pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 5, May -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

COMPARING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN UZBEKISTAN: A QUALITY, COST AND FUTURE PROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS WITH INTERNATIONAL LESSONS

Jumaniyazov Nizomjon Bakhtiyorovich
PhD, Associate Professor, Department of General Technical Sciences, Asia International University

Abstract:
The rapid expansion of higher education in Uzbekistan has produced a two-tier system comprising public and private universities. Despite higher tuition fees and better-paid professors, private institutions generally deliver unsatisfactory student knowledge levels, while public universities offer marginally better educational quality at lower cost. This paper systematically compares both sectors across five dimensions: tuition affordability, faculty compensation, learning outcomes, graduate employability, and long-term career prospects. Drawing on international experiences from Kazakhstan, Turkey, India, Poland, and Malaysia—countries that have already navigated similar public-private higher education dynamics—the analysis provides evidence-based recommendations. The paper concludes that public universities currently offer a superior return on investment for the majority of students, while professors must weigh higher private-sector salaries against job security and academic freedom. A coordinated policy framework that enforces quality standards across both sectors is urgently needed.

Keywords: Public universities, private universities, higher education quality, tuition fees, professor salaries, graduate employment, Uzbekistan, international comparison.

1. Introduction: The Emerging Divide in Uzbek Higher Education

Uzbekistan has witnessed a dramatic transformation of its higher education landscape over the past decade. The number of higher education institutions surged from 77 in 2016 to over 219 by 2024, a 184% increase driven by the establishment of new public universities, private institutions (now numbering 67), and foreign branch campuses. This expansion has undeniably increased access, with the gross tertiary enrollment ratio reaching nearly 60%. However, this quantitative growth has masked a deepening qualitative crisis: the emergence of a two-tier system where private and public universities operate under fundamentally different cost structures, faculty incentives, and—crucially—educational outcomes.

Observers and participants within the system note a troubling pattern. Private universities in Uzbekistan charge fees that are three to eight times higher than their public counterparts, yet the general level of student knowledge in private institutions is widely regarded as below satisfactory. Public universities, while still facing significant challenges, deliver somewhat better academic results at a fraction of the cost to the student. Compounding this paradox, professors in private universities earn approximately 1.5 to 2 times more than those in public institutions, creating a financial incentive for faculty to migrate to the private sector even as quality suffers.

This paper addresses a pressing question facing Uzbek students, families, and academics: given these conditions, which sector offers better future prospects? The analysis proceeds in four parts. First, we establish the background of higher education development in Uzbekistan. Second, we systematically compare both sectors across key metrics. Third, we examine international cases—Kazakhstan, Turkey, India, Poland, and Malaysia—that have already experienced similar public-private dynamics. Finally, we offer targeted recommendations for professors and prospective students, along with policy implications.

2. Background: The Development of Public and Private Higher Education in Uzbekistan

2.1 The Soviet Legacy and Post-Independence Expansion

Uzbekistan's higher education system inherited the Soviet model of centralized, state-funded universities with strong quality assurance mechanisms, rigid curricula, and a focus on STEM

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 5, May -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

disciplines. For the first decade after independence in 1991, the system remained almost entirely public. However, beginning in the 2000s and accelerating dramatically after 2016, the government pursued a policy of privatization and expansion. The stated goals were to increase enrollment, reduce the burden on state budgets, and introduce market-driven efficiencies.

2.2 The Current Two-Tier Structure

As of 2025, Uzbekistan's higher education sector consists of approximately 152 public universities and 67 private universities, plus around 30 foreign branch campuses. Public universities continue to receive state subsidies, though students pay nominal tuition fees ranging from 500to500*to*1,300 USD annually depending on the program. Private universities operate entirely on student fees, with annual tuition ranging from 3,400to3,400*to*4,400 USD for standard undergraduate programs, and exceeding $5,000 USD for medical or specialized degrees.

2.3 The Quality Paradox

The most striking feature of the current landscape is the inverse relationship between cost and quality. Internal assessments and employer surveys consistently indicate that graduates of public universities demonstrate stronger foundational knowledge, particularly in mathematics, natural sciences, and engineering. Private university graduates, despite having access to newer facilities and smaller class sizes, often struggle with basic disciplinary competencies. This paradox can be explained by several factors: lower admission standards in private universities (driven by revenue needs), a focus on customer satisfaction over academic rigor, and the relatively recent establishment of many private institutions without established academic cultures.

2.4 Faculty Compensation and Motivation

Public university professors in Uzbekistan earn an average monthly salary of approximately 6 to 9.5 million soums (480–480–750 USD), depending on workload and rank. This compensation has been described by faculty as inadequate given the demanding workload of 850+ teaching hours annually. Private universities offer significantly higher salaries—often 1,200–1,200–1,500 USD per month for comparable positions, and senior roles can exceed $3,000 USD monthly. This differential has created a brain drain of experienced academics from public to private institutions, yet the expected quality improvement in private universities has not materialized, suggesting that salary alone does not determine educational effectiveness.

