

A CASE STUDY: INSIGHTS FROM THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM OF UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Locating in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan pays out an enormous portion of its budget and attention to compulsory education in the area. Meanwhile, public education is afflicted by several issues apart from excellence both in the teaching and learning process. The author tried to define the current circumstance of primary education and sought possible solutions for them. Through field surveys and data analysis methods used throughout the investigation. Found data shows that improper infrastructure of government expenditure on education, low salary, and limited quota in pedagogical universities lead to a shortage of teachers in rural areas. The government of Uzbekistan needs further educational reforms in the area of public education, teacher training, and re-training programs, and increasing teachers' salaries.

Keywords: compulsory education; primary schools; reforms; teaching-learning process; Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Spending 23.4% of the total budget on primary education does not pay off yet. The academic results excellence is still far from excellence (World Bank Group, 2018). The government of Uzbekistan is facing major issues such as a shortage of teachers in rural areas, traditional teaching methods, and frequently updated textbooks sum up that the academic results of the schoolchildren remain low in Uzbekistan.

The double unlocked country in the heart of Central Asia, the Republic of Uzbekistan is trying to introduce soft skills, like leadership, and communication skills in the teaching-learning process in primary schools of the Republic (Shaturaev, 2014). However, compulsory



education suffers much more crucial issues in the way of development of primary education in the country. One of the main outstanding issues in the sphere is an excessive number of pupils in the classrooms. Sometimes, the number reaches 40-45 children, whereas the classroom capacity is designed for 25 individuals, however (Shaturaev, 2014). It troubles the teacher to check up on home tasks and work individually with students. As the population grows, demand for schools increases dramatically, hence, students must be queued at the Public Service Agency in each region of the country. The government of Uzbekistan has officially granted businessmen the nod to establish private schools.

BACKGROUND

COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

In Uzbekistan 11 years of education are compulsory and free, beginning with 4 years at primary school, and followed by 2 phases of secondary education taking 5 and 2 years respectively (Habibov, 2012). Primary school begins at age 6 and there is no specific leaving examination after the 4 years are complete. The next 5 years are spent at general secondary school from ages 10 to 15. Following that, there is a choice of between 2 to 3 years of upper education at either general or technical vocational schools (Shaturaev, 2021c). The former provides a certificate of completed secondary education and the opportunity to enter university, the latter a diploma of specialized secondary education, through a network of secondary vocational institutions. Unemployment remains relatively high, and there are many people desperately in need of new or more appropriate skills. There are several state and donor programs in place to address the structural training shortfall. Eventually, the goal is to meet European Union standards. Non-university-level tertiary education is provided by national enterprise training centers and many business schools, as well as a center that trains professionals in new economic and service fields (Shaturaev, 2014). Higher education is available from several universities and over 50 higher education institutes. The flagship is the Tashkent Islamic University opened not many years ago. On its grounds still stands the mausoleum of the grandfather of the Mughal Emperor Babur dating from the 15th Century.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Through the research, the author picked two methods of data collection: field observation and analysis of available data. The first phase consists of observation right in the field, and interviews with school staff, as the purpose of the paper is to define the current obstacles in



primary education, core reasons for those issues, and exact solutions for those problems. As the Covid-19 pandemic is still challenging face-to-face communication, the author tried to watch out for it with naked eyes, hence, visiting possible schools in the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent city. Administrators from each participating school informed teachers, students, and parents about the study, including the benefits and potential risks to the children. All participants were informed of their right to leave the study at any time. Data were securely stored and maintained to protect children's anonymity. The four key aims of the research were to:

