

Language Policy In Uzbekistan: Attitude Towards State And Foreign Languages

Ibrakhimova Iroda Bobir qizi,

Uzbekistan State University of World Languages.

iroda0705@gmail.com



Abstract – Language policy is a critical aspect of any nation’s development, influencing education, culture, and social cohesion. Uzbekistan, a diverse Central Asian nation with a rich linguistic heritage, has undergone significant language policy reforms since gaining independence in 1991. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of language policy in Uzbekistan, examining its historical context, evolution, and implications for education, identity, and nation-building. It delves into the nation’s linguistic diversity and the role of language in shaping its cultural identity. The study employs a range of methods to comprehensively assess the multifaceted landscape of language policy in Uzbekistan. The results and discussions highlight the importance of maintaining a balance between the preservation of linguistic diversity and the promotion of common national identity, and present the results of the analysis of the current role, importance, and level of use of the Russian, Uzbek, and English languages in society. The problem of the script is studied in terms of historical development, its previous and present state; advantages and negative consequences of the proposed solutions are listed. While the increasing role of English as a global lingua franca in the educational system of Uzbekistan is positively assessed, the strengthening of the reputation of the state language is assessed as one of the important tasks.

Keywords – Language, Policy, Identity, Lingua Franca, Native Language, State Language, Cyrillic, Alphabet Based On Latin.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is not just a medium of communication but a potent tool that shapes cultural identity, social cohesion, and national development. In Uzbekistan, a country known for its linguistic diversity, language policy has played a pivotal role in nation-building and cultural preservation. The importance of coherently established language policy was understood even before gaining independence. Since October 21, 1989, Uzbek has been considered to be the official language of Uzbekistan. However, as stated in the law “On Official Language” itself “Giving to Uzbek the status of official language shall not infringe the constitutional rights of nations and ethnic groups reside in the territory the Republic of Uzbekistan to use their native languages” [1]. Since then the historical development of language policy in Uzbekistan has had several milestones.

Language policy has a role in shaping individual and collective identities too. As sociolinguists have emphasized, language is not merely a tool for communication but a powerful marker of one’s cultural background, heritage, and social identity. The relationship between language and identity is symbiotic, as language reflects one’s identity, and identity influences language choice and use. Therefore, studying language policy becomes crucial in understanding how specific linguistic choices and regulations impact the identities of individuals and communities. Language policies, as shown in numerous studies, significantly influence language choices and preferences among individuals, particularly in educational contexts. Investigating language policy in Uzbekistan would provide valuable insights into how these students negotiate their linguistic identities in a multilingual environment where the state actively promotes Uzbek as the primary language of instruction. Such research not only deepens our understanding of the intricate relationship between language and identity but also shows the real-world implications of language policies on the everyday lives of multilingual individuals, contributing to a nuanced comprehension of the complexities surrounding language identity formation.

A notable research gap in the field of language policy in Uzbekistan lies in the limited exploration of the practical implications and challenges of implementing the country's evolving language policies. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the historical context, legislative framework, and overarching goals of language policy in Uzbekistan, there is a need for more in-depth research that delves into the ground-level implementation, societal reactions, and the effectiveness of these policies. Additionally, with the increasing emphasis on English proficiency, there is an opportunity for research to explore the challenges and successes of integrating English language education into the national curriculum and its broader implications for internationalization and global competitiveness. Addressing these research gaps would contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of language policy in Uzbekistan and its implications for education, culture, and society.

II. METHODS

To conduct the research several linguistic methods were used. We did **Content Analysis** to examine learning laws and regulations related to language policy development; **Discourse analysis** was applied to scrutinize the language used in legislative texts and official documents; **Historical analysis** was used to compare language policies before and after Uzbekistan's independence. Historical documents, archives, and academic literature to trace the evolution of language policies over time were examined. **Statistical Analysis** was made to collect new statistics related to language usage, proficiency, and language education in order to provide empirical evidence supporting the research findings. **Comparative linguistic analysis** was employed to understand how language policies in Uzbekistan compare with those of other countries, especially those with similar linguistic diversity or sociopolitical contexts.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uzbekistan is a developing country. It is doing extensive work in many fields to become developed. The attention paid to the language policy is one of the measures towards this goal. On the one hand, it is necessary to raise the prestige of the state language, increase literacy in it, and preserve it as a national heritage. On the other hand, it is an important obligation to actively learn foreign languages, to promote communication in them, and to achieve effective results in order to enter the international arena and to be able to use the achievements of world science at a high level.

