

MANAGERIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FEATURES OF A TURKISH UNIVERSITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. Newly independent states occur after the collapse of Soviet Union. A number of Turkish Higher Education Institutes were opened in Central Asia after this event. One of them is the International Atatürk Alatoo University. The International Atatürk Alatoo University is one of the first private universities established in the Kyrgyz Republic that started its educational activity in 1996. International Atatürk Alatoo University aims at being the best model for higher education depending on the highest education standards and norms in newly reshaping Central Asia. The International Atatürk Alatoo University has an education mentality motivating free thinking and personal skills in a world in which paradigms are rapidly changing. In this paper, in order to find the answer for 'what makes International Atatürk Alatoo University different from other institutes'; the strategies and features of International Atatürk Alatoo University were examined from the managerial and educational perspectives, interviews were made with students, lecturers and businessmen. Opinions of those people who have different University experiences (one International Atatürk Alatoo University experience and one local or International) were collected and discussed. By this way success factors and problems faced in the region were explained.

Keywords: former Soviet Union republics in Central Asia, private higher education, management of higher education, Kyrgyzstan, International Atatürk Alatoo University

1. Turkish Universities in Central Asia

Turkey is a country who has a strong historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic relationships with the newly independent Central Asian countries¹⁾. In order to be a bridge between those countries and Turkish Republic, some high schools and higher education institutes were opened by Turkish State and Turkish entrepreneurs. There are five Turkish universities in the region (Fig. 1). Two of them are established by the coparation of states:

1. Hoca Ahmet Yesevi University, Kazakhstan (Established by Kazakh and Turkish States);
2. Manas University, Kyrgyzstan (Established by Kyrgyz and Turkish States).

And three of them are established by Turkish entrepreneurs:

1. Süleyman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan
2. International Turkmen-Turkish University, Ashgabad, Turkmenstan
3. International Atatürk Alatoo University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Also there are some faculties or departments working under the local universities that sponsored and managed by Turkish enterprisiers. Besides those Turkish Higher Education Institutions, there are American, English, Russian, Uzbek, Arabic, German, etc., ones as well in the region. And also some other countries as South Korea and Iran have been planning to open new ones.

2. International Atatürk Alatoo University²⁾

2.1. History

International Atatürk Alatoo University was established by „Sebat“ International Educational Institution. „Sebat“ International Educational Institution is a private non-profit educational institution. Since February 1992 the Turkish Educational Association „Sebat“ has been acting on the basis of an agreement with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Culture. To date Sebat has opened 14 high schools, the International Ataturk Alatoo University, the International „Silk Road“ School, and the „Secom“ Center for language and computer study³⁾. On 15 April 1998 an official opening of the University was made with participation of Turkish Republic and Kyrgyz Republic Prime Ministers as Mesut Yilmaz and Kubanychbek Jumaliev. In 2002-2003 academic year, new building of the University was opened with the participation of the Kyrgyz Republic Prime Minister Nicolay Tanayev.



Fig. 1. Turkish universities in Central Asia

2.2. Key Issues

In this University, an outstanding group of instructors from Europe, USA, Pakistan, Turkey, Russia and Kyrgyzstan deliver lectures by using the same text-books and training appliances as used in American and European Universities. The main courses in all departments are instructed in English. In addition to English, local languages as Kyrgyz, Russian and Turkish languages as foreign languages are also taught. All graduates can speak those languages in advanced level and are able to use basic computer programs. The student body of the University consists of citizens of 11 different countries from Europe, Asia and Africa. And 22% of those students are International students. Totally, there are 750 students and all of them create friendly environment which is very important in getting excellent education.

The most important asset of the International Ataturk Alatau University is its profound, high-quality education. The university possesses an appropriate infrastructure and all the necessary facilities required for such high

standards. A conscientious attitude towards education and high discipline are the main principles.

2. 3. Goals

Goals of University were described as contribution to strengthen peace in the world by training young scientists, bringing up in the spirit of humanism and love for humanity and preparation of professionals who are able to support integration in all spheres. Also it wants students to be strongly bound for their motherlands, protect their material and spirit values and to be responsible firstly towards themselves, then towards family and society as well. The International Ataturk Alatoo University is reaching its goals with the help of such principles as a modern approach to education and close dialogue between instructors and students.

3. Problems in Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan and International Ataturk Alatoo University

There are some general problems for the Kyrgyz Higher Education System and some unique ones for the International Ataturk Alatoo University. As mentioned by Thomas Wolanin⁴⁾, there exist four main problems in Kyrgyz Higher Education System: 1) corruption; 2) not matching both with market and student demand; 3) too many similar higher education institutions; 4) low academic quality.

