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## INTRODUCING A CREDIT RECOGNITION SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF THE UZBEKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, a credit recognition system has been developing in Uzbek higher education institutions. Much research has been done on this development, but it has been concentrated on system building, barriers/issues and international practices. The relationship between credit recognition system reforms and democratization of higher education has attracted little attention. This article will provide insight for understanding the ongoing development of credit recognition in Uzbek institutions, in the perspective of democratisation. It outlines the major institutional implications of credit recognition system development and illustrates what have been effected in Uzbek high education institutions in terms of democratisation. The author suggests that though democratisation is not pursued as an official policy, it is going on unnoticed, hand in hand with reforms to recognise credit for study in Uzbek higher education. This paper is described current preparation to move toward new system in Uzbek higher education police. Uzbek higher education is going to join international higher education by implementation credit system and giving some academic freedom to the higher education organisations. In summary we have a quick look on higher education reform policy which shows all the initiatives on quality of education. Underlying the development of a system to recognised studies undertaken follows the same logic. However, developing a system to recognise study credit not only improves quality, it has a strong linkage with democratisation of higher education.

**Keywords:** autonomy; credit recognition system; democratisation of education; equality; equity.

**INTRODUCTION**

In Uzbekistan, there was early, post transition support for free democracy and economic market reforms within their countries that influenced education reform. The principle factors driving the need for change in the education system are: the transition from a command to a market economy ensuring genuine economic independence of the Republic; redirection of the economy from production of manufactured goods; the development of a strong democratic state and civil society, eliminating social conflicts among citizens while developing their intellectual potential, a sense of pride in their country, respect for its cultural and high traditions and intellectual heritage; the promoting of education as a priority in national social policy; the development of the protection and improvement of the environment, and integration of the Republic into the international community (ADB, 2004).

In effect, end of second decade of XXI century Uzbekistan seems to have taken a different approach, though the outcomes have been quite different: Just over a two decade has passed since the market economy reform process started in Uzbekistan in 1991. By adopting a new Strategy in 2017, Uzbekistan have aspired to the objective of building a humane, civil and democratic society and have commenced reforms in politics, economy and society .

Uzbekistan to have made a political and economic transition from a single party government and command economy to a liberal democracy and market economy, much like many outside observers from the West assumed would happen.

In education, this is reflected in efforts to change from centralized control, teacher-centered instruction and planned manpower supply driven systems to more decentralized control, student entered instruction, and student and labor market demand driven systems (Weidman et al. 1977).

Today Uzbekistan been more successful in accomplishing these transitions. While starting at roughly the same transition level of economic development in 2000 (2,002 per capita PPP in constant 2005 international \$ for Uzbekistan), by 2008, figure Uzbekistan was just 2,455 (World Bank, 2014).

Uzbekistan has remained strongly centralized had has had more of a top-down approach to education reform. Uzbekistan's educational reform process has been very centralized. The principle vehicle for education reform has been the National Program of Personnel Training (NPPT), which was created in 1996 through decrees of the President and resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers. The NPPT is a comprehensive plan of reform for all aspects of the Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan passed laws on education in the early 1990s, which provided a broad legal framework for educational reform. Uzbekistan passed subsequent laws for education reform in more specific areas of education. The country implemented education reforms in stages. Uzbekistan's education laws are primarily decrees from the president of the country.

Uzbekistan's political and economic reform processes, the creation of educational laws and the stages of reform have been very centralized. Uzbekistan's first Law on Education was passed in 1992 and formed the basis for the subsequent educational reform efforts, the NPPT in 1996. The basic goals the NPPT are:

to ensure that the education process responds to the personal interests, legislative needs and organizational, psychological and pedagogical conditions necessary for the formation of national culture; (b) to adapt the attitudes of society towards the choice of individuals to study in subsequent educational and professional programs; and (c) to help to develop today's citizens so that they are aware of their responsibilities to the state, society and their families. (Cohen, 2002))

The NPPT formed the central vehicle for educational reforms, but all initiatives emanated from the president's office. No specific evidence is given in the country case study about which reforms were successful, though most are presumed to be progressing as expected.

