

EFFECTIVE FORMS OF CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE
WORK OF DISABILITY COMMUNITIES

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Annotation:The article discusses the implementation of innovative ideas in inclusive education and upbringing, as well as in cultural and educational activities of people with disabilities in the Republic of Uzbekistan. It highlights the fundamental changes in clubs, libraries, and reading activities, the effective forms of various cultural events among people with disabilities, scientific and creative achievements, and issues related to the spiritual development of individuals with disabilities.

Keywords:disability, library, reading, club, inclusive education, Braille, boarding school, textbook, methodological manual, modernization, credit-module, Renaissance, bachelor's degree, master's degree, non-governmental educational institution.

The Role of Spirituality in the Development of an Individual and Society

The role of spirituality in the development of an individual is incomparable. Today, understanding spirituality and comprehending its essence has become a natural necessity for every person. Both individuals and nations are primarily evaluated based on their level of spirituality. Our benevolent and compassionate people have always paid special attention to and cared for those in need, including individuals with disabilities, striving to enrich their spiritual world. This tradition has been cherished as one of the most significant values contributing to peace, friendship, and unity in society.

To further develop these noble traditions in line with contemporary demands, in recent years, Uzbekistan has been implementing state policies aimed at supporting citizens with disabilities, creating all necessary conditions for them, and enhancing their spiritual well-being. Under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, large-scale reforms have been carried out in New Uzbekistan based on the principle of "For the Dignity of Man," ensuring inclusive development, elevating the cultural level of individuals with disabilities, and guaranteeing their equal rights and opportunities.

Currently, about 15% of the world's population, approximately 1 billion people, have disabilities. In Uzbekistan, this figure accounts for around 2-3% of the total population. As of January 1, 2017, 650,284 people in Uzbekistan were officially recognized as having disabilities, including 84,908 children under the age of 16. Today, 760,727 individuals with disabilities reside in Uzbekistan, with over 100,000 of them being children under 16. These individuals are provided with social protection, medical, and social rehabilitation measures.[1]

The "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan" for 2022-2026, which outlines seven key directions for national prosperity, is of great significance. Objective 66 of the program focuses on establishing an effective system to support people with disabilities, improving their quality of life, and ensuring the practical implementation of these measures. The strategy prioritizes strengthening social protection, reducing poverty, creating new job opportunities, ensuring guaranteed income sources, and providing quality healthcare and education services as part of state policy. These initiatives have reached a qualitatively new level.

The increasing global attention to individuals with disabilities is reflected in the shared goals enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This

Convention was adopted on December 13, 2006,[2] and came into force on May 3, 2008. As of May 2021, 183 out of 192 UN member states had ratified the Convention.

A historical analysis of the sector shows that reforms aimed at ensuring the rights and privileges of people with disabilities have played a crucial role. From the early days of Uzbekistan's independence, ensuring that people with disabilities were not left behind in the reform process and providing them with equal opportunities for social protection became a necessity. Measures were taken to organize targeted non-governmental associations, allocate financial resources from the state budget, and provide material and moral support.

In 1991, the Society of the Disabled of Uzbekistan was established based on Resolution No. 18 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Its charter was officially registered by the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan on November 21, 2014, under Resolution No. 514p, titled "On the Organization of the Activities of the Society of the Disabled of Uzbekistan." The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, along with the initiatives of disabled persons' public associations, led to the establishment of the "Association of Disabled People of Uzbekistan" on February 21, 2018. According to its adopted Charter, the association focuses on expanding the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities and ensuring their active participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life in forms that respect and consider their rights and characteristics. Initially, the association had 33 non-governmental, non-profit organizations as members. Today, it has grown to include 48 organizations, along with regional branches in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Tashkent city, and 12 regions of the country.

By 2024, nearly 600 non-governmental, non-profit organizations are operating in the field of disability in Uzbekistan. These include the Society of the Disabled of Uzbekistan, the Public Fund for the Disabled of Uzbekistan, the National Association of Businesswomen with Disabilities of Uzbekistan, the Center for Youth and Children with Disabilities, the Public Center for Assistance to Children and Adolescents with Paralysis in Uzbekistan, and various NGOs such as "Nur," "Umr," "Status," "Mehribonlik," "Opa-singillar," "Millennium," "Mehrko'zda," as well as the "Inclusive Life" Public Association of Persons with Disabilities, the Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan, and the Society of the Deaf of Uzbekistan.

