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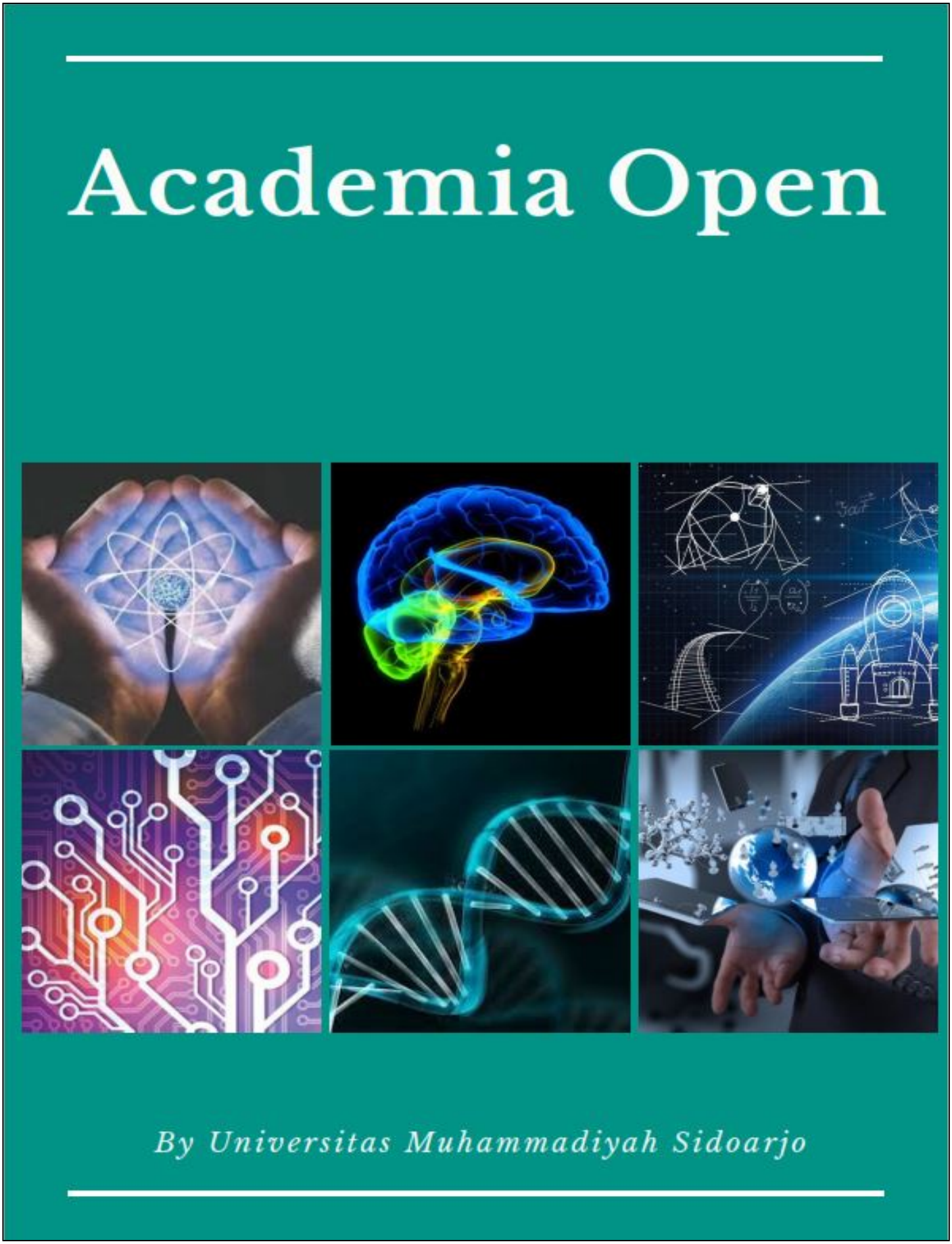

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Graduate Competency Patterns for Strategic Differentiation in Bukhara HEIs

