FOREIGN EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE MODELS AND POSSIBILITIES OF ADAPTING IT TO UZBEKISTAN

Ruzimurodova Nigora Oybek qizi
The Shaykhantohur Specialized School under the System of Agency of Specialized Educational Institutions, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
nigora.oybekovna68@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis comparatively examines school governance models in Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, focusing on school autonomy, leadership development, and accountability. Through analysis of policy documents and international research, it identifies key features of each model and considers their applicability to Uzbekistan's evolving school autonomy framework. The findings indicate that while no model can be directly transplanted, clear leadership roles, career-stage differentiation, and links between evaluation and professional development offer adaptable approaches for Uzbekistan. The study concludes with implications for education policy and practice.

Keywords: school governance, educational management, school autonomy, leadership development, comparative education, Finland, Singapore, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan.

ЗАРУБЕЖНЫЙ ОПЫТ МОДЕЛЕЙ ШКОЛЬНОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ И ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ ЕГО АДАПТАЦИИ К УСЛОВИЯМ УЗБЕКИСТАНА

Аннотация

В данной диссертации проводится сравнительный анализ моделей управления школами в Финляндии, Сингапуре и Великобритании с акцентом на автономию школ, развитие лидерства и подотчётность. На основе анализа нормативно-политических документов и международной научной литературы выявляются ключевые особенности каждой модели и оценивается возможность их применения в условиях развивающейся системы школьной автономии Узбекистана. Результаты исследования показывают, что ни одна модель не может быть перенесена в Узбекистан в полном объёме, однако чёткое распределение лидерских ролей, дифференциация по этапам карьерного развития и взаимосвязь между оцениванием и профессиональным развитием могут быть адаптированы к условиям страны. Исследование также формулирует выводы и рекомендации для образовательной политики и практики.

Ключевые слова: управление школой, образовательный менеджмент, школьная автономия, развитие лидерства, сравнительное образование, Финляндия, Сингапур, Великобритания, Узбекистан.

MAKTAB BOSHQARUVI MODELLARIDA XORIJIY TAJRIBA VA UNI O'ZBEKISTONGA MOSLASHTIRISHNING IMKONIYATLARI

Annotatsiya

Ushbu tezis Finlandiya, Singapur va Buyuk Britaniyaning maktab boshqaruvi modellarini maktab avtonomiyasi, liderlikni rivojlantirish va hisobdorlik nuqtayi nazaridan qiyosiy tahlil qiladi. Siyosiy-

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huquqiy hujjatlar va xalqaro ilmiy adabiyotlarni tahlil qilish orqali har bir modelning asosiy xususiyatlari aniqlanib, ularning O'zbekistonda rivojlanib borayotgan maktab avtonomiyasi tizimiga mosligi baholanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, hech bir modelni to'liq ko'chirib olish mumkin emas, biroq aniq liderlik rollari, martaba bosqichlariga ko'ra differensiallashuv hamda baholash va kasbiy rivojlanish o'rtasidagi uzviy bog'liqlik O'zbekiston sharoitida qo'llash mumkin bo'lgan samarali yondashuvlardir. Tadqiqot ta'lim siyosati va amaliyoti uchun tegishli xulosalarni taqdim etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: maktab boshqaruvi, ta'lim menejmenti, maktab mustaqilligi, liderlikni rivojlantirish, qiyosiy ta'lim, Finlandiya, Singapur, Buyuk Britaniya, O'zbekiston.

I. INTRODUCTION

As Uzbekistan continues to restructure its education system under the "Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy (Presidential Decree PF-158, 2023) and the updated continuous professional development framework (Presidential Resolution PQ-231, 2024), school governance has moved from a purely administrative function to a central instrument of educational reform. Directors are now expected to write development programs, manage personnel strategically, interpret data, and respond to the needs of diverse communities — responsibilities that exceed anything that teaching experience alone can prepare a person for. This shift raises an immediate comparative question: how have other education systems handled the same transition, and what do they suggest about organizing governance models that actually produce capable school leaders?

The international literature offers no shortage of examples. Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom are three of the most frequently cited high-performing systems, and they are also three of the most contrasting in their approach to governance. Finland relies on professional trust, high autonomy at school level, and minimal external accountability. Singapore uses a centralized, pipeline-based model in which school leadership is a managed career path from the moment a teacher shows early leadership potential. The United Kingdom has moved progressively towards decentralized governance, combining expanded institutional autonomy with performance accountability frameworks. Examining these three systems together creates a productive comparative tension: they share strong outcomes but achieve them through different structural logics.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the governance models of Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom through a comparative lens and to identify which structural features are realistically transferable to the Uzbekistan context. The object of the study is the school governance model as an organizational and institutional construct. The subject is the transferable architectural components of those models — the elements that function independently of the cultural and political contexts in which they originated.

