FROM DEFECTOLOGY TO INCLUSION: THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This research paper is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of the historical-chronological and institutional stages of transition from the traditional special (defectological) education system to the modern model of inclusive education in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The article systematically examines the medical-segregationist approaches inherited from the Soviet period, the socio-psychological consequences of the residential institutional system, and the formation of national legislation during the independence years. In particular, it empirically and conceptually highlights the legal shifts that occurred as a result of the adoption of the new edition of the Law "On Education", Presidential decrees, and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in recent years. Structured in the IMRAD format, this comprehensive paper analyzes contemporary barriers to implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools, including architectural infrastructure deficits, the psychological readiness of pedagogical personnel, and the shortage of shadow teachers, while offering evidence-based scientific and practical recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: inclusive education, defectology, special education, chronological stages, Uzbekistan, educational reforms, medical-pedagogical model, UN Convention, infrastructure, tutoring services.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot ishi O‘zbekiston Respublikasida an’anaviy maxsus (defektologik) ta’lim tizimidan zamonaviy inklyuziv ta’lim modeliga o‘tishning tarixiy-xronologik va institutsional bosqichlarini har tomonlama tahlil qilishga bag‘ishlangan. Maqolada sovet davridan meros qolgan tibbiy-segregatsion yondashuvlar, internat tizimining ijtimoiy-psixologik oqibatlari hamda mustaqillik yillarida milliy qonunchilikning shakllanishi tizimli tadqiq etilgan. Ayniqsa, keyingi yillarda qabul qilingan yangi tahrirdagi "Ta'lim to'g'risida"gi qonun, prezident farmonlari va BMTning Nogironlar huquqlari to‘g‘risidagi konvensiyasining ratifikatsiya qilinishi natijasida yuzaga kelgan huquqiy burilishlar empirik va konseptual jihatdan yoritilgan. IMRAD formati talablari asosida tayyorlangan ushbu maqolada inklyuziv ta’limni umumta’lim maktablarida joriy etishdagi mavjud to‘siqlar, xususan, me’moriy infratuzilmaning yetishmasligi, pedagogik kadrlarning psixologik tayyorgarligi

hamda yordamchi tyutorlar (shadow teachers) tanqisligi muammolari tahlil qilinib, ularni bartaraf etish bo‘yicha ilmiy-amaliy tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilgan.

Kalit so‘zlar: inklyuziv ta’lim, defektologiya, maxsus ta’lim, xronologik bosqichlar, O‘zbekiston, ta’lim islohotlari, tibbiy-pedagogik model, BMT konvensiyasi, infratuzilma, tyutorlik xizmati.

Аннотация: Данное исследовательское работа посвящено всестороннему анализу историко-хронологических и институциональных этапов перехода от традиционной специальной (дефектологической) системы образования к современной модели инклюзивного образования в Республике Узбекистан. В статье системно исследуются медико-сегрегационные подходы, унаследованные от советского периода, социально-психологические последствия интернатной системы и формирование национального законодательства в годы независимости. В частности, эмпирически и концептуально освещаются правовые сдвиги, произошедшие в результате принятия новой редакции Закона «Об образовании», указов Президента и ратификации Конвенции ООН о правах инвалидов в последние годы. В статье, подготовленной в соответствии с требованиями формата IMRAD, анализируются существующие барьеры на пути внедрения инклюзивного образования в общеобразовательных школах, в том числе нехватка архитектурной инфраструктуры, психологическая готовность педагогических кадров и дефицит ассистентов (shadow teachers), а также разрабатываются научно-практические рекомендации по их устранению.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, дефектология, специальное образование, хронологические этапы, Узбекистан, образовательные реформы, медико-педагогическая модель, Конвенция ООН, инфраструктура, тьюторская служба.

INTRODUCTION

Global Context and Theoretical Foundations. The international landscape of special education has undergone a fundamental transformation over the last half-century, transitioning from models of institutional confinement to universal human-rights-based inclusion. Historically, children with physical, sensory, or intellectual variations were isolated from mainstream society under the pretext of clinical intervention. This paradigm began to shift globally with the adoption of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), which asserted that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning within general education frameworks. This human-rights approach was later codified by Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), establishing inclusive education not as an optional charity, but as a binding state obligation.

