

Structural Reforms and Development Process in Uzbekistan's Education System

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Abstract: Education plays a key role in realizing the potential of individuals and sustainable development of society. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has carried out comprehensive reforms to restructure its education system. The basis of these reforms are the “Law on Education” and the “National Program for Human Resources Development”, adopted on August 29, 1997. These documents defined the priority place of education in state policy and identified long-term development strategies. In 2017, 11-year compulsory education was introduced, replacing the previous 9+3 years system. The purpose of this change was to make the educational process more flexible for students and provide more opportunities for transition to higher education. This article analyzes the historical development of the education system in Uzbekistan, its legal infrastructure and reforms carried out in recent years, and reveals the current state and future trends in the development of the system.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, education, education reform, curriculum, development, school

Introduction.

As is known, today our country is undergoing large-scale reforms in every sphere. In turn, a significant part of these reforms is the reforms being implemented in the education system. In recent years, practical work has been carried out to organize all stages of the education sector based on modern requirements. In particular, reforms and practical measures are being implemented in the higher education system on a very large scale. Since gaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has carried out a number of legal and structural reforms aimed at restructuring the education system. In particular, the “Law on Education” and the “National Program for Human Resources Development”, which came into force in 1997, became the fundamental documents in shaping education policy. In recent years, due to the education reforms that came into force in 2017, compulsory 11-year education was reintroduced, and a regionalization system was introduced in secondary education. This article will examine in detail the basic structure of the education system of Uzbekistan, its legal basis, the reforms carried out and the impact of these reforms on the education process. As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev emphasized at the solemn ceremony dedicated to the Day of Teachers and Mentors: We all know that the cornerstone of development, the force that makes a country powerful and a nation great, is science, education and upbringing. Our tomorrow, the bright prospects of our Motherland, are closely related, first of all, to the education system and the upbringing we give to our children [1].

According to the constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan (chapter 9, article 41) "Everyone shall have the right to education. The state shall guarantee free secondary education. Schooling shall be

under state supervision" [2].

The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" guarantees equal rights to education for all, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, religion, personal and social status [4].

It should be emphasized that the new concept of education was enshrined in legislation with the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" and the "National Program for the Development of Human Resources" in 1997. These documents established the priority importance of education in public policy, as well as the strategy and main directions of its long-term development. These areas include:

- preserving the unity of educational space of Uzbekistan;
- introduction of a system of educational standards;
- ensuring successiveness of the levels and stages of education;
- providing various options of educational programs;
- combining mass education with elite education in each phase;
- identification of talented youth;
- creating prerequisites for gaining fundamental and special knowledge at the highest educational level at academic institution including in highly developed countries;
- humanizing education – building a comprehensive picture of the world, high spirituality, culture, and global thinking among students;
- rational focus of education enshrined in its organic unity with national history, traditions and customs, preserving and enriching the culture of Uzbek people, recognizing the education as a central instrument of national development and respect to the history and culture of other nations;
- mandatory nature of general secondary as well as secondary special and vocational education;
- universal access to education within the state educational standards [3].

The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan consists of:

- state and non-state educational institutions that implement educational programs in accordance with state educational standards;
- scientific and pedagogical institutions that carry out research necessary to ensure the functioning and development of the education system;
- government bodies in the field of education, as well as enterprises, institutions and organizations subordinate to them.

The education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan is unified and continuous.

Education in the Republic of Uzbekistan is implemented in the following ways:

- pre-school education;
- general secondary education;
- specialized secondary and vocational education;
- higher education;
- postgraduate education;
- professional development and retraining of personnel;
- extracurricular education.

The Model of Uzbekistan educational system (New Model After 2021)

Level	Class / Age	Duration	Compulsory / Elective	Description
Preschool Education	3–6 years	~3 years	Elective	Kindergarten, early childhood education
Primary education	1–4 grade / 7–10 years	4 years	Compulsory	Free
Secondary education-1 Level	5–9 grade / 11–15 years	5 years	Compulsory	General education continues
Secondary education – 2 Level (High school)	10–11 grade / 15–17 years	2 years	Compulsory	University preparation, general or field selection
Alternative: Vocational Education	after 9th grade	2–3 years	Elective	College, technical school; profession acquisition
Higher Education (Bachelor's degree)	17+ years	4 years	Elective (entrance exam)	University, academy, institute
Master's Degree and PhD	21+ years	2–5 years	Elective	Scientific specialization and academic development

While compulsory education in the country was 11 years, it was reduced to nine years in 1993 as a result of the reduction of the budget allocated to the economy due to economic difficulties, and this system was accepted as one of the most important achievements of the country's independence. (<http://www.mapzones.com/world/asia/uzbekistan/educationindex.php>).

