

NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE PROBLEMS OF MOTHER-TONGUE
EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENT UZBEKISTAN

Tursunov Mirzokhid Ikromjon ogli

Research Fellow, Uzbek Language, Literature and Folklore Institute,
Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

tursunov.mirzohid1995@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0004-3867-7591

Abstract: This article analyzes the main directions of the national language policy implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan during the years of independence, the reforms aimed at strengthening the status of the state language in social life, and the current challenges of mother-tongue education. In particular, it highlights issues related to enhancing the prestige of the Uzbek language as the state language and improving the quality and effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction within the education system. The article also puts forward recommendations and proposals for further improving national language policy and increasing the effectiveness of mother-tongue education.

Keywords: language policy, national language policy, state language, Uzbek language education, mother-tongue education, language and society, educational reforms, development of the state language.

Following the attainment of independence, the issues of strengthening national identity, as well as preserving, restoring, and developing the rich cultural and spiritual heritage, became one of the priority directions of state policy in the Republic of Uzbekistan. In this complex process, consolidating the status of the state language both legally and practically, enhancing its role and prestige in social life, and fundamentally improving mother-tongue education were identified as key strategic objectives. Through the implementation of a national language policy, the aim was not only to preserve and enrich the language itself, but also to educate the younger generation in the spirit of national values and patriotism, while fostering their ability to express their thoughts freely, accurately, and effectively in their native language.

As correctly stated by Professor N. Mahmudov, “by today, it has become evident that a considerable number of problems have accumulated in the important field of teaching the mother tongue, and that shortcomings are numerous. Improving the organization of mother-tongue instruction has become a vital necessity. Love for language, a deep knowledge of its laws, and respect for it are the main indicators of adherence to moral and spiritual “hygiene”. In its true sense, both national identity and internationalism, as well as the feeling of patriotism, fundamentally begin from this very point”[1].

An examination of the historical foundations of Uzbek language education within the school system and its condition during the Soviet period reveals significant imbalances. Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, exceptional emphasis was placed on the study of the Russian language, resulting in insufficient recognition of the role and importance of the mother tongue in society. Although Uzbek was granted the status of the state language in 1989, in practice the Russian language continued to maintain a dominant position. This situation was clearly reflected in the allocation of instructional hours within school curricula of that period. For example, in Russian-medium schools, Uzbek language instruction began only in the third grade, with a total of 540 hours allocated throughout the entire period of schooling. In contrast, Russian was taught as a compulsory subject from the first grade in Uzbek-medium schools, with a total of 1,560 instructional hours allocated. This figure was nearly three times higher than that devoted to



the national language, indicating that the status of the Uzbek language was artificially constrained within society. Furthermore, inadequate mastery of the principles and norms of the native language created additional obstacles for students in successfully acquiring other foreign languages later in their educational development.

During the early years of independence, Uzbek language education in Uzbekistan's schools underwent a complex transition from the models inherited from the Soviet educational system to a new national framework. Following the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1992, the number of instructional hours allocated to the state language was significantly increased, and compulsory Uzbek language instruction was introduced in educational institutions where teaching was conducted in Russian and other languages. In order to eliminate ideological influences from the educational content, texts glorifying the communist regime were removed from existing textbooks and replaced with materials reflecting national values, folklore, and the works of Jadid intellectuals such as Cho'lpon, Fitrat, and Abdulla Qodiriy, whose literary heritage had been suppressed for many years. However, the "Mother Tongue" and "Uzbek Language" textbooks and curricula developed during this initial period were still largely based on the methodological approaches used in Russian-language textbooks. Although this approach played a certain role in providing learners with a foundation in grammar, orthographic norms, and stylistics, it relied heavily on theoretical instruction and therefore paid insufficient attention to the development of practical communicative skills. One of the most significant strategic steps of this period was the adoption of the Law "On the Introduction of the Uzbek Alphabet Based on the Latin Script" in 1993. This reform began within the school system, leading to the publication of the first primers and textbooks for primary school students in the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, particularly during the period from 2016 to 2026, the process of redistributing instructional hours and modernizing school textbooks continued systematically. During this period, the scope of Uzbek language instruction in Russian-medium schools was expanded, and the subject began to be taught from the second grade. Likewise, in Uzbek-medium schools, Russian language instruction was introduced from the second grade. At the same time, a new generation of textbooks was developed in order to update educational content in accordance with contemporary requirements and pedagogical standards.

However, the reforms aimed at improving textbooks also revealed a number of challenges. In particular, the language, exercises, and texts contained in current mother-tongue textbooks are often so complex that they are difficult for students to comprehend and master independently. As a result, many teachers are required to provide additional explanations and simplify the content during classroom instruction. Furthermore, the lack of a consistent and systematic presentation of grammatical rules and linguistic phenomena in these textbooks limits students' ability to acquire theoretical knowledge independently and places a greater instructional burden on teachers. This situation highlights the need to further improve the quality of mother-tongue education and to reconsider the content and methodological foundations of existing textbooks.

Furthermore, while English, Russian, and other foreign languages are taught effectively in schools through the division of classes into smaller groups, this practice has not yet been implemented for state language instruction. Under conditions where a single class consists of 25–30 students, the effectiveness of practical language teaching is significantly reduced. Therefore, revising this policy and introducing smaller instructional groups for state language classes has become an urgent necessity. Notably, this issue was also highlighted by N. Mahmudov as early as 37 years ago, indicating that it remains an unresolved challenge in the field of language education.



