

Prospects for Organizing and Improving Cooperation Between Preschool Educational Institutions and Community Organizations

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Abstract: This article analyzes the theoretical and practical aspects of organizing and improving cooperation between preschool educational institutions (PEIs) and community organizations. Drawing upon academic sources, it highlights the importance of the participation of families, mahallas (neighborhood communities), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in preschool education. Based on both international and local experiences, the main forms of cooperation, their outcomes, and future prospects are discussed. The current situation, opportunities, and challenges in Uzbekistan are examined, and concrete recommendations are proposed for enhancing collaboration between preschool institutions and community organizations.

Keywords: Preschool education, community participation, family, mahalla, non-governmental organizations, public-private partnership, education quality, Uzbekistan.

Introduction: In the current era, enhancing public participation in the activities of preschool educational institutions has become critically important for improving the quality of child upbringing and education. In developing mutual cooperation between preschool educational institutions and community organizations, it is necessary to extensively utilize the potential of families, neighborhood communities (mahallas), and non-governmental non-profit organizations. In this regard, a comprehensive analysis of foreign and local experiences, the study of their effective aspects, and their adaptation to the context of Uzbekistan are considered among the pressing tasks. Developing mechanisms to improve partnership relations between preschool institutions and the community for the comprehensive development of children is a significant scientific and practical task of today. Therefore, this article provides a broad analysis of the pedagogical, social, and managerial aspects of this cooperation and, based on existing academic sources, regulatory legal documents, and advanced foreign practices, formulates viable proposals that may

be implemented in Uzbekistan. This, in turn, will contribute to improving the efficiency of the preschool education system and ensuring the sustainable development of society within the continuous education system.

Ensuring the participation of families, mahallas, and the community in the process of preschool education and upbringing for the comprehensive development of the child is a pressing issue today. Global studies show that collaboration between parents and educators increases the effectiveness of child upbringing. For example, as Tarugashvili (2024) emphasizes, “a child is shaped in two environments—the family and the kindergarten; therefore, the parties responsible for the child's upbringing must work collaboratively, complementing and supporting each other, which serves the child's well-being.” Wider community participation is also important for the child's socialization. For instance, a study conducted in Hong Kong notes that as a result of the family-school-mahalla community partnership, social capital is being formed among children that is “connecting, integrating, and

linking with higher-level authorities.” Thus, in order to ensure the holistic development of the child, preschool institutions must possess mechanisms for working not only with parents, but also jointly with mahallas and relevant community organizations.

In recent years, as a result of reforms in the preschool education system of Uzbekistan, the coverage of children in preschool education has increased significantly. According to UNESCO data, the coverage of preschool education in 2017 was 27%, whereas by 2023 it had reached 70%. In particular, in 2015, 634,000 children were enrolled in preschool education, whereas by 2022 this figure had reached almost 2 million—indicating a 39% increase in coverage over the past five years. State policy and international cooperation have played a crucial role in achieving such large-scale progress. The establishment of a separate Ministry of Preschool Education in 2017 and subsequent reforms allowed for greater attention to be paid to the sector. The Presidential Decree No. PF–5812 dated September 6, 2019, and Resolution No. PQ–4312 dated May 8, 2019, were aimed at reforming the preschool education system and developing it through to 2030. In particular, within the framework of the Concept for the Development of the Preschool Education System Until 2030, approved by Resolution PQ–4312, the expansion of the non-state kindergarten network through the development of public-private partnerships was designated as a priority task. As a result, private and family kindergartens were established rapidly, helping to reduce the burden on the state sector. At the same time, in order to improve the quality of preschool education, the need arose to implement alternative educational forms in mahallas, engage parents in preschool education, and launch social projects in cooperation with public organizations. The presidential decrees and resolutions also emphasize the importance of utilizing the capabilities of local communities in the sector, including the strengthening of cooperation with mahallas and non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs).

The role of public organizations in preschool education. The issue of enhancing the participation of public organizations in preschool education has also attracted the attention of international institutions. According to UNICEF, international cooperation has played a vital role in the reform of preschool education in Uzbekistan. In addition to strong political commitment and financial investment at the state level, collaboration with international organizations such as the World Bank and UNICEF has contributed significantly to the expansion of preschool coverage. Specifically, with the support of the World Bank,

