

**POPULARIZATION OF THE “STUDY IN UZBEKISTAN” PLATFORM IN
ENHANCING THE INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN**

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Abstract

This methodological guide explores the mechanisms for attracting international students to higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. It provides a comprehensive analysis of theoretical foundations, strategic approaches, and the creation of a favorable academic environment for foreign students. Additionally, the guide examines the role of modern digital tools, branding strategies, and international collaboration in enhancing Uzbekistan's global educational image. By integrating innovative educational technologies and improving student support services, this work aims to offer practical recommendations for increasing the competitiveness and attractiveness of Uzbekistan's higher education sector in the global market.

Keywords: Higher education, international students, Attracting foreign students, Uzbekistan's education system, Education export, Global rankings, University image, Academic environment, international collaboration, Higher education strategy, educational tourism, Digital marketing, Branding and PR, Innovative education technologies.

Introduction

Studying abroad has already become an essential component of international education, creating a competitive environment among higher education institutions to attract foreign students. Increasing the proportion of international students in Uzbekistan's higher education institutions necessitates a study of the factors influencing their choice of institution. According to the International Organization for Migration's 2021 report, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Canada are the leading countries in terms of the number of international students. At the same time, China, India, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan are among the top countries sending students abroad for education.

These statistics indicate that all leading countries in attracting international students belong to the group of developed nations. This trend in student mobility dynamics has remained unchanged. Specifically, in 2008, 64% of all international students worldwide chose to study in the United States. Research conducted in 2017 found that when selecting a study destination, international students consider infrastructure, costs, amenities, overall conditions, and opportunities for building their future in the host country. Consequently, it can be argued that a country's level of development, infrastructure, and convenience for foreigners play a significant role in international students' decisions. In other words, an international student must be able

to envision their future in the country where they choose to study. It is also noteworthy that all leading countries sending students abroad belong to the category of developing nations, including Uzbekistan. Considering this, it is not difficult to assume that Uzbekistan's higher education institutions are struggling not only to attract foreign students but also to retain local applicants. This situation highlights the need to prioritize research on additional factors influencing student enrollment.

Higher education institutions worldwide are undergoing profound transformations in the context of globalization. Accordingly, attracting international students depends on the extent to which higher education institutions and academic programs are adapted to the globalization process. In this regard, researchers emphasize that the English language has become a crucial factor in the internationalization of education. This can be explained by the fact that English has become the dominant foreign language in business, science, and various other fields worldwide. In Uzbekistan, English plays a significant role in the transformation of higher education. International students come from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, higher education institutions that attract foreign students naturally cannot provide instruction in each student's native language. In such cases, global experience shows that English has become the primary medium of instruction for international students. Consequently, the level of English proficiency among professors and lecturers at a university enhances the institution's attractiveness to foreign students.

Research has examined the foreign language proficiency of professors and lecturers working in Uzbekistan's public higher education institutions. According to the findings, 79% of faculty members with B2 and higher-level foreign language certificates obtained their certification in English, 11% in Russian, 4% in Turkish, and the remaining 3% in other languages. Currently, no more than 15% of professors and lecturers in public higher education institutions hold foreign language certificates, with the majority of these certifications being in English.

This indicates that the higher education system in our country is successfully overcoming the language barrier in admitting international students. It is worth noting that English is gradually replacing Russian as a foreign language, which plays a positive role in attracting students from various countries.

At the same time, the foreign language proficiency of local students can also be considered a factor in attracting international students. When studying far from their homeland, international students' academic performance and psychological stability can be influenced by factors such as cultural shock and language barriers. It is not difficult to assume that improving intercultural communication has a positive impact on attracting international students. By enhancing local students' foreign language skills, a more comfortable environment for international students can be created. The Center for Higher Education Development Research has analyzed students' foreign language proficiency. As of 2024, more than 36,000 students in public higher education institutions in Uzbekistan hold a B2 or higher-level foreign language certificate. More than 90% of these certificates are in English.

