

## Prospects of Private Higher Education in Uzbekistan

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### ABSTRACT

Last two-three decades private higher education has become striking phenomenon worldwide namely in Asia, while plays significant role in growing of economy of the region. This paper deals with prospects of Private Higher Education Institutes in Uzbekistan. History and current scenario in higher education system of young independent country have been deliberated, hence issues, challenges, opportunities, benefits described and future development stages of private higher education are proposed.

**KEYWORDS:** Uzbekistan, Private Higher Education, Education Policy and Act, Quality of Education, Reforms.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education in Central Asia (also known as Ancient Turkistan which includes independent states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) namely in Uzbekistan has very long and great history. World famous scholars of middle centuries such as Al-Khwarizmi, Imam Al Bukhari, Imam AtTermizi, IbnSina, Al Farabi, Al Beruni, Mirzo Ulughbek, Ahmad Yassaviy, Sharafiddin At-Tusiyetc, were borne and lived in Central Asia. Contribution of those scientists were described in many literatures (unfortunately most of the authors referred them as a Persian or Arabic scholars due to historical, geopolitical, geographical influences and indeed the language they used for their study and writing) and played significant role in development of science and education.

It is well known that the institutions of higher education were founded in the East as Madrasah, which has been reformed as University in the West. These Madrasahs and Universities have been the centres of education (namely higher education), science and technology, culture and enlightenment throughout the centuries while madrasahs were also the centres of discoveries, inventions and innovations [17].

There were three Renaissance periods in Central Asia, which are recognized by historians and scientists all over the world. The first Renaissance occurred in IX-XII centuries where world recognised scholars such as Abu Rayhan Al Biruni, Abu Ali Ibnu Sina (Avicenna), Muhammad Al-Khwarizmi, Abu Sahl Masihy, etc. made major contribution to the advancement of philosophy, history, literature, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, logics, geography, pharmacology, mineralogy, chronology, physics and medicine. Most of them were involved in “The house of scientists” (“Baytulhikma”) in city of Urganch, (modern Uzbekistan) established by Khalifa Mamun. Al-Khwarizmi contributed to the development of mathematics namely to foundation of algebra in his famous book “The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing” (Al-KitābAl-Mukhtaṣar FīḤisāb Al-JabrWal-Muqābala). Al Biruni was famous with his astronomical works, where he described the different phases of the moon and estimating the radius and circumference of the Earth. His findings were substantial scientific achievement of that time and his observational data has entered the larger astronomical historical record and is still using by modern scientists in geophysics and astronomy. Medical encyclopaedia written by Avicenna “The Canon of Medicine” (Al-Qanunfi’t-Tibb) used as the standard medical textbook in the Islamic world and Europe up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were many other scientific achievements of scholars from Central Asia in period of first Renaissance, which significantly contributed to the growth of science and education of humankind.

The next scientific and cultural development, the second Renaissance occurred in the reign of Amir Temur(historically known as Tamerlane) and his descendants (Temurids, XIV-XVI). Temur who was the patron of science, culture and enlightenment focused not only founding of a big country but also he congregated educated and skilful peoples from all over the world around the native scholars and made Samarkand the ornament of the world. Mirzo Ulughbek who was the grandson of Amir Temur built first observatory in the world, where he studied features of more than thousands stars. Alisher Nawayi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (founder of Turco-Muhgal dynasty in India, 1526-1857who was grand-grandfather of Shah Jahan-Jahangir-Akbar-Humayun-Babur) were leaders of encouraging advancement and usage of Turkic language.

The third Renaissance in Turkistan occurred in the last XIX century and in the beginning of XX century. Although it was the historical continuation of the first two Renaissances, it was quite different from them with its national features. This historical event happened as the result of Jadid action that tried to make reforms in the national, social, political, cultural, ideological and educational spheres. Besides, the ideology of national and secular higher education Jadids prepared hard and fulfilled effective tasks to found a higher educational institutions.

The first higher education institute in Central Asia were established in 1918 (under USSR regime), as Turkistan State University. Later known as Central Asia State University from 1923 to 1960, Tashkent State University from 1960 to 2000 and National University of Uzbekistan since 2000.