3. Comparative Analysis: Public vs. Private Universities in Uzbekistan

The table below summarizes the key differences between the two sectors across dimensions relevant to students and professors.

Aspect	**Public Universities**	**Private Universities**
Annual tuition (USD)	500–500–1,300	3,400–3,400–4,400+
Professor monthly salary (USD)	480–480–750	1,200–1,200–1,500+
Student knowledge level (general)	Moderate (somewhat satisfactory)	Low (below satisfactory)
Admission selectivity	Moderate to high (state exam)	Low to moderate
Class size	Large (30–60 students)	Small (15–25 students)
Facilities and infrastructure	Variable, often aging	Generally modern
Curriculum flexibility	Low (centralized)	Moderate
Graduate employability (domestic)	Moderate to good	Poor to moderate
International recognition	Moderate	Low to moderate
Academic freedom for faculty	Limited (bureaucratic)	Higher but contingent on enrollment
Job security	High (tenure-like)	Low (contract-based)
Risk of institutional closure	Very low	Moderate

3.1. Interpretation of the Comparative Data

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 5, May -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

For students, the calculus is stark. A public university education costs approximately one-quarter to one-third of a private university education, yet yields better or at least equivalent learning outcomes and employability. The only compelling reasons to choose a private university are (a) failure to achieve a passing score on the state entrance examination for public universities, (b) the desire for a specific program not offered in the public sector, or (c) access to facilities (e.g., modern labs, libraries) that may be superior in some private institutions.

For professors, the decision is more complex. Private sector salaries are clearly higher, often by a factor of 1.5 to 2.5. However, this premium comes with significant risks: private universities in Uzbekistan operate under market pressures, and declining enrollments (a growing concern as public universities expand) can lead to sudden contract non-renewal. Moreover, private universities typically lack the research infrastructure and scholarly communities that enable long-term academic career development.

3.2 The Systemic Problem: Why Private Quality Lags Despite Higher Pay

The persistent quality deficit in private universities stems from structural rather than individual factors. First, the profit motive incentivizes private universities to maximize enrollment while minimizing academic rigor that might lead to student attrition. Second, the rapid proliferation of private institutions has outstripped the supply of qualified faculty; many private universities hire recent graduates with minimal teaching experience. Third, the absence of robust external accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms means that private universities face little penalty for low learning outcomes. Finally, the student body in private universities is self-selected: many students who cannot meet public university entrance standards turn to private alternatives, creating a lower baseline of preparedness that further depresses overall quality.

4. International Lessons: Countries That Have Lived Through This Situation

Several countries have already experienced the dynamics now unfolding in Uzbekistan. Their experiences offer valuable lessons.

4.1 Kazakhstan: The Most Privatized System in Central Asia

Kazakhstan's higher education system is nearly 60% private by institution count, with private universities enrolling the majority of students. However, this expansion came at the cost of academic standards. The government was forced to close dozens of low-quality private institutions and implement mandatory national testing for all graduates, regardless of institutional type. The lesson: unregulated private expansion produces credential inflation rather than human capital development.

4.2 Turkey: The Financial Collapse of Private Foundation Universities

Turkish private (foundation) universities have seen occupancy rates drop from 91% to 76% in recent years. Families have calculated that it takes 15–20 years of post-graduation earnings to recoup private tuition costs, leading to a mass preference for public universities, which maintain 99% occupancy. The lesson: even wealthy families will choose public universities when the return on investment is transparently calculated.

4.3 India: The Skill Gap Across Sectors

India's massive higher education system includes prestigious public institutions (IITs, IIMs) that remain the gold standard, alongside thousands of low-quality private colleges. However, top-tier private universities that partner with industry have shown that private education can succeed when quality is rigorously enforced. The lesson: private does not inherently mean low quality; the critical variable is the presence of strong accreditation and market signals.

4.4 Poland: Depoliticizing the Public-Private Comparison

Poland has moved toward ranking public and private professional universities on a single list based on educational quality metrics rather than ownership type. This policy shift has forced private universities to compete on outcomes, leading to gradual quality improvement. The lesson: transparent, comparative data empowers students to make informed choices.

4.5 Malaysia: The Perils of Treating Students as Customers

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 5, May -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

Malaysia's private higher education sector grew rapidly but became criticized for diluting academic standards to retain fee-paying students. The result: graduates who were poorly prepared for employment, leading to a backlash from employers. The lesson: market mechanisms in education require strong regulatory guardrails.