Uzbekistan's newly elected president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, from the first days of his term, started work on returning to the 11-year compulsory education system that was abandoned exactly 20 years ago and started work on returning to the compulsory education system, and compulsory education was increased to 11 years in 2017 (KZ, 2017). With this change, students can attend 10th and 11th grades directly after the 9th grade. This reform aims to replace the previous 9+3 system (9 years of general education + 3 years of college or academic high school), facilitate the direct transition of students to university and increase flexibility in education. In addition, with the regulations made in 2023, the areas where students can specialize according to their interests in the 10th and 11th grades have been determined. Among these fields, there are options such as "chemistry-biology", "mathematics-physics", "mathematics-foreign language" and "mother tongue-literature-foreign language". This approach aims to enable students to gain in-depth knowledge during the university preparation process.

Preschool Education (Ages 3–6)

Pre-school (kindergarten) is the first stage of continuous education system. It ensures the formation of healthy, developed children arouses their inclination to learning, preparing them for school systematic study. Pre-school education in Uzbekistan, catering to children aged 3 to 6, has undergone significant reforms since 2017. In 2017, the Ministry of Preschool Education (now the Ministry of Preschool and School Education) was established, which became a turning point in the development of this area. The purpose of the establishment of the ministry was to ensure a unified

state policy, improve management and coordination in the field of preschool education. Most of pre-school educational establishments are state owned, however some non-government pre-school establishments are also in operation. State kindergartens are funded by the state and provide services according to a standard program while private kindergartens offer alternative programs and often have a more flexible approach to learning. Since 2018, over 12000 non-state preschools have been established, significantly increasing enrollment rates (UNICEF, 2022). The main language of instruction in preschools is Uzbek. It is no secret that in Uzbekistan, most of the citizens of this country speak Russian fluently. This language became popular in Uzbekistan immediately after the country joined the USSR. Today, residents of Uzbekistan consider Russian to be their second national language, so they send their children to Russian-language schools, preschools and classrooms. Russian schools are motivated by the fact that the child will be able to get a better education and find a good job in the future, because most of the scientific and fiction literature is written in Russian. Russian is officially considered a foreign language in Uzbekistan, therefore, when applying to a university or applying for a job in the future, its native speaker will have significant privileges. However, in some regions, other local languages are also used, which helps preserve cultural and linguistic diversity.

Primary education (1-4 grade)

Primary education is aimed at the formation of elementary literacy, knowledge and skills of students necessary for obtaining general secondary education. Children are admitted to the first grade at the age of 6-7 years. Primary education is provided in certain types of basic schools, such as schools with primary education only (grades 1-4), incomplete (grades 1-9) and full (grades 1-11), general education schools, secondary educational institutions, adult education centers, specialized schools, boarding schools for students with disabilities. Currently, it is also held in some educational institutions, such as gymnasiums, lyceums and some of them at higher educational institutions. In primary school, from 6 to 10 years of age, children are divided into groups according to intellectual abilities and development.

Children who fail to complete their assignments must take the course again. They are given two opportunities to repeat the course successfully, and if they still fail, they can be transferred to schools for the mentally retarded. Primary education provides children with basic reading, writing, and math skills, as well as an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, natural sciences, social sciences, art, and music. Primary school teachers are graduates of the pedagogical faculty of primary education.

Secondary education-1 Level (Age 11-15 Years)

As we mentioned above, if the task of the initial stage is to form the basis of knowledge that will be needed in further studies, then the tasks of the next stage are:

1. Submission of a large amount of information.
2. Development of independent thinking and organizational skills.
3. Acquisition of practical experience for professional orientation.

Free school education in Uzbekistan is designed for children from 6 to 16 years old. It should be said that primary and secondary education are closely related organizationally and meaningfully. Both levels of general secondary education, such as primary and secondary education, are taught in every Uzbek school. Secondary education is a logical continuation of primary education, which ensures continuity in the system of general secondary education. Nine-year general secondary education (grades 1-9) It is mandatory and free in Uzbekistan. It consists of primary (grades 1-4) and secondary (grades 5-9) education, as shown in the table below. Compulsory education means that every person should be educated. The academic year starts in September and ends in May. The academic year consists of four semesters. Accordingly, graduates of the 9th grade can continue their studies at lyceums and colleges, choosing the type and direction of the institution where they

can get the basics of knowledge for admission to university or to work.