II. LITERARY REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

School governance is understood here in Bush's (2020) sense as the intersection of management, which concerns the maintenance of effective current operations, and leadership, which concerns the direction of change. In most systems both functions are concentrated in the school director, but how that director is selected, prepared, held to account, and supported varies enormously across systems. The present analysis proceeds from the view that governance models are not neutral administrative arrangements; they embody assumptions about professional competency, institutional trust, and the relationship between school-level autonomy and system-level accountability.

Pont, Nusche and Moorman's (2008) OECD review of school leadership policy across more than twenty systems remains the most comprehensive comparative account available. Their central finding is

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that systems which successfully improved school leadership did so through four shared moves: redefining school leadership as a professional function rather than an administrative appointment; distributing leadership rather than concentrating it in one person; developing leadership through a continuum rather than a single training event; and making school leadership an attractive and viable career. These four moves are observable in different combinations across the three systems examined in this thesis.

Hallinger (2018) supplies the critical qualification. He argues that although a generic repertoire of leadership practices exists across systems, these practices must be adapted to the institutional, community, and socio-cultural contexts in which a school operates, and that research methods focused on average effects tend to relegate context to the shadows. This creates a direct warning against unreflective model transplantation: borrowing the surface features of a system without understanding the contextual conditions that make them work is likely to produce formal compliance rather than genuine improvement. The distinction between architecture and content — between the structural logic of a system and its specific operational content — is therefore the analytical tool on which this thesis relies.

Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020), revisiting twenty years of accumulated evidence, conclude that leadership is the second most significant in-school factor affecting student learning, and that its influence is stronger when it is widely distributed across the school's staff. Fullan (2010) adds that system-level improvement depends not on individual leader performance but on the professional capital of the school — the collective knowledge, skill, and motivation of its teaching staff — being developed deliberately and continuously. These frameworks together suggest that governance models should be evaluated not by their administrative features but by the professional development cultures they generate and sustain.

III. RESULTS

This thesis is based on comparative policy analysis and a systematic review of international research literature. Three governance systems — Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom — were selected on the basis of their contrasting structural approaches and their frequent citation as reference cases in comparative education research. The primary analytical sources are the OECD comparative reviews (Pont et al., 2008), peer-reviewed studies of each system's governance features, and key theoretical treatments of school leadership (Bush, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2018). The national normative framework of Uzbekistan — including the "Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy (Presidential Decree PF-158, 2023) and Presidential Resolution PQ-231 (2024) — provides the basis for the adaptation analysis in the results section.

The method of analysis is comparative-descriptive with an explicit focus on transferability. Each system's governance features are evaluated not on intrinsic merit but on the degree to which they are structurally separable from their originating context and compatible with the institutional conditions of Uzbekistan. The analysis proceeds in two stages: first, identifying the core architectural features of each governance model; second, evaluating each feature against the transferability criterion by examining whether it depends on context-specific cultural or economic conditions or whether it represents a structural choice that can be made in different contexts.

3.1 Finland: High Trust, High Autonomy, Low External Accountability

Finland's school governance model rests on a principle that is both its greatest strength and its most context-dependent feature: institutional trust. Finnish school directors are given substantial autonomy over curriculum implementation, staffing, and budget allocation, and schools are not subject to national

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inspection or the public ranking of performance data (Sahlberg, 2015). This architecture is sustainable because it rests on a teaching profession that is rigorously selected — approximately one in ten applicants to teacher preparation programmes is accepted — and highly regarded socially and professionally. The principal in Finland functions culturally as primus inter pares: first among professional equals rather than a manager above a workforce.

What is transferable from the Finnish model is not its trust-based accountability, which depends on a depth of professional culture that takes decades to construct, but two specific structural features. The first is role clarity: Finnish governance explicitly separates pedagogical leadership at school level from system-level administrative control, which prevents directors from being overwhelmed by compliance burdens at the expense of educational work. The second is the expectation that school leadership is fundamentally educational leadership — that a director's primary function is to support and participate in teacher professional development rather than to administer paperwork. This expectation is consistent with what Leithwood et al. (2020) identify as the most productive orientation available to a school director.

3.2 Singapore: Pipeline Management and Leadership as Career

Singapore's model is the most explicitly managed of the three. Teaching in Singapore is a graduate career with a structured progression track, and school leadership is treated as a distinct professional pathway that teachers enter by selection at a relatively early career stage. Leadership training is centralized, sequential, and competency-assessed; principals are prepared before appointment rather than promoted and then left to learn on the job (Pont et al., 2008). The system also practises a form of distributed leadership by design: senior teachers and heads of department carry formal leadership responsibilities, so the principal is not the sole leadership resource in the school.