Despite 25 years of independence, there are not many papers dedicated to the reform of higher education of Uzbekistan, namely introducing private higher education institutes. There were some PHEI in early 1990<sup>th</sup> but due to issues on enrolment (selection of students), quality of education, integrity and professionalism of lecturers, insufficient facilities and lack of governance of those institutes resulted their unsuccessful closure. There are some authors who paid attention to HE of Central Asia namely Uzbekistan and discussed on issues, challenges and constraints in HE of the region while some analyses and recommendations have been made in order to bring HE of independent states to the international arena [1, 6-8, 11, 13, 21, 24-27].

In this paper, we discuss prospects of Private Higher Education Institutes (PHEI) in Uzbekistan. It consists three sections including Introduction, brief on Uzbekistan higher education system and prospects of private higher education. Introduction presents brief history of education. The second section describes higher education system of independent Republic of Uzbekistan, where development stages of higher education, current level of science, admission and financial support matters were briefly discussed. Last section deals with the steps of establishment and development of PHEI in Uzbekistan, outlining current scenario in higher education, opportunities, issues, challenges and prospects of private education. The benefits of private higher education to the society, nation, parents, students, businesses and industry are listed. The steps of establishment of private higher education institutes have been proposed.

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

After Independence from Soviet Union in 1991 there were massive challenges for the young country in many areas including economics, politics, education and higher education. Uzbekistan had very well developed education system, high qualified teachers, experts, researchers (compare to other central Asian countries) with long, rich and glorious historical past and with strong traditional, cultural and religious values which makes easier to reform higher education (HE) system [25].

The main and significant document on developing education system was adopted in 1997: National Program for Personal Training (NPPT) and the Law on Education [12, 14]. Those two documents are legal basis for HE of the nation [10]. It is very important to the country to have long-term strategy for strengthening education, as well as continuous improvement of higher education and training. Over 30 million population with major young generation (approximately 35% of the population are under 16 years old) needs quality education with promising employability.

There are a few types of higher education institutes in Uzbekistan, such as University, Academy and Institute. Total number of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) is 77 including 2 Academies, 23 Universities, 34 Institutes, 16 branches (of universities and institutes) located in country regions, 1 Conservatory-Uzbek State Conservatory and 1 school-National School of Dance and Choreography [19]. The following international well recognized institutes were involved in higher education sector: Westminster International University in Tashkent (UK), Turin Polytechnic University (Italy), Russian Plekhanov University of Economics, Moscow State University named after Lomonosov, Russian University of Oil and Gas named after Gubkin, Management Development Institute of Singapore and Inha University in Tashkent (Republic of Korea). According to the Education Act, higher education is provided by HEIs after 12 years of compulsory and free-of-charge education obtained in primary and secondary schools (9 years) and in secondary specialised institutions: college or lyceum with 3 years of education [1]. The reforms in the higher education sector of the country have resulted in a switch to a two level structure consisting of Bachelor programme (4 years of study) and a Master programme (2 years) replacing old USSR's 5 years higher education system. Note that in Medical institutes duration of study for bachelor degree is up to 7 years, while master programs 3 years. Fully government sponsored 3 years doctoral program provides platform for researchers to get their PhD (doctor of philosophy) degree followed by 3 years research in order to receive "doctor of science" scientific degree. In 2012, some changes has been made on postdoctoral level, where "Doctor of Philosophy" and "Doctor of Science" degrees have been combined to be called as a "Doctor of Science". Requirements for postdoctoral degrees monitored by Higher Attestation Commission [18], the main government organization which is responsible to all matters related to postgraduate studies (PhD and above), directly reporting to Cabinet of Ministers.

## SCIENCE IN UZBEKISTAN

Modern Uzbekistan has huge scientific potential benefiting not only Central Asia, but also plays significant role in advancement of science and technology in the world. There are nearly 300 well-developed scientific institutions with over 25,000 skilful scientists and researchers in Uzbekistan. Currently, the number of world class researchers, professors and academics from Uzbekistan are working in top universities worldwide and contributing to the development of science and technology. The scientists and researchers are paying their attention to fundamental research in the important fields of modern science such as mathematics, physics, astronomy, microelectronics, biophysics, genetics and geology. There are significant achievements of Uzbek scientists in mathematics, probability theory, hydrometeorology and the study of superconductors, medicine and agriculture are well known. International collaboration with well recognized research centres in terms of research and higher education is increasing simultaneously. Number of publications in high quality international journals also rising year by year. The government of Uzbekistan has been allocated many research funds for scientists in order to conduct a quality research.

The Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan is a supreme scientific institution in the country and the main hub of research, which was formed on November 4, 1943. The scientific institutions are incorporated into seven branches / clusters depending on the profile of their research: physics and mathematical sciences; mechanics and management processes; earth sciences; chemical-engineering sciences; biological sciences; philosophical, economic and juridical sciences; history, linguistics and literature.

During the years of independence Uzbekistan has established and is developing scientific and technical cooperation with many countries in the world, including USA, the European Union, Japan, China, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Turkey, India and others. Over 60 international agreements in the field of scientific-engineering cooperation and the protection of intellectual property have been signed since independence. The republic regularly hosts international scientific seminars and conferences in various fields such as natural sciences, humanitarian sciences, medicine, agriculture, applied research, innovation and commercialization of science, development and transfer of modern technologies[15].

## ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Admission to higher education institutes based on entrance exam (Testing system) monitored by the State Testing Centre[16, 19]. Applicants who succeed in test exams by scoring high marks in three subjects (depending on program applied/offered) will be enrolled to respective institutes/universities. There are two types of admission to higher education institutes, based on state grant (sponsored by government) and self-sponsorship/ contract-paid basis (tuition fee to be paid by students/parents/private companies/education loan). All enrolled students entitle for allowance (stipends) based on performance and results: basic allowance, good performer allowance and well performer allowance. However, special types of allowances provided for most talented and very well performed students namely stipends of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and many other types of stipends such as Beruni, Avicenna, Nawaiy, Ulughbek and Imam Al-Bukhari. Those stipends encourages talented students to achieve more success in their studies and career.

Great attention is paid in the republic to the improvement of educational system and training of qualified specialists. Government allocated 10-12% of GDP for education which is considered high compare to neighbouring countries, in the world in general. Higher education section (including colleges or lyceums) fully sponsored by central budget (government budget).

There are many achievements have been attained based on NPPT and Education Act in education and higher education systems of Uzbekistan. Number of Government initiatives, Presidents Decrees improved higher education standards namely optimization of education areas and specialities for training highly-qualified experts; construction, renovation, refurbishment of academic and laboratory facilities; creation of scientific-research labs and improving sport and living facilities for students [4-5, 28].

However, for the time being there are no nongovernmental universities (private institutes of higher education) in Uzbekistan (excluding international universities listed below and education centres), although the Education Act 1997 provided a legal basis for the establishment of non-governmental HEIs. Educational institutions of this kind may operate if accredited and certified in line with the established guidelines of the Cabinet of Ministers and obtain the rights of a legal entity and right to undertake educational activities [1].

## DEMAND FOR PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Private higher education sector is growing and plays crucial role on economics and human capital of any developed or developing country. Since higher education requires huge financial investment, it should be point out that well-structured private higher education might help to solve issues and challenges in this sphere.

Despite government effort for the betterment of higher education section while to improve economics of the country, Uzbekistan still faces some issues as a young independence state on this matter.

For instance, Number of private institutes in higher education are increasing globally after 1990's the most African and Asian countries started to establish PHEI. For the time being, there are hundreds of PHEI those contingents which contributes to growth of economy of the region. For instance, there are many successful PHEI in African countries, namely 48 in Senegal, 28 in Ghana, 27 in Benin, 17 in Cameroon, 15 in Uganda, 14 in Kenya, 13 in Nigeria, 10 in Tanzania and 4 in Zimbabwe [29]. Asian countries also improving their private higher education section namely there are 727 PHEI in China, 620 in Japan, 501 in Malaysia (including private colleges), 289 in Iran, 185 in India, 179 in South Korea, 9 in Saudi Arabia and etc. [3, 20].

Even Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan establishing both state and non-state (Private) higher education institutions. There are number of PHEI in those countries established where some of them were income generating platform for their founders and owners, which makes negative effect on the social stature of the private education sectors in the region.

Private higher education nowadays making a significant contribution to the growth rate in Asian HE [3, 20]. The blast of private higher education is relatively a response to the increase in demand in countries which has been provided only public higher education. The influence of higher education to economic growth has been recognised and extensively acknowledged by [22-23]. However, there are some issues on smooth implementation and development of PHEI in Asia.