infrastructure in both urban and rural preschools was improved, while UNICEF provided technical assistance in introducing innovative approaches. UNESCO has recognized Uzbekistan’s efforts in developing preschool education, highlighting the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education held in Tashkent in 2022 as a major milestone. The Tashkent Declaration, adopted at the conclusion of this conference, outlined a global strategy for the development of preschool education through 2030. Moreover, international organizations recommend implementing innovative solutions in collaboration with communities to improve the quality of education and ensure inclusion for all children—including those with disabilities, girls, and children in rural areas. Examples of such strategies include engaging parents and mahalla communities in the educational process, establishing community advisory councils at preschools, and providing methodological support to parents through NGOs. Analysis of existing literature indicates that cooperation with parents, mahallas, and the wider public is a critical factor in increasing the effectiveness of child upbringing and early education. In the context of Uzbekistan, there are clearly defined scientific foundations and recommendations for achieving such cooperation. The following sections of the article will explore practical methods, experiences, and outcomes related to implementing this cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative analytical approach, focusing on the analysis of existing data and experiences related to the topic. As part of the study, relevant legal documents and programmatic acts—such as presidential decrees and state development programs—were analyzed using content analysis methods. In addition, both local and international academic sources and official reports were reviewed (see literature review above). A number of exemplary regional projects were also examined through the case study method. For instance, the local experience of inclusive education groups implemented by UNICEF in the Surkhandarya region was analyzed to assess community-level cooperation practices. Data and statistics identified during the research process were synthesized and generalized. Based on these findings, conclusions were drawn and practical recommendations were developed.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that preschool educational institutions employ a variety of methods and approaches in working with the parents of enrolled children. These can be broadly categorized into two

groups:

- ❖ *Individual forms of work with parents;*
- ❖ *Group-based forms of work with parents.*

Individual methods include one-on-one conversations with a child's parent or guardian, home visits for providing pedagogical consultations, and assessments of the home environment. Group methods encompass activities and meetings involving multiple parents, such as parent assemblies, seminar-trainings for parents, the organization of a "Parents' School" within the kindergarten, and involving parents in family-oriented events or sports competitions. Preschool staff implement these methods in a flexible and adaptive manner based on their experience and context. For example, according to the research by Usmonova and Qurbonbekova (2021), experienced educators who are well-acquainted with children's individual characteristics can successfully conduct one-on-one conversations with parents, which in turn positively impacts child development. Moreover, it has been emphasized that educators can engage the parents of all enrolled children in preschool life by organizing well-structured collective meetings. During the course of this study, interviews with several preschool educators revealed that in recent years, modern methods of parent engagement have also been introduced—for example, educators have created dedicated Telegram groups and online chats for parents, through which they share updates from the children's daily life at kindergarten, as well as advice and recommendations. These tools have reportedly helped build greater trust among parents and have encouraged more active involvement in the preschool environment (based on informal reports).

The Mahalla Citizens' Assembly serves as a public structure that directly cooperates with preschool institutions. According to current legislation, the mahalla chairperson and council are involved in coordinating the activities of educational institutions within their territory. One practical manifestation of this cooperation is the mahalla's assistance in increasing preschool enrollment. For instance, in some communities, the mahalla maintains records of preschool-aged children and collaborates with institutions to ensure their enrollment. If a parent wishes to send their child to preschool, the mahalla chairperson may participate by issuing a recommendation or referral (a practice still retained in some regions). In addition, with the support of mahallas, family-based non-state preschool institutions are being established at the local level. For example, due to favorable conditions created by a presidential decree, hundreds of family kindergartens were opened between 2018 and 2021. These institutions were

mainly organized in mahallas by private entrepreneurs and proactive women on a small scale and were financially supported by the government. As a result, preschool coverage in remote villages and mahalla areas increased significantly. Another form of mahalla-preschool cooperation involves strengthening children's school readiness through local women's committees and other civic associations. In certain regions, short-term preparatory groups for preschool-aged children have been launched in mahalla buildings. These are financed either through local budgets or sponsored donations.

DISCUSSION

The findings discussed above clearly indicate that cooperation between preschool educational institutions and community organizations—including parent associations, mahallas, and NGOs—has a significant positive impact on both preschool enrollment and the quality of education.

First and foremost, such collaboration has expanded access to preschool education by enabling greater child enrollment—particularly in remote areas where the establishment of family-based kindergartens and alternative groups has provided many children with their only opportunity to receive early education. For example, in Surkhandarya region, community-driven initiatives and international partnerships facilitated the creation of new groups that allowed 400 children to access preschool services. This demonstrates that in locations beyond the reach of public institutions, coverage can be expanded through grassroots efforts and civil engagement. Second, this collaboration has positively affected the quality of child development. Parental involvement in preschool activities has strengthened the alignment between home and institutional environments. Moreover, interactions between children and mahalla representatives (such as respected elders and experienced women) have helped instill respect for national values and traditional authority. In this context, community-based cooperation has contributed to the development of children's social skills, which in turn serves as a foundation for future academic success. International research supports these conclusions, showing that children's social-emotional development is significantly enhanced in environments where community participation is strong. For example, studies conducted in the United States found that community-supported preschools received higher quality ratings than urban public preschools, particularly in terms of language and literacy outcomes (Camilli et al., 2010 – Source: ScienceDirect). Similarly, interviews with local educators in Uzbekistan revealed that in kindergartens where close cooperation with parents and mahallas is

