



THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS IN ENSURING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Fayzullayev Sardorbek

Navoi State University, 3rd-year student at "School Management.

E-mail: mr.olimdjon@gmail.com

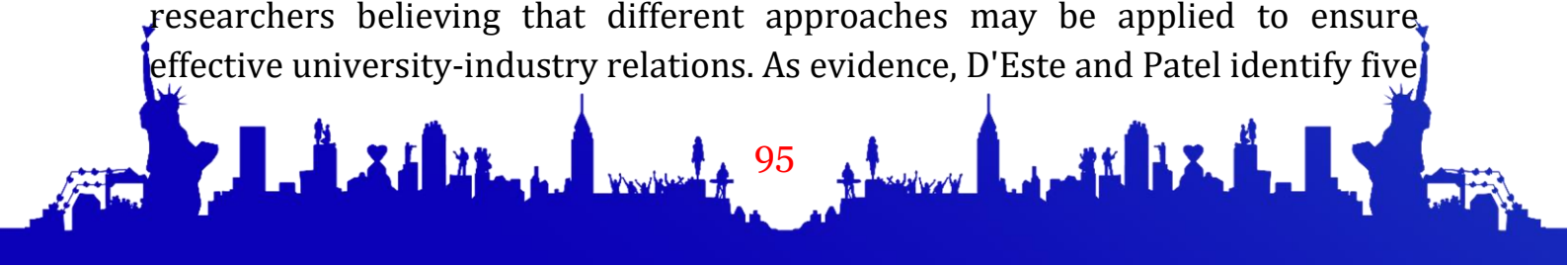
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Abstract. The aim of the research is to discuss the role of employers in the educational process of universities in ensuring the quality of education services and preparing high-quality graduates. In modern conditions, the implementation of the integration principle of education, science, and production ensures a balance between the content of educational programs, research outcomes, and production results. The findings of the article can serve as a guide for potential managers and practitioners in academia, highlighting the most crucial aspects of collaboration between universities and employers.

Key words:

Introduction. Potential employers of higher education institutions play a crucial role in ensuring the effective functioning of universities. They are primarily responsible for providing expertise on the main requirements of society and the labor market, as well as offering technical advice necessary for research, teaching, and the transmission of knowledge. Additionally, many employers collaborate with specialists and practitioners in specific fields of education. In Kazakhstan, the governance model in state higher education institutions is transitioning to non-profit organizations. As a result, the role of potential stakeholders has significantly increased, as they have been involved in shaping the future, and the output of universities has become vital. The growth of competition, the development and application of new markets, and the use of innovative technologies create the necessary conditions for integrating industry and universities.

Today, the issue of graduate employment is a primary concern for all higher education institutions. University administrators have already recognized the urgent need to establish cooperation with industry representatives to support graduate employment after completing their studies and to meet the demands of the labor market. As a result, interest in collaboration between universities and industry has been growing among scholars, particularly in delivering quality education services. Numerous studies have been conducted on this topic, with researchers believing that different approaches may be applied to ensure effective university-industry relations. As evidence, D'Este and Patel identify five





types of organizational approaches to collaboration: meetings and conferences, consultancy and contract research, physical facilities for cooperation, teaching, and joint research.

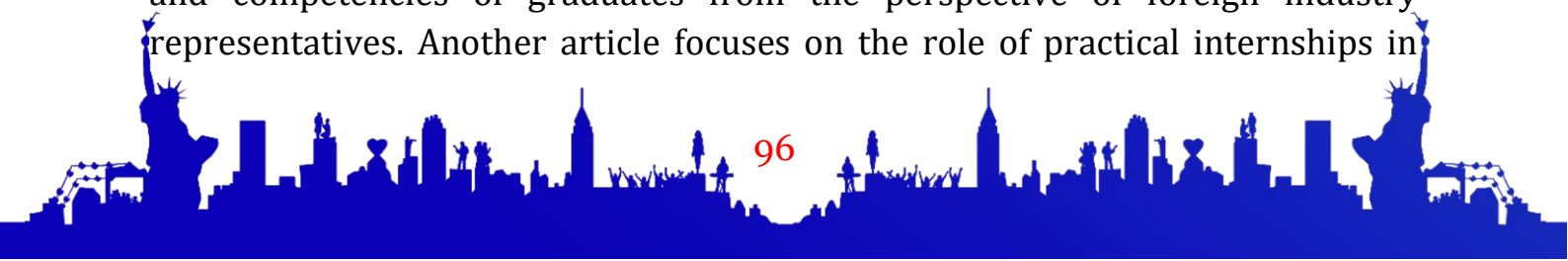
In this regard, other scholars argue that a managed approach and measurement tools should be developed to foster university-industry alliances. Similarly, Teixeira and Mota (2012) identified some of the key evaluations of collaboration, while Osmo Kauppila conducted empirical research to identify the application of excellence models for collaboration assessment, such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).

