

**FROM I-HOPE TO U-HOPE: PROSPECTS FOR JAPAN-UZBEKISTAN
INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA-GOVERNMENT COOPERATION THROUGH
ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Policy transfer research asks what is transferred, but international cooperation in education also requires asking whether a transferred program is reproduced locally. This paper examines U-HOPE, an entrepreneurship education program transferred from Yamagata University to Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, within a national policy framework and commissioned by a state-affiliated bank. Drawing on the author's first-hand involvement in 2025 as an interviewer and a team mentor, it finds that selection is the interface at which policy and pedagogy meet, and that continuity was embedded in the educational design itself through mentor training, tiered certification, and the return of graduates as instructors.

Keywords:

policy transfer, entrepreneurship education, industry-academia-government cooperation, Japan-Uzbekistan, Karakalpakstan, participant selection, capacity building

Introduction

Policy transfer research asks what is transferred, by whom, from where, to where, and to what degree (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). International cooperation in education needs one further question. What matters is not only whether a program works while it is delivered, but whether the receiving side reproduces it afterwards. A program that functions only while the sending institution remains involved has not truly been transferred.

This paper examines U-HOPE, an entrepreneurship education program implemented in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. It is based on I-HOPE, the core program of the Center for Entrepreneurship Education and Research at Yamagata University. U-HOPE forms part of a national policy based on Presidential Decree PF-10, Article 27.2, and has been delivered since 2024 under a commission from the Business Development Bank (BDB), a state-affiliated bank (Onodera, 2026). The author took part in the 2025 program as an interviewer in participant selection and as a team mentor.

Two questions are asked. What was actually transferred, and what made that transfer possible? The answer is stated in advance: what was transferred was not the program itself but the capacity to reproduce it locally, and what made this possible was a division of decision rights between the two sides.

Main Part

Framework and materials

This paper distinguishes two objects of transfer. Program transfer means copying content and method; capacity transfer means reaching a state in which the receiving side can reproduce the activity by itself. The first can be achieved with materials and lectures, the second requires a design of people and roles (Stone, 2012). The materials used are the report of the Yamagata University president's press conference of 9 April 2026 (Yamagata University, 2026), project documents, a memorandum of understanding among six parties, and the author's own observation, which reaches processes outside observers cannot but carries a risk of favorable evaluation.

The division of decision rights

I-HOPE is an eight-month program ordered from mindset formation, through skill acquisition, to practice, in which mixed teams of students, working adults and public officials address regional problems.

In U-HOPE this design was transferred under the following division. First, the policy frame and its legitimacy were supplied by the Uzbek side: Presidential Decree PF-10, Article 27.2, places support for entrepreneurship in Karakalpakstan among the tasks of the state and gives the program a public basis. Second, the contract, the funding and the pool of participants were supplied by BDB, whose requirement for 2025 was to train 50 young entrepreneurs in Karakalpakstan as mentors and to include 30 employees of the bank. Third, the educational content, the lectures, the mentoring and the judgement exercised in selection were designed by Yamagata University. What deserves attention is that the side supplying funding and legitimacy did not prescribe the content: autonomy over design remained with the sending side, and this arrangement shapes the character of the case.

Selection as the interface

Selection took place face to face in Nukus in early June 2025. Over three days, six interviewers including the author met candidates through a local interpreter. About 120 people applied, 55 were selected, and 56 finally took part; on the BDB side, 30 were selected and 24 took part.

Two kinds of criteria were applied, and each belonged to a different party. The first defines the boundary of the pool. An age limit of 40 was set as a condition by the Uzbek side, and all participants were already running a business of some kind, because the purpose was to train mentors rather than first-time founders. Criteria of this kind are easy to record in writing and make fairness easy to secure.

The second kind evaluates each candidate. In the interviews, weight was placed not on the completeness of the business plan but on ownership of the business, on the will to improve the region, and on interest in solving social and regional problems through business. These are educational judgements, and they are difficult to write into a rule.

Selection was therefore the single point at which policy and pedagogy met directly: the state defined the pool, and educational judgement was applied within it. Had the second layer also been administrative, those chosen would have met the requirements rather than been able to sustain eight months of practice. Among the participants selected, the proportions of women and men were roughly equal.

Reproduction

Continuity in this program was embedded not in outputs but in the educational design itself, through three devices.

First, the object of training was mentors rather than entrepreneurs. The aim was not to produce people who can create businesses but people who can train those who create businesses. This answers in advance the question of who will teach once the involvement of the sending side is reduced.

Second, teams were mixed. Participants were divided into 16 teams, each composed of local entrepreneurs and employees selected from BDB. The author was responsible for Team 6, a platform integrating aptitude assessment, training, certification and employment, and Team 14, freeze-drying of fruit for year-round sale.

Third, certification was tiered and graduates became instructors. The 63 people who completed the 2025 program were certified as U-HOPE Coordinators (Silver). Teaching in 2025 was carried out by ten mentors prepared by the Japanese side together with four holders of Gold certification from the previous year's graduates, who included not only bank employees but also entrepreneurs in Nukus. Those who learned in one year taught in the next, and reproduction extended beyond the bank into local business.

What travelled with least resistance was neither institution nor funding but a manner of working together. At the final presentation, a participant from the winning team said, in substance, that he had won business plan competitions abroad and had assumed his own ability would suffice, but that discussion produced ideas he could not have reached alone. The premise that a business cannot be built alone proved to be shared across borders.

Prospects

Two channels of cooperation of different character exist between Japan and Uzbekistan. The first is the bilateral contract between BDB and Yamagata University, through which U-HOPE has been delivered for two years. With a single source of funding and a single implementing body, decisions are quick.

The second is a memorandum among several parties. In September 2024, BDB, the Tashkent Region government, the Yamagata Prefectural Government, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Uzbekistan-Japan Center and Yamagata

University concluded a memorandum, valid until March 2027, for transferring to the Tashkent Region the knowledge of yori-i, a regional problem-solving project in Yamagata (Onodera, n.d.). Here the prefecture is placed as a provider of knowledge from its own practice. At the time of writing, however, this framework remains at the stage of the memorandum.

The difference between the channel that moved and the one that did not lies not in the number of parties but in the presence of funding and of a single body bearing responsibility for implementation. Cooperation is established not by assembling participants but by determining who carries implementation. Exchange between local governments nonetheless continues: the prefecture visited Tashkent with two local companies in November 2025, and a further delegation including the director of the responsible division is planned for October 2026. If the memorandum is to move to implementation, the occasion is likely to come from such working-level exchange.

Conclusion

This paper examined, from the perspective of policy transfer, how a Japanese entrepreneurship education program was transferred to Uzbekistan. It offers two contributions. First, selection is the interface between policy and pedagogy: the state defined the pool while the sending side supplied the individual judgement, and this two-layer structure preserved the quality of the transfer. Second, continuity was embedded in educational design rather than in outputs, through mentor training, tiered certification, and the return of graduates as instructors. The limitations are a single case, one program year, and an account by a participant.

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