in Uzbekistan. Internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan will be manifested in such aspects as studying abroad, development of international corporations, the wide introduction of international criteria into the higher education system, development of integration in higher education and modernization of the national higher education system. Initially, its features were in the adoption of new normative and legal documents on education, the development of international cooperation, the mobilization of young people of the Republic of Uzbekistan to foreign countries through special funds, and their initiatives. Later, the opening campuses of foreign universities and other factors contributed to the development internationalization of higher education in Uzbekistan. [2]



3. Internationalization of Universities in Uzbekistan

The biggest contribution to the development of internationalisation of higher education in Uzbekistan was the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No PD-5545 “On the organization of activities of the El-yurt UMIDI Foundation” signed on September 25, 2018. The “El-yurt UMIDI” Foundation provides great opportunities for young specialists and talented youth of Uzbekistan to study in foreign universities by granting the scholarships covering study fee, as well as cost of travelling and/or cost of stay.

In the following three years, cooperation with developed countries was further enhanced. During the 2018/2019 academic year, 832 foreign specialists from the US, Germany, UK, South Korea, Japan, Australia, Austria, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and other countries were involved in the educational process. In the 2018–2019 academic year, 164 applicants were sent to study in the leading foreign higher education institutions to get a master’s degree and 78 applicants for doctoral degrees. 546 teachers, doctoral students, and researchers of the Republic of Uzbekistan were sent to internships and 755 were sent for professional development. In the 2018–2019 academic year, 32 joint textbooks and 2236 scientific articles were published in scientific journals that have an impact factor. [3] Student mobility is also increasing year by year. More than 4 million students are currently studying abroad. According to experts, by 2020 this figure will reach 8 million. [4] 34,990 citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan study abroad. [5] This figure is 0.7% of the world’s students. [5] Additionally, foreign citizens are studying in Uzbekistan. For example, at Westminster International University in Tashkent, over 30 foreign students are currently studying in various specialties. [6]

On October 8, 2019, the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan “Concept of Development of Higher Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030” was approved. This concept clearly states that at least 10 universities of Uzbekistan should have an international rating (Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019, October 8). During 2 years, 9 foreign higher education institutions were established in Uzbekistan. Three of them are Russian universities, 2 of them are South Korean universities, and 2 of them are Indian, 1 American and 1 Latvian university. The 2018 Silk Road International University of Tourism opened in Samarkand. It is noteworthy that this was the first local international university in the Republic of Uzbekistan. [2]

Taking a course towards the massization of higher education, Uzbekistan made a choice in favor of accelerated internal internationalization, seeking to combine an increase in the volume of training of specialists with an increase in the quality of graduates. One of the means of internal internationalization was the opening of branches of foreign universities in the country. In 2020, there were 22 branches of



foreign universities in Uzbekistan, while in 2016 there were only seven. By 2030, the number of branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan should increase to 45. [7]

4. Problems and Challenges

Problems related to the effectiveness of internationalisation processes in higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan can be conditionally divided into 3 main groups:

Language barrier

Different curricula

Inability to pay for mobility

According to the statistics, less than 30% of the teaching and administrative staff are proficient in English (or another foreign language) enough to actively participate in the exchange programs, trainings or mobilities (<https://stat.uz/ru/publikatsii/3680-obrazovanie-v-uzbekistane>). However, students' foreign language proficiency is more than 70% and this number tends to be increased within the following next years, thanks to the internationalisation of higher education as well. Therefore, insufficient language skills prevent teachers and students from participating in internationally recognized courses, which are usually in English, or in any other activities (trainings, seminars, workshops, etc.) organized by the foreign partners of the local universities.

According to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education", Higher Education includes two main stages (Bachelor and Master Degrees), which is similar to the European educational system however, the content of the courses is not the same. Moreover, the ECTS is gradually introduced in higher education and is still not implemented in its full scale. Therefore, the main problem for Uzbekistan HEIs is to find compromises between European and local curricula, especially when discussing opening new double-degree programs or organizing long-term mobilities (at least 1 semester) with credits transfer.

If the mobility opportunity is not sponsored by university or program supported by European partners, very few students may allow paying for it at full rate. Therefore, socially disadvantaged groups will be excluded from the mobility opportunities because they are unavailable to pay all costs. On the other hand, university funds do not have enough budget to pay for many students' mobilities, therefore, international student exchange, as an essential part of internationalisation of higher education, does not work properly.



