

**RELEVANT TOPICS OF EDUCATIONAL SECTOR REFORMS IN
THE MODERNIZATION OF UZBEKISTAN**

Khilola Sayfiddinovna TURAKULOVA

Lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages

“Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Samarkand, Uzbekistan

+998882706266

hilola6266@gmail.com

khilolaturakulova@univ-silkroad.uz

Abstract: *After Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected as the President of Uzbekistan in 2016, huge reforms are being implemented in the field of education. Since then, modern educational standards have been introduced at various stages of education. The current document critically examines the problems of the education sector and lists priorities. The conclusion section discusses possible solutions to these problems.*

Keywords: *education, capacity-building, challenges, clusters, Uzbekistan.*

Uzbekistan has adopted a number of regulatory acts, resolutions and guidelines for improving the national higher education system. Following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country did not change its education system significantly till 1996. However, the “National Program on Capacity building” adopted from 1996 started the colossal reforms in the education sector, which touched-upon all the stages the education was divided into following stages:

- nine-year compulsory secondary education covering 7-16 years old pupil.
- it was followed by three-year compulsory professional colleges or academic lyceums covering 16-19 years;
- four-year optional tertiary education (bachelor) (30-50% public-funded);

- two-year optional master program (10% public-funded);
- three-year optional candidate of science program (100% public funded);
- five-year optional doctor of science program (100% public funded).

Education sector is undergoing tremendous reforms after the change of the political landscape in 2016. Since then modern education standards are being implemented in various stages of post-school education. More transparent entrance exam systems were adopted. To this end it is particularly worth mentioning the Presidential decrees on restructuring and reforming of the education sector institutions and education quality enhancement measures, e.g. establishment of the Ministry for Pre-school education, five-folds increase of the wages of the secondary school teachers, gradual increase of the intake quota for tertiary education etc.

The program entitled “Program on complex development of the higher education system during 2017-2021” elaborated on the key target parameter of the capacity building process, which consist of increasing the university intake quota from 9% to 15% in two years¹. switching back to 11 years secondary education through massive-closure of professional colleges. In line with the degree and in accordance with the set parameter, university intake quotas for covering the school graduates in higher education should be increased in the following areas:

- In humanities – 18.4%;
- In social sciences, economics and law – 3.5%;
- Manufacturing and technical area – 32.8%; - Agricultural and water management – 38.5%;
- Healthcare and social provisions area – 25.7%; and
- Service sector – 39.7%.

Within this framework, the country experienced a 30% increase of intake of students to the higher education institutions in the country in time span of three years.

¹ Cabinet of Ministers define a early university intake quota based on the labor market inquiry, which is allocated among the state universities and institutes. Only eight universities established in cooperation with foreign counterparts can define their annual intake size independently.

Moreover, the current President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev gave high priority to the issue of education from his first day of presidency and have been initiating and supporting crucial programs in this sphere. He has also touched upon the education sector reforms in his address to the national Parliament on 28 of December 2018 and underlined that “We have to strengthen our efforts directed at establishing more opportunities for getting higher education. Higher education coverage of the school graduates remained at the level of not more than 9-10% during the previous years. The actions and measures taken since 2016 have allowed us to increase this number to 15%. But this is still insufficient according to national demand, because plentiful experience of more developed countries demonstrates that this indicator should be 60-70% in average. Therefore, the country has set as long-term objective achieving a 20% coverage of the school graduates attending higher education, which was realized already in the 2019 entrance season with a strong commitment of gradual increase in the coming years”².

Due to planned university intake quota system, low coverage of the graduates in higher education (only 9% of graduates were seated in tertiary education) has eradicated the interest of the youth in higher education during the years of independence.

In fact, enhancement of the education processes and organization of delivering modern education to the youth is one of the most topical issues nowadays. During the meeting dedicated to the further development of the education system, improving the sector of human capacity building and expanding the integration of science and technology with the manufacturing sector, which took on 24 October 2018, the President of Uzbekistan highlighted the issues related to integrating innovative methods to the process of education, providing consistency of the existing education curricula with manufacturing and production, and existing challenges associated with making the education system in line with the structural changes labor market demands is experiencing and mentioned “It is

² Address of the President of Uzbekistan to the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) from 24 December 2018.

bothersome that instead of serving as an engine of national economic growth and development, our higher education system is lagging behind the global, contemporary level”.

It should be of interest to national and international stakeholders alike to review one of the most important factors for increasing the efficiency of the current education system. The further focus therefore is on cluster technologies defined here as:

“unification” (collection, association) when applied to education and includes number of pedagogical processes. In general, the term cluster and the approach is used for explaining large producers and economic complexes, in which modern systems of their management are established and interlinked³.

In contemporary life, pedagogical processes are applying also to cluster methods in practice. In line with acting independently, pedagogical processes review challenges, search for alternative solutions, run common projects, unity various stages of education under one cluster with the overarching aim of increasing the efficiency in the education sector, i.e. covering more students in tertiary education at lower costs.

In practice, developing countries use to operate stand-alone policies for higher, secondary specialized, secondary and pre-secondary education and consequently a low consistency is observed within the entire system. Uzbekistan is hosting 11 universities accredited by foreign education authorities and this number is growing. These universities operate under modern curricula, outlined in syllabuses and monitored through proper evaluation systems. These universities are overseen by the Uzbekistan Higher Education Ministry; however, the latter is not engaged with local universities. Hence, there is no joint course, neither a common module delivered in cooperation with the local universities accredited by foreigners in the country. Therefore, knowledge and skills of the local university

³ Begalov B.A., Jukovskaya I.E Metodologicheskie aspekti vliyaniya informatsionnogo obshestva na innovatsionnoe razvitie ekonomiki». T.: Science and technology, 2016. - 135 s.

graduates do not always meet the national requirements of present-day employers⁴.

