



## MULTILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN UZBEKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines issues in multilingual education in Uzbekistan. It analyzes the language acquisition method in multilingual society, the continuation of the tradition of Russian language education since the Soviet era and what problems are occurring about the new foreign language education policy introduced in 2012. In Uzbekistan's educational reforms in recent years the most emphasis is placed on foreign language education. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Presidential Decree was issued on "Measures to Improve Learning System for Foreign Languages", and it came to focus on learning foreign languages at each stage of education. In particular, English learning has been strengthened. Even at the compulsory education stage, English was taught from the secondary education stage, whereas after the presidential decree was issued, English education was introduced from the first grade of primary education. We analyzed the interview survey conducted to clarify the issues that arise at the time of implementation and execution of presidential decree PQ- 1875 at each educational institution.*

**Keywords:** *multilingualism, foreign language learning, presidential decree, language policy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is a multi-ethnic nation and multilingual society, and the status and functions of multiple languages are officially defined. Multilingual education is already being implemented in educational institutions. In fact, primary and secondary education in Uzbekistan is conducted in one of seven languages: Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Karakalpak. Uzbek, Russian, and foreign



languages are compulsory subjects in all schools in Uzbekistan. In the context of globalization, reform and expansion of foreign language education is recognized as an important social and educational challenge for many countries.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the current state of Uzbekistan's foreign language education policy, focusing on a presidential decree that has rarely been discussed in previous research. The adoption of Presidential Decree PQ-1875 brought about major changes in foreign language education. Based on the directive, foreign language education, which previously began in the fifth grade of secondary education, now begins in the first grade of primary education. This study analyzes the issues that have arisen surrounding the foreign language education policy that was introduced in light of these changes.

## **1. Overview of the Interview Survey**

In Uzbekistan, the Presidential Decree "On Measures to Improve the Foreign Language Learning System" was adopted on December 10, 2012, bringing about major changes in the education sector, particularly foreign language education policy. Various challenges likely emerged as educational institutions implemented the Presidential Decree. To clarify the challenges that arise during and after the implementation of the Presidential Decree at each educational institution, we conducted an interview survey. With the cooperation of local foreign language teachers (mostly English teachers) and foreign language education personnel working in the field of foreign language education at primary and secondary educational institutions and secondary vocational educational institutions in Uzbekistan.

Many of the participants were born in the 1980s. Some participants received their education during the Soviet era and have extensive experience in foreign language education. Below, the participants are referred to as A, B, C, D, E, and F, depending on their educational institution.

Table 1. Lists of the participants.



Survey	Gender	Age	Affiliation
A1	F	70	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 14
A2	F	32	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 14
A3	F	33	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 14
B1	M	36	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 54
B2	F	38	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 54
B3	F	30	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 54
C1	M	29	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 16
C2	M	29	English teacher, Primary/Secondary School No. 16
D1	F	35	English teacher, Bulungur Agricultural College
D2	M	32	English teacher, Bulungur Agricultural College
E1	F	34	English teacher, Academic Lyceum, Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages
F1	M	42	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Vice President
F2	M	35	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Associate Dean



F3	F	35	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Japanese Language Teacher
F4	F	38	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Japanese Language Teacher
F5	F	27	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Korean Language Teacher
F6	M	31	Samarkand State University of Foreign Languages, Korean Language Teacher

Below, we will present an analysis of the survey results by quoting the statements of the interviewees.

## 2. Survey Results and Analysis. Language Education Situation.

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, foreign language education in Uzbekistan entered a new era, with all educational settings, including primary and secondary schools, secondary vocational schools, and universities, ready to change their foreign language teaching practices. Nevertheless, there was uncertainty about how these changes would be implemented, what changes should be introduced, and who would initiate them, as well as people's reactions to these changes in the education sector. This was due to the fact that Uzbekistan had been under the Soviet Union for nearly a century and had not undergone consistent reforms in foreign language education.

During the Soviet era, foreign language education at higher education institutions included at least one foreign language in the university curriculum: English, French, German, or Spanish. Two hours of foreign language classes per week continued for four of the five years of study. The purpose was for students to read specialized books and articles related to their field and achieve results. Commonly studied languages were English and German. The curriculum for most university-level English teachers reflected the importance of grammar and phonetics.

