INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

UDC 377.014.5(575.1)

INSTITUTIONAL STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEKISTAN'S VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ITS GOVERNANCE FEATURES

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23449171

Abstract. The article examines the formation and development of vocational and technical education in Uzbekistan through a historical-institutional approach. The periodisation is based not on changes in institutional names, but on transformations in education levels, governance powers, cooperation with industry, and mechanisms for validating learning outcomes. Content analysis of regulatory documents and a comparison of official statistics identified six institutional stages. The study substantiates the need to account for changes in classification and statistical coverage when interpreting data for the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 academic years. A functional framework linking needs, programmes, resources, practical training, and validated outcomes is proposed for assessing system development.

Keywords: vocational and technical education, vocational education, institutional development, governance, periodisation, technical college, dual education, statistical comparison.

Introduction

Under conditions in which the labour market is characterised by technological renewal, changes in occupational structures, and increasingly complex qualification requirements, the role of vocational and technical education cannot be reduced to teaching a particular operation. The system should enable learners to perform occupational activities effectively and safely, adapt to new technologies, and make informed choices about further education pathways. UNESCO defines technical and vocational education and training as a comprehensive field linked to lifelong learning, the world of work, and social development [10]. Therefore, describing the development of this system solely in terms of the number of institutions or enrolment figures does not fully reveal its governance dimension.

In recent years, the organisational model of vocational education in Uzbekistan has undergone significant renewal. Education levels have been reorganised; dual education and credit-module mechanisms have been introduced; and multidisciplinary technical colleges and new tiers of governance have been established [3-9]. On the one hand, these changes have expanded opportunities to align the system more closely with labour-market needs. On the other hand, they create methodological problems when concepts and statistical indicators from different periods are compared directly. For example, when institutions are reclassified, an increase in their reported number does not automatically mean that new buildings or additional real capacity have been created.

The purpose of this study is to identify the institutional stages in the development of vocational and technical education in Uzbekistan on the basis of changes in governance relationships and to substantiate criteria for interpreting the development of the system. Accordingly, three tasks were undertaken: the conceptual boundaries of the vocational and technical education system were

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

defined; regulatory changes were divided into historical-institutional stages; and the conditions for comparability in interpreting changes in official statistics were specified.

In the international literature, the sustainability of TVET systems is explained by the coherence between curricula, financing, teaching staff, employer participation, and outcome assessment. A joint study by the World Bank, ILO, and UNESCO stresses that the idea of reform is insufficient in itself: institutions must have appropriate mandates, resources, and feedback mechanisms for implementation [11]. The OECD assesses the future-readiness of vocational education in terms of curriculum responsiveness to labour-market signals, flexibility of learning pathways, and stakeholder collaboration [12].

The general conclusion from the literature is that vocational education should be viewed not as a collection of separate institutions, but as a system of interconnected elements. In this article, the system is interpreted through five functional layers: goals and qualification requirements; institutions and governance actors; curricula, pedagogy, and assessment; human and material resources; and outcomes, employment, and feedback. When the legal, resource, and information links connecting these layers are broken, a nominal structure may exist, but the quality of learning outcomes cannot be assured.

Traditional approaches to periodisation often treat the name of an institution or the date on which a regulatory document was adopted as the principal boundary. However, this approach does not show which specific governance relationship the document actually changed. Therefore, four criteria were selected for distinguishing stages: institutional structure, programme level, form of cooperation with industry, and procedure for validating learning outcomes. A separate stage was recorded when these criteria changed together or when a new functional link was introduced into the system.

The study employed qualitative document analysis, historical-institutional periodisation, comparative analysis, and descriptive statistics. The units of document analysis were norms, mandates, resources, cooperation obligations, and verifiable outcomes. In accordance with Bowen's principles of document analysis, the purpose for which the source was created, its legal status, and the limits of the conclusions that could be drawn from it were taken into account [13]. Current regulatory documents were used to characterise the present system, while repealed documents were used only to describe the historical period.

For the statistical comparison, data from the official press release of the National Statistics Committee for the 2025/2026 academic year were used as the basis [14]. Arithmetic differences were calculated; however, because of changes in classification and coverage, the dynamics were not interpreted as causal outcomes. In other words, the changes in figures were recorded, but without disaggregated primary data it was not possible to determine how much resulted from reclassification and how much from new capacity or expanded coverage.

The analysis showed that the vocational and technical education system is a broader concept that cannot be equated with career guidance or vocational training. Career guidance helps individuals make informed choices about occupations and education pathways; vocational training develops methods of performing a specific activity; and vocational education encompasses the levels and programmes established by law. The vocational and technical education system, by contrast, integrates institutions, programmes, resources, partnerships, and outcomes within a common

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governance framework. Its development therefore lies not in increasing the number of elements, but in the quality of the links operating between them.

Table 1.