A professor of Indiana University Bloomington William Fierman has written several articles about language development in Uzbekistan. "Familiarity with the past of independent Uzbekistan is crucial in understanding current policies that are in play, because these policies are largely grounded in the colonial past of the state" – he stated in one of his articles written in a year independence gained [2]. The idea provided by the scientist is actual nowadays too.

Under imperial Russia, "In the mid-1930s, cultural and language policies stressed Russification. Along with the marginalization of traditional customs, Uzbek words of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic origin were replaced by Russian ones. Then, between 1938 and 1940, the Latin alphabet was abandoned in favor of the Cyrillic script throughout Central Asia, while the teaching of the Russian language was made compulsory in all non-Russian schools across the Soviet Union in 1938" [3]. As a result, during the Soviet era, Russian was the dominant language of administration and education, while Uzbek, the native language, faced marginalization.

However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 heralded a new era of language policy reform in Uzbekistan. Since independence, Uzbekistan has pursued a deliberate shift in language policy to promote Uzbek as the state language. Language policy in Uzbekistan has had significant implications for the education system. The transition from Russian to Uzbek as the primary language of instruction occurred gradually.

Analyzing the role of the Russian language during the early years of Uzbekistan Professor of Central Asian Studies at Stockholm University - Birgit Schlyter states: "Be it that Russian is no longer either a state language or even an official language in Uzbekistan, it is nevertheless a language that a great number of people are used to meeting in everyday life even comfortable within their own linguistic communication. Thus, Russian is still far from having lost its position as a lingua franca in this

country” [4]. The researcher gave the example of newspapers appearing in both an Uzbek and a Russian version, such as Xalq so’zi/Narodnoye slovo, and Tashkent oqshomi/Vechernyy Tashkent to show how Russian was actively been in use.

Language policy plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of national identity too. The promotion of Uzbek as the state language aims to strengthen the cultural roots of Uzbekistan’s diverse population. However, it is essential to strike a balance between preserving linguistic diversity and promoting a common national identity. “Even though the implementation of language reform has met with serious obstacles and been inhibited in many respects, Uzbek has maintained its position as a state-wide language throughout the post-Soviet independence period” [5].

Now Uzbekistan’s linguistic landscape is marked by the coexistence of various languages, primarily Uzbek, Russian, and Tajik. English is gaining popularity among the youth.

English, as a global lingua franca, plays a vital role in international communication, trade, and education. Many countries recognize the importance of promoting English language proficiency among their citizens. Uzbekistan is also shaping itself into a modern multilingual nation by promoting English learning.

The primary aims of encouraging English learning include improving employability, facilitating international communication, and fostering global competitiveness. Positive outcomes often include a more skilled workforce, enhanced access to global information, and improved international relations.

Similar aims are seen in the experiences of several countries adopting various approaches to encourage English learning so far. These systems include incorporating English into the national curriculum, providing language training, and offering scholarships for overseas English language education. For example, countries such as Singapore, Sweden, South Korea, Netherlands, and China pay attention to the English proficiency of their people aiming to improve international, economic competitiveness and communication. English is a compulsory subject in many schools around the world as a part of educational systems incorporating English-language instruction from a young age.

Uzbekistan is internationalizing its education too. Uzbekistan is also investing heavily in English education. It has incorporated English language instruction into the national curriculum, focusing on early exposure and immersion programs. According to the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to further improve foreign language learning system” PQ-1875, since the academic year 2013/2014, English has begun to be taught in all regions of the Republic from the 1st grade.

Collaboration with English-related organizations is seen as a help in developing effective English learning. “The work of the British Council in Uzbekistan began with the signing of a formal bilateral agreement with the Government of Uzbekistan in October 1996. Over the past quarter century, they have made significant progress in strengthening educational and cultural relations between Uzbekistan and the UK at the institutional level” [6]. British Council organizes different events, as well as IELTS tests for Uzbek people. In 2018 a new official IELTS test center started to organize IELTS exams in Uzbekistan too. The collaboration of IDP Australia and Edu-Action allowed more people in Uzbekistan to sit an international exam and get certified according to their language level [7].

At the seminar held in August 2023 on Attracting foreign citizens to teach foreign languages in Uzbekistan Ministry of Preschool and School Education announced that it would bring 500 native speakers this year, and another 1,500 specialists would be brought next year [8].