- assess learning levels (both in terms of content knowledge and performance by cognitive domain) among children at the end of primary school
- understand background factors that may influence learning levels
- provide a starting point to demonstrate the use of national assessments (and their analysis) to systematically track effective learning and quality improvement
- provide recommendations for policymaking to improve the quality of education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uzbekistan's new government has prompted broad political reforms with the introduction of its Development Strategy 2017–2021 (Hakimov et al., 2020). These changes aim to expand economic growth, increase employment, encourage innovation, and improve skills and experience. A key focus is to improve the quality of education and learning among children and youth. This long-term economic investment will ultimately support the introduction of a more skilled and competent workforce. While Uzbekistan has made remarkable progress in improving access to general secondary education and achieving gender parity in school enrolment, the quality of education is not well understood. To address this knowledge gap, a national learning achievement survey was conducted by UNICEF Uzbekistan in 2018 (Izvorski et al., 2019). This comprehensive study provides the first insights into children's school performance at the primary level and the causes and correlations between learning and education quality in Uzbekistan (ADB, 2010). It also offers a crucial benchmark, enabling comparisons of educational performance within and beyond Uzbekistan, and lays the groundwork for optimizing children's learning outcomes. In 2010, UNICEF reported that although school enrolment rates were high in Uzbekistan, sparse data were available on the quality of education and learning outcomes (ADB, 2012). This situation has not changed over the last decade, even though education remains a priority of government social policy. Within the context of the country's

ongoing education sector reforms, there is a recognized need for evidence on children's learning to inform and support further progress. Besides, as a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Uzbekistan is responsible for achieving some educational targets. These include Target 4.1: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes" (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). To progress toward the achievement of quality education for all children, UNICEF Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Public Education, and the wider Government of Uzbekistan worked together to conduct the most comprehensive assessment of primary school student learning to date (World Education Forum, 2015).

PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

General (basic) education is provided in several types of basic education schools: schools with only primary education (Grades I-IV); schools that offer partial (Grades I-IX) and complete (Grades I-XI) secondary education; adult education centers, and specialized schools and boarding schools for students with disabilities (World Bank Group, 2018). General education is also available in new types of institutions (gymnasias and lyceums), some of them attached to higher education institutions. General basic education is followed by two or three years of upper secondary education (leading to the Certificate of Completed Secondary Education) or vocational and technical (VTE) education (Shaturaev, 2021d). This is provided at two levels: the first level offers six months to three years of basic vocational training after grade 9; the second level generally offers at least two years of training (post-secondary) in over 300 specializations leading to the Diploma of Specialized secondary education. A network of specialized secondary vocational institutions was formed in 1997/98 (Shaturaev, 2021a). Literacy is practically universal for both men and women (99%) (Shaturaev, 2014). However, considering that the government is implementing a long-term program of transition from Cyrillic to Latin script, in the short term there could be some changes in the literacy rate (Shaturaev, 2021b). At the basic education level, 73% of the teachers have higher education while 22% have only secondary/vocational education (Shaturaev, 2014). The retraining of teachers is a priority that needs taking into account the fundamental changes in the philosophy, content, and methods of education.

School-age population by education level in 2020

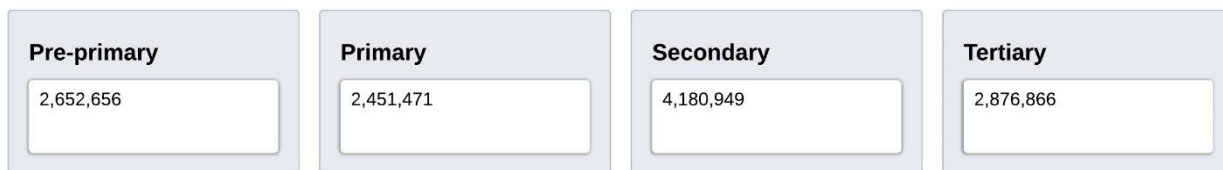


Table 1. Compulsory education lasts 12 years from age 7 to age 18 (for primary to post-secondary education, the academic year begins in September and ends in May) *in millions
Source: Authoring

The structure of the school system is primary in Uzbekistan. The type of school providing this education is a primary school (Grades 1-4). The length of the program is 4 years starting from age of 6 to 10 years (Shaturaev, 2021d).