Thus, this article discusses one of the best practices and approaches for ensuring quality education through university-industry collaboration, focusing on the role of quality managers in developing mutual cooperation with external stakeholders. In terms of the positive impact of collaboration for both parties, universities can gain access to funding and technology, receive feedback on the practical relevance of research, and recognize the current needs of the labor market, thereby becoming more competitive in education and employment sectors. For industry, such collaboration provides access to scientific expertise, facilitates joint project design and development, and helps meet labor demands by aligning educational programs and developing the professional competencies of graduates, thereby creating a competitive advantage.

The role of employers in the quality assurance process is critical, particularly when it comes to revising and defining the content of degree programs. Their contributions and feedback are essential in shaping the competencies required of graduates. Today, the effectiveness of the education system depends not only on equipping students with knowledge and skills but also on ensuring their employment and adaptability to the labor market's needs. Therefore, the collaboration between educational institutions and employers is of great importance in organizing effective education processes and preparing professionals who meet the labor market's demands.

This article analyzes the importance, forms, challenges, and solutions of collaboration between educational institutions and employers.

There are numerous studies in the world literature regarding the importance of university-industry collaboration, examining it from various perspectives. One study, published in the *Journal of Economic Annals-XXI*, explores the development of higher education relations and the practical skills and competencies of graduates from the perspective of foreign industry representatives. Another article focuses on the role of practical internships in





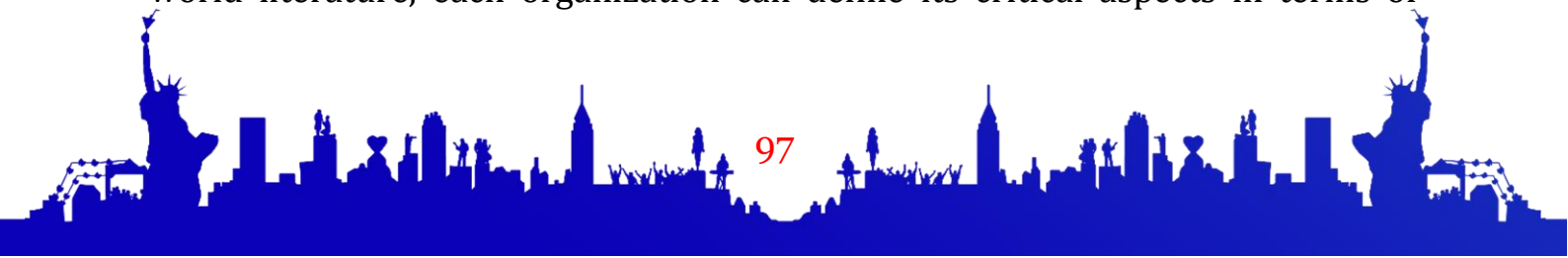
preparing qualified and skilled graduates. In this study, the authors examine employers' attitudes toward providing the best opportunities for students to acquire necessary labor skills, creating the most favorable conditions for their learning.

The research highlights employers' understanding of students' acquired skills and abilities and their satisfaction. It was conducted to identify the relevance of graduates' competencies, particularly in the fields of economics and business. A different group of researchers conducted a similar empirical analysis to determine employers' satisfaction with business graduates' qualifications. Their conclusion is that graduates' transversal competencies are more important than those specific to their professions, and university managers are being provided with opportunities to implement competency-based education systems.

In a similar vein, a comparative study conducted to analyze employers' feedback emphasized the importance of graduates' general skills. Basit, Tehmina N., and others (2015) analyzed employers' participation in education, and in their research, they recommended a strategic approach from the perspective of higher education institutions. The authors proposed strengthening university-industry integration and enhancing workplace learning to meet the interests of all stakeholders. They argued that this strategy should be considered an integral part of the university's operations.

