REPORT 7: EDUCATION – UZBEKISTAN

This report is based on the results of two focus groups held in Uzbekistan, to explore the attitudes of young Uzbeks towards education and their opinions on the quality of education available to them. This report is a copy-edited version of material provided to the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre by the Expert Sociological Research Centre in Tashkent. The views are the views of those who took part in these discussions. All those participating did so on a confidential basis. All names have been changed.

About the Focus Groups

Focus Group One (FG1) was held in the city of Tashkent on 15 November, 1999 and consisted of eight young people aged 15-18 – four girls and four boys. All the boys were still at secondary school, and one of the girls. Another girl had started a course at a language college, while the other two were trying to get into higher education, having left school. Focus Group Two (FG2) was held on the territory of the former state farm (sovkhоз) of Turkiston, in Zangiatinskii raion, Tashkent oblast, on 18 November 1999. This group was also mixed, comprising four girls and four boys aged 15-17, all of whom were attending secondary school. In general, the rural young people were less critical of their teachers and had less free time.

Focus Group One (FG1)

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<tr>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Expert Sociological Research Centre, Tashkent.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date of focus group:</td>
<td>15 November 1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Details on selection of participants:</td>
<td>The participants were male (4) and female (4) aged between 15 and 18 years. They were either attending, or had just left, secondary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participants (name, age, gender) | Umida, 17, F  
Khulkar, 18, F  
Dilafruz, 17, F  
Dilnoza, 17, F  
Sherzod, 16, M  
Zhakhongir, 16, M  
Emil, 15, M  
Gairat, 15, M |
| Start time:        | 18.00 pm                                      |
| End time:          | 19.30 pm                                      |
| Comments from facilitator on group dynamics: | All participants contributed to the discussion, and expressed themselves openly. There was no tensions or shyness. The questions under discussion seemed important to them. |
| Problems encountered: |                                              |
| Any other comment: |                                              |
Focus Group Two (FG2)

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<th>Location:</th>
<th>Village soviet, office of chairman.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date of focus group:</td>
<td>18 November 1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Details on selection of participants:</td>
<td>The participants were male (4) and female (4) aged between 15 and 18 years, and all attended secondary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participants (name, age, gender) | Makhubar, 15, F  
|                              | Aisulu, 15, F  
|                              | Ra'no, 15, F  
|                              | Aziza, 16, F  
|                              | Amir, 16, M  
|                              | Bakhovuddin, 16, M  
|                              | Abu, 16, M  
|                              | Ulugbek, 16, M |
| Start time:    | 19.00 pm                             |
| End time:      | 20.30 pm                             |
| Comments from facilitator on group dynamics: | None. |
| Problems encountered: |                                      |
| Any other comment: |                                      |
A summary of responses from the Focus Groups

This report reflects the order in which topics were discussed, following the discussion guidelines on this subject. However, in order to distinguish between quotes from urban and rural dwellers, the comments made by participants in FG1 (urban youth) are reported first, followed by those by members of the rural group (FG2).

2.1 FG1 (urban).

What is good education?

The participants were asked what they considered to be a “good education”. Overall education was considered important by the participants. They thought that a person with a good education can always find a job; that a person with a good education is clever, and knows how to behave correctly in any situation:

- “Good education – is a guarantee of success in life” (Sherzod, 17 years, male)
- “Good education is when a person receives an education and becomes educated, with a good degree of knowledge and the ability to apply this everywhere. Having a diploma from a prestigious university does not mean that you have a good education. A good education is when you can apply your knowledge in practice.” (Dilnoza, 17 years, female)
- “Good education is connected with your future job and wage. But it is also important for your personal development” (Umida, 17 years, female)
- “Without education a person is nobody. What you will become in the future, where you will work, your choice of profession, all depends on education”. (Zhakhongir, male, 16 years).

The participants were asked on what good education depends; what are the vital ingredients for good education. Members of the urban group thought that good education depended on (i) the teachers, (ii) the resources allocated to education, and especially the teacher’s wage; (iii) the attitude of the student; and (iv) the living standard of the person.

With regard to teachers, there was criticism that some are not honest and take bribes to give students good marks. But many participants also spoke up for teachers. They considered that their work effort reflects their pay level, which is very low. One boy said:

- “Sometimes I look at my teacher and I feel sorry for her. I see that she cannot concentrate, is thinking about other things. And I wish that she did not have to worry about all these everyday cares. That she had enough money to concentrate on doing her job and teaching us well.” (Gairat, male, 15 years)

The participants in the urban group also drew attention to cases of teachers who despite their low wages devote a lot of their time and energy to their pupils. Within this group of teachers, there are three categories:

- Those who have been teachers for a long time, understand and like their work and understand their social responsibility
- Pensioners who stay on to teach despite their age
- Those who cannot find another job.

