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HISTORICAL PROCESSES AND DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF THE MODERNIZATION OF THE SECONDARY SPECIALIZED AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This article examines the historical processes and developmental stages of the modernization of the secondary specialized and vocational education system in Uzbekistan. It analyzes the legal foundations of educational reforms implemented during the years of independence, their essence, and the key directionfor improving the education system in accordance with contemporary requirements. The study also evaluates, from historical, chronological, and comparative perspectives, the evolution of the Law on Education, the National Program for Personnel Training, the activities of academic lyceums and vocational colleges, the transition to the professional education system, and the development of state policy in this field. The research identifies the main stages of modernization of the secondary specialized and vocational education system, substantiates their contribution to the country's socio-economic development, and determines the prospects for further improvement of the system.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, secondary specialized education, vocational education, professional education, education system, modernization, educational reforms, National Program for Personnel Training, academic lyceum, vocational college, historical development, stages of development, educational policy, human capital, qualified personnel.

During the years of independence, the gradual transition of Uzbekistan to a market economy made the training of competitive and highly qualified personnel, capable of meeting the requirements of the new socio-economic environment, one of the country's most pressing priorities. The socio-economic and cultural development of any state largely depends on the professional competence, knowledge, and practical skills of specialists working in various sectors. Therefore, the effective implementation of personnel policy has become one of the key factors determining the level of economic and social development. Particular attention was also paid to this issue in the Kashkadarya region, where priority was given to training specialists in accordance with the needs of the regional labor market.

It should be emphasized that the development of the National Program for Personnel Training marked the beginning of fundamental reforms in Uzbekistan's education system. Based on national values and advanced international experience, the program aimed to prepare specialists with a high level of professional culture, independent thinking, and the ability to solve practical problems effectively.

In order to implement the objectives established by the Law on Education and the National Program for Personnel Training, as well as to ensure the consistent continuation of reforms in the secondary specialized education system, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a number of organizational and legal measures. In particular, in accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of February 24, 1998, the Center for Secondary Specialized and Vocational Education and its regional branches were established within the structure of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education. Furthermore, on May 13, 1998, the Cabinet of Ministers

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approved the Regulation on Secondary Specialized and Vocational Education. Within the framework of the National Program for Personnel Training, several regulatory mechanisms were introduced, including the establishment of a coordinating council for the training of junior specialists, boards of trustees, the "Best Academic Lyceum" competition, training and experimental farms attached to vocational colleges, regulations governing vocational education for children and adolescents with physical and mental disabilities, basic educational institutions, and procedures for conducting graduates' practical examinations. In addition, the Time Standards guidelines defining the workload of teachers in secondary specialized and vocational educational institutions—including teaching, scientific-methodological, and educational activities—were developed and became the principal regulatory document for organizing the educational process and determining teachers' remuneration. The practical implementation of these reforms was also carried out gradually in secondary specialized educational institutions of the Surkhandarya region [1].

Pursuant to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan of October 16, 2000, the State Educational Standards for Secondary Specialized Vocational Education were approved. Beginning with the 2001–2002 academic year, a new personnel training system based on updated curricula and subject programs was introduced in all institutions of secondary specialized vocational education. These State Educational Standards were gradually implemented in secondary specialized vocational educational institutions of the Kashkadarya region, contributing to the organization of the educational process in accordance with unified national standards [2].

By the end of the 1990s, the number of secondary specialized educational institutions in Uzbekistan had increased steadily. During the 1997–1998 academic year, 259 secondary specialized educational institutions were operating, with 224.8 thousand students enrolled. By the 2015–2016 academic year, their number had reached 1,566, while student enrollment had increased to 1.498 million. During the same period, the network of secondary specialized educational institutions in the Surkhandarya region was also significantly expanded through the continuous establishment of new vocational colleges.

The regional growth in the number of secondary specialized educational institutions was equally remarkable. During this period, the number of such institutions increased from 22 to 104 in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, from 36 to 130 in Andijan Region, from 16 to 90 in Bukhara Region, from 6 to 51 in Navoi Region, from 14 to 52 in Syrdarya Region, and from 12 to 93 in Khorezm Region. Nationwide, the largest concentration of secondary specialized educational institutions was recorded in Kashkadarya Region (145 institutions), Fergana Region (157 institutions), and Samarkand Region (175 institutions) [3].

During the 2018–2019 academic year, the number of secondary specialized educational institutions decreased to 1,537. At that time, 656.3 thousand students were enrolled in vocational colleges, while 70.8 thousand studied in academic lyceums. These figures indicate that the optimization of vocational colleges in subsequent years resulted in a gradual reduction in the number of secondary specialized educational institutions. Academic lyceums, which played a significant role in educating academically gifted students, were predominantly located in urban areas. Of the 123 academic lyceums operating during the final academic year, 117 were situated in cities and only 6 in rural areas. This situation created certain challenges for talented students residing in remote districts of the Kashkadarya region who wished to pursue their studies at academic lyceums [4].

