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FULL LENGTH ARTICLE

Organizational Mechanism of Interaction of Higher Education Institutions of Belarus and Uzbekistan with Employers

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that effective communication between higher education institutions and employers contributes to the development of competent personnel prepared to solve real-world problems in production and business. This issue is highly relevant given rapid changes in the economy and technological processes, requiring the constant adaptation of educational programs and advanced training for graduates. This article examines areas of cooperation between universities in Belarus and Uzbekistan and proposes a model for their interaction with enterprises in the real sector of the economy in the context of the emerging knowledge economy and the trend toward developing education as a key element of scientific, technical, and innovation policy.

Keywords: Education ▪ Cooperation ▪ Academic mobility ▪ Program ▪ Competency ▪ Labor market Mechanism ▪ Interaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of an education system in any country is of strategic importance. This is primarily because education is one of the largest sectors of the global economy and one of the fastest-growing sectors of global trade in services, largely determining a country's economic development and its global competitiveness. A number of countries that have already created highly effective national higher education systems and, based on them, innovative economies, are undisputed leaders in the export of educational services and innovation, allowing them to reap significant benefits. Education plays a key role in the development of a country's human capital and promotes cultural exchange and interethnic cooperation.

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The Republic of Belarus, with its rich traditions and significant potential in higher education, is consistently following global advances in this field, developing both the commercialization of educational services and its scientific, intellectual, and innovative sectors.

The Republic of Belarus has traditionally attracted international students due to its high-quality education, affordable tuition fees, and welcoming environment. The total number of international students and postgraduates in the Republic of Belarus from 2019 to 2023 showed significant fluctuations (Table 1). The maximum number was observed in the 2021/22 academic year (24,338), while the minimum was recorded in 2023/24 (18,838). This volatility is due to changes in foreign policy, geopolitical risks, and the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The analysis showed that China, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are the leading sources of students arriving in Belarus. The number of Chinese students increased most rapidly during the analyzed period (up 213% over five years), while students from Uzbekistan showed the largest percentage increase (almost a fivefold increase), despite a recent slowdown.

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Table 1. Number of students and postgraduates who are foreign citizens studying at higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus (at the beginning of the academic year; people).

Country or measure	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total	19 745	20 936	24 338	20 474	18 838
Of which, by country:					
China	2 112	3 634	8 011	6 492	6 608
Uzbekistan	418	1 045	2 327	2 999	2 434
Turkmenistan	10 056	8 738	6 451	3 462	2 214
Sri Lanka	819	1 016	1 439	1 583	1 828
Russian Federation	1 489	1 517	1 397	1 391	1 492
India	656	734	772	781	825
Lebanon	531	659	545	534	490
Israel	82	115	285	338	318
Nigeria	322	259	284	274	256
Azerbaijan	313	284	266	261	218
Congo, Democratic Republic of	65	156	188	179	181
Tajikistan	425	323	223	222	175
Kazakhstan	231	170	194	171	150
Iran, Islamic Republic of	539	416	313	190	144
Share of foreign citizens in total undergraduate and graduate enrollment (percent)	7,2	7,9	9,5	8,6	8,1

A fundamental aspect of the strategic development of university education is the recognition that personnel training must go hand in hand with the development of general competencies required by specialists, regardless of their specific professional specialization. Key competencies include:

- knowledge of the fundamentals of project and team management;
- the ability to work with large volumes of data and process information;
- proficiency in modern communication and remote collaboration tools;
- the ability to adapt to rapidly changing labor market conditions;
- creative thinking and a willingness to solve unconventional problems.

Modern trends in the development of the knowledge economy confirm that education today must focus not only on education and the general development of students and their professional training for the labor market, but also on ensuring that they receive sound research training to actively participate in the creation of new technologies and new products.

Clearly, the traditional approach to specialist training must give way to a comprehensive program for developing a wide range of competencies, beginning early in education and continuing throughout a professional's career. To train in-demand specialists for the economies of cooperating states, it is therefore advisable to develop a mechanism for interaction between universities and employers, especially when implementing joint educational programs.

