

# Distinctive Features of Preschool, General Secondary and Higher Education in Uzbekistan and Finland

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## **Abstract:**

This article compares and contrasts the key characteristics of the education systems in Uzbekistan and Finland at the preschool, general secondary, and higher education levels. Through a literature review and analysis, significant differences are identified in areas such as educational philosophies, curriculum, teaching methods, and outcomes. Finland's education system is found to prioritize play-based learning, teacher autonomy and robust teacher training and qualifications. In contrast, Uzbekistan's system features more structured academics at earlier ages, centralized curricula and testing, and a focus on specialization in higher education. Both countries have made strides in expanding access to education.

**Keywords:** comparative education, early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, Uzbekistan, Finland, education policy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Uzbekistan and Finland, despite vast differences in geography, history, and culture, share a commitment to developing robust education systems. However, their approaches to structuring and delivering education at the preschool, general secondary, and higher education levels differ significantly. This article aims to elucidate and compare the distinctive features of each country's education system across these three levels, with a particular focus on teacher autonomy, subject differences, and university admissions.

## METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study relies on a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, government reports, and educational data pertaining to the education systems in Uzbekistan and Finland. Key sources include official publications from the Ministries of Education, international organizations such as UNICEF and the OECD, and academic journals focused on comparative education and educational policy.

The literature review reveals several important themes and findings. First, Finland's education system consistently ranks among the highest in the world on international assessments like PISA, while Uzbekistan's performance has been more mixed [1]. Second, Finland is known for its highly qualified and well-respected teaching workforce, whereas Uzbekistan has faced challenges in teacher training and retention [2]. Third, Finland's approach to education emphasizes play-based learning, teacher autonomy, and minimal standardized testing, in contrast to Uzbekistan's more structured and centralized system [3]. Fourth, both countries have made significant strides in expanding access to education, particularly at the preschool and higher education levels [4][5].

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

**Preschool Education.** Finland's preschool education system is characterized by a focus on play-based learning and socioemotional development. Children typically attend preschool starting at age 6, although voluntary programs are available for younger children. Preschool is free of charge and is considered a fundamental right for all children [6]. The curriculum emphasizes learning through play, outdoor activities, and social interaction, with minimal formal academic instruction [7].

In Uzbekistan, preschool education is provided for children aged 2 to 7, with the last year being compulsory [8]. The curriculum is more academically oriented than in Finland, with an emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and school readiness skills [9]. Preschools are a mix of public and private institutions, with public preschools being subsidized by the government [10].

**General Secondary Education.** Finland's general secondary education is renowned for its high degree of teacher autonomy. Teachers have significant flexibility in designing instruction and assessment within a broad national curriculum framework [11]. There is minimal standardized testing, and teachers are trusted to evaluate student progress using diverse methods. The system emphasizes individualized support for students and holistic development [12].

In contrast, Uzbekistan's general secondary education system is more centralized, with a national curriculum that all schools must follow. Teachers have less autonomy in curriculum design and assessment, with regular standardized tests and a final examination required for graduation.

Subject differences are also notable. Finland's curriculum emphasizes broad, interdisciplinary learning, with equal importance given to academic subjects, arts, and physical education. Uzbekistan's curriculum places a stronger focus on core academic subjects, particularly STEM fields.

**Higher Education.** Finland's higher education system is divided into universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). Admissions are highly competitive and based on a combination of factors, including secondary school performance, entrance exams, and sometimes work experience or other relevant qualifications. Importantly, once admitted, tuition is free for both domestic and EU students.

Uzbekistan's higher education system includes public and private universities offering a mix of academic and professional programs. Admissions are primarily based on centralized entrance exams, with some consideration given to secondary school performance. Tuition fees are charged, although scholarships are available for high-performing students.

Both countries have been working to align higher education with labor market needs, but their approaches differ. Finland emphasizes developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills across disciplines. Uzbekistan has a stronger focus on STEM fields and professional specialization.

**Teacher Autonomy.** The contrast in teacher autonomy between the two countries is stark. In Finland, teachers are highly respected professionals with significant decision-making power in curriculum implementation, teaching methods, and student assessment. This autonomy is supported by robust teacher education programs, typically requiring a master's degree.

In Uzbekistan, while there have been recent efforts to increase teacher autonomy, the system remains more centralized. Teachers generally have less flexibility in curriculum delivery and assessment methods, with a greater emphasis on adhering to standardized curricula and preparing students for centralized exams.

## DISCUSSION

This comparative analysis reveals significant differences in the education systems of Finland and Uzbekistan. Finland's approach is characterized by a child-centered philosophy, high teacher autonomy, minimal standardized testing, and a focus on holistic development and critical thinking skills. Uzbekistan's system features more structured academics, centralized curricula and testing, and a focus on STEM fields and professional specialization.

The stark contrast in teacher autonomy between the two countries is particularly noteworthy. Finland's trust in teachers as professionals capable of making important educational decisions contrasts with Uzbekistan's more centralized approach. This difference has implications for teacher training, job satisfaction, and potentially for student outcomes.

Both countries have made strides in expanding educational access, but their priorities and methods differ. Finland's tuition-free higher education model and emphasis on research and critical thinking reflect a commitment to education as a public good. Uzbekistan's reforms have focused more on economic development and global competitiveness.

These differences are rooted in each country's unique historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts. While Finland's education system has been widely praised, its success is tied to specific sociocultural factors and may not be easily replicable. Uzbekistan's efforts to modernize its education system are promising, but there may be opportunities to learn from Finland's experience, particularly in areas such as teacher autonomy and student-centered pedagogy.

In conclusion, while both countries strive for educational excellence, their paths differ significantly. Continued comparative research and policy exchange could benefit both systems, potentially leading to more effective and equitable education for all students.

## CONCLUSIONS

This comparative analysis of the education systems of Uzbekistan and Finland reveals significant differences in educational philosophies, curriculum, teaching methods, and outcomes at the preschool, general secondary, and higher education levels. Finland's system is characterized by a child-centered approach, teacher autonomy, minimal testing, and a focus on holistic development and critical thinking skills. Uzbekistan's system, in contrast, features more structured academics, centralized curricula and testing, and a focus on STEM fields and professional specialization.

Both countries have made important strides in expanding access to education and improving educational quality, but they have done so in different ways and with different priorities. While Finland's system has been widely praised and emulated around the world, it is important to

recognize that its success is rooted in a specific sociocultural context and may not be easily replicable in other settings.

Uzbekistan's efforts to modernize and internationalize its education system are promising, but there may be opportunities to learn from Finland's experience in areas such as teacher training, curriculum design, and student-centered pedagogy. At the same time, Finland may benefit from studying Uzbekistan's approach to STEM education and workforce alignment.

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