Note that there are some non-governmental education centres in Uzbekistan [9], but those centres are offering short courses where graduate may receive certificates only upon completion of programs. Therefore, they may not suit and fulfil the current manpower demand in the country.

### CURRENT SCENARIO

Definitely, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence makes proud people of Uzbekistan. During this period of time, young nation attained many achievements in science and education, sport, economics, business, manufacturing, engineering, international relations, agriculture, construction, ruler area development, banking, textile, oil and gas, industry, medicine, law, etc. Despite those achievements government and people of the country strive improving services, facilities and quality of life. Indeed, one of the key areas of nation building is education (including higher education) where every country is designing and developing its own model by learning existed ones. Political, social, economic, historical and cultural experience of the country plays significant role on establishment of education direction.

Fast developing world required more attention for education namely for higher education. Uzbekistan as a young independent state established own model of development of higher education based on Law of Education and NPPT. Many universities in Uzbekistan involved into the programs of international quality assurances, improving delivery methods, establishing e-learning platforms, satellite branch campuses and offering joint degree programs [2].

As mentioned above, government allocated huge amount of budget for the establishment of education based on Law of education and NPPT where graduates of school (after 9 years of education) will continue their study in Lyceums or colleges. Hence, after successful completion of three years study they have opportunity to continue their study in HEI, based on choice and interest.

Figures below show current scenario of higher education opportunities (for bachelor degree) where comparison can be made on number of graduates from colleges and lyceums, statistics of annual applications to HEI, number of available placements in higher education and percentage of candidates enrolment (DTM).

