Systemic Barriers To Human Resource Capacity Development In Higher Education System Of Uzbekistan

Mavluda Kengboeva

Teacher at Foreign Languages School at the Academy of Public Policy and Administration under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This study employs a qualitative documentary analysis of national policy frameworks, institutional regulations, international development reports, and comparative literature to examine systemic barriers impeding HR capacity development in Uzbek universities. The analysis identifies five interrelated constraints: centralised governance and limited institutional autonomy, chronic underfunding and fragmented resource allocation, HR units oriented primarily toward administrative functions, formalistic and misaligned professional development, and hierarchical organisational culture. The findings underscore the necessity of a holistic HR capacity development strategy to facilitate institutional modernisation, strengthen workforce capabilities, and advance the alignment of Uzbekistan's higher education sector with international benchmarks.

Introduction: The quality of higher education is largely influenced by human resource (HR) capacity, which plays a key role in teaching effectiveness, research output, and overall institutional success [3]. Strengthening HR systems has become a key policy focus in Uzbekistan, where higher education reforms are closely linked to national strategies for human capital development [14,11]. Since 2017, reforms have expanded institutional autonomy, improved curriculum standards, and promoted internationalization [14]; however, progress in HR capacity development remains uneven [5].

Universities continue to face systemic constraints, including limited professional development funding, bureaucratic and fragmented HR procedures, weak digital infrastructure, ineffective performance management, and difficulties in retaining qualified personnel [1,9,10,12]. Empirical studies further indicate that HR units largely function as administrative bodies rather than strategic actors due to centralized governance and restricted autonomy [5,7]. These conditions impede alignment with international quality benchmarks.

Despite growing research on higher education reform in Uzbekistan, HR capacity development has rarely been examined through an integrated, multi-level framework. Existing studies seldom analyse the combined effects of policy, financial, institutional, and organisational factors, nor do they provide substantive comparisons with global HR models [8,6].

This study addresses these gaps by analysing the systemic barriers shaping HR capacity development in Uzbek higher education institutions and situating these findings within international best practices. It identifies key constraints, evaluates their implications for institutional performance, and proposes evidence-based interventions to support the sector's ongoing modernization.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative documentary analysis to investigate systemic barriers to human resource capacity development (HRCD) in Uzbekistan's higher education sector. Documentary analysis is well suited to a policy-driven context in which HR practices are

strongly shaped by national legislation, centralised governance, and donor-funded reforms, and it enables comprehensive comparison between national practices and international HRCD standards [12].

The methodological approach is conceptually informed by established HRCD frameworks, including Human Capital Theory, the Resource-Based View, and the Capability Approach [3,14,1]. These theories, together with global research demonstrating the importance of structured professional development, digital HR systems, performance management, and strategic HR leadership [7,6,8], provide an analytical foundation for interpreting the documentary evidence.

Data were selected based on relevance, credibility, and accessibility, and encompass four categories of sources: national policy documents such as the Higher Education Development Concept 2030 and institutional HR regulations [14,5]; international development reports produced by ADB, UNESCO, and the World Bank [1,10]; peer-reviewed empirical research conducted in Uzbekistan [5,4,6]; and comparative international literature, including HR benchmarking studies [3,7]. These materials collectively outline both the conceptual foundations of HRCD, and the specific challenges observed in Uzbek universities, such as underfunded professional development, administrative rather than strategic HR roles, and limited digital infrastructure.

Analysis followed Bowen's (2009) structured coding process. Initial coding involved extracting statements related to HR systems, governance, professional development, and institutional capacity. Axial coding grouped these statements into thematic categories covering policy constraints, financial limitations, governance and autonomy issues, HR processes, organisational culture, and alignment with international practices. Selective coding synthesised these themes to identify core structural barriers, including policy incoherence, persistent underinvestment in HR development, limited institutional HR capacity, fragmented professional development provision, and inadequate digitalisation and monitoring systems. Triangulation across policy texts, empirical studies, and international benchmarks enhanced the validity and consistency of the findings.

The use of secondary data constrains the ability to capture lived experiences and internal institutional dynamics, and document availability may not fully reflect recent reforms. Nevertheless, documentary analysis provides a robust basis for identifying systemic patterns and structural obstacles affecting HR capacity development in Uzbekistan's higher education sector.

RESULTS

Analysis of policy documents, institutional regulations, and empirical studies identifies five interrelated structural barriers to human resource capacity development (HRCD) in Uzbekistan's higher education sector. These barriers—policy and governance, funding and resources, HR unit capacity, professional development, and organisational culture—are summarised in Table 1.

A central barrier is the highly centralised and compliance-driven governance system, which limits universities' autonomy in recruitment, promotion, and remuneration. Consequently, HR departments primarily perform administrative functions rather than strategic workforce planning, reducing their capacity to support talent development and institutional innovation [1,5]. Although national reforms emphasise digitalisation, quality assurance, and modernisation, operational HR practices remain inconsistent.

