



Primary Education in Türkiye and Uzbekistan: A Comparative Analysis of its Relationship with Pre-school and Secondary School Levels

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a comparative analysis of the primary education systems in Türkiye and Uzbekistan, focusing on their vertical integration with pre-school and lower secondary levels. Adopting a comparative case study method based on comprehensive document review, the study scrutinises the structural characteristics and reform dynamics of both nations. The findings reveal two divergent trajectories. Türkiye possesses a mature, centralised 4+4+4 system shaped by internal political dynamics. A key challenge within this model is the abrupt transition from the single-teacher primary level to the multi-teacher lower secondary level, which creates significant psycho-social difficulties for pupils. Conversely, Uzbekistan is pursuing a comprehensive "system-building" reform, substantially supported by international partners and oriented towards global standards. Its planned 1+4+5+2 model positions pre-school education as a foundational cornerstone and aims to ease the transition into primary school via a compulsory preparatory year. The analysis concludes that Türkiye employs an internal "problem-solving" approach, whereas Uzbekistan adopts a "system-building" approach based on global best practices.

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Introduction

Context and Significance of the Research

In a globalising world, education systems play a pivotal role in the economic development, social progress, and preservation of cultural identities of nations. In this context, comparative education studies are of critical importance for analysing the educational policies, structures, and practices of different countries, thereby deriving lessons from successful models and presenting evidence-based recommendations for the improvement of existing systems (Özsoy et al., 2021). This study scrutinises the primary education systems of Türkiye and Uzbekistan, two nations sharing common historical, cultural, and linguistic ties, yet which have followed distinct political and social development trajectories since the late twentieth century. Given that education constitutes a fundamental element of the national development strategies of both countries (Özsoy et al., 2021; Mamajonov & Askarov, 2022), a comparison of these two systems holds the potential to offer valuable insights that will enable each to perceive its own strengths and weaknesses more clearly and to shape future educational policies.

This comparison goes beyond merely juxtaposing the education systems of two countries; it serves as an examination of two distinct national development models in the twenty-first century. Türkiye represents an education system tradition shaped by a deep-rooted republican history, the modernisation of centralised institutions, and internal socio-political debates (Gedikoğlu, 2005; Başdemir, 2012). Conversely, Uzbekistan symbolises a new state in a dynamic process of reform, strategically utilising international partnerships to rapidly build human capital and integrate into the global economy following its independence. Consequently, the

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education systems are a reflection of the national strategies of these two countries: whilst Türkiye's system reflects internal political dynamics, Uzbekistan's system mirrors its outward-looking, global objectives. This framework elevates the analysis from a simple comparison of schools to a broader study of geopolitics and development through the lens of education.

Purpose of the Article and Research Questions

The primary objective of this article is to analyse and compare the primary education systems in Türkiye and Uzbekistan in depth, centering on their vertical integration with the preceding level, pre-school education, and the subsequent level, lower secondary school (middle school). Accordingly, the article seeks answers to the following fundamental research questions:

- What are the structural characteristics, legal frameworks, and primary objectives of primary education in Türkiye and Uzbekistan?
- How does pre-school education shape the transition to primary school and pupil readiness in both countries?
- How are the transition processes from primary to lower secondary school structured, and what academic and social experiences do pupils undergo during these transitions?
- What are the fundamental similarities and differences between the two education systems in terms of vertical integration, reform dynamics, and compliance with international standards?

Method and Scope

This study adopts a comparative case study method, a qualitative research design. The analysis is based on a comprehensive document review comprising official documents published by the Ministries of National Education of both countries, legal texts such as Laws No. 1739 and 222, reports from international organisations such as UNICEF and the World Bank, and academic articles relevant to the subject (National Education Basic Law No. 1739, 1973; UNICEF, 2022). The scope of the study is kept broad to include not only the structural features of the systems but also the functionality of transitions between levels and pupil experiences within these transitions.

Structure of the Article

The article will principally address the education systems in Türkiye and Uzbekistan separately within their own internal dynamics. Firstly, Türkiye's established structure and the vertical integration between pre-school, primary, and lower secondary school will be examined. Subsequently, Uzbekistan's current system and its ongoing comprehensive reform process will be analysed from the same perspective of vertical integration. In the following section, the structural characteristics, reform dynamics, and approaches to transitions between levels of both systems will be evaluated through a direct comparative analysis. In the conclusion, key findings will be synthesised to present policy recommendations for both countries and to offer directions for future research.