In 2017, education reforms in Uzbekistan changed from a 12-year program to 11 years after a previous reform disappointed and troubled parents and children (Shaturaev, 2021d). Eleven years of primary and secondary education are obligatory, starting at age seven (Erkinova Saida, 2022). The rate of attendance in those grades is high, although the figure is significantly lower in rural areas than in urban centers. Preschool registration has decreased significantly since 1991 (Shaturaev, 2014). The official literacy rate is 99 percent (Ministry of Public Education, 2017). However, in the post-Soviet era educational standards have fallen. Funding and training have not been sufficient to effectively educate the expanding younger cohorts of the population. Between 1992 and 2004, government spending on education dropped from 12 percent to 6.3 percent of gross domestic product (World Education Forum, 2015). In 2006 education’s share of the budget increased to 8.1percent (Shaturaev, 2021d). Lack of budgetary support has been more noticeable at the primary and secondary levels, as the government has continued to subsidize university students. Between 1992 and 2001, university attendance dropped from 19 percent of the college-age population to 6.4 percent. The three largest of Uzbekistan's 63 institutions of higher learning are in Nukus, Samarkand, and Tashkent, with all three being state-funded (Shaturaev, 2014).

Official school ages by the level of education

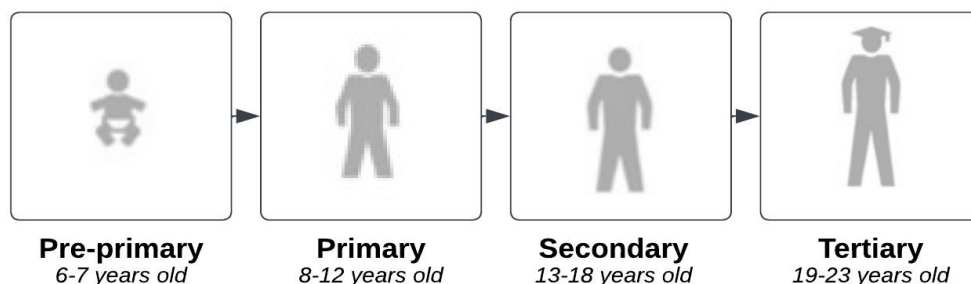


Table 2 Source: Authoring



Private schools are forbidden as a result of a government crackdown on the establishment of Islamic fundamentalist (Wahhabi) schools. However, in 1999 the government-supported Tashkent Islamic University was founded for the teaching of Islam (World Bank Group, 2018). Among higher educational institutions, the highest-rated at the domestic level are Tashkent Financial Institute and Westminster International University in Tashkent. The first one was established by the initiative of the first president of Uzbekistan in 1991. Later in 2002, in collaboration with the University of Westminster (UK) and the “UMID” Foundation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Izvorski et al., 2019).

According to official sources, about 60 percent of Uzbekistan's population is covered under the system of education. The earlier educational system required 11 years of compulsory schooling for both men and women (ADB, 2010). In 1992 the policy decision was made to change from 11 to 9 years of compulsory education. After nine years of compulsory schooling, students can prepare for higher education in the tenth or eleventh grade or turn to vocational training (The World Bank, 2015). After graduating from any type of secondary education, an individual can enter a higher education institution to obtain a bachelor's degree and continue studying toward a master's or doctoral degree (ADB, 2012).

Grading Scales: Table 3

Table 3. Grading scales in public education of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Source: Authoring

Education Stage	Grade	Scale	Grade	US Grade
Tertiary		85.00 - 100.00	A'lo (Excellent)	A
Tertiary		75.00 - 84.00	Yaxshi (Good)	B
Tertiary		55.00 - 74.00	Qoniqarli	C
Tertiary		0.00 - 54.99	Qoniqarsiz	F
Tertiary	P		Sinov (Pass)	P

Budget constraints and other transition problems following the collapse of the Soviet Union have made it difficult to maintain and update educational buildings, equipment, texts, supplies, teaching methods, and curricula. Foreign aid for education is desperately needed but has not been sufficient to compensate for the loss of central funding.

When viewed in general, the Uzbekistan educational system includes:



- Preschool training (preprimary-from three to six years old)
- General secondary education (from 6 to 15 years old)
- Secondary vocational education (from 15 to 18 years old)
- Higher education (undergraduate and graduate-from 18 years old).