Table 1.1: Overview of Secondary General Education Programs

Age	Grades	Type of education
7	1-grade	Elementary education
8	2-grade	
9	3-grade	
10	4-grade	
11	5-grade	The secondary education
12	6-grade	
13	7-grade	
14	8-grade	
15	9-grade	

In 2019 and 2020, the official credential confirming completion of grade 9 was called “Certificate of 9 Years General Secondary Education” (Uzbek: 9 Yillik Umumiy O’rta Ta’lim To’g’risida Shahodatnoma, Russian: Свидетельство о 9-летнем Среднем Общем Образовании). In 2021 this changed to “Certificate of Basic Secondary Education” (Uzbek: Tayanch O’rta Ta’lim To’g’risida Shahodatnoma, Russian: Аттестат о базовом среднем образовании).

It is important to mention that the English designation "Certificate of General Secondary Education" and the Uzbek term "Umumiy o’rta ta’lim to’g’risida shahodatnoma" were employed for the grade 9 qualification from the mid-2000s until approximately 2018 (The Connection, 2024).

Secondary education-2 Level (Age 15-17 Years)

Uzbekistan’s education system has undergone significant reforms in recent years, particularly concerning upper secondary education. These changes aim to modernize the curriculum, provide students with more flexibility, and better prepare them for higher education or vocational pathways. Before the reform, Uzbekistan's education system followed the 9+2 structure of the Soviet system, and completion of grade 9 was mandatory. The General Secondary School, known in Russian as a Secondary School, included a senior secondary school program that emphasized languages, mathematics, and science. Since then, speakers at the 91st annual meeting of AACRAO have found that the system lacked sufficient professional training before the reform. Only about 10% of secondary school graduates could enroll in higher education institutions. Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union on September 1, 1991. In December of the same year, it joined the Commonwealth of Independent States. After their reform, the structure of a 9-year "general education" + a 3-year "lyceum" or "college" was introduced [6].

As a result of the education reform carried out in 2021, the duration of general secondary education in Uzbekistan has been increased to 11 years. Thanks to this reform, students can continue their studies until the 10th and 11th grades immediately after the 9th grade. For completion of grade 11, the credential issued in 2020 was called Certificate of General Secondary Education (Umumiy o’rta ta’lim to’g’risida attestat, Russian: Аттестат об общем среднем образовании). In 2021, the Uzbek name of the grade 11 credential was updated to Umumiy o’rta ta’lim to’g’risida shahodatnoma, but the English and Russian names remained the same (The Connection, 2024). This certificate qualifies them for admission to higher education institutions or vocational training programs.

Higher education

The next stage is considered to be higher education. Higher education is provided in universities and higher education institutions. Access to the four-year bachelor's degree program is carried out on the basis of state testing of the State Testing Center (in Uzbek - DTM). Admission of students

to an educational institution is carried out with the help of regular and additional tests that check the knowledge of applicants. It takes another two years to obtain a master's degree, and another 3 years for a PhD. At the university level, the academic year begins in September and ends in June. Education is divided into two semesters, each lasting 17 weeks. An exam is held at the end of each semester. Students have summer holidays, national holidays and New Year holidays. The goal of higher education is to provide professional training of qualified, competitive personnel. Graduates should be able to work in their chosen field of knowledge, contribute to the scientific, technical, economic, social and cultural development of the country and have high moral, cultural and ethical qualities. Postgraduate education is aimed at satisfying the needs of society for highly qualified scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel. Instead of the previous two-stage postgraduate study (which included a course of study and subsequent defense of dissertations for the academic degrees of candidate and doctor of science), a single-stage system was introduced on January 1, 2013, providing for the defense of dissertations and the award of the academic degree of doctor of science. Higher educational institutions and research centers provide postgraduate education. According to the May presidential decree, starting from the 2020/2021 academic year, applicants will take exams in 5 subjects to enter universities. The first section of the set of questions will include three compulsory subjects: native language (Uzbek, Russian or Karakalpak), mathematics and the history of Uzbekistan. In the second section, the questions will consist of two subjects that are relevant to the chosen bachelor's degree program. It is planned to score 2.1 points (a total of 94.5 points) for tests in compulsory subjects and 3.1 points (a total of 186 points) for test tasks in individual subjects of the chosen direction. At the same time, the total total score that an applicant can score is 280.5.