In general, an analysis of the historical development of secondary specialized educational institutions in Uzbekistan demonstrates the existence of different approaches to their establishment and development. In 2001, 194 technical schools and 313 vocational-technical schools were granted the status of vocational colleges, providing training for junior specialists in 78 fields of specialization.

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By 2008, instruction was offered in more than 264 educational fields and 704 occupations within the country's secondary specialized education system. Major enterprises—including the Tashkent Aviation Production Association named after Chkalov, the Navoi Mining and Metallurgical Combine, the Kungrad Soda Plant, the National Company "Uzbektourism," the Uzbekistan Airways National Airline, Uzbekistan Railways, and the Uzkimyosanoat State Joint-Stock Company—participated as employers by placing workforce orders for these specialties. This partnership mechanism also contributed to improving the preparation of specialists in several vocational colleges of the Surkhandarya region in accordance with industrial needs [5].

Taking into account the regional characteristics and economic specialization of different provinces, particular attention was devoted to establishing vocational colleges designed to meet the labor demands of specific industries. For example, due to the advanced development of the mining industry in Tashkent Region, institutions such as the Angren Chemical Industry College, Angren Coal Industry College, Almalyk Mining and Metallurgical College, Almalyk Mining College, and Qibray Energy Vocational College were established. Likewise, considering the development of the oil and gas industry in the Fergana, Bukhara, and Kashkadarya regions, specialized vocational colleges were created to train mid-level specialists for this sector. At the same time, a new draft classifier covering educational fields, specialties, and occupations within the secondary specialized vocational education system was developed. Nevertheless, insufficient integration between education, science, and industry limited the system's ability to fully satisfy the demand for competitive specialists in the labor market [6].

Furthermore, to increase the participation of Grade 11 graduates in secondary specialized vocational education, curricula allowing students to continue their education without leaving employment were developed. This approach was gradually introduced in several vocational colleges of the Surkhandarya region.

Between 1998 and 2015, more than 1,500 educational programs developed in accordance with the State Educational Standards were implemented. During this period, vocational colleges provided training in more than 230 occupations and 670 specialties, while academic lyceums offered education in five major academic fields [7].

On April 17, 2006, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Presidential Resolution No. PQ-325, "On Measures to Accelerate the Development of the Service Sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2006–2010." In accordance with this resolution, vocational colleges introduced five specialties and thirty-one occupations in the field of services, as well as three specialties and sixteen occupations in agriculture. In addition, during 2006, the names and content of 73 occupations related to information technology, transportation, industry, communications, public utilities, culture and the arts, and economics were revised. As a result, the number of specialties offered within the secondary specialized education system increased to 351 by 2007. Responding to labor market demands, four additional educational fields were introduced during the same year.

In the 2006–2007 academic year, 399,432 students were admitted to secondary specialized vocational educational institutions, representing 64 percent of general secondary school graduates. During the 2007–2008 academic year, 480,842 graduates of Grade 9 were admitted, raising the enrollment rate to 75.9 percent. These reforms were consistently implemented in the Kashkadarya region, where the enrollment of Grade 9 graduates into vocational colleges and academic lyceums expanded considerably. For example, 50,928 students were admitted to academic lyceums and vocational colleges in Tashkent City during the 2007–2008 academic year, ensuring that all 35,770 Grade 9 graduates of the city's general secondary schools continued their education. Overall, graduates

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from general secondary schools in 44 districts and cities across the country were enrolled in academic lyceums and vocational colleges [8].

Despite these achievements, admission procedures were not consistently observed in some educational institutions. In 2005, 2,400 students were illegally admitted to 75 unauthorized educational programs at 55 colleges in the Republic of Karakalpakstan; 1,040 students were admitted to 23 unauthorized programs at 19 colleges in Bukhara Region; and 480 students were admitted to six unauthorized programs at six colleges in Namangan Region. Similar shortcomings prompted the strengthening of admission supervision in the Kashkadarya region. These irregularities contributed to the emergence of various negative practices within the education system [9].

In addition, as in other sectors, particular attention was devoted to establishing educational institutions responsible for training military personnel within the secondary specialized education system. To this end, Presidential Resolution No. PQ-641 of May 22, 2007, "On Measures for Organizing the Activities of Military Academic Lyceums," provided for the establishment of academic lyceums on the basis of existing military lyceums throughout the country. These reforms also created an important legal foundation for the development of military education in the Surkhandarya region. Furthermore, in accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of October 23, 2007, "On Improving the Activities of Military Academic Lyceums," 600 Grade 9 graduates were admitted to military academic lyceums during the 2007–2008 academic year [10].

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