The Soviet Defectological Inheritance

For nearly seven decades, the Republic of Uzbekistan developed its educational resources under the Soviet administrative and scientific apparatus. The bedrock of this system was "defectology"—an advanced, highly clinical discipline established by Lev Vygotsky and expansionist Soviet neuroscientists. Defectology posited that biological variations (primary defects) trigger social anomalies in development (secondary defects) if not addressed by early,

highly controlled scientific intervention. While this school attained world-class breakthroughs in developing specialized methodologies for specific diagnoses—such as tactile learning systems for the blind and structured phonetic tools for the deaf—its institutional manifestation was strictly segregationist.

Within this framework, children with disabilities were viewed through a medical model, which conceptualized disability as an individual pathology requiring institutional correction. Specialized Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Commissions (MPPK) served as institutional gatekeepers, systematically routing children out of mainstream schools and placing them into closed residential boarding institutions (internats). This structure separated children from their families and local communities, cultivating institutional dependence and reinforcing social marginalization.

Problem Statement and Research Objectives

Following its independence in 1991, Uzbekistan faced the monumental challenge of transitioning from this deeply entrenched, segregated network to an inclusive educational model. This transition requires more than just changing legal language; it demands a total restructuring of physical school infrastructure, a major overhaul of university-level teacher training curricula, and a shift in societal attitudes toward disability.

While the state has launched a wave of modern policy reforms since 2017, the implementation process encounters systemic resistance rooted in old defectological assumptions, widespread architectural deficits, and an acute shortage of classroom support personnel. This study reconstructs the historical and chronological evolution of this paradigm shift in Uzbekistan from 1925 to 2026. By examining distinct political and educational eras, this article analyzes how legal mechanisms, international development partnerships, and institutional realities have shaped the republic's current inclusive education landscape.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, historical-comparative, and institutional policy analysis research design to examine the longitudinal evolution of special and inclusive education policies in Uzbekistan over a century-long continuum (1925–2026). This historical-legal approach allows researchers to trace how changing political ideologies directly altered classroom structures and the socio-legal status of children with special educational needs (SEN).

Data Corpus and Document Analysis

The primary data for this study was collected from four distinct sources to ensure comprehensive triangulation:

1. **Statutory Frameworks of the Soviet Era (1925–1990):** Historical decrees from the Soviet Commissariat of Enlightenment and institutional guidelines from the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences regarding the administration of specialized boarding schools.

2. **National Legislation of Independent Uzbekistan (1991–2026):** Critical analytical reviews were conducted on successive editions of the Law "On Education" (1992, 1997, 2020),

the Law "On Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities" (1991, 2008), and the contemporary Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (2020).

3. **Executive Policy Directives:** Major presidential decrees, most notably Presidential Decree No. PP-4860 (October 15, 2020) "On measures to further improve the system of education and upbringing for children with special educational needs," and the structural directives of the "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026."

4. **International Treaties and Collaborative Monitoring Reports:** The study reviews the text of the UN CRPD alongside multi-year evaluation metrics published jointly by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, UNICEF, UNESCO, and USAID.

Analytical Indicators

To ensure methodological rigor, the collected qualitative data was evaluated using content analysis structured around four core analytical indicators:

- **Ontological Position:** How disability was understood by the state (medical defect versus environmental barrier).
- **Institutional Setting:** The physical locus of instruction (segregated boarding schools, integrated remedial classrooms, or fully inclusive general education classrooms).
- **Pedagogical Workforce Profile:** The qualifications and methods required of instructional personnel (clinical defectologists versus collaborative general education teachers and inclusive tutors).
- **State Funding and Resource Allocation:** The mechanisms used to distribute educational resources (funding designated exclusively for separate special institutes versus equity-focused resource allocation in public schools).

