

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

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**Abstract:** The higher education system of Uzbekistan is undergoing an active phase of reforms aimed at improving the quality of education, expanding access, and strengthening international integration. The rapid growth of private universities and the development of public-private partnerships have contributed to the formation of a dual educational market in which public and private institutions compete using different management models and marketing strategies. The purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of key trends, legal frameworks, and marketing approaches in the public and private sectors of higher education. Based on data from 2019–2025, the study identifies the main reasons for the decline in trust toward public universities, the specific features of private institutions' development, and the role of digital marketing in attracting prospective students.

**Keywords:** Higher education, public universities, private universities, dual education, reforms, marketing strategies, digital marketing, transformation.

### INTRODUCTION

The higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is undergoing extensive and dynamic reforms aimed at improving the quality of educational services, integrating the national system into the international academic space, and preparing competitive specialists capable of functioning effectively in a globalized economy. In recent years, the government has implemented a series of strategic initiatives focused on modernizing academic programs, introducing innovative educational technologies, enhancing institutional autonomy, and improving learning infrastructure. Particular attention is given to the development of human capital as a fundamental driver of the country's sustainable socio-economic advancement.

Within the framework of the Higher Education Development Concept until 2030, ambitious goals have been set, including increasing the higher education enrollment rate to more than 50% of the population. Achieving these objectives is facilitated by the expansion of the network of higher education institutions, the introduction of flexible learning formats, and the active attraction of private investment. Public–private partnerships play a significant role, serving as an effective mechanism for enhancing sectoral competitiveness, fostering healthy competition, and diversifying educational programs.

Against the backdrop of these reforms, a rapid expansion of private higher education institutions has been observed. Whereas previously the educational market was almost entirely concentrated within the state sector, today Uzbekistan is witnessing the formation of a dual market of educational services that encompasses both public and private universities. This emerging structure strengthens competition, encourages institutions to adopt modern marketing

tools, improve service quality, enhance communication with prospective students, and develop strong institutional branding.

However, the parallel development of these two sectors brings not only new opportunities but also a number of challenges. These include issues of quality assurance, accreditation standards, labor market competitiveness, and the accessibility and differentiation of educational services. Under these conditions, both public and private institutions must search for effective marketing strategies that enable them to retain and expand their student audience, adapt to evolving needs, and strengthen their attractiveness to applicants.

This review is devoted to analyzing the key trends in the development of higher education in Uzbekistan, comparing the public and private university sectors, examining their marketing strategies, and identifying existing challenges and prospects for the evolution of the dual system of higher education.

## METHODS

As the informational foundation for this review, analytical data on the growth of higher education institutions and admission statistics were utilized, along with the findings of preliminary comparative studies of universities in Uzbekistan conducted between 2019 and 2025. The analysis included the following components:

Statistical Data. Examination of the dynamics in the growth of higher education institutions (public, private, and foreign branches) and changes in the number of applications submitted by prospective students;

Comparative Quality Analysis. Application of statistical methods, such as the t-test, to compare quality models between public and private higher education institutions;

Legal Analysis. Study of the regulatory framework governing non-state educational institutions, including the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" and subordinate regulations related to licensing and taxation;

Comparative PR/Marketing Analysis. Investigation of the specific features of PR activities and digital marketing strategies employed by public and private universities.

## RESULTS

By 2025, Uzbekistan is home to 102 public, 71 private, and 30 foreign higher education institutions. The number of non-state universities has increased more than sixteenfold over a five-year period. The total number of students enrolled in higher education institutions exceeded one million in the 2023/2024 academic year, marking a 133% increase compared to the 2019/2020 academic year<sup>1</sup>. The number of students per 10,000 inhabitants reached 334 by 2024, nearly triple the 2019 level of 130. The private sector demonstrates particularly dynamic growth: the number of students enrolled in private universities has increased almost twenty-onefold over the past five years.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Crisis of Trust in Public Universities and Outflow of Applicants.

A significant decline in interest in applying to public universities has been observed, as evidenced by a sharp decrease in the number of applications from 1.484 million in 2020 to 732,411 in 2025. The reasons for this decline include the high cost of tuition contracts (ranging

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1 Ablatdinov, S.A. Trends in the Development of Higher Education Marketing in the Republic of Uzbekistan. *Ilg'or iqtisodiyot va pedagogik texnologiyalar: ilmiy elektron jurnal*, 2024, No. 2, pp. 230–237.

2 [www.stat.uz](http://www.stat.uz)

from 10 to 15 million UZS per year), concerns regarding the low quality of education, and outdated technical infrastructure. Some applicants prefer to prepare for admission to foreign universities, where, in their view, critical thinking skills are more highly valued. An additional contributing factor is the outflow of young men who, due to acute financial hardship, leave for labor migration to Russia immediately after finishing school.

### 3. Quality, Innovation, and Legal Status.

According to research, private higher education institutions are introducing new pedagogical innovations, although they may possess weaker infrastructure compared to public universities. Diplomas issued by both private and public institutions have the same legal status and are recognized in Uzbekistan, provided that the educational programs comply with state standards. However, the activities of private educational organizations are regulated by a fragmented body of legislation over 40 subordinate regulatory acts – which leads to legal uncertainty and a lack of systematic governance.

### 4. Marketing Strategies.

Private universities actively employ an integrated marketing model with a strong emphasis on digital technologies. Competition has shifted from rivalry between individual universities to a “war of ecosystems,” in which the key marketing asset is the guarantee of graduate employability. In contrast to public universities, which often rely on administratively oriented PR models, private institutions dominate the digital environment, making use of SEO, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and Telegram as the primary platform for communication and community building.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained reflect the cardinal transformations in the higher education market of Uzbekistan, which are a direct consequence of the ongoing reforms. The significant growth of the private sector and the increase in overall education coverage (confirmed by the growing number of universities and students) indicate the effectiveness of accessibility measures, especially in the context of public-private partnerships.

The key dilemma. On the one hand, private universities that are market-oriented (for example, IT, management) and guarantee a career path attract students with flexibility and modern approaches. On the other hand, the drop in interest in public universities, expressed in a twofold decrease in the number of applications, indicates a deep crisis of trust caused by the high fee base (contracts), low assessment of the quality of education and lack of transparency. The problem is compounded by the fact that some young people (especially men) choose labor migration instead of studying because of financial need.

The influence of marketing and law. The success of the private sector is partly due to their active and technological marketing activities focused on dominating the digital space and providing job security that meets the needs of the Gen Z audience. However, despite their rapid growth and innovation, the legal framework for private educational institutions remains fragmented, which creates legal uncertainty and complicates their functioning. To ensure the sustainability and further growth of the private sector, as well as to increase their competitiveness, it is necessary to adopt a single legislative act that would systematize all the norms related to their activities.

In conclusion, the reforms of higher education in Uzbekistan have achieved their goal of expanding access and stimulating competition, but at the same time have exposed serious problems with trust in traditional government structures, which requires public universities to urgently modernize their technical base and improve the quality of education in order to keep

up in a market where graduate career success has become a core value.

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