Girls and boys are legally considered equal and study in the same classes and schools. Schools are open to all ethnic groups, and minorities in schools are rarely an issue. The academic year begins on 2 September (the first of September is Independence Day) or the first working day of September (Habibov, 2012). The academic year ends in June for secondary schools and in July for higher education. Russian was a common language for over 100 nationalities living in the Soviet Union and played the same role as English in the United States (Hakimov et al., 2020). It was also the Lingua Franca of the socialist world that included Bulgaria, Poland, Mongolia, and other European and Asian countries. Without Russian as a common language, Uzbeks (and other ethnic groups) would have to learn Ukrainian, Belorussian, Moldavian, Armenian, and many other languages to communicate with the multinational population of the Soviet Union (World Bank Group, 2018). Therefore, until 1991, Uzbeks preferred schools with instruction in Russian for their children (Fayzievna, 2012). To not do so would have put them at a great disadvantage socially. After Uzbekistan gained its independence, Uzbek (not Russian) became the official language of instruction. From 1998-1999, some 76.8 percent of pupils at day schools were educated in Uzbek (ADB, 2012).

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

Examinations in the educational system of Uzbekistan are primarily oral. Universities, institutes, and some colleges still have entrance exams. Course exams occur only at the end of the course (semester). State exams are taken at higher education institutions after all coursework. The grading system of Uzbekistan is numerical. The highest grade is 5 (excellent = A), then follows 4 (good = B), 3 (satisfactory = C), and 2 (unsatisfactory = F). One is never used. Final grades are determined by test scores, papers, attendance, and class participation (Shaturaev, 2014). Because compulsory education is freely provided to all children of Uzbekistan, private schools have a difficult time justifying their existence. They were banned in 1993 (The World Bank, 2015). Also, since Uzbekistan Law declares the separation of education from religion, there are no religious schools. However, in 1999, the establishment of the Tashkent Islamic University was allowed. Computer technology, thanks to international assistance, is being introduced to educational institutions and training centers.

In 1994, the Central Asian Telecommunications Training Center (CATTC) was established in Uzbekistan under the Tacis Program of the European Commission. Training at the CATTC is provided using modern teaching aids, active methods, and individual and group methods by specialists and experts in different fields. The Computer Center at the University of Samarkand provides computer services to departments and research units and collaborates with other institutions and the private sector to run short training courses. At the secondary school level, computers are still rare (World Bank Group, 2018).

Structure of Education in Uzbekistan

Education	School/Level	Grades	Age	Years	Notes
Primary	Primary	1-4	6-10	4	Primary and secondary education is compulsory
Middle	General Secondary	5-9	10-15	5	grants access to academic and specialized post-secondary programs
Secondary	Technical Secondary		15-17	2	
Secondary	Upper Secondary	10-11	15-17	2	Lyceum, Gymnasium
Vocational	Specialized Secondary		17-19	3	
Tertiary	Bachelor			4	
Tertiary	Diploma of Physician			7	
Tertiary	Master			2	
Tertiary	Doctorate			6	

Table 4 Source: Scholaro database 2022.

<https://www.scholaro.com/db/Countries/Uzbekistan/Education-System#:~:text=In%20Uzbekistan%2011%20years%20of,the%204%20years%20are%20complete.>

As a result of the decline in funding, the printing of books, textbooks, and other publications faces numerous difficulties. This problem is common in all NIS countries. Nevertheless, despite obvious difficulties, according to UNESCO, Uzbekistan schools supplied about 60 percent of textbooks as a whole and for some selected subjects up to 100 percent. Publishing houses produced about 149 million copies of over 1700 various titles. From 1992 to 1997, some 174 textbooks with over 53,000 copies were published, including 138 originals, 19 translated, 8 parallel in 2 languages, and 9 experimental textbooks. About 170 various tutorials and educational literature in 7 languages are published. Audiovisual materials are usually manually prepared by teachers. With the high price of copying and low salaries, teachers and professors must be creative (ADB, 2010).



