



## ANTI-CORRUPTION EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Research article

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### **Academic governance under pressure: corruption and bureaucracy in Uzbekistan's higher education system**

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#### **Abstract**

Today's issues (corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency) remain enduring obstacles to integrity and progress within global higher education systems. This study examines their impact on scientific research and academic development in Uzbekistan, comparing national practices with international experiences in Finland, Japan, and South Korea. Through methodological research, the research identifies key structural, legal, and socio-economic factors that perpetuate academic corruption and administrative stagnation. It also evaluates Uzbekistan's recent reforms aimed at improving transparency, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and aligning governance frameworks with international standards.

The findings reveal that while bureaucratic rigidity delays research processes and suppresses innovation, corruption undermines academic integrity by fostering biased evaluations, misallocation of funds, and institutional mistrust. Drawing upon effective anti-corruption models from Finland, Japan, and South Korea, the paper proposes strategies for strengthening academic integrity in Uzbekistan through legal reform, institutional restructuring, and enhanced global cooperation. The study contributes to scholarly debates on academic governance and provides practical insights for policymakers and legal experts seeking to promote transparency and efficiency in higher education.

**Keywords:** corruption, bureaucracy, academic integrity, higher education, Uzbekistan, comparative legal study



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## 1. Introduction

Corruption and bureaucracy are among the most pressing barriers to the sustainable development of higher education systems [1]. Academic institutions are expected to foster innovation, scientific progress, and societal advancement; however, when plagued by inefficiency and misconduct, they may become stagnant and compromised. In many countries, including Uzbekistan, the higher education sector has historically been affected by excessive bureaucratic procedures, lack of transparency in research funding, and practices that undermine the principles of academic integrity [2], [3].

The global context demonstrates that corruption in academia is not confined to developing states [4]. Even highly developed countries face challenges in maintaining fair competition, unbiased evaluation, and equitable access to research resources [5]. Bureaucratic inefficiencies further exacerbate these challenges by imposing administrative burdens on academics, which can discourage innovation and reduce the overall quality of research outputs [6]. Analyses show that in this field, there is no universally accepted criterion for classifying corruption. Scholars have categorized corruption arising in the education sector, including in scientific activity, based on a range of different criteria. In our view, the reliance not on a single criterion but on multiple criteria in the classification of corruption enables us to identify its underlying causes and contributing factors, to gain a deeper understanding of its nature, and, as a result, to develop the most effective solutions for preventing and combating corruption in the sphere of public education.

In addition, the concept of “bureaucracy in scientific activity” also exists, and this notion was first extensively studied by the German sociologist Max Weber, who described bureaucracy as the most efficient form of administration in modern organizations in his work “*Economy and Society*” [7]. Similarly, the French scholar Michel Crozier, in “*The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*”, examined the negative aspects of bureaucracy, particularly emphasizing the dangers of rigidity and the obstruction of innovation within bureaucratic systems [8].

Merton [9] discussed the “unintended consequences” of bureaucracy, arguing that rigid rules and procedures may sometimes reduce organizational adaptability. Unlike the above perspectives, Alvin Gouldner, in his work “*Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*”, analyzed different forms of bureaucracy and introduced the concept of “representative bureaucracy,” through which he highlighted that bureaucratic systems are grounded in rules accepted by all participants [10].

Among contemporary researchers who have critically examined the role of bureaucracy and its impact on society, Graeber [11] notes that bureaucratic systems have not lost their significance, even in an era of rapid development of information technologies. In our view, the signs of bureaucracy in scientific and innovative activity are manifested in the following areas:

- 1) processes of approving and financing scientific projects;
- 2) procedures for awarding academic titles and degrees;

- 3) processes of publishing articles in academic journals;
- 4) organization of scientific conferences and events;
- 5) establishment of international scientific cooperation, among others.

All of the above processes, while subject to certain bureaucratic rules and regulations, serve to improve the quality of scientific activity on the one hand but may hinder the advancement of research and innovation on the other.

Thus, based on the analysis of the views of the aforementioned scholars, it can be concluded that bureaucracy is an important mechanism for managing complex organizational systems; however, it always requires balance. Excessive bureaucracy, in turn, tends to reduce the effectiveness of scientific activity and creates conditions for the emergence of artificial barriers.

Uzbekistan has undertaken significant reforms in recent years to address corruption and reduce bureaucratic barriers within the higher education system. The country has sought to implement transparent recruitment processes, introduce digitalization in administrative management, and align academic practices with international standards (OECD, 2020) [12]. Nevertheless, the persistence of certain structural challenges highlights the need for a deeper legal and comparative analysis.

