

Advances in Uzbekistan's Educational Sector: Adopting International Best Practices

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Abstract: This article examines the educational exchanges between Uzbekistan and leading international organizations and developed countries, highlighting their accomplishments and experiences in the education sector.

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UNESCO, established as a specialized agency of the UN for education, science, and culture on November 16, 1945, in London, strives for peace through international cooperation in its mandate areas. The UNESCO Constitution, adopted after World War II, begins with the premise, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.

UNESCO's programs in communication and information, culture, education, natural, and social sciences contribute to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN General Assembly for 2030. As a laboratory of ideas, UNESCO sets international standards, implements collaboration programs, enhances the capacities of member states, and facilitates free exchange of ideas and knowledge.

In 1993, Uzbekistan became one of the 193 member states of the organization. The inauguration of the UNESCO Office in Tashkent in 1996 created excellent opportunities for executing UNESCO's mandate in Uzbekistan, fostering international collaboration, and continuing cultural and other relations with this country.

Education is a pillar of human rights, democracy, and sustainable global development, hence it should be accessible to everyone, throughout their lifetime. This was declared in UNESCO's 1998 World Declaration on Higher Education in Paris, emphasizing the role of higher education in the political, economic, and social development of every nation.

Uzbekistan has been an active participant in UNESCO, being elected twice to its Executive Board for the periods 1997-2001 and 2009-2013.

The collaboration between UNESCO and Uzbekistan was further solidified with the Action Plan for 2018-2021 signed during President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's historic visit to UNESCO headquarters in October 2018.

UNESCO's activities in Uzbekistan are closely coordinated with its office in Tashkent, its headquarters in Paris, regional offices in Bangkok and Jakarta, the Cluster Office in Almaty, and the National Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan for UNESCO.

Globally, UNESCO leads in achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) in Uzbekistan. A notable example is the recently launched EU-funded "Skills Development for Employability in Rural Areas of Uzbekistan" program in collaboration with the European Union, valued at €9.6 million

over four years (2020-2024), aimed at increasing rural employment and improving living standards through sustainable and diversified products and skills for women and men.

Over the past years, UNESCO's Tashkent Office in the Education sector has developed various resources, manuals, and guidelines on topics like "Developing and Assessing Competency in Information and Communication Technologies" and "A Guide for Teachers on Preventing Violence and Bullying in Schools."

Science, signified by the "S" in UNESCO's acronym, has been an integral part of the organization since its inception in 1945. UNESCO encourages its member states to invest in science, technology, and innovation (STI), which has become a key policy goal in both developed and developing countries. STI acts as a catalyst for building sustainable infrastructure, supporting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation, notably contributing to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). In Uzbekistan, this effort was initiated at the end of 2019 with financial support from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The UNESCO-IDB project resulted in the development of a country profile for Uzbekistan in the field of science, technology, and innovation, through the GO-SPIN (Global Observatory of Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy Instruments) platform.

"Education for All" embodies the right of men and women, young and old, to access education. The goals set in continuous education involve active participation in society, acquiring comprehensive knowledge, becoming specialists in specific fields, aligning personal goals with those of society, and contributing to societal development through one's knowledge.

Comparative Analysis of the Educational Process in India:

India's education system annually produces millions of graduates in IT and engineering, underpinning the country's recent economic achievements but also masking deep-rooted issues within its educational framework.

With 35% of the population under 30 years old, India faces numerous challenges in education. Successive governments have promised to increase education spending to 6% of GDP, but actual expenditures have hovered around 4% in recent years. India's business schools, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and universities strive to produce globally competitive graduates, yet primary and secondary schools, especially in rural areas, struggle to attract talent.

Post-independence, school curricula have emphasized inclusivity and national pride to foster a harmonious existence as one nation. In the early 1900s, the Indian National Congress advocated for national education, focusing on technical and vocational training. In 1920, Congress called for a boycott of government-supported and controlled schools, leading to the establishment of numerous "national" schools and colleges.

In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi introduced the National Policy on Education (NPE), aimed at preparing India for the 21st century, emphasizing the need for reforms. The policy sought to improve standards and accessibility of education while protecting secular, socialist, and egalitarian values promoted since independence. The government sought financial support from the private sector to supplement state funds and announced that the central government would take greater responsibility for ensuring the national and integrative character of education and maintaining quality and standards.

However, states retained a significant role in the curriculum. The central government took on the responsibility of funding a portion of development costs, with about 10% of primary education now funded through a centralized sponsorship scheme. The legacy of the 1986 policy includes encouraging privatization and maintaining a focus on secularism and science.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) also led to improvements in education quality in India, with numerous initiatives developed over the years. A centralized scheme for informal education was established to educate dropouts, working children, and children in areas without schools.

This program began on a trial basis in 1979 and covered educationally backward states over the next few years. In the 1980s, 75% of children not enrolled in schools lived in these states.

Today, India's higher education system comprises over 17,000 colleges, 20 central universities, 217 state-level universities, 106 universities with university status, and 13 institutes of national importance. The near future will see the addition of 30 new central universities, 8 new Institutes of Information Technology, 7 Management Institutes, and 5 Indian Institutes of Science.

In higher education, 7.5% of seats are reserved for tribal communities, 15% for lower castes, and 27% for other backward groups (OBGs). This reservation system has sparked discontent among the unreserved upper classes.

While the country's education system is rapidly evolving and producing competitive professionals on a global scale, the overall literacy rate in the region remains low.

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