A key area of cooperation is the joint work of universities in the two countries to create a comfortable learning environment, as confirmed by agreements between the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan. More than 550 treaties and agreements between educational institutions and research organizations in both countries are currently in effect. In the 2024/2025 academic year, the number of Uzbek citizens studying at Belarusian universities exceeded 4,000, including those studying under joint educational programs; in 2020/2021, the figure was 2,327.

Furthermore, in the 2024/2025 academic year, nine Uzbek citizens were accepted to study in Belarus through a grant program. The most popular universities among Uzbek citizens are the Belarusian National Technical University (2,708 students), Polotsk State University named after Euphrosyne of Polotsk (284 students), Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno (240 students), and the Belarusian State Pedagogical University named after Maxim Tank (218 students). Cooperation between the two countries in education promotes international academic mobility, broadens the professional horizons of students and faculty, strengthens intercultural ties, and develops internationally qualified personnel [1].

International cooperation in education opens up additional opportunities for exchanging knowledge and practical experience. Belarus is actively developing such programs, particularly with universities in Uzbekistan, which contribute to improving the quality of specialist training and increasing the international competitiveness of graduates [2].

Academic mobility also helps enrich the educational process with new ideas and methods. Students have the opportunity to spend a semester or a year studying at partner universities abroad, gaining unique experience and improving their career prospects. Such initiatives help develop professionals capable of working in an international environment and solving

complex problems in the modern economy [3].

One key aspect of this collaboration is the creation of joint educational programs that allow students to gain practical skills directly in the workplace. Currently, 18 Belarusian universities are implementing more than 100 joint educational programs with universities in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Joint educational programs can be implemented using the following models:

1. Joint and dual (or more) degree programs involve coordination of curricula and programs, teaching methods, and student assessment; mutual recognition of learning outcomes at partner universities; common program management structures; and the issuance of a joint or separate diploma.
2. Accredited and validated programs involve mutual recognition by the university and other partner universities of the equivalence of their educational programs, with the potential issuance of their own diploma to graduates of the partner university.
3. Franchise programs involve one university transferring the right to implement its educational program to another while retaining the right to control its quality (e.g., administering examinations and issuing diplomas).

Furthermore, the practice of student internships at large, high-tech enterprises in both countries is being actively implemented. Such activities contribute to the development of practical skills and the adaptation of future specialists to real-world labor market conditions. An important step was the decision to organize internships for university faculty and staff, which allows for the transfer of best teaching methods and the adaptation of curricula to employer requirements.

Another important element of interaction is the development and implementation of new educational documentation that meets modern professional training standards. In particular, modern textbooks and teaching aids prepared in Belarus or co-authored by representatives of the two countries are being introduced into the curricula of vocational educational institutions in Uzbekistan [4]. These measures are aimed at improving the quality of specialist training and adapting the educational process to the needs of the modern labor market.

Effective interaction between universities and employers requires ongoing communication channels that ensure a two-way exchange of information and experience. Regular meetings, conferences, and forums are important tools for establishing dialogue between representatives of the academic community and the business community [5, 6]. They help universities obtain up-to-date information on labor market needs and adapt their curricula accordingly.

At the First Forum of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Uzbekistan, held in October 2023, 29 cooperation agreements were signed aimed at strengthening interaction between universities in both countries and employers [4]. Such events create conditions for exchanging experience and developing joint initiatives that contribute to improving the quality of specialist training.

Furthermore, exhibitions and presentations of educational potential allow universities to promote their services and attract employers' attention. Delegations from Belarusian universities actively participate in such events in Uzbekistan, demonstrating a high interest in cooperation and attracting talented students. For example, the Belarusian National Technical University participated in the "Education and Career" exhibition held in Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan, from October 11 to 19, 2024.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the key elements in ensuring a high level of training for specialists who meet the demands of the modern labor market is establishing effective feedback between universities and companies. Assessing the effectiveness of educational programs is impossible without regularly monitoring graduate employment. Collecting and analyzing data on graduates' careers helps universities assess the quality of their educational activities and make timely adjustments to their curricula. The introduction of a graduate career trajectory tracking system is becoming increasingly common in both countries.