The third category may work conscientiously, but it is clear that they would like to find another job with a higher wage. The other two categories are usually interested in their pupils, and organize clubs, games, etc.

The following comment was made on those teachers who take bribes:

- “I know, for example, that a friend of mine who I know very well managed to get into the Institute. Even though I know more than her. I am not complaining, but I just want to say that there are teachers who for money give good marks for pupils they do not even know. And this means that teachers can have a negative influence on getting a good education” (Dilnoza, female, 17 years)

Although this group first agreed that having a good education meant that you were more likely to get a good job, they later said that often a person with a good education could not get a job, because of the need to pay bribes.

- “in our country the system is such that you can get a job only with the help of bribes or connections” (Sherzod, male, 16 years)

The participants were asked about how satisfied they were with their own experience of the school system. Half of the urban group was satisfied with their school education, and the other half was not. Those who were not satisfied either went to courses or were trying to get into further education.

The participants defined a bad education as when there is no good basis given at school, or when pupils pay money to get good marks, or buy diplomas in higher education. Many pupils who are well-off actually get a bad education. Rather than study, they pay money so that teachers give them good marks. And these pupils are also, in general, guaranteed a job. In many schools, apart from gymnasium or lyceum, pupils receive a poor education. There is no incentive for teachers to transmit knowledge to the pupils, because they get such low wages.

Relevance of good education to future jobs.

One of the participants said that teachers forgive girls if they do not do their homework, saying that they will soon get married and sit at home, and their husbands will work and provide for them. But boys should study, because they will have to feed their families. Therefore it is more difficult for boys to get good marks than girls. (Gairat, 15 years, male)

This was disputed by the female participants, who stressed that girls could not rely on their future husbands’ wages to keep them. Education is important for girls as well, so that they know they can work when they want to or need to.

- “I do not agree. Life is such. If a girl gets married and she does not have an education, then she cannot earn money. There are husbands, who make a living at the bazaar, but the bazaar is not eternal, the profit is not stable there. If the husband
cannot earn, who will happen? It is therefore very important for everyone to have a good education.” (Dilnoza, 17 years, female)

- “For example, my sister worked even though she had three small children. Everyone told her that she should quit her job and stay at home with the children. But she did not quit, and she made the right decision, because her husband lost his job and became unemployed. As a result, for the last 6 months the family has been living off her wage”. (Dilafruz, 17 years, female)

With regard to future jobs, all participants in the group would prefer to work for state organizations because they are considered more reliable, stable, and less likely to close down. But only if there is a stable and reasonable wage.

- “The state sector is better than the private one, because in the state sector there is the chance to have a career, and in the private one there is not” (Emil, 15 years, male)

The participants were asked about attendance rates among their peers. They claimed that many children are forced to skip school in order to earn money.

- “Some children do not attend school and trade at the bazaar because of material difficulties. They have to do this, because they are sorry for their parents. Children see how difficult it is for them and want to help. Some children look around and see well-dressed and well-shod children, and they want to dress well too. That’s why they run after earnings.” (Dilafruz, 17 years, female)
- “At school you pay 500 sums to get good marks. Therefore children try to earn money and give teachers money and get top marks.” (Khulkar, 18 years, female)

**Problems and who to turn to.**

Most of the participants claimed that they turn to the “prefects” (leaders) in their classes who usually help to solve problems. Parents can help on such matters as getting textbooks and helping with homework. Respect for one’s parents is a strong part of Uzbek culture. The participants claim that their parents are important in advising on future jobs and that any decisions on their future studies or career will be taken together with their parents. The most relevant subjects in higher education for the job market are economics and law.

When asked about the concrete problems they faced, many participants mentioned the cost of education. Not everyone has access to good education. There are now many private fee-paying schools, but not everyone can afford them. If parents cannot pay for university, then the child will have to give up the idea of studying. Not all participants could afford to pay for higher education.