Several laws have been passed including language policies, educational guidelines, and standards for English language proficiency tests. On December 10, 2012, the 1st President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov signed a decree “On measures to further improve foreign language learning system” PQ-1875. It was the first step to motivate quality English teaching by allocating a 30% salary increase for foreign language teachers in rural areas and, a 15% increase for those in other areas. PQ-5117 of May 19, 2021 “On measures to bring the activities of popularization of learning foreign languages to a qualitatively new level” was signed by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It was one of the key milestones in the evaluation of language policy in

Uzbekistan. According to this decree, foreign language teachers with a C1 certificate have started to be paid an additional 50 percent monthly bonus over their base rate. Exam expenses were stated to be covered by the government and institutions.

When applying for undergraduate education, applicants with a B2 certificate in a foreign language are exempted from the foreign language exam and are given the maximum score for the foreign language tests. Additionally, with decree 5117, a requirement to have a language proficiency certificate of C1 for linguists, and B2 for other specialists was set for applying to postgraduate and doctoral education programs. However, three years later, the requirement changed slightly. The foreign language certificate for master's and doctoral studies in some areas (particularly culture, art, sports, education, health, production, engineering, agriculture, veterinary, architecture and construction, physics and natural sciences, and transport services) was lowered to the B1 level. In exact sciences, biology, mathematics, law, journalism, information and communication technologies, and economics, the B2 level was maintained. Furthermore, the certificate requirement was canceled for students who completed the educational program in a foreign language. Applicants pursuing a master's or doctoral degree in foreign languages must have a C1-level certificate to be accepted.

According to the report of the Ministry of Higher Education, since 2021, the requirement of a foreign language certificate for admission to the master's level of state higher education institutions has caused quotas to remain open. As a result, financially independent higher education institutions suffered losses. Due to this requirement, admission quotas in some specialties have remained open in recent years. Specifically, 20.7 percent of the quota remained open in 2021, 80.2 percent in 2022, and 62.6 percent in 2023 [9].

The establishment of "Foreign Languages" TV channel (2021) specializing in foreign languages is a sign of the expansion of the system of encouraging learning of foreign languages in Uzbekistan [10].

Efforts began to bear fruit. For the first time in Uzbekistan, IELTS band 9 has been registered this year, 2023. And this did not remain as a single case. Several IELTS candidates from Uzbekistan performed maximal level of English proficiency one after another which has given motivation to many to learn the language at a high level and increased the number of young people who want to learn a foreign language.

English proficiency indices, such as the EF English Proficiency Index and TOEFL or IELTS scores, provide valuable insights into a country's language learning progress. Many countries track these statistics to gauge their citizens' English proficiency levels. English Proficiency in Uzbekistan is marked as "very low" securing 93th place out of 113 countries [11]. The current state is not praiseworthy but much work is being done to improve the results. "The average result IELTS score of test takers in Uzbekistan is 5.7. For comparison, in Kazakhstan, this indicator is 6.1. As the exam expenses of young people with high results are paid by the state, young people are required to work for high results and to get more knowledge" [12].

Youth Affairs Agency of Uzbekistan is one of the most active organizations doing noticeable work to encourage language learning. According to the statistics given by Alisher Sa'dullayev, the director of Youth Affairs Agency, in April 2023, examination expenses of 13,084 young people who achieved high results in 18 types of international examination systems had been compensated so far. As A.Sa'dullayev stated, 23 billion soums was paid as compensation to 9,770 young people who took IELTS and secured 7+ [13].

All the work is being done to create opportunities for youth to learn languages and achieve success in different fields of life, to be competitive in the job market, and to take the level of development of Uzbekistan to the next level.

Another important part of the language policy is seen in the attitude towards state language. Article 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan states that "The state language of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall be Uzbek. The Republic of Uzbekistan shall ensure a respectful attitude toward the languages, customs, and traditions of all nationalities and ethnic groups living on its territory, and create the conditions necessary for their development." In this way, the Uzbek language has become a sacred symbol of the state protected by law, standing among the Flag, Emblem, and Anthem of this independent state.

However, the current use of the state language has become a great concern of modern Uzbek intelligentsia. They criticize use of dialects in formal settings, using Russian in state events, streets full of foreign words, and society's level of literacy.

"If Uzbek language is the state language, first of all, it is needed to "create" this language, "unitize" and introduce into scientific circulation. The actual absence of Uzbek language in science and art impedes its development as a national one" [14].

In order to find solutions to such issues, the Department of Spirituality and Development of the State Language was established under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The department performs a number of tasks, such as the development of the state language, monitoring of compliance with legislation on the state language, and the introduction of effective forms of public control in this field. The department's website <http://til.gov.uz> is a rich source of many materials, articles, and interviews on language policy, focusing not only on language but also on writing.