3.1. Corruption

Because of the low salaries in universities, corruption is one of the biggest problems in the area. Lecturers cannot earn enough to survive. And a ranking was prepared by the Ombudsman of Kyrgyzstan in order to show the corruption level at universities. But the International Ataturk Alatoo University is financed by student tuition fees and charities mainly from Turkish companies. So that University has not a financial problem. It can pay lecturers enough to have a normal level of living.

3.2. Market-Student Demand

There is an unbalanced situation between Kyrgyzstan's needs and University outputs. On one hand, there are lots of unemployed graduated people and on the other hand – lots of free working-places in some areas. Today, the basic qualifications for having a good job are having computer skills and

English language. But most of the local higher schools cannot supply those. International Ataturk Alatoo University satisfies these market demands. Most of the International Ataturk Alatoo University students start working before they graduate. Also number of applicants to International Ataturk Alatoo University increases day by day at a level of approximately 50% each year⁵⁾ (Fig. 2). This also shows that the International Ataturk Alatoo University satisfies student demands.

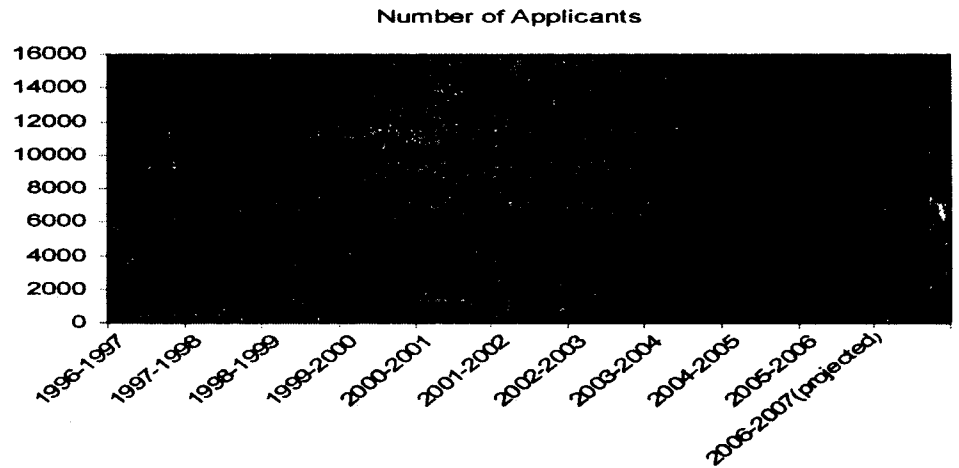


Fig. 2. Number of Applicants to International Ataturk Alatoo University, yearly

3.3. Similar Higher Schools

In Bishkek, a city of one million people, there are more than 30 higher education institutions. This is a meaningless number for that population. And those universities have similar programs and give similar education. But the International Ataturk Alatoo University is unique because of:

- giving education in four languages as English, Turkish, Kyrgyz and Russian;
- giving computer skills to all the students;
- giving lectures with well-qualified lecturers;
- giving importance for ethical values;
- providing a good infrastructure for education.

3.4. Academic Quality

Lecturers have to work in two or three places because of low salary and of course they do not have enough time for preparation in local universi-

ties⁶⁾. Also most of the lecturers got their degrees during Soviet times and some of them have failed to adopt to the new system today. But at International Ataturk Alatoo University, most of the lecturers got their degrees from Turkish and Western universities or have an international experience. And they can earn enough by just doing their jobs. So they can focus on their studies and students.

In 2004, The Center of Training and Consulting⁷⁾ made a program for recruiting staff for Shoro Company⁸⁾ (Table 1). If we ignore the universities with one or two participants (first four institutes), the students of International Ataturk Alatoo University got the highest score (the fifth column). The Nos 6-9 are the institutes above the average. The rest ones are the institutes under the average⁹⁾. The results of the program can be used as a tool for comparing academic quality of the universities. Also it is hard to find generally accepted tool for comparing universities in the country.

3.5. More Problems...

Beside those problems mentioned above, there are some others:

Firstly, the system is too flexible. Students can easily transfer to any other higher education institution. In some cases, being registered to a university for four years is enough to get a degree. This gives a big harm on the education discipline. You can not force students too much. If they get bored, they can change their institutions. And approximately just half of registered students can graduate from International Ataturk Alatoo University. This is an acceptable level though in order to keep the education level high. But with a string system, the productivity of education will increase. In International Ataturk Alatoo University system, a student has to be successful in four languages. This is not easy for an average student.

Secondly, total responsibilities of students are too much. The student should have approximately 30 hours of lectures weekly. But in Western universities, a student must have approximately 20 hours of lectures. A Kyrgyz student spend 50% more for lectures hours. Additionally, they have homework and other responsibilities. All this limits the students. They just focus on completing their responsibilities or searching some other ways to get a diploma.