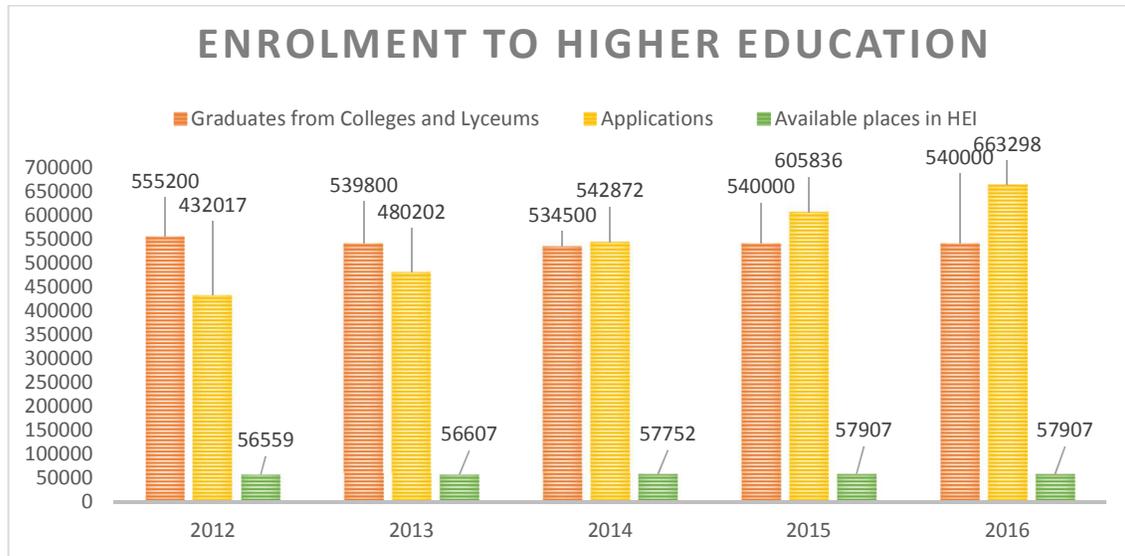


Figure 1: Enrolment to Higher Education in Uzbekistan for last five years

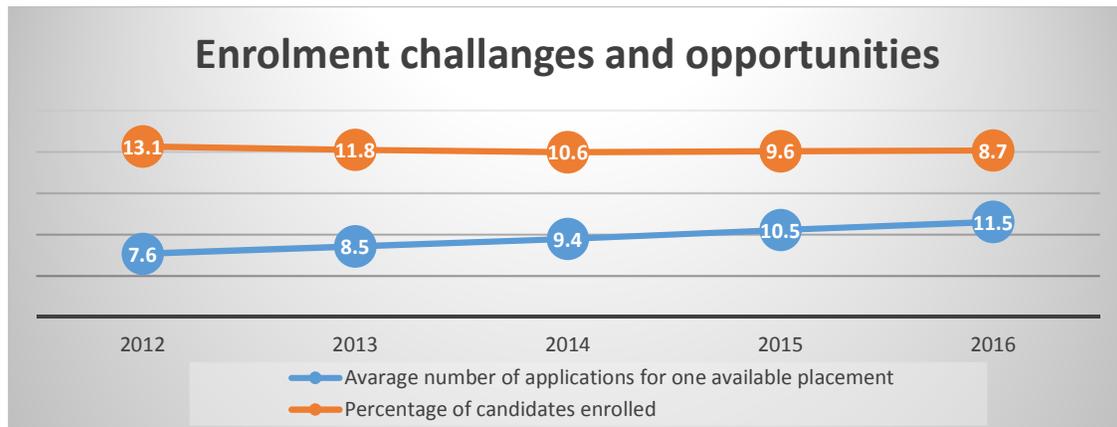


Figure 2: Enrolment challenges and opportunities

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the number of candidates (applicants to pursue) for higher education is increasing. Therefore, the percentage of enrolment (those who able to entre to universities) is decreasing due to limited available placement and high demand. According to State Test Centre data (DTM) in 2016, number of applications to HEIs increased to 53% compare to 2012. But, during this period of time (2012-2016), available places in existed HEIs were increased 2.3% only. Young generation and their parents care about higher education, at least to pursue their bachelor degree in order to get better job opportunities. There is a room for improvement in this sector due to growth of population in young independent country.

### JOB OPPORTUNITIES (EMPLOYABILITY)

Uzbekistan has all facilities and huge resources to run new businesses and create new job vacancies in many spheres such as agriculture, textile industry, heavy metal industry, farming, railway, manufacturing, tourism and education. Every year government leading to create thousands of new jobs namely for college graduates. Creation of small and medium businesses is one of the key strategies of Uzbek economic development model, where new jobs opportunities are offering for job seekers.

Job opportunities for high qualified experts is very promising compare to non-qualified workers in internal and external job market. It is well known that Russia has some issues on population growth and there is very high demand in Russian market for skilful employees. Kazakhstan biggest state in Central Asia (by territory) with huge resources also needs staff support from neighbouring countries like Uzbekistan (largest state by population in Central Asia). Government signed several agreements on labour with Republic of Korea, where

high qualified workers may meet expectations of well developing East Asian country. Despite huge effort on creation of new job opportunities, Uzbekistan needs high qualified, educated, skilful graduates who can contribute towards great future of the state.

Speedy development of science and technology requires well trained, skilful, creative, independent and hardworking employees.

### **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Figures 1 and 2 described high demand for higher education which is good sign for the country, where many people realised that education is important to be succeed in personal life and career. Providing more opportunities for graduates of colleges and lyceums will fulfil the industry needs on manpower. Young generation is taking higher education very seriously and hence the number of seekers to entry into higher education institutions is increasing extremely.

- Number of available placements in HEI
- Applicants are allowed to apply for one HEI
- Distribution of government-sponsored grant placements
- Reputation of Uzbekistan HEI in global arena
- Internationalization and marketability of offered programs

Establishment of private higher education institutes/universities opens new opportunities for students who were unsuccessful in entry exams into public universities. The following factors need to be considered seriously while establishing PHEI:

- Integrity and professionalism of lecturers
- Qualifications of academic staff
- Quality of teaching and learning
- Involvement of international staff and students in higher education
- Availability of educational loans and financial assistance
- Ranking and rating in global university ranking systems
- Research and innovation facilities
- Involvement of IT in teaching and learning
- Informative websites and accessibility into it
- Implementation of Online registration, online banking, online assessment, e-learning platforms
- Implementation of quality assurance
- Financial sustainability of HEI
- Employability of graduates

The most serious issue in Uzbekistan (in Central Asia) is the negative perception to private education, where society (even policy makers) think that PHEI will be focus only about income generation for their founders and owners. But, many developed and developing countries are practising private higher education with the success which brings huge impact to the economy of the country and region. If PHEI will be implementing by learning from experienced countries will be competitor for public universities, where both sides will benefited from healthy competition. Finally, it helps to improve quality of higher education, marketability of offered programs, employability of graduates and etc.