Moreover, the current pedagogic systems have clear individual shortcomings, among which:

1. Lack of life-long learning;
2. Secondary education is 11 years in Uzbekistan compared to an average of 12 years in most of the developed countries.
3. Unnecessarily extensive curricula and hence pedagogic load for the teachers and learners (due to Soviet-style curricula development, where ideological bringing-up of the students was the principal leaning objective);
4. One-sidedness of pedagogic processes which offers strong theoretical knowledge loosely linking it with practice;
5. Inconsistence of human capacity building program with the practical market economy requirements (larger part of the university staff do not possess practical experience in their own fields);
6. Barriers in foreign language learning which would facilitate independent learning; which limits the access to much intelligence and information as well as lessons learned from elsewhere.
7. More emphasis is given to theoretical rather than practical knowledge, loosely linking the former knowledge with actual demand from practice;
8. Physical and technical limitations of the learners' independent learning abilities (low student-to-textbook ratio, limited access to online article databases and almost no subscription to prestigious international journals);
9. Limitations linked with usage of information technologies due to lack of equipment and applications;
10. Ever decreasing reputation and real-wage of the teachers, which is hindering the engagement of highly skilled pedagogical personnel with applied attainments;
11. Student performance evaluation systems have been amended frequently

⁴ Jukovskaya I.E. Innovatsionnie aspekti sovershenstvovaniya upravlencheskix protsessov v visshem uchebnom zavedenii na osnove primeneniya sovremennix informatsionno-kommunikatsionnix texnologiy // Otkritoe obrazovanie №4, 2016 g., s. 17-22.

during the last 20 years but still is intrasparent and obscure, which is negatively affecting the quality of the higher education.

12. Creating of wrong impression among the youth, parents and society that becoming a student guarantees possession of a degree diploma, due to relaxed requirements to some students at some higher education facilities and courses, which in turn is arguably impacting the prestige and reputation of some higher education facilities.

Therefore, one solution to the above-mentioned challenge is reviewing the avenues of implementing an education cluster system following the example of other countries leading in innovative education systems such as the US and Germany. It includes developing national methodologies for the creation of education cluster systems and implementation of these systems. To this end one way could be the establishment of an inter-ministerial pilot “higher education facilities-secondary specialized in education facilities-schools” education cluster for addressing and solving current challenges based on e.g. best-practices obtained during the testing in practice of this pilot cluster. Following a review of the experiences on the potential available solutions to the challenge of optimal resource allocation (i.e. education spending at all levels) based on the best-practices of developed countries, it can be noted that curricula and syllabuses (subject plans) of pedagogic programs are consistent with each other at any given stage, be it in higher, secondary specialized, secondary or pre-school levels. In the USA e.g., curricula of professional colleges (offering e.g. secondary specialized degree) are envisaged for three years and have compatible identical curricula and programs with the curricula of the university colleges (higher education facilities). Therefore, as a consequence a graduate of a professional college may choose to continue her/his education as a final year student at the university (college) and possesses thus an opportunity of obtaining a bachelor’s degree which is an additional incentive to the students and parents to gain a better competitive

position at the labor market⁵.

CONCLUSION

Following independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union. The new country Uzbekistan faced key challenges in the transfer from a command driven and state-central centered economy and education system to market guided systems which demanded min depth adaptations and reforms also in the education set up and systems. The educational reform after independence was thus carried by political and evidenced by several presidential decrees. Yet in practice the right mix has not been found and consequently results on the ground are still modest demanding even more reforms and changes. E.g. Uzbekistan's five-year-long higher education system was divided after the reforms in 1996 into a 2-stage system: "bachelor" and "master" degree programs within the framework of a policy, which aimed during 1996-1998 to make these degree programs in line with the EU-Bologna system. However, this process was implemented by initially only shortening the curricula inherited from the Soviet Union times to ca.20%. It is known that Soviet Union curricula emphasized the teaching and transfer of theoretical knowledge as a priority. As a result, the hours dedicated for theoretical knowledge were shortened in favor of the applied skills, which required creation of modern labs, heavier integration of ITC etc. But this was not well-implemented due to underfunding and irrational allocation of resources (larger part of investments in the education sector were directed to building, reconstruction and renovation of education facilities).

At the same time, dividing the five-year Soviet education into two stages required the creation of master courses. Delivery of applied knowledge and skills were again stifled at this level due to lack of appropriate material basis. This led to repeating once again larger part of the program delivered in the bachelor level. Such implementation of the Bologna system turned out to be inefficient as the resulting graduates were not able to meet the requirements of the labor market. The lack of necessary basis for practical classes (labs, hardware and software etc.)

⁵ Gulyamov S.S. Risk management of information and communication systems in commercial banks // Science and education studies № 1(17), January-June, 2016, p.163.

for developing applied skills led to a condition in which lecturers had to deliver these applied skills through additional lectures.

Ensuring the independence of the higher education facilities in defining the intake quotas based on e.g. labor market demand for specific professions is vital for solving one of the abovementioned problems. But most importantly, one has to eliminate the correct impression that once becoming a student guarantees the award of a degree diploma, irrespective of the performance of students. This requires the elimination of forecast of intake and degree delivery quotas, which will definitely lead to increased quality of the higher education. This in turn should improve the healthy competition among the higher education facilities.

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