RESULTS

The historical transition from a segregated defectological system to an inclusive educational model in Uzbekistan unfolds across five clearly defined chronological stages.

[Phase 1: Soviet Defectology (1925-1990)] ——► Absolute Institutional Segregation
|
[Phase 2: Post-Soviet Transition (1991-2000)] ——► Preservation of Internat Networks
|
[Phase 3: Integrated Pilots (2001-2016)] ——► Remedial Classes (Korreksion Sinflar)
|
[Phase 4: Legislative Breakthrough (2017-2021)] ——► Mandatory Inclusive Classrooms
|
[Phase 5: Systemic Scaling (2022-2026+)] ——► Universal Constitutional Accessibility

Stage 1: The Soviet Defectological Foundation and Absolute Segregation (1925–1990)

The formal institutionalization of special education within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) began during the late 1920s as part of the broader Soviet modernization and industrialization campaigns. This early development was tightly controlled by the centralized

ideology of the Soviet Commissariat of Enlightenment and grounded in the scientific frameworks of the Research Institute of Defectology in Moscow. The system operated entirely on a medical-segregationist paradigm.

During this era, children showing physical, sensory, or cognitive differences were screened by regional Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Commissions (MPPK). These state commissions applied clinical neurological and psychiatric testing measures to assign children rigid diagnostic labels, such as oligophrenia (intellectual delay), anacusis (deafness), or severe visual impairment. Once classified, these children were legally removed from mainstream educational environments and placed into specialized boarding schools (internats). [1]

By 1990, the UzSSR had built an extensive, highly centralized network of these specialized boarding schools. While this structure concentrated valuable specialized resources—including Braille printing presses, auditory amplification labs, and speech pathologists—it pathologized disability. It operated on the assumption that individuals with biological variations could not achieve educational or social parity alongside their neurotypical peers. Consequently, they were denied access to ordinary peer groups, codifying separation as a permanent social reality.

Stage 2: Post-Independence Ambiguity and Continuation of the Boarding Network (1991–2000)

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 forced Uzbekistan to construct its independent socio-legal and educational frameworks. The state quickly demonstrated its commitment to protecting vulnerable populations by enacting the Law "On Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Republic of Uzbekistan" in late 1991. This was soon supported by the country's first post-independence Law "On Education" in 1992, which underwent a major structural revision in August 1997.

However, a close textual analysis of Article 23 of the 1997 Law "On Education" shows that despite achieving political sovereignty, the state largely preserved the legacy institutional model of Soviet defectology. The law explicitly stated that the state would fund and organize specialized education, but mandated that this instruction take place within "specialized educational institutions, boarding schools, and sanatorium-type schools" for children exhibiting developmental or physical limitations. [2]

Mainstream public schools during this decade remained entirely unadapted. They lacked wheelchair ramps, modified learning materials, and the legal or administrative mechanisms required to enroll children with diverse functional needs. As a result, the legacy defectological boarding network remained the sole operational pathway for educating children with SEN, maintaining the historical division between disabled and non-disabled peers.

[1] *"The History of Special Education for Blind and Visually Impaired Children in the Uzbek SSR (1925–1990)."* (2024). E-Conference Globe & Eurasian Journal of Pedagogy. Available on the EI Publication Digital Archive.
[2] **Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education"**, updated version adopted on September 23, 2020. Available on the Lex.uz Codes Database.

Stage 3: The Emergence of Integrated Classrooms and International Pilot Projects (2001–2016)

The third historical stage was defined by increasing collaboration between the Government of Uzbekistan and international development organizations, including UNESCO, UNICEF, and the European Union's educational assistance programs. This period introduced the concept of "integrated education"—a vital transitional step toward genuine inclusion.

