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EDUCATIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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Abstract.

The paper systematises international experience of educational tourism development and identifies strategic directions applicable to Uzbekistan. A comparative analysis of national approaches (USA, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan) is carried out along three parameters: the number of foreign students, the share of educational tourism in GDP and the content of state support policies. Existing barriers to the development of educational tourism in Uzbekistan are identified: insufficient promotion of higher-education institutions, infrastructure limitations, language barriers and outdated management approaches. Practical recommendations are proposed to transform Uzbekistan into a regional educational hub of the “Silk Road Knowledge Hub” type.

Keywords: educational tourism, internationalisation of higher education, Uzbekistan, Silk Road, state support policy, comparative analysis, human capital.

Introduction.

The number of international students worldwide has grown from 2 million in 2000 to more than 6.4 million in 2022 – a more than threefold increase. In leading destinations, educational tourism has become one of the largest service-export items: the USA receives an average of 44 billion US dollars, Australia – about 30 billion AUD, the United Kingdom – approximately 28.8 billion GBP annually. Against this background, Uzbekistan attracts only slightly more than 14 thousand foreign students (2025) and the share of educational tourism in GDP is below 0.05 %. Studying international best practice and adapting it to national realities is therefore a task of both theoretical and practical significance.

International experience.

Two dominant models can be distinguished. Under the "tourism-as-priority" model (Thailand, Turkey) short-term training programmes are integrated with cultural experiences, excursions and historical sites: state support is concentrated on aggressive visa incentives and marketing campaigns of the "Study in Turkey" type. Under the "education-as-priority" model (USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Singapore) the export of high-quality higher education itself becomes an independent branch of the economy, sustained by systemic scholarship programmes (Fulbright, Chevening, Campus France, Erasmus+) and by academic rankings of the universities. An intermediate position is taken by Russia, Kazakhstan (Bolashak) and Spain, where the emphasis is placed on regional integration and on the promotion of the national language. A comparative summary is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Share of educational tourism in the economy and state support policies, by country

Country	Foreign students	Share in GDP, %	Flagship programme
USA	1,000,000+	≈ 0.30	Fulbright
UK	500,000+	≈ 0.50	Chevening
France	350,000+	≈ 0.40	Campus France
Russia	300,000+	≈ 1.00	State quotas
Turkey	200,000+	≈ 0.50	Türkiye Bursları
Spain	125,000+	≈ 0.20	Erasmus+
Kazakhstan	20,000+	< 0.10	Bolashak
Uzbekistan	14,216 (2025)	< 0.05	Branches of foreign universities

Source: authors' compilation based on UNESCO, OECD, national statistics agencies and Australian Trade and Investment Commission (2022).

Situation in Uzbekistan.

Over the past few years the country has taken important steps towards the internationalisation of higher education: branches of Webster University, MGIMO and Turin Polytechnic University have been opened; the International Tourism Academy has been established in Samarkand (2023); visa procedures for academic researchers have been liberalised. The number of foreign students has grown by 28.8 % year-on-year over the first eight months of 2025 (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, systemic barriers remain: insufficient

promotion of higher-education institutions on international markets, a limited number of programmes in English, an underdeveloped scholarship infrastructure, uneven distribution of tourist infrastructure across regions and language barriers between international students and the local population.

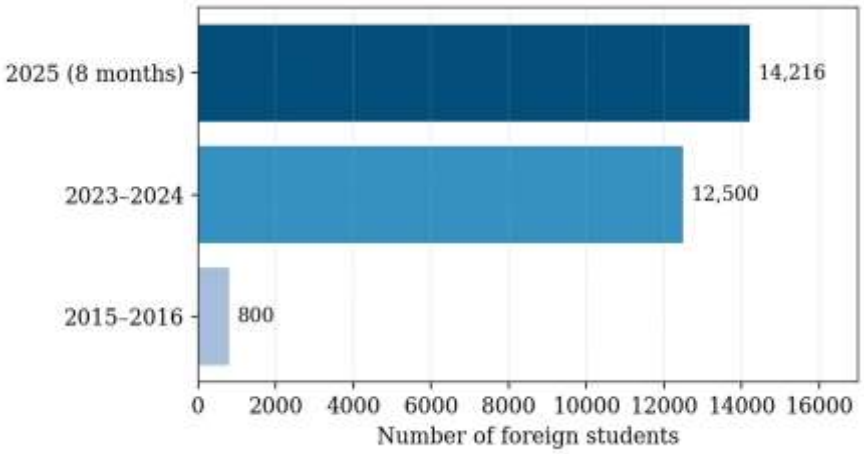

Fig. 1. Growth of foreign students in Uzbekistan, 2015–2025

Source: authors' compilation based on Ministry of Higher Education data (Republic of Uzbekistan) and stat.uz.

Strategic directions.

On the basis of the comparative analysis and the results of the empirical survey (150 respondents), five priority directions of development are proposed. First, integration into international academic programmes (Erasmus+, DAAD, Bolashak) and expansion of joint educational programmes with foreign universities. Second, launching a national grant and scholarship programme for foreign students, similar to "Türkiye Bursları". Third, increasing the number of English-language programmes and obtaining international accreditation of curricula. Fourth, simplifying the study-visa procedure and creating a single online application platform. Fifth, active marketing of the country's rich cultural-historical potential through participation in international educational fairs and digital campaigns of the "Silk Road Knowledge Hub" type.

Conclusion.

Educational tourism represents a strategic resource for the diversification of the economy of Uzbekistan and for the increase of the country's soft power on the international arena. The comparative analysis has shown that success in this segment is not so much determined by the volume of the domestic tourist market as by the coherence of state policy, by the quality of university infrastructure and by branding of the country as a "knowledge hub". Consistent realisation of the proposed directions will allow Uzbekistan to occupy a significant niche in the regional market of educational tourism and to increase the contribution of the segment to GDP by an order of magnitude within a five-year horizon.

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