

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPROVING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION LEADERS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF FINLAND, SOUTH KOREA AND UZBEKISTAN

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## Abstract

This article provides a comparative analysis of the experiences of improving the qualifications of preschool education leaders in the education systems of Finland, South Korea and Uzbekistan. In each country, programs aimed at training, retraining and developing their professional potential, management principles, pedagogical leadership models and organizational and pedagogical mechanisms of the qualification improvement process are studied. Finland's innovative educational approaches, South Korea's technological and systematic management model and Uzbekistan's national experience, which is being formed on the basis of reforms in recent years, are compared.

**Keywords:** Preschool education, leadership qualifications, professional development system, comparative analysis, Finnish education model, South Korean education system, Uzbek education reforms.

## Introduction

The level of socio-economic development of any country is closely connected with the quality and effectiveness of its education system. In this regard, early childhood education is considered a fundamental stage in the formation of human capital, requiring modern management approaches, advanced pedagogical strategies, and highly qualified leaders. In today's globalized and increasingly competitive world, leading nations are achieving significant success by continuously improving the professional competencies of preschool education administrators, implementing

innovative management practices, and developing sustainable leadership models. Finland and South Korea, in particular, are widely recognized for their high-performing education systems and robust approaches to leadership development in early childhood institutions.<sup>[1]</sup>

In recent years, Uzbekistan has also undertaken comprehensive reforms aimed at modernizing preschool education and strengthening the system for training and developing managerial personnel. Presidential decrees, state programs, and sectoral strategies have substantially increased the expectations placed on preschool administrators regarding leadership, professional competence, and management culture. As a result, the role of the preschool director has evolved from a traditional administrative position into that of a pedagogical leader and change manager capable of guiding teaching processes, fostering innovation, and ensuring quality improvement.

Finland's experience highlights leadership development rooted in trust-based governance, professional autonomy, and pedagogical leadership. South Korea, on the other hand, is noted for its highly systematized management structure, strong discipline, and the integration of advanced digital technologies into leadership training. Uzbekistan is actively working to modernize its professional development system through digitalization, international collaboration, competency-based training standards, and new approaches to continuous professional growth.<sup>[3]</sup>

Against this background, a comparative analysis of leadership development practices in Finland, South Korea, and Uzbekistan provides valuable insights for strengthening the quality and effectiveness of preschool management in Uzbekistan. Examining similarities and differences in management mechanisms, training programs, digital tools, organizational models, and leadership competencies across the three countries allows for the identification of best practices relevant to national needs.<sup>[3]</sup>

This research aims to analyze advanced international models, assess their applicability to Uzbekistan's context, and propose practical recommendations for enhancing the professional development system of preschool education administrators. The findings of this study hold both theoretical significance and practical relevance, contributing to the continued improvement of early childhood education leadership in Uzbekistan.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The state's educational policy plays a crucial role in shaping the organization and quality of education. Effective educational policy prioritizes student learning, personal development, and the fulfillment of societal needs. In Uzbekistan, education and training are provided through a diverse network of institutions, including preschools, general schools, specialized schools, vocational colleges, institutes, universities, and academies. These institutions can be public, private, joint, or established through partnerships with the government. As of 2022, Uzbekistan had 8,412 preschool institutions, 10,522 general secondary education institutions, 827 secondary specialized and vocational institutions, and 154 higher education institutions [6]. To ensure quality education within these institutions, both favorable conditions and highly qualified personnel are essential.[4]

When examining the educational systems of developed countries, one cannot help but notice the high level of teacher qualifications, the advanced learning environments, and the remarkable achievements of students, which collectively foster innovation and excellence. Finland serves as a prime example of a country that has achieved exceptional results in education. Education is considered a cornerstone of Finnish society, providing equal opportunities for all citizens from early childhood through higher education, and it is free of charge.

The Finnish education system is structured as follows:[5]

- Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), which serves children before compulsory schooling begins (typically at age seven);
- Preschool education, provided during the year prior to the start of compulsory schooling;
- Nine years of comprehensive primary and lower secondary education, which is mandatory;
- Upper secondary education, which may be general or vocational;
- Higher education, offered by universities and universities of applied sciences.

