

Current Issues in The Development of The Education Sector in The Post-Independence Period

Tursunov Akhtam Salomovich

Professor of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Doctor of Law, Professor, Uzbekistan

Mirzaev Rakhmatillo Ibodullaevich

Dean of the Faculty of Law, Samarkand State University, Doctor of Law, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article analyzes the main stages of reforms implemented in the education system over the 35 years since the Republic of Uzbekistan gained state independence, as well as their legal-institutional foundations, achieved results, and future prospects. The study specifically highlights the initial stage of reforms in education, which involved forming the national education system; the period of improving educational content and governance; and the "New Uzbekistan" stage, which began in 2017. The article establishes that improving the quality of education, strengthening the status of educators, deepening the integration of education and science, developing a digital educational environment, and ensuring equal opportunities in education are priority tasks for the future.

Keywords: Independence, education system, education policy, reforms, New Uzbekistan, human capital, preschool education, general secondary education, professional education, higher education, digital education, quality of education, academic freedom, innovation.

Introduction: The long-term development of any state is primarily determined by the quality of its human capital, the societal attitude toward knowledge and science, and the extent to which its education system meets modern requirements. From this perspective, the Republic of Uzbekistan's attainment of state independence initiated a new stage of development in the country's history, not only in the political and economic spheres but also in the field of education and enlightenment.

After 1991, Uzbekistan faced the task of establishing an education system that aligned with the national interests and socio-economic needs of an independent state. This process was intrinsically linked to revising educational content based on national values, improving the national personnel training system, creating the legal foundations for education, and defining its strategic importance in national development.

From the very first years of independence, education

was recognized as one of the key directions of state policy. In subsequent years, reforms in the education sector have been progressively enhanced, and particularly since 2017, they have been raised to a qualitatively new level within the process of building a New Uzbekistan.

Today, education is viewed not only as a process of knowledge transfer but also as a strategic tool for developing human capital, training personnel for an innovative economy, ensuring social mobility, and increasing the country's competitiveness. In 2024, the President's designation of education system reforms as one of the primary tasks in the "Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy also clearly demonstrates the role of this sector in the country's development[8].

Therefore, on the eve of the 35th anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence, the scientific and theoretical assessment of the path traveled by the education system, the analysis of the results of implemented reforms, and the determination of future

priorities are of great scientific and practical importance.

In preparing the article, methods of systematic approach, historical-legal analysis, comparative analysis, institutional analysis, content analysis and generalization of regulatory legal acts were used. Reforms in the field of education were considered not as a set of separate decisions, but as an interconnected process in the chain of "legal framework - institutional change - educational content - educational outcome - human capital."

The source base of the research consists of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law "On Education," the Concepts for the Development of the Education Sector until 2030, regulatory legal acts on the development of pedagogical education and science, and the "Uzbekistan - 2030" Strategy [1-8]. The criteria of systematicity, continuity, effectiveness, and the impact of educational reforms on human capital were adopted as the primary scientific approach.

The scientific novelty of the article is manifested in a comprehensive study of reforms in the field of education not as a simple set of normative-legal acts and organizational measures, but on the basis of a systemic-legal approach aimed at identifying the functional and causal relationship between institutional mechanisms of legal regulation, modernization of educational content, quality of education and resulting indicators of human capital development. At the same time, along with quantitative coverage indicators, the ratio of quality criteria such as education quality, competence, suitability for the labor market, academic independence, scientific effectiveness, and digital transformation is taken as the analytical criterion. Based on this, the article proposes a result-oriented approach to assessing the effectiveness of educational policy.

1. Formation of the national education system in the early years of independence. In the early period of independence, the primary task facing the education system was the gradual transition from the educational model formed under the former administrative-command system to an educational system that meets the needs of the national state and society.

During this period, special attention was paid to the nationalization of educational content and the wide introduction of national history, culture, language, and spiritual values into the educational process. Strengthening the status of the Uzbek language as the state language also occupied an important place in educational policy.

Independence has turned the issue of training national

personnel in the education system into a strategic task. This was because it was necessary to train a new generation of specialists for the economy, public administration, legal system, social sphere, and science of an independent state.

From this perspective, the legal documents adopted in the field of education during the first years of independence served as the institutional foundation for subsequent reforms.