Financial constraints further impede HRCD. Public spending on higher education is below international norms, restricting professional development budgets and limiting financial autonomy. Many PD initiatives rely on short-term donor funding, such as UNESCO's TPD@Scale, which often lacks continuity after donor exit [10]. Low salaries and strict budget regulations reduce staff retention and hinder competitive recruitment.

Institutional HR capacity is limited. Public universities generally maintain HR units focused on recordkeeping, contracts, and workload management rather than strategic functions such as succession planning, talent management, or workforce analytics. Administrative leaders frequently lack formal HR training, and weak digitalisation exacerbates the problem, as most institutions rely on paper-based monitoring of staff workload, qualifications, and training [1].

Professional development practices are often formalistic and misaligned with institutional needs. Mandatory PD hours are typically fulfilled through outdated or generic courses without a competency-based or mentorship approach. Needs assessments are seldom systematic, and the impact of PD on teaching quality, performance, or retention is rarely evaluated [10,5].

Organisational culture also constrains HRCD. Hierarchical decision-making, low recognition, bureaucratic workloads, and unclear career pathways reduce motivation and inhibit innovation [4,12]. Faculty and HR staff have limited influence over policy development, and reward systems insufficiently acknowledge teaching excellence or pedagogical innovation.

Comparison with international frameworks (CUPA-HR,

OECD, UNESCO) highlights persistent gaps. While national policies reference principles such as HR autonomy, evidence-based management, and digitalisation, institutional implementation remains limited, maintaining a persistent disparity between policy objectives and operational practice [3,10].

Overall, these five barriers collectively limit the development of strategic and effective HR systems in Uzbek universities, contributing to persistent gaps between national reform objectives and institutional practice.

Table 1. HR Capacity Barriers in Uzbek Universities

Barrier Category	Key Issues	Evidence / Examples	International Benchmark
Policy & Regulation	Centralised, compliance-focused regulations; limited institutional autonomy	ADB (2022); Higher Education Development Concept 2030; Imomov & Umirova (2025)	Decentralised HR authority; autonomy in recruitment, promotion, and professional development
Funding & Resources	Low PD budgets; irregular allocations; reliance on donor programs; low salaries	ADB (2022); UNESCO TPD@Scale; WIUT PDP (2024)	Dedicated, performance-linked PD funds; flexible budget allocation for HR development
HR Unit Capacity	Administrative focus; limited strategic HR functions; weak digitalisation; low leadership competence	Imomov & Umirova (2025); ADB (2022)	Strategic HR departments; workforce analytics; integrated HR information systems
Professional Development	Formalistic, outdated, misaligned programs; lack of needs assessments and impact evaluation	UNESCO TPD@Scale (2023); Imomov & Umirova (2025)	Competency-based, continuous PD; mentorship programs; systematic impact evaluation
Organizational Culture	Hierarchical decision-making; low recognition; unclear career pathways; limited faculty input	Ganiev (2024); EduJournal (2023)	Participatory decision-making; transparent promotion systems; recognition and reward for teaching and innovation

DISCUSSION

Human resource capacity development (HRCD) in Uzbekistan's higher education is shaped by three interrelated dynamics: misalignment between reform goals and institutional capacity, structural constraints in governance, funding, and organisational practices, and divergence from international standards of strategic HR management [5,7,8]. Although national policies such as the Higher Education Development Concept 2030 prioritise modernisation, digitalisation, autonomy, and staff development, universities often lack the infrastructure, competencies, and resources to implement these objectives effectively [5,7,8]. Centralised governance further restricts institutional autonomy in staffing, resource allocation, and strategic HR planning.

The barriers to HR capacity development identified in this study were derived from a systematic analysis and synthesis of multiple sources, including national policy documents, institutional regulations, and empirical research. Five interrelated barriers emerged: centralised governance and limited institutional autonomy, chronic underfunding and fragmented resource allocation, HR units oriented primarily toward administrative functions, formalistic and misaligned professional development, and hierarchical organisational culture. These barriers are mutually reinforcing and collectively constrain HR capacity [1,5,10,12].

HR units primarily perform administrative tasks, limiting strategic workforce planning, career advancement, and recruitment. Chronic underfunding reduces professional development opportunities, merit-based incentives, and digitalisation, undermining

staff motivation [1,7]. Weak workforce planning, fragmented competency frameworks, and limited performance analytics contrast sharply with global HR practices. Professional development is often formalistic, hierarchical, and misaligned with institutional needs, while organisational culture further diminishes engagement and innovation [6,2].

HR systems are fragmented and largely manual, restricting evidence-based decision-making and staff monitoring. In contrast, international standards emphasise autonomy, strategic HR roles, competency-based development, analytical performance systems, and integrated digital HR solutions. These gaps are structural rather than technical, reflecting governance, cultural, and institutional limitations [3,10].

