

REFORMS IN THE PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. *Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone substantial transformations in its education system, particularly in primary education. The government has prioritized educational reform as a key driver of national development, aligning its efforts with global standards and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article reviews the major reforms in Uzbekistan's primary education sector, highlighting notable achievements such as curriculum modernization, improved infrastructure, and expanded access to early childhood education. It also discusses persistent challenges, including disparities in rural education, teacher training needs, and systemic implementation gaps. The analysis underscores the importance of sustained policy commitment, capacity building, and inclusive approaches for long-term success.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, primary education, education reform, teacher training, curriculum modernization, educational equity.*

Uzbekistan has embarked on a comprehensive journey to reform its education system since the early 1990s, recognizing the crucial role of education in national development, human capital formation, and social cohesion. Primary education, in particular, has been a central focus of this reform agenda due to its foundational importance in shaping future learning outcomes and opportunities. In recent years, the government has accelerated its efforts to modernize the primary education system. Key policy initiatives include the adoption of the *National Development Strategy (2017–2021)*, the *Education Sector Plan*, and alignment with international benchmarks such as the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda. These policies aim to improve the quality, inclusivity, and accessibility of education at all levels, with primary education serving as a critical pillar.

Noteworthy progress includes the revision of national curricula to include more student-centered and competency-based approaches. New textbooks and learning materials have been introduced, and early childhood education has expanded significantly, with increased state investment in kindergartens and preparatory programs. Additionally, digital technologies and IT education have begun to play a larger role in classroom instruction. Despite these achievements, systemic challenges remain. Rural-urban disparities continue to affect the equitable distribution of educational resources and qualified teachers. Teacher professional development programs, while growing, still struggle to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving curriculum. Moreover, implementation gaps and institutional inertia sometimes slow the pace of reform. This article explores both the achievements and the ongoing challenges of primary education reform in Uzbekistan. Through a balanced analysis, it provides insights into how the country can build on its progress to create a more inclusive, high-quality, and future-ready education system for its youngest learners.[1]

The reform of Uzbekistan's primary education system has yielded several significant achievements. One of the most transformative has been the revision of national curricula, emphasizing critical thinking, communication skills, and practical knowledge. Textbooks have been updated to reflect new teaching methodologies and a greater focus on interactive, learner-centered approaches. This marks a departure from the Soviet-era focus on rote memorization.

Another major success is the expansion of early childhood education. The government launched the *Presidential Program for Preschool Education Development (2017–2021)*, which significantly increased preschool enrollment, especially in rural areas. Public-private partnerships have also been encouraged, leading to a rise in non-governmental early education centers. Teacher development has been another area of focus. The National Center for Teacher Training has rolled out professional development courses to help educators adapt to new curricula and pedagogical techniques. Teachers are being encouraged to incorporate digital tools into their teaching, supported by investments in school ICT infrastructure.

However, these gains are tempered by persistent challenges. Rural and remote schools often lack sufficient teaching staff, and the quality of teacher training varies widely. While urban schools benefit from updated facilities and learning technologies, rural students face overcrowded classrooms and limited access to resources. Moreover, assessment practices have not yet fully adapted to the new learning goals. Standardized testing remains prevalent, which can discourage creative and individualized teaching approaches. Curriculum overload is also a concern, as reforms have sometimes added new material without eliminating outdated content.

Lastly, institutional coordination can be fragmented. Multiple agencies are involved in reform implementation, occasionally leading to policy overlap and inefficiencies. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need strengthening to ensure reforms translate into measurable outcomes. Despite these obstacles, Uzbekistan's commitment to education reform remains strong, driven by both national priorities and international cooperation. Continued focus on teacher quality, equity, and systemic coherence will be essential in consolidating progress.[2]

The reform of primary education in Uzbekistan stands as a testament to the country's broader developmental ambitions. In a relatively short period, Uzbekistan has made significant progress in transforming its primary education system—from curriculum renewal to expanded access to early childhood education and the professionalization of its teaching workforce. A key achievement has been the movement toward a more child-centered and skills-based approach to learning, aligning with international educational standards. The integration of new content areas such as information technology, environmental education, and life skills reflects a modern vision for education in the 21st century. Investments in early childhood education have also helped set the foundation for lifelong learning and school readiness, especially for children in marginalized communities. However, these achievements coexist with persistent challenges. Disparities in educational quality between urban and rural regions remain a major concern. Teacher training is still inconsistent, and many educators feel unprepared to implement modern pedagogical practices. Infrastructure gaps, particularly in remote areas, and uneven access to learning technologies hinder the equitable realization of reforms. Additionally, the pace of policy implementation and the capacity of educational institutions to adapt to change need

strengthening. Reforms should not only focus on structural adjustments but also foster a culture of innovation, continuous learning, and accountability within the education sector.

Looking forward, Uzbekistan must maintain a balanced approach that combines ambitious reforms with realistic strategies for implementation. Sustained investment in teacher development, rural education, and institutional coordination will be key. Inclusive stakeholder engagement—including teachers, parents, and local communities—will further ensure that reforms reflect the needs of all learners. In conclusion, while challenges remain, Uzbekistan's progress in primary education reform is commendable. With sustained effort and inclusive planning, the country can achieve a more equitable, high-quality education system that empowers every child to reach their full potential.

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