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Research Article

EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY BRANCHES IN UZBEKISTAN: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENT PATHWAYS

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ABSTRACT

International University Branch Campuses in Uzbekistan present significant opportunities for advancing the country's higher education landscape. These institutions offer advanced educational quality through internationally recognized curricula and faculty., promote global recognition and mobility. However, they also face challenges. Issues include language proficiency among faculty and students, which impede a positive students experience. Varieties in English proficiency among students in the classroom settings hinder motivation for study and a successful academic performance. Addressing these challenges requires language support programs, prioritizing language proficiency language proficiency in faculty hiring and tailored admission requirements to align student abilities with academic demands. By tackling these challenges, IUBCs can maximize their positive impact on Uzbekistan's higher education system and enhance education quality in these institutions.

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KEYWORDS

International University Branch Campuses (IUBCs), internalization, language proficiency, educational quality, student experience, challenge, opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education has created expectations among educational policymakers and managers that it would foster a desire for increased mobility and international initiatives, as well as the development and implementation of innovative teaching and learning methods fueled by the growth of blended learning and online education (Becker 2009). Education systems and institutions are extending their global reach through traditional methods like recruiting international students and offering exchange and study abroad programs, as well as new forms of cross-border higher through education, such as transnational institutions and online courses. Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization (Knight J, 2004). Knight and Wit (2018) noted that over the past 25 years, the internalization of higher education has expanded from minor role to global phonemenon, which becoming primary strategy and dominant trend in the field.

Currently, this strategy aids in the further integration of countries' higher education systems into the global higher education landscape which fosters development influenced by this trend. The internalization of higher includes nations worldwide. The education internalization of higher education become a prominent trend, with universities seeking to expand their national borders. One significant manifestation of this trend is the establishment of international University branch campuses, which serve as extensions of many prestigious universities inn foreign countries. campuses aim to provide high-quality education, foster cross-cultural exchanges and enhance global academic collaboration. Uzbekistan, a Central Asian nation with rich heritage and strategic geopolitical location, has been undergoing reforms in Education especially, started after independence of the country. Since, 2016, measures in higher education have advanced significantly, smilar to many other

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countries Uzbekistan has intensified efforts to evaluate the activities of higher education institutions to meet international standards. Successful integration into the global higher education system has become a centeral focus of Uzbekistan's higher education policy. This policy emphasizes increasing the number of foreign Universities, branch campuses, and collaboration with developed countries. In the need of qualified specialists and providing youth access to higher education with improving their qualifications in developed countries, Uzbekistan's first president let to open International University Branch. As a result, foreign university and branches began to operate. This paper aims to explore the dynamics of IUBCs in Uzbekistan, focusing on the opportunities they present, the challenges they encounter, and the pathways to improvements. The purpose is to analyze the role of International University Branch Campuses in Uzbekistan's context.

Literature Review

The internalization of higher education has accelerated over the past two decades, with International University Branch campuses emerging as a key strategy for institutions to expend their study globally. Most researches both

gobally and Uzbekistan have been devoted to this phonemeone. Altbach and Knight (2007) explored that the motivations for internalization encompass commercial benefits, acquiring knowledge and languages, enriching the curriculum with global content, among others. Specific initiatives such as branch campuses, establishing English-Medium programs and degrees have been put into place as a part of internalization (p.290). According to the report Cross-Border Education Research Team (2024) identified that 333 branch campuses are available in the world today, with significant growth in regions such as Asia and the Middle East. This growth is driven by the demand of host countries to improve their educational systems, and the strategic goals of host universities to internationalize. Successful IUBC s bring worldclass education to new markets, introduce innovative teaching and research practices, and foster cross-border academic collaborations. However, establishing and maintaining these campuses involves addressing challenges such as ensuring academic quality, adapting to local educational and regulatory frameworks, and achieving financial sustainability (Healey, 2015). The processes of internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan began in

