



COMPARATIVE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION EXPORT: A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN AND LATVIA

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Abstract. Education export — the strategic positioning of a higher education institution (HEI) toward foreign students, international partners, and cross-border funding — requires a distinct management approach from purely domestic operation. This article compares the strategic management of education export at universities in Uzbekistan and Latvia, as representative cases of an emerging-market and an EU-integrated higher-education system respectively. Drawing on the broader national policy environments and institutional practices characteristic of each system, the article develops a comparative framework across four strategic-management dimensions: goal-setting and policy alignment, resource mobilization, quality assurance, and operational mobility. The analysis finds that the two systems diverge less in strategic intent than in the maturity of specific management mechanisms, particularly mobility administration and decentralized partnership initiative. The article proposes a transferable strategic-management model for HEIs pursuing education export under evolving national reform conditions.

Keywords: strategic management, education export, higher education internationalization, comparative case study, Uzbekistan, Latvia

1. Introduction. As higher education becomes an internationally traded service, universities increasingly require explicit strategic management of their export activity: setting institutional goals for international enrollment and partnership, allocating resources to pursue them, assuring quality to a standard recognized abroad, and enabling the physical and administrative mobility that underpins credibility and reputation. This article compares how universities in Uzbekistan and Latvia approach the strategic management of education export, given very different regulatory starting points: an emerging national reform environment actively building export capacity in the Uzbek case, versus an EU-integrated system in which many export mechanisms are already standardized.

The comparison is deliberately asymmetric: it does not assume convergence toward a single 'best' model, but treats the two national contexts as illustrating different stages and structures of strategic management, from which transferable lessons can be drawn in both directions.

2. Theoretical Framework

We organize the comparison around four dimensions commonly identified in the strategic-management literature on internationalization:

- 1) goal-setting and policy alignment — the extent to which export activity is tied to explicit, measurable institutional targets;
- 2) resource mobilization — grant-seeking, funding diversification, and budget allocation for international activity;
- 3) quality assurance — accreditation, credibility signaling, and partner due diligence;
- 4) operational mobility — the administrative and cultural infrastructure enabling faculty and student movement across borders. Each dimension is assessed for both institutions using available documentary evidence.

3. The Uzbek Case: Regional State Universities

3.1 Goal-setting and policy alignment

In Uzbekistan, the international cooperation strategy of regional state universities is increasingly nested within national higher-education reform agendas, which set institutional transformation targets and performance indicators for international cooperation. This gives export strategy at such institutions a top-down, nationally coordinated character, with formal target-tracking built into institutional planning documents rather than left to individual faculties.

3.2 Resource mobilization

Regional Uzbek universities have moved toward diversified international funding strategies, drawing on programs such as Erasmus+ and other bilateral and multilateral cooperation schemes rather than relying on a single donor or partner type. This activity is typically coordinated through periodic institutional reporting cycles that track cooperation-related tasks and feed into academic-council-level decision-making.

3.3 Quality assurance

A growing number of Uzbek universities have pursued international institutional accreditation and have begun developing independent due-diligence practices for prospective international partners, reflecting an emerging but active quality-assurance and risk-management function within export strategy. This is often formalized through internal regulations establishing dedicated international-cooperation governance bodies.

3.4 Operational mobility

International accreditation processes in this context frequently identify low faculty and student academic mobility as a specific weakness, prompting targeted action plans to expand scholarships, encourage master's-level study abroad, and institutionalize conference participation. Alongside such formal plans, universities have developed short-term, low-barrier mobility formats — such as cultural-creative summer programs for foreign students

— as a practical entry point for international engagement while longer-term mobility infrastructure matures.

4. The Latvian Case: Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS)

Operating within Latvia's EU-integrated higher-education system, VUAS benefits from structurally embedded mechanisms across all four dimensions: goal-setting aligned with EU and Bologna-process frameworks rather than requiring separate national-level construction; resource mobilization through routine Erasmus+ and EU structural-fund access; quality assurance through EU-harmonized accreditation norms; and — most distinctively — operational mobility that functions as ordinary institutional practice rather than a capacity-building target. This last point is the sharpest point of contrast with the Uzbek case.

5. Comparative Analysis

Across the four dimensions, the Uzbek and Latvian cases show a consistent pattern: Uzbek institutions match or approach the Latvian benchmark in the more formally regulated dimensions — goal-setting via national reform targets, and resource mobilization via increasingly diversified funding activity — while lagging specifically in operational mobility, the dimension most dependent on accumulated institutional practice and individual-level routine rather than policy design alone. Quality assurance occupies a middle position: Uzbek institutions have entered international accreditation and begun formal risk-management practice, but these functions are newer and less embedded than in VUAS's EU-standardized environment.

This pattern suggests that strategic management of education export in emerging systems such as Uzbekistan's can achieve parity with EU counterparts on the more policy-driven dimensions relatively quickly, while the dimension requiring sustained behavioral and administrative routine — mobility — requires longer institutional time horizons and is precisely where an EU comparator has the most concrete, transferable practice to offer.

6. Strategic Recommendations

- Treat operational mobility as a distinct strategic-management dimension with its own budget line and performance indicator, rather than folding it into general cooperation reporting.
- Direct existing grant-diversification strength toward funding outbound mobility specifically, converting resource-mobilization success into mobility-gap closure.
- Formalize ad hoc partner due-diligence practice into a standing quality-assurance procedure, applied before any new agreement is signed.
- Establish structured staff exchanges between Uzbek and EU partner universities to transfer mobility-administration practice directly into operational routines.
- Continue and expand short-term mobility formats (e.g., summer programs) as a strategic bridge while longer-term degree-mobility infrastructure is built.

7. Conclusion

The comparative case of Uzbek and Latvian higher education institutions shows that strategic management of education export does not develop uniformly across its component dimensions. Policy-driven dimensions — goal-setting and resource mobilization — can be built comparatively quickly under coordinated national reform, as the Uzbek case

demonstrates. Operational mobility, by contrast, depends on accumulated institutional routine and is the dimension where Uzbek institutions' own accreditation processes have identified the clearest gap relative to an EU comparator such as VUAS. A strategic-management framework for education export in emerging systems should therefore treat mobility as a distinct, resourced priority rather than an assumed byproduct of partnership and funding growth.

References

[To be completed in the agreed citation style — recommend adding sources on strategic management of internationalization (e.g., Knight, de Wit, Hunter), Uzbek higher-education reform policy documents, and EU/Erasmus+ and Bologna Process policy sources.]