In the Republic of Belarus, systematic efforts have been established to ensure graduate employment and monitor their employment for two years after graduation. The procedure is governed by the Regulation approved by Resolution No. 821 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated June 22, 2011 (as amended on May 16, 2014, No. 470). This work includes maintaining personal records of graduates who have started working, determining whether their position matches their specialization, their arrival at their first job, and their actual employment. The Ministry of Education aggregates reports from subordinate organizations, creating a single database reflected in official national statistics (Table 2).

The table presents information on the placement of specialists who received higher education funded by the state for the period from 2019 to 2023. Analysis showed that the largest number of graduates were placed in 2022 (22,200). In 2023, the number decreased to 17,300, which may indicate a reduction in the number of budget-funded places.

The number of graduates receiving job placements is virtually identical to the total number eligible for placement, confirming the high effectiveness of the placement system. Employment rates remain stable, but a significant decline in the number of employed specialists (16,000 people) was observed in 2023, due to a reduction in state-funded places. The share of specialists eligible for independent employment is extremely low, less than 0.1% of all graduates. Almost all graduates receive job placements, demonstrating the system's high effectiveness. In 2023, approximately 92.5% of those who received job placements were employed. Thus, the placement system in Belarus is functioning effectively, providing job placements to almost all graduates studying at the expense of the national budget.

Uzbekistan is also implementing measures to systematically record graduate employment data. A dedicated database has been created to track graduates' careers, enabling comparative analysis and informed decisions on modernizing educational programs. This ensures transparent and objective evaluation of program effectiveness, enhancing their quality

Table 2. Placement of specialists who received higher education funded by the state.

Measure	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Graduates eligible for placement and job placement (thousands)	19,4	19,3	20,3	22,2	17,3
Including:					
Received job placement	19,3	19,3	20,3	22,1	17,3
Of whom were employed	17,9	18,1	18,9	20,9	16,0
Gained the right to independent employment	0,02	0,02	0,03	0,01	0,01
Graduates receiving job placement as a proportion of all graduates eligible for placement (percent)	99,9	99,9	99,9	99,9	99,9

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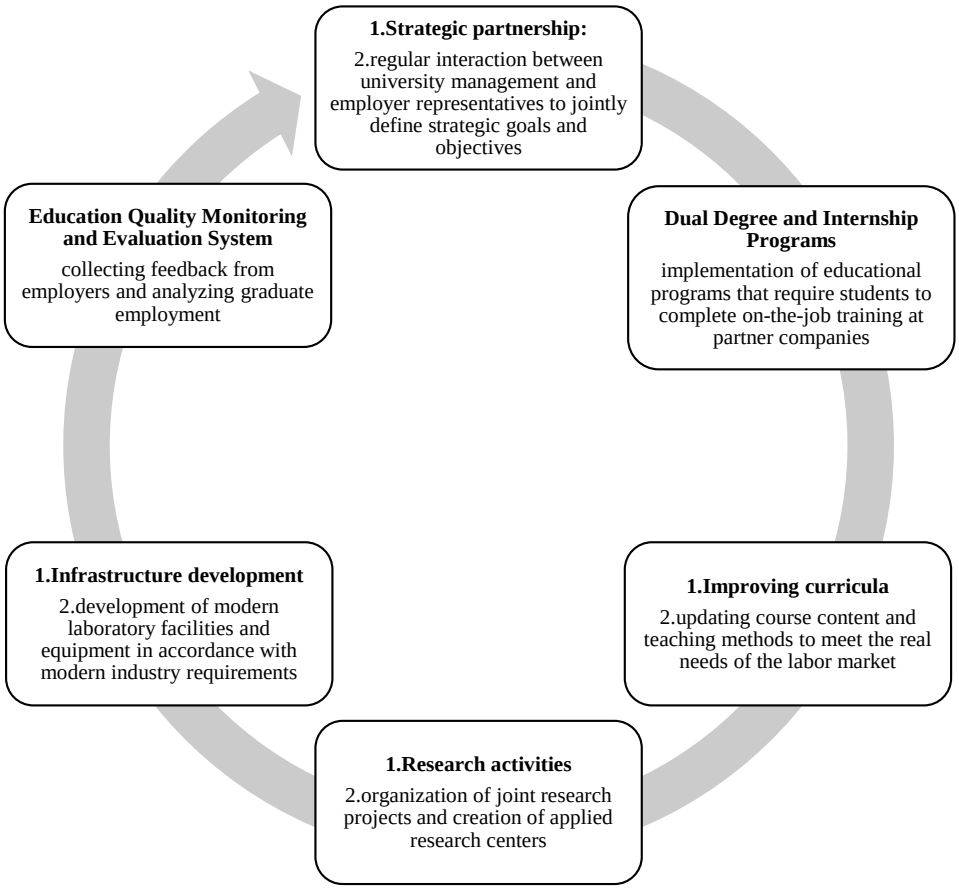


