

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND REFORM PROCESSES IN UZBEKISTAN'S PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

Preschool education is recognized worldwide as a fundamental stage in the formation of human capital and sustainable social development. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has undertaken a series of reforms aimed at improving the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of preschool education. This article examines the evolution of preschool education reforms in Uzbekistan from independence to the present period. The study analyzes legislative frameworks, institutional transformations, educational modernization, teacher training initiatives, and the expansion of preschool coverage. The findings reveal that reforms implemented particularly after 2017 significantly increased access to preschool education and improved educational quality through the introduction of modern curricula, innovative teaching methods, and public-private partnerships. The study concludes that continued investment in infrastructure, teacher development, and digital transformation remains essential for achieving sustainable progress in early childhood education.

Keywords: *preschool education, educational reforms, early childhood development, Uzbekistan, educational policy, preschool institutions, quality education.*

Introduction

Early childhood education is universally acknowledged as one of the most effective investments in human development. Research conducted by international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank demonstrates that children who participate in quality preschool education achieve better educational outcomes, develop stronger social skills, and contribute more effectively to economic growth throughout their lives. Consequently, many countries have prioritized the development of preschool education as a strategic component of national educational policy.

In Uzbekistan, preschool education has undergone significant transformation since the country achieved independence in 1991. During the Soviet period, preschool institutions operated under a centralized administrative system that emphasized standardized educational practices. Following independence, the newly established state faced substantial economic and social challenges that affected various sectors, including education. The preschool education system experienced a decline in enrollment rates,

deterioration of infrastructure, shortages of educational resources, and insufficient financing.

The transition to a market economy required the government to reconsider existing approaches to educational management and financing. As a result, educational reforms gradually became an important component of state policy. The government recognized that investment in early childhood education was necessary for preparing future generations capable of contributing to national development and global competitiveness.

A particularly important stage in the modernization of preschool education began after 2017, when comprehensive reforms were introduced under the framework of broader national development strategies. The establishment of the Ministry of Preschool Education marked a turning point in the governance and administration of the sector. New policies focused on increasing accessibility, improving educational quality, introducing innovative teaching methods, strengthening institutional capacity, and encouraging private sector participation.

The significance of studying preschool education reforms in Uzbekistan lies in understanding how policy initiatives can contribute to educational modernization in developing countries. Furthermore, examining these reforms provides valuable insights into the relationship between state policy, educational quality, and social development.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the major reforms implemented in Uzbekistan's preschool education system during the years of independence and to assess their impact on educational accessibility, quality, and institutional development.

Methods

This study utilizes qualitative research methods, including historical analysis, comparative analysis, and document analysis. Legislative acts, presidential decrees, government resolutions, official statistical reports, strategic development documents, and academic literature related to preschool education were examined.

The research covers the period from 1991 to 2026 and focuses on four major dimensions of reform:

1. Institutional and administrative transformation.
2. Expansion of preschool enrollment and accessibility.
3. Improvement of educational quality and curriculum development.
4. Professional development of preschool educators.

Comparative analysis was also employed to examine similarities between Uzbekistan's reforms and international trends in early childhood education development.

Results

Institutional Transformation and Governance Reform

One of the most significant achievements in the development of preschool education was the establishment of the Ministry of Preschool Education in 2017. This institutional

reform strengthened state management and coordination of educational policies. The ministry was tasked with developing long-term strategies, monitoring educational quality, and expanding access to preschool services throughout the country.

The introduction of specialized governance mechanisms improved accountability and enabled more effective allocation of resources. As a result, preschool education became a national priority within the broader framework of educational modernization.

Expansion of Preschool Coverage

Increasing enrollment rates became a central objective of educational reforms. Numerous state and non-state preschool institutions were established, particularly in regions where access to preschool education had previously been limited.

Public-private partnership programs played a critical role in attracting investment and expanding educational infrastructure. Family-based preschool institutions also emerged as an innovative solution for increasing accessibility in rural communities.

Consequently, preschool enrollment rates increased substantially compared to the early years of independence, reflecting the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at universalizing early childhood education.

Modernization of Educational Content

Curriculum reform constituted another major component of modernization efforts. The introduction of the "Ilk Qadam" State Curriculum represented a shift toward child-centered educational approaches emphasizing creativity, communication, critical thinking, and social development.

Educational programs increasingly incorporated modern pedagogical principles, interactive learning strategies, and developmental assessment methods. Elements of STEAM education were introduced to encourage problem-solving skills and innovative thinking among young learners.

Human Resource Development

Recognizing the importance of qualified educators, the government implemented extensive professional development programs. Training centers, retraining courses, and certification systems were established to enhance pedagogical competencies.

Teacher salaries and social support measures were gradually improved to increase professional motivation and attract qualified specialists to the sector.

Digitalization and Innovation

Digital technologies have become increasingly important in educational administration and quality assurance. Electronic databases, monitoring systems, and digital reporting mechanisms have improved management efficiency and transparency.

The use of information technologies has also facilitated communication between educational institutions, parents, and government authorities.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that preschool education reforms in Uzbekistan have produced significant positive outcomes. The transformation of governance structures, particularly the establishment of a specialized ministry, provided a strong institutional foundation for long-term development.

International experience suggests that successful preschool education systems require coordinated policy implementation, adequate financing, and effective quality assurance mechanisms. Uzbekistan's reform trajectory demonstrates the importance of integrating these components into a comprehensive national strategy.

The expansion of preschool coverage has contributed to greater educational equity by providing opportunities for children from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Increased accessibility is particularly important because early educational experiences significantly influence future academic achievement and social mobility.

Curriculum modernization reflects contemporary international approaches emphasizing child-centered learning and holistic development. By adopting innovative pedagogical methods, Uzbekistan has aligned its preschool education system more closely with global educational standards.

Despite these achievements, several challenges remain. Regional disparities in educational infrastructure continue to affect equal access to quality preschool services. Rapid expansion of enrollment requires continuous investment in teacher training, educational materials, and quality monitoring systems. Additionally, digital transformation efforts must be accompanied by adequate technological resources and professional support.

Future reforms should focus on strengthening inclusive education, enhancing cooperation between families and educational institutions, expanding research-based educational practices, and improving mechanisms for evaluating educational outcomes. Such measures will contribute to the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of preschool education reforms.

Conclusion

The development of preschool education in Uzbekistan during the years of independence represents one of the most important achievements of national educational policy. Comprehensive reforms have transformed the sector from a system facing significant challenges into a dynamic and rapidly developing component of the national education system.

Institutional reforms, expansion of educational access, modernization of curricula, professional development of educators, and digital innovation have collectively contributed to improving educational quality and accessibility. These achievements demonstrate the government's commitment to investing in human capital and supporting children's holistic development.

As Uzbekistan continues implementing its long-term development strategies, preschool education will remain a key factor in promoting social progress, educational excellence, and sustainable national development. Continued reforms aimed at quality enhancement, inclusiveness, and innovation will further strengthen the role of preschool education in shaping future generations.

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