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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN UZBEKISTAN: A MISSING LINK

Oqboyeva Shaxribonu Xayrulla qizi
shahribonuoqboyeva1@gmail.com

Abstract. Uzbekistan has pursued two ambitious educational reform programmes simultaneously — the expansion of English language instruction from the first grade and the introduction of a statutory framework for inclusive education — yet the two have proceeded without institutional connection. This thesis argues that the absence of any explicit provision for learners with specific learning difficulties in the country's foreign-language policy instruments constitutes a structural gap, and that its most probable consequence is the widening rather than the narrowing of attainment gaps for a group amounting to some seven per cent of the school population.

Keywords: inclusive education; English language policy; dyslexia; specific learning difficulties; teacher training; Uzbekistan.

Two reform trajectories have shaped Uzbek schooling over the past fifteen years. The first is linguistic. Presidential Decree PQ-1875 of 10 December 2012 introduced compulsory English instruction from the first grade with effect from the 2013/2014 academic year, aligned assessment to the Common European Framework of Reference and provided salary supplements for foreign-language teachers; Decree PQ-5117 of 19 May 2021 established a dedicated agency for the promotion of foreign-language learning. The second trajectory is inclusive. The Law "On Education" No. LRU-637 of 23 September 2020 created, for the first time, a statutory basis for inclusive education; Presidential Resolution PQ-4860 of 13 October 2020 approved the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education for 2020–2025 with a target of enrolling forty per cent of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in 2021.

Examined separately, each programme is coherent. Examined together, they reveal an omission. None of the foreign-language policy instruments makes any reference to learners with specific learning difficulties, and the inclusive-education Concept, which addresses schooling in general terms, contains no subject-specific guidance for the language classroom. The consequence is that the one school subject in which the difficulty is most acute has been left outside the scope of the inclusion framework.

The scale of the affected population is not marginal. The meta-analysis of Yang and colleagues (2022), pooling data from primary-school samples internationally, reports a prevalence of developmental dyslexia of 7.10 per cent (95 % CI 6.27–7.97), with 9.22 per cent among boys and 4.66 per cent among girls. The same analysis found no significant difference in prevalence between writing systems or between shallow and deep orthographies, which indicates that the Uzbek figure is unlikely to diverge materially from the international one. Applied to a general-education cohort, this implies that roughly two learners in a class of thirty will require systematic adaptation in the English lesson.

Table 1. Parallel reform trajectories and the point of disconnection

Instrument	Year	Provision for specific learning difficulties
Decree PQ-1875 (foreign languages)	2012	None
Law "On Education" LRU-637	2020	General inclusion provision (Art. 20); no subject guidance

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Instrument	Year	Provision for specific learning difficulties
Resolution PQ-4860 (Inclusion Concept 2020–2025)	2020	General; no reference to language teaching
Ratification of the UN CRPD	2021	Binding obligation under Art. 24
Decree PQ-5117 (agency for foreign languages)	2021	None

Compiled by the author from the cited legal instruments.

Implementation data confirm that the gap is practical rather than merely formal. According to UNICEF estimates, of approximately 122,300 children with disabilities in Uzbekistan fewer than six thousand are enrolled in mainstream schools — under five in every hundred. Learners with dyslexia, whose difficulty is not visible and rarely formally diagnosed, are a still less well-served group, since they typically fall outside disability registration altogether while remaining fully within the mainstream classroom.

Two consequences follow for policy. The first concerns identification. Because Latin-script Uzbek is a comparatively transparent orthography, dyslexia manifests in it principally as slow reading rather than as inaccuracy; screening instruments based on accuracy alone will therefore systematically under-identify at-risk learners, and timed fluency measures are the appropriate alternative. The second concerns teacher preparation. International survey evidence is consistent: Kumas and colleagues (2021) found that 95 per cent of 400 Turkish EFL teachers had received no training in specific learning difficulties, and Indrarathne (2019) reported that none of 129 Sri Lankan teachers surveyed had received relevant training. There is no reason to expect the Uzbek position to be more favourable, and no dyslexia component is currently embedded in foreign-language teacher preparation.

The remedy is neither costly nor technically demanding. Nijakowska (2022) and Kormos and Nijakowska (2017) demonstrated that short courses, delivered face-to-face or online, produce large gains in teacher self-efficacy and knowledge and significant reductions in professional concern, with a dose–response relationship between course completion and outcome. The DysTEFL2 materials developed under European Commission funding are freely available and adaptable. Incorporating such a module into pre-service and in-service preparation for teachers of English, and issuing ministerial guidance that extends the inclusive-education Concept explicitly to language classrooms, would close the identified gap at negligible marginal cost.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's difficulty in this domain is not one of policy absence but of policy connection. The legal foundation for inclusion exists and the commitment to English is substantial; what is missing is the link between them. Since the reform of teacher preparation is already under way, the necessary provision can be built in at the design stage rather than retrofitted later at considerably greater cost.

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