

Institutional Alignment and Skills Transformation

The Role of Transnational Education in Bridging Higher Education and
Labour Market Needs in Tajikistan

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Context

- Many emerging economies face a structural disconnect between what universities produce and what labour markets demand. In Tajikistan, this challenge is especially acute.
- The government's 2026–2030 National Development Strategy prioritises:
 - Resilient Infrastructure;
 - Economic Competitiveness;
 - Improved Governance;
 - Quality Social Services.
- These priorities place mounting pressure on higher education institutions to produce graduates equipped to drive national development.

Situating the Study in Existing Scholarship

- The higher education reform literature consistently emphasises aligning university curricula with labour market demands to enhance employability and economic development (Pham, 2020).
- Despite significant global growth in TNE, very limited research has examined its role in supporting institutional reform and skills development specifically within the Tajik and broader Central Asian context, a critical gap this study addresses.

What the study examines.

- **Aim:** This study examines the extent to which higher education institutions in Tajikistan are aligned with evolving labour market needs and explores how Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships can support curriculum innovation, skills development, and graduate employability.
- **RQ1:** How do government policy, labour market demands, and international partners shape curriculum reform in Tajikistan?
- **RQ2:** How do TNE partnerships shape institutional responses to skills mismatches and labour market needs?
- **RQ3:** To what extent can TNE partnerships contribute to workforce skills aligned with Tajikistan's national priorities?

Literature

- TNE partnerships as an opportunity to develop students' personal attributes that equips them as graduates with the skills to meet the local employers' expectations (Lim et al., 2019).
- TNE should exploit the extension of curricula that relates to work integrated learning that supports employability (Bilsland, et al., 2020).
- TNE education offers students the opportunity to position themselves in the local employment market (Tran, et al., 2021).
- Wang (2026) recently argued that it is crucial for TNE to be sustainable and this can be achieved with their engagement as part of an ecosystem that is integrated into the local economy, local relevant industry as well as the government.

Research design

- A qualitative study.
- Grounded in Institutional Theory to analyse how external pressures shape higher education responses.
- Secondary Sources - Policy documents, national development strategies, and empirical studies on skills mismatches in Tajikistan.
- A conceptual framework analysing the interplay between HEIs, labour markets, and international education partnerships

Findings - TNE as a Catalyst for Institutional Change

- Higher education institutions operate within complex institutional environments shaped simultaneously by policy mandates, global academic norms, and international partnerships.
- TNE partnerships emerge as potential catalysts for change by facilitating:
 - **Curriculum Innovation:** Exposure to international pedagogical approaches and up-to-date content.
 - **Knowledge Transfer:** Faculty development and cross-institutional academic exchange.
 - **Strategic Alignment:** Linking educational outcomes to national economic development priorities.

How TNE Mediates HE-Labour Market Alignment

- **Institutional Pressures** - Policy, norms, and mimicry shaping Higher Education in Tajikistan
- **TNE Partnership Engagement** - Cross-border collaboration and mediation such as MDIS Dushanbe.
- **Curriculum and Capacity Reform** - Redesign courses and build faculty skills.
- **Labour Market Alignment** - Employability and graduate outcomes.
- TNE partnerships serve as a mediating mechanism, translating external institutional pressures into tangible reforms in curriculum design, faculty capacity, and graduate outcomes aligned with Tajikistan's national development agenda.



**LARGE, BOLD
COERCIVE
PRESSURE**

Government policies
and regulations



**LARGE, BOLD
NORMATIVE
PRESSURE**

Global education
standards, academic
norms



**LARGE, BOLD
MIMETIC
PRESSURE**

Emulate successful
international models

Scholarly Contributions

- Extends Institutional Theory to encompass TNE partnerships as mediators of HE-labour market alignment in emerging economies.
- Addresses a critical gap in research on Central Asian and specifically Tajik higher education systems.
- Provides an evidence-informed framework applicable beyond Tajikistan to comparable emerging economy contexts

Summary

- Tajikistan's HE-labour market misalignment reflects deep institutional pressures requiring systemic reform, not incremental adjustment.
- Coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures together shape how institutions respond – and where TNE can intervene most effectively.
- Transnational Education partnerships offer a strategic mechanism for curriculum innovation, knowledge transfer, and employability enhancement.
- This conceptual framework must be validated through mixed-method and comparative research across Central Asian contexts

References

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Thank you