Another serious problem in the school education system is related to the negative or indifferent attitude toward the state language in Russian-medium schools located in major urban centers. In many cases, the Uzbek language is perceived as a secondary or even unnecessary subject, which significantly diminishes the interest of both students and parents in studying it. Practical experience demonstrates that meaningful progress cannot be achieved unless the indifferent attitude of school administrations and educational authorities toward this subject is fundamentally changed. A notable example is Secondary School №110, located in the Mirabad district of Tashkent. Although the school is officially classified as an Uzbek-medium educational institution, Russian-medium classes occupy a substantial place in its actual educational structure. According to the testimony of a teacher who worked at the school, each grade level from the first through the eleventh grade contained more than ten Russian-medium classes, whereas the number of Uzbek-medium classes was limited to only two or three. This situation is largely attributed to the considerable proportion of Russian-speaking residents in the area and the prevailing tendency among parents to enroll their children in Russian-medium classes. Such circumstances indicate that the implementation of national language policy at the local level requires more effective monitoring and consistent oversight.

The teaching of the mother tongue and the training of qualified personnel within the higher education system have historically and contemporarily been characterized by a number of problematic issues. On the eve of independence, 550 instructional hours were allocated to the theoretical course “Modern Uzbek Literary Language” at the Faculties of Uzbek Language and Literature in the country’s pedagogical institutes. In contrast, 500 hours were allocated to the Russian language, with an additional 400 hours devoted to related language courses, resulting in a total of 900 instructional hours. This historical imbalance in higher education laid the foundation for the relatively low level of language proficiency and literacy observed among many members of the intellectual community today. At the same time, the number of hours allocated to Uzbek language instruction in Russian-medium groups at higher educational institutions has been gradually reduced over the years. For example, at the Nizami Tashkent State Pedagogical University, 240 instructional hours were previously allocated to this subject, but this figure was later reduced to 180 hours. Such a number of instructional hours is clearly insufficient for ensuring students’ comprehensive mastery of the language [1].

Following the attainment of independence, Uzbek language instruction at universities began to be organized in two main directions. The first was an advanced academic track offered within philological faculties through such disciplines as linguistics, literary studies, stylistics, and speech culture. The second involved the teaching of Uzbek as a general education subject under the titles “State Language” or “Uzbek Language and Speech Culture” in non-philological specialties. The primary objective of this approach was to equip students with proficiency in the language of official communication, academic writing, and formal written literacy. At present, it is necessary to make Uzbek language instruction compulsory in all public and private higher education institutions across the country and to discontinue the practice of limiting it to only one or two semesters. Uzbek language courses should be taught systematically for at least two academic years, followed by a specialized course entitled “Official Documentation in the State Language” during the third year of study. Such measures are particularly important because even professional linguists and specialists in various fields frequently encounter serious difficulties when working with official documents and preparing them in accordance with established orthographic and stylistic standards.

At the state level, the infrastructure for teaching the Uzbek language to representatives of other nationalities and to foreign learners is also characterized by a number of significant shortcomings. During the first two to two and a half decades of independence, digital platforms



and electronic resources capable of providing comprehensive Uzbek language instruction for foreigners were virtually nonexistent. Even today, although free courses on the fundamentals of official communication in the state language are offered through a center affiliated with Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, a well-developed system of digital platforms that teaches Uzbek through modern methodologies, interactive tools, and game-based learning approaches has yet to be fully established. Admittedly, Uzbek language learning is currently available through platforms such as UzbekOnline.ru, Tutor.uz and [Ibrat Farzandlari](http://IbratFarzandlari). However, both the number and the quality of such educational resources need to be significantly expanded in order to meet the growing demand for Uzbek language learning among domestic and international audiences.

There is also a noticeable shortage of visual learning materials, illustrated dictionaries, and reference guides that could facilitate the learning of the Uzbek language by representatives of other nationalities. In contrast, many of the world's major languages possess a wide range of methodological resources designed to teach languages through colorful illustrations, interactive activities, and educational games. Therefore, as N. Mahmudov has emphasized, it is essential to prevent the Uzbek language from being reduced merely to a language of everyday household communication and to take practical measures aimed at strengthening its academic standing and international prestige.

Uzbekistan possesses a rich historical and legal experience in regulating language policy and promoting the compulsory acquisition of the state language. Examining this experience from a chronological perspective is of considerable importance for scholarly research. During the period of the Russian Empire, specifically in a letter issued by the Governor-General of Turkestan in December 1905, all administrative officials, including district (uyezd) administrators, were instructed to learn the local languages. As an incentive measure, additional salary supplements were granted to those officials who successfully acquired proficiency in the local languages [1]. Subsequently, during the early years of Soviet rule, a special resolution entitled "On the Compulsory Learning of the Uzbek Language by Workers and Employees of Institutions, Enterprises, and Organizations of the Uzbek SSR" was adopted on 18 October 1928. According to this resolution, beginning on 1 October 1929, individuals who did not possess knowledge of the Uzbek language were not to be recruited for employment. Furthermore, authorities were granted the right to replace employees who disregarded or failed to acquire proficiency in the local language with personnel who were competent in Uzbek [2]. During the years of independence, this legal framework acquired a fundamentally new significance. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan №. 167-I, adopted on 21 December 1995, "On Amendments and Additions to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On the State Language,'" as well as Presidential Decrees №. PF-5850 of 21 October 2019 and No. PF-6084 of 20 October 2020, established the legal foundations for the comprehensive implementation of the state language throughout the public sphere. These normative acts defined the strategic objectives of enhancing the status, prestige, and development of the Uzbek language and ensuring its effective functioning as the state language.

As a logical continuation of these legal reforms, in accordance with a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, starting from 2021, all managerial personnel and individuals appointed to responsible positions have been subjected to mandatory testing of their proficiency in the state language, and relevant proficiency certificates have been introduced. One of the most recent and fundamentally transformative reforms in language policy is related to the academic sphere. Until