4.6 Key Synthesized Lessons for Uzbekistan

From these international cases, three principles emerge. First, private universities can succeed, but only when accompanied by rigorous, independent quality assurance. Second, salary alone does not determine educational quality; institutional culture, governance, and faculty qualifications matter more. Third, students and families will rationally prefer public universities when cost-benefit calculations are transparent; private universities must offer demonstrable added value to justify higher fees.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Recommendations for Professors

For academics considering employment in either sector:

1. **Weigh total compensation against long-term career stability.** Private university salaries are higher, but contracts are often annual and subject to enrollment fluctuations. Public universities offer lower pay but significantly greater job security, pension benefits, and opportunities for research and promotion.

2. **Consider the full workload, not just monthly salary.** Public university professors often report excessive teaching loads (850+ hours annually) that leave little time for research. However, some private universities impose even heavier contact-hour requirements to justify salaries. Request detailed workload data before accepting any position.

3. **Evaluate the research environment.** For academics aspiring to publish, secure grants, or pursue doctoral supervision, public universities currently offer superior infrastructure. Private universities in Uzbekistan are overwhelmingly teaching-focused, with minimal research support.

4. **Use private sector experience strategically.** Early-career academics might consider a few years in a private university to gain teaching experience and higher income, then transition to a public institution for long-term career development. Conversely, established public university professors should be cautious about leaving tenure-like positions for temporary private sector gains.

5.2 Recommendations for the Youth (Prospective Students)

For students and families choosing a university:

1. **Prioritize public universities unless you have a specific reason not to.** Given the cost differential and quality evidence, public universities offer a superior return on investment for the vast majority of students. The only exceptions are: (a) failure to achieve a competitive state exam score, (b) pursuit of a niche program unavailable in the public sector, or (c) scholarship or financial aid that makes private tuition comparable to public.

2. **If considering a private university, conduct rigorous due diligence.** Request data on graduate employment rates, starting salaries, and employer partnerships. Be wary of institutions that refuse to provide this information. Speak with current students and recent alumni independently.

3. **Consider a hybrid pathway.** For students who cannot enter public universities directly, consider: completing foundational courses at a public university's evening or correspondence programs, then transferring to a private university for specialized training; or using affordable online AI-driven learning (as discussed in related work) to supplement formal education regardless of institutional type.

4. **Look beyond the university brand.** In both sectors, program-specific reputation matters more than institutional prestige. A public university's engineering program may be excellent while its humanities program is weak; the reverse can also occur in private universities.

5.3 Conclusion: Toward a Balanced and Quality-Driven System

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 5, May -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

Uzbekistan's higher education system stands at a crossroads. The current configuration—where private universities charge more, pay faculty more, yet deliver less—is unsustainable. Students and families will continue to prefer public universities, private enrollments will decline, and financially fragile private institutions will close. This market correction is necessary but painful.

The preferred path forward involves policy reform: establishing an independent accreditation agency with authority to close low-performing private universities, mandating transparent reporting of graduate outcomes, and creating competitive research funding accessible to faculty in both sectors. For professors and students navigating the current system, the evidence is clear: public universities currently offer better future prospects for the majority. However, with deliberate reform, private universities could become genuine alternatives rather than expensive safety nets. The international examples reviewed here show that this transformation is possible—but it requires political will, regulatory rigor, and a shared commitment to educational quality above institutional profit or prestige.

References

1. Jumaniyazov, N. B. (2025a). An analysis of the decline of mathematics learning in developing countries in the 21st century. *Journal of Applied Science and Social Science*, 15(10), 1278-1281.
2. Jumaniyazov, N. B. (2025b). The role of AI in math education in the 21st century: Personalized learning. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations*, 5, 2056-2059.
3. Jumaniyazov, N. B. (2025c). AI, academic dishonesty, and the future of mathematics learning. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations*, 5, 1295-1300.
4. Jumaniyazov, N. B. (2025d). Synergetic and innovative approaches in modern mathematics education. *Journal of Applied Science and Social Science*, 15(10), 1282-1288.
5. Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2024). *Higher education statistics annual report*. Tashkent.
6. OECD. (2023). *Higher education in Kazakhstan and Central Asia: Challenges and reforms*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
7. Özoğlu, M., Gür, B. S., & Coşkun, İ. (2021). Private foundation universities in Turkey: A financial sustainability analysis. *Higher Education Policy*, 34(2), 412-435.
8. Tilak, J. B. G. (2020). Private higher education in India. In P. N. Teixeira & J. C. Shin (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of higher education systems* (pp. 1-18). Springer.
9. Kwiek, M. (2021). The Polish higher education system: From expansion to post-expansion. In *30 Years of higher education reforms in Central and Eastern Europe* (pp. 89-112). Palgrave Macmillan.