Reforms in foreign language education in Uzbekistan primarily focused on teaching English at all levels and stages of education. The introduction of English



into the Uzbek education system began in 1932, as mentioned above, with secondary school students beginning in the fifth grade when they turned 12.

Foreign language education was introduced in primary schools in 2013, with English, German, and French often being taught as foreign languages.

Table 2: Weekly language lesson schedule for primary and secondary schools in the 2018-2019 year

Subjects Grade	Primary education				Secondary education				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Language and Literature	8	8	10	10	9	7	5	5	5
Uzbek/Russian		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Foreign Language	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
Number of Lessons per Week	22	24	26	26	30	32	34	35	37

(Source) Umimiy o'rta ta'lim maktablarining 1-11 sinflari uchun 2018-2019 o'quv yiliga mo'ljallangan tayanch o'quv rejasi. Created by the author based on the basic curriculum of the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan for the 2018-2019 academic year.

As shown in Table 3, foreign language education begins in the first grade of elementary school. From the second grade, students at schools where the language of instruction is Uzbek begin learning Russian, and students at schools where the language of instruction is Russian begin learning Uzbek.

To examine the current state of language education in primary and secondary education institutions, I conducted interviews at Primary and Secondary School No. 14 in the urban city of Samarkand and Primary and Secondary Schools No. 54 and No. 16 in the rural city of Burungur. The reason for this was to demonstrate regional differences.



I visited each school and was able to observe foreign language classrooms and lessons. The classrooms were equipped with modern equipment and facilities (e.g., laptops, projectors, DVD players). Depending on the school, English classrooms may be used exclusively for English classes, shared with other teachers, or used for other classes.

Below, I will quote from participants and explain the current state of language education.

Recently, my husband had an interview for a job at the customs office. He said that during the interview, he was asked about his Russian and English proficiency, and the extent to which he could understand and speak them. Foreign language skills are becoming increasingly necessary in an increasing number of fields. While the signs on the entrances of stores and coffee shops used to read "Ochiq, Yopiq" or "открыто, закрыто," they now read "Open, Close." (A2,F,32)

This comment points out that modern foreign language skills are required in a variety of fields, and that the use of English words is now widespread, replacing Russian. Foreign language skills are also becoming necessary in the workplace. Samarkand is a multilingual region of Uzbekistan, and in urban areas, people routinely use Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, and other languages. Some people have been accustomed to hearing three languages since they were young and are fluent in multiple languages. Recently, the number of people who can speak English has been increasing.

In Uzbekistan, primary and secondary education is conducted in one of seven languages, but those hoping to enter university receive instruction in either Uzbek or Russian. Even though the language of instruction at the university level is Uzbek, some students (mainly from urban areas) frequently use Russian during class.

I'm completely illiterate in Russian. I can understand a little when I hear it, but I can't speak it. I consider this a weakness of mine. I graduated from the English Department of the Pedagogical University in Jizzakh. After graduation, I returned to the countryside and am now working as an English teacher. If I had been fluent in



Russian and English, I would have liked to work in the city. I regret not studying hard enough in school. (C2,M,29)

From the above statements, it appears that this person regrets not studying languages hard enough in school, thinking that strong foreign language skills would help them find a good job in the city. After independence, urbanization began to progress in Uzbekistan, and many people now move from rural areas to study at universities in urban areas, find work in cities after graduation, and live there.

My Russian isn't very good, but I can understand it. I work at a rural school, so it's not a problem if I don't speak Russian at all. In cities, people of various ethnicities live together, so I think Russian is necessary for work. (B2,F,38)

The above is a comment from an English teacher at a rural school. Looking at language usage in Uzbekistan, there is a big difference between urban and rural areas. In cities, the multilingual situation is more pronounced. Most people can speak at least two or three languages. In rural areas, there are people who can speak Russian in the center, but the percentage of people who cannot speak Russian at all increases the further away from the center. In many areas, only the ethnic language of the student is used in daily life.

During the Soviet era, Russian was naturally the common language in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, not being able to speak Russian put one at a disadvantage in the workplace. While foreign languages such as English, German, French, and Spanish were taught, even if one mastered these languages, opportunities to use them were few. This was due to extremely limited international exchange and information sharing.