This article seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main causes of corruption and bureaucracy in Uzbekistan's higher education sector?
- 2) How do international experiences, particularly those of Finland, Japan, and South Korea, provide insights for reform?
- 3) What legal and institutional mechanisms can be implemented to strengthen academic integrity and efficiency in Uzbekistan?

The structure of the paper includes the introduction, the methodology with a comparative legal framework, results, conclusion, and recommendations. The results section presents findings from Uzbekistan alongside international case studies. The discussion analyses these findings in the global context, followed by conclusions and recommendations for strengthening academic integrity in higher education.

## **2. Literature review and theoretical framework**

### ***2.1. Conceptualizing corruption and bureaucracy in higher education***

Corruption in higher education has been widely studied in political science, law, and education management. Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which in academia manifests through bribery, nepotism, plagiarism, and the manipulation of research funding (Transparency International, 2023) [3]. According to Hallak and Poisson, academic corruption not only affects institutional reputation but also undermines the social contract between universities and society (Hallak & Poisson, 2007) [5]. There are various views on the types of corruption around the world. The foreign scholar Stephen Heyneman distinguishes between two main types of corruption in the field, namely service corruption and academic corruption (Heyneman, 2004) [2]. He identifies several specific forms of corruption, including:

- 1) corruption in procurement processes;

- 2) corruption related to institutional property and taxation;
- 3) corruption in recruitment and selection procedures;
- 4) corruption associated with accreditation;
- 5) corruption concerning professional ethics.

According to the foreign scholar K. Spekbacher, corruption in the field of education may be categorised, based on its structural characteristics, into simple and complex forms of corruption (Spekbacher, 2013) [13]. Simple corruption refers to relationships that arise directly between the bribe-giver and the bribe-taker, or cases where an individual acts solely for their own benefit. In contrast, complex corruption encompasses instances of “abuse of influence,” whereby an individual exploits their reputation or status to affect an official’s decision in favor of another person’s interests. According to I. A. Damm, corruption in scientific activity can be examined by dividing the relevant relationships into two groups: corruption in the management of scientific activity and corruption in the organization of scientific activity (Damm, 2010) [14]. Furthermore, in the sphere of education, Damm categorises corruption according to the benefits obtained, distinguishing between material and non-material gains. He also differentiates it by its degree of social harm, separating offences (violations) from crimes, and by the misuse of authority, distinguishing between corruption committed through abuse of power or exceeding official authority and corruption carried out within the limits of one’s authority (Damm, 2010) [14]. In our view, the classification criteria proposed by Damm, excluding those concerning corruption in the management and direct organization of the education system, play a limited role in developing effective mechanisms for analyzing and preventing corruption in this sector.

Bureaucracy, as conceptualised by Max Weber, was originally regarded as a rational system of administration ensuring impartiality and order (Weber, 1947) [7]. However, in practice, excessive bureaucracy often leads to inefficiencies, delays in decision-making, and obstacles to academic freedom (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016) [6]. In the higher education context, bureaucracy may appear in the form of lengthy accreditation processes, over-centralised decision-making, and complex administrative regulations that discourage scientific innovation (Heyneman, 2019) [2]. Among the bureaucratic obstacles encountered in scientific activity, scholars highlight excessive documentation requirements, the complexity of authorisation procedures, the overly burdensome reporting system, the slowness of decision-making processes, the difficulties in implementing innovative ideas, and the continued enforcement of outdated regulatory documents (Shayzakov, 2021) [15].

Bureaucracy is a form of governance within the state and large organizations based on vertical hierarchy, in which all officials are subordinated to higher-ranking authorities in order to operate within clearly established rules. In history, the term “*bureaucracy*” referred to the power exercised by heads of governmental offices and administrators; however, over time, it came to denote the stratum of employees within large organizations across various spheres of society. As bureaucracy becomes an integral part of administration and governance, it gradually develops into a distinct social stratum.

According to historical sources, the principles and forms of bureaucratic management include hierarchy and discipline, division of labor and specialization, adherence to rules and documentation, and appointment to positions based on qualifications and merit. (*Source: National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan (UzME) – Article “Bureaucracy.” Tashkent, 2000.*)

## **2.2. Corruption in the Academic Context**

Several scholars emphasise the specific manifestations of corruption within academia. Denisova-Schmidt identifies four major categories:

- 1) *Admissions corruption* - bribery for university entrance;
- 2) *Academic corruption* - buying grades, falsifying diplomas;
- 3) *Research corruption* - ghostwriting, falsification of data, and misuse of grants;
- 4) *Administrative corruption* - nepotism in appointments and procurement fraud [16].

