
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Annotation

This article examines inclusive education as a global educational paradigm that seeks to guarantee equal access to quality learning for every child, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other individual characteristics. Drawing on international documents — the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Incheon Declaration (2015), and UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) — the article traces the conceptual shift from integration to genuine inclusion in contemporary pedagogy. Particular attention is given to the legal and institutional framework of inclusive education in the Republic of Uzbekistan, including the Law “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (2020), the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education (2020–2025), and Uzbekistan’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021). The article concludes by identifying the principal pedagogical, methodological, and infrastructural challenges that determine the pace and quality of inclusive reform in national schools and universities.

Keywords: inclusive education; equal access to education; special educational needs; UNESCO; educational policy; Uzbekistan; teacher training; Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Education systems worldwide are shifting from segregated and integrated models of schooling toward genuinely inclusive education — an approach that reorganizes teaching, learning environments, and institutional culture around the diversity of learners, rather than requiring learners to adapt to a fixed system. The urgency of this shift is underscored by persistent global disparities: despite decades of Education for All initiatives, hundreds of millions of children remain excluded from quality learning because of disability, poverty, language, gender, or geographic location. Inclusive

E- Global Congress

Hosted online from Dubai, U. A. E., E - Conference.

Date: 30th July 2026

Website: <https://eglobalcongress.com/index.php/egc>

ISSN (E): 2836-3612

education has therefore moved from the margins of special-needs pedagogy to the center of mainstream educational policy, anchored in Sustainable Development Goal 4. For post-Soviet education systems such as Uzbekistan's, which historically relied on a separate network of specialized (correctional) schools, the shift toward inclusion is both a legal obligation following international commitments and a profound pedagogical reorientation for teachers and teacher-training institutions.

Contemporary scholarship distinguishes inclusion from earlier models of integration, in which learners with disabilities were placed in mainstream classrooms without corresponding changes to curriculum, pedagogy, or school culture. Inclusion, by contrast, is an ongoing process of identifying and removing barriers to presence, participation, and achievement for all learners, not only those with disabilities. Booth and Ainscow's influential Index for Inclusion (2002) frames inclusive development along three interconnected dimensions — creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive practices — arguing that lasting change requires movement on all three at once. Ainscow (2005) likewise stresses that sustainable inclusion depends less on specialist resources than on shifts in ordinary classroom practice, school leadership, and everyday values. UNESCO's own definition, articulated across the Salamanca Statement and the Incheon Declaration, treats learner diversity as an asset rather than a problem, positioning inclusive education as a continuous process of transforming systems to respond to the differing needs of all learners.

The modern inclusive education movement rests on a sequence of international instruments. The 1994 Salamanca Statement, adopted by ninety-two governments, first called on states to adopt inclusion as a guiding principle of educational policy. The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established a binding right to inclusive education at all levels. The 2015 Incheon Declaration embedded inclusion within Sustainable Development Goal 4, making it a measurable global commitment through 2030. UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, subtitled "Inclusion and Education: All Means All," found that fewer than ten percent of countries had laws ensuring full inclusion, and that roughly 258 million children worldwide remained entirely excluded from

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ISSN (E): 2836-3612

schooling. Its central finding — that inclusion requires transforming mainstream education rather than running parallel systems — has become a reference point for national reform strategies across Central Asia, including Uzbekistan’s own policy documents of the early 2020s.

Uzbekistan’s engagement with inclusive education dates to 1996, when the concept was first introduced through a joint project of the Republican Education Center and UNESCO, but reform accelerated markedly after 2020. The Law “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (No. ZRU-641, 15 October 2020) established the legal foundation for equal access to education. This was followed by the government’s Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education in the Public Education System for 2020–2025, with an implementation road map, and by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 638 (2021), approving the regulation on organizing inclusive education in general secondary schools — covering accessible infrastructure, specialized materials, and psychological-pedagogical support staff. Uzbekistan’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 7 June 2021 aligned national obligations with the global framework and extended attention to higher education. The “New Uzbekistan” Development Strategy for 2022–2026 further set explicit targets for education and employment of people with disabilities (Goal 66) and for expanding inclusive education across the regions (Goal 70). UNICEF’s Ishonch 2030 initiative has supported implementation by introducing accessible, Universal-Design infrastructure and inclusive technologies in fifty model schools nationwide. Together, these measures mark a shift from a historically segregated system toward a policy architecture that formally endorses inclusion, even as implementation across regions remains uneven.

Legislative progress alone does not guarantee inclusive classrooms. Research on inclusive reform, in Uzbekistan and internationally, points to recurring challenges. Teacher preparation remains a critical bottleneck: many practicing and pre-service teachers, including future English-language teachers, report limited training in differentiated instruction, individualized planning, or assistive technologies. Physical and material accessibility — ramps, adapted furniture, Braille or large-print materials, sign-language interpretation — remains concentrated in a small number of “model”

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institutions rather than distributed system-wide. Societal attitudes also shape outcomes, as concerns about the pace of learning for other students can quietly undermine formal policy commitments. Addressing these gaps calls for embedding inclusive pedagogy within initial teacher education rather than treating it as a specialized add-on; expanding in-service training in differentiated assessment; strengthening psychological-pedagogical support within mainstream schools; and extending the model-school approach to a broader share of the national network, including higher education, where inclusive practice remains comparatively underdeveloped.

Conclusion

Inclusive education has evolved from a specialized concern of special-needs pedagogy into a defining principle of quality education systems worldwide, endorsed through Sustainable Development Goal 4 and reinforced by two decades of international policy. Uzbekistan's legislative and strategic reforms since 2020 — the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the national Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education, and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — reflect substantial alignment with this global agenda. The task ahead lies less in further legislation than in translating policy into everyday classroom practice: preparing teachers, adapting curricula and assessment, and building an institutional culture in which every learner can participate fully.

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