On a national scale, the Society of the Deaf of Uzbekistan holds a unique position. This organization was founded on September 1, 1991, and its Charter was adopted on March 14, 1991. A revised version of its statute was approved on April 4, 1994. Initially, it was known as the Society of the Deaf-Mute. On January 21, 2011, under Resolution No. 451 of the Cabinet of Ministers, it was officially renamed the Society of the Deaf of Uzbekistan. During this period, the organization had 23,326 members, with 9,131 people employed in urban and district government offices, 5,224 in agriculture, and 3,551 in other enterprises and organizations.[3]

Another significant organization is the Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan, established during the First Congress of the Uzbek SSR Council of People's Commissars on July 15, 1932. The First Congress of the Society was held the same year, and the organization was named the Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan, beginning its gradual expansion across the republic.[4]

Regional branches were also established. For instance, in Bukhara, the Society of the Blind was founded in 1938 under the leadership of Sharif Mahmudov, a person with a disability. By 2015, the Society had 10 district branches in Bukhara. As of December 31, 2015, the number of visually impaired individuals in the region was 2,872, with 1,348 members registered in the Society.[5]

After the reestablishment of Navoiy region in 1992, the Society expanded its operations to Navoiy city, Kiziltepa, Karmana, Khatirchi, Navbahor, and Konimex districts. Since December 31, 2020, Tolqin Sharipov has been leading the organization. In its early years, the region registered 2,543 visually impaired individuals.[6]

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As of January 1, 2024, a total of 66,503 individuals with visual impairments were registered across 198 local branches of the Society of the Blind. Notably, in 2023, administrative restructuring took place, with the Tashkent regional branches of Zangiota and Tashkent districts becoming independent branches, and the Yangiyabad district branch in Jizzakh region was newly established. Among the total registered individuals, 22,691 belong to Group I disability, 30,447 to Group II, 8,956 to Group III, and 4,409 are children under 16 with congenital visual impairments.

According to reports from the regional branches of the Society of the Blind, 144 clubs operate within the system, including 63 artistic amateur clubs with 684 participants, 51 sports clubs with 513 participants, and 30 other types of clubs with 218 members, totaling 1,415 active members. These clubs provide opportunities for people with visual impairments to engage in meaningful activities during their free time.

Throughout 2024, 227 specialized cultural and educational facilities have been serving visually impaired citizens free of charge. These include 7 clubs, 17 public cultural and recreation centers, 17 special rooms, 48 spirituality rooms, and 138 specialized libraries for the blind.

Currently, 16 specialized educational institutions, known as "Nurli Maskan" (Lighted Shelter), provide education for blind and visually impaired children across Uzbekistan. In September 2022, a specialized educational institution for blind and visually impaired children was inaugurated in Sirdaryo region. As of now, 2,775 boys and girls are receiving education in these institutions.[7]

Today, government decrees and resolutions are fundamentally based on several key policies, including the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-4860, dated October 13, 2020, "On Measures to Further Improve the Education and Upbringing System for Children with Special Educational Needs," the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education in the Public Education System for 2020–2025, and the Cabinet of Ministers' Resolution No. 417, dated June 2, 2018, "Regulations on the Admission of Persons with Disabilities to Higher Educational Institutions under Additional State Grant Quotas." These policies play a crucial role in ensuring the legal protection and decent living conditions of persons with disabilities.

The PDK Cultural Palace in Tashkent has been actively working to provide young people with disabilities with various books, textbooks, and educational materials. It has established a special reading room for students from special boarding schools, with 15,285 book storage units available. The number of student visitors increased from 902 in 2009 to 1,794 in 2010. Currently, the library administration has donated 25,793 books to students this year.

Since July 1948, a Braille printing house has been operating under the Bukhara Regional Society of the Blind, producing tactile literature. From its early days, the printing house has published a large number of textbooks and literary works. In 1949, it was restructured as a community-based special printing house under the Bukhara Society of the Blind. Rufina Latifyanova, who led the printing house from 1952 to 1965, made significant contributions to its development.

In 1965, a special department for promoting tactile literature was established under the Ibn Sina Regional Library in Bukhara. However, in 1971, this department was dissolved, and the Bukhara Special Library for the Blind was founded. The library was later named after the famous Russian writer N. Ostrovsky. Another library was established on July 8, 1992, under the Bukhara Cultural Technical College, and on June 8, by Decree No. 336 of the Bukhara City Administration, it was named after Bahrom Karimov, a member of the Society of the Blind and a person with a disability. This library has 13 staff positions.[8]

The total book collection of specialized libraries in Bukhara region comprises 37,274 books, including 11,704 Braille books, 18,807 regular printed books, 5,710 talking books, and 1,053 digital disks. The total number of registered readers is 7,335.[9]

In Samarkand region, the Samarkand Regional Special Library for the Blind operates 16 district branches. It houses four types of literature, with a total book collection of 41,884 units.[10]

The first specialized library in Navoiy region was founded in 1972 as the Karmana District Society of the Blind Library, under the leadership of U. Tokpanov, a Group I disabled person. In 2007, this library was transformed into the Regional Library for Persons with Disabilities. Currently, four district branches and one in Navoiy city are in operation, serving 3,357 readers. The total book collection includes 21,393 books, of which 4,808 are in Braille, 13,197 are in regular print, 2,646 are talking books, and 742 are electronic disks.[11]

Following the Presidential Decree No. 381 of June 20, 2006, "On the Organization of Information and Library Services for the Population of the Republic," the library system in Uzbekistan has experienced significant development. For example, in January 2011, a new library opened in the "Sitora" preschool educational institution (No. 57) in Bukhara. This library provides practical and methodological support to the specialized libraries for the blind in G'ijduvon, Vobkent, and Shofirkon districts.