The systemic barriers identified are illustrated in Figure 1, which demonstrates how these challenges interact to constrain HR capacity. Consequently, policy-driven reforms often fall short of intended outcomes, as these barriers operate as mutually reinforcing constraints.

Overall, HR capacity is crucial for higher education modernisation. Without strengthened HR structures and strategic practices, universities will struggle to enhance teaching quality, increase research productivity, maintain a skilled workforce, implement digital systems, and achieve national and international competitiveness. HRCD must therefore be recognised as a strategic priority essential for institutional transformation and sector-wide reform.
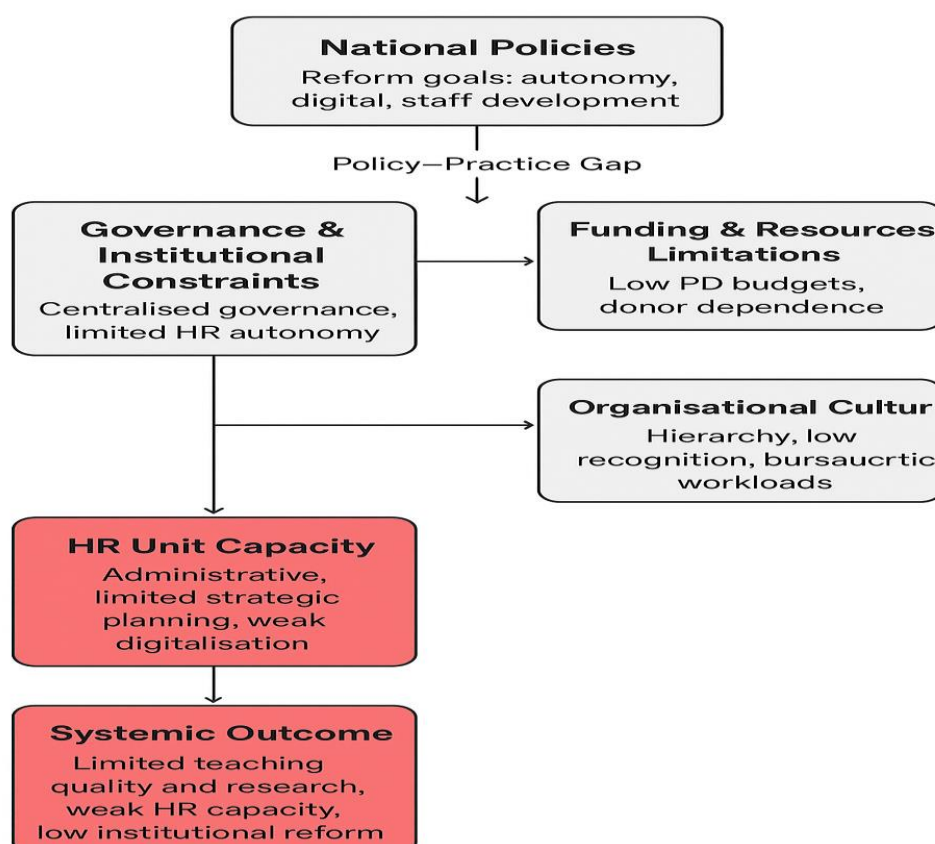

Figure 1. Systemic Barriers to HR Capacity Development in Uzbek Universities

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that human resource (HR) capacity in Uzbekistan's higher education is constrained by interrelated policy, financial, institutional, cultural, and technological barriers [1,5,10]. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated reforms at the policy, institutional, and operational levels.

Policy-level recommendations include strengthening the HR regulatory framework through national competency standards, structured professional development requirements, and minimum annual training expectations; ensuring sustainable funding via dedicated HR budgets and performance-based grants; and increasing institutional autonomy in recruitment, promotion, and compensation to allow tailored HR strategies [14,3].

Institutional-level recommendations involve transforming HR departments into strategic partners responsible for talent management, workforce planning, and evidence-based decision-making; implementing competency-based professional development programs with regular needs assessments and evaluation; establishing transparent, merit-based performance management and

recognition systems; and promoting participatory governance and faculty engagement to foster collaboration and reduce resistance to change [5,6,2].

Operational-level recommendations focus on digitalisation through HR information systems and digital learning platforms for efficient monitoring of qualifications, training, workload, and performance; aligning HR development with career pathways, retention initiatives, and labour market requirements; and fostering collaboration with universities, professional associations, and development organisations to access global best practices and benchmarking tools [9,10,11].

Overall, HR capacity development is critical for enhancing teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional performance. Current reforms—including the Higher Education Development Concept 2030, UNESCO's TPD@Scale, and ADB assessments—have yet to fully address gaps in autonomy, funding, HR structures, digital infrastructure, and organisational culture. A holistic framework integrating policy alignment, sustainable funding, strategic HR units, competency-based professional development, digital systems, participatory governance, and robust evaluation is essential to build a capable, motivated, and future-ready workforce, supporting both institutional modernisation and national competitiveness in higher education [3,14,1].

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