



The Role of Science Diplomacy for Strengthening Education in Uzbekistan



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Introduction

Education is a key for development of the country and in enhancing well-being of society. This sector holds a special place in the national development strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as it determines the quality of national human capital upon which successful implementation of wide-scale policy reforms rests. Simply saying, economic development, social progress and political stability of any society by and large depend on the quality of education, in general, and literary rate of its population, in particular.

It is worth noting that 99 per cent of country's population is literate, and it is primarily due to the effectiveness of 9-year compulsory education. The benefit of this system is that it ensures access to education to all strata of the population. The main cornerstone of the development of national education system has been the National Programme on Cadre Training and the Law on Education enacted in 1997, which embody all important aspects of developing national human-capital.

Science Diplomacy, enabling international research and scientific partnerships and influencing foreign policy through advice and expertise in science, is of paramount importance for Uzbekistan for building sustainable future; developing and managing effective learning environment in universities; and finding innovative solutions to equip young generation with skills requisite for the local and global markets. To achieve this, Uzbekistan is closely cooperating with foreign partners in educational domain through diplomatic channels-developing its ties with foreign countries' educational institutions think tanks and

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establishing affiliates of international well-known foreign universities (Moscow State University, University of Westminster, etc.).

The national programme of training specialists and the law on education has been for reforms in the educational system in Uzbekistan. It is oriented to have of a new generation of experts with high professional and general culture; distinguished for their creative and social activity. The programme, among other things, stipulates formation of absolutely new structures, academic institutions and colleges. On 24 February 1998, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a special decree on establishing lyceums and colleges and managing them. The reason was that students would acquire not only basic but also specialized knowledge on certain disciplines for further training in an institution of higher learning. Within three years, boys and girls mastered 2-3 professions. At present, there are 400 academic lyceums and professional colleges in the republic. There are 246 specialized secondary schools, where 250,000 students master in 170 specialties.

Science diplomacy and policy dialogue

The Ministry of Higher and Secondary special Education (MHSSE) of the Republic of Uzbekistan runs regular international policy dialogue events around the issues of quality assurance in higher education in partnership with foreign educational establishments and international institutions. There high-level discussions bring together government officials, university rectors, key employers and leading institutions and experts from developed countries and Uzbekistan. Science diplomacy efforts of the Republic of Uzbekistan through these platforms are directed at enhancing quality of higher education. To achieve this Uzbekistani long-term relation with international scientific institutions, which promote innovation in science and research.

General Information

Education system of Uzbekistan consists of the following:

- state and private educational institutions implementing educational programmes in accordance with the state educational standards;
- research and teaching institutions performing research-work required for operation and development of education system;
- Government administrative bodies in the field of education as well as their subordinate enterprises, institutions and organizations;
- Education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is single and continuous, It is realized in the following ways:
- Non-school education;
- pre-school education;
- secondary education;
- specialized secondary and vocational education;
- Higher education;
- graduate education; and
- personnel training and retraining;

The system is generally supervised by the Cabinet of Ministers. It also controls directly some higher education institutions, including Tashkent Islamic University, as well as government is working with its international partners to establish the values in higher education qualifications.

International cooperation is one of the fastest and dynamic developing spheres of higher education in Uzbekistan. Internationalization of higher education is given a high priority by the national authorities in Uzbekistan.

International cooperation is going on in the following (based on the data supplied by MHSSE):¹

- Establishment of joint higher education institutions;
- Involvement of foreign teachers, scientists in teaching process of Uzbek HEIs;
- Support for incoming and out-going student mobility;
- Support in organization of joint research-works;
- Organization of international conferences

on burning issues of higher, innovative technologies, resources and energy saving; and

- Attracting foreign investments.

For higher education Uzbek universities are involved with the universities of 45 countries throughout the world. At present, higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan are cooperating with more than 10 Indian universities and research centres such as Delhi University, Indian Institute of Finance, GGS Indraprastha University (Delhi), the United Service Institution of India. Partnership in the field of science is developing dynamically; a number of Research Institutes; under the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan cooperate and conduct joint research with research center in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune.

Uzbekistan has been a partner of India's ITEC Programme since 1993-94. Currently, 130 slots are being allotted annually. The ITEC Programme has been very well received in Uzbekistan, and areas of training include information technology, English language, management, journalism, diplomacy, small business planning, remote sensing, banking, hotel management, etc. Twenty-five Scholarships are being offered to Uzbekistan annually for various courses in Indian Universities under the ICCR's Scholarship Programmes and one scholarship is for study of Hindi at the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra.²

Moreover the few years research partnerships were established with the UK Universities (University of Bath, Birmingham City University, Cambridge University, and London Metropolitan University) to benefit quality of teaching and learning and respond to national development priorities in the areas of finance, economics, health-care, medicine, English language learning, translation and interpreting.