Institutional Stages in the Development of Vocational and Technical Education in Uzbekistan

Stage	Principal regulatory basis	Change in governance content	Analytical limitation
1997 model	National Programme for Personnel Training	Establishment of secondary specialised vocational education as a distinct tier within the continuous education system	Examined as a historical norm
2018 revision	PF-5313	Renewal of education tiers and the organisational model	The transition process is taken into account
2019-2020 differentiation by level	PF-5812; Resolution No. 466	Organisation of programmes and institutions by education level	Programme level and institution type are distinguished
2021-2023 process renewal	Resolutions Nos. 163 and 648	Introduction of dual education and credit-module mechanisms	The regulation and its actual implementation are examined separately
Optimisation from 2024	PF-158	Expansion of multidisciplinary technical colleges and international programmes	Statistical coverage may have changed
2025-2026 governance renewal	PF-190; PQ-316; Resolution No. 216	Renewal of the Agency, regional cooperation, and financial mechanisms	The reform is assessed as an ongoing process

At the first stage, vocational education was consolidated as an independent component of the continuous education system. The 2018 revision initiated the adaptation of the organisational model to new conditions. In 2019-2020, the levels of primary, secondary, and secondary specialised vocational education were regulated in law [3; 4]. At this stage, equating the name of an institution with the level of education is a methodological error; it must be recognised that a single institution may deliver programmes at different levels or of different duration.

A distinctive feature of the 2021-2023 changes was that they renewed not only the governance structure but also the educational process. Dual education requires the educational institution and

ISSN: 2224-6878 | Pakistan Volume 6, No. 10.

IF: 14.91 | 2026 http://waerasia.org/index.php/ijtar

enterprise to coordinate responsibilities, time, workplace mentoring, and assessment [5]. The credit-module mechanism entails revising the procedures for recording outcomes, study workload, and attainment [6]. It is therefore appropriate to characterise this stage not merely by the date of adoption of a document, but by the organisation of education across two settings and the module-based monitoring of outcomes.

From 2024, the emphasis on multidisciplinary technical colleges and the introduction of international education programmes was strengthened [7]. The 2025-2026 reforms redefined the organisational and financial relationships of governance through mechanisms such as the Agency for Vocational Education, regional cooperation units, and a development fund [8; 9]. A definitive conclusion about the results of this process requires comparing the tasks stipulated in the documents with actual implementation, resource use, and learning outcomes.

Table 2.

Selected Official Indicators of the Technical College System

Indicator	**2024/2025**	**2025/2026**	**Arithmetic difference**
Technical colleges, units	272	712	+440
Students, thousand persons	127.1	463.3	+336.2
Admitted students, thousand persons	52.9	266.6	+213.7
Teachers, excluding part-time staff, persons	6 630	26 414	+19 784

The increases shown in the table coincide with a period of large-scale institutional restructuring. However, the rise from 272 to 712 cannot be interpreted as evidence that exactly 440 new technical colleges were built. The reclassification of institutions from other categories as technical colleges, expansion of statistical coverage, and reorganisation of existing institutions may also have affected the result. Similarly, growth in the numbers of students and teachers does not directly prove that educational quality has improved. Conclusions about quality should be supported by comparable data on programme outcomes, practical competence, completion, and graduate destinations.

Three types of linkage are particularly important in managing development. Legal linkages define powers and obligations; resource linkages ensure that programme requirements are supported by staff, equipment, time, and work-placement settings; and information linkages record outcomes and enable decisions to be reviewed. For example, dual education may be legally introduced, but if the role of the workplace mentor, assignments, and assessment evidence are not agreed, the regulation will not fully translate into the expected educational outcome.

To assess system development, the following chain is proposed: “need - programme - resources - practical training - validated outcome - feedback”. A need is expressed not as an employer’s

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general preference but at the level of the occupational task to be performed. The programme specifies the learning outcome corresponding to that task; resources create the conditions for achieving it; practical training develops competence through real or simulated activity; assessment evidence validates the outcome; and feedback updates the next governance decision. If any link in the chain is broken, the substantive quality of development remains unknown even when external indicators appear positive.

The scientific novelty of the analysis lies in periodising the history of vocational and technical education not by changes in institutional names, but by substantive changes in governance relationships. This approach reduces errors such as treating old and new documents as simultaneously applicable norms, equating institution type with programme level, and automatically interpreting statistical growth as quality improvement. The periodisation also provides a clear initial model for future empirical testing of the effects of a given stage on learning outcomes.

Conclusions and Recommendations. The development of vocational and technical education in Uzbekistan is manifested in six institutional stages, each of which introduced new requirements into the governance structure, programme level, cooperation with industry, or the mechanism for validating outcomes. At the latest stage, organisational, regional, and financial mechanisms are expanding; however, their effectiveness should be assessed by the extent to which regulatory tasks translate into actual implementation and learning outcomes.

Competent authorities are advised to report institution type, programme level, and reorganisation status separately in statistical reports; technical colleges should draw up development plans based on the linkages between needs, resources, and outcomes; and researchers should explicitly report classification, coverage, and the legal status of documents when making comparisons across periods. These requirements do not reject numerical indicators; rather, they supplement them with governance content and verifiable outcomes.

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