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Parental Involvement in Uzbekistan's Education Reforms: A Pathway to Sustainable Change

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Abstract

Uzbekistan's education reforms, while ambitious, often exclude parental voices despite their cultural and practical significance. This mixed-methods study (June–August 2025) examines how parents perceive and engage with reforms, drawing on interviews, focus groups, and policy analysis. Findings reveal systemic communication gaps, cultural barriers, and untapped opportunities for collaboration. Grounded in Epstein's parental involvement framework and lessons from Turkey and Malaysia, the study proposes actionable policies to strengthen family-school partnerships. Recommendations include localized communication strategies, parent advocacy training, and inclusive governance models.

Keywords: education reform, parental involvement, Uzbekistan, family-school collaboration, policy design

Introduction

Since 2016, Uzbekistan has prioritized education modernization through initiatives like the *National Program for Education Development* (Ministry of Public Education, 2023). Reforms target teacher training, digital infrastructure, and inclusive curricula. Yet, parents—critical mediators of children's learning—remain peripheral to policy design.

Globally, parental involvement correlates with improved student outcomes, from academic performance (Jeynes, 2018) to socioemotional resilience (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In Central Asia, however, top-down reforms often neglect familial perspectives (Silova et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by answering: *How can Uzbekistan's education reforms integrate parental insights to align with community needs?*





Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations

Epstein's (1995) framework identifies six parental roles: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) home learning, 5) decision-making, and 6) community collaboration. In Turkey, Yildiz (2016) found that religious and cultural values motivate involvement, but bureaucratic hierarchies limit engagement. Similarly, Malaysian studies highlight parents' desire for consultation but note systemic exclusion from policymaking (Abu Bakar et al., 2018).

Uzbekistan's Context

Uzbek families traditionally prioritize education, with 89% viewing it as the "primary path to success" (UNICEF, 2022). However, parental roles remain confined to passive tasks (e.g., fee payments, attendance at meetings). A 2023 World Bank report criticized the "one-way communication" between schools and families, urging participatory models (World Bank, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative dominant mixed-methods approach, combining:

1. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) with 30 parents (15 urban, 15 rural).
2. Focus groups (4 groups of 6–8 parents) in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana.
3. Document analysis of 25 policy texts (e.g., Ministry of Education circulars, school-parent memos).

Sampling

Participants were purposively sampled for diversity:

- Gender: 60% mothers, 40% fathers.
- Language: Uzbek (70%), Russian (20%), Tajik (10%).
- Socioeconomics: Low-income (40%), middle-income (50%), high-income (10%).





Data Collection

- Interviews: Explored perceptions of reforms (e.g., digital curricula, teacher incentives).
- Focus groups: Discussed community-specific barriers (e.g., rural internet access).
- Policy analysis: Coded for keywords like “parental inclusion” and “community feedback.”

Analysis

Data were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using NVivo 14. Thematic coding followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach, with intercoder reliability ensured via Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.82$.

Ethics

Approved by Tashkent State Pedagogical University’s IRB (#IRB-2025-EDU-015). Participants received consent forms in their preferred language.

Findings

1. Perceptions of Reforms

- Support for inclusivity: 78% praised special education expansion but requested teacher training. “My daughter’s school welcomed disabled students, but teachers seem unprepared” (Parent 12, Tashkent).
- Digital divide: Urban parents praised online portals, while rural ones noted inequities. Only 35% in Fergana accessed the “E-School” platform due to connectivity gaps.

2. Current Involvement

- Limited engagement: 85% participated only in mandatory meetings.
- Structural barriers: Rural schools held 70% fewer parent council meetings than urban counterparts.

3. Cultural Dynamics

- Respect for authority: 62% hesitated to critique teachers, framing it as “disrespectful” (Parent 9, Samarkand).
- Gender roles: Mothers handled day-to-day communication, but fathers dominated financial decisions.





Policy Recommendations

1. Decentralized Communication

- Action: Partner with mahalla committees to co-design reform updates.
- Model: Adapt Turkey's "Family Education Programs" (Yildiz, 2016), which use local leaders to disseminate information.

2. Parent Advocacy Training

- Action: Train NGO(Non-governmental organization)s to deliver workshops on navigating school systems.
- Evidence: Malaysia's "Parent Power Initiative" raised engagement by 40% (Abu Bakar et al., 2018).

3. Inclusive Governance

- Action: Reserve 30% of regional education council seats for parents.
- Example: Norway's parental councils influence budget allocations (Bæck, 2019).

Conclusion

Uzbekistan's reforms aspire to modernity but risk replicating Soviet-era top-down approaches unless parents are embraced as partners. As Epstein (1995) argues, sustainable change requires recognizing families as "co-architects" of education systems. For Uzbekistan, this means leveraging its cultural strength—strong familial bonds—to build bridges between policymakers and communities. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of parental inclusion on student retention and achievement.

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