According to the document, the goals of the NPPT would be achieved through the following educational reforms:

1. A competitive environment for teachers and personnel training would be created through the development of an integrated educational scientific and productive system consisting of government and private schools.
2. Education contents would be updated to include contemporary scientific, technological and cultural advances; and tied to the political and economic conditions of the country.
3. Stronger links would be created between education and the development of democracy and civil society.
4. Teacher in-service training would be improved and increase the social status of teaching as a profession would be increased.
5. Licensing and accreditation standards for schools and standards for teacher training would be created.
6. Character education called "spiritual and moral learning" would be developed.
7. Funding for education would be diversified, including increasing foreign investment.
8. International cooperation in the field of personnel training would be developed.

The ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan relating to the credit students receive for their studies will undoubtedly have a profound impact on the daily operation of Uzbek higher education institutions and the interests of all stakeholders. Much research that concentrates on ways of system building, barriers/issues and international practices that may be borrowed has been done. Yet little attention has been paid in the literature to the relationship between credit reform and the democratisation of Uzbek higher education. Actually, in addition to the overt changes brought to institutions, the credit recognition system has also had a significant covert impact, that is, the democratisation of high education.

Although democratisation per se is not pursued in official policies, it is happening quietly and profoundly with the process of reforms in credit for studies in Uzbek higher education. In this paper, an attempt is made to provide an insight into understanding the current tide of the development of credit recognition in Uzbek institutions in a perspective of democratisation. (Usmonov, 2018)

## **CONCEPTUALISATION OF DEMOCRATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The democratisation of high education is an elusive concept, because researchers with different interests tend to define it by highlighting its different aspects and utilisations. A preliminary examination of the notion of democratisation of education might therefore help in comprehending its implications. Eide (1982) discussed two dimensions of the democratisation of education, namely the horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension refers to the quantitative aspect of educational provision, at the core of which is universalisation of education. The vertical dimension refers to the qualitative aspect of educational provision, which is concerned with the nature, standard and quality of education. Fan (2006) formulated a specific concept for the democratisation of education, suggesting it was the process of reshaping education and rebuilding school in accordance with the needs of democracy. According to his definition it may be argued that to democratise education is to perform a dual task. One of these is to democratise the national or regional educational system that frames the way of education is provided. The other is to democratise the institutions that provide education.

As to democratisation of higher education, Spaulding and Kargodorian (1982) once summarised it as being conceived as 'equalising the chances of gaining access to institutions of higher education', indicating that the then prevailing views regarded democratisation as equality. In addition, they indicated that equal opportunity encompassed equal access, equal participation and equal success. ADB (2004) and World Bank (2010) are discussed the connotation of democratisation of higher education and emphasised four elements: rights to equal and fair education and opportunity; wide personal and ideological freedom; reasonable balance between administrative and academic power and equality and equity in teacher–student relations. The above elements concern both systematic and institutional aspects of higher education democratisation.

Based on the above discussion, it may be concluded that democratisation of higher education encompasses two main dimensions: one is concerned with equality and equity in the provision of higher education; and the other is concerned with the democratic management of higher education. Democratisation of higher education may also be observed at two levels: the social system level and the institutional level, and both levels have to do with higher provision and management. If it is self-evident that democracy has a variety of forms, there should be no universal approach to democratisation of higher education. As higher education is in a state of constant reform in order to adapt to societal needs, democratisation of higher education is also an endless process of evolution towards absolute equity and equality.

## **INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOCRATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

To identify the signs of democratisation of Uzbek higher education institutions, it is necessary to understand what democratisation of higher education implies for institutions. Democratisation of higher education institutions may be roughly observed through the two dimensions mentioned above related to respective provision and management. However, to analyse it in a more detailed way, it is necessary to conceptualise its major implications. Seen from the point of view of institutions, it can be argued that the democratisation of

higher education has five major implications: equality and equity in provision; enforced power of teachers in institutional governance; academic autonomy; student autonomy; and equalising teacher–student relations.

Equality and Equity in Provision requires the institution to provide education of the same quality to all students enrolled in it. Ensuring absolute equality and equity in providing good education to all students is not a doable task, yet a democratising institution should cherish it as a sacred mission of its operation, and see it as a goal that deserves perpetual efforts. As students differ from each other due to the uniqueness of their background and competence, uniform arrangements of learning and campus life cannot meet the needs of all students equally and fairly. To pursue equality and equity in institutional provision, a key is to strive for maximum individualisation in providing programmes, subjects and services.

