

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION REFORMS OF
UZBEKISTAN
-FOCUSING ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM AFTER
INDEPENDENCE-**

Urolboeva Dilshoda Gaybullayevna

Special researcher of

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

dilshoda_1983@yahoo.co.jp

Abstract: *This research analyzes foreign language education reforms in Uzbekistan after Independence. The Republic of Uzbekistan was one of the 15 countries that gained independence following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereinafter referred to as the USSR) in 1991. The new government at the time prioritized economic development and embarked on the construction of a new nation and transition to a market economy. Like other former Soviet republics, the collapse of the Soviet Union has brought about significant changes in Uzbekistan itself. Changes in the political and economic systems have significantly altered the social structure, leading to shifts in people's values and lifestyles. The new nation was forced to break away from the old system in all areas. Education, in particular, was a key issue leading to the construction of a new nation and economic development. The government's reforms focused primarily on the development and introduction of new educational guidelines and textbooks, and the revision of the Education Act.*

Keywords: *educational reforms, foreign language education reforms, presidential decree, language policy.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Uzbek government has begun to focus on foreign language education in an effort to further develop its economy. On December 10,

2012, Presidential Decree PQ-1875 entitled "Measures to Improve the Foreign Language Learning System," was issued, bringing about significant changes to the foreign language education system. Until 2013, foreign language education began in the fifth grade of primary and secondary education. Presidential Decree PQ-1875 expanded this to include first grade students in primary and secondary education starting with the new 2013 school year. Foreign language education also began to be offered in preschools nationwide.

In the context of globalization, reform and expansion of foreign language education is considered an important social and educational issue for many countries. Foreign language education is also a key issue in Uzbekistan. During the Soviet era, Russian was the most important "foreign language" in Uzbekistan, and even today, many people study Russian for economic reasons, such as migrant work in Russia and other Russian-speaking countries. Many parents also want their children to learn English before they start school, and the number of English language programs for children on television and radio has been increasing in recent years. Furthermore, a presidential decree was issued designating the period from 2017 to 2021 as the implementation period for the "Strategy for Action of Five Priorities for Development". This decree calls for creating the conditions necessary for reform, comprehensive development for the fundamental improvement of the state and society, and modernization in all sectors. Language education occupies a crucial position in this policy. The fourth item of the development strategy focuses on the development of social structures, the development of education and science, support for state youth policies, and the deepening of foreign language education.

2. Literature Review

There has been a wealth of research on the Central Asian region, particularly Uzbekistan, in fields such as history, economics, political science, sociology, and international relations, as well as some research on education. Most research on language policy focuses on the former Soviet Union or Central Asia as a whole.

Most of the research on language policy and language education to date has focused on the legal and social status of languages (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele,

2001) and bilingualism and multilingualism (Bakhry, 2008), and has discussed issues such as the transition from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet and orthographic reform (Asamura, 2009).

Fierman's (1991), "Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience," is a study of language reform in Uzbekistan. In it, Fierman focuses on the internationalization of writing, orthography, and vocabulary in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era, focusing on the relationship between language reform and political development processes.

Shiokawa (2004) attempts a comprehensive overview of ethnic, ethnic, and linguistic issues across the Soviet Union. From the perspective of ethnicity issues, he reinterprets the grand experiment in human history known as socialism, discusses the fate of the Russian Empire, which was built on a complex multi-ethnic and multi-lingual space, and considers why the Soviet Union collapsed and why socialism failed.

Asamura (2009) also details language policy in Uzbekistan, focusing particularly on writing system reform and writing systems, and the changes in writing system from the Soviet era to independence. Asamura points out that a series of Uzbek language policies reflect the Uzbek government's unique view of language, known as the "idea of independent nationhood (idea of national independence)" (milliy istiqlol g'oyasi). The "idea of independent nationhood" is essentially an ideology that is the central goal of the nation, linking the past with the future and helping to realize centuries-old goals.

Uyama (2005) states that it is an undeniable fact that Russian has raised the level of science, technology and knowledge in Central Asia, and that even today, when local languages have become more prominent, Russian still holds an important position as a common language between different ethnic groups and as an international language connecting Uzbekistan with other countries, and that it is impossible to understand Central Asia without Russian.