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1991 (Eshchanov & others, 2011). The newly created states have only adopted the concept of internationalization of higher education after formulating higher education trends and educational policies to the extent that it serves national interests (De Wit, 2002) Uralov (2020) discussed the internalization of higher education Uzbekistan's context. in Training skilled specialists for a specific country is crucial for achieving future prospects. Recognizing this need, The Republic of Uzbekistan has started implementing new principles higher in education. Emphasis has been placed on enhancing cooperation with foreign countries in higher education. As a part of this cooperation, agreements have been made with foreign countries to establish foreign higher education branches and institutions within Uzbekistan (Uralov, 2020, p.3). Developing countries seek to attract foreign students to their universities to improve the quality and cultural composition of the student body, gain prestige, and earn income (Albatch & Knight, 2007, p.294). Ubaydullayeva (2024) discussed about the Current research on the internationalization of HE overlooks how excessive reliance on the opening of foreign university branches without reforming the local HE system remains unsustainable and give

information of current state of foreign university branches in Uzbekistan. Alan P France and Matyakubova (2018) explored the prestige and reputation of the international university branches in Uzbekistan in their "The Perception of the Prestige and Reputation of International Branch Campuses" article. This paper aims to contribute to the expanding of scientific literature on the Internalization of higher education in the context of Uzbekistan.

Analysis of Opportunities

In 2001, the Uzbekistan government initiated what we call "The Uzbek Model" of Transnational Education. This model invited foreign universities from countries it perceived to have high-quality education systems to bid for and develop "International University" branches. The first International University, WIUT (Westminster International University in Tashkent), was established in 2002. Since then, Uzbekistan has established additional International Branch Campuses (IBCs), including the Management Development Institute in Singapore in Tashkent, Turin International University of Tashkent, INHA of Tashkent (Korean), Webster University in Tashkent, Tashkent Branch of Moscow State University, Tashkent Branch of Russian State

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Institute of Oil and Gas named after Gubkin, and others. While these branches offer promising opportunities for international collaboration and knowledge exchange, they also present inherent challenges that warrant careful examination. These opportunities can span various domains, including educational quality, global recognition, economic development and cultural exchange. IUBCs bring internationally recognized curricula and teaching methodologies to Uzbekistan, which can help raise the overall standard of education. By aligning with the main university's academic standards, these branch campuses ensure that students receive a high-quality education comparable to the offered at the home institution. This includes updated course materials and rich online libraries, modern pedagogical techniques and assessment methods. These educational institutions employ a mix of international and local faculty. providing opportunities professional development and knowledge transfer. The presence of international faculty members introduces various teaching styles and expertise, which enhance the learning experience for students and contribute to the professional growth of local education. Graduaters of these universities receive globally recognized degrees, enhancing their employability and chances for

further education and jobs. Alan P France and Dilmira Matvakubova (2018) conducted a research responding to published online employment opportunities using fictitious applications from graduates of IBC International Universities and Traditional Universities to to measure the response rate graduate applications in the local labour market. The results showed that "The timing of 'call-backs' showed that the priority was given to IBC graduates rather than a local institution's graduate" (France & Matyakubova, 2018, p.9).

This international recognition is a significant advantage in a globalized job market, where employers value credentials from reputed institutions. IUBCs also, facilitate exchange programs that allow students and faculty to spend time at the main campus or another universities. These exchanges provide valuable exposure to different educational environments and cultures, enriching the academic experience and broadening students' perspectives. Wilkins (2020) stated that Programs must equip students with the knowledge and skills (use value) that will enable them to gain employment in local, regional and international labour markets (exchange value) (p.42). In developing a skilled workforce

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that meets the needs of both local and international employment requirements. By offering programs in high-demand fields such as business, engineering, information technology, healthcare, these campuses help bridge the skills gap and prepare students for successful careers. The medium of instruction at most IUBCs is English, which helps students improve their language skills. Kari et al (2021) in his research reported that in 71 percent of countries the use of English as a medium of instruction was increasing (p.21). English as a medium of instruction is rather a new phenomenon in Uzbek higher education landscape. Ibrokhimov (2023) stated that English as a medium of instruction signifies the modernization of education in Uzbekistan.

Analysis of Challenges

While international University branch campuses (IUBC)s **UZbekistan** in offer numerous opportunities for enhancing higher education in Uzbekistan, they also face several significant challenges. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the successful establishment, integration, and sustainability of IUBCs in the Uzbek educational landscape. One of the major challenges faced by international university branches in Tashkent is the language proficiency of both Uzbek and

foreign faculty members. Often, instructors may not have current proficiency certificates that prove their language performance. They may not have native-level proficiency in English or may have accents that differ significantly from standard **English** pronunciation. Students struggle with comprehension as they may not understand the information presented in the class. Language learning often involves imitation, and students may simultaneously pick up accents different and pronounciations from their instructors.