In the framework of European educational programme, higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan have established close ties with higher education institutions in Europe. There are training courses, seminars, training courses for professors and teachers, master's and doctoral programme in cooperation with universities in the UK, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Czech

Republic, Slovakia, Greece, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and other countries.

Currently, 10 Tempus projects are at the stage of completion, 18 projects of Erasmus + and 80 inter-university joint projects on credit mobility are underway. About 40 universities and institutes of Uzbekistan are taking part in projects with higher educational institutions in Europe. The country has developed co-operation in all fields of science and education with universities in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, the Russian Federation and other countries fields of science and education. A number of higher educational institutions have been established to study foreign languages with the assistance of embassies, accredited in Uzbekistan.

One of the key directions of partnership of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan is continuing professional development of academic leaders and sharing best international and national practice in developing quality culture in higher education.

To illustrate, since 2015 the British Council has worked with the MHSSE and the Methodology Centre under MHSSE to develop and pilot a new Quality Management programme sharing current thinking and best practice in developing and managing effective learning environment in universities, discussing education standards and expectations and exploring most effective ways to engage students and employers through collaborative learning activities and project work. The Quality Management programme has been developed in partnership with London Metropolitan University, with advice and input from Quality Assurance in the UK, and at present benefitting 500 academic leaders and staff annually.³

Inspired by the success of collaboration in professional development in 2015-20, the British Council Centre in Uzbekistan started work on the ICT for Quality Assurance programme with MHSSE and the Head Methodology Centre under MHSSE, and has developed another joint programme; again in partnership with London Metropolitan University and leading

UK e-learning providers. The programme is surveying eight dimensions of e-learning and exploring how ICT can support education in a holistic, meaningful and productive way. It also reviews at how ICT would improve university management and would create a positive collaborative environment in higher education institutions and would share information about Universities with wider stakeholders. This programme is being finalized.

Experience through Science Diplomacy

The Ministers of Education of Uzbekistan take part in the Education World Forum in London every year to share Uzbekistan education reform experience and to strengthen partnerships with leading UK education institutions, as Quality Assurance Agency, UK universities, language schools and education product developers and publishers.

To add new dimensions for Internationalising Higher Education Programme in 2012-14 the QAPD TEMPUS project was jointly managed, with London Metropolitan University being a lead partner; the project involved the MHSSE, eight Uzbekistan Universities, the University of Peloponnese in Greece and V. Magnus University in Lithuania. The project contributed to curricula reforms in partner universities and developed a concept of Quality Assurance Centres under the auspices of universities in Uzbekistan.

The British Council Centre in Uzbekistan is now acting in consortium for a new Erasmus Plus project – IMEP, which aims to develop a CPD concept for academics in higher education, and through pilots and projects to develop guidelines for employers and students engaged in the higher education system in Uzbekistan.

Researcher Connect programme was started by the British Council in 2015 and aims to build researchers' capacity to work internationally. Precisely speaking, it offers benefits in terms of learning about new methods of academic research to help local researchers to publish papers in international journals, communicating

with researchers from different countries and collaborating with international scientific journals. The programme has benefitted 25 selected young researchers and 20 trainers representing higher education institutions from all-over Uzbekistan as well as a network of 450 early stage researchers at the State Science and Innovation Committee. The focus of the training activities so far has been on Writing for International Publications and publishing internationally.

It is worthwhile to mention the role of specialized agencies of the United Nations in improving quality of education in Uzbekistan. The Office of UNESCO in Uzbekistan rendered assistance to the Government of Uzbekistan in improving quality and access to education through of technical assistance, development of standards, innovative projects and creation of a network for exchange of professional information.

Conclusion

The role of science diplomacy in enhancing educational sector cannot be underestimated. Uzbekistan's case can be illustrative in this regard. At the contemporary stage of the development Uzbekistan pays enormous attention enabling international scientific and research partnerships through science diplomacy to strengthen partnerships with leading education institutions of the world, for leading universities, language schools and education product developers and publishers.

Internationalisation of science and research by Uzbekistan government is creating opportunities to develop professional academic leaders and to share best international and national practices in developing quality culture in higher education.

Endnotes

1. Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education (MHSSE) of the Republic of Uzbekistan. International cooperation. <http://edu.uz/en/pages/xh>
2. Ministry of External Affairs of India. http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Uzbekistan_July_2016.pdf
3. The British Council Centre in Uzbekistan. Internationalizing Higher Education. <https://www.britishcouncil.uz/en/programmes/education-society/higher-education>