

The Quality of Primary Education and Educational Tools

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Abstract: The article examines the reform of primary education and the renewal of its scientific and methodological foundations in Uzbekistan. It reflects on the challenges faced by teachers and administrators in ensuring quality instruction, particularly in first-grade literacy education. Drawing from long-term observations and practical experiences, the study highlights organizational, pedagogical, and ergonomic factors that influence the efficiency of teaching handwriting and developing graphic skills among pupils. Based on experimental work conducted in several general secondary schools across Bukhara, Navoi, and Kashkadarya regions, the paper analyzes the relationship between classroom environment, student readiness, and instructional outcomes. It underscores that educational effectiveness depends not only on pedagogical professionalism but also on the adequacy of the physical, hygienic, and psychological learning conditions. The findings emphasize the necessity of extending the pre-alphabet training stage, ensuring methodological accuracy in learning materials, and improving the ergonomics of classroom tools such as desks, notebooks, and writing instruments.

Keywords: primary education, handwriting instruction, literacy development, ergonomic standards, preparatory stage, pedagogical methods, educational reform.



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Introduction

The reform of primary education and its renewal on scientifically grounded foundations were initiated by the Head of our State. Following this initiative, a series of laws, decrees, and directives were adopted and put into action, and their implementation began to unfold widely across the educational institutions of our republic. Although certain concrete measures have been planned and commendable efforts are being made in this regard, a number of pressing issues still await resolution.

Drawing on my many years of experience and observation, I would like to share my reflections on the existing challenges confronting primary education today. Each year, school principals enter into debates with the district Department of Public Education regarding this matter. The heads of

regional and district departments, in turn, strive to reduce the number of classes—claiming that such actions are measures of “economic efficiency.” Yet, have they ever considered how “costly” this so-called “saving” might ultimately prove for our nation? We have already embarked on the path toward forming **independent primary schools**—an approach rooted in the revival of Eastern traditions of upbringing, the heritage of folk pedagogy, and the genuine wishes and expectations of parents¹. In such circumstances, is it not paradoxical that the aforementioned practices might undermine the quality of education itself? Let us visualize a simple situation: a teacher instructing a class of twenty pupils. Within a forty-five-minute lesson, each student receives one or two minutes of the teacher’s individual attention, thereby enhancing the likelihood that every child will grasp the lesson’s essence. Now imagine a classroom with thirty-six to forty-eight students. Picture the teacher’s predicament. Should they focus on maintaining order among dozens of diverse personalities, or strive to deliver quality instruction? Should they attempt to manage the slower learners individually? The situation becomes even more complex in **first-grade literacy lessons**, where the teacher must literally take each child by the hand to demonstrate the correct way to write. Even the most skilled and experienced educator would find such a task overwhelming under those circumstances. Given that this problem stands as one of the most critical challenges of our educational system, why are we not actively seeking solutions? Why do the responsible authorities continue to exhibit indifference, choosing instead to look the other way?

Second issue

Our observations indicate that in the process of literacy development among primary school students—particularly those in the first grade—their age and level of physical readiness play a crucial role. At the initial stage of acquiring writing and reading skills, a child expends nearly all available energy—both physical and mental. During the act of writing, the muscles of the hands and shoulders, as well as the tendons of the back and legs, and the nervous system, are subjected to significant strain. Therefore, experienced teachers monitor this process with great sensitivity, paying attention to the speed and coordination of finger and hand movements, the correctness of the pupil’s sitting posture, and the overall physical and psychological condition of the learner. Naturally, in the early phases of learning to read and write, children experience both physical and emotional tension. They often struggle to overcome initial difficulties and failures. As a result, such strain tends to inhibit rather than stimulate progress. Even when a child recognizes an error and understands it, he or she is often unable to correct it independently—even with the teacher’s guidance. In such cases, skillful teachers use short, engaging games or micro-breaks to restore the child’s emotional balance. These brief moments of relaxation help relieve both physical and psychological fatigue, enabling the pupil to refocus and better absorb new material. Experience shows that such methods yield positive results only when organizational and methodological aspects of instruction are properly structured and prepared. Indeed, the quality of teaching in the first grade depends not only on the teacher’s professionalism but also on the adequacy of the physical and educational environment. What do we mean by “organizational and methodological aspects”? Let us examine this in more detail. A schoolchild spends a large part of the day interacting with learning tools such as the desk, the blackboard, the notebook, and writing instruments. Therefore, the hygienic and pedagogical suitability of these materials is of fundamental importance. Unfortunately, observations reveal that in many primary classrooms, such requirements are either completely ignored or grossly violated.

