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Higher Education in Mongolia

Oyun-Erdene Bat-Erdene[1*], Sanjaa Budnyam, Sc.D, Professor[2]

[1, 2] Graduate University of Mongolia

Corresponding Author: Oyun-Erdene Bat-Erdene
Graduate University of Mongolia

ABSTRACT

Mongolia ranks 104th out of 193 countries in the Human Development Index, 101st out of 137 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index, 81st out of 190 countries in the Doing Business Index, and 111th out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index. These rankings indicate that Mongolia continues to lag behind regional and global averages in terms of development. Rapid global socio-economic and technological changes demand more agile and comprehensive approaches in human capital development. Education is not only a key driver of 21st-century economic growth but also an expanding sector in itself. This study provides insights and recommendations for reforming education and science in Mongolia.

KEY WORDS: Science, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, Human Development

Introduction

Knowledge is built on education, research, and innovation. Over time, continuous growth in scientific knowledge proves to be the most effective driver in complex and evolving conditions. Human capital, particularly highly skilled professionals, plays a central role in building future civilization, culture, and values. It is evident that science and education are fundamental for developing knowledge-intensive human capital.

According to the World Bank, human capital accounts for 79% of wealth in Central America, 77% in East Asia, 76% in North America, 74% in Western Europe and South America, 69% in North Africa, and 65% in South Asia. In Mongolia, the human capital coefficient is estimated at approximately 60%, highlighting the urgent need to improve the quality of the education system.

Since the 1990s, Mongolia liberalized higher education, relying primarily on tuition fees, reducing state responsibility for ensuring broad access to higher education. In comparison, countries such as Germany provide free higher education to all high school graduates, Japan aims for universal higher education, and Israel has achieved over 80% tertiary enrollment.

Science can be defined in three ways:

1. A system of knowledge (e.g., physics, mathematics, chemistry);
2. A form of creative activity;
3. An economic sector producing knowledge.

In Mongolia, higher education institutions and research academies developed independently and with limited integration. National research requires coordinated government support to transform knowledge into economic growth. Strong university research fosters

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innovation, with students trained in research methods alongside acquiring knowledge—a model called the "Professor-Student Research School."

Results

1. **Human Development and Competitiveness**

   Mongolia ranks 104th in the Human Development Index, 101st in the Global Competitiveness Index, 81st in the Doing Business Index, and 111th in the Corruption Perception Index (2025 data). These rankings highlight moderate progress but significant gaps in innovation capacity, workforce skills, and institutional efficiency.

2. **Higher Education and Research Capacity**

   Mongolia has over 70 higher education institutions. However, these institutions lack consistent alignment with national development strategies and global standards. Undergraduate programs focus more on teaching than research, limiting student participation in innovation.

3. **Human Capital Development**

   With a human capital coefficient of around 60%, Mongolia's education system must focus on quality improvements to prepare a competitive workforce. Countries in East Asia exceed 70% in human capital, underscoring Mongolia's need for targeted reforms.

4. **Institutional Gaps and Policy Challenges**

- Limited coordination among universities, research institutions, and industry reduces innovation.
- Quality assessment mechanisms, such as national testing and university rankings, are underdeveloped.
- Governance and funding models are unclear, with private universities driven by market forces and public universities underfunded.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen University Research Capacity**

- Create independent research centers within universities for integrated student participation.
- Allocate faculty time and resources to research activities beyond teaching.

2. **Enhance Human Capital Development**

- Develop curricula combining foundational scientific knowledge with emerging technology skills.
- Implement continuous faculty and administrative training programs.

3. **Institutional Reform and Governance**

- Clearly define roles of public and private universities.
- Introduce performance-based funding tied to research output and international rankings.

4. **Quality Assurance and Standardization**

- Revise national entrance exams to include technical and scientific skills.
- Develop a national university ranking system emphasizing research and graduate employability.
- Participate in international assessment programs like PISA.

5. **Integration of Science and Industry**

- Promote university-industry partnerships for applied research and technology transfer.
- Support commercialization of research via incubators and startup funding programs.

Conclusion

Mongolia's education and science sectors are at a critical juncture. While progress has been made, gaps in research integration, human capital development, and institutional governance limit the country's potential in a knowledge-based economy. Strengthening research-driven learning, improving quality assurance, and aligning institutional priorities with global standards are essential. These reforms will help Mongolia build intellectual and technological capacity, enhancing its competitiveness and sustainable socio-economic growth.

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