- “My sister cannot study because she does not have enough money” (Khulkar, 18 years, female)
- “In Uzbekistan there are international business schools and their diplomas correspond to world standards, but to get such diplomas you need big money” (Dilnoza, 17 years, female)
Books are also a problem at schools. At the Russian schools they cannot find the textbooks in Tashkent, and they have to travel to Russia to buy them. Pupils usually have to share textbooks. Even in Uzbek schools there are not enough textbooks and 2-3 pupils generally share one book.

- “For some subjects we have one textbook for 2-3 pupils” (Dilnoza, 17 years, female)
- “We make photocopies and study. That is how we solve problems – at our own expense” (Umida, 17 years, female)

There were also some hints at unequal access to books:

- “In our school there are 2 lyceum classes and 3 normal ones. The lyceum classes get the best books, and the normal ones, get whatever is left. We are told that we should buy them ourselves” (Gairat, 15 years)

Extra tuition is very important, but expensive. Khulkar pays $5.00 per hour for extra tuition, but her parents are well-off. Dilnoza said that she feels that her family could eat more and better food if they did not have to pay for her extra tuition. Therefore this year she is trying harder to study on her own.

The participants also alluded to the fact that the physical repair of the school itself often left a lot to be desired. The toilets at the schools are considered disgusting and unusable.

- “we have problems because they do not clean the toilets, they are cold, dirty” (Dilafruz, 17 years, female)

Leisure

When asked about their possibilities for pursuing leisure activities, the participants said that schools organize some cultural activities. However, most free time is spent at home, looking at television. Cinema is too expensive, as is public transport. And it is not considered correct for young girls to go to the cinema. The boys were more interested in sport. The girls said that when they were younger they did sport, but now their parents did not encourage it. Again, it was not considered correct for young Uzbek girls.

- “Now television is replacing any cinema or theatre. In my free time I do sport.” (Zhakhongir, 16 years, male)
- “I want to do a cooking course. And since January I have been getting extra tuition because I want to go to a foreign language institute” (Dilafruz, 17 years, female)
- “Now it is dangerous to go to the cinema, because we are afraid of thieves. It is a bad time” (Khulkar, 18 years, female)
- “Discos are not for Uzbeks. You get various bad comments from various quarters. Overall it is better for girls to sit at home and do domestic things” (Dilafruz, 17 years, female)
- “I can go with my parents to the cinema and other places, but not on my own. Uzbek upbringing is such: girls can sit at home, study, and now some parents even make them cover their faces” (Dilnoza, 17 years, female)
• “I play tennis. I do not go to sports facilities. We play in the yard.” Dilafruz, 17 years, female.
What is “good education”? 

The participants had a relatively simple approach to defining good education, namely: good education depends on the teacher.

- “The main role in receiving a good education is played by the teacher” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “Yes, if the teacher gives good lessons, if they are interesting, then the pupils receive a good education” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)

However, later on in the discussion, participants were asked whether the current education system corresponds to their ideas of good education. At this point some participants were critical of the curriculum, and of the lack of equipment and facilities at their schools.

- “No – there are differences. When it is time to apply for a place at a higher education institute, we see the differences, because we have to sit exams here which are quite different from the material required there. The things we learn at school are not relevant to the entrance exams for higher education institutes” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “In our school there are not all the conditions to receive a good education. For example, there is not laboratory for physics, and we want to do the experiments ourselves....” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)

Bad education was also defined using a relatively simple approach. Education is good per se, and if a person has a bad education, then it means that he/ she did not apply him/herself.

- “There is no bad education. If you have had education, then it is good – if it is bad, then it means you did not have any” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “It all depends on the pupil. The teacher gives all the basic knowledge, but all pupils take it in differently, and try to learn as they can” (Aziza, 16 years, female)
- “Yes, the teacher cannot force the child, if he does not want to learn. When the teacher sees that his pupil is skipping lessons, then he can only warn the parents about this” (Ra’no, 15 years, male)

Relevance of good education to future jobs

Participants in this group also thought that education was vital for their future work lives.

- “Good education is very important for my future life. Therefore from the start of school life it is necessary to study well” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “If a pupil studies well from the 1st class then it will be very useful for him. Good education is very important for future life” (Abu, 16 years, male)
Interestingly, members of the rural group also thought that women should work, not only for their financial security, but also because they need to have contact with a bigger world.

- “Women should not only sit at home, otherwise they will get out of touch with life” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)

When asked where they would like to work in the future, participants also stressed that they considered state jobs to be the best. In terms of higher education, the following were considered the most useful: computer science, medicine and pedagogical institutes, law, English and Russian languages. The participants hinted at the importance of choosing one’s own career, but also having to take into account and respect the wishes of parents. As was stressed above, the influence of the family is very strong in Uzbek society, and respect for one’s elders an inherent part of the culture.