In Uzbekistan, as in many post-Soviet states, both academic and administrative corruption have been reported, particularly in the allocation of research funding and in hiring practices [17] [12].

## **2.3. Bureaucracy and its dual role**

While bureaucracy is often associated with inefficiency, it also provides necessary checks and balances within academic governance. As Weber (1947) [7] suggested, bureaucratic procedures are designed to limit arbitrariness and promote meritocracy. However, when bureaucratic systems become rigid and over-regulated, they risk fostering opportunities for corruption by creating additional points of discretion [18].

## **2.4. International anti-corruption mechanisms in academia**

Comparative studies highlight that successful reforms often combine legal enforcement with institutional transparency [19]. For example:

*Finland* emphasises decentralised university governance and strong ethical codes [20].

*Japan* has developed strict legal frameworks against research misconduct and plagiarism [21].

*South Korea* introduced comprehensive digitalisation of higher education governance to reduce human discretion and bureaucratic inefficiencies [22].

These international experiences show that corruption and bureaucracy are not eliminated solely by legal measures but also by cultural transformation and digital innovation.

# **3. Methodology**

## **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a comparative legal and institutional analysis to investigate corruption and bureaucracy in higher education. The research combines doctrinal legal analysis with comparative policy studies, enabling an evaluation of Uzbekistan's reforms within a broader international framework. By juxtaposing the Uzbek experience with Finland, Japan, and South Korea, the study identifies common patterns, divergences, and best practices in combating corruption and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies.

## **3.2. Data Sources**

The analysis is based on a multi-layered set of data sources:

1. *Legal and policy documents* - Laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan on anti-corruption, higher education acts, and relevant regulations; OECD reports; and UNESCO guidelines on academic integrity [23].

2. *Academic literature* - Peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science addressing corruption, bureaucracy, and academic governance.
3. *Institutional reports* - Transparency International indices, World Bank governance indicators [24], and national statistics from Uzbekistan's State Committee on Statistics.
4. *Comparative sources* - Policy papers and official reports from Finland [20], Japan [21], and South Korea [22].

### **3.3. Analytical approach**

The study applies three complementary methods:

1. *Doctrinal legal analysis* - Examination of statutory and regulatory frameworks addressing corruption and bureaucracy in academia.
2. *Comparative institutional analysis* - Evaluation of organisational practices in Finland, Japan, South Korea, and Uzbekistan.
3. *Qualitative synthesis* - Integration of data from academic articles, reports, and statistical sources to produce a coherent evaluation of reforms and challenges.

### **3.4. Comparative Legal Institutionalism**

This article adopts a comparative legal institutionalism approach. The framework builds on two dimensions:

1. *Legal normativity* - examining how laws and regulations in different countries define and prevent academic corruption.
2. *Institutional practices* - analysing organisational culture, bureaucratic structures, and enforcement mechanisms.

By combining these dimensions, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how legal reforms interact with institutional realities in shaping academic integrity.

**Table 1.** Types of Corruption in Higher Education and Their Consequences

| <b>Type of Corruption</b>        | <b>Examples</b>                   | <b>Consequences</b>                 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Admissions corruption</b>     | Bribery for entrance exams        | Unqualified students admitted       |
| <b>Academic corruption</b>       | Buying grades, falsified diplomas | Devaluation of academic merit       |
| <b>Research corruption</b>       | Ghostwriting, grant misuse        | Distrust in scientific findings     |
| <b>Administrative corruption</b> | Nepotism, procurement fraud       | Inefficient allocation of resources |

*Source:* Compiled by the author based on Denisova-Schmidt [16], Heyneman [2], Hallak and Poisson [5], and OECD reports [12].

### **3.5. Scope and limitations**

The research focuses on the period 2016–2024, during which Uzbekistan introduced major reforms in higher education and anti-corruption policy. While the study integrates statistical indicators, it primarily relies on qualitative analysis due to the limited availability of disaggregated corruption data in academia. Additionally, the comparative scope is limited to three international case studies (Finland, Japan, and South Korea), chosen for their distinct governance traditions and successful reform experiences.