Structure and Vertical Integration of the Education System in Türkiye

General Framework: 12-Year Compulsory Education and the 4+4+4 Model

The education system in Türkiye possesses a centralised structure conducted under the supervision and control of the state (Demirkol et al., 2023; Gedikoğlu, 2005). The legal basis of the system is constituted by the National Education Basic Law No. 1739 and the Primary Education and Education Law No. 222 (National Education Basic Law No. 1739, 1973; Primary Education and Education Law No. 222, 1961). In accordance with these laws, primary education is compulsory for all Turkish citizens and is provided free of charge in state schools (Primary Education and Education Law No. 222, 1961).

One of the most significant structural transformations in the Turkish education system was realised in 2012 with Law No. 6287 (Primary Education and Education Law No. 6287, 2012). With this regulation, the uninterrupted compulsory education, which was previously 8 years, was extended to 12 years, and the system acquired a tiered structure known as "4+4+4". This model consists of three levels: four years of primary school, four years of lower secondary school (middle school), and four years of upper secondary school (high school) (TÜSEB, 2019). This alteration has been a subject frequently debated and its effects analysed in academic studies

on the Turkish education system (Hark Söylemez & Adıyaman, 2023). With the new regulation, the school starting age was also redefined. For registration in the first year of primary school, it is essential that the child has completed 69 months as of the end of September of the year in which the registration takes place. However, in line with the written request of the guardian or a medical report, children aged 66, 67, and 68 months may also be registered (Primary Education and Education Law No. 6287, 2012; TÜSEB, 2019).

Relationship with the Lower Level: The Role of Pre-school Education in Preparation for Primary School

Although pre-school education in Türkiye is not within the scope of compulsory education, it plays a critical role in the child's development and preparation for primary school. According to the Pre-school Education Programme prepared by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the fundamental objectives of this level are to support children's physical, mental, and emotional development, to instill good habits, to ensure they speak Turkish correctly and beautifully, and, most importantly, to prepare them for primary school (National Education Basic Law No. 1739, 1973; MEB, 2024). This education is structured with a child-centred, flexible, holistic, and play-based pedagogical approach (MEB, 2024).

Research indicates that pre-school education significantly and positively affects children's levels of school readiness and their adaptation process to primary school. Studies based on the views of classroom teachers reveal that pupils who have received pre-school education have more developed fine motor skills, such as holding a pencil and drawing lines (Yurdakal, 2023). Simultaneously, these pupils are at a more advanced level in early literacy skills such as recognising and distinguishing sounds, as well as in social and behavioural skills such as collaborating with peers, participating in group work, and obeying classroom rules (Yurdakal, 2023; Erkan & Kırca, 2010). This readiness ensures that they commence academic studies with greater motivation and adapt more rapidly to the school culture (Yurdakal, 2023).

Conversely, the transition process from pre-school to primary school may entail certain difficulties, particularly for children who have not received this education or come from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Amongst these difficulties, separation anxiety from the family, difficulties in adapting to the new social environment, and attention and concentration problems are prominent (Deretarla Gül, 2019). The healthy management of this transition process necessitates strong cooperation between teachers, families, and the school administration.

Primary School Level: Structure, Curriculum, and Assessment

Primary school is the first level of the 4+4+4 model, lasting for four years and covering Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 (TÜSEB, 2019). As stated in Law No. 222, the main objective of this level is to provide "basic education and instruction serving the physical, mental, and moral development and upbringing of all Turks, male and female, in accordance with national goals" (Primary Education and Education Law No. 222, 1961). The curriculum focuses on equipping pupils with basic knowledge and skills. Whilst the Life Sciences course plays a central role in the first three years, core subjects such as Turkish, Mathematics, Sciences, and Social Studies gain weight in subsequent years. The assessment system is focused on monitoring the pupil's development process rather than grading. The practice of repeating a year is not common in primary school and can only be applied once, upon the written request of the parent, depending on the pupil's developmental status.

Relationship with the Upper Level: Transition from Primary to Lower Secondary School

In the Turkish system, the transition from primary to lower secondary school is not subject to a central examination. Pupils who successfully complete the fourth year of primary school are automatically registered in the lower secondary school closest to their address via the e-School system (Primary Education and Education Law No. 6287, 2012). Although this transition appears structurally seamless, it represents a significant psycho-social period of change for pupils. This situation indicates that the structure of the system, separated by sharp blocks such as 4+4+4, creates predictable points of friction and stress for pupils that are not always compatible with natural developmental processes.