### **PROSPECTS**

It is extremely important to ensure that opportunities can be extended for students who were unsuccessful in gaining entry into public universities by allowing the establishment and growth of PHEI. Current demand of the nation for education leads to think about this matter which contributes to development of many areas and beneficial to all parties: society, nation, parents, students, businesses and industries. However, establishment of PHEI may contribute to:

- expand the access to higher education
- provide new opportunities for employability
- improve rural areas development
- to reduce the burden on government to finance higher education through public funds
- fulfil market demand on quality graduates / employees
- strengthen the quality of higher education
- foster the accountability in the higher education marketplace
- reinforce collaborations with well recognized international universities

- enhance internationalization and integration to global arena
- advance research activities and increase number of publication
- expand recognition and reputation of HEIs in international rankings and ratings
- increase number of tourists visiting to the country
- establish new businesses which contributes to the economy of the state
- produce high qualified and skilful managers and professionals based on market and industry needs
- create healthy competition between public and private universities
- offer more opportunities for college and lyceum graduates
- keep talented students inside the country, rather than sending them oversea universities
- generate income involving international students
- minimise current issues in higher education system

Allowing to open branches of foreign universities listed above can be considered as a first and very significant effort on this direction. However, some matter need to be deliberated while establishing PHEI in Uzbekistan:

- Building institutes in different places of the country (not only in capital city)
- Encouraging well developed agencies, companies and associations to establish their own education institute as a platform to produce high qualified manpower for respective industry
- Offering part time programs for working adults
- Implementing practice of well developed countries on private higher education sector by considering local factors

Three steps are proposed to be implemented for establishment of PHEI in Uzbekistan, where each step is required certain criteria's to be fulfilled in given period of time (for instance 5 years for each step):

- I. Establishment and Growing
- II. Improvement and Recognition
- III. Advancement and Sustainability

We briefly describe the components of each step in order to secure smooth development of PHEI.

#### **Establishment and Growing**

Establishment of flexible and dynamic policies on private higher education is the first step of proposed initiative where academic staff and management of institutes need academic freedom, autonomy in decision making matters. Rather than that the following matters need to be considered in early stages:

- Enforcing effective governance
- Establishing quality teaching and learning in PHEI
- Hiring high qualified teachers/lecturers/researchers
- Managing professionally, starting from students enrolment up to graduation
- Establishing online services for registration, timetabling, assessment, e learning, staff portal, student's portal
- Providing higher quality internet, WIFI, hostel, sport facilities/services
- Using modern literature and upgrading library facilities

#### **Improvement and Recognition**

Once HEI been established, it is very important to improve service and facilities in order to compete with public universities and also competitors in different countries offering similar programs. Recognition of university brings more international students, strong industry partners and promising future:

- Recognizing Industry needs and market demand
- Enhancing industry related research and innovation
- Strengthening financial status of higher education institutions
- Intensifying international, industrial and institutional partnership
- Reinforcing the delivery systems: Teaching and learning
- Providing quality campus environment and infrastructure
- Participating in world university ratings and rankings

#### **Advancement and Sustainability**

First two steps are easier than advancement and sustainability because this stage requires more fund and new strategies, ideas and innovations in order to survive in current market. Research collaboration with high

ranking universities will come in this level where university must enhance research on applied science and technology, while strong engagement with alumni helps in financial sustainability, employability of graduates, creating non-educational business:

- Advancing research on applied science and technology
- Enhancing R&D capability and capacity
- Strengthening engagement with alumni, parents and community
- Upgrading IT and communication services
- Applying new teaching and learning methods and technologies, while enshrining lifelong learning
- Creating non-educational businesses
- Collaborating with top universities

## CONCLUSION

The author does not have any political, ideological and financial interest or ambitions by writing this paper. The concern is to share the ideas in order to contribute to the betterment of higher education section of Uzbekistan by implementing the practice of other developed and developing countries have been used on PHEI where tremendous benefits comes to the country, nation, people and most importantly to talented young generation. It is free of any complains or criticism of any parties, personalities or organizations. Views in listed references might be different from each other and not necessarily represents the views of the author. The author who worked several years in private higher education institute in Malaysia (University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology) realised that its prospects in Uzbekistan is very much promising. This paper is the first effort made by author (background of the author is in mathematics and research interest is in pure mathematics namely in algebra) it is not safe from mistakes or weakness points. Therefore, author would be very happy to receive comments or suggestions from respectful readers.

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