**Table 2.** Comparative legal and institutional framework of academic integrity in Uzbekistan, Finland, Japan, and South Korea

| Country            | Legal Frameworks                                  | Institutional Structures           | Academic Integrity                |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Uzbekistan</b>  | National anti-corruption laws                     | Bureaucracy in universities        | Transparency in admissions        |
| <b>Finland</b>     | Universities Act and education laws               | High governance autonomy           | High research quality             |
| <b>Japan</b>       | Research ethics and academic integrity guidelines | Strict anti-plagiarism regulations | High trust in academia            |
| <b>South Korea</b> | Anti-corruption and e-government policies         | Digitalised administrative systems | Efficiency in academic management |

Source: Compiled by the author based on OECD (2020) [12], Ministry of Education and Culture (2011) [20], Yamada (2024) [21], and The Korea Herald (2021) [22]

## 4. Results and Comparative Analysis

### 4.1. The situation in Uzbekistan

Since 2016, Uzbekistan has embarked on a comprehensive reform agenda aimed at modernizing higher education and combating corruption. The adoption of the Law on Combating Corruption (2017) [25] and the State Anti-Corruption Program [26] (2019–2021) [27] marked a turning point in institutional recognition of academic corruption. Several developments are noteworthy:

*Digitalization of admission processes:* Since 2019, all university entrance examinations have been fully digitalized, reducing opportunities for bribery in admissions.

*Transparency in research grants:* The Ministry of Higher Education introduced online platforms for grant allocation to prevent favouritism and nepotism [28].

*Institutional reforms:* New academic integrity offices were established at leading universities in Tashkent, aimed at monitoring plagiarism and academic misconduct [29] [12].

*Persistent challenges:* Despite reforms, bureaucratic inefficiencies remain significant [30]. Lengthy approval processes for research projects, overlapping regulations, and centralized governance hinder academic productivity.

### 4.2. Finland's experience

Finland represents a model of decentralized university governance and strong adherence to academic ethics [20]. Universities operate under autonomy laws, granting institutions significant independence in recruitment and research funding [20]. A well-developed system of ethics committees ensures transparent peer review and strict oversight of academic misconduct. Bureaucratic procedures are minimized through a digital-first policy in academic administration.

Finland has consistently ranked among the least corrupt countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index [31], and its universities maintain high levels of international trust.

### 4.3. Japan's experience

Japan has developed a strong legal and institutional framework against corruption and academic misconduct [21]. The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) enforces strict codes of conduct for research funding and academic integrity. Cases of plagiarism and falsification have been addressed under national academic integrity regulations and enforcement mechanisms [21]. Bureaucracy in Japanese academia remains relatively high; however, it is mitigated by merit-based recruitment systems and strong accountability structures [6]. Japan demonstrates how legal enforcement, combined with cultural norms of discipline, contributes to reducing corruption in higher education [32] [21].

### 4.4. South Korea's experience

South Korea's reforms illustrate the role of digitalisation and transparency:

- Since the 2000s, South Korea has implemented comprehensive e-government initiatives that extend to higher education governance [22].
- Research grant applications, evaluations, and academic promotions are managed through online platforms, limiting human discretion.
- Strong collaboration between universities and the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) ensures accountability.

**Result:** South Korea successfully combined technological innovation and legal oversight to reduce both corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency in academia [33].

### 4.5. Comparative Insights

**Table 3.** Comparative insights on corruption and bureaucracy in higher education systems

| Country           | Key Mechanisms                        | Outcomes                                    |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Uzbekistan</b> | Digitalised admissions; legal reforms | Reduced bribery, but bureaucracy persists   |
| <b>Finland</b>    | Autonomy laws; ethics committees      | High trust in academia; low corruption      |
| <b>Japan</b>      | Strict misconduct laws; meritocracy   | Strong accountability; moderate bureaucracy |
| <b>S. Korea</b>   | E-governance; digitalised processes   | Efficiency gains; improved transparency     |

Source: Compiled from OECD (2020) [12], Ministry of Education and Culture (2011) [20], Yamada (2024) [21], and The Korea Herald (2021) [22].