In the Soviet-type higher education institution, most students studied for a full working week (five to six days a week, six to eight hours of classes a day). Evening and correspondence courses were also popular. The first and the second year of the curriculum usually included the study of social science with similar course requirements for all students. Specialization began in the third year and continued in the fourth year (Izvorski et al., 2019). Within this period a student had between 4,500 and 5,000 face-to-face hours of instruction in 20 to 30 subjects, depending on the field of concentration. The curriculum included general subjects like philosophy and economy, specialized subjects determined by the chosen profession, and very specific courses depending on the deeper specialization. The curriculum was very rigid and equal for all students. There were no choices. In the modern system of higher education institutions, the curriculum is certainly less rigid. However, the authorization of the curriculum is still the responsibility of a ministry, not a particular institution (World Education Forum, 2015).

The expansion of curricula, including the addition of courses in French, Arabic, and English, has placed new stress on a limited supply of teachers and materials. In the mid-1990s, a major curriculum reform was begun. Western experts advised: a more commercial approach to the mathematics curriculum more emphasis in economics courses on the relationship of capital to labor more emphasis in social science courses on individual responsibility for the environment the addition of entirely new subjects, such as business management (Shaturaev, 2021d).

Such changes involve new materials and a new pedagogical approach by staff, the reform period is estimated at 10 to 15 years. The current transformation of the educational system is performed along with educational models in developed countries (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). According to Gulyamov, "During the process of developing the National Program the experience of reforming education in more than 30 leading countries in the world has been studied". In 1997, President Karimov founded "Umid," a program providing students with educational fellowships for obtaining education abroad (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). By the year 2000, over 700 students have been awarded the "Umid" Presidential Scholarship to pursue graduate and undergraduate degrees in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan. Certainly, returning graduates are expected to bring back "the influence," and those who have finished their studies are employed by the State. The Uzbekistan educators established contacts with the United Nations Organization and separate countries like France, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and the United States. Many organizations like Peace



Corp (USA), ACCELS (USA), British Council, Merci Project (Great Britain), Goethe Institute (Germany), NAFE (USA), and Save the Children Fund (Great Britain) participate in the educational efforts undertaken by Uzbekistan. For example, the Ministry of Education of Turkey assisted in forming 22 *Lycra* for over 4.8 thousand students. Another example is the American Council on Cooperation in Education (ANNALS) which within 4 years helped over 222 Uzbekistan students get an education in the United States. Finally, within only 2 years, 25 Uzbekistan schools got the certificates of UNESCO Associated Schools Project (ASP) (Ministry of Public Education, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Education has and will continue to play a significant role in development. First, it increases an individual's internal potential, self-respect, and self-esteem. Second, it makes an individual a better prospect for employment. Third and most importantly, an educated individual gives more back to society. Unfortunately, the results of education and training are less directly connected to revenue for immediate business growth, which is why the government tends to cut educational budgets. By the end of primary school, students in Uzbekistan were able to identify or recall simple and more obvious information and complete set-out uncomplicated tasks. However, students struggled to identify, interpret and evaluate more complicated information, solve complex mathematical problems and respond to questions that required reasoning and application. Girls performed better than boys in reading comprehension but similarly in mathematics and science. Children in urban areas performed better than those in rural areas in mathematics and science but not in reading comprehension. Better test scores were achieved by those students whose families had provided them with early learning and literacy experiences, for example, by reading books, telling stories, and singing lullabies to them. Children who felt supported by their families, and who were either rewarded or reprimanded for their school performance, also achieved higher scores. Children who had attended a preschool before starting primary school performed better than those who had not. Furthermore, those children who were educated in the same language as spoken at home performed much better than children whose school and home languages differed. In tests of reading comprehension, students in Uzbek-speaking schools (where 68 percent of students spoke Uzbek at home) did much better than those in Russian-speaking schools (where only 42 percent of students spoke Russian at home).



Conflict of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest

Limitation

The study has some limitations despite the findings. The number of participants in the study was limited, in addition, a primary school in rural areas is yet to be covered. Thus, researchers should take into consideration involving wider geography for future studies to draw a picture comprehensively.

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