

### THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES

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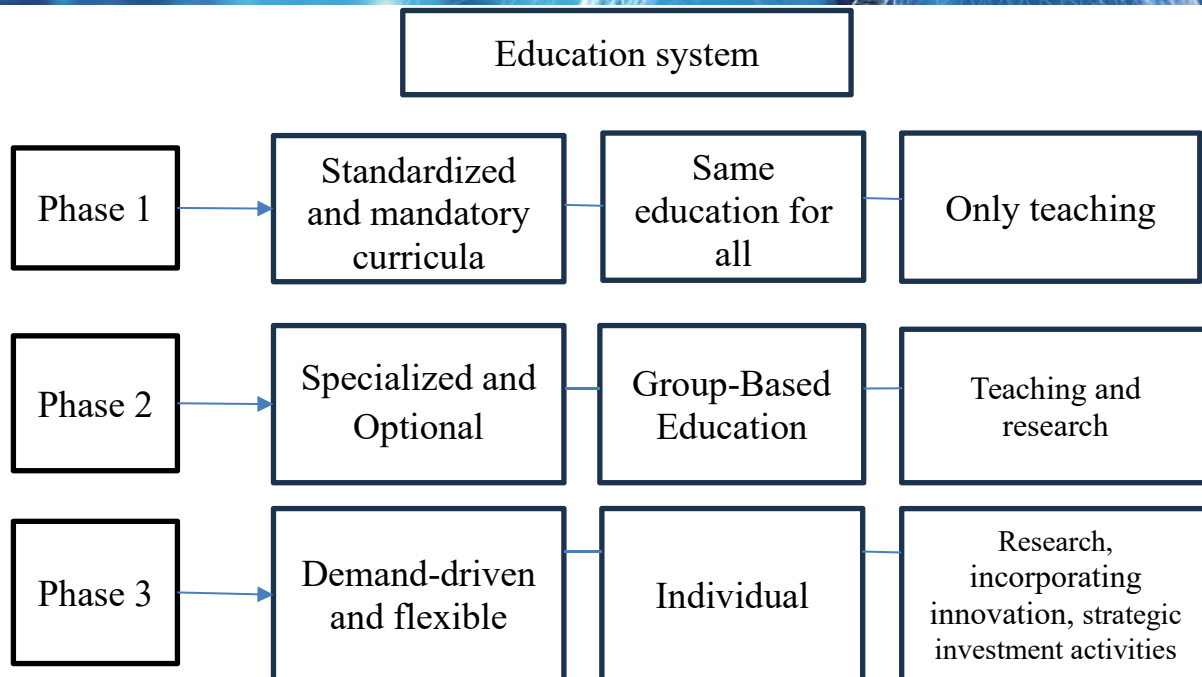
**Abstract:** This article explores the developmental trends within the education system and the pivotal role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in societal progress. It examines changes in Uzbekistan’s education sector in comparison to international standards and highlights the integration of modern universities with government and public initiatives, substantiated by case studies. Drawing on experiences from institutions like Oxford and Melbourne universities, the paper underscores achievements in scientific research, innovation, and ecological sustainability. Moreover, it discusses educational programs aimed at sustainable development and their practical implementation in Uzbekistan. The paper evaluates the emerging functions of universities, including their roles in scientific innovation, shaping public opinion, and supporting national strategies, offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance education policies and accelerate socio-economic development in the country.

**Keywords:** education reforms, globalization, academic research, sustainability, innovation, investment, entrepreneurship, green economy, think tanks, societal impact, labor market demands, interdisciplinary collaboration, strategic goals.

In present-day Uzbekistan, education has emerged as a cornerstone of national development and is more critical than ever before. This heightened focus is driven by both ongoing domestic reforms and the pressing influence of globalization, accompanied by intense competition in the global education system. Historically, the primary mission of higher education institutions was to impart knowledge and enhance students' academic skills. However, in the 21st century, the role of universities has expanded significantly, transforming them into think tanks, centers for policy innovation, and strategic advisors to governments on critical political and economic issues.

Today, universities are increasingly entrusted by government and public organizations to conduct targeted research in various fields. The findings and recommendations produced by academic researchers are shaping policies and strategies at national and organizational levels. Beyond research, higher education institutions now serve as platforms for public engagement. Through academic articles, media discussions, and public lectures, experts contribute not only to the development of knowledge but also to the cultivation of informed public discourse, thereby influencing societal attitudes and decision-making processes.

Moreover, this evolution reflects a global trend where universities play a central role in addressing pressing challenges such as sustainability, technological innovation, and socio-economic development. By fostering interdisciplinary research and collaboration, these institutions are establishing themselves as vital drivers of progress, bridging the gap between academia, policy-making, and society at large.



The table above outlines the stages of the education system in Uzbekistan. Initially, education was designed for all people, with a standard curriculum that was not specialized and applied equally to everyone. Higher education institutions (HEIs) focused solely on teaching students. However, the current system has evolved, with education now being divided into specialized fields, and universities have expanded their role to include research alongside teaching.