Enforced Power of Teachers is concerned with the increased participation of teaching academic staff members in the institutional governance. A democratic institution ensures active participation of teachers in institutional decision-making processes by absorbing them into the governing boards and councils, thus a relative balance between the administrative power and the academic power in institutional governance may be maintained. The decisions that involve teachers' participation include not only those that affect daily operations, but also those that result in institutional visions, missions, objectives, goals, strategies, approaches, modes of development, and so forth. Compared with administrator hegemony, group decision-making characterised by wide participation of the teaching staff is able to take into consideration the collective needs and institutional practicality and formulate the best decisions for the daily operations and long-term development of the institution.

Academic Autonomy refers to the considerable authority that academic staff enjoy in conducting academic activities including teaching and research. Democratic institutions are characterised by granting their academics high levels of academic autonomy in fulfilling their teaching responsibilities and pursuing academic improvement. Regarding teachers, this means more independence, self-governance and discretion in making teaching plans, compiling compendiums, organising teaching activities, evaluating student performance, conducting research, attending conferences, publishing papers, and so forth. With less control and intervention of the institutional management, the academics may feel more loyalty towards the institution and demonstrate more accountability to the students, parents and society – the customers of the higher education institutions.

Student Autonomy refers to the empowerment of university students. It recognises their capabilities and rights, sees them as autonomous learners and facilitates them in taking charge of their own learning (World Bank, 2014). The old master–apprentice relationship of learning has long been rejected. This was only effective and efficient when the volume of human knowledge was still limited, if the approach to learning is non-optional, and expectations of the learning outcome are comparatively low. Conferment of the status of autonomous learner to university students means allowing them to join in the management of their learning. First, they ought to be represented in the institutional governance board and councils, participating in decision-making at all levels regarding institutional management. Second, democratic institutions ought to give students the chance to

express themselves and students' views on what to learn, how to learn and how to evaluate their learning should be respected. The possibility of these occurring may vary according to the preparedness of institutions and their stage of development.

Equalising Teacher–Student Relations should go hand in hand and sustain each other with student autonomy. It emphasises the rights of college students as being equal with the teachers. Marketisation has magnified the need for institutions and their teachers to respect students' equal rights and provide good educational services. A democratic institution ought to see and treat their students as equal to their teachers. This indicates that teachers should abandon their authoritarian style of teaching, integrating the needs and expectations of students into the plans of programmes and subjects, encouraging students to participate in the planning and organising of learning activities, and offering them more choices of learning contents and forms. Learning activities should be characterised by facilitation, open discussion, debate and questioning. Students should be encouraged to share their values in classroom instead of swallowing the teachers' coercion. Equalising teacher–student relations favour student-centredness.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF A CREDIT RECOGNITION SYSTEM AND DEMOCRATISATION OF UZBEK HIGH EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

A quick look at any Uzbek policy paper on higher education reform will show that all the initiatives are centred on quality. Underlying the development of a system to recognise studies undertaken follows the same logic. However, developing a system to recognise study credit not only improves quality, it has a strong linkage with democratisation of higher education.

First of all, having a credit recognition system cultivates the democratic competence of both staff and students. It is generally accepted that democratic citizens need training in democratic competence. According to UNDP (2009), democratic competence includes being conscious of democracy, understanding the capabilities of democracy, knowing the attitudes about democracy, having knowledge of democracy and holding beliefs about democracy. In contrast with Western higher education, Uzbek higher education has been characterised by inculcation. Students are used to accepting what they are given by the institution, and adjusting themselves to the learning and living requirements of the institution instead of making demands based on self needs. Members of the teaching staff are also used to doing the job as allocated and as instructed by the management. The establishment of a credit recognition system will provide all students and teachers with an opportunity to have a dialogue with the institutional management and make choices for themselves based on their personal needs and expectations. While adjusting themselves to this new mode of learning or teaching experience, the teaching staff will become better trained in democratic competence. For example, by selecting subjects and trying to win the chance to study others, the students would learn more about expressing their needs and ideas, communicating and negotiating with the institution authority, and defending their interests, thus they have improved their capacity for democracy. After having learned to make choices for themselves, each student has also established the belief that they are equal to any other student in terms of learning opportunities. Hence,

cultivation of democratic competence goes on simultaneously while institutions develop their credit recognition system.