First, classroom desks often fail to match pupils’ age, height, and body proportions. According to established ergonomic standards, each child must sit at a desk appropriate to their stature. The inclination of the desktop should be 15 degrees, and the distance between the front edge of the

¹ The concept of primary education. Tashkent, 1994, p. 5.

desk and the backrest—known as the desk differential—should correspond to the child’s body length, with approximately 4 centimeters between the lower edge of the desktop and the seat back. As the prominent Uzbek methodologist Mirhabib G‘ulomov explains²:

“When selecting desks for pupils, another crucial factor is maintaining the correct differential. If the seat is too low, the child hangs over the desk; if too high, they are forced to stoop. The height of the seat should match the length of the pupil’s legs, allowing the heels to rest on the floor or on a footrest.” In practice, however, many primary classrooms are equipped with flat, rigid, mismatched furniture—iron or wooden desks of varying heights, often lacking any foot support. Such blatant disregard for hygienic and pedagogical standards has a severely detrimental impact on educational outcomes. Imagine a first-grader seated at an office table serving as a makeshift desk. Because the seat is too low, the child struggles to reach the desktop, having to raise both arms uncomfortably to find a suitable position. Within minutes, pain sets in in both arms, concentration wanes, and frustration grows. Mistakes become frequent, leading to irritability and disengagement. The absence of proper foot support can cause leg muscle strain, further exacerbating the discomfort. If such conditions affect an entire class—none of whom have desks that meet ergonomic norms—then even the most dedicated teacher’s efforts are inevitably undermined.

Secondly, one must question whether the writing and penmanship notebooks currently marketed by private publishing firms meet methodological standards. The answer, regrettably, is no. The only exception is the Writing Notebook for Grade 1 designed by Mirhabib G‘ulomov (Tashkent: “Ma’naviyat,” 2004, 72 pages), which fully complies with pedagogical requirements. In contrast, many notebooks produced by commercial publishers exhibit inconsistencies: the distance between parallel writing lines is 5 mm instead of 4 mm, the spacing in single-line notebooks for Grades 2–4 ranges from 9 to 11 mm instead of 8 mm, and in Grade 1 copybooks, the slant-line intervals extend to 27–30 mm instead of the recommended 25 mm. Teachers often overlook these discrepancies, which makes developing neat handwriting exceedingly difficult.

It must be emphasized that the proper organizational and methodological structuring of handwriting instruction is one of the most important factors in improving literacy at the primary level. A teacher who neglects the quality of essential classroom tools—the blackboard, desks, and writing materials—will inevitably achieve low instructional effectiveness, no matter how well-versed they are in pedagogical methods. To determine the methodological foundations for teaching first-grade students handwriting and developing their graphic skills, experimental studies were conducted in several general secondary schools in Uzbekistan: Schools No. 19, 34, 35 in the city of Bukhara; Schools No. 1 and 52 in Shofirkon district; School No. 11 in Peshku district; School No. 41 in Romitan district; Schools No. 6 and 19 in Nurota district; Schools No. 8 and 19 in the city of Navoi; Schools No. 2 and 5 in Karmana district; and Schools No. 31, 30, and 9 in Muborak district of Kashkadarya region. The current state of teaching handwriting and forming graphic skills among first-graders in these schools was examined. According to the curriculum of general secondary education, within the subject “Mother Tongue” (Grades 1–11), the didactic requirements for Grade 1 allocate eight hours for handwriting lessons during the preparatory stage. These preparatory sessions aim to help pupils learn how to use notebooks correctly, position them properly on the desk, maintain a distance of approximately 35 cm between eyes and notebook, hold writing instruments properly, sit upright while writing, and coordinate elbow and hand movements effectively. Students are also trained to understand the basic elements of letter formation—where to begin and end each stroke, how to turn lines to the right or left, and how to maintain continuous movement while writing.

² G‘ulomov M. Husnihat methodology. Tashkent: teacher, 1976, P.8.

The second section of the program—the “Alphabet” stage—is allocated 120 hours, of which 60 hours are devoted to handwriting instruction. At this stage, pupils are taught to write both uppercase and lowercase letters using the genetic method, to distinguish between similar letter forms, and to ensure accuracy in connecting letters and maintaining the required 65-degree slant according to the linear method. Furthermore, students are guided to preserve uniform letter height across lines (count-rhythm method), maintain consistent spacing between letter elements, letters, and words, and visualize letter shapes in spatial orientation (imaginative writing method). Through oral explanation or demonstration on the board, the teacher clarifies where to place the hand, how and where to turn or lift the pen, and how letters are aligned along the writing line. At the same time, theoretical understanding and practical motor skills are developed. Students practice listening and visual memory through short dictations of syllables, words, and short sentences consisting of two to three words, reinforcing both accurate spelling and proper sentence structure.

Conclusion

Our research and classroom observations reveal that the pre-alphabet stage—currently limited to eight hours—should be somewhat extended. (The “Alphabet” textbook, by contrast, provides only six to seven days for this period.) It must be noted that, during this stage, handwriting and reading lessons naturally differ in focus, and such divergence should not be considered problematic. At this stage, students learn to write words and letters based on the materials already covered in reading lessons; later, reading and writing merge into a single, coherent instructional process. For effective preparatory exercises, students must be provided with black and colored pencils, ergonomically designed pens suited for beginners, writing tools, and specialized handwriting notebooks. Additionally, the teacher’s use of colored chalks during this period has proven to yield particularly effective results in reinforcing letter formation and maintaining students’ visual attention.

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