The transferability of Singapore's model is high at the structural level. Its core logic — identify leadership potential early, develop it deliberately through a career-stage sequence, and assess competency formally before appointment — does not depend on Singapore's specific cultural conditions in the way that Finland's trust model does. What it requires is institutional will: a decision that school leadership is a profession rather than a reward for teaching longevity, and that preparation for it should precede appointment rather than follow it. Pont et al. (2008) note that this logic is replicable and that several systems have begun to adopt versions of it. The challenge in any new context is designing the assessment instruments that make competency visible and the incentive structures that make the leadership track attractive to strong teachers.

3.3 United Kingdom: Decentralization, Accountability, and the Autonomy Paradox

The United Kingdom — and England in particular — has moved aggressively towards decentralized school governance through academy conversion, free school creation, and multi-academy trust structures. Schools that convert to academy status gain significant freedoms over curriculum, staffing, and budget allocation. In exchange, they face robust external accountability through inspection and public performance data (Pont et al., 2008). The UK model illustrates what Hallinger (2018) describes as the autonomy paradox: expanding governance autonomy without simultaneously developing the leadership capacity to exercise it wisely can intensify institutional inequality rather than reduce it. Schools led by well-prepared leaders benefit from expanded autonomy; those led by inadequately prepared directors can deteriorate more rapidly without the corrective buffer of close system oversight.

For Uzbekistan, where institutional autonomy is growing under recent policy reforms, the UK experience suggests a principle that is directly actionable: governance decentralization must be

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accompanied by a commensurate investment in leadership preparation. Autonomy without competency is not empowerment — it is risk transferred from the system to the individual school.

3.4 What Is Transferable: The Architecture of Governance Development

Taken together, the three models suggest a distinction that is crucial for policy adaptation: the difference between architecture and content. The architecture of effective school governance development — the structural features shared across Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom despite their different surface characteristics — consists of five components. The first is a clearly defined leadership role that is separated from pure administration and grounded in educational rather than bureaucratic function. The second is a managed career pathway into leadership, with differentiated preparation at each career stage. The third is a diagnostic instrument that makes management competency visible before and after development. The fourth is a continuous relationship between evaluation and professional development rather than periodic certification followed by no structured follow-through. The fifth is a deliberate distribution of leadership functions across the school's staff rather than their concentration in the director alone.

These architectural features do not depend on the trust culture of Finland, the centralized pipeline of Singapore, or the market accountability of England. They are context-independent structural choices that any system can make, adapting the content to local institutional realities. For Uzbekistan, the most immediately actionable implication follows from Leithwood et al.'s (2020) evidence: leadership preparation should not begin at appointment. The reserve candidate stage — the period before a teacher formally assumes a directorship — is the most productive investment point, because it allows competency to develop before the pressures of the role make sustained learning difficult.

IV. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis confirms that no single foreign governance model can or should be transplanted into the Uzbekistan context wholesale. The point of comparative study is not to identify a country to copy, but to identify which structural principles have proven durable across very different contexts, since those are the principles most likely to function in a new one. The Finnish, Singaporean, and British models are not competitors; they are complementary illustrations of the same underlying architecture operating under different cultural and political conditions.

The findings converge on a conclusion that is consistent with Fullan's (2010) argument that system change depends on developing professional capital collectively rather than reforming governance structures in isolation. School governance improvement, on the evidence examined here, is not primarily a regulatory problem — it is a professional development problem. Directors lead effectively when they have been prepared to lead effectively, when their competency is recognized and developed continuously rather than assumed at appointment, and when the system treats leadership as a career continuum rather than a threshold crossed once.

For teachers at specialized schools in Uzbekistan, these findings carry an implication that goes beyond national policy. The governance questions that matter most at school level are not about compliance with national frameworks but about the professional development culture of the school itself: how teachers are developed, how leadership is distributed, how decisions are informed by evidence. These are areas where international governance models offer genuine and transferable insight, independent of the political and economic contexts in which they originated. Specialized schools, with their greater institutional autonomy and expectation of pedagogical innovation, are in a particularly

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strong position to model this kind of governance — and in doing so to generate the local evidence base that national policy currently lacks.

V. CONCLUSION

Two directions for further research emerge from this analysis. The first is empirical: a survey study of how school directors in Uzbekistan currently understand and exercise governance functions would allow the transferability claims developed here to be tested against actual practice rather than policy aspiration. The second is developmental: the design and piloting of a leadership development continuum adapted to the Uzbekistan context, building on the architectural principles identified through the comparative analysis.

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