During this phase, the Ministry of Public Education, with technical support from UNICEF, launched a series of localized pilot programs. These initiatives aimed to move children with mild-to-moderate impairments out of distant residential boarding schools and place them back into their local communities by enrolling them in mainstream public schools. In 2009, these efforts led to the creation of the initial "National Concept of Inclusive Education," which formalized the introduction of specialized "remedial classes" (korreksion sinflar) within standard public educational institutions. [3]

However, analysis of this phase indicates that these frameworks achieved integration rather than true inclusion. In these integrated schools, children with disabilities occupied the same physical buildings but remained isolated in dedicated classrooms for their academic coursework. They interacted with the broader student population only during non-academic periods, such as lunch breaks or school assemblies.

Crucially, the burden of adaptation lay entirely on the individual student; if a child with special needs could not conform to the rigid, highly standardized national curriculum, they were frequently directed back to the specialized internat network.

Stage 4: Legislative Formalization, Policy Reforms, and the Rights-Based Breakthrough (2017–2021)

This five-year window brought a comprehensive, high-velocity modernization of Uzbekistan's legal code, explicitly targeting the deinstitutionalization of special education and the realization of genuine inclusion. This policy turn was driven by three interconnected legislative developments:

1. **The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" (New Edition, September 2020):** This updated statutory document formally integrated the term "Inclusive Education" into the national legal lexicon. Article 20 of this law guaranteed that children with physical, sensory, or psychological needs possessed an unalienable right to receive education directly within mainstream general education institutions, effectively dismantling the old, restrictive diagnostic barriers. [4]

[3] Yusupov, D. (2020). *"Integrated or Inclusive Education in Uzbekistan: A Critical Analytical Review."* Public Scholarship and Disability Policy Analysis Portfolio. Available on Dilmurad.me Analytical Portal.

[4] **Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education"**, updated version adopted on September 23, 2020. Available on the Lex.uz Codes Database.

2. **Presidential Decree No. PP-4860 (October 15, 2020):** Entitled "On measures to further improve the system of education and upbringing for children with special educational needs," this executive mandate established a concrete national implementation roadmap. It ordered the creation of inclusive classes across public schools in all regions, set up specific funding mechanisms to pay salary bonuses to inclusive teachers, and ordered the creation of specialized resource rooms staffed with trained pedagogical support specialists.

3. **Ratification of the UN CRPD (June 2021):** By formally ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Uzbekistan bound its national legal system to Article 24, which mandates that states parties must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels without discrimination.

This phase represents the official transition from a medical-defectological model to a human-rights-based model. It shifted the legal and operational burden onto the state, requiring schools to adapt to the child rather than forcing the child to conform to the school environment.

Stage 5: Systemic Institutionalization and Contemporary Nationwide Scaling (2022–2026+)

The fifth and contemporary stage focuses on scaling up these programs nationwide, building long-term institutional stability, and rolling out systematic infrastructure adaptations.

The core policy framework for this era is anchored in the "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026" and the sweeping constitutional reforms enacted in 2023. The revised Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan explicitly guarantees equal access to education for all citizens, prohibiting discrimination against individuals with physical or mental variations.

Operationally, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education has moved beyond local pilot projects to systematic execution. The state has implemented a multi-tiered strategy that includes:

-Restructuring the old MPPK diagnostic teams into modern, prefabricated "Psychological-Pedagogical Support Services." These updated services assess a child's specific environmental and curricular adaptation needs rather than assigning rigid clinical diagnostic labels.

-Introducing mandatory Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) across public school classrooms.

-Standardizing the university-level preparation of general education teachers to ensure they possess basic competency in inclusive methodology.

DISCUSSION

The chronological analysis of Uzbekistan’s journey reveals a complex transition. While the rapid deployment of legislative mandates between 2017 and 2026 has established a robust legal framework for inclusive education, a critical evaluation of the implementation process

highlights an ongoing tension between historical defectological assumptions and modern inclusive concepts.

The Professional Ideological Divide

One of the primary challenges identified in contemporary educational settings is the professional tension between traditional defectologists and advocates of inclusive education . Traditional Soviet defectology possessed a highly refined, clinical, and structured set of tools that yielded measurable cognitive results within controlled, segregated environments. Many veteran special educators and institutional administrators express concern that the rapid placement of children with complex neurodevelopmental or sensory impairments into general education classrooms can lead to "wild inclusion"—a scenario where a child is placed in a mainstream classroom but receives no meaningful, tailored instruction due to the teacher's lack of specialized expertise .

