



Language and Education Issues in a Multilingual Environment in Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article discusses the issues of language and education, the historical roots of bilingualism in Uzbekistan, the growing need to acquire Western and Eastern languages in today's multilingual environment in the republic, continuous and field-specific foreign language teaching, the application and teaching of the Uzbek language, existing problems, and reflections on their elimination.

Key words: language and education, zullisonaynlik (bilingualism), multilingualism, foreign languages, Uzbek language, continuous education, preschool education, general education, professional education, higher education, field-specific language teaching.

Introduction

Today, languages have become an essential tool for all professionals in mutual information exchange, acquiring knowledge, and international socio-economic and cultural cooperation. This transforms preparing the young generation for multilingual communication into an imperative need. The ongoing educational reforms in the renewing Uzbekistan focus significantly on developing the bilingual (zullisonaynlik) capability inherent in our great ancestors, enabling youth to thoroughly learn international foreign languages in today's multilingual environment. Simultaneously, serious attention is paid to ensuring the full utilization of the Uzbek language as a language of interethnic communication within the republic.

The radical reforms implemented in the field of language education are based on the Resolution of the Government of Uzbekistan dated December 10, 2012, No. PP-1875 "Chet tillarini o'rganishni yanada takomillashtirish chora tadbirlari to'g'risida"; the Presidential Decree dated October 21, 2019, No. PF-5850 "O'zbek tilining davlat tili sifatidagi nufuzi va mavqeini tubdan oshirish chora-tadbirlari to'g'risida"; and the Presidential Decree dated October 20, 2020, No. PF-6084 "Mamlakatimizda o'zbek tilini yanada rivojlantirish va til siyosatini takomillashtirish chora-tadbirlari to'g'risida". These reforms are aimed at improving the country's language and education policy, preparing a young generation that has thoroughly mastered foreign languages, enabling them to communicate freely as competitive specialists within the global community in professional spheres, and further developing the Uzbek language.

In today's globalization process, the continuous expansion of socio-economic, cultural, and political ties among nations has immensely elevated the status of international languages, particularly English. In the global community,

this has reduced the scope of application for many languages and even led to a decline in the prestige of certain international languages. To date, the scope of usage of the languages of some ethnic groups is shrinking increasingly, and the number of languages turning into extinct languages is growing year by year. While this supports the aspiration of youth from various countries to find their place in the global community by learning foreign languages, specifically English, it simultaneously accentuates the urgency of taking measures to preserve the native language of every nation.

This article presents certain views and reflections on the implementation of language and education policy aimed at organizing continuous foreign language teaching and simultaneously developing the Uzbek language within the current multilingual environment of Uzbekistan, alongside the existing problems and issues regarding their elimination.

Main Part

Uzbekistan is a multinational republic inhabited by more than 130 nationalities. Turkic nationalities constitute the majority in the country, and Uzbek-Karakalpak, Uzbek-Kazakh, Uzbek-Tajik, Uzbek-Kyrgyz, Uzbek-Turkmen, Uzbek-Uyghur, Uzbek-Tatar, and Uzbek-Russian bilingualism are widespread. Bilingualism (*zullisonaynlik*) has existed in this region since ancient times; our great scholars such as Al-Farabi, Al-Khwarizmi, Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Az-Zamakhshari, and Mahmud al-Kashgari perfectly mastered Arabic and Persian. The great thinker Alisher Navoiy and other poets created literature not only in the Turkic language but also in Persian-Tajik. In the 10th century at the Mamun Academy in Khwarazm, and in the 15th century at the Ulugbek, Sherdor, and Tillakori madrasahs in Samarkand, education was conducted in Arabic and Persian.

The tradition of bilingualism, i.e., dual-language proficiency, continues in our region to this day. Currently, not only bilingualism between cognate languages (i.e., Uzbek and other Turkic languages) but also bilingualism between typologically different, non-cognate languages—including Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Russian—is widely observed in the republic. Since the majority of nationalities and ethnic groups living in our country speak Turkic languages and Russian, general secondary education in our republic is provided in 7 languages: Uzbek, Russian, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Turkmen, Tajik, and Kyrgyz. At the stage of specialized secondary and higher education, instruction is conducted in 2 languages: Uzbek and Russian; in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, education is established in Karakalpak, Uzbek, and Russian.

Most nationalities living in our republic speak Uzbek and Russian fluently. Among Turkic-speaking nationalities, Uzbek-Kazakh, Uzbek-Karakalpak, Uzbek-Kyrgyz, Uzbek-Turkmen, Uzbek-Uyghur, Uzbek-Tatar, and Uzbek-Azerbaijani bilingualism is prevalent, while Uzbek-Tajik bilingualism is widespread in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and several regions. In recent years, the desire to learn distant foreign languages, particularly English, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic, has intensified, leading to the spread of Uzbek-English, Uzbek-Chinese, Uzbek-Korean, and Uzbek-Arabic bilingualism among youth.