The most important feature of this period can be explained by the formation of the legal and organizational foundations of the national education system.

2. Development of legal and institutional reforms in the field of education. The development of the education system of independent Uzbekistan cannot be imagined without the gradual improvement of the legal framework.

The main principles of state policy in the field of education are aimed at ensuring the right to education, the continuity of education, the quality of education, the development of individual abilities, and ensuring the harmony of education with the development of the state and society.

In particular, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education," adopted on September 23, 2020, played an important role in systematizing the modern legal foundations of the education sector. This Law was adopted under No. ZRU-637 and is aimed at the comprehensive regulation of relations in the field of education[2].

The significance of the law lies in the fact that it creates opportunities for the legal development of modern forms of the education system, including distance learning, dual education, adult education, and inclusive education.

At the same time, the legal framework for expanding the participation of the state and non-state sectors in the field of education, using public-private partnership mechanisms, and forming a competitive environment in the educational services market has been strengthened.

Thus, one of the important results of reforms in the field of education during the years of independence is the formation of modern and systemic legal foundations for educational relations. This situation, along with the institutional stability of the right to education, also ensured its adaptability to new socio-economic relations.

3. A new stage of educational reforms in the period of New Uzbekistan. The large-scale political, economic, and social reforms implemented in the country since

2017 have also placed qualitatively new requirements on the field of education.

At the center of the development model of New Uzbekistan is the person, the realization of their rights and interests, knowledge and potential. Therefore, reforms in the education system are also aimed at developing human capital.

During this period, reforms in the field of education can be conventionally divided into the following directions:

1. radical reform of preschool education;
2. improving the quality of general secondary education;
3. adaptation of vocational education to the requirements of the labor market;
4. expanding the coverage of higher education;
5. modernization of the content and management of higher education;
6. digitalization of education;
7. Increasing the status and professional potential of teaching staff;
8. strengthening the integration of education, science, and innovation;
9. development of international cooperation and academic mobility.

These areas are not separated from each other, but are presented as components of a single system of continuous education.

4. Preschool education: the initial stage of educational reforms. During the period of New Uzbekistan, the attitude towards preschool education has fundamentally changed. Preschool education began to be viewed not as a social institution that ensures a child's readiness for subsequent stages of education, but as one of the first and most important stages in the formation of human capital.

In 2019, the Concept for the Development of the Preschool Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 was approved. It defines tasks such as increasing preschool education coverage, developing public-private partnerships, implementing modern pedagogical and information-communication technologies, and training and professional development for educators.

An important aspect of this process is the expansion of the participation of the non-governmental sector in the preschool education system alongside state institutions.

As a result, a competitive environment, new educational models, and conditions for expanding the range of services were created at the first stage of

education.

At the same time, in the coming period, it is necessary to pay more attention not only to the coverage indicators of preschool education, but also to its content and quality, the early detection and development of the child's individual abilities.

5. General secondary education: a quality and competency-based approach. The system of general secondary education is the most comprehensive link in the formation of human capital in the country. For this reason, reforms in school education have become one of the central directions of the educational policy of New Uzbekistan.

In 2019, the Concept for the Development of General Secondary and Extracurricular Education until 2030 was approved. It defines the tasks of updating the content of education, introducing innovative teaching methods, strengthening the individual approach, using modern information and communication technologies, and assessing the quality of education based on international criteria[4].

From this perspective, the integration of international assessment programs such as PISA into educational policy is of great importance. This approach emphasizes the student's ability not only to memorize information but also to apply it in life situations, analyze it, think independently, and solve problems.

In the modern school model, the teacher must act not only as a knowledge provider but also as a pedagogical leader who organizes the intellectual and creative development of the student.

Therefore, the main criterion for improving the quality of education, along with the number of students or school infrastructure, should be the quality of educational outcomes. In this regard, transparency in measuring educational outcomes, evidence-based management decisions, and the identification of the student's real competencies are of great importance.

6. Vocational education and the labor market. The modernization of the economy is increasing the demand for new professions and specialties in the labor market. Therefore, harmonizing the vocational education system with the labor market occupies an important place in the educational policy of New Uzbekistan.

Since 2020, a new model of vocational education has been formed: a system of vocational schools, colleges, and technical schools. The goal of this system was to train young people in modern professions and skills, ensure their competitiveness in the labor market, and train personnel in accordance with the needs of employers.