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Abstract

General Background: In today's global knowledge economy, the competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly depends on their ability to align graduate competencies with labor market expectations. **Specific Background:** This is particularly relevant in regional contexts like Bukhara, Uzbekistan, where institutions must adapt to evolving demands while preserving traditional education values. **Knowledge Gap:** Despite global emphasis on employability, limited empirical research has analyzed how specific competencies influence HEI competitiveness in transitional economies. **Aims:** This study investigates the impact of five key graduate competencies—communication, creativity, self-competence, IT competence, and social competence—on employer evaluations to inform strategic competitiveness management. **Results:** Using data from 363 employers and regression analysis, the findings reveal that communication and creativity are the most significant predictors, explaining 47.9% of the variance in employer ratings. Institution-specific models further highlight varied strengths across five HEIs. **Novelty:** The study provides a competency-based, data-driven framework for HEI competitiveness management that differentiates institutional profiles rather than applying uniform standards. **Implications:** These insights offer HEI leaders targeted guidance for curriculum development and strategic planning, demonstrating how employer feedback can serve as a powerful tool for institutional enhancement and labor market alignment.

Highlight :

- Communication and creativity are the strongest predictors of graduate employability.
- Each university exhibits unique competency strengths, requiring tailored improvement strategies.
- Competency-based employer evaluations support evidence-driven competitiveness management.

Keywords : Higher Education, Graduate Competencies, Institutional Competitiveness, Employer Evaluation, Regression Analysis

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Introduction

In the context of rapid transformations in the global education sector, the issue of competitiveness among higher education institutions (HEIs) has become a central concern for educational policy and institutional strategy [1]. The ability of universities to maintain a stable position in the education market, align with labor market demands, and continuously improve their academic output is now closely tied to how effectively they manage their competitiveness [2]. For institutions in regions like Bukhara, this is particularly pressing given the need to balance traditional educational models with emerging expectations for innovation and graduate employability. Competitiveness management in HEIs requires robust mechanisms to assess institutional performance, identify strategic strengths and weaknesses, and guide data-driven decision-making [3]. One promising approach involves the use of competency-based evaluations, particularly those grounded in employer feedback. By examining how graduates perform in real-world settings, specifically through the lens of essential competencies such as communication, creativity, adaptability, technological literacy, and teamwork, HEIs can gather critical insights into the effectiveness of their academic programs and student preparation strategies [4]. This study explores the use of such employer-based competency assessments as a tool for managing the competitiveness of HEIs in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Drawing on a structured survey of 363 employers across various industries, the research applies regression analysis to measure how different graduate competencies impact overall employer satisfaction. The goal is to identify which competencies most strongly influence graduate success and how this data can support strategic competitiveness management across institutions [5], [6]. By comparing five universities in the region, the study aims to uncover institutional disparities, highlight areas for targeted improvement, and propose actionable recommendations for HEI leadership. In doing so, it contributes to the growing discourse on evidence-based management in higher education and offers a model for using labor market feedback to enhance institutional quality and reputation.

Methods

A. Research Design This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to evaluate the perceived competitiveness of higher education institution (HEI) graduates from the perspective of employers. The aim was to identify which key graduate competencies most significantly contribute to their overall employability and to develop institutional strategies for managing HEI competitiveness.

B. Participants and Sampling The research was conducted across five HEIs located in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. A total of 363 employers from various sectors were surveyed. Respondents included managers from lower, middle, and upper levels, representing a broad cross-section of employers who have had recent experience with graduates from the participating institutions. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to target employers who have direct knowledge of graduate performance in the workplace.

C. Instrument and Measures The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “very poor” and 5 represented “excellent.” The questionnaire focused on five core competencies:

1. X_1 – Communication: Oral and written communication abilities
2. X_2 – Creativity: Problem-solving and critical thinking skills
3. X_3 – Self-Competence (Autocompetence): Adaptability and self-development
4. X_4 – IT Competence: Use of modern technologies and digital tools
5. X_5 – Social Competence: Teamwork, collaboration, and leadership

The dependent variable (Y) was defined as the employer’s overall rating of graduate potential and job readiness on a 10-point scale.

D. Data Collection Procedure Data were collected via in-person and electronic surveys distributed through partner organizations and employer networks affiliated with the participating HEIs. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

E. Data Analysis Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analysis included:

1. **Descriptive Statistics** to assess the central tendencies and variability of competency ratings.
2. **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis** to determine the relationship between the independent competency variables (X_1– X_5) and the dependent variable (Y).
3. **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)** to evaluate the overall significance of the regression model.
4. **Multicollinearity Diagnostics** including Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values, to ensure the independence of predictor variables.