Figure 1. Organizational mechanism for interaction between educational institutions and the real economy.

Figure 1. Organizational Mechanism for Interaction between Educational Institutions and the Real Economy

and attractiveness for both students and employers.

The modern economy places high demands on the quality of professional education, necessitating regular updates to educational standards and their adaptation to labor market needs. Establishing constructive interaction between universities and businesses is therefore crucial and requires an organizational mechanism for such interaction. This model should ensure high-quality alignment between student training and employer needs, increasing graduates' attractiveness in the labor market. Our proposed model includes six key components covering all aspects of interaction between educational institutions and the real sector of the economy (Figure 1).

The practical implementation of the developed model is organized in stages, involving the consistent implementation of the following steps:

- clearly formulating goals and objectives aimed at establishing effective relationships with partner organizations;
- legally formalizing agreements regulating partnerships with specialized commercial entities;
- reviewing and modernizing existing educational programs, integrating best practices and the latest advances in science and technology;
- organizing systematic professional development for faculty through specialized seminars, training, and other supplementary education formats;
- continuously controlling the quality of the educational process and promptly adjusting the strategy to account for the demands of the modern labor market and socioeconomic realities.

The practical implementation of the developed model is organized in stages, involving the consistent implementation of a number of steps:
– clearly formulating goals and objectives aimed at establishing effective relationships with partner organizations;
– legally soundly formalizing agreements regulating partnerships with specialized commercial entities;
– reviewing and modernizing existing educational programs, integrating best practices and the latest advances in science and technology;
– organizing systematic professional development for faculty through specialized seminars, trainings, and other supplementary education formats;
– continuous quality control of the educational process using mechanisms for promptly adjusting the strategy, taking into account the objective demands of the modern labor market and socioeconomic realities.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the conducted study allows us to conclude that the interaction between higher education institutions in Belarus and Uzbekistan and employers is characterized by a high degree of activity and a focus on continuous improvement. The key success factors include regular feedback mechanisms and long-term partnerships.

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4. CONCLUSION

Thus, the conducted study allows us to conclude that interaction between higher education institutions in Belarus and Uzbekistan and employers is characterized by a high degree of activity and a focus on continuous improvement. Key success factors include regular feedback between universities and companies, adapting educational programs to current labor market demands, actively using internships and practical training, and developing international cooperation and academic mobility.

Further recommendations for developing cooperation include strengthening the role of sector councils, involving employers in the design of educational programs, expanding the number of internships and practical training opportunities, and actively using digital platforms to collect and analyze graduate employment data. Improving organizational mechanisms for interaction between universities and employers will form the basis for training competitive specialists capable of functioning effectively in the global economy.

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