Additionally, a specialized library operates under the Navoiy Regional Society of the Blind School-Internat. Today, the library under the State Testing Center (DTM) has 6,048 Braille textbooks, 785 works of fiction, and 60 electronic disks. Librarian F. Abdullayeva actively promotes reading among students and strives to ensure they spend their free time meaningfully.

On September 18, 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued Resolution No. 739, "On Improving the System of Information and Library Services for Persons with Disabilities." This resolution established key tasks for enhancing the quality of information and library services for persons with disabilities, meeting their information needs, and ensuring meaningful leisure activities.

According to the resolution, from 2020 to 2024, the Republican Central Library for the Blind and newly constructed libraries for the blind in Bukhara, Jizzakh, Navoiy, Tashkent regions, and Tashkent city were planned. Additionally, reconstruction and equipment upgrades were scheduled for libraries in Andijan, Kashkadarya, Namangan, Surkhandarya, and Fergana regions.

The State Unitary Enterprise "Urban Planning Documents Expertise" under the Ministry of Construction developed a project to implement these tasks. By the end of 2022, these objectives were fully accomplished. A total of 1 trillion 215 million UZS was allocated for these initiatives.[12]

In 2024, under the leadership of Zarifboy Sobirov, a new library for the blind was constructed and put into operation in Bog'ot district, Khorezm region. Within a short time, the number of books in the district's library for the blind increased from 70 to 200. The library's collection was enriched with "talking books," Braille books, and regular print books.

Currently, based on grant projects funded by the Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) for Supporting NGOs and Other Civil Society Institutions, the Uzbekistan Society of the Blind's Central Board has led the publication of the educational manual "English Lessons" and the book "Independent Movement Skills" for the rehabilitation of blind individuals, initiated by the editorial board of the "Bir Safda" magazine. These publications have played an essential role in supporting the visually impaired.

Additionally, the Bukhara Society of the Blind successfully obtained a grant of 20 million UZS. As part of the project, books such as "Laykam Yig'lagan Kunlar" by A. O'roqov, "Umrim Mening" by J. Rahmatov, "Ilm-Urfonining Turonzamin Fozila Ayollari" by O'. Nazarov, and "Nam Ko'zlaridan Boshlanar Bahor" (authored by a group of young writers) were published in regular print, Braille, and audio formats and distributed free of charge to the public and educational institutions.[13]

The novel "Ko'zi Ojiz Oligarch" by writer Nabijon Xoshimov and the anthology "Munir Qalblar Armug'oni" compiled by Ikrom Rajabov, chief editor of "Bir Safda" magazine, were also published and distributed to participants of a jubilee event. Additionally, books on the history of the Society of the Blind and its prominent figures were printed.

In 2019, the Bukhara regional Society of the Blind (Vobkent district branch) won a grant competition and participated in the "First Steps in Islamic Knowledge" project, securing 29.5 million UZS in grant funding. This allowed them to purchase computers and printers and publish the second volume of the "Arabic Grammar" textbook in Braille, which was distributed free of charge to those studying Islamic sciences.

From October 25 to 27, 2023, Bukhara city hosted the "Creativity" Forum for Persons with Visual Disabilities. Organized by the Uzbekistan Society of the Blind's Central Board, the Bukhara regional branch, and the Society of the Deaf of Uzbekistan, the event took place at the Sitorai-Mohi Khosa sanatorium in Bukhara.

During the "Literature" category of the forum, Tursunoy Matqulova from Andijan region won the "Best Poetry Book" award for her work "Umr Hikmatlari", and Tohir Yo'ldosh from Fergana region received the "Best Prose Book" award for his book "Ikki O't Orasi". Other participants from various regions with disabilities actively participated and were also recognized with awards.

Cultural and educational initiatives have been successfully implemented. On December 22, in cooperation with the Central Board of the Uzbekistan Society of the Blind, the Tashkent City Branch, and the Republican Central Library for the Blind, an artistic-literary evening titled "The Man of a Courageous Heart" was held at the "San'at Gulshani" Cultural Palace.

This event commemorated the 100th anniversary of Vali G'ofurov, a blind writer, WWII veteran, and member of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan, known for works like "Vafodor" and "The Novel Written with a Needle". The evening was attended by his family members, elderly veterans, and about 60 members of the Society of the Blind.[14]

Conclusion: To ensure the comprehensive development of students with special needs, it is essential to protect their rights and improve the education system. Within the framework of priority policies, modernizing cultural and educational activities, promoting literature, organizing events, and introducing new formats are necessary.

Additionally, in conducting cultural and educational activities for people with disabilities, it is crucial to apply innovative methods that align with contemporary requirements and to effectively utilize international experiences.

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