These findings suggest that developing and popularizing new platforms is essential to enhancing the international image of Uzbekistan's higher education institutions. Conducting pilot studies is crucial in determining the practical effectiveness of scientific theories.

This research is conceptually based on assessing the effectiveness of the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform in promoting higher education and attracting international students. Platforms like *Study in Uzbekistan*, which simplify the admission process to higher education institutions, are being integrated into Uzbekistan's higher education system for the first time.

Method

Within the framework of this research, the conducted pilot study puts forward the following hypotheses:

H1: The *Study in Uzbekistan* platform is a more effective tool for promoting higher education compared to the independent websites of individual higher education institutions.

H2: The *Study in Uzbekistan* platform is quantitatively and statistically more effective in attracting international students to higher education institutions compared to institution-specific websites.

H0: The *Study in Uzbekistan* platform is not more effective than other existing alternative tools in promoting higher education and attracting international students.

To test the above hypotheses, the pilot study was conducted in three stages:

- Clarifying Stage
- Emphasizing Stage
- Formative Stage

The Clarifying Stage involves developing scientifically grounded criteria and indicators for improving the process of attracting international students to higher education. This stage requires adapting concepts published in leading scientific journals to local conditions and structuring the key ideas that form the basis of the pilot study.

In the Emphasizing Stage, surveys are conducted to assess the potential of the developed platform based on the established criteria. This stage also includes a mathematical and statistical comparison of the differences between the experimental group (users of the newly developed platform) and the control group (users of independent university websites).

Based on the literature review, the platform's functionality should be established according to the following criteria:

- Design
- Interface usability and text style
- Ease of use
- Information search system
- Data quality
- Logo and brand quality
- Diversity of services and service quality
- Loading speed of the platform and pages, as well as browser compatibility

To ensure the synergy between pedagogy and information technology in the research study, a survey will be conducted among specialists in these fields, including students, professors, and lecturers. The evaluation of the platform and the web pages in the experimental group based on the above criteria will be carried out using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The Likert scale is a convenient method for assessing participant choices by dividing responses into levels in

surveys.

In the emphasizing stage, to conduct the pilot study, a survey will be administered among technical administrators, developers, and educators in higher education institutions. The survey will assess the experimental and control groups based on the defined criteria (Table 1).

The evaluation based on the above criteria was conducted separately for the experimental and control groups. The assessment results were statistically and mathematically compared using a paired t-test (Wilcoxon test).

In the formative stage, the platform undergoes testing, and the activities of higher education institutions in attracting international students are compared between the experimental group (platform) and the control group (selected university websites).

Table 1
Survey Form

Criterion Number	Type	Description	Rating scale
1 st Criterion	Design	Assesses the extent to which experimental and control subjects evaluate modern web design standards.	1-5
2 nd Criterion	Interface usability and text style	Evaluates the usability of interfaces in experimental and control subjects, including the degree to which they are free of grammatical, orthographic, and stylistic errors.	1-5
3 rd Criterion	Ease of use	Assesses the ease of use of experimental and control subjects, considering how understandable and simple they are for users.	1-5
4 th Criterion	Information search system	Measures the effectiveness of the search function in comparing academic programs and their associated higher education institutions, evaluating their content, and comparing tuition fees.	1-5
5 th Criterion	Data quality	Assesses the accuracy, reliability, relevance, and completeness of the data in experimental and control subjects.	1-5
6 th Criterion	Logo and brand quality	Evaluates how well the branding and logos of experimental and control subjects align with modern branding concepts.	1-5
7 th Criterion	Service diversity and service quality	Examines the diversity of academic program profiles in experimental and control subjects, as well as the quality of administrative support and user assistance.	1-5
8 th Criterion	Platform and page loading speed	Evaluates the platform's compatibility with major browsers, ensuring seamless user experience and assessing server reliability during document submission.	1-5

The platform was tested in collaboration with the following higher education institutions:

1. Tashkent Medical Academy
2. Tashkent State Dental Institute
3. Kokand State Pedagogical Institute

These higher education institutions formed the experimental group in the formative stage.