In this era of globalization, the fact that languages have become a vital tool for all professionals in mutual information exchange, acquiring knowledge, and international socio-economic and cultural cooperation turns preparing youth for multilingual communication into a contemporary requirement. More than 20 foreign languages are taught at the Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, and the Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages. Furthermore, the integration of foreign languages into specialized subjects is widely established in non-philological directions. It is well known that globalization is a comprehensive concept implying the socio-economic, political, and cultural rapprochement and unification of world countries; it signifies that events and phenomena transcend the boundaries of a single country and acquire a universal human scale.

It is widely recognized that global problems can only be resolved through mutual agreements between states and international cooperation. International agreements and mutual cooperation in various fields necessitate collaboration not only in practical spheres but also in science and education. Therefore, in recent years, alongside the term "globalization", terms such as "global education" and "internationalization" have come into wide use. Internationalization is characterized as a process of popularizing any phenomenon or event on an international scale. In particular, the internationalization of science, as an integral part of globalization, has become one of the important factors in solving global problems on a worldwide scale. According to some scholars, the process of globalization affects each country differently based on its history, culture, and traditions. Specialists also emphasize that globalization encompasses more economic issues, whereas internationalization manifests in aligning the educational system with international requirements and covers issues related to the language of instruction.

All of these factors turn the development of multilingualism alongside bilingualism, as well as the implementation of language teaching integrated with professional-academic disciplines, into one of the most pressing issues in education today. The language and education policy in Uzbekistan is directed toward these requirements. Today, continuous foreign language teaching is ensured across the stages of preschool education – primary education – general secondary education – vocational education – higher education. In the country's philological higher education

institutions, secondary and tertiary languages are also taught based on students' choices alongside the main foreign language. In today's multilingual environment, knowing not just one but several international languages has become a requirement of the times. Particularly in the context of Uzbekistan, those who know Russian constitute the majority among the middle-aged population, while those who know Western and Eastern languages constitute the majority among youth. In this regard, Western languages such as English, French, and German, and Eastern languages such as Chinese, Korean, and Arabic are gaining priority.

The "Concept for Developing the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030" puts forward the tasks of improving education quality, expanding international cooperation, attracting foreign educational and scientific technologies, and training competitive personnel. In this context, special attention is paid to teaching foreign languages integrated with professional-academic disciplines, particularly in non-philological directions, and organizing EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) groups where professional subjects are taught in English. In joint higher education institutions such as Singapore, INHA, etc., as well as private higher education institutions like AKFA, etc., education is conducted entirely in English.

At the same time, serious attention is paid to maintaining the prestige and status of the Uzbek language, which is the state language of the republic, developing its use as an official state language and a language of interethnic communication in Uzbekistan, and organizing its teaching as a second language to various nationalities living in our country, as well as a foreign language to foreigners and compatriots living in other countries. However, there are a number of specific problems to be resolved in each of these directions. The transition of the writing system three times during the last century (the transition to the old Latin script from 1929, to the Cyrillic script from 1940, and to the new Latin script from 1993), the entry of numerous loanwords and dialectal lexica into the Uzbek literary language as a result of globalization and urbanization processes, and the impact of these situations on the orthoepic and orthographic norms of the Uzbek literary language create a need to improve the teaching of the Uzbek language as a native language.

Simultaneously, there are several problems regarding teaching the Uzbek language as a second language to representatives of various nationalities living in the country and as a foreign language. A number of regulatory legal documents aimed at eliminating these problems and further improving the Uzbek language teaching system have been adopted. Specifically, the "Concept for Developing the Uzbek Language and Improving Language Policy in 2020–2030" highlights:

1. The learning of the Uzbek language by all nationalities and ethnic groups residing within the territory of our country;
2. Providing favorable conditions for teaching the Uzbek language to foreigners who wish to learn it and to our compatriots residing in foreign countries.

In this regard, the first direction envisages teaching the Uzbek language within the language environment, i.e., to all nationalities and ethnic groups residing within the territory of our country, while the second direction covers teaching the Uzbek language in a non-language environment, both of which require specific methodical approaches. The problems arising in these directions demonstrate the expedience of paying special attention to nationalization alongside the processes of globalization and internationalization in language and education issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, radical reforms are being implemented regarding language and education issues in the renewing Uzbekistan. In the country, serious attention is paid to raising competitive personnel who know several international languages to cooperate in the world market, and simultaneously to raising youth who know the language of their own country well and cherish it. The Uzbek language is one of the most ancient and richest languages. World-famous scholars, poets, and writers created numerous works in this language. The Uzbek language is also a means of instilling our national-spiritual values and rich spiritual and artistic heritage into youth, and preserving and delivering it to subsequent generations. The role and significance of the native language are incomparable precisely in protecting youth from the onslaught of "mass culture" from which the whole world suffers, and in instilling in them vital human qualities such as love for the Motherland, loyalty to their people, respect for parents, considering the family sacred, and honoring kinship ties. Therefore, developing the trend of nationalization alongside the trend of internationalization in language and education policy will undoubtedly serve to preserve national languages.

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