



Article

Factors Influencing the Competitiveness of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract The article analyzes the factors influencing the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Based on the results of the research, the author has developed scientific and practical proposals and recommendations. The article thoroughly analyzes the various factors influencing the competitiveness of higher education institutions. It delves into both internal and external elements that contribute to the ability of universities to adapt to changing educational landscapes. These factors include educational quality, innovation, financial sustainability, student satisfaction, faculty qualifications, and institutional reputation. The research also examines the impact of government policies, technological advancements, and global educational trends on the performance of universities. Based on extensive data analysis and case studies, the author identifies key strategies for improving the competitive positioning of higher education institutions. The article further proposes scientific and practical recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of universities in an increasingly globalized and technology-driven world. These recommendations include the development of innovative curricula, the adoption of modern teaching methodologies, enhanced international cooperation, and the implementation of performance-based financial models. The findings are expected to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, academic leaders, and stakeholders in the higher education sector, guiding them towards better decision-making and long-term strategic planning for institutional development and growth.

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Introduction

The significance of educational services, which represent one of the strategic sectors of the rapidly developing global economy and play an increasingly important role in socio-economic development, continues to grow. In the context of the accelerated intellectualization of the economy, higher education is becoming a crucial factor in introducing new technologies into all spheres of human activity, ensuring the competitiveness of the national economy, and improving the population's standard of living [1].

Today, in Uzbekistan, extensive measures are being implemented to develop the higher education sector. In particular, the *Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030* identifies as priority tasks "the development of public-private

partnerships (PPP) in the field of higher education, the creation of a competitive environment in higher education through the establishment of state and non-state higher education institutions in the regions, as well as the organization of branches of prestigious foreign universities with the involvement of investments [2].”

In this process, especially the branches of prestigious foreign universities and private entrepreneurship entities namely, non-state higher education institutions are playing a significant role. As a result, the number of competitors operating in the higher education sector has increased, and the system is transitioning to a new market environment that requires fair competition [3]. The formation of a competitive environment is primarily linked to the emergence of higher education institutions with diverse forms of ownership, which has become a driving force for competition among them.

To examine the factors influencing the competitiveness of higher education institutions, this study adopts a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the key factors that determine the competitive positioning of universities and allows for the triangulation of data from various sources.

This research follows a descriptive-exploratory design, which is appropriate for identifying and exploring the factors that affect the competitiveness of higher education institutions. The study is grounded in the need to examine both objective, quantifiable factors (such as institutional performance indicators) and subjective insights (such as perceptions of faculty, students, and administrators). By combining these two perspectives, the study seeks to uncover patterns, correlations, and insights that could inform policies and strategies for enhancing the competitiveness of universities.

Primary data is collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders within the higher education sector, including university administrators, academic staff, students, and external experts such as industry leaders and policymakers. A well-structured questionnaire was designed to capture various aspects of university competitiveness, such as teaching quality, faculty qualifications, institutional reputation, financial management, research output, and student satisfaction. Interviews with university leaders further provided a deeper understanding of strategic decisions, governance structures, and innovation processes that contribute to the competitive advantage of the institution. The data collected through these methods serves to provide both quantitative measures and qualitative insights into the factors influencing competitiveness.

Secondary data was gathered from various sources such as institutional reports, academic publications, and higher education rankings. These sources provide quantitative data on university performance indicators, including student enrollment figures, research funding, publications, and global ranking positions. Additionally, government reports, educational statistics, and comparative data from global higher education rankings (e.g., QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education) were used to assess the relative competitiveness of universities. This data allows for benchmarking and comparison across a range of institutions.