Pupils make a sudden transition from the status of being the "eldest in the school" in primary school to being the "youngest in the school" in lower secondary school. More importantly, they are compelled to adapt from a

structure consisting of a single classroom teacher, to which they have been accustomed for four years, to a multi-teacher system where a different subject teacher attends each lesson. This abrupt change in pedagogical structure may lead to various difficulties in pupils as it coincides with the onset of adolescence. During this period, behavioural changes such as a decrease in interest in lessons, the prioritisation of peer relationships, and an increase in conflicts with the family are frequently observed. Significant responsibilities fall upon school guidance services and families to ensure that this transition does not turn into a moment of "crisis". The preparation of information brochures for parents by schools affiliated with the MoNE to manage this transition process is an indication that the system itself acknowledges the difficulties at these structural transition points.

Structure of the Education System in Uzbekistan and Current Reforms

General Framework: From Soviet Legacy to International Standards

The legal framework of the Uzbekistan education system is delineated by the Constitution and the "Law on Education" dated 1997. According to these laws, education is defined as the highest priority in the state's social development, and equal rights are guaranteed to everyone regardless of gender, language, race, or social origin (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1992; Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education", 1997). In Uzbekistan, which has implemented significant reforms on the structure inherited from the Soviet Union, an 11-year compulsory education system has been in effect since 2017. This system consists of four years of primary school starting at the age of seven and seven years of secondary school (UNICEF, 2022).

However, the most defining characteristic of the Uzbekistan education system is a comprehensive and dynamic reform vision aiming to elevate the country to international standards beyond the existing structure (Mamajonov & Askarov, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). At the centre of this vision lies a plan to transition to a new 12-year education system compatible with the models of countries successful in international assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (Gazeta.uz, 2025; Fergana News, 2025). The primary aim of this reform is to ensure that graduates can transition directly to universities abroad and to make the quality of the country's human capital competitive at a global level (Fergana News, 2025).

Relationship with the Lower Level: Internationally Supported Transformation in Pre-school Education

One of the most remarkable achievements in Uzbekistan's education reform process has occurred in the field of pre-school education. The schooling rate of children aged 3-7, which was at a low level of 27% in 2017, rose to 75% by 2024 with substantial financial and technical support provided by international organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (World Bank, 2025; GPE, n.d.; UNICEF, 2022). This situation is the most concrete example of Uzbekistan's policy of making a "strategic leap" by adopting internationally proven models rather than gradual development.

These reforms have focused not only on increasing the schooling rate but also on ensuring the quality and equity of education. A transition has been made from the traditional, care-oriented kindergarten model to play-based, child-centred pedagogies that develop children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills (World Bank, 2025). In this context, thousands of teachers have been trained in line with the new curriculum, and innovative and low-cost models such as mobile bus kindergartens named "Aqlvoy" have been implemented to reach children particularly in rural and disadvantaged regions (World Bank, 2025; GPE, n.d.). All of these efforts aim to ensure that children start primary school better equipped and ready (World Bank, 2025; UNICEF, 2022). Nevertheless, such rapid growth of the system brings with it challenges such as standardising service quality across the country and the full integration of children from the poorest families into the system (UNICEF, 2022).

Primary School Level: Structure, Curriculum, and Assessment

In the current system, primary school lasts for four years (Years 1-4) and is generally based on the principle of one classroom teacher delivering all subjects throughout primary school (TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, 2021). When examining the curricula of teacher training programmes, it is observed that basic subjects such as Mother Tongue (Reading-Writing Methodology), Mathematics Methodology, Natural Sciences, Technology Education, and Physical Education are included in primary school. In addition to state schools, programmes such as the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) or the British National Curriculum are also

implemented in some international schools in Tashkent, and inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and individualised teaching methods are adopted in these schools.

A fundamental component of Uzbekistan's reform process is the determination to evaluate education quality according to objective criteria and to make comparisons at the international level. Accordingly, the country has begun to actively participate in international student assessment programmes such as PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), PISA, and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) (TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, 2021). This participation functions not merely as an outcome evaluation tool, but also as a policy instrument that guides and legitimises the entire reform process. At the national level, pupil progress is monitored through regularly conducted current checks, interim examinations held at the end of quarters, and phased checks conducted at the end of the year (TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, 2021).