A word about the alphabet in use: Cyrillic alphabet was officially in use until 1993. On September 2, 1993, the law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the introduction of the Uzbek alphabet based on the Latin script" was announced. Two years later, on May 6, 1995, the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a law on making changes to the alphabet. Although the Uzbek alphabet based on the Latin script has already been legally adopted, the Cyrillic alphabet has also been actively used in different documents until recently.

In the article about consequences of the transformation between scripts A.Ikhamov analyzed the reasons why the Cyrillic alphabet has not yet completely fallen out of use and presented the statistics of how many books were published in the Cyrillic alphabet, which had been in use for more than 50 years (1940-1993). "It is known that already in 1950 in Uzbekistan it was published 908, and in 1970 – 2030 books and brochures. This is an average of 1000 new editions per year between these dates. If one extrapolates this growth trend to 1990, one will get roughly 80,000 books and brochures between 1950 and 1990" [15]. How can a script be forgotten when all the libraries are full of materials published in it and there is elder generation who grew learning to read in it?

Another matter to concern is some letters of the current alphabet. The need for changes for the forms of letters O', G', Ch, Sh is at the center of heated discussion today. They are not considered technically friendly because of having two symbols to describe one sound. Proponents of the idea believe that it is of vital importance to meet the needs of modern technologies, when the opponents keep counting economic cost of the change and the drawbacks seen in the literacy level of people.

Because of having noticeable matters, serious approaches to the issue of attention to the state language began. It is no exaggeration to say that efforts to improve language policy in Uzbekistan have reached the highest level in recent years. Several historic decisions related to the fate of the native language were made. In particular, "On measures to fundamentally increase the prestige and position of the Uzbek language as a state language" (PQ-5850, October 21, 2019); "On determining the regulation on the Department of State Language Development" (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers N984, December 12, 2019); "On measures to organize the activities of the Terminology Commission under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers N40, January 29, 2020), "On measures to further develop the Uzbek language in our country and improve the language policy" (PF-06084, October 20, 2020) and other normative legal documents can be cited as a basis.

Based on PF-6084, the concept of development of the Uzbek language and improvement of the language policy in 2020-2030 was developed. It is planned to achieve several results by 2030 in the development of the prestige and status of the Uzbek language as a state language by fulfilling the tasks defined within the framework of the concept: in all areas of the country's life, including public administration, modern and innovative technologies, industry, banking and financial system, jurisprudence, diplomacy, military work, medicine and other areas, full and correct use of the capabilities of the state language is achieved; the state language will gain prestige as the language of science in scientific research in all branches of science; the national terminological system by fields will be improved by developing the Uzbek language educational lexicography network, creating modern, new-generation educational dictionaries, and creating their electronic forms; the possibilities of using the Uzbek language in the field of science and technology will expand; ample opportunities will be created for preserving the ethno-cultural

and linguistic identity of compatriots living abroad, for the formation of respect for Uzbek cultural traditions and values; regular contact is established with scientists and researchers conducting scientific research on the Uzbek language and literature abroad, and scientific cooperation is established; the state language will literally be transformed into a national value that unites the citizens of our country, regardless of their nationality, and its place and influence at the international level will increase [16].

As for the numbers about the Uzbek language, according to the article provided by kun.uz about an educational event held in Mekka, the number of speakers of the Uzbek language in the world exceeded 60 million, and the Uzbek language is taught in more than 50 higher educational institutions of foreign countries [17]. Another article says that The Uzbek language ranked first in Central Asia and 45th in the world by the number of articles on Wikipedia [18].

IV.CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan's language policy reflects its dynamic path toward nation-building and cultural preservation. The intentional promotion of Uzbek as the state language signifies the nation's dedication to safeguarding its cultural heritage. However, the quest for equilibrium between preserving diverse languages and nurturing a unified national identity remains an ongoing challenge that necessitates careful planning and execution. As Uzbekistan continues to evolve and assert its presence on the global stage, language policy will unquestionably play a pivotal role in shaping its future. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on English language proficiency signifies the country's aspirations for international engagement and competitiveness. The numerous legislative steps and initiatives taken to enhance language education and proficiency demonstrate Uzbekistan's commitment to language as a tool for progress, diplomacy, and cultural preservation. In this ever-evolving landscape, Uzbekistan is poised to chart a path forward where linguistic diversity and a common national identity can coexist harmoniously.