Second, a credit recognition system enhances equality and equity of institutions' education provision. The diversity of students' backgrounds and needs requires maximum individualisation of educational provision at each institution. Yet the uniformity of programmes and structures cannot attend all students equally and fairly in terms of participation and success opportunities. To some extent the establishment of a credit recognition system brings in the required individualisation. By improving each student's participation in learning and resultantly the success opportunity, the equality and equity of educational provision is enhanced, and thus democratisation is promoted.

In recent years, the extent of social stratification in Uzbekistan has been declining and having a profound impact on higher education. Some students from disadvantaged families either give up higher education or choose low tuition-fee specialisations in institutions located in inexpensive regions (which often means lower quality education). In addition, as Uzbek students obtain access to higher education through tough national entrance examinations, only the students with extremely high scores have the opportunity to choose where and what they will learn. To some extent, many of the students outside this elite have to accept what is allocated to them by the different programme and the institutional representative as to which institution they can enter and which specialisation they can study. A credit recognition system actually provides certain compensation to those relatively unprivileged students by supplying further choices through which they may accommodate their own interests, talents, capabilities and expectations. For instance, not being able to afford the high tuition fees to enrol in the law specialisation, a high school graduate who has been dreaming of studying law might have to decide to study something completely different, such as biology in a university's School of Life Sciences. However, with the establishment of a credit recognition system in the university, the student might be granted the opportunity to study a selective law course in the School of Law. Thus, by providing further choices to students, a credit recognition system can enhance the equality and equity of higher education provision that has been impaired by factors including family income, social relations, regional gap, learning abilities, periodic academic achievements, and so forth. Third, a credit recognition system reinforces the power of the teaching staff in relation to institutional management. Traditionally Uzbek teachers have little influence on the management and daily operation of the institutions they work for. To some extent there is actually a kind of dichotomy between the leadership and the teachers in Uzbek higher education institutions. Those in leadership are appointed by the government and the teachers are to work by following the instructions of that leadership. However, with the establishment of the credit recognition system, institutions have to be market-oriented, taking into consideration the real and practical needs of students. As the teachers who work at the forefront confront various challenges and receive feedback straight from the students, their complaints may be important information for strategy designing, and their suggestions may be the best solutions to knotty problems in relation to organising teaching and providing campus services. Therefore, the institutional management and leadership must consult the teachers and rely on their contribution to satisfy all the stakeholders and improve the quality of education

provision. Consequently, teachers' direct and indirect participation in institutional governance will be welcomed and enhanced gradually, and a certain state of balance between the power of the institutional management and the power of the teaching staff will be attained.

Fourth, a credit recognition system strengthens academic autonomy in higher education institutions. Academic autonomy has been one of the advocated aims of Uzbek decentralisation reforms. However, the process has been going quite slowly, so progress has been frustratingly slow. Among the various factors that hinder this progress is the political system embedded within institutional management, which seems to have become an insurmountable barrier. The development of a credit recognition system could symbolise the start of an era that will speed up the progress of strengthening academic autonomy.

A credit recognition system is characterised by flexibility, a good example of which is the increased number of elective subjects for students that feature flexible provision and evaluation. In order to create more programmes and subjects that cater to students' expectations and are recognised by students, institutions have to transfer some management power to the academics. Consequently, the increase in course selectivity leads to strengthened autonomy of the academics in terms of what to teach and how to teach. In other words, as a credit recognition system requires a market orientation, it forces governmental intervention and the authoritarianism of the institutional management to give way to choices of the academics in relation to teaching content and forms. The increased choices in teaching will surely result in improved freedom in academic research.

Thus, through the development of a credit recognition system, academic autonomy can be strengthened in both teaching and research.

Next, a credit recognition system builds up student autonomy. In the student– institution relationship in Uzbekistan, the tradition is that students are supposed to follow instructions and accept the learning arrangements provided by the institutions. Though a student union and various student organisations exist in each institution, they basically serve as an assistant for the institutional management. The development of a credit recognition system provides new opportunities for students to exert more influence over institutional governance. When planning teaching programmes and subjects, institutional leadership would have to follow the preferences of the students because the programmes or subjects could only be implemented if enough students registered for that programme.