Table 1. Results of Recruiting Program

No:	University	2 Tour	%	1 Tour	%	Regis- tered	%
1	Moscow Institute of Entrepreneurship and Law	1	100	1	100	1	100
2	Bishkek Subsidiary of Social Institute of Moscow	1	50	2	100	2	100
3	Diplomatic Academy	1	50	1	50	2	100
4	International Academy of Business Law, Finance and Accounting	1	50	1	50	2	100
6	Kyrgyz Russian Slavic Univesity	19	24	33	42	79	100
7	American University in Central Asia	9	21	16	38	42	100
8	Academy of Management under President	11	29	14	37	38	100
9	Kyrgyz Russian Pedogy Academy	1	17	2	33	6	100
10	Kyrgyz Politechnik Univesity	7	9	20	26	76	100
11	Kyrgyz National Univesity	16	7	56	26	217	100
12	Arabaev University	4	6	15	23	66	100
13	International University of Kyrgyzstan	2	4	11	23	47	100
14	Bishkek Humanitarian University	2	4	11	21	53	100
15	Kyrgyz Medical Academy	1	5	3	15	20	100
16	Constraction and Arhitecture University of KG	2	5	5	13	38	100
17	Kyrgyz Turkish Univetsity „Manas“	3	5	7	12	58	100

18	Bishkek Academy of Management, Finance and Economy	1	10	1	10	10	100
	Total	91	12	211	27	783	100

4. Management Issues

The higher education environment is undergoing far-reaching change. Institutions are facing changes in the balance between state and market, global and local, public and private, mass education and individualization, competition and cooperation. To cope with these challenges, International Ataturk Alatoo University intends to set up an ongoing process of quality assurance (ISO standards and TQM), guidance, reflection, analysis and sharing of best practices among professionals in the field of education. Such a network is intended to enable the University to keep up with the latest innovations in education and in managing higher education institutions and enjoy even greater scope for information exchange, experience and professionalism using an interactive, dynamic approach.

The activities of the University focus on two main policy areas: the governance and management of the institution and its integration into the environment.

Strategic management which is defined as the allocation of resources to programmed activities calculated to achieve a set of goals underlines the University's overall strategy. In that sense, the strategic themes that are accepted by the University are:

- To develop a stronger „Student-Centered“ approach;
- To become more responsive to employers' needs;
- To serve students' special needs:
 - minorities;
 - geographically remote areas;
 - academically poorly prepared;
- To improve retention and graduation rates.

4.1. The Tools Used for Better Management

4.1.1. Ensuring that the institution is financially monitored efficiently managed

Managing human resources: today the demand for – and requirement – education are growing all the time, and this calls for a genuine human resource policy. But for reasons of tradition or special status, many institutions have little room for maneuver when it comes to personnel management. Attracting, retaining and motivating high-quality teaching-research staff and administrators becomes a challenge with a limited budget.

Budgeting is making decisions that distribute resources to enable the institution. The budget is the device by which an organization

- carries out its plans
- signals its priorities

It is the primary mechanism through which positive incentives and change can be created.

Linking planning and budgeting however is so difficult because:

- planning is typically conducted at the strategic level;
- budgeting is typically focused at the operational level.

Thus there is a need to develop and approach to strategic budgeting. Strategic decisions focus on the creation and maintenance of institution capacity. Operational decisions focus on the utilization of that capacity in ways designed to accomplish specified purposes (Table 2).

In order that the budget responds to the responsibilities of institutional leaders and link to the strategic plan, it is suggested that:

1. The budget be given a structure that explicitly reflects the areas of responsibility of strategic level decision-makers – that it contains the following components:

- Base/Continuation-the Status Quo Adjusted for Price Changes;
- Strategic Initiatives;
- Contingency;
- Asset Maintenance;
- Asset Creation/Deletion – Intentional Changes in the Asset

Structure.

2. The budget process requires a guidelines to be established around each component prior to initiating unit level budget-building.

Table 2. Costs/Revenues

Costs	Revenues
Assets	Tuition
Personnel	Appropriations
Facilities	Government Grants
Equipment	Private Gifts
Collections	Endowment
Students	Sales and Services
Finances	Other
Program	Reserves
Consumables	
Services	
Supplies	
Utilities	
Contingency	
New initiatives	

2.2.2. Sharing and disseminating information and experience

Joint events (e.g. seminars, conferences and workshops) provide University personnel with access to a genuine network of professionals in the field of education. This gives them the opportunity to share and compare the management policies and practices of a variety of institutions in an international setting using an interactive approach. Disseminating examples of successful innovation and developing a knowledge base are ways of building the capacity and tools required for institutional management.