In this regard, strengthening mechanisms for dual education, cooperation with employers, and practice-oriented training is of particular importance.

In the future, the effectiveness of vocational education should be assessed by indicators such as the employment of its graduates, their professional mobility, and labor productivity.

7. Higher education: from coverage to quality and competitiveness. One of the biggest institutional changes in the period of New Uzbekistan occurred in the higher education system.

The process of expanding higher education coverage, establishing new state and non-state higher education institutions, developing cooperation with foreign universities, and adapting educational programs to international standards has accelerated.

The Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, approved in 2019, defines strategic tasks such as increasing higher education enrollment to more than 50 percent, a phased transition to a credit-module system, ensuring academic independence, developing public-private partnerships, and improving the positions of higher education institutions in international rankings[5].

Another important aspect of this concept is the goal of transforming higher education not only into a training institution but also into a center that unites education, science, and innovation.

Within the framework of the "University 3.0" concept, tasks have been defined for the commercialization of research results, the development of startups, technology transfer, and innovation centers.

These changes significantly strengthen the role of higher education in the country's economy and innovative development.

8. The personality of the educator and its status: a decisive factor in educational reforms. The success of any reform in the education system depends, first and foremost, on the potential of the teaching staff.

New requirements have been imposed on the system of training, retraining, and professional development of teachers in New Uzbekistan. The resolution adopted in 2020 on the development of pedagogical education set tasks to improve the quality of teacher training based on international standards and increase the coverage of pedagogical higher education [6].

At the same time, stimulating the work of a teacher, increasing their professional prestige, and strengthening their status in society have become an important direction of educational policy.

However, the quality of education is ensured not only by increasing the requirements for the teacher, but also by creating decent working conditions, academic and methodological freedom, the opportunity for continuous professional development, and a fair assessment system.

9. Digitalization of education and innovative transformation. In the 21st century, it is difficult to imagine the development of the education system without digital technologies. Digitalization allows for expanding access to educational resources, developing distance learning, monitoring educational outcomes, and forming individual educational trajectories.

The digitalization of education in Uzbekistan has also accelerated. The development of electronic educational resources, distance learning, digital management systems, and online educational platforms is transforming traditional models of organizing the educational process.

However, it is not enough to measure digitalization only by the number of computers or electronic platforms. Its actual effectiveness should be determined by the content of education, pedagogical methodology, and the student's influence on the learning outcome. Therefore, digital transformation should be viewed not as a technological modernization, but as a complex institutional process that changes the goals, content, and management logic of the educational process.

In the future, artificial intelligence, adaptive learning technologies, big data analysis, and digital assessment tools will naturally become increasingly important in the educational process.

10. Integration of education and science. Since the early years of independence, the development of science in Uzbekistan has been one of the important directions of state policy. During the period of New Uzbekistan, the integration of education and science was given a new meaning.

In 2020, the Concept for the Development of Science until 2030 was adopted, setting tasks for the effective use of scientific and innovative potential, modernizing scientific infrastructure, and strengthening the training of highly qualified personnel[7].

Tasks such as strengthening the research activities of higher educational institutions, encouraging professors, teachers, and doctoral students to actively participate in international scientific publications, and implementing scientific results into practice contribute to the formation of a new university model.

At the same time, in the future, it is necessary to pay more attention to the practical effectiveness of scientific research in the fields of economics, law,

medicine, technology, and the social sphere than to quantitative indicators.

11. Achievements and existing problems in the field of education. An analysis of the results of 35 years of development shows that the education system of Uzbekistan has undergone significant institutional changes.

First, mechanisms aimed at ensuring the continuity of education and the connection between its various stages have been developed.

Second, large-scale measures have been implemented to expand the coverage of preschool, general secondary, vocational, and higher education.

Thirdly, the expansion of the participation of the state and non-state sectors in higher education contributed to the formation of a competitive environment.

Fourth, new mechanisms have been widely introduced, such as adapting the content of education to international requirements, the credit-module system, academic mobility, and international cooperation.

Fifth, institutional foundations have been created to strengthen ties between education, science, and innovation.

However, along with these results, there are also a number of problems. Their presence does not negate the effectiveness of the reforms; on the contrary, it indicates the need to strengthen quality- and efficiency-oriented management mechanisms at the next stage.