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) data, Finland consistently demonstrates higher transparency levels compared to Japan, South Korea, and Uzbekistan, which remain in lower positions of the index [31]. However, direct year-by-year comparison is not fully methodologically consistent due to differences in data availability and reporting cycles.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. The relationship between corruption and bureaucracy

The findings demonstrate a clear relationship between corruption and bureaucracy in higher education. While corruption often manifests in direct violations such as bribery or nepotism, bureaucracy creates an enabling environment by fostering inefficiency, opacity, and excessive discretion. In Uzbekistan, for example, the persistence of overlapping regulations and centralised decision-making not only slows academic processes but also increases

opportunities for rent-seeking behaviour. This supports the argument of Rose-Ackerman and Palifka [6] that bureaucratic complexity frequently acts as a breeding ground for corruption.

### ***Implications from comparative international experience***

The international case studies offer important lessons for Uzbekistan. Finland demonstrates that university autonomy combined with strong ethical institutions fosters a culture of transparency. This suggests that excessive state control over academia in Uzbekistan could be gradually replaced with decentralised governance models. Japan highlights the importance of legal enforcement and accountability. Despite bureaucratic traditions, strict misconduct laws ensure that violations are effectively sanctioned, thereby maintaining academic trust. South Korea provides evidence that digitalisation is a powerful tool in reducing human discretion and administrative inefficiencies. Uzbekistan's early steps in digital admissions could be further extended to research management and faculty evaluation.

### ***The role of legal and institutional frameworks***

The comparative analysis indicates that legal reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by institutional and cultural changes. Uzbekistan's *2017 Law on Combating Corruption* represents progress, yet its implementation remains inconsistent. Without effective monitoring, even progressive legal norms risk becoming symbolic. As Mungiu-Pippidi argues, anti-corruption strategies require both strong laws and robust enforcement mechanisms supported by civil society and academia itself [34] [18].

### ***Academic integrity as a driver of development***

Academic integrity is not merely a professional norm but a cornerstone of national development. Countries with strong academic governance (e.g., Finland and Japan) consistently perform well in innovation rankings and research output [35] (OECD, 2020) [12]. Academic integrity in the educational process encompasses honesty, transparency, and responsibility, as well as the commitment to combating plagiarism and corruption. In other words, it is the principle of maintaining honesty, fairness, and responsibility within the educational process, which entails fostering a climate of trust between students and faculty, ensuring the authenticity of knowledge, and contributing to the advancement of society. For Uzbekistan, enhancing academic integrity is critical not only for domestic reforms but also for successful integration into the global research community. Strengthening trust in the academic system can also help attract international collaborations, research funding, and talent. Therefore, accepting a new law on academic integrity to provide transparency and responsibility in the higher education system of Uzbekistan has been a crucial aspect of life. Actually, the adoption of the "*Law on Academic Integrity*" holds significant necessity and importance in preventing corruption within higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. This law serves not only as a reform mechanism for the education system but also as a contributor to justice, trust, and development in society.

First, a legal basis is essential for the systematic fight against corruption and its prevention. At present, corruption remains one of the most pressing issues in higher education institutions (for example, irregularities in entrance examinations, grading, and the defense of theses). The *Law on Academic Integrity* establishes clear legal boundaries in this area and introduces enforcement mechanisms.

Second, there exists a pressing need to prepare graduates who are truly competitive in the labor market. Graduates who obtain diplomas without genuine knowledge increase the number of unqualified professionals in the workforce, thereby negatively affecting economic development. The law guarantees assessment based on knowledge and competencies.

Third, the law ensures the promotion of justice within society. Through this law, the principle that success should be achieved based on effort and knowledge—rather than through personal connections or financial means—is reinforced.

Fourth, the law strengthens both national and international credibility. In the global educational arena, the recognition of Uzbek diplomas is closely tied to the level of academic integrity. This law might consolidate trust in society.

Finally, one of the key priority areas is the further strengthening of anti-corruption measures in Uzbekistan and the promotion of a zero-tolerance attitude toward corruption in society. Combating corruption and bureaucratic barriers in educational and research institutions constitutes an essential component of this priority.

### ***Main Key Factors of an Effective Strategy to Address Corruption and Bureaucratic Barriers***

According to the results of the analysis above, each country's strategy for combating corruption is context-specific [36], with its effectiveness depending on the strictness of legislation, the mechanisms of implementation, and the influence of national mentality [15]. When generalizing the findings, several key factors can be identified as the main strategies for managing corruption and bureaucratic barriers:

- ensuring openness and transparency;
- strengthening the severity of legal sanctions;
- effective use of digital technologies;
- introducing codes of professional ethics;
- enhancing mechanisms of state control;
- expanding the participation of the academic community;
- adapting to and adopting international standards.

