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Encyclopedia of
International Higher
Education Systems
and Institutions

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Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Mongolia



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Higher Education System Development

Mongolia is a sovereign state, located in Eastern Asia bordering with Russia and China. Covering 1,553,556 km², Mongolia is the 18th largest country in the world by land mass and has a population of over three million people. Mongolia is one of the fastest growing emerging economies, where the higher education sector is seen as a crucial means to help accelerate sustainable economic and social development. The Mongolian higher education has experienced a remarkable expansion since its transition from planned economy to open-market economy when Mongolia became a democratic country in 1990. Between 1991 and 2017, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) grew from 14 to 95, and gross enrollment ratio in tertiary level grew from 14.0% to 69.0% (Table 1).

The total number of tertiary students rose from some 20,000 to about 150,000 during the same period (Fig. 1).

Higher learning in Mongolia has been closely related to Mongolia's rich history of statehood since its establishment of the Khunnu Empire in

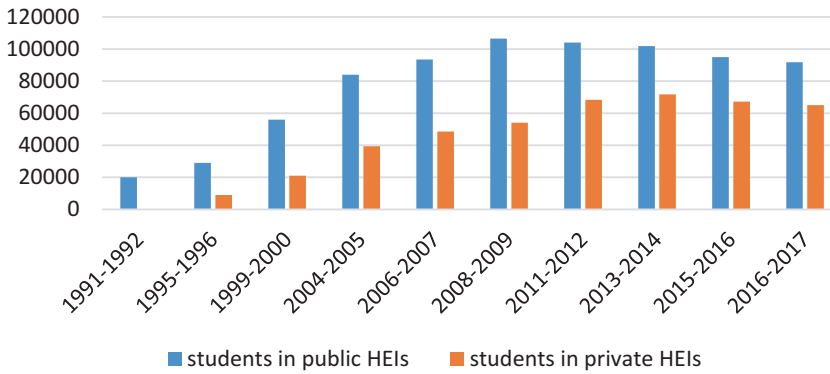
the third century BCE and the Great Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century founded by Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan). Higher learning was provided mainly through tutoring to educate royal and noble families' members to lead the Empire. Talented foreign scholars and tutors were often hired to educate royal heirs and aristocrats' children. The higher learning was strengthened by Khubilai Khaan, Chinggis Khaan's grandson (1215–1294), through religious education when he promoted the Buddhist teachings in the Mongol Empire. The ultimate goal of higher learning was directed toward enlightenment, eliminating human ignorance. Ten subject studies including linguistics, logics, arts, medicine, philosophy, rhetoric, mathematics, stylistics, music, and astrology were taught to disciples at monasteries and home tutoring with Buddhist monks till the early twentieth century when Mongolia became a communist country.

The first modern university in Mongolia, the National University of Mongolia (NUM), was established in 1942. Some of the initial faculties of NUM spun off into separate universities, including the Agricultural University, the Medical University, as well as the Mongolian University of Science and Technology and the University of Humanities. During the communist era, specialized personnel were trained in the state universities for economic development. The highest achieving students were also sent to be educated in other communist countries. There was much influence from the Soviet model on academic

Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Mongolia, Table 1 Number of public and private HEIs: selected years, 1991–2017

	1991–1992	1993–1994	1998–1999	2000–2001	2004–2005	2007–2008	2009–2010	2010–2011	2012–2013	2014–2015	2016–2017
Total HEIs	14	57	104	172	184	162	146	113	99	101	95
Public HEIs	14	32	33	38	49	47	42	16	15	16	17
Private HEIs including branches of foreign HEIs	0	25	71	134	135	115	104	97	84	85	78

Source: MECS (2002) and MECSS (2017)



Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Mongolia, Fig. 1 Number of students in public and private HEIs: selected years, 1991–2017. (Source: Sodnomtseren 2002; MECSS 2017)

program content and delivery during the 70-year period of communism.

The 1990s saw strong impact of political change on higher education. When Mongolia transitioned to democracy, values of autonomy and academic freedom of universities were redefined and reflected in legal documents. Mongolia embarked a policy of decentralization of its higher education, aiming for building autonomous and self-sufficient higher education institutions (Munkh-Erdene 2008). Reform actions were implemented to introduce academic degree system and credit-based system, promote self-financing of universities, and upgrade academic programs to reach international standards. Moreover, the legalization of private higher education resulted in the proliferation of private HEIs which grew from 0 to 129 in 2005 (MECSS 2017).

In 2017, a total of 157,138 students enrolled in Mongolia's 95 HEIs. The 58.4% of the total students studied at 17 state-owned HEIs, 41.4% at 74 private HEIs, and 0.2% at 4 branches of foreign HEIs. According to the Higher Education Law, the institutions of higher learning are divided into three categories: university, institute, and college. A major difference between these three categories is that universities offer a full range of degree programs, while institutes offer programs up to master's degree and colleges offer vocationally oriented bachelor's degree as well as nondegree programs. By the type of higher education institutions, 17.8% of the total HEIs are

universities, 69.3% are institutes, 7.9% are colleges, and 5.0% are branches of foreign HEIs (MECSS 2017).

Higher Education Governance

The Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Sports (MECSS) has overall responsibility for higher education in Mongolia at the system level. Public universities are directly accountable to MECSS and regulated by the Higher Education Law and a number of statutes. Mongolia adopted the shared governance system inspired from that of the USA in the mid-1990s in order to enable its higher education institutions autonomous and self-sufficient at the institutional level (Munkh-Erdene 2008). However, the state-run universities haven't achieved desired autonomy due to different ruling parties' interests and short-term political reversals. Higher education policy, law, and regulations regarding governance have changed back and forth which have had bad effect on leadership, management, and overall performance of state universities.