3. Education Policy Trends

Human resource development is one of the government's top priorities in

education policy, and the Uzbek government allocates 10% to 12% of GDP in the national budget to the education sector. National literacy rates and primary school enrollment rates are high, approaching 100%.

Current education policy is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1992), the Law on Education (1992), the revised Law on Education (1997), and the National Human Resources Development Program (1997). Article 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Article 4 of the Law on Education guarantee the right to education for all persons (including citizens of other countries and stateless persons). Educational reforms immediately after independence, as mentioned above, primarily focused on the development and introduction of new curricula and textbooks, the revision of teaching methods, and the introduction of a qualification and accreditation system for educational institutions.

The Education Law was enacted twice, first in 1992 and then revised in 1997. The 1997 revision introduced a 12-year compulsory education system and institutionalized a 9-year general education and a 3-year secondary vocational education (4-5-3) system to ensure a smooth transition from general education to vocational education. The law also changed the length of upper secondary education to three years and divided it into academic lyceums, which focus on general education, and vocational colleges, which emphasize vocational training. This system continued for 20 years, until Presidential Decree No. 5353 of January 25, 2018, reintroduced an 11-year 4-5-2 system of compulsory primary and secondary education.

4. Foreign Language Education Reform

4.1. Educational Language Policy

Until 1940, 22 languages were taught in Uzbekistan. By the 1950s, this number had decreased to seven. Currently, seven languages are still used as instructional languages in primary and secondary education institutions in Uzbekistan: Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen. Table 1 shows the number of primary and secondary schools by language of

instruction. The most numerous are Uzbek and Russian language schools, followed by Kazakh, Karakalpak, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen. In terms of learners, Uzbek has the most learners, followed by Russian, Karakalpak, Tajik, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen.

Table 1. Number of primary and secondary schools by language of instruction (number of students, percentage of students) for the 2017-2018 school year.

Language of Education	Number of Schools (Number of Learners, %)
Uzbek	9,018 schools (4,492,012 students, 85.6%)
Russian	903 schools (523,810 students, 10%)
Karakalpak	378 schools (100,000 students, 3,383 students, 2%)
Kazakh	365 schools (50,686 students, 1%)
Tajik	245 schools (61,082 students, 1.2%)
Kyrgyz	90 schools (7,430 students, 0.1%)
Turkmen	44 schools (9,617 students, 0.2%)

Since its independence, Uzbekistan has implemented policies that emphasize the promotion of the national language and the development of the Uzbek people. The primary goal was to elevate the status of Uzbek as the national language and to pass on to future generations the respect for the language and ethnicity that our ancestors have preserved to the present day.

After Uzbekistan gained independence from the former Soviet Union, a law was enacted entitled "On the Introduction of an Uzbek Writing System Based on the Latin Alphabet," and officially, Uzbek is written in the Latin alphabet. However, Cyrillic alphabet is still widely used in educational settings and on the streets. Translating the Cyrillic alphabet, which has been a part of daily life for many years,

solely using the Latin alphabet may be difficult, and there are also potential orthographic issues (such as how to pronounce certain characters that can be written in either the Cyrillic or the Latin alphabet but not the other).

4.2 Reforms in Foreign Language Education

Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but reestablishing national identity has been complex and challenging. This is particularly evident in the field of education, which had long relied on Soviet-era norms for the organization and traditions of teaching and learning. The state closed its doors to foreign countries, particularly Western Europe, exacerbating the situation by significantly reducing the number of Uzbek educators and experts traveling abroad. Language education at all levels has stagnated significantly, and even many university graduates are unable to speak or write foreign languages fluently. This stagnation has been passed down from generation to generation of Uzbek language teachers. All teachers were steeped in Soviet-era grammar-translation methods and relied on outdated textbooks (e.g., Arakin, 1961; Bonk, 1973), which for many years was the only language instruction method for university-level learners of English. In 1996, the Ministry of Higher Professional and Secondary Education, in collaboration with the British Council established in Uzbekistan, began offering professional development opportunities to university English teachers throughout Uzbekistan in what became known as the English Reform Project.

English language instruction in the Uzbek region began in 1932. It was incorporated into the curriculum of schools and other institutions through the Decree on the Need for the Provision of Foreign Languages in Secondary Education. At the time, foreign language instruction began in primary and secondary school from the fifth grade. The weekly number of hours of English instruction was four for grades five and six, and three for grades seven through ten. Teaching methods from the 1930s through the 1990s were largely teacher-centered, with classes primarily focused on grammar rules, analytical reading, and the practice and analysis of grammar exercises. The emphasis on grammar and translation was justified by

prevailing policies.