Language education, especially foreign language education, is highly valued today, but students planning to enter university study hard for entrance exams. Many college students are primarily job-seeking. The rate of students continuing on to higher education is low. Students hoping to continue on to higher education attend specialized language centers or cram schools and use private tutors to prepare for entrance exams. (D1,F,35)



Today, foreign language subjects are included in entrance exams for all departments in Uzbekistan. Foreign language knowledge is required of all students. It is considered extremely difficult to advance to higher education solely through attending classes at an educational institution. Students who choose to continue their education often consult with their parents and attend specialized cram schools or preparatory courses after school.

The difference between lyceums and colleges is that many lyceums have students who want to continue their education. Colleges are primarily attended as a continuation of compulsory education. There's a significant difference between lyceum and college teachers. The quality of lyceum teachers is also higher. Students must pass exams in their specialized subjects before being hired at a lyceum. Lyceum teachers (though not all) are able to offer private tutoring to some students after school, leading to higher incomes. At colleges, students typically either get a job or don't continue their studies, so no one wants private tutoring. (D1,F,35)

The above statement compares lyceum education with college education. Lyceums offer a better education, preparing students for higher education, while colleges provide education geared toward employment. There's also a difference between college and lyceum teachers, as the statement mentions that lyceum teachers can increase their income by offering private tutoring after school. Especially since the presidential decree, people's attitudes toward foreign language education have changed significantly, and many are now sending their children to English classes and private tutoring.

Next, I will share the opinions of a collaborator in higher education.

After independence, the Uzbekization policy became more important, and Russian, being the language of the ruling state, began to be seen as a language that should be eliminated. However, in my opinion, Russian is a necessary language in Uzbekistan. It is one of the world's languages. Russian is necessary for all researchers. Information is primarily in Russian. Russian has continued to be taught



since independence, but this was not something that could be immediately abolished. I think that over time, English will take over Russian's place. (F6, M, 31)

I think Russian is a very necessary language. It is necessary for my current job. If materials for a class are not in Uzbek, they must be translated from Russian. Anyone who wants to advance scientifically needs to know Russian as well as Uzbek. People who cannot speak Russian were not even hired. After independence, various campaigns were launched to elevate the status of the Uzbek language. Road names were even changed to Uzbek, and it was proposed that restaurants, cafes, and other establishments be named in Uzbek rather than using foreign words. During the Soviet era, all paperwork was done in Russian. I've heard that people who could not speak Russian sometimes borrowed the Russian skills of others to complete paperwork. (F5, F, 27)

These statements reveal the importance of the Russian language in society. During the Soviet era, office work was done in Russian, so people who could not speak Russian relied on others to complete paperwork. Their comments reveal the importance of Russian even in today's jobs.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges facing multilingual education in Uzbekistan. It examined the nature of language acquisition in a multilingual society, the continuation of the tradition of Russian language education since the Soviet era, and the issues arising from the new foreign language education policy introduced in 2012. Foreign language education has been a major focus of Uzbekistan's educational reforms in recent years.

During the Soviet era, Russian held an important position in Uzbekistan. Immediately after independence, the national language became more important, and Russian's status began to decline. However, in today's increasingly globalized world, multilingualism is essential, with the study of international languages such as English, Chinese, and Russian becoming increasingly popular. Foreign language proficiency (particularly English and Russian) is required in various fields, and



people are strongly aware that those with foreign language proficiency can access better jobs. This finding suggests that an increasing number of people want their children to learn foreign languages from an early age. Even 28 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian remains highly necessary in Uzbekistan.

Finally, I would like to mention some issues that need to be further pursued. While English education is gaining importance, the decline in the status of other foreign languages (particularly Western languages such as French and German, and Eastern languages such as Japanese and Korean) is becoming a problem. Furthermore, this policy is resulting in a decline in education in ethnic minority schools.

This study examined the issues and problems surrounding foreign language learning at various educational institutions in Uzbekistan, but was unable to fully consider the current state of foreign language education other than English or the nature of foreign language education in ethnic minority schools. Clarifying these issues is a future goal.

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