

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN SWEDEN AND UZBEKISTAN.

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Abstract. Early childhood education (ECE) plays a crucial role in the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children, laying the foundation for their future academic success and social integration. This article provides a comparative analysis of the early childhood education systems in Sweden and Uzbekistan, two countries with distinct cultural, economic, and educational contexts. Special attention is given to the structure and financing of early childhood institutions, teaching methodologies, pedagogical practices, and the impact of social and cultural environments on child development. The study highlights the differences and similarities in the approaches to ECE in these two countries.

Keywords: early childhood education, Sweden, Uzbekistan, pedagogy, educational systems, teaching methods, inclusivity, social development.

Early childhood education (ECE) is a critical component in the development of cognitive and social skills that influence a child's future learning experiences and social interactions. The systems of ECE vary greatly between countries, influenced by economic, social, and cultural contexts. Analyzing different models of early childhood education helps identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for mutual learning. Sweden and Uzbekistan offer two contrasting examples of ECE systems. Sweden has a well-established, inclusive, and flexible approach to early childhood education, while Uzbekistan has been undergoing significant reforms aimed at improving access and quality in its early education sector. This article aims to compare and analyze the ECE systems in both countries, focusing on key aspects such as accessibility, pedagogy, teacher training, and the role of cultural and social factors.

Theoretical Foundations of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education typically spans from ages 1 to 6 and focuses on the development of key skills, including cognitive, emotional, and social competencies. The theories underlying ECE practices range from an emphasis on academic learning to the promotion of holistic personal development through play and socialization. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasizes the importance of interaction with the environment and active participation in learning. In contrast, Albert Bandura's social learning theory stresses the role of observation and interaction with others. These theories have shaped early childhood education methods by influencing how children engage with their environment and the pedagogical role of adults.

The Early Childhood Education System in Sweden

1. Structure of the System

Early childhood education in Sweden is accessible to all children starting from the age of 1. Public preschools "förskola" are funded by taxes and are free for children aged 3 and older.

Parents of younger children can choose between private and municipal preschools, with fees based on income levels. Approximately, 80% of children aged 1 to 6 attend preschools in Sweden, a result of state policies aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality early education.

The Swedish system is designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate the needs of working parents.

2. Pedagogical Methods and Approaches

The educational process in Swedish preschools emphasizes play and child-led learning.

The goal is not to focus solely on formal education but to create an environment that fosters natural development through interaction with the world and socialization with peers. The pedagogical approach in Sweden is centered on inclusivity, with children with special educational needs integrated into the general classroom environment.

2.3. Role of Educators

In Sweden, preschool educators are required to have university-level training in early childhood education, ensuring a high level of professional competence. Swedish teachers are trained to be adaptable, allowing them to customize learning experiences to meet the individual needs of children. This emphasis on teacher training contributes to the overall quality of the preschool system.

The Early Childhood Education System in Uzbekistan

1. Structure of the System

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in expanding and improving its early childhood education system. In the early 2000s, the government began emphasizing the importance of early education as part of its broader educational reforms. Since 2020, early childhood education has become mandatory for children starting at the age of 3. In 2017, the government launched a program to improve access to preschools, particularly in rural areas, and to enhance the quality of education provided. While the network of public and private preschools has expanded in recent years, there are still challenges related to equal access, particularly in remote areas.

2. Pedagogical Methods and Approaches

Early childhood education in Uzbekistan has traditionally focused on preparing children for formal schooling, with an emphasis on basic academic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and foundational knowledge in subjects like mathematics. However, recent reforms have shifted the focus toward a more comprehensive approach, encouraging the development of creative and social-emotional skills in addition to academic competencies.

3. Role of Educators

Preschool educators in Uzbekistan are required to complete specialized training in pedagogical institutions. Although the quality of teacher education has improved, there are still disparities in the qualification of educators, particularly in rural areas. Ongoing professional development and the adoption of modern pedagogical methods are priorities for the government.

4. Comparative Analysis of Early Childhood Education Systems in Sweden and Uzbekistan

1. Accessibility and Funding

In Sweden, early childhood education is universally accessible and free for children aged 3 and older, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to attend preschool. In contrast, although early childhood education is now mandatory in Uzbekistan, challenges remain in ensuring equal access to quality education, particularly in rural and remote areas. The government's efforts to improve infrastructure and expand preschool networks are ongoing.

2. Pedagogical Methods

Sweden's focus on play-based learning, socialization, and inclusivity allows children to develop holistically, fostering not only cognitive but also emotional and social growth. This approach aligns with the country's broader educational philosophy, which values individual development and collective responsibility. Uzbekistan's system, while still focused on academic preparation, is undergoing a transformation to include more diverse teaching methods that encourage creativity and social development alongside academic learning.

3. Teacher Training

In Sweden, the high level of teacher preparation is a cornerstone of the preschool system.

Educators receive formal university education in early childhood pedagogy, ensuring a high standard of professional competence. In Uzbekistan, although the quality of teacher training has improved, there remains a need for more widespread adoption of contemporary pedagogical practices and professional development programs, particularly in rural areas.

The early childhood education systems in Sweden and Uzbekistan reflect different social, economic, and cultural contexts, each with its strengths and challenges. Sweden's system is characterized by its inclusivity, flexibility, and emphasis on play-based learning, while Uzbekistan's system is in the midst of significant reform, moving toward greater accessibility and incorporating a more holistic educational approach. Both countries are committed to improving the quality of early childhood education, and their experiences offer valuable lessons for each other, as well as for other nations seeking to enhance their own educational systems.

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