Including:

- the quality of education is not uniform across regions and institutions;
- it is necessary to bring the content of education even closer to the needs of the labor market;
- It is important to improve mechanisms for ensuring the continuous professional development of educators;
- it is necessary to increase the real economic efficiency of educational and scientific results;
- it is important to reduce the digital divide in the use of digital technologies;
- it is necessary to further strengthen the culture of academic integrity and research ethics in education;
- a complete transition from formal indicators to a result-based assessment system is required when assessing education quality.

Thus, at the next stage, the main criterion for educational reforms should be not the number of reforms, but their effectiveness in the life of the individual and society.

12. Perspective directions for the development of the education system. The implementation of tasks in the field of education within the framework of the "Uzbekistan - 2030" Strategy defines the country's long-term human capital strategy. The strategy sets goals aimed at prioritizing education system reforms, developing vocational education, expanding higher education coverage, and improving the quality of education[8].

In the coming years, the following areas may become priority for the education system of Uzbekistan.

The first direction is to evaluate the quality of education based on results.

It is necessary to evaluate the activities of an educational institution not only by the number of students, buildings, and material and technical facilities, but also by the results of education, the competence of graduates, and their competitiveness in the labor market.

The second direction is to increase the prestige of the teaching profession.

The status of the educator in society, working conditions, professional independence, and scientific-methodological development remain among the key factors of education quality.

The third direction is the integration of education and the labor market.

Higher and vocational education programs should be closely linked to the needs of employers, and dual and practice-oriented educational models should be expanded.

The fourth direction is the digital transformation of education.

The use of digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and adaptive learning technologies can ensure the individualization of education. At the same time, the human factor, academic integrity, and the protection of personal data should not be overlooked.

The fifth direction is international integration.

The further expansion of cooperation between Uzbekistan's educational institutions and foreign universities, joint educational programs, academic mobility, and international accreditation processes will strengthen the position of the national education system in the global educational space.

The sixth direction is strengthening the triad of education, science, and innovation.

Higher education institutions must become not only centers for training personnel but also centers for creating new knowledge, technologies, and innovations.

In conclusion, the general logic of the changes that have occurred in the education system during the years of independence demonstrates a trend toward transitioning from institutional restructuring to a result-oriented educational policy. Although the expansion of the regulatory framework and the increase in the coverage of educational services have created important conditions, the social effectiveness of these changes should be assessed through the real competencies of students, the flexibility of graduates in the labor market, the implementation of research results into practice, and the equality of educational opportunities across regions. Therefore, in the next stage of reform management, evidence-based decision-making, measurability of indicators, and regular monitoring of results are of paramount importance.

The 35-year period of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan represents a complex but important historical stage in terms of the development of the education system[1].

While the legal and organizational foundations of the national education system were created in the early years of independence, its content and management mechanisms were improved in subsequent periods. In the period of New Uzbekistan, which began in 2017, reforms in the field of education have acquired a comprehensive and systemic character.

The development of preschool education, the renewal of the content of general secondary education, the reorganization of vocational education, the expansion of higher education coverage, the credit-module system, academic independence, digitalization, and the strengthening of international cooperation are important features of this period.

The Concepts for the Development of Preschool, General Secondary, and Higher Education until 2030, adopted in 2019, made it possible to link educational reforms with long-term strategic goals.

At the same time, the next stage of reforms in the field of education requires a transition from quantitative indicators to qualitative ones. The number of educational institutions or educational coverage alone is not enough. The main task is to educate an individual who thinks independently, possesses modern knowledge and skills, is capable of creating innovations, and has high professional and civic responsibility.

In this sense, it is advisable to build the next stage of development of Uzbekistan's education system based on the principle of "transitioning from coverage to quality, from knowledge transfer to competence formation, and from education to human capital development." The legal, institutional, and intellectual

potential in the field of education formed over 35 years of independence is an important strategic resource for the further development of Uzbekistan. Now the main task is to effectively use this potential, raise the quality of education to the level of international standards and turn human capital into the main driver of the country's innovative development.

Thus, if the 35th year of independence was a period of formation and renewal of Uzbekistan's education system, the period of New Uzbekistan is a stage in the formation of a qualitatively new, competitive, and human-capital-based national education model.

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