As mentioned above, effective and efficient university-industry partnerships require a deep understanding of the partner organizations and their activities. Numerous studies in the literature discuss factors influencing university-industry collaboration. These factors may include the cultural and perspective alignment of partners, organizational compatibility, strategic interests, and identifying key performance indicators for collaboration (Mead et al., 1999). Other important factors include the geographic location of partners and effective communication channels for sharing information, which is crucial for successful collaboration.

Moreover, effective collaboration requires consideration of the diverse social and economic missions and goals of organizations, taking into account each party's organizational culture and differences. Intellectual property issues and technology are also crucial elements in fostering successful partnerships. Given the many factors that influence university-industry collaboration in the world literature, each organization can define its critical aspects in terms of





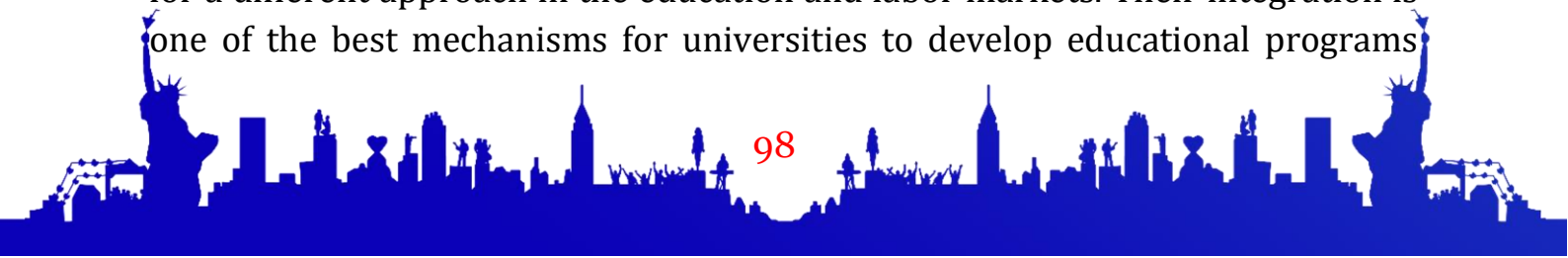
organizational culture, shared interests, mutual commitments, and the clear mission of both parties.

As part of the methodology, the article explores the global literature on identifying the importance of developing university-industry collaboration in providing quality education. As evidence, the current article examines the work of a leading university in Uzbekistan, which actively implements advanced practices in graduate employment within the educational processes.

Without consulting employers' opinions, educational programs are developed, and recommendations on the required skills and qualifications for graduates are formulated. The current agenda for higher education institutions is focused on the development of mechanisms for involving employers in the process of creating educational programs and training qualified graduates. This article discusses Uzbekistan's national strategy for optimizing communication between universities and the labor market. In Uzbekistan, the State Education Development Program was launched, outlining the main tasks for higher education and postgraduate education from 2011 to 2020, with the goal of achieving quality education. The main objective of the program is to achieve a high-quality level of education that meets the needs of the labor market and is aligned with the country's industrial and innovative development goals.

Before discussing the implemented mechanisms and improvement approaches, the article analyzes the effectiveness of employers' participation in quality management processes and examines the main trends and employment indicators of graduates over the past five years. It is recognized that the key indicators of education quality and efficiency are the successful employment of graduates. National universities have introduced strategic programs and mechanisms to address this pressing issue, which are discussed in this article. The recent two figures show a positive trend in graduate employment, with the first being 86% and the second 95%. This trend can primarily be explained by the full responsibility of students for their education and future. Furthermore, since Navoi State University is defined as a research university, all material and immaterial resources are allocated to training qualified and competitive specialists. Researchers and experts focus on increasing the country's research competitiveness in both the public and private sectors, as well as promoting innovations.