5. National Recommendations and Conclusions

In order to provide sustainable development of higher education within a framework of its successful internationalisation the following recommendations may be suggested:

- ✓ To develop online platform for teachers and students for organizing online mobilities, as well as developing opportunities for further cooperation and communication;
- ✓ To develop joint projects for applying for Erasmus+ programs;
- ✓ To develop opportunities for academic mobilities for teachers and students to EU HEIs;
- ✓ To adapt national curricula to EU standards;
- ✓ To promote further integration of ECST into Uzbekistan higher education;
- ✓ To revise national priorities in the sphere of internationalisation of higher education;
- ✓ To activate the cooperation between researchers from Uzbekistan and EU HEIs;
- ✓ To optimize the interaction between administration and researchers, assisting the latter in their scientific activities, since not all the results obtained can have a formalized scientometric assessment;
- ✓ To optimize university funds to support talented students from disadvantaged groups in mobility actions

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National Recommendations for International Cooperation in Teaching/Learning/Research in China

1. Higher Education System Context in China

Nowadays, despite twists and turns, People’s Republic of China has been established one of the largest higher education systems in the world. Chinese universities and colleges have been accommodated the largest numbers of under- and post-graduate students worldwide, with more than 44.32 million students (including 3.03 million postgraduate students) on campuses ^[1].

China’s gross enrolment ratio for higher education reached from 40% in 2015 to 57.8% in 2021 of the 18-year-old population. This indicates that its higher education system will soon offer near-universal access to higher education according to United States sociologist Martin Trow’s definition ^[2]. Also, it produced and trained more than 60,000 doctoral graduates in 2018. The latest report showed that more than 509.5 thousand PhD students on campuses. This number is even larger than that for US universities.

The Chinese education system is considered one of the most challenging and competitive ones in the world, even though it has a great reputation ^[3]. Students are provided with education at different levels:

Level	Education Type	Age (year)	Duration (year)
Primary School	Primary	6-12	6
Lower Secondary School	Primary	12-15	3
Senior Secondary School	High School	15-18	3
Short Cycle	Vocation Education	18-21	2-3
Bachelor’s Degree	Undergraduate	18-22	4
Master’s Degree	Postgraduate	22-24	2-3
Doctoral Degree	Postgraduate	24-32	3-8

Both high and vocational education programmes are available. Subject and occupation-specific education and training are provided through vocational senior schools. Vocational senior school



is very job-oriented, and graduates usually go straight into the workforce. However, it does provide certain opportunities for higher study, notably in technical and vocational fields. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has permitted graduates of vocational schools to take the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) and gain admission to higher education programmes from the year 2000. The latest education reform shows that almost half of the total students will be enrolled by the high and post-secondary vocational education programmes in 2025.

A postdoctoral fellow (colloquially "post-doc") is a temporary research position held by a person who has completed his or her doctoral studies, also available in some high-level universities. Postdoctoral fellows commonly last for periods ranging between 12 months and 3 years, and have traditionally been dedicated purely to research. The appointee is typically given a title such as research associate, or sometimes research assistant professor.

In 2019, there were all together 2688 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), among which 1265 were universities, 257 were independent colleges and 1423 were higher vocational colleges. There were also 268 higher education institutions for adults. In 2019, the total enrolment of undergraduate in the regular HEIs were 30,315,262. The total enrolment of postgraduate in the regular HEIs were 2,863,712. The total enrolment of adult higher education institutions was 6,685,603 ^[4]. All these students are allocated to 13 disciplines, 92 undergraduate program catalogues, 587 majors and more than 56,000 specialized major stations.

China has some of the best international schools with excellent reputation in Shanghai, Beijing, and other prominent destinations in China. With more than 200 universities worldwide, admissions for international students are a much easier process than for domestic students, even for the Chinese Ivy League universities like Tsinghua University, Peking University, Zhejiang University, etc. For example, in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020, Tsinghua and Peking universities and the University of Science and Technology of China are listed among the top 100, with four other Chinese universities in the top 200.

2. National Policies and Programs for the Internationalization of HEIs in China

China has improved the quality of education through a major effort at school curriculum and other reforms. China's Education Modernization 2035 plan is launched to set the direction for the development of the education sector from "capacity" to "quality", and that the modernization of education should support the modernization of China ^[5].