Academic conferences are one of the key issues in higher education for sharing information, experience, opportunities for new cooperation, and meeting with scholars. Every year International Ataturk Alatoo University holds several International conferences in the fields of management, international relations, computers and electronics, and language teaching. These events are being organized in cooperation with some governmental bodies like Kyrgyz Government, Kyrgyz Ministry of Education, and with some local Higher Education Institutions like Kyrgyz Police Academy, Kyrgyz Russian Slavonic University, and foreign universities like University of Technology Zurich and with International organizations like NATO and TICA.

In this way, lots of academicians from several countries have visited Kyrgyzstan and met with Kyrgyz scholars and shared their opinions and experience.

2.2.3. Managing and supporting University research

University research is caught between the demands and needs of civil society, universities, business, industry and government. So finding a balance to ensure that the necessary funding, training and administrative support is available for research to function properly becomes an important issue.

4.1.4. Developing new tools

The development of information and communication technologies offers new potential for dispensing and acquiring knowledge. Yet the infrastructure and human capital required to realize this potential are complex and often expensive which makes it a challenge to be met. The most realistic approach to e-learning, taking into account the risks weighing on institutions in this field is also being searched for this matter.

4.1.5. Monitoring Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization affects the wider environment of higher education. In this sense, the implications for University and the demands in terms of skills and the provision of educational and training services become important issues.

The regions are vital players in promoting sustainable economic development and social cohesion. Optimizing the links between the University and the regions so as to fostering their mutual support and development gains extra importance as well for this matter.

5. Opinions about International Ataturk Alatoo University

At a conference at Georgetown University in 2001, Thomas Michel, explained his opinion related to the International Ataturk Alatoo University and high schools of Sebat as follows¹⁰):

- These schools were ones of the most dynamic and worthwhile educational enterprises;
- The students had very good English and seemed equally competent in Russian and Turkish, in addition to their native Kyrgyz language;

- Lecturers sought to communicate students with universal values such as honesty, hard work, harmony, and conscientious service.

Demir et al.¹⁾ in their study of Turkish schools in Kyrgyzstan have made interviews with parents, students and teachers of the education institutions and determined three major characteristics of Turkish schools in the region:

- quality of education which includes positive attitudes of the teachers toward the students and parents;
- teaching four languages;
- training well-bred individuals.

Most of graduates of International Ataturk Alatau University work in foreign companies in Kyrgyzstan. Those foreign companies prefer to hire them because they have:

- foreign and also local language skills in a good way;
- computer skills;
- experience with foreign people;
- ability to adopt foreign working styles.

In order to determine what makes International Ataturk Alatau University different from other higher education institutions in the region, interviews were taken from students. Results of interviews with International Ataturk Alatau University students are as follows:

- A safe and clean environment for education;
- High academic quality;
- No oppress, a friendly atmosphere;
- No corruption;
- International environment.

Similar interviews were taken from lecturers. Results of interviews with lecturers are as follows:

- A good infrastructure for education;
- Harmony between administrative staff and academic staff;
- Student oriented education;
- Using Western style;
- Using new technologies, tools approaches;
- Discipline in education;
- Good education system.

Notes

¹ C. E. Demir, A. Balci, F. Akkok. The Role of Turkish Schools in the Educational System and Social Transformation of Central Asia Countries: The Case of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asia Survey*. 19(1), 141–155.

² International Ataturk Alatoo University, <http://www.iaau.edu.kg>

³ Sebat International Educational Institution, <http://www.sebat.edu.kg>

⁴ T. Wolanin. Higher Education Reform in Kyrgyzstan. *Intern. Higher Educ. The Boston College Center for International Higher Education*, Number 26, Winter 2002, p. 8–10.

⁵ *Handbook of International Ataturk Alatoo University*, April 2006, p. 29.

⁶ B.A. Isabekova. Improvement of Conversional English Teaching Methodology in Kyrgyzstan Universities. In: *International Conference on the Importance of Efficient Foreign Language Teaching and Its Application in Central Asia Countries During the Transformation Period*, 13 May 2004, Bishkek: International Ataturk Alatoo University, p. 24.

⁷ The Center of Training & Consulting's new web address: <http://www.strategs.com>

⁸ Shoro Company is one of the biggest beverage companies in the region, operating in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and China, <http://www.shoro.kg>

⁹ <http://www.strateg.org/modules.php?name=content&pa=show-page&pid=113>

¹⁰ T. Michel. Fethullah Gulen as Educator. In: *Islamic Modernities: Fethullah Gulen and Contemporary Islam*, Georgetown University Conference, 26–27 April 2001, <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/review/a1222.html>

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