In Uzbekistan, Presidential Decree PQ-1875, "On Measures to Improve the Foreign Language Learning System," was issued on December 10, 2012, ushering in a new era in the field of foreign language education. First, let me discuss the reforms the national education system is undertaking to improve foreign language learning. Based on Presidential Decree PQ-1875, a measure was put into place to provide foreign language education to first-year students in primary and secondary education starting from the 2013-14 school year.

Starting with the 2013 school year, foreign language learning, primarily English, began in all regions in the first year of secondary education through game lessons and oral lessons, with alphabet, reading, and grammar learning gradually implemented from the second year onwards. The provision of teaching materials and methodologies to students and teachers at secondary and secondary vocational institutions, as well as republication within the specified deadlines, was provided free of charge using capital from the Publication Fund of the Treasury of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

By May 1, 2013, the Coordination Council approved new curricula and programs for primary and secondary educational institutions, secondary vocational educational institutions, and higher education institutions, based on the premise that foreign language education will be taught continuously from the first year of primary and secondary education and that foreign language education will continue at all levels of education.

Starting with the new school year of 2013, foreign languages were introduced in 9,692 schools across the republic. English was taught in 8,543 schools with 3.01 million students, German in 1,589 schools with 316,000 students, French in 1,076 schools with 216,000 students, and Spanish, Indian languages, Arabic, Chinese, and other languages taught to 6,300 students in 27 schools. As of the 2016 academic year, the number of foreign language learners in primary and secondary education reached 6.312 million in the first year, 5.835 million in the second year, and 5.393 million in the third year (an average of 94.2% learning English, 3.4%

learning German, and 2.4% learning French).

Here, I would like to touch upon the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Uzbekistan. To provide effective education, Uzbekistan has undergone significant reforms by adopting the CEFR and the National Qualification Framework. The CEFR standards are being implemented to provide effective learning in foreign language classes and strengthen the communication skills and international effectiveness of future Uzbek experts in all fields. Prior to the introduction of the CEFR: National Educational Standards for a Foreign Language Education System Based on Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, 2013), there was inconsistency and a lack of continuity in educational standards. There were no unified standards for the objectives and outcomes of teaching and learning English at all levels of education.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Uzbekistan's post-independence education reforms. Since its independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has pursued its own unique educational reforms. However, this was not a sudden policy shift; rather, it was a gradual reform that utilized the Soviet framework.

The current state of primary education in Uzbekistan's overall education system is quite favorable and promising. The content of primary education is richer than before. Textbooks used in classes have been revised to reflect current global trends, and care is taken to familiarize students with concepts such as globalization and internationalism from an early age. In addition, great attention is paid to students' emotional well-being, with child psychologists assigned to each school to monitor students' healthy personality development. The entrance examination concept was likely introduced to improve the overall quality of education, as a well-planned and implemented primary education system ultimately leads to improved educational standards at each stage and the development of each student's innate abilities.

In recent years, foreign language education has been the focus of

Uzbekistan's educational reform. On December 10, 2012, a presidential decree entitled "On Measures to Improve the Foreign Language Learning System" was issued, placing greater emphasis on the study of various foreign languages at every stage of education. English, in particular, has been emphasized. As mentioned above, an English textbook for first-year primary school students was published in April 2013, and a two-month trial was conducted at pilot schools selected from each region of Uzbekistan. Subsequently, starting in September of the same year, English classes were implemented nationwide, starting with first grade.

However, with this increased emphasis on English education, a decline in awareness of other foreign language education has become a concern.

In Uzbekistan, the number of language centers is increasing year by year, and the number of people learning foreign languages is on the rise. An increasing number of parents are encouraging their children to learn foreign languages, believing that strong foreign language skills will help them secure better jobs. Presidential Decree PQ18-75 has been well received by foreign language teachers and education officials, and educational institutions are actively implementing the directive. With government support, educational institutions are making efforts to provide high-quality instruction. Foreign language classrooms are being equipped with modern equipment and teaching materials, which is also one way to improve the quality of instruction.

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