International collaboration goals appear to be heavily focused on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)^[6]. An important part of modernizing the education system is strengthening efforts on “opening up”, i.e., international cooperation and exchange. The MoE’s 2019 budget saw a 36% increase in outbound study abroad funding and an 18% increase for inbound studies^[7]. By the end of 2020, China aims to have 500,000 international students. In 2018, there were 492,185. The top 15 source countries in 2018 were: Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, India, United States of America, Russia, Indonesia, Laos, Japan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, France, Mongolia, and Malaysia – out of which 11 have signed Belt and Road agreements with

China as of January 2020. Over 60% of all in-bound international students in 2018 came from Asia and the Pacific region.

As to the strategic tasks of China's Education Modernisation 2035 Plan, focusing on the internationalization are listed as following:

- Create a new pattern of opening education to the outside world – improve the level of international exchanges and cooperation, and optimize services for studying abroad;
- Improve the quality of Chinese-foreign cooperative education and encourage high-level humanities exchange between China and foreign countries;
- Promote the development of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms;
- Speed up the construction of overseas international schools with Chinese characteristics;
- Actively participate in global education governance and in the development of international education rules, standards, and evaluation systems;

.....

Accordingly, each government department also gave a series of corresponding supporting measures, listed in the key tasks from Implementation Plan for Accelerating Education Modernisation (2018-2022)^[8]:

- Promote Belt and Road education action – including by accelerating training of international talents and improving policies for overseas students to return to hometowns and commence employment;
- Improving quality of Chinese-foreign cooperatively run schools;
- Strengthening cooperation with BRI;
- Optimizing Confucius Institutes and strengthen international education in Chinese;

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The above measures are based on the Ministry of Education's internationalization. In addition, the Chinese government is pushing hard for internationalization in another area, which is the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) headed by the Ministry of Science and Technology^[9]. It is one of the municipal government departments in charge of scientific and technological (S&T) affairs and innovation development. It is mainly responsible for the



compilation and implementation of S&T development plans, formulation, implementation and evaluation of various policies and measures to support the development of science and technology innovation, promotion of international scientific and technological cooperation and exchange.

3. Internationalization of Universities in China

In general, education in China is less expensive than in many other developed nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This may make a major impact for international students seeking higher education, for example, in China, the textbooks and referencing paper documents will most likely be less expensive than in other nations. The quantity of money spend will be significantly reduced as a result of this.

It is attractive to those who want to study in China, and here are the top 6 main reasons: Affordable Study Costs, Travel and Discovery, Immersed in Chinese Culture, High-Quality Education, Promising Job Market, and Safety^[10]. Known by all, China is the world's second largest economy after the United States. It is the world's fastest-growing major economy, with average growth rates of 10% during the past 30 years. China is also the largest exporter and second largest importer of goods in the world.

In contrast, there is a sharp contrast between the strong and attractive open China and the relatively closed campus of today's Chinese universities. The vast majority of Chinese universities still do not have any foreign student because all higher education institutions are rigidly controlled and regulated by the central government. All presidents and party secretaries in national universities are directly selected and appointed by the Ministry of Education or local authorities and higher education management institutions.

On the other hand, putting so much emphasis on the development of domestic education, it is easy to overlook the importance of international education.

It is noteworthy that in recent five years, most of Chinese universities have begun to pay attention to the cultivation of students' international vision and the importance of international education. On the one hand, they support their faculty members to go abroad for visiting exchanges through the approved funds of China Scholarship Council (CSC), so as to expand their international horizons. On the other hand, the universities are fostering an international environment by hiring a large number of foreigners to teach English, French, Russian and other languages. For example, Northwest A&F University, as one of the top "double first-class" universities in China, has formulated a clear strategic plan for internationalization as follows:



- 5~7 new cooperative teaching programs of Sino-foreign;
- during the undergraduate period, the proportion of students with more than 3 months overseas study experience reaches 10%;
- 3~5 new academic innovation bases;
- international science and technology cooperation funding 8 million USD per year;
- support several comprehensive overseas agricultural science and technology demonstration parks;
- training 1,200 agricultural talents from One Belt and One Road countries each year;
- establish 6~8 country study centers / regional research institutions.