Conversely, the social model underpinning the UN CRPD argues that the social harm caused by institutional segregation far outweighs any short-term clinical benefits . Resolving this divide requires a balanced synthesis: the state must avoid completely abandoning its rich history of defectological science, instead reimagining it as a mobile, school-based consulting resource. Traditional defectologists should be integrated into mainstream schools to serve as specialized consultants, assisting general classroom teachers rather than operating isolated external institutions .[5]

Infrastructural and Architectural Accessibility Barriers

The transition from segregation to inclusion cannot be accomplished by legal decree alone; it requires deep transformations of the physical learning environment. Empirical assessments of public school structures across Uzbekistan—especially those constructed during the Soviet era—reveal substantial architectural accessibility barriers . [6]The absence of functional wheelchair ramps, unadapted multi-level configurations, and a lack of tactile indicators for visually impaired students present persistent physical hurdles.

Furthermore, there is a pronounced geographic disparity between urban centers and rural regions . While landmark schools in Tashkent, Samarkand, and regional capitals have been successfully retrofitted with modern inclusive resource spaces and accessible facilities, rural educational institutions frequently struggle with basic infrastructure challenges, let alone high-tech sensory equipment. Achieving the state's ambitious targets for widespread school accessibility requires sustained capital investment and strict enforcement of universal design standards in all new school constructions.

[5] *"Principles of Inclusive Education and the Institutional Framework: A Comparative Analysis of Uzbekistan, Finland, and the United States."* (2025). Science and Innovation International Scientific Journal. Available on the Scientists.uz Database Registry.

[6] **Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education"**, updated version adopted on September 23, 2020. Available on the Lex.uz Codes Database.

The Shortage of Support Personnel and the Role of Inclusive Tutors

A critical operational bottleneck in the current inclusive model is the acute shortage of trained, professional inclusive tutors—frequently referred to as shadow teachers or tyutors . Under Presidential Decree No. PP-4860, the state established the legal right to place assistive personnel in classrooms to help children with severe learning needs manage daily routines and academic tasks. However, the institutional pipeline for training these tutors remains underdeveloped.

Mainstream classroom teachers, who are often responsible for large classes exceeding thirty students, frequently report feeling overwhelmed when an SEN student is integrated without an accompanying assistant tutor. To address this, higher education institutions—such as Tashkent State Pedagogical University and regional pedagogical institutes—must scale up specialized bachelor's and master's level programs dedicated specifically to training inclusive classroom assistants and collaborative co-teaching specialists.

Conclusion. The Republic of Uzbekistan has made historic strides in shifting its special education system away from the segregated, medical-defectological model inherited from the Soviet era, moving toward an inclusive, rights-based system. This transition has unfolded across distinct chronological stages, shifting from absolute institutional segregation to an integrated pilot era, and finally culminating in the comprehensive legal and constitutional guarantees seen today. The ratification of the UN CRPD and the execution of Presidential Decree No. PP-4860 have permanently reshaped the country's legislative landscape, establishing education as a universal right for all children, regardless of physical or cognitive variations.

Bakorariyatni ta'minlash uchun, davlat endilikda qonun chiqarish bosqichidan to'liq amaliy ijro bosqichiga o'tishi lozim. Kelgusi strategik qadamlar maktablarning jismoniy ommaviy dizaynini (Universal Design) ta'minlash, qishloq joylarida inklyuziv sinflarni moliyaviy va uslubiy jihatdan qo'llab-quvvatlash hamda pedagogika universitetlarida majburiy inklyuziv ta'lim modullarini kengaytirishga qaratilishi shart. An'anaviy defektologiyaning boy tajribasini ijtimoiy model tamoyillari bilan uyg'unlashtirish orqali O‘zbekiston Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasida barcha uchun teng va ochiq bo‘lgan ta’lim modelining o‘ziga xos andozasini yaratish imkoniyatiga ega.

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