established, children tend to exhibit greater confidence and communication abilities. Despite these positive trends, some challenges and limitations remain in organizing community cooperation. Firstly, not all parents are equally involved in preschool life. Due to work obligations or time constraints, some parents are unable to participate in events or meetings, which weakens the connection between the home and the preschool. Secondly, in some regions, mahalla and community organizations are not fully prepared to engage with preschool institutions. For example, because of a heavy workload, mahalla officials may not dedicate sufficient attention to preschool cooperation. Thirdly, preschools often lack standardized guidelines or methodological tools for involving the public. For instance, the structure and functions of parent committees vary widely between institutions, with no unified framework, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of collaboration. International experience shows that when comprehensive state-level policies and official guidelines are in place, it becomes much easier to stimulate and support parental and community engagement. Thus, the development of a national program or manual on community participation in preschool education could become a promising direction for future progress in Uzbekistan.

Future Opportunities. To further improve cooperation between preschool institutions and community organizations, the following opportunities and measures are proposed:

- Clarifying legal norms related to public involvement in preschool education in existing legislation. For example, making it mandatory for each preschool to establish a Parent Council with defined responsibilities, and institutionalizing Community Oversight Committees through legal frameworks. In addition, local government resolutions could introduce cooperation programs between preschools and mahallas at the neighborhood level.
- Allocating grants and subsidies from the state budget and sponsors for partnership projects with public organizations. For instance, initial grants may be provided to entrepreneurs or NGOs wishing to open family-based kindergartens, and additional payments can be made to community activists who establish alternative preparatory groups in mahalla areas—measures that would encourage community engagement.
- Investing in human resources capable of engaging with the community. Training should be provided to educators on communication with parents and the fundamentals of adult education (andragogy).

Similarly, seminars on child psychology and education could be offered to the leaders of mahallas and community organizations. International partners and experts could be involved in delivering these capacity-building activities.

- Expanding public awareness campaigns through traditional and digital media about the importance of preschool education and community participation. For example, producing television reports on model family kindergartens, publishing articles about active communities, and broadcasting radio programs or webinars on early childhood development for parents would inspire wider participation and raise awareness.
- Another important direction is the continuation and expansion of international cooperation. Current projects implemented in collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank are already bringing innovative practices in early education to Uzbekistan. In the future, these partnerships can be extended to support small-scale local initiatives led by NGOs and community foundations.

For example, international grants could fund projects to establish mobile preschool services (e.g., kindergarten buses) in rural areas or to develop home learning guides for mothers. Successful implementation of such initiatives would require joint efforts from both government agencies and community organizations. If these efforts are coordinated effectively, they will significantly enhance the quality and accessibility of preschool education and ensure that all children—regardless of location—receive the foundation they need to grow into healthy, educated, and socially responsible individuals.

CONCLUSION

Organizing and improving cooperation between preschool educational institutions and community organizations—including families, mahallas, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—is a pressing task in the current educational landscape. Based on the conducted research and analysis, the following key conclusions were drawn:

1. Family–preschool cooperation is essential and effective. Theoretical and practical analyses confirm that the holistic development of a child depends on a strong connection between family upbringing and preschool education. When parents and educators act as complementary partners in child development, a stable and consistent educational environment is created. Local research shows that such cooperation improves children's attitudes toward learning and eases the responsibilities of educators.

2. The mahalla is a vital third component in child development. Following the family and preschool, the mahalla plays a key role in children's social education. Mahalla committees contribute to child development by supporting preschool enrollment and organizing spiritual and educational activities. Improved collaboration between the mahalla, family, and preschool can realize the principle of "harmonious mahalla – harmonious family – exemplary preschool," fostering a healthy societal environment.

3. Cooperation with community organizations has expanded access. Ongoing reforms have stimulated rapid development of public-private partnerships in the sector. The number of non-state preschools—including private and family-based kindergartens—has increased, and international grants have supported the creation of alternative educational groups.

In addition, wide-reaching public campaigns on early childhood development should be continued in cooperation with organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO. If these measures are implemented, both the quality and accessibility of preschool education will improve. Most importantly, they will help ensure that children grow up healthy, morally grounded, and well-educated.

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