- “Of course in a state institution, I would like to work in a state organization” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “Parents do not wish anything bad for their children, but young people should choose their own job. However, if my parents were against my job or profession, then I would obey them.” (Aziza, 16 years, female)
- “I am interested in the law faculty, but I will go wherever my parents say” (Abu, 16 years, male)
- “It is possible to not listen to your parents and study what you want, but then if you don’t get into that institute, or can’t study there….our parents know our capabilities better than us.” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)

The participants did not only blame financial difficulties for the fact that many children skip school. They claimed that some children themselves want to work and earn money, in order to keep up with the latest consumer fashions.

- “Schoolchildren might not do this if the parents made them study at school, but parents do not do this, and the children want to help their parents with the material problems faced by the family” (Aziza, 16 years, female)
- “but now, children are interested in money and cigarettes, they want to earn quickly, but the parents have low wages. Therefore their children are forced to do this.” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “many go to trade at the bazaar, because at school everyone wants to be dressed in the most expensive and beautiful way, to have good schoolbags…” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)

All thought that overall the relations with teachers were good. There was notably less criticism of teachers than in the urban group. However, there was still some criticism, which shows a sense that the dignity of both the pupil and the teacher is to be respected.

- “The teachers do not understand the pupils, they can reprimand someone in front of the whole class” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “At our school this happens often. For example in our class there is a boy, who in every lesson argues with the teachers and treats them as equals” (Makhubar, 15 years)
Problems and who to turn to.

Problems were seen mainly in terms of the lack of facilities, equipment and books at the school. Teachers were seen to be incapable of solving such problems.

- “We do not have enough books, the gym is not equipped.” (Ulugbek, 16 years, male)
- “In the laboratory there is no possibility to carry out experiments” (Makhubar 15 years, female)
- “I came to school after the beginning of the school year, and then all the text books had been given out. I am now studying without books. I copy from books, borrow from friends.” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “We have only got books for 2-3 subjects: literature, chemistry, Russian language, algebra and geometry. There are not enough books at school, - I bought books myself at the bazaar” (Aziza, 16 years, female)

However, all agreed that it is also the fault of pupils that there are not enough books at the school, in that books get lost or are not returned

- “The headmaster and the teachers say, you should buy books yourself……I bought books for 250 sums. Maybe if pupils gave back the books to the library on time and did not lose them, then we would have these text books….The pupils often do not give back books.” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “Whoever we turn to with these problems, they don’t do anything, only make promises” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “We turn to the teachers, but they only make promises” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)

Participants were adamant that there was no equality of opportunity in the current Uzbek education system.

- “Good education is not accessible to all. We live in the transition period, and in order to survive many young people go to the bazaar, and there is no time or money to study” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “Now without money you cannot get a good job. If a journalist wants to work wherever he wants to, then he has to pay money, give bribes” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “The children of the rich do not study, they can pay for good marks” (Ulugbek, 16 years, male)
- “The children of the rich do not have to study, because they can rely on the money of their parents, even if they have no knowledge, they can get into an institute by paying bribes” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “Not long ago a boy from our school got into the agricultural school. He studied really badly at our school, skipped classes, but got in by paying. Now even if you have no knowledge, you can get in for money” (Aziza, 16 years, female)
- “There are possibilities. We have knowledge, but we have no guarantee of money.” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
Leisure

The rural group claimed that there were clubs for mathematics, and sport, in particular basketball and volleyball. Private tuition is considered to be very important.

- “They (clubs) help consolidate knowledge. Before there were more clubs” (Ulugbek, 16 years, male)
- “Tutors can prepare you for the entrance exams, and at school they do not prepare us. We need more knowledge for the institute” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)
- “Tuition for English language, 3 times a week, costs 1000 sums” (Ra’no, 15 years, female)

One girl went to a tutor twice a week for English, and paid 5000 sum a month. (note – minimum wage = 3,500 sums)

The boys play football, but they play in the yard. The sports facilities are in bad condition.

- “I play volleyball. I really like it – I go with friends to our gym, but there are no windows or balls. We buy the balls ourselves and play”. (Ra’no, 15 years, female)
- “There are no sport facilities near us. Only if you go to Tashkent, but it is far and there is not time after school. It is better to stay at home and help our parents.” (Makhubar, 15 years, female)