The majority of HEIs is small private HEIs where their presidents are appointed by the owner or are themselves the owner. These institutions have rather symbolic governing boards, so decision-making is mainly made by their owners.

In 1998, the Mongolian National Council for Education Accreditation (MNCEA) was established to conduct institutional and program

Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Mongolia, Table 2 Education share of the total public expenditure

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Education share of the total public expenditure/in billion tugriks	978.5	1147.6	1112.2	1305.8
Higher education sector/in billion tugriks	88.6	158.1	95.3	123.6
Higher education sector/by percentage	9.1	13.8	8.6	9.4

Source: MECSS (2018)

accreditation. Institutional accreditation is compulsory, while program accreditation is voluntary. As MNCEA's board is chaired by the Minister himself/herself, it is not entirely independent agency from the Ministry.

Higher Education Finance

Although education share of the total public expenditure has remained consistently high, 18.3% (MECSS 2017), only about 10.0% of spending is allocated to the higher education sector (Table 2).

As a result, Mongolia's higher education sector is financed largely by private expenditures through the payment of tuition fees, donations, and income generation (World Bank 2010). Tuition fees are the largest source of financing for public higher education institutions, accounting for 70–85% of the total funds (Annual reports of public HEIs 2016). The state budget mainly finances operation costs of the public HEIs including utilities, such as electricity and heating.

The student financial aid is provided from the semigovernmental agency, the State Training Fund (STF). The financial aid provided from the STF includes tuition loans, grants, and scholarships. As of 2016, about 30% of students enrolled in higher education received some type of financial aid (Posadas and Munkhbayar 2016).

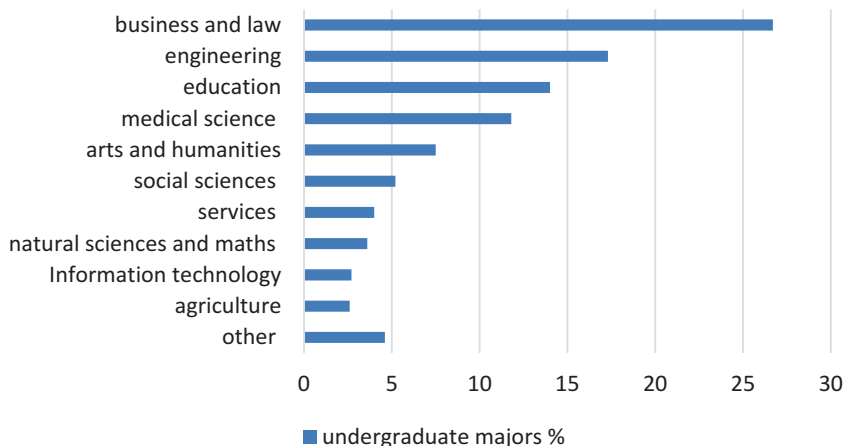
Academic Profession, Students, and Administrative Staff

The total number of employees in Mongolian higher education sector is 12,740, and 54.3% (6917) of it is full-time academics (MECSS

2017). Among the full-time faculty, female members outnumber male colleagues composing 59.7% of the total. The 64.2% of full-time faculty members work at state-run HEIs whereas 35.5% at private HEIs and the remaining 0.3% at branches of foreign institutions. The 29.4% of the total full-time academics held PhD, and the majority of them (65.9%) had master's degree (MECSS 2017).

Typical academic positions are defined by the Higher Education Law as assistant lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and professor. By the position categories, 7.3% of the total academics are teaching assistants, 41.6% are lecturers, 29.5% are senior lecturers, 12.0% are associate professors, and 9.7% are professors. The rapid expansion of higher education led to an overall dramatic increase of university staff, and junior academic positions expanded much faster than the senior ones (Sukhbaatar 2014). As a result, HEIs employ a large portion of assistant lecturers and lecturers who are in their earlier careers of the profession, while the professoriate comprises less than a quarter of academic community (Sukhbaatar 2014). The situation is much more evident in private institutions compared to those in state-owned universities (Sukhbaatar 2014).

Undergraduate admission requires students to sit the national examination of university entrance (commonly known as *EЭИИ*). Top programs require higher scores of the examination. In 2017, entrants into Mongolia's higher education institutions were as follows: 84.8% at bachelor's, 12.8% at master's, and 2.4% at doctoral levels (MECSS 2017). Top four majors students enrolled are business and law, engineering, education, and medical science (Fig. 2).



Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Mongolia, Fig. 2 Undergraduate majors. (Source: MECSS 2017)

Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

Higher education institutions of the country offer, typically, a 4-year bachelor's, 2-year master's, and 4-year doctoral degree programs. The Mongolian higher education has been working on addressing the issue of low-cost, low-quality academic programs which are often not relevant to the labor market. Graduate unemployment is a major issue given that an estimated 40% of higher education graduates were unemployed (MECSS 2017). There were too many narrowly specialized programs which were even duplicated within the single institution as well as across all HEIs. In order to address the issues around the academic programs, Mongolian universities have been undertaking major curriculum reforms since 2013, primarily by placing more emphasis on upgrading general education, promoting outcome-based education, and broadening narrowly defined undergraduate programs (Orkhon 2018). Even though program structures were changed, the courses were designed and delivered in ways that were still content-heavy, incoherent, and teacher-centered. Consequently, to address the issue, HEIs are establishing faculty development centers and internal quality assurance units to facilitate deep-rooted implementation of the curriculum reform. The development of internal quality assurance is an important agenda

in Mongolian higher education as it is expected to support the curriculum review process and employability of graduates.

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