Balancing language proficiency and teaching experience requirements is crucial aspect while hiring staff members. Some IUBCs can not provide these qualities equally. Administrative staff must prioritize both language proficiency and teaching experience. Some teachers may boast extensive teaching experience but lack language proficiency. Conversely, others have strong language skills but possess limited teaching experience.

International university branches set English proficiency requirements language (IELTS, MICHIGAN TEST, TOEFL) for admission or accept students conditionally. The actual level of taught content in courses may exceed the language

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abilities of some students. This mismatch can create challenges for students who struggle to comprehend materials due to lack of proficiency language. Encountered difficulties in in understanding materials can directly impede students' academic performance and diminish their motivation for studying. Students who receive a high quality experience are more likely to be satisfied with their program and institution, and satisfied students are more likely to perform better academically (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011). Students may experience feelings of inadequacy and low confidance if they cannot meet the language expectations, leading to a negative impact on their overall experience. Student experience is important because it may impact upon student learning and attainment; student motivation, commitment and satisfaction (Wilkins, 2020, p.41). Students come from various linguistic backgrounds with differing degree of fluency English. This diversity results in disparities in comprehension, engagement, and academic performance. In the classroom setting where students have different levels of English proficiency, language barriers impact the flow of communication and collaboration. . In a classroom setting where students have different levels of English proficiency, language barriers

can disrupt the flow of communication and collaboration. Higher-level students may dominate in discussions or class activities, leaving little opportunity for lower-level students to contribute or engage actively. This imbalance in participation can cause feelings of alienation or inadequacy among lower-level students, further dampening their motivation to participate in class. Higher-level students may progress at faster pace, while lower- level students may struggle to keep up. Variations in language proficiency levels can hinder communication, comprehension, and academic performance. Wilkins (2020) noted that "very often, students lack sufficient English language competency, and it is difficult for such students to enjoy a positive classroom experience". This can result in a widening achievement gap over time, with lowerlevel students falling further behind their peers. This impact the quality of education and decreases the equity of the students' knowledge level comparing to the students who study at the main campus.

Recommendations for Improvement

Language Proficiency Certification:

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- Teachers and students should undergo language proficiency assessments or provide current proficiency certificates to ensure they possess the necessary language skills for effective communication and instruction. Language proficiency certificates should be current and recognized by reputable language assessment bodies to validate the individuals' language abilities accurately
- Institutions should establish minimum language proficiency requirements for both teachers and students, aligning them with the linguistic demands of the academic programs offered. Administration should change the requirement of language proficiency level (from 5.5 to 6.5 for bachalors and from 6.0 to 7.0 for master's degree students) and set level for each language skill (reading, listening, speaking and writing). Students should be divided into groups according to their language levels.

Addressing Pronunciation Barriers:

- Professional development programs should be offered teachers to improve their reduce pronunciation skills and dialectal variations that may hinder comprehension

Language laboratories equipped with pronunciation software and resources should be made available to both teachers and students to practice and refine pronunciation

Differentiated Instruction:

Tomlinson & Allan (2000) stated that implementing a differentiated instruction approach involves grouping students according to their language proficiency levels. Each should tailored language group receive instruction and support, including additional practice opportunities, remedial sessions, and scaffolded assignments.Instructors should employ a variety of teaching strategies and materials to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences within each language group.

Collaborative Language Support Services:

- Establishing language support services, such as peer tutoring programs, language workshops, and conversation clubs, can provide additional language practice opportunities for students
- Language support services should be accessible to all students, regardless of their proficiency levels, and integrated into the broader academic support infrastructure of the institution.

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incorporating these recommendations. By international university branches in Uzbekistan can enhance the language learning experience for both students and faculty, leading to improved academic cultural outcomes and greater competence among graduates.

Conclusion

International University Branch Campuses (IUBCs) in Uzbekistan offer numerous advantages, including access to high-quality education, enhanced global recognition, and the promotion of economic development and cultural exchange. These institutions bring internationally recognized curricula, faculty expertise, and research opportunities, significantly contributing to the modernization and internationalization of Uzbekistan's higher education system. However, several challenges which should be addressed. Language proficiency is a critical issue both among teachers and students. Variety of language levels create some issues for students which impact academic performance and motivation. To mitigate these issues, IUBCs should implement support programs for both students and teachers. Prioritizing language proficiency and teaching experience in faculty recruitment is essential to

ensure high-quality education delivery. By managing these issues, International University Branch campuses in Uzbekistan can maximize their positive impact on host country's higher education. This will not only enhance the academic experience for students but also contribute to the broader socio-economic development of the country.

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