


English Language Teaching and Elitism: A Comprehensive Analysis in Uzbek Higher Education

Burieva Gulhayo¹ and Ibrokhimov Firdavs²

¹Tashkent State University of Law, ESP teacher, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

²Center for the Research on the Development of Higher Education, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
g.burieva@tsul.uz

Keywords: Lingua Franca, Elitism, Elite, Non-Elite, Admission, Tertiary-Level Education, Tuition Fees.

Abstract: This article discusses in detail the role of English as the language of instruction in higher education institutions, as well as the classification of universities based on the language of instruction, entrance requirements, and tuition fees in the higher education system of Uzbekistan.

1. INTRODUCTION


Today, English serves as a lingua franca across a wide array of global domains (Marina & Xu, 2018). It is the language of science (Bitetti et al., 2017), diplomacy (Mirvan, 2022), and higher education. The significant expansion of English underscores its role as a key factor in enhancing job prospects, providing access to vast amounts of information, and serving as a gateway to international higher education. The increasing importance of English in the labor market, diplomacy, research, and various socio-economic and political dimensions is reshaping the social paradigms of higher education. Marsh (2006) highlights the consideration of English as a language of instruction by a growing number of higher education institutions.


Elitism in higher education refers to the disparities among institutions arising from financial, quality, and selection constraints (Elise, 2018). In simpler terms, variations in tuition fees, university expenditures, stringent selection processes, and the quality of the university experience contribute to the classification of higher education institutions as elite or non-elite. Uzbekistan, a developing country with over 162 higher education institutions, underwent a century without distinct elite schools, maintaining uniform standards in quality, tuition, and curriculum. However, as Uzbekistan transitions to a market economy, the significance of English and the prestige associated with certain higher education institutions are on the rise. The concept of elitism in Uzbek higher

education is largely based on anecdotal evidence. This article explores the variables determining the elite status of higher education institutions and aims to investigate whether a relationship exists between the use of English as a language of instruction and the classification of schools as elite in higher education in Uzbekistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Elitism in higher education, driven by socioeconomic factors, is evident globally. Elite institutions maintain high budgets, strict admission criteria, and elevated tuition fees, contributing to educational disparities. Research on British elite schools emphasizes the material basis over cultural achievements. Strict entry requirements, as seen in Russell Group universities, and high tuition fees pose barriers. The historical alignment of elitism with language, such as Latin or French, has evolved, with English now asserting dominance. In Uzbekistan, post-liberalization, English proficiency became linked to prestige and employment opportunities, revealing a correlation between emerging elite institutions and English as the medium of instruction.

^a <https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0000-0000>

^b <https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0000-0000>

2.1 Elitism in Higher Education

Elitism in higher education manifests as socioeconomic inequality, primarily precipitated by a market-oriented economy (Shamash, 2018). Every country experiences elitism in higher education, and while specific traits may vary, certain characteristics are universal worldwide. The distinction between elite and non-elite higher education institutions is influenced by diverse factors, yet they commonly share features such as restricted access for privileged groups (Sebastian et al., 2018), limited by costs, and stringent admission criteria. High budgets, strict admission criteria, and elevated tuition fees characterize elite higher education institutions. The disparity in tuition amounts between elite and non-elite schools determines the extent of elitism in higher education (Elise, 2018).

2.2 High Budget

In his research on elite schools in Britain, Gamsu (2022) identifies that the social and cultural achievements of these schools are secondary to their material basis. Although the author focused on secondary schools, the results of his research can be applicable to tertiary-level education. This is because private elite universities and schools are operated and financed similarly, following the principles of business administration. Usher (2016), in his study, notes that funding universities striving to offer world-class education is challenging, revealing the high budget that top-notch universities require to maintain.

2.3 Strict Admission Criteria

Elite higher education institutions uphold stringent entry requirements to safeguard their status (Paul, 2006). In her research on entry statistics into the elite Russell Group universities, Jane (2014) discovered that students admitted to these schools achieved high scores, implying rigorous entry criteria. Globally, it is widely recognized that elite schools generally impose stricter admission requirements compared to other universities typically attended by the general population. Examples include the Ivy League, Oxbridge, and South Korea's SKY leagues.

2.4 High Tuition Fees

High tuition fees pose a significant barrier to students seeking quality higher education. Marc (2004) discovered that spikes in tuition fees led to

lower enrollment among socioeconomically vulnerable segments of the population in Ontario, Canada. It is easy to generalize this finding to understand how higher education is affected by socioeconomic status. In fact, there is a correlation between a university's reputation and the amount of tuition fees (Cindy et al., 2004). Globally, elite schools such as Harvard, Oxford, or Yonsei University in Korea charge relatively higher tuition fees.