Relationship with the Upper Level: Restructuring in the Planned 12-Year System

The new 12-year education system that Uzbekistan plans to implement is structured as a "1+4+5+2" model (Gazeta.uz, 2025; Fergana News, 2025). This model consists of the following levels:

- 1 year compulsory preparatory (age 6)
- 4 years primary school (Years 1-4)
- 5 years basic general secondary education (Years 5-9)
- 2 years general secondary education (in schools, lyceums, or vocational colleges)

In this new structure, the transition from primary to lower secondary school will continue as a transition to Year 5 (basic general secondary education level) at the end of Year 4. However, the most significant structural change is the formal inclusion of a one-year preparatory education for 6-year-old children into the school system as compulsory (Gazeta.uz, 2025; Fergana News, 2025). This strategic move aims to consolidate the gains of major breakthroughs in pre-school education, to make the transition between pre-school and primary school smoother and more holistic, and to provide an equal foundation for all children when starting primary school. This clearly demonstrates Uzbekistan's intention to make transitions between levels more fluid through structural reforms.

Comparative Analysis and Evaluation

The primary education systems of Türkiye and Uzbekistan have developed unique structures nourished by different historical trajectories and reform dynamics. The table below summarises the key structural features of the two systems comparatively.

Table 1: Structural Comparison of Education Systems in Türkiye and Uzbekistan

Feature	Türkiye	Uzbekistan (Current and Planned)
Duration of Compulsory Education	12 Years (4+4+4) (Primary Education and Education Law No. 6287, 2012; TÜSEB, 2019)	Current: 11 Years (UNICEF, 2022). Planned: 12 Years (1+4+5+2) (Gazeta.uz, 2025; Fergana News, 2025)
School Starting Age	69 months (66 months with exceptions) (TÜSEB, 2019)	Current: 7 years (UNICEF, 2022). Planned: 6 years (with preparatory class) (Fergana News, 2025)
Pre-school Education	Optional, widespread, focused on preparation for primary school (MEB, 2024)	Optional, rapidly spreading with recent reforms, focused on quality and equity (World Bank, 2025; GPE, n.d.)
Primary School Structure	4 Years (Years 1-4) (TÜSEB, 2019)	4 Years (Years 1-4) (TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, 2021)
Lower Secondary Structure	4 Years (Years 5-8) (TÜSEB, 2019)	Planned: 5 Years "Basic General Secondary Education" (Years 5-9) (Gazeta.uz, 2025)

Governance Structure	Centralised (MoNE) (Demirkol et al., 2023)	Centralised (Ministry of Pre-school and School Education) (UNICEF, 2022)
Reform Dynamics	Based on internal political dynamics and debates (e.g., 4+4+4) (Hark Söylemez & Adıyaman, 2023; Şenkaloğlu, 2021)	Based on compliance with international standards and foreign partnerships (Mamajonov & Askarov, 2022; Gazeta.uz, 2025)

This comparison reveals a fundamental dichotomy defining the approaches of the two countries in the field of education: a "problem-solving" oriented approach versus a "system-building" oriented approach. Türkiye's educational discourse is shaped around identifying existing problems within a matured system (such as transition stress, curriculum debates, teacher quality) and proposing solutions to them (Şenkaloğlu, 2021; Başdemir, 2012). This is a process of continuous maintenance and modification of an existing mechanism. In contrast, Uzbekistan's discourse focuses on constructing a new system based on a plan derived from global best practices. "Problems" (such as low schooling rates, lack of international compliance) are defined not as chronic flaws to be managed, but as starting points to be overcome through a comprehensive reform project (GPE, n.d.). This fundamental difference elucidates the nature of academic and political debates in both countries.

Structural Differences in Education Systems

The most distinct structural difference emerges in the tiering models. Whilst Türkiye's established 4+4+4 model draws clear and sharp boundaries between primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school, Uzbekistan's planned 1+4+5+2 model aims to ensure a more organic and smoother transition between pre-school and primary school by integrating a one-year compulsory preparatory class into the system. This philosophical difference reflects Uzbekistan's strategy of directly linking the gains of early childhood education to the foundation of primary school.

The Role of Pre-school Education and Approaches

Although both countries acknowledge the importance of pre-school education, the roles they attribute to this level differ. In Türkiye, pre-school education is largely viewed as a support mechanism "preparing" pupils for the existing primary school system, and its success is evaluated more through individual pupil adaptation and readiness (Yurdakal, 2023; Erkan & Kırca, 2010). In Uzbekistan, however, pre-school education is positioned as the "cornerstone" of rebuilding the entire education system. This level is seen as a systemic tool for equity and quality, and thus international investments and reform efforts are concentrated in this area (World Bank, 2025). This reflects the understanding that pre-school education is not merely a preparatory stage, but the most critical foundation of the entire learning journey.