The share of admitted international students in the total number of enrolled international students was calculated using the following formula:

$$x/y * 100 = p$$

In this formula, x represents the number of admitted international students, y represents the total number of enrolled international students, and p represents the percentage share of admitted international students among all enrolled international students.

The technical and pedagogical factors that contributed to the effectiveness of higher education institutions demonstrating successful performance indicators are studied through interviews.

Results and Discussion

To improve the process of attracting international students to higher education institutions, the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform was created. The platform operates online and serves as a bridge between higher education institutions and international applicants. The main functions of the platform include:

- Attracting international applicants to higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.
- Promoting the achievements of higher education in Uzbekistan to an international audience.
- Simplifying the admission and application process for international applicants to Uzbekistan's higher education institutions.
- Providing international applicants with detailed, comprehensive, and useful information about academic programs offered by higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.
- Eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic barriers and misunderstandings in the application process for international applicants to higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.

The *Study in Uzbekistan* project functioned as the experimental subject, while independently created web pages for attracting international students served as the control subjects.

Table 2 Descriptive statistical data

The type of Criterion	Type of group (subject)	Number of participants	Arithmetic mean value	Standard deviation	Standard error	Coefficient of variation
Design	Control group	849	3.834	1.216	0.042	0.317
	Experimental group	856	4.06	1.205	0.041	0.297
User-friendliness of the interface	Control group	850	3.916	1.149	0.039	0.293
	Experimental group	856	4.083	1.099	0.038	0.269
Data search system	Control group	847	3.94	1.182	0.041	0.3
	Experimental group	856	4.126	1.1	0.038	0.267
Data quality	Control group	847	4.027	1.116	0.038	0.277
	Experimental group	848	4.184	1.021	0.035	0.244
Brand and logo quality	Control group	843	4.084	1.128	0.039	0.276
	Experimental group	856	4.227	1.043	0.036	0.247
Service diversity	Control group	846	3.96	1.153	0.04	0.291
	Experimental group	852	4.171	1.056	0.036	0.253
Loading speed	Control group	848	3.96	1.162	0.04	0.294
	Experimental group	856	4.125	1.11	0.038	0.269
Ease of use	Control group	844	3.962	1.144	0.039	0.289
	Experimental group	856	4.182	1.076	0.037	0.257

The experimental group achieved a higher arithmetic mean value across all criteria compared to the control group. Additionally, the standard deviation for the experimental group was lower than that of the control group. This indicates that there was less variation in the ratings given by survey participants when evaluating the experimental group, suggesting a stronger tendency toward positive assessments.

In particular, the standard deviation values in the experimental group were lower for the criteria of “design,” “interface usability and text style,” “information search,” “data quality,” and “loading speed and browser compatibility,” while the arithmetic mean was higher (Table 2). This can be attributed to the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform’s implementation of modern design concepts, its ability to function without stylistic errors in texts, its technical features ensuring high-quality data, and its capability to subscribe to high-speed servers. These advantages enhance the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform’s potential to promote higher education.

According to the results of the paired t-test, the experimental group received higher ratings than the control group across all criteria, meaning that the comparison between the control and experimental groups yielded negative "z" values. Furthermore, all criteria recorded p-values below 0.05, which indicates that *Study in Uzbekistan* is conceptually, pedagogically, and economically superior to individually created university websites for attracting students (Table 3).

