

Development Of The Lifelong Education System In Uzbekistan: School, Vocational And Higher Education

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Received: 13 October 2025; **Accepted:** 05 November 2025; **Published:** 09 December 2025

Abstract: This article explores the impact of socio-economic factors on the development of the lifelong education system in Uzbekistan, which includes school, vocational, and higher education levels. The study examines the modernization trends in education within the context of ongoing socio-economic transformations and reforms aimed at improving the quality of training and developing human capital. The interaction between educational institutions and employers, as well as the influence of market mechanisms on the formation of students' professional competencies, is analyzed. Particular attention is paid to the issues of continuity between educational levels, the introduction of dual education models, and the adaptation of curricula to the needs of the national economy. Based on the analysis of statistical data and state strategic documents, the paper proposes directions for improving the education system in accordance with the socio-economic development priorities of the country.

Keywords: Lifelong education, school, vocational education, higher education, socio-economic factors, human capital, employment, qualification, employers, quality of education.

Introduction: At the current stage of development, the Republic of Uzbekistan faces a number of strategic objectives, among which the further advancement of the education system stands out as a critical factor for the country's prosperity, sustainable economic growth, and the provision of employment for the population. The reform of the education sector and the improvement of the vocational education system have been prioritized through a series of decrees and resolutions issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan [1]. In the "Uzbekistan-2030" development strategy, one of the key priorities is the training of students in contemporary knowledge and skills through the enhancement of the vocational education system [2].

The formation and development of the labor market, as well as the evolution of social and labor relations, increase the demands placed on the quality of the workforce, its level of training, and education. It appears that the labor market is a system of relations that arise within the framework of social order and consensus between employers and employees, with the participation of state and public institutions, based on the principles of supply and demand concerning wages, working conditions, social guarantees, social

protection, support, and so forth. Society is transforming and developing, and year after year new professions appear that require new knowledge, abilities, and skills. Higher professional education, which is aimed at training qualified personnel in various spheres of society, does not manage to adapt to the new requirements of the time, which generates certain problems in these areas. In the current globalized world, the crisis of higher education is further exacerbated, since most universities in developing countries are not able to compete with the technologically progressive universities of developed countries. In addition, many educational institutions in the CIS countries, particularly in Uzbekistan, do not keep up with the rapid changes of the labor market and often produce high-level specialists, but those who do not possess the competencies that are required on the market "at the present time" or will be in demand in the next 10–20 years. There are studies proving this unfortunate trend. On the other hand, this is also a problem for companies that understand their needs in hiring young graduates of educational institutions, but also assess their risks and the resources spent on retraining and developing such specialists based on the needs of the business. In view of all this, the issue arises of communication between universities and

employers, as well as the strategic management of the selection, hiring, and adaptation of young specialists. It is worth noting that the transition to market relations in the Republic of Uzbekistan required significant changes in the training and retraining of personnel. Since the early 1990s, several generations of state standards of higher education have already been developed and tested, a system of licensing and accreditation of universities has been established, and higher educational institutions have accumulated certain experience in implementing a two-tier system of education — bachelor's and master's degrees; directions of international cooperation in the field of training specialists at higher educational institutions are developing. On the other hand, this is also a problem for companies that understand their needs in hiring young graduates of educational institutions, but also assess their risks and the resources spent on retraining and developing such specialists based on the needs of the business. In view of all this, the issue arises of communication between universities and employers, as well as the strategic management of the selection, hiring, and adaptation of young specialists.

It is worth noting that the transition to market relations in the Republic of Uzbekistan required significant changes in the training and retraining of personnel. Since the early 1990s, several generations of state standards of higher education have already been developed and tested, a system of licensing and accreditation of universities has been established, and higher educational institutions have accumulated certain experience in implementing a two-tier system of education — bachelor's and master's degrees; directions of international cooperation in the field of training specialists at higher educational institutions are developing. Moreover, on October 8, 2019, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. M. Mirziyoyev, issued a decree approving the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 [3]. Within the framework of this concept, it is planned to bring the universities of Uzbekistan to a new level that will meet international standards and will make it possible to train independently thinking, highly qualified personnel with modern knowledge and high spiritual and moral qualities, as well as to increase the level of development of the social sphere and sectors of the economy. Interaction with employers under these conditions acquires fundamentally new significance. The success of a university in a market economy directly depends on the employer. The transition of higher education to a qualitatively new level presupposes new models of interaction with employers as professional communities in which graduates will