2.5 English and elitism in higher education

While academic literature on the topic is limited, elitism in higher education has historically aligned closely with the lingua franca of its era. Latin and Classical Greek, for instance, were characteristic features of educational elitism up to the Modern Era (Campbell, 1968). In Early Modern Central Asia, nobles were groomed and expected to be proficient in Classical Persian. Rashod Nuri Guntekin, in his novel "The Wren," illustrates how, in 20th-century Turkey, French was confined to elite gymnasiums and revered as the language of prestige. Therefore, elitism in education has evolved alongside changes in linguistic preferences, and currently, English stands out as a dominant candidate claiming such elitism.

2.6 Elitism in Uzbek Higher Education

Until 1991, Uzbekistan adhered to a traditional Soviet model of education characterized by no tuition fees, sub-optimal educational quality, and no impact of university reputation on employment prospects. Graduates from regional universities had equal rights and privileges compared to graduates from any other university. Starting in 1991, the country initiated the liberalization of its higher education policy and, to a limited extent, encouraged the establishment of foreign universities. Consequently, as the country faced high unemployment rates, disparities in university reputation began to surface. Notably, the most prestigious institutions were branches of foreign universities offering programs in English and charging significantly higher tuition fees. Some state universities also held prestige, particularly those located in Tashkent.

After 2016, Uzbekistan fully liberalized the higher education sector, allowing the opening of more foreign and private universities. The country's demand for specialists proficient in English increased, as they were offered better wages and had higher chances of studying abroad or securing

employment. In the context of this liberalization and the growing importance of English in the labor market, it is plausible to hypothesize a relationship between emerging elite higher education institutions and the use of English as a medium of instruction in Uzbekistan.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

We utilize secondary data obtained from the official websites of universities, selecting institutions based on the following parameters:

Identifying the ten most expensive higher education institutions in terms of tuition fees.

Identifying the ten universities with the strictest entry requirements from the state statistical database.

Identifying the percentage of English as a Medium of Instruction (EAMI) among these higher education institutions.

We plan to conduct a statistical test to explore any associations among the variables, specifically the amount of tuition, language of instruction, entry requirements, and whether the institution is in the private or public sector. Given our small sample size, we will employ Fisher's Exact Test, a suitable statistical tool for testing categorical variables (Freeman et al., 2007; Keith, 2003), as in our case. The association between these variables will be tested at a 0.01 significance level using Fisher's Exact Test. We intend to process the data using an online statistics tool from <https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/chisquare2/default2.aspx>, as recommended by Kim (2017).

4. RESULTS

Out of the ten universities, two charge \$5000, two charge \$3000, and the remaining ones charge below \$3000 for tuition fees (Table 1). Among the ten most expensive universities, nine (90%) use English as the primary language of instruction. The only exception is MGIMO University in Tashkent, which uses Russian as the language of instruction (Figure 1). Additionally, eight out of the ten most expensive universities are private, while MGIMO University and New Uzbekistan University are public institutions (Figure 2).

Table 1: The list of the most expensive universities.

No	Univer	Tuition	Language
1	Akfa Uni	\$5,000	English

2	MGIMO	\$5,000	Russian
3	Westminister	\$3,000	English
4	Inha Univer	\$3,000	English
5	MDIS	\$2,500	English
6	Turin	\$2,500	English
7	Bucheon	\$2,200	English
8	Webster	\$2,200	English
9	New Uzb	\$2,000	English
10	Team	\$1,800	English
English		90%	
Russian		10%	
Private		80%	
Public		20%	

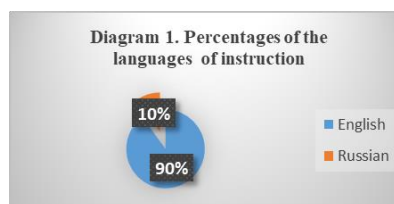


Figure 1: Percentages of the languages of instruction.

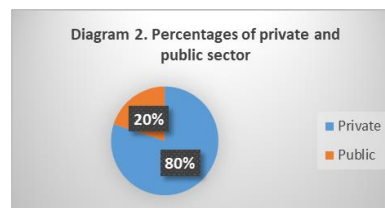


Figure 2: Percentages of private and public sector.

We selected ten universities with the strictest entry requirements, evident in entry scores across a wide range of fields (Table 2). All of these universities were public institutions. Among them, nine universities used Uzbek as the primary language of instruction, while New Uzbekistan University was the sole institution using English as the language of instruction.

Table 2: The list of the most expensive universities.