After gaining autonomy, national university managers recognized the need for a different approach in the education and labor markets. Their integration is one of the best mechanisms for universities to develop educational programs





that meet quality standards and train qualified graduates. However, currently, there is a lack of interaction between higher education institutions and the labor market, and the mechanisms for graduate employment are not regulated. To address this issue, and considering the following factors, Kazakhstan's National University developed a guideline titled "Collaboration Between Universities and Employers," which includes the following issues: *Social and economic changes; The impact and role of new information technologies in the educational process; Developing the ability of each individual to perceive new information; Strengthening international cooperation; The evolution of the internal economic environment from the perspective of the market economy; Business development that significantly outpaces the education system; Bridging the gap between employers' expectations and graduates' qualifications; Challenges in establishing links between businesses and universities; Insufficient opportunities for graduate employment.*

The university administration claims that the cooperation between universities and employers guarantees that the skills and experience acquired by students remain a priority in the university's mission. The guideline plays an essential role in developing national and institutional systems for collaboration between universities and employers. It is worth noting that engaging employers in the educational process ensures the quality, transparency, and recognition of qualifications. A guideline on involving employers in quality management processes has been developed within the Erasmus project, with five representatives from different countries participating, including Uzbekistan as the project coordinator and partners from Russia, India, Turkey, and Malaysia. The aim of the guideline is to define the structure of practical systems for collaboration between universities and employers at the national and institutional levels, to implement the principle of integrating education, science, and production, and to define the degree of collaboration in developing educational programs.

One of the primary objectives of the document is to establish mutually beneficial collaboration between the business sector and universities, developing methods and systems to support entrepreneurship, and preparing highly competitive graduates ready to meet the requirements of the labor market. These graduates should be skilled, responsible, ethically trained, and meet the standards for international employment. The university's leadership currently adheres to the principle of integration between the university and the industrial sector. This approach is driven primarily by the increasing number of





industry-oriented and developed educational programs based on sectoral foundations and professional standards. Secondly, university managers support the development of educational programs focused on quality and supported by industry experts, in line with the country's industrial-innovative development program and qualification standards. The third reason is that program coordinators aim to increase the number of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary subjects in education, aiming to deepen and expand the scope of education and enhance the competitiveness of graduates.

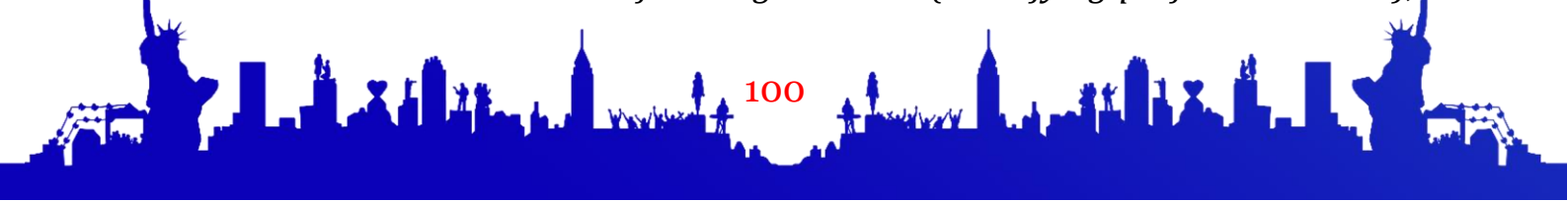
During the development of the guideline, all parties agreed on the following principles:

Ensuring mutual responsibility between universities and employers for providing quality education and maintaining quality; Studying various collaboration practices between universities and employers at the national and institutional levels; Developing qualification foundations for graduates based on the needs of industrial sectors; Conducting quality assessments of educational programs.

The practical collaboration guide between higher education institutions and industry is divided into ten sections, which define the mechanisms of collaboration between the business sector and universities and ensure their integration. The key objective of student entrepreneurship is to adapt research and developments to the requirements of the real economy and ensure their commercialization. Within the university, student entrepreneurship should be part of an effective mechanism to stimulate and develop connections between the economy's sectors—science, education, and production.

The university administration, in collaboration with employers, coordinates and plans joint activities, sets strategies for developing cooperation, monitors planned outcomes, and ensures the introduction of professional standards and regulations. The national university has been successful in ensuring graduate employment opportunities in recent years. However, it is essential to continue to improve the management and measurement of this activity and strengthen collaboration with external stakeholders. The labor market includes a variety of employers with diverse needs, which requires in-depth marketing research to identify opportunities and common interests.

Taking this into account, the university leadership considers the following characteristics before collaborating with industrial partners: *The size of the organization (small, medium, large business, or manufacturing); The business sector and the main activities of the organization (identifying professional skills);*





The regional characteristics of employers (regional or international requirements); The existing relationship between the university and key employers; The organization's willingness to employ university graduates and provide support; The reputation of the university in the national education field.