Regression models were developed both in aggregate (across all HEIs) and separately for each institution, to allow

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for institution-specific strategic insights.

Results

A. Descriptive Statistics The descriptive analysis (Table 1) showed that employers rated graduates' overall potential (Y) at an average of 7.39 out of 10 (SD = 1.77), indicating a generally positive perception of HEI graduates in Bukhara. Among the five measured competencies, communication (X_1) received the highest mean score (4.25, SD = 0.77), while creativity (X_2) was the lowest-rated competency (3.66, SD = 1.02).

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Y - overall competence	363	8	2	10	7.39	1.770	3.133
X1 – Communication	363	4	1	5	4.25	0.769	0.592
X2 – Creativity	363	4	1	5	3.66	1.022	1.044
X3 – Autocompetence	363	4	1	5	3.77	0.971	0.942
X4 – IT Competence	363	4	1	5	3.98	0.984	0.969
X5 - Social Competence	363	4	1	5	3.78	0.952	0.907
Valid N (listwise)	363						

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

All competency scores ranged between 3.66 and 4.25, suggesting that employers viewed graduate skillsets as being moderately to well-developed [7]. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistency in employer responses.

B. Regression Model Summary A multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the predictive power of graduate competencies on the overall employability score (Y). The model was statistically significant (Table 2)

1. **R = 0.692**, **R^2 = 0.479**, **Adjusted R^2 = 0.472**
2. **F(5, 357) = 65.64, p < 0.001**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0,692a	0,479	0,472	1,286

Table 2. *Model summary*

These results suggest that 47.9% of the variance in employer ratings of graduate potential can be explained by the five assessed competencies. The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y_{total} = 0.082 + 0.446\ X_1 + 0.417\ X_2 + 0.316\ X_3 + 0.371\ X_4 + 0.322\ X_5$$

All predictors were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and positively associated with the dependent variable. Communication (X_1) and creativity (X_2) were the strongest predictors, based on their standardized coefficients [8].

C. ANOVA and Multicollinearity Diagnostics To assess the statistical significance of the overall regression model, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed. As shown in the ANOVA table below, the regression model is highly significant with an F-value of 65.643 and a p-value less than 0.001 (Table 3).

Model			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
1	Regression	543.185	5	108.637	65.643	.000b
	Residual	590.821	357	1.655		
	Total	1134.006	362			

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Table 3. *ANOVA*

The F-test evaluates whether the explained variance in the model is significantly greater than the unexplained variance. Since the significance value is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05 ($p < 0.001$), we conclude that the set of independent variables (X1–X5) collectively contributes to explaining variations in the dependent variable (Y). In other words, the regression model is statistically valid and not a result of random chance. In order to confirm the independence of the predictor variables and the validity of the model coefficients, multicollinearity diagnostics were also conducted [9]. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Condition Index were used to evaluate the degree of multicollinearity — i.e., whether any of the independent variables are excessively correlated with each other, which could distort the reliability of the regression coefficients. The VIF values for all predictors ranged between 1.257 and 1.400, which are well below the commonly accepted threshold of 10, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model. Further insight is provided by the Eigenvalue and Condition Index diagnostics shown below (Table 4).

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions					
				(Constant)	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5
1	1	5.83	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2	0.045	11.326	0.03	0.01	0.79	0	0.23	0
	3	0.041	11.902	0	0.01	0.12	0	0.35	0.63
	4	0.038	12.468	0.01	0	0.07	0.94	0.11	0.06
	5	0.03	13.897	0.24	0.2	0	0.05	0.31	0.31
	6	0.016	19.226	0.72	0.78	0	0.01	0	0

Table 4. *Multicollinearity Diagnostics*

The Condition Index remained below 30 for all dimensions except one (Dimension 6 = 19.226), further confirming that severe multicollinearity is absent. While a few dimensions showed modest variance inflation (e.g., Dimension 5), none of the Eigenvalues fell below the critical 0.01 threshold that would indicate high collinearity [10]. Additionally, the variance proportions for multiple variables within the same dimension were not simultaneously high, which would have suggested shared multicollinearity risk. Taken together, these results provide strong statistical assurance that the model's predictors are independent and the estimates are robust. This allows for valid interpretation of the regression coefficients and supports the model's use for institutional competitiveness analysis [11].