On the whole, the road to the future internationalization of Chinese universities has been opened, and all the faculty and staff of all universities are working hard for the internationalization of higher education.

4. Problems and Challenges

The Chinese Educational System has a considerable quantity and quality difference in China between different cities and provinces. Qinghai, a remote province in China, had only 12 colleges and universities in 2021. In contrast, Beijing had 92 in the same year. Since the mid-1990s, China has developed “the “211” project and the more recent “985” project for transforming universities. The “985” project aimed to establish “world-class universities in the 21st century.” The “211” project aimed to strengthen higher education institutions in the 21st century. However, 12 out of 29 of the “985” universities and 36 out of 116 of the “211” universities are located in Beijing and Shanghai, the two most developed cities in China. For international students, this is only a partial understanding of China, but not the whole real China.

Due to the widespread realization of inequality in accessing higher education in China, the Chinese government has proposed multiple solutions. China has launched a special program for colleges and universities to provide opportunities for intelligent students in rural areas to access top universities more easily. The policies included an independent registration path for those outstanding rural students and lower grade requirements, aiming to help large numbers of students living in remote areas attain access to quality higher education.

Similar to the reduction of educational inequality in China, a large number of international students from Africa, Central Asia and other developing regions have been recruited in the past decades, while there is a lack of international students from Europe, the United States, Japan and other countries, which makes the internationalization process of China's higher education not particularly effective. However, this may also have to do with the relevant policy context, As the Chinese government is more willing to fund the development of infrastructure in developing countries to bring them new ways of modern life. For Europe and the United States, Chinese are



more inclined to conduct scientific research cooperation with universities in these regions to learn from their advanced management experience, so as to cope with various scientific and technological problems in the process of modernization.

At the same time, the very low ratio of the international staff is also an important reason for the slow internationalization process for most of Chinese universities. Even in Northwest A&F University, which is a “double first-class” university, there are no more than 5 full-time foreign teachers among its 4,500 faculty members. This causes far from the goal of internationalizing the university.

5. National Recommendations and Conclusions

The future-oriented internationalization of the most promising business on the planet requires new ideas to reshape and lead the ecosystem of higher education, such as issuing new policies to focus on equity and quality in higher education. Meanwhile, as the field of higher education in the post-epidemic era, the rapid development of many advanced new technologies in the past two years is constantly calling for the empowerment of digital technology for higher education, and these new demands are constantly stimulating the vitality of innovation.

The internationalization of higher education should proceed from the reality and embrace the opening of education to the outside world with a more inclusive, more cooperative and more innovative attitude. In this way, we can naturally get the following helpful advices:

(1) From the national level, after designing a perfect internationalization strategy, it should pay attention to the important role played by cultural exchanges in the field of nationalization, make due contributions to establishing the image of a "positive and responsible" world power, and completely change the deficiency of "good story told poorly" in the past.

(2) From the perspective of local authorities and government management departments, they should not only manage the education policies of the university, but also release more authority on the internal governance of the university, so that the advanced experience brought by the university through internationalization can be used to support the improvement of the local economy and people's life, so as to realize “1 + 1 > 2” of the good effects.

(3) On the point view of the university, strengthen international exchanges of financial support, training more familiar with international business employees, introducing more teachers from the developed countries and professional management staffs, appropriately changing the current situation of cooperation in the field of scientific research don't attach importance to the cultural exchanges, will greatly promote the internationalization of the current process.



(4) Last but not least, for university teachers, international scientific research cooperation is important, and the humanities social sciences international cooperation will also be valuable. After all, through the interaction with the exchange of teacher visiting and student mobility, it will better facilitate in-depth communication, a lot of great ideas, even some disruptive technology innovations and theories will burst out.

Following the release of the China's Education Modernisation 2035 Plan, many provincial governments and universities released directives or action plans to achieve education modernization by 2035 and by 2050, aiming to align with that in other developed countries. It is expected that more policies and guidelines at national and provincial level will be published in the future supporting the internationalization goals and strategies.

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FINAL WORDS

Based on these National Recommendations, the UNICAC partners can further develop their individual internationalization of Teaching, Learning, and Research activities and also benchmark their partners' solutions and innovations and thus further develop the regional co-operation in the creation of a fruitful and modern educational Silk Road.



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