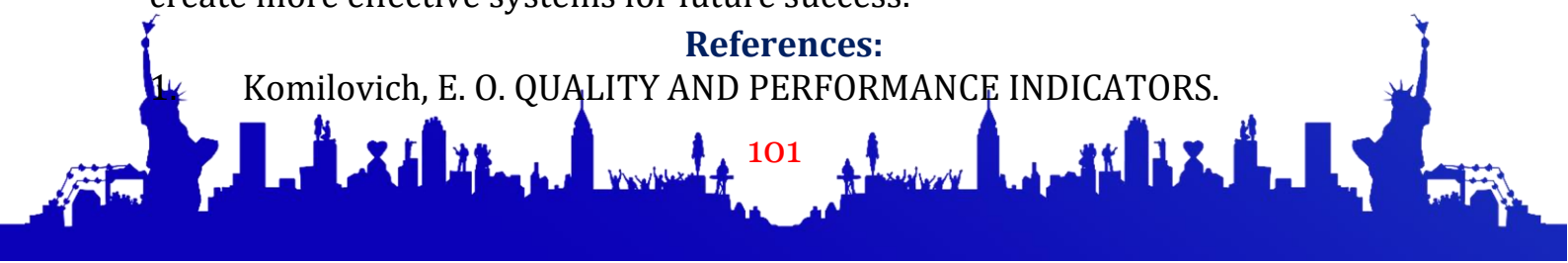
It should be recognized that a strategic partner of the university may be large corporations for long-term collaboration, as they have high-tech production facilities and can contribute to the joint planning and development of academic programs. To conclude this article, the university-industry policy is an effective approach to delivering quality education and training graduates with qualifications in line with internal and external market demands. Secondly, this approach strengthens the practical orientation of educational programs and enhances the quality of educational services. Thirdly, it ensures graduates' readiness and ability to solve professional problems in line with their academic program and the expectations of employers, addressing the internal labor market. This collaboration unlocks the potential for universities and organizations to produce quality products and create conditions that will help graduates develop their professional careers.

Conclusion. The guideline discussed can be implemented by university leadership across all types of higher education institutions, including transnational and cross-border institutions. The guideline's goal, objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes focus on involving employers in the development of new educational programs and the revision of existing ones to meet the needs of the labor market. This includes evaluating the quality of degree programs.

Although universities are responsible for producing and delivering quality education, it is crucial that employers participate in the process of managing product and service quality, as they are the final consumers who recognize and validate the results. Collaboration between employers and universities is a central issue on the agenda for university leaders. The cooperation between educational institutions and employers plays a key role in improving the efficiency of the education system and meeting the needs of the labor market. This partnership ensures that students and graduates are prepared for employment, integrates new technologies and innovations, and increases employment opportunities. Additionally, there is a need to continuously develop new initiatives and solutions to address existing challenges in collaboration and create more effective systems for future success.

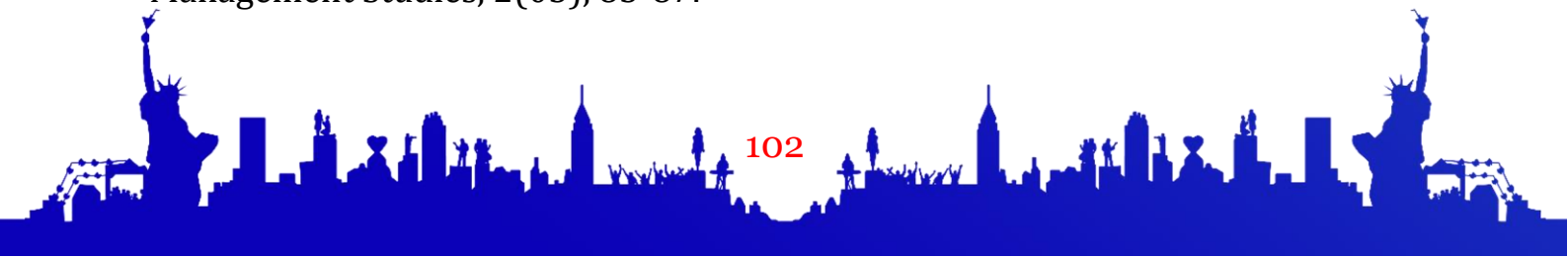
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