In the evaluation of teaching programmes or the performance of teachers, the number of students registered becomes a crucial index, thus the students will play an important role through their choice of learning in the evaluation. Moreover, empowering students with more self-choice of learning also implies improving students' autonomy in their own learning evaluation. Uzbek institutions have a tradition of selecting excellent students, which constitutes an important part of the so-called student management workload. The selection is based on students' examination scores and other campus performance.



Excellent students are rewarded with attractive prizes and scholarships and the results often have an impact on future job seeking. By choosing what and how to learn, students would be able to obtain more control over their learning achievements, and thus win a greater say in evaluating their own performance. Arguably, a credit recognition system authorises students to participate more in institutional management and thus builds up student autonomy.

Finally, a credit recognition system favours a student-centred approach and contributes to the democratisation of student–teacher relations. Within student–teacher relations, Uzbek culture puts the teacher(teacher) at the centre and in a much higher position than the students. As the old saying goes, ‘a one-day teacher is as a life-long father’. Under a credit recognition system students are granted more autonomy and thus more power in institutional management, teachers have to change their attitude towards their students and ways of handling their relations with their students. In making teaching plans they would have to keep in mind the students’ expectations, needs, competence and priorities. In the classroom, they would have to make efforts to have their work recognised by students through elaborately designed teaching methods and the learning outcomes of the students. With the establishment of a credit recognition system, students become the judge to legitimise a teacher’s status as a qualified teacher. Therefore, being student-centred is no longer an option; rather it is becoming a necessity for the teachers, as the traditional mode of student–teacher relations within which students are in an extremely lower position does not fit in with the new teaching environment under the credit recognition system.

#### **DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

In recent years, establishing a credit recognition system has been a new major reform initiative among Uzbek higher education institutions. Few educationists have noticed or even discussed that its significance goes beyond educational quality and it has a profound impact on democratisation. This paper has tried to provide an insight into the credit recognition system development in Uzbek higher education institutions in the perspective of democratisation. It has suggested that at the level of institutions, democratisation of higher education may be seen as having five major implications, namely, equality and equity in provision, enforced power of teachers in institutional governance, academic autonomy, student autonomy and equalising teacher–student relations. Since the establishment of a credit recognition system promotes the democratisation of institutions in the areas signified by the five major implications, therefore, it may be argued that the process of developing a credit recognition system encompasses a hidden process of democratisation.

Democratisation of higher education is surely closely related to the democratising progress of the nation it belongs to. Uzbekistan is widely acknowledged as a nation of high centralisation in politics, the economy and education. Democratisation of higher education has never been part of the official political rhetoric of the government, yet this does not mean it is not happening.

As privatisation contradicts the building of a communist society, it has never been adopted and advocated as a policy of higher education reforms by the government in Uzbekistan since 1997.

Since democratisation is closely linked to educational quality (Dewey, 1916), and arguably it is practically an unavoidable tool for every nation to raise the quality of its higher education provision. Purposely or not, Uzbekistan is using this tool in an unnoticed way in improving its quality of higher education. Hand in hand with the process of developing a system to provide students with credit for their studies, democratisation of higher education is on its way in Uzbekistan. The ongoing dynamics of democratisation of Uzbek higher education institutions deserves more scrutiny by educationists.

To study the democratising process of Uzbek higher education institutions, the issues that are emerging with higher levels of democracy deserve close observation. For example, while promising to give students more choices according to their needs and expectations, do institutions and their teachers have the competence to adapt efficiently to providing sufficient and good quality choices? Will they be overwhelmed by students' demands and complaints? Will the teachers be overloaded and even have their rights as a teacher challenged? Will teachers complain about their repositioning in student–teacher relations? If the students welcome the new mode of learning, will they be able to adjust themselves to it and manage their learning well without any confusion? More importantly, a credit recognition system means inevitable disorganisation of the traditional forms of student class; it will be a big challenge to institutions in terms of student management.

#### **ETHICAL TEXT**

“In this article, journal writing rules, publishing principles, research and publishing ethics rules, journal ethics rules are followed. Responsibility belongs to the author for any violations related to the article.

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