D. Institutional Comparisons To understand how graduate competencies and perceived employability vary across institutions, mean scores were compared for each of the five HEIs included in the study:**Bukhara State University (BSU)**, **Bukhara State Medical Institute (BSMI)**, **Bukhara State Pedagogical Institute (BSPI)**, **Bukhara Engineering-Technological Institute (BETI)**, and **Bukhara Institute of Natural Resources Management (BINRM)**. The results are presented in

HEI		X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	Y
Bukhara State Pedagogical Institute	Mean	3.93	3.16	3.87	3.45	3.40	6.75
	Std. Deviation	.663	.898	.795	.765	.894	1.669
Bukhara State Medical Institute	Mean	4.57	3.49	4.04	3.96	3.95	7.63
	Std. Deviation	.768	.889	.876	.862	.974	1.694
Bukhara State University	Mean	4.32	4.09	3.55	4.15	4.00	7.64
	Std. Deviation	.802	.968	.920	.934	.899	1.839
Bukhara Engineering-Technological Institute	Mean	4.23	3.90	3.94	4.08	3.76	7.52
	Std. Deviation	.721	1.044	1.206	1.192	1.035	1.827
Bukhara Institute of Natural Resources Management	Mean	4.03	3.34	3.42	4.07	3.56	7.07
	Std. Deviation	.694	1.027	.855	.998	.815	1.639

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Total	Mean	4.25	3.66	3.77	3.98	3.78	7.39
	Std. Deviation	.769	1.022	.971	.984	.952	1.770

Table 5. *Institutional Comparisons*

E. Institution-Specific Regression Models To better understand the unique factors influencing graduate competitiveness at the institutional level, separate multiple regression models were developed for each HEI [12]. These models provide insight into the relative importance of each competency in shaping employers' overall assessment of graduates and help identify strategic priorities for institutional improvement. The regression model for BSMI identified creativity as the most influential factor (B = 0.924, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the value employers place on graduates' ability to engage in innovative problem-solving and critical thinking [13]. Other moderate influences included self-competence (B = 0.411) and social competence (B = 0.192), though IT and communication showed weaker effects.

$$Y_{BSMI} = 0.526 + 0.2X_1 + 0.924X_2 + 0.411X_3 + 0.137X_4 + 0.192X_5$$

This suggests that to sustain and improve its competitive edge, BSMI should continue strengthening its creativity-focused curricula, particularly through clinical simulations, innovation labs, and interdisciplinary projects. For BSU, the dominant predictor was communication competence (B = 0.985, $p < 0.001$), followed by self-competence (B = 0.474). While creativity, IT, and social skills had some effect, they were statistically less impactful. This indicates that employers value BSU graduates' clarity in expression, persuasive ability, and interpersonal communication.

$$Y_{BSU} = -0.53 + 0.985X_1 + 0.251X_2 + 0.474X_3 + 0.147X_4 + 0.149X_5$$

To remain competitive, BSU should maintain its emphasis on public speaking, writing, and soft skills, while bolstering digital and team-based competencies. The regression model for BSPI revealed IT competence as the most significant predictor (B = 0.673, $p = 0.014$), indicating that digital literacy plays a key role in how employers evaluate the institution's graduates. Though creativity and self-competence also contributed moderately, communication and social skills had lower influence [14].

$$Y_{BSPI} = -0.423 + 0.331X_1 + 0.407X_2 + 0.438X_3 + 0.673X_4 + 0.165X_5$$

For BSPI, a strategic focus on digital education tools, e-learning pedagogies, and hands-on IT training could significantly enhance graduate competitiveness. BETI's model showed a balanced influence of three key competencies: creativity (B = 0.462), self-competence (B = 0.419), and social competence (B = 0.397). This profile suggests that employers see BETI graduates as needing to integrate innovation, independent learning, and collaboration to succeed.

$$Y_{BETI} = 0.478 + 0.134X_1 + 0.462X_2 + 0.419X_3 + 0.375X_4 + 0.397X_5$$

BETI should invest in project-based learning, cross-functional teamwork, and mentoring programs to further develop these key areas. In the BINRM model, social competence (B = 0.735) and IT competence (B = 0.512) emerged as the strongest predictors. This reflects a demand for graduates who can work effectively in multidisciplinary teams and adapt to the digitalization of resource management industries.

$$Y_{BINRM} = -0.358 + 0.402X_1 + 0.159X_2 + 0.168X_3 + 0.512X_4 + 0.735X_5$$

Strategic improvement efforts should center on enhancing team collaboration, leadership training, and technology-integrated coursework. These institution-specific models illustrate the heterogeneous nature of graduate strengths and help guide targeted interventions. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, HEI leaders can use these findings to develop tailored management strategies that reinforce their existing advantages and address competency gaps.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the strategic value of competency-based evaluation in managing the competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs). By assessing how different graduate competencies influence employer perceptions across five HEIs in Bukhara, this research provides empirical evidence that can directly inform institutional planning and development [15].