No	University	Language
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1	New Uzb	English
2	UWED	Uzbek
3	TSUL	Uzbek
4	TSIOS	Uzbek
5	TSUE	Uzbek
6	UPS	Uzbek
7	TTU	Uzbek
8	NUU	Uzbek
9	UUMCJ	Uzbek
10	TFI	Uzbek
English		10%
Uzbek		90%

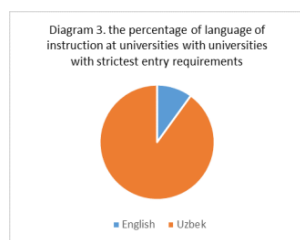


Figure 3: The percentage of language of instruction at universities with strictest entry requirements.

Table 3: Fisher's Exact test about the relationship between sector and language of instruction.

	Public	Private	Marginal Row Totals
EAMI	1	8	9
Non-EAMI	9	1	10
Marginal Column Totals	10	9	19 (Grand Total)
Chi ² = 0.0011			

Table 4: The relationship between high tuition and the language of instruction.

	High tuition	Standardized tuition	Marginal Row Totals
EAMI	9	0	9
Non-EAMI	1	9	10

Marginal Column Totals	10	9	19 (Grand Total)
Chi ² = 0.0001			

We selected ten universities with the strictest entry requirements, as evidenced by entry scores across a wide range of fields (Table 2). All of these universities were public institutions. Nine universities used Uzbek as the primary language of instruction, whereas only one university, New Uzbekistan University, used English as the language of instruction (Diagram 3). When we examined the tuition fees, all universities, except for New Uzbekistan University, were found to have standardized fees set by the government.

We employed Fisher's exact test to investigate the association between the higher education sector and the language of instruction at a 0.01 significance level (Table 3). The Chi² value revealed 0.0011, which is significant at a 0.01 p-value. Thus, there is an association between the private sector and the use of English as the language of instruction.

Furthermore, we explored the association between high tuition fees and English as the Medium of Instruction (EAMI) (Table 4). The Chi² value was 0.0001, indicating a p-value less than 0.01, and thus, suggesting statistical significance. This implies a strong association between high tuition fees and the use of English as the language of instruction.

5. DISCUSSION

This study represents the first exploration of the relationship between elite universities and the use of English as the medium of instruction in Uzbekistan to date. It also marks the inaugural use of statistical methods to measure elitism in Uzbekistan. According to our findings, there is a significant association between the use of English as a medium of instruction and the prevalence of elite private higher education institutions. All private elite universities in our sample utilized English as the medium of instruction. The Fisher's exact test conducted on the relationship between the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EAMI) and the private and public sectors revealed a statistically significant value of 0.0011.

Only one elite public university, New Uzbekistan University, was identified as using English as the primary language of instruction. Even this university had higher tuition fees compared to other elite public universities using Uzbek as the language of

instruction (Table 3). This finding may explain the observed strong relationship between high tuition fees and the use of English as the medium of instruction. Our study suggests that the scenario of elite higher education in Uzbekistan mirrors that of other developing countries. English, considered the language of prestige and internationalization, is primarily confined to expensive private colleges, while local languages are predominantly used in public elite universities and other institutions.

For instance, Jahan et al. (2019) reported that English as a medium of instruction was restricted to elite schools in Bangladesh due to high tuition fees. It can be assumed that elite private universities in Uzbekistan offer courses in English due to the demand for English in the labor market and its significance in research, international education, and other areas. Considering the high cost of education at private elite universities, it is plausible that most applicants prefer reputed public universities, leading to increasingly higher entry requirements at these institutions. In this context, elite public universities may impose stringent entry requirements not necessarily to protect their reputation but because of the high number of applicants.

In our case, all universities with standardized tuition used Uzbek as the language of instruction. Interestingly, even the elite public university that used English as the language of instruction charged tuition fees at a similar rate to elite private universities. Fareed et al. (2022) found, in their study on the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools in Pakistan, that teachers faced challenges in teaching technical subjects in English. This raises the possibility that the overall high cost of lecturing in English in Uzbekistan may be linked to the shortage of lecturers proficient in English, resulting in the recruitment of expatriates.

More studies are needed to explore the reasons why English is increasingly becoming associated with elite private higher education and how this language can be incorporated into mass higher education.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our study reveals a significant relationship between the use of English as a medium of instruction and elite private higher education, as well as high tuition costs in Uzbekistan. Possible explanations for the confinement of English to elite private education

include a low number of proficient lecturers. Further studies are needed to delve into this intricate topic.

7. LIMITATIONS OF OUR STUDY

Our study has several limitations:

This is a sample study, and a more comprehensive investigation may be necessary to study this topic more accurately.

We relied on secondary sources of data, such as website information. Some universities may have failed to update their relevant data, such as tuition fee changes, on time. Therefore, a study based on primary data, such as population surveys, may be needed to investigate the matter more accurately.

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