Table 3
The results of the paired t-test

Control group		Experimental group	W	Z	P	Accepted hypothesis
Design	-	Platform design	69833	-3.88	< .001	H1
User-friendliness of the interface and text style	-	User-friendliness of the interface and text style on the platform	74814	-3.047	< .001	H1
Ease of use	-	Ease of use of the platform	62071.5	-4.237	< .001	H1
Data search system	-	Data search system of the platform	69242.5	-3.465	< .001	H1
Data quality	-	Data quality of the platform	62071.5	-3.088	< .001	H1
Brand and logo	-	Brand and logo of the platform	60641	-2.822	0.002	H1
Variety of services and service quality	-	Variety of services offered on the platform and service quality	64222	-4.113	< .001	H1
Loading speed and browser compatibility level	-	Platform loading speed and browser compatibility	72293.5	-3.152	< .001	H1

Formative stage

In the formative stage, the activities of the experimental and control groups were structured based on the validated criteria. The experimental group collaborated with the platform, while the control group attracted international students through their independent websites. Among higher education institutions, Tashkent Medical Academy, Kokand State Pedagogical Institute, and Tashkent State Dental Institute participated in the experimental group within the platform’s

framework to attract international students. Meanwhile, the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan, Termez State University, and Bukhara State University participated as the control group. Through the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform, Tashkent Medical Academy successfully attracted 970 international students, Kokand State Pedagogical Institute attracted 11, and Tashkent State Dental Institute attracted 68. In contrast, in the control group, the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan and Termez State University each attracted 7 international students, while Bukhara State University attracted 10 (Table 4).

Table 4 Indicators of Higher Education Institutions in the experimental and control groups

Group type	Name of the higher education institution (HEI)	Accepted students (foreign)	Enrolled students (foreign)	Ratio of accepted foreign students to total enrolled students
Experimental group	Tashkent Medical Academy	970	1548	62.66%
	Kokand State Pedagogical Institute	11	10	110.00%
	Tashkent State Dental Institute	68	456	14.91%
Control group	Uzbekistan University of Journalism and Mass Communications	7	3	233.33%
	Termiz State University	7	30	23.33%
	Bukhara State University	10	6	166.67%

Within the experimental group, a total of 1,049 international students were attracted, while the control group managed to attract only 24 international students. It should be noted that the number of international students currently studying in the experimental group amounted to 2,014, whereas in the control group, this number was only 39. In terms of the ratio and proportion of admitted and enrolled international students, there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups. For instance, in the experimental group, Kokand State Pedagogical Institute had 10 international students already enrolled, and 11 new students were admitted, indicating a 110% effectiveness rate. In the control group, the University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan had 3 international students already studying, while 7 new students were admitted, reflecting a 233% effectiveness rate. From this perspective, it was not possible to reject the null hypothesis (H0) regarding the platform's effectiveness in attracting international students.

It should be emphasized that the number of international students and admission trends are highly fluctuating processes, which makes it appropriate to examine them in more detail in future research. Additionally, it is important to highlight that medical programs offered by the country's higher education institutions appear to be more attractive to international students. Interviews conducted to analyze the factors behind this trend revealed that the prestige of medical education, the availability of joint programs with foreign universities, and the significant interest in medical fields among applicants from India and Pakistan play a crucial role. As of July 2024, a total of 5,549 Indian students and 1,163 Pakistani students were studying in Uzbekistan, ranking first and second, respectively, in terms of the number of international students in the country.

Conclusion

The pilot study conducted within the framework of this research demonstrates that the *Study in Uzbekistan* platform surpasses existing website projects in the field of higher education promotion in Uzbekistan from technical, conceptual, and pedagogical perspectives. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the platform achieved a higher arithmetic mean across all selected criteria, while statistical and mathematical analysis showed that independent websites received lower ratings compared to the platform. Furthermore, the critical value range of mathematical statistical findings confirmed the significance level ($p\text{-value } 0.001 < 0.05$ alpha critical value). At the same time, it should be noted that the platform's performance in attracting international students within the experimental group did not lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis. In other words, while the number of admitted international students was significantly higher than that of the control group, the effectiveness indicators between the experimental and control groups were not statistically significant. Considering this, it would be appropriate to conduct further research to analyze the future prospects of the platform in attracting international students.

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