Methodology

The methodology of the present research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods for examining the influences of factors determining the competitiveness of higher education institutions. The mixed-methods methodology type is appropriate for the study of competitiveness and falling together the research of influencing factors on the different levels of the education market such as government policy and the situation of the global educational space and internal factors. Because the focus of the research is the determinants of competitiveness, a qualitative-exploratory type of research design will be used. This will allow data collection that could describe and investigate particular elements and events related to the chosen structures and events but will not provide generalizations of the results. Primary data will be collected using the methods of semi-structured interviews and surveys. Surveys are aimed at stakeholders involved and include university administration, students involved in the educational process, experts from external organizations, representatives of other universities in the context of the country, and world higher education organizations. The students will analyze universities on levels of teaching, practical exercises and fieldwork, quiz excursions that are so common

nowadays. Such specialists from all over the world will provide the survey results based on the quality of the university's staff and other factors influencing university competitiveness. The semi-structured interviews will analyze the analyzed samples and the reasons for such results. The further questions will be investigated related to university management, which follows these results and builds its strategy. As a result of primary data collection, the secondary one will also be presented in the research, and such data as the reports of universities, publications or analyses of authors will be collected.

Results and Discussion

Educational services encompass all types of teaching and support provided to learners during the educational process. In this process, factors such as the quality of education, professional support from specialists, infrastructure, and the efficiency of the learning process play a crucial role [4].

The competitiveness of a higher education institution is determined by its ability to provide students with high-quality educational services and by its position in the global education market. Educational institutions strive to enhance their competitiveness through the quality of their services and the specialization of their programs (Fig 1).

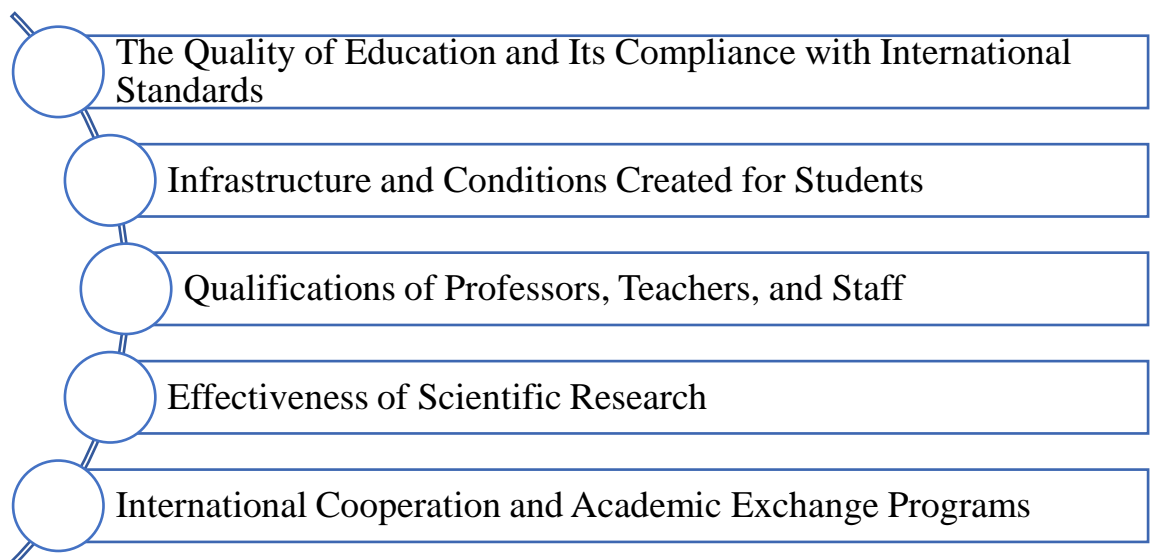


Figure 1. Factors Influencing the Competitiveness of Higher Education Institutions

Today, higher education institutions around the world are focusing on effectively managing their activities and developing the necessary mechanisms to ensure global competitiveness [5]. Analyzing the factors that influence competitiveness and creating an effective management system for these factors are essential tasks for higher education institutions [6].

The analysis of scientific sources conducted during this research shows that the competitiveness of higher education institutions depends on numerous factors (*see Figure 1*).

