STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND MARKET POSITIONING

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Abstract

Background: The expansion of private higher education in Uzbekistan has increased competition among institutions and strengthened the importance of strategic management, quality assurance, and market positioning. Official data for 2025 reported 207 higher education institutions, including 74 non-state institutions.

Purpose: This study examines how strategic management, quality management, and market positioning can be considered interconnected dimensions of competitiveness in private higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.

Methods: A qualitative conceptual design was used. The study synthesizes literature on strategic management, higher education quality, university branding and positioning, together with official information on Uzbekistan's higher education sector. No primary statistical results are claimed.

Results: The analysis indicates that sustainable institutional competitiveness depends on the alignment of long-term strategy, educational quality, organizational capabilities, student-oriented services, and differentiated institutional positioning.

Conclusion: Private higher education institutions can strengthen sustainable competitiveness by integrating strategic planning, continuous quality improvement, evidence-based management, faculty development, and credible market positioning.

Keywords: strategic management, private higher education, competitiveness, quality management, market positioning, institutional development, Uzbekistan.

1. Introduction

Uzbekistan's higher education sector has expanded substantially. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, 207 higher education institutions operated in the country in 2025, including 74 non-state universities, 32 foreign universities and branches, and 101 state institutions. Higher-education students reached about 1.7 million and gross coverage exceeded 44 percent.

This development increases the relevance of strategic management. Strategic management in higher education concerns the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and adaptation of institutional priorities. Research on strategic management in education has linked strategic educational management and effective leadership with institutional improvement.

Quality management is a second central dimension. A systematic review identified many dimensions of quality of service in higher education, including reliability, responsiveness, programme design, academic and non-academic processes, reputation, and facilities.

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Market positioning is also increasingly relevant. A 2023 systematic review of university branding identified brand positioning, brand identity, marketing strategy, and reputation as important areas of higher-education management.

The Uzbek context therefore provides a relevant setting for examining how strategic management, quality management, and positioning interact. This study develops a conceptual framework without presenting uncollected primary data as empirical findings.

2. Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative conceptual research design based on literature synthesis and official sector information.

Three dimensions are examined: (1) strategic development — mission, long-term objectives, resources, innovation and organizational capabilities; (2) quality management — programme quality, teaching, faculty development, student services, quality assurance and continuous improvement; and (3) market positioning — differentiation, reputation, programme portfolio, branding, communication and responsiveness to stakeholders.

The framework treats the dimensions as interconnected. Strategic management establishes priorities; quality-management processes translate priorities into operational improvement; and market positioning communicates institutional value.

The study is conceptual and therefore does not report survey percentages, causal coefficients, or institution-level results that have not been collected and analysed.

3. Results and Discussion

The literature and official sector evidence support a multidimensional interpretation of competitiveness in private higher education.

Strategic development provides a framework for coordinating resources and responding to environmental change. Private institutions face decisions concerning programmes, faculty capacity, digital transformation, partnerships, student services and financial sustainability.

Quality management is closely related to institutional value. Higher-education quality literature shows that students and other stakeholders experience quality through multiple academic and non-academic dimensions. Quality assurance should therefore be connected with continuous improvement.

Market positioning can differentiate institutions in an expanding higher-education market. University-brand research emphasizes brand identity, positioning, communication and reputation. For private institutions, positioning should be based on capabilities demonstrated through programmes, student experience, graduate outcomes, faculty expertise, international opportunities or other institutional strengths.

The conceptual relationship can be represented as:

Strategic Management → Quality Management → Institutional Value → Market Positioning → Sustainable Competitiveness

This is a framework for analysis rather than a tested linear causal relationship. In February 2026, the Ministry also reported a governance programme involving university leaders and governing-board members, with attention to modern governance principles and strategic management culture, further demonstrating the relevance of management research in higher education.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that strategic management, quality management, and market positioning should be treated as interconnected components of private higher education management in Uzbekistan.

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1. Develop measurable strategic plans covering academic development, faculty capacity, research, digital transformation, student services and financial sustainability.
2. Integrate quality assurance with continuous improvement by monitoring teaching, student services, programme relevance, satisfaction and graduate outcomes.
3. Build market positioning around genuine institutional capabilities rather than promotional claims alone.
4. Strengthen evidence-based decision-making through systematic use of student, graduate, labour-market and institutional performance information.
5. Invest in faculty development and organizational capabilities.
6. Periodically review strategy and positioning in response to changes in demand, technology, regulation and the labour market.

Future empirical research should test the framework using data from private higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.

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