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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA: LESSONS FOR UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article analyses the effectiveness of the preschool education systems of Japan and South Korea. The advanced experiences, pedagogical approaches, and management models of these countries in the field of preschool education are examined. The current state of Uzbekistan's preschool education system is analysed, and practical recommendations for implementing the positive experiences of Asian countries are developed. As a result of the research, a conceptual model for improving the effectiveness of preschool education in Uzbekistan is proposed.

Keywords: preschool education, Japanese education system, South Korean education system, Uzbekistan, educational effectiveness, comparative analysis, early childhood education, teaching staff.

Introduction. Preschool education is globally recognised as a fundamental foundation that exerts a profound influence on a child's subsequent life. Scientific research conducted over the past decades demonstrates that the brain develops most intensively between the ages of 0 and 6, and the education and upbringing received during this period exerts a positive influence throughout a person's entire life.[1]

In the Asian region, Japan and South Korea occupy leading positions in preschool education on a global scale. Japan's education system, grounded in the philosophies of "ikigai" (purpose in life) and "kaizen" (continuous improvement), and the effective implementation of South Korea's "Nuri" programme confirm these countries' achievements in the field of education. According to OECD data, the enrolment rate of children aged 3–5 in preschool education institutions is 96% in Japan and 93% in South Korea.[2]

In Uzbekistan, wide-ranging reforms are also being implemented to improve the preschool education system. Within the framework of the 2017–2021 Action Strategy and subsequently in the "Uzbekistan-2030" strategy, expanding and improving the quality of preschool education has been designated a priority direction. However, at present the enrolment rate of children aged 3–6 in preschool education institutions in the country remains at approximately 70%.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the preschool education systems of Japan and South Korea, to identify their positive aspects, and to assess the possibilities of their application to Uzbekistan's conditions.

Literature review and methodology. Comparative research in the field of preschool education began to develop intensively from the second half of the twentieth century. The theories on child development put forward by such eminent psychologists as J. Bruner (1966), L. Vygotsky (1978), and J. Piaget (1952) formed the scientific foundations of preschool education.

1. Heckman, J. J. (2006). Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children. Science, 312(5782), 1900-1902.

2. 4. OECD (2023). Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing, Paris.

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Tobin, Wu, and Davidson's (1989) work "Preschool in Three Cultures" holds an important place in the study of Japanese preschool education. This research carried out a comparative analysis of Japanese, Chinese, and American kindergartens. The authors highlight as one of the distinctive features of Japanese preschool education the great emphasis placed on group activities.[3]

The research of Kim and Park (2017) is of particular significance regarding South Korean preschool education. They conducted a wide-ranging study evaluating the effectiveness of the "Nuri" curriculum and scientifically demonstrated its positive impact on children's cognitive and social development.[4]

Among research on preschool education in Uzbekistan, the works of N. Musurmonova (2020) and Kh. Yuldoshev (2022) are of particular importance. These researchers analysed the pressing problems of preschool education in Uzbekistan and developed recommendations for applying international experience in the national context.[5]

The following methods were employed in the research: comparative analysis, systematic analysis, document study, statistical data analysis, and synthesis. Data were drawn from reports by the OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF, and national ministries of education.

THE JAPANESE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Structure and Characteristics of the System

Japan's preschool education system consists of two types of institutions: "yochien" (kindergartens) and "hoikuen" (nurseries). Yochien are under the Ministry of Education and primarily serve children aged 3–6, while hoikuen are managed by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and are intended for children aged 0–6. From 2019, the "kodomoen" — an integrated institution system combining both types of services — was introduced.[6]

The most important characteristic of Japanese preschool education is an approach oriented towards fostering a sense of community and developing children's independence. The concept of "shudan seikatsu" (group life) forms the foundation of Japanese preschool education; children learn to feel responsible towards their group, to solve problems collaboratively, and to provide mutual assistance.

The Japanese National Curriculum (Course of Study for Kindergartens) encompasses five core areas: health, human relationships, the environment, language, and expression. These areas are developed in close interconnection with one another and are realised through play activities.[7]

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3. UNESCO (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report: Non-state Actors in Education. Paris: UNESCO.