Each of these factors plays a crucial role in enhancing the level of competitiveness. In this regard, the research results indicate the following:

1. The Quality of Education and Its Compliance with International Standards. The quality of education holds significant importance in both national and international rankings [7]. Obtaining international accreditation and implementing modern curricula increase students' interest in higher education institutions and strengthen their motivation to learn. Moreover, the quality of education determines the reputation of a university not only among students but also among employers and international partners.

International accreditation confirms that the educational programs of higher education institutions comply with global standards, thereby improving the competitiveness of graduates in the labor market. Modern curricula are developed to incorporate new knowledge and skills, ensuring students' effectiveness in addressing global challenges. Furthermore, the integration of innovative teaching methods, digital technologies, and practical training into the learning process greatly influences students' academic and professional achievements [8].

Within the framework of international cooperation, the implementation of student exchange programs and joint academic disciplines helps students gain international experience and broaden their worldview. Therefore, prioritizing the improvement of education quality, striving for higher positions in international rankings, and becoming a globally recognized institution should be the key objectives of higher education institutions.

2. Infrastructure and Conditions Created for Students. The availability of modern academic buildings, laboratories, and student dormitories is among the key factors influencing the choice of a higher education institution by students and their parents. This infrastructure plays a decisive role in improving the quality of education and creating a comfortable environment for students [9].

Modern educational buildings equipped with advanced technologies and innovative learning materials can make the learning process more effective and engaging. Laboratories, in turn, provide the necessary foundation for conducting practical sessions and scientific research, enabling students to acquire knowledge through experience and better preparing them for the labor market.

Student dormitories also play a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions, as they provide safe, comfortable, and affordable living conditions for students. Good housing conditions allow students to fully focus on their studies, thereby improving their academic performance [10].

Therefore, higher education institutions must continuously improve their infrastructure and adapt it to modern standards. This not only helps gain the trust of students and parents but also contributes significantly to increasing the overall competitiveness of the institution.

3. Qualifications of Professors, Teachers, and Staff. The quality of professors and teaching staff their qualifications, research activities, and ability to implement academic programs is a key factor determining the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Moreover, their international experience and capacity to apply modern pedagogical technologies have a significant impact on the overall reputation of universities. The scientific activity of professors not only reflects their personal achievements but also plays an essential role in improving the university's position in international rankings [11].

At the same time, their salaries, the conditions created for professional development, and motivation systems directly influence their performance. Continuous professional development programs such as advanced training courses, participation in conferences, and involvement in research collaboration projects help teachers align their knowledge and skills with modern requirements.

Therefore, higher education institutions should pay particular attention to supporting the professional development of their professors and teachers, providing funding for their research projects, and introducing innovative teaching methodologies. This approach not only enhances the quality of education and improves the students' learning experience but also contributes to strengthening the overall competitiveness of the institution [12].

4. Effectiveness of Scientific Research. The effectiveness of scientific research determines the international reputation of higher education institutions. Therefore, publishing articles in international journals and attracting national and foreign grants are of great importance, as these contribute to enhancing the scientific potential of universities and strengthening their position in the global academic community. Publications in international journals not only disseminate research findings to a broader audience but also help improve the academic ranking and credibility of researchers.

Attracting grants, on the other hand, provides funding for research activities, enables the establishment of modern laboratories, and facilitates the implementation of new technologies. This, in turn, contributes to the development of students' and faculty members' knowledge and skills, ensuring that the educational process meets international standards [13].

Furthermore, through grants and international publications, universities can expand their networks of scientific collaboration, create opportunities for innovation, and increase their chances of achieving higher positions in global university rankings. For this reason, organizing scientific research in accordance with international standards and requirements should be regarded as a top priority for higher education institutions.

5. International Cooperation and Academic Exchange Programs. Collaboration with international universities and participation in academic exchange programs open new opportunities for higher education institutions. International cooperation enables universities to expand their research activities, access innovations and advanced technologies, and strengthen their academic potential.