REFERENCES

- [1] Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan On introducing amendments and additions to the law "On the state language of the Republic of Uzbekistan". December 21, 1995, No. 167-I. 2nd article.
- [2] Fierman, W. (1991). Language planning and national development: The Uzbek experience. Berlin, Germany/New York: Mouton De Gruyter, available at <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110853384.fm>
- [3] Djurayeva, M. (2015) Language in Education Policy in Uzbekistan: Formation of Uzbek National Identity. In book: Language Education Policy Unlimited: Global Perspectives And Local Practices (pp 123-143), available at https://www.academia.edu/44100112/Language_in_Education_Policy_in_Uzbekistan_Formation_of_Uzbek_National_Identity
- [4] Schlyter, B.N. (2012) Language policy and language development in multilingual Uzbekistan. Brill (pp-176–207), available at https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004217652_007
- [5] Schlyter, B.N. (2014) The Status of Uzbek as "National Language". Historiography and Nation-Building among Turkic Populations, Stockholm/Istanbul 2014 (pp.129-144), available at https://www.academia.edu/24001311/The_status_of_Uzbek_as_national_language
- [6] 25 Years of the British Council in Uzbekistan. <https://www.britishcouncil.uz/en/programmes/25-years>
- [7] O'zbekistonda rasmiy IDP IELTS test markazi ochildi! (29.12.2017). <https://kun.uz/14902950?q=%2Fuz%2F14902950&ysclid=lmohcei0d1421794832>
- [8] Maktablarda dars berish uchun xorijdan 500 nafar "til egalari" olib kelinadi. (30.08.2023). <https://kun.uz/uz/news/2023/08/30/maktablarda-dars-berish-uchun-xorijdan-500-nafar-til-egalari-olib-kelinadi>
- [9] Magistratura bosqichiga chet tili sertifikati talabi qo'yilgani sabab otmlar moliyaviy zarar ko'rgan – hisobot. (25.03.2024). <https://abt.uz/blog/magistratura-bosqichiga-chet-tili-sertifikati-talabi-qoyilgani-sabab-otmlar-moliyaviy-zarar-korgan-hisobot>
- [10] "Foreign Languages" xorijiy tillar teleradiokanalini tashkil etish chora-tadbirlari to'g'risida"gi O'zbekiston Respublikasi Vazirlar Mahkamasining 27.08.2021 yildagi 546-son qarori. <https://lex.uz/docs/5607094>

- [11] English Proficiency Index: Uzbekistan <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/regions/asia/uzbekistan/>
- [12] Hukumatning tegishli qaroriga muvofiq 1-maydan boshlab Xalqaro imtihon tizimlarida yuqori ball to'plagan yoshlarga xarajatlari to'liq davlat tomonidan qoplab beriladigan bo'ldi...(15.04.2021). https://t.me/alisher_sadullaev/1557
- [13] Prezidentimizning qarori bilan yoshlarning chet tillarini o'rganishiga alohida e'tibor qaratayotganimizdan xabaringiz bor... (25.03.2023). https://t.me/alisher_sadullaev/3685
- [14] Alimdjanov, B. (2019) Uzbekistan: Why Uzbek Language Has Not Become a Language of Politics and Science? The analytical platform CABAR.asia, available at https://www.academia.edu/38395724/Uzbekistan_Why_Uzbek_Language_Has_Not_Become_a_Language_of_Politics_and_Science_pdf
- [15] Ilkhamov, A. (2021) Boosted Transition of Uzbek Language to Latin alphabet: Consequences for the Population. Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, available at [Boosted Transition of Uzbek Language to Latin alphabet: Consequences for the Population | Alisher Ilkhamov - Academia.edu](#)
- [16] "Mamlakatimizda o'zbek tilini yanada rivojlantirish va til siyosatini takomillashtirish chora-tadbirlari to'g'risida"gi O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining 20.10.2020 yildagi PF-6084-son farmoni. <https://lex.uz/docs/-5058351>
- [17] Number of Uzbek language speakers exceeds 60 million people worldwide. (18.10.2022). <https://kun.uz/en/news/2022/10/18/number-speakers-in-uzbek-language-exceeds-60-million-people-worldwide>
- [18] Uzbek language ranked 1st in Central Asia by the number of articles on Wikipedia. (17.04.2023). <https://kun.uz/en/news/2023/04/17/uzbek-language-ranked-1st-in-central-asia-by-the-number-of-articles-on-wikipedia#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20before%20the%20start,the%201st%20in%20Central%20Asia.>