begin their work upon completion of their studies. It should be noted that the goal of the main strategies for interaction between organizations and educational institutions is to regulate the supply and demand on the labor market for young specialists. This need has developed historically, since vocational education was separated into an independent sphere of production, and the development of professional competencies directly in the work process was relegated to the background.

On the other hand, this state of affairs in the labor market was facilitated by the scientific and technological revolution and the significant leap in science and technology. In order for employees to possess a sufficient level of professional information about new production processes, much more time was required for training. It was precisely this task that classical university education fulfilled at that time and continues to fulfill to this day; in essence, it became an independent mechanism for acquiring and assimilating professional knowledge.

Nevertheless, it was at this moment that the global problem of academic education became evident: the large gap between the theoretical part of education and the practical needs of the labor market. It was precisely at this moment that the intervention of third parties in the professional training of young specialists became necessary in order to regulate the very mechanisms of aligning supply and demand in the labor market.

For a long time in many countries, the state acted as such a third party. At the national level, this could be expressed in a certain state plan for producing trained personnel in a particular professional field for the purpose of developing the country's economy. State control in such a model of interaction is reflected in state educational standards, in the regulation of the level of professional knowledge and skills, and in "standard" curricula. It should be noted that such a strategy of interaction between an organization and an educational institution is absolutely ineffective in the modern world.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis consists of systemic, learner-centered, and socio-pedagogical approaches, which rely on the national strategic documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan and international principles of sustainable development in education, ensuring a holistic analysis of the problems and directions for improving the system of higher and vocational education.

MAIN PART

Analysis and conclusions. The results of the assessment of the relevance of the system of vocational education and training from the perspective of labor market requirements, conducted by World Bank experts in 2019, indicate that the available data are limited and contradictory. While teachers, administrators, and students believe that the system has been aligned with the needs of the labor market, employer surveys showed that graduates of the vocational education and training (VET) system do not possess the skills that enterprises need in order to operate successfully.

Employers and administrators of vocational colleges surveyed during the 2019 VET system assessment believe that today students and graduates of the VET system entering the labor market lack socio-emotional skills [3].

As of the end of 2023, against the backdrop of high investment activity in the Republic of Uzbekistan, specialists in the construction and trade sectors are the most in demand. The total number of employed persons increased by 312 thousand, or 2.3%, compared to the previous year. The unemployment rate in the economy has significantly decreased and amounted to 6.8%.

The demand for labor, measured as the number of vacancies in the labor market, has increased significantly. The average number of vacancies during this period amounted to approximately 36.8 thousand, which is 14% higher than the figure in December 2023 (32.2 thousand). The largest number of vacancies continues to be formed in the sectors of retail trade, construction, public catering, manufacturing, and education [4].

The main drivers of growth are expected to be construction and services, while the fairly high employment growth rates in the retail sector indicate the continued demand in the economy.

On the supply side, among job seekers, a significant share of advertisements falls on the sectors of transportation services, construction, accounting, and the provision of household services. At the same time, vacancies requiring special skills — information technology, medicine, manufacturing — remain from previous periods, while faster vacancy turnover is observed in household services, security/protection, and student jobs [5].

The absence of a connection between the education system and business has led to insufficient practical abilities and skills among graduates. This also indicates a low level of dialogue and feedback between employers and the developers of educational and vocational training programs. Meanwhile, the VET system in Uzbekistan has sufficient potential to

contribute to job creation and to solving employers' problems related to skills shortages. According to experts, interest in VET in Uzbekistan is growing, especially given that it is a viable solution to the problems mentioned above [6]. Considering the relevance of ensuring the alignment of VET students' skills with employers' needs, the implementation of national qualification frameworks would be a fundamental step forward on the part of the government, in close cooperation with practitioners and representatives of various sectors [7].