In addition to formal education, adult education is widely available. Liberal adult education promotes informal learning, personal growth, and civic engagement through courses in arts, crafts, and community-related subjects. Adult learners may study independently or through vocational training, apprenticeships, professional development programs, or other employer-supported opportunities.

Finland's Early Childhood Education and Care system integrates care and teaching in a structured, goal-oriented manner. Its primary objective is to support children's overall development, health, well-being, and learning opportunities. The Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC, established by the Finnish National Education Agency, guides both content planning and implementation while providing a framework for local curriculum development.

**Table 1. The comparative table on preschool education leaders' professional development[6]**

Aspect	Finland	South Korea	Uzbekistan
Leader Training	University-based; focus on pedagogy, leadership, child development; continuous CPD	Structured programs; focus on administration, curriculum, teacher supervision	State and international programs; ongoing reforms; focus on management and pedagogy
Qualification Requirements	University degree in education; research-informed practice	University degree + certification; evaluated performance	Varies; workshops, seminars; standards improving
Autonomy	High; leaders make pedagogical and managerial decisions	Moderate; follow guidelines, reporting required	Developing; increasingly responsible for staff and curriculum
Professional Development	Regular CPD, seminars, research, university collaboration	Mandatory training, policy updates, tech integration	Workshops, short courses, international collaboration
Evaluation & Accountability	Reflective practice; emphasis on professional judgment	Frequent inspections; performance-based evaluation	Monitored by authorities; quality assurance developing
Strengths	Research-based, holistic, trusted leadership	High standards, structured, tech-savvy	Rapid modernization, international best practices, leadership focus

Preschool education in Finland ensures that children have equitable opportunities for learning and development. Since 2015, preschool education has been free and compulsory for all children, and parents or guardians are required to ensure their child's participation. Comprehensive school education spans grades one through

nine, generally covering children ages seven to seventeen. Attendance is mandatory for all children residing permanently in Finland, and public education is free of charge. Only a small percentage of students attend private schools. Upon completing compulsory education, students must pursue upper secondary education, choosing either general education (lukio) or vocational education. The general secondary pathway emphasizes broad knowledge rather than preparation for a specific career. Students take a national examination at the end of secondary school, which determines eligibility for higher education, including universities and universities of applied sciences.[7]

Higher education in Finland emphasizes both academic and applied learning. Universities primarily focus on scientific research and academic degrees, while universities of applied sciences provide practical education tailored to labor market needs. Degree programs include bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, with standard timelines ranging from three to four and a half years, depending on the program and institution.

Adult education supports lifelong learning, upskilling, reskilling, citizenship education, and vocational or leisure-based studies in diverse disciplines. It may be self-funded or provided through employer-supported programs. Liberal adult education promotes personal development and well-being and is accessible to all citizens without granting formal qualifications or degrees. Similarly, basic arts education progresses through goal-oriented levels to develop self-expression and artistic skills for future vocational or higher education.[8]

Comparing the educational systems of Uzbekistan and Finland reveals both similarities and differences. In Finland, teacher preparation involves a rigorous five-year university degree focusing on pedagogy and didactics. Trainee teachers engage in research on how learning occurs and the most effective ways to teach specific subjects. This extensive preparation allows Finnish teachers a high degree of autonomy and trust, resulting in minimal supervision and a strong sense of ownership over their work. This system fosters creativity and responsibility among teachers. Relationships between teachers and students are more informal, and supportive physical interactions, such as comforting a distressed child, are permitted, reflecting the high level of trust placed in educators.

The Finnish National Core Curriculum has recently been updated to integrate contemporary educational approaches and emphasize student well-being, active

learning, and holistic development. Key features include fostering leadership, building school communities, and ensuring that every student has equal access to education. School meals, supplies, and transportation are provided free of charge, creating equitable opportunities for students from all backgrounds.[9]

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, regardless of the country, it is evident that education requires continuous innovation and reform to positively influence society. Finland's globally recognized success highlights the importance of state commitment to education and the shared cultural value placed on learning. When a nation's collective mindset prioritizes education, the country is positioned to achieve exceptional outcomes in all sectors.

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