Academic exchange programs provide excellent opportunities for students and faculty members to gain international experience, foster intercultural communication, and broaden their worldview. Moreover, such programs contribute to aligning the educational process with international standards and introducing innovations in curricula and teaching quality. Through these efforts, local higher education institutions can achieve international recognition and prestige, positioning themselves as leaders in training highly qualified specialists.

Joint projects, conferences, and research events with international universities play a vital role in applying research findings to practice and contributing to global scientific progress. Therefore, strengthening and expanding such partnerships is of strategic importance [14].

Various indicators are used to assess the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Global university rankings are among the most widespread tools in this field, evaluating criteria such as student satisfaction, graduate employment rates, and research output. These indicators serve as important resources for developing effective competition strategies in higher education.

During the process of enhancing competitiveness, higher education institutions face several challenges (*Figure 2*).

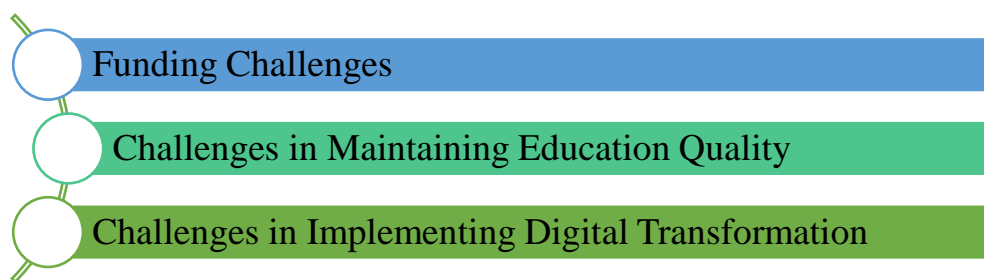


Figure 2. Challenges Related to Enhancing the Competitiveness of Higher Education Institutions

The financial needs of higher education institutions are steadily increasing in order to provide the quality infrastructure, highly qualified personnel, and support for research activities required for modern educational processes. A shortage of financial resources limits the ability of universities to implement new programs, conduct innovative research, and develop projects aimed at enhancing students' professional skills.

Therefore, expanding cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as effectively utilizing international grants and investments, is of great importance for improving the quality of education. Moreover, insufficient financial support hinders the recruitment and retention of highly qualified faculty members, which in the long term may lead to a decline in the overall quality of education.

Ensuring the quality of education is a complex and multifaceted process that requires the introduction of modern teaching methods, advanced pedagogical approaches, and innovative technologies that meet contemporary standards. To maintain quality, it is essential to organize interactive teaching methods and practical sessions that foster students' independent thinking skills.

To enhance the effectiveness of the educational process, universities should expand research activities, ensure active student participation in learning, and continuously improve the qualifications of educators. Maintaining education quality in line with international standards is also crucial for increasing graduates' employability and competitiveness in the labor market. In addition, educational institutions must continuously adapt their curricula to modern economic, technological, and social changes [15].

In today's globalized world, the importance of using digital technologies in education is steadily increasing. Distance learning, electronic resources, and online platforms are key tools for

expanding access to education and improving its quality. Digital transformation enables higher education institutions to provide students with access to modern information resources, manage educational processes more efficiently, and meet individual learning needs.

Through distance learning platforms, students can have regular access to educational materials, while the integration of information technologies into the teaching process encourages independent learning and promotes the creation of a competitive education system. Moreover, digital tools facilitate stronger interaction between students and instructors, making the learning process more dynamic, engaging, and effective.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Enhancing the competitiveness of educational services and higher education institutions requires the application of scientific and theoretical approaches. Universities have the opportunity to strengthen their competitiveness by providing high-quality educational services, introducing innovations, and developing international partnerships. Furthermore, it is essential to make effective use of digital technologies in the educational process and to develop strategies aimed at achieving higher positions in international rankings.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that each factor influencing the competitiveness of higher education institutions must be developed in close interconnection to ensure their sustainable growth. Such an integrated approach will enable universities to achieve higher positions in international rankings and to strengthen their standing in the global market for educational services.

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