A. Key Competencies Driving Competitiveness The general regression model showed that all five competencies — communication, creativity, self-competence, IT competence, and social competence — significantly contribute to graduate competitiveness. Notably, communication (B = 0.446) and creativity (B = 0.417) emerged as the strongest predictors of overall graduate ratings. This aligns with global research emphasizing the increasing importance of soft skills and innovation in the modern labor market (Yorke, 2006; OECD, 2012). These findings reinforce the need

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for HEIs to prioritize not just technical knowledge, but also interpersonal and cognitive agility in their curricula.

B. Institutional Strengths and Strategic Focus Areas The institution-specific regression models revealed distinctive competency profiles that reflect each HEI's educational orientation and current positioning in the labor market:

1. **BSU** demonstrated strength in communication and social competence, indicating a well-rounded graduate profile and suggesting that reinforcing writing, speaking, and teamwork programs could maintain its leading position.
2. **BSMI's** strong association with creativity suggests a unique institutional advantage in fostering problem-solving and innovation — critical in clinical and applied fields.
3. **BSPI**, despite its lower overall rating, showed the greatest potential in IT competence, pointing to a clear path for institutional renewal through digital integration.
4. **BETI** displayed balanced performance across most competencies, suggesting it can position itself as a model for interdisciplinary training and adaptability.
5. **BINRM** showed particular strengths in social and IT competence, reflecting growing employer expectations in environmental and resource sectors for teamwork and tech-savvy professionals.

These insights allow HEI administrators to align development strategies with market demands, rather than rely on abstract indicators of quality.

C. Management Implications The study advances the concept of competitiveness management in HEIs by showing how labor market feedback can inform internal decision-making. Institutions can use this data to:

1. Develop targeted training modules in weak competency areas.
2. Allocate resources more strategically to departments influencing top-rated competencies.
3. Create institution-specific KPIs that reflect both national policy goals and local employer needs.

Moreover, embedding these insights into performance-based funding models or accreditation frameworks could further institutionalize quality enhancement mechanisms .

D. Limitations and Future Research While the study provides valuable diagnostic insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of employer perception data, though practical, may not fully capture actual graduate performance. Second, the sample is region-specific and may not generalize across other contexts in Uzbekistan or beyond. Finally, this research focused on perceived competencies rather than actual learning outcomes or employment data. Future research could address these gaps by integrating graduate tracer studies, longitudinal performance assessments, and cross-regional comparisons. Additionally, incorporating qualitative interviews with employers could offer deeper insights into how competencies are interpreted in sector-specific contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant role that graduate competencies play in shaping the competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bukhara. Through a robust quantitative approach involving employer-based evaluations and regression modeling, it becomes clear that competencies such as communication, creativity, self-competence, IT skills, and social competence are essential for enhancing graduate employability and, by extension, institutional performance. The overall regression model, which explained nearly 48% of the variance in employer assessments, confirms that employers' perceptions are not arbitrary but rooted in specific, observable skill sets that graduates either possess or lack. Institutions that align their academic strategies with these labor market expectations are better positioned to enhance their reputations and stakeholder trust. What distinguishes this research is its multi-layered analysis, which goes beyond generalized trends to offer institution-specific diagnostic models. By highlighting the unique strengths and weaknesses of each HEI, the study equips university administrators with precise data for designing competency-enhancing interventions. For instance, while Bukhara State University excels in communication, Bukhara State Medical Institute demonstrates strength in creativity—a competence increasingly valued in clinical and interdisciplinary fields. Similarly, BSPI's comparative advantage in IT competence reflects the rising demand for digital skills in educational environments. This differentiation in institutional profiles underscores the necessity for customized management strategies rather than a uniform approach to competitiveness.

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