The State Testing Center has approved blocks of subjects, the number of test assignments and assessment criteria for bachelor's degree entrance tests for the 2022/2023 academic year. The number of questions in compulsory subjects has been reduced from 15 to 10, and the maximum score for them has also decreased. Compared to the 2020/2021 academic year, the number of tests decreased from 105 to 90. Previously, the maximum possible score was 280.5, now it is 189 points. As in previous years, three subjects will be compulsory for all applicants in the exams this year:

- native (Uzbek, Russian or Karakalpak) language;
- mathematics;
- the history of Uzbekistan.
- in the first subject — 30 tests, the cost of the test is 3.1 points, the maximum number of points is 93;
- in the second subject — 30 tests, the cost of the test is 2.1 points, the maximum number of points is 63 (Gazeta.uz, 2022).

Higher educational institutions provide professional training funded both by government grant and on a fee basis [8]. Higher education in Uzbekistan faces several challenges, including:

- There are set quotas for entrance in educational institutions.
- High tuition fees for those who study on a fee basis.
- Test results- the required entrance level is separately established for each higher educational institution. The student who gets a sufficient score for chosen institution might have scored enough to get into another institution, but students can apply once each year.
- There are fewer opportunities for girls compared to young men. The share of girls amongst students in higher education is 40%.
- Lack of inclusive education for students with disability.
- Low level of teachers' salaries.
- The educational process is excessively overloaded with too many subjects having to be learned, i.e.10-14.

- The equipment and educational facilities in higher educational institutions do not meet contemporary requirements [9].

Conclusion

Uzbekistan's educational landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation since its independence in 1991. The strategic goal: to modernize its human capital and integrate it into the global economy. This ambition is reflected in fundamental legislative frameworks like the 1997 "Law on Education" and the "National Program for Human Resources Development". These acts cemented education's central role in national policy, viewing it as the cornerstone of sustainable development, social harmony, and economic prosperity.

A key milestone was the shift from a 9+3 to an 11-year compulsory education system. This seemingly simple change had profound implications. The extended schooling provides a more comprehensive foundation, equipping students with a broader skillset. Furthermore, the increased duration allows for greater flexibility. Students can now seamlessly transition to higher education, vocational training, or even dual-track programs combining academic and professional skills. This flexibility is further enhanced by the introduction of specialized tracks within the upper secondary years, allowing students to tailor their education to their aptitudes and future aspirations, promoting deeper engagement and better preparing them for university or the workforce. This specialized approach contrasts with previous, more generalized curricula, offering a more nuanced and individualized learning experience. For example, students might choose a focus on STEM subjects, humanities, or vocational skills like IT or agriculture, depending on their interests and the regional economic needs. The curriculum itself is undergoing continuous revision, incorporating modern pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, problem-solving activities, and critical thinking exercises.

The expansion of preschool education, culminating in the establishment of the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, represents another significant achievement. Recognizing the critical role of early childhood development in shaping future success, Uzbekistan has invested heavily in expanding access to quality preschool programs. This includes not only increasing the number of preschool facilities but also improving teacher training, curriculum development, and the provision of resources. The focus is on fostering cognitive, social, and emotional growth, laying a solid foundation for future academic and life success. Early intervention programs targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also gaining traction, aiming to reduce educational inequalities.

The commitment to multilingualism is another defining characteristic of Uzbekistan's educational reforms. While Uzbek remains the primary language of instruction, the government recognizes the importance of Russian and other local languages. This reflects the country's diverse linguistic landscape and aims to promote intercultural understanding and global competitiveness. The inclusion of foreign languages, particularly English, is also being strongly promoted, facilitating access to global information, opportunities, and collaborations. This multilingual approach is not just about language acquisition but also about fostering cultural sensitivity and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

However, despite these substantial advances, considerable challenges remain. These include persistent inequalities in access to quality education, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities. Teacher training and development, while improving, still need significant investment to ensure that educators are equipped with the skills and resources to deliver effective instruction using contemporary methodologies. The digital divide also presents a major hurdle, with limited access to technology and internet connectivity in many parts of the country hindering the implementation of innovative teaching practices and online learning opportunities.

Furthermore, the ongoing curriculum reform needs sustained support to ensure its effective implementation and ongoing adaptation to the ever-evolving needs of the 21st-century workforce. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment, innovative solutions, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that Uzbekistan's education system truly fulfills its potential in nurturing a highly skilled and globally competitive workforce. The ultimate goal is to create a truly equitable and high-quality education system that serves the needs of all Uzbek citizens.

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