On this basis, it is advisable to creatively and adaptively introduce international practices, develop innovative approaches that take into account national specificities, reinforce ethical norms within academic institutions, and expand the use of digital technologies and open monitoring systems [15].

### ***Policy implications for Uzbekistan***

The analysis suggests three critical policy implications for Uzbekistan:

- 1) *Decentralisation of governance* – grant universities greater autonomy in decision-making, budgeting, and recruitment.
- 2) *Expansion of platforms* – extend digitalisation from admissions to research funding, peer review, and faculty evaluation.
- 3) *Cultural change in* – embed academic integrity training into curricula, strengthen whistleblower protections, and promote ethical leadership among administrators.

These implications align with international best practices and can help reduce both corruption and bureaucracy in Uzbekistan's higher education sector.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that corruption and bureaucracy remain significant impediments to the sustainable development of the higher education and research sector in Uzbekistan. Despite ambitious reforms and the establishment of anti-corruption legislation, the persistence of administrative inefficiencies and opaque decision-making processes

continues to undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives. Evidence from the comparative analysis with Finland, Japan, and South Korea confirms that the success of anti-corruption measures depends not only on the existence of legal frameworks but also on the presence of transparent institutions, effective enforcement mechanisms, and a strong culture of academic integrity. In Finland, Japan, and South Korea, legal frameworks have been established to combat corruption and bureaucratic barriers in the fields of education and research. However, the enforcement and application of these laws may vary across the three countries.

Each of these nations possesses strong legal foundations for preventing and sanctioning corruption, safeguarding academic freedom, and regulating research activities. Independent oversight bodies-such as research funding agencies and ethics committees-play a decisive role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness.

Finland's emphasis on autonomy and transparency, Japan's strict accountability mechanisms, and South Korea's rapid adoption of digital technologies all offer useful lessons for Uzbekistan. The Uzbek experience indicates that partial reforms cannot achieve a lasting impact unless they are complemented by systemic changes in governance, institutional culture, and enforcement practices. Strengthening academic integrity is therefore not only a legal or administrative concern but also a developmental priority, essential for Uzbekistan's integration into the global academic community and for fostering innovation-driven growth.

## **Recommendations**

According to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for Uzbekistan's higher education and research sector to enhance developments in the education sector:

### **1. Strengthen University Autonomy:**

Reduce centralised bureaucratic control and empower universities with decision-making authority in areas such as recruitment, budgeting, and research funding.

Promote self-regulation through independent ethics committees and boards of trustees.

### **2. Expand Digitalisation Initiatives:**

Extend digital governance beyond admissions to cover peer review systems, grant distribution, and faculty evaluations.

Introduce blockchain-based solutions to improve transparency in research funding and publication processes.

### **3. Enhance Legal Enforcement and Accountability:**

Improve the implementation of the Law on Combating Corruption in 2017 by strengthening monitoring mechanisms and ensuring effective sanctions for violations.

Establish specialised anti-corruption units within academic institutions to investigate misconduct.

### **4. Promote a Culture of Academic Integrity:**

Integrate ethics and integrity courses into higher education curricula.

Provide regular training for faculty and administrators on transparency and anti-corruption practices.

Protect whistleblowers and create secure reporting mechanisms within academic institutions.

### **5. Foster International Collaboration:**

Encourage partnerships with universities in Finland, Japan, South Korea, and other countries with strong practices in integrity and governance.

Promote exchange programmes and joint research projects to align Uzbek academia with global standards.

## **Final Remark**

Corruption and bureaucracy within the scientific sphere pose a serious threat to a country's innovative development and competitiveness [37]. They not only undermine trust in science and research outcomes but also result in the inefficient use of resources, a decline in the quality of scientific investigations, and a reduction in the motivation of honest scholars.

Tackling corruption and bureaucracy in the scientific sector requires a comprehensive approach. Such an approach should include the improvement of legislation, the integration of digital technologies, the development of systems of scientific ethics, the strengthening of the role of prosecutorial bodies, the enhancement of transparency and accountability within research institutions, and the promotion of international collaboration.

Addressing corruption and bureaucracy in academia is a long-term endeavor that requires coordinated action between government authorities, universities, and civil society. Uzbekistan's progress so far is commendable, yet the path forward necessitates deeper reforms that target both structural and cultural dimensions of governance. By adopting international best practices and embedding academic integrity at the core of its education system, Uzbekistan can build a transparent, efficient, and globally competitive research environment.

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