Dynamics of Transition Between Levels

As a consequence of structural differences, the dynamics of transition between levels also diverge. In Türkiye, the transition from primary to lower secondary school looms as a potential moment of psycho-social "crisis" for pupils due to sudden changes in pedagogical (from single teacher to multiple teachers) and social (from eldest to youngest) structures. The responsibility for managing this transition within the system is largely placed on guidance services and families. Uzbekistan's new model, on the other hand, aims to minimise the negative effects of such sharp transitions by aiming to structurally soften the pre-school to primary school transition through the integration of a one-year preparatory class (Gazeta.uz, 2025; Fergana News, 2025).

Teacher Training and Professional Development

In both countries, teacher training programmes are conducted by faculties of education within universities. Türkiye possesses long-standing established mechanisms such as the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) and the candidate teacher process for teacher appointments. In Uzbekistan, teacher training programmes are being restructured in parallel with ongoing educational reforms. For instance, the "4+2" model (4 days at university, 2 days internship at school), which aims to integrate theoretical knowledge more with practice, is a product of this dynamic process.

Parental Involvement and Educational Technologies

The positive effect of parental involvement on student success is acknowledged in both countries ("The Role of Parental Involvement," 2025). A preliminary study conducted in Uzbekistan indicates that whilst the rate of parental involvement is high, it generally occurs upon the request of the children ("The Role of Parental Involvement," 2025). In Türkiye, whilst teachers believe that the roles of parents should primarily take place at home, it is observed that parents harbour a desire to participate more in educational decisions. In the field of educational technologies, Türkiye possesses an advanced and widely used digital platform at the national level, such as the Education Informatics Network (EBA). Uzbekistan, aiming to increase its capacity in this field as well, utilises international collaborations and pilot applications, particularly encouraging the use of digital tools such as Duolingo and Kahoot! in foreign language teaching (Suleimanova, 2024).

Conclusion

Synthesis of Key Findings

This comparative analysis reveals that the primary education systems of Türkiye and Uzbekistan are progressing on different trajectories in terms of structure, vertical integration, and reform dynamics. Türkiye possesses a centralised and structurally established system with a deep-rooted history. The fundamental challenges of this system are the psycho-social effects on pupils caused by the sharp level transitions created by the 4+4+4 model and the continuity problems experienced in solving the internal problems of the system. Conversely, Uzbekistan is a country realising a radical breakthrough in the field of education in the post-Soviet era. The quantitative and qualitative progress it has recorded, particularly in pre-school education through international partnerships, is noteworthy. The country's general education strategy is shaped around the goal of harmonising its entire system with global standards such as PISA and thereby increasing its competitiveness in the international arena.

Areas for Mutual Learning and Policy Recommendations

The experiences of both countries offer valuable learning opportunities for one another:

Lessons to be Learnt from Türkiye for Uzbekistan: Türkiye's decades of experience in developing and managing national-scale digital education platforms like EBA, operating central examination and appointment systems covering millions of students and teachers (such as KPSS), and establishing a widespread in-service training network contain significant lessons for the process of institutionalising and making sustainable Uzbekistan's rapidly growing education system.

Lessons to be Learnt from Uzbekistan for Türkiye: How Uzbekistan rapidly increased the schooling rate and education quality in pre-school education by establishing strategic collaborations with international organisations presents a model worth examining for the elimination of regional educational inequalities in Türkiye. Flexible and low-cost models developed specifically to reach disadvantaged groups may be inspiring. Furthermore, the approach of designing, implementing, and monitoring education reforms based on international criteria such as PISA can be considered to strengthen evidence-based decision-making mechanisms in Türkiye's policy development processes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study constitutes a foundation for deepening dialogue and cooperation in the field of education between the two countries. Future research may carry this analysis further. In this context, the following areas are proposed:

- Longitudinal studies monitoring the long-term effects of the new 12-year education model to be implemented by Uzbekistan on student outcomes and transitions between levels.
- Field-based research comparing the effectiveness of primary school teacher training programmes in both countries (such as the preparation process for KPSS in Türkiye and the "4+2" internship model in Uzbekistan).
- Empirical and comparative studies measuring the effect of technology use in education (Türkiye's EBA platform and pilot applications in Uzbekistan) on learning outcomes.

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