An analysis of the experience of educational institutions in countries with a developed market economy shows the almost universal presence of specialized systems that include regulatory and legal support, a financial mechanism, the presence of specialized services, the provision of close ties with employers, the functioning of a system of social and economic partnership, and so on [8].

From the standpoint of studying the relationship between the labor market and the market of educational services, it is of interest to examine certain aspects of the theory of human capital. In substantive terms, the theory of human capital makes it possible to explain the investment aspects of people's behavior in the labor market and the problems of income distribution and economic inequality, as well as to understand the significance of education both for the economic growth of society and for solving many socio-economic problems [9, p. 58].

Human capital is most often defined as the totality of a person's knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations that contribute to the growth of their productive capacity and can be used over a certain period of time. The purposeful use of these characteristics should generate income. Human capital is formed from the natural abilities of the individual. The accumulation of human capital consists of certain expenditures made by an individual (family, organization, or the state) aimed at maintaining health, obtaining education, professional training and retraining, mobility, and so on. Human capital can be increased through education, professional training, and the acquisition of work experience.

It is assumed that the investments made should pay off and yield profit. Investments in human capital characterize the time and financial costs necessary for obtaining education and professional training. If investments produce returns, if they pay off, then only in this case do they generate higher income, i.e., investments are recouped in the form of higher wages or work that brings greater satisfaction. The rates of return therefore act as a regulator for the distribution

of investments among various types and levels of education, as well as between the education system, the labor market, and the economy as a whole. According to the 2021 Employment Report for Central Asian countries [10, p. 5], compared to its neighbors, Uzbekistan's education system is well funded, and the levels of school enrollment and literacy in the country are high; however, the country needs to improve the quality and relevance of its education and vocational training system.

At the same time, the rates of return on education for society as a whole differ from the rates of return for an individual. In any case, a modern state must be interested in investing in education. The degree of the state's attitude toward the education system can be expressed through the share of public expenditure on it in the gross domestic product.

An important way to address these tasks is the presence of a system of the most effective measures for modernizing higher and vocational education, taking into account the forecasting of labor market needs. In this regard, a number of proposals and recommendations have been formulated aimed at ensuring more effective work in these areas:

- the development of principles and methodology for labor market research, taking into account the specifics of regional economic development, its priority directions, and broken down by sectors and professional-qualification groups;
- the conduct of comprehensive sociological studies of the labor market and the formation of a mechanism for regional demand for personnel training in higher and vocational education institutions;
- the formation of social and economic demand for personnel training through the conclusion of agreements with enterprises of all forms of ownership and individuals, with a guarantee of subsequent employment.
- the formation of a regional balance in the distribution of graduates of general education schools across further educational pathways;
- the organization of cooperation with labor and employment authorities and other interested bodies engaged in the analysis and forecasting of labor demand;
- the establishment of partnerships with organizations of various forms of ownership and the analysis of their development trends from the perspective of human resource potential;
- the participation of vocational education institutions in various professional associations and employers' unions, and the support of various forms of

interaction with employers;

- the formation and improvement of the system for adaptation and professional development of future workers using the potential of vocational education institutions;
- the inclusion in state educational standards, through regional components and elective courses, of relevant disciplines that accelerate the adaptation of graduates to the real production conditions of a specific employer;
- the extensive use of information systems with computer technologies to form a database on labor market demands, as well as artificial intelligence tools in educational practices;
- the development of a new structure combining vocational and general education training in vocational education institutions in connection with the new structure of dual education, oriented toward international quality standards;
- the formation of a mechanism for adjusting the content, forms, and methods of higher and vocational education, training directions and enrollment structure, and state educational standards, based on forecasts of the interconnected development of the labor market and educational services.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the existing problems in the relationship between the labor market and the market of educational services require a whole set of well-considered long-term measures. Education is precisely the social institution capable of providing diverse sets of educational services in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. The modernization of the vocational education system and its adaptation to the labor market will make it possible to increase the socio-economic return of the vocational education system, create conditions for the restructuring of organizational personnel, support the professional and social development of young people, and reduce the level of social tension in the labor market and in society as a whole.

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