When examining the practices of developed countries, it is evident that the education process is shifting from group-based learning to an individualized approach, where each student's unique abilities and development paths are taken into account. This shift is yielding more effective results in preparing a new generation of professionals. Today, students choose their fields of study based on labor market demands, and universities are broadening their scope to engage in various innovative projects, attract investments, and participate in entrepreneurial activities.

The global transition towards this system can be attributed to several factors. For instance, with the advancement of technology, new professions such as IT specialists, marketers, and other emerging careers are in demand. To meet the rapidly evolving needs of the market, universities are adapting to these changes, ensuring that graduates are equipped with relevant and up-to-date skills.

When discussing think tanks, one could reference the renowned University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. Oxford is home to some of the best available research evidence, supported by a network of over 1,000 experienced researchers and professional service staff who facilitate collaboration. The *Oxford Policy Engagement Network* [1] plays a critical role in bridging the gap between academic research and policy-making, offering insights and recommendations to parliament, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies.

As a result, the university's total revenue from both external and internal research in the 2022–2023 period amounted to £789 million, with £147.2 million derived from industry and manufacturing sectors [2]. This illustrates that higher education institutions have evolved into independent entities with the ability to exert significant influence on both government and society. Universities now operate as powerful forces, shaping policies and driving societal change.

In Uzbekistan, the use of higher education institutions (HEIs) as intellectual hubs is becoming increasingly popular. For example, in 2023–2024, a project titled “*Enhancing Ethno-Tourism Potential in the Districts of Rishton, Chust, Yangikurgan, and Boysun Based on Local Attributes*” was implemented under the leadership of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. The primary goal of this project was to develop tourism in Uzbekistan and discover new tourist destinations.

The scientific outcomes of the project included the analysis of collected data, which was published in academic articles and disseminated in the form of videos on national television and online platforms. These materials were shared within both national and international academic communities. Additionally, a dedicated website for the project was launched to further engage and inform the public [3]. This process simplifies the assimilation of information about the history and significance of historical landmarks and destinations located in the region, particularly for tourists interested in ethno-tourism. It also ensures a higher likelihood of their visit to the region by enhancing their understanding of its cultural and historical value.

The declaration of 2025 as the “Year of Environmental Protection and Green Economy” in Uzbekistan indicates the country’s long-term strategic goals in this area [4]. In this context, higher education institutions play a leading role in ensuring ecological sustainability, offering innovative solutions, and engaging the public. It is essential to study and implement the experiences of international universities in this regard.

For example, the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom has developed a sustainability policy aimed at environmental protection, social justice, and sustainable development goals for the 2017–2023 period. This policy recognizes research focused on these objectives as a strategic priority. It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration with students, staff, and the wider community to achieve these goals [5].

Another important aspect to note is that universities in developed countries began their efforts toward sustainability and greening at the start of the century. For instance, the University of Melbourne in Australia has been focusing on sustainability programs since 2006. In 2008, the university prevented the release of 9,713 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and by 2014, this amount had increased to 31,754 tons. Additionally, since 2006, the university has reduced its annual water consumption by 164 million liters, representing a 30% decrease [6]. Furthermore, the University of Melbourne collaborates with the city government and conducts research on sustainability. For example, researchers from the Faculty of Architecture, Building, and Planning are working with the Melbourne City Council on long-term strategic plans to integrate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into the city’s urban development [7]. This illustrates that collaboration between governments and higher education institutions (HEIs), with the universities acting as advisory bodies, plays a crucial role in the development of effective strategies and achieving real-world results.

The transition to a green economy requires raising public awareness about sustainability. Educational institutions support government policies through the following mechanisms:

- Offering academic programs that cover various subjects related to climate and sustainability.
- Encouraging research and studies in various sectors, helping students actively contribute to society with meaningful input.
- Conducting high-quality research themselves, acknowledging the complexity of climate science and sustainability.
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, enabling researchers to discover new knowledge, develop tailored sustainable solutions for different contexts, and introduce innovations to the market.

– At the leadership level, universities must prioritize sustainability and green initiatives in decision-making processes.

In this way, educational processes not only foster individual development but also ensure the achievement of national strategic goals.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's higher education institutions need to evolve into not only knowledge-providing entities but also centers of innovative research, offering science-based policy recommendations and contributing socio-economic benefits to society. This transformation will elevate the higher education system to a new level by adapting to both national needs and global demands.

The successes of universities in Europe, the US, and Australia as intellectual hubs, their collaborations with governments on sustainable development strategies, and their active role in transitioning to a green economy should serve as examples for Uzbekistan.

From the experience of developed countries, it is clear that universities' roles as research, innovation, and strategic advisory institutions are key drivers of national development. Therefore, Uzbekistan's higher education system must serve as a foundation for not only individual development but also the realization of national strategic goals, playing a crucial role in enhancing the country's global standing in the future.

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