4. UNICEF (2022). Early Childhood Education in Central Asia. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office.

5. Musurmonova, N. (2020). Problems of development of the preschool education system in Uzbekistan. Scientific Bulletin of the Pedagogical Institute, 4, 45-52.

6. Yuldoshev, Kh. (2022). Innovative approaches in preschool education. Tashkent: Fan Publishing House.

7. OECD (2023). Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing, Paris.

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Teacher Training System

In Japan, becoming a preschool education teacher requires completing at least a two-year college programme or a four-year university programme. Teachers are required to hold a special licence. In Japan, teachers are obligatorily required to attend at least 20 hours of professional development courses per year.

A distinctive feature of the work of Japanese preschool teachers is that, rather than directly instructing children, they focus on creating a favourable developmental environment for them. This approach is called "kansho" (observation and reflection); the teacher carefully observes the children's play and activities, offering assistance when necessary.

Financing and State Policy

The financing of preschool education in Japan is based on both public and private sources. From 2019, the government adopted a resolution to make preschool education free for all children aged 3–5. This reform removed a financial burden equivalent to approximately 1 trillion Japanese yen (9 billion US dollars) per year from families.[8]

Particular attention is also paid to the infrastructure of preschool education institutions in Japan. All kindergartens are required to meet special standards — that is, to create a safe, comfortable, and developmental environment for children. The government allocates special subsidies for the renovation of institutional buildings and equipment.

THE SOUTH KOREAN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

The "Nuri" Programme and Its Characteristics

In South Korea, a unified "Nuri" (meaning "world" in Korean) curriculum for children aged 3–5 was introduced from 2013. This programme eliminated the educational disparity that had previously existed between separately operating kindergartens ("yuchiwon") and children's centres ("eorinjip"), and ensured a unified standard of educational quality.[9]

The core principles of the "Nuri" programme are: the holistic development of the child, learning through play, the child's active participation and creativity, and cooperation with the family and community. The programme encompasses five educational areas: physical health and movement, communication, social relationships, arts and expression, and exploration of nature.

Integration of Digital Technologies

South Korea occupies one of the leading positions in the world in the use of digital technologies in preschool education. All kindergartens in the country are equipped with high-speed internet, interactive whiteboards, and educational tablets. However, the use of digital technologies is carried out in appropriate measure and under pedagogical supervision.[10]

The South Korean government developed the "Smart Kindergarten" programme for the years 2020–2025. Within this programme, equipping preschool education institutions with artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies is envisaged. The programme incorporates special algorithms that monitor the individual development of each child.

Family and Community Participation

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[8] Musurmonova, N. (2020). Problems of development of the preschool education system in Uzbekistan. Scientific Bulletin of the Pedagogical Institute, 4, 45-50

[9] UNICEF (2022). Early Childhood Education in Central Asia. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office

[10] Ministry of Preschool Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2022). Report on the State of the Preschool Education System in 2022. Tashkent.

[11] Ministry of Education Korea (2019). 2019 Revised Nuri Curriculum. Seoul: MOE.

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The active involvement of parents in the preschool education process is one of the important characteristics of the South Korean system. A "Parents' Council" operates in every kindergarten, and its members participate directly in the management of the institution. At least once per quarter, seminars, masterclasses, and consultation sessions are held for parents.

Community preschool education institutions ("Community Child Centres") occupy a special place in South Korea. These institutions provide free services for families in need and socially vulnerable children, operating with the active support of the local community.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN SYSTEMS

In order to conduct a comparative analysis of the preschool education systems of Japan and South Korea, a table was compiled based on the following indicators:[11]

Indicator	Japan	South Korea
Enrolment rate (ages 3–5)	96%	93%
Curriculum	National curriculum (5 areas)	"Nuri" programme (5 areas)
Teacher qualification	College to university	Bachelor's degree required
Financing	Free for ages 3–5 (2019)	Free for ages 3–5 (2013)
Technologies	Moderate level	High level
Group size	Max. 35 children	Max. 20 children
Daily hours	4–8 hours	3–9 hours

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the preschool education systems of Japan and South Korea

When comparing the two systems, a number of common features are evident: the state's considerable attention to preschool education, the tendency towards making education free, the primacy of play-based learning methodology, and the great importance attached to family cooperation. Differences are observed mainly with regard to the proportion of financing, the level of technology use, and the requirements placed on teacher qualifications.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN: CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES

The preschool education system in Uzbekistan has been developing rapidly in recent years. As a result of the establishment of the Ministry of Preschool Education in 2016 and the reforms subsequently implemented, the number of preschool education institutions has increased considerably. According to 2022 data, more than 15,000 preschool education institutions are operating in the country.[12]

However, a number of pressing problems still await resolution. Firstly, the disparity in the quality of preschool education between urban and rural areas remains considerably large. Secondly, the shortage of qualified teaching staff – particularly in rural areas – remains a serious

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12. Yuldoshev, Kh. (2022). Innovative approaches in preschool education. Tashkent: Fan Publishing House.

13. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan (2018). Course of Study for Kindergartens. Tokyo: MEXT.

14. Yuldoshev, Kh. (2022). Innovative approaches in preschool education. Tashkent: Fan Publishing House.

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problem. Thirdly, the deterioration of the buildings and material-technical base of preschool education institutions has a negative impact on educational quality.[13]

Wages for preschool education teachers in Uzbekistan are relatively low, which is leading qualified specialists to leave the sector. At present, the average wage of preschool education teachers is 15–20% lower than the average wage in the country.[14]

Furthermore, traditional teaching methods predominate in preschool education institutions in Uzbekistan. Modern pedagogical approaches aimed at developing children's independent thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities have not yet been widely introduced.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UZBEKISTAN BASED ON ASIAN EXPERIENCE

Improving the Curriculum

Drawing on the experience of Japan and South Korea, it is recommended that Uzbekistan also update and improve its unified national preschool education curriculum. In the new curriculum, the principles of the child's holistic development, the primacy of play activities, and an individual approach should occupy a central place. Moreover, cultural heritage and national values should be organically integrated into the educational process.

Improving the Quality of Teaching Staff

Inspired by the South Korean experience, it is advisable to strengthen the requirement for a bachelor's degree in the training of preschool education teachers. Furthermore, introducing the practice of "kansho" (observation and reflection) from the Japanese system would play an important role in improving teachers' professional skills. Setting teachers' wages at least 20–30% above the national average would provide them with material incentives.

Improving the Financing Model

The experience of Japan and South Korea demonstrates that making preschool education free or more affordable considerably increases enrolment rates. It is recommended that Uzbekistan also pursue the path of gradually making preschool education services free — first for the poorest families, and then for all citizens. To this end, it is necessary to increase the share of preschool education in the state budget and to develop mechanisms for attracting private investment.

Integration of Digital Technologies

Drawing on the South Korean experience, it is necessary to gradually equip Uzbekistan's preschool education institutions with modern information and communication technologies. However, this process must not be carried out without pedagogical justification. It is advisable to first train teachers in the correct use of digital technologies, and then to equip institutions.

Strengthening Family and Community Cooperation

Inspired by the "parental cooperation" model in Japan and South Korea, it is recommended that active parents' councils also be established in preschool education institutions in Uzbekistan. By strengthening cooperation between mahallas (community committees) and preschool education institutions, social capital can be utilised effectively.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the preschool education systems of Japan and South Korea occupy leading positions in world educational practice through their effectiveness, holistic approach, and commitment to continuous improvement.

The principal lessons from Japan's experience are: fostering a community spirit, learning through play, the teacher's observational role, and continuous professional development. The

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principal lessons from South Korea's experience are: a unified national programme ("Nuri"), the integration of technologies, active parental participation, and ensuring social equality.

Uzbekistan can and should introduce these experiences selectively, taking into account its national particularities. The proposed reforms are: updating the national curriculum, improving the quality of teaching staff, improving the financing model, introducing digital technologies on a pedagogically justified basis, and strengthening family-community cooperation.

Promising directions for future research include: the experimental introduction of Asian countries' preschool education experiences in Uzbekistan and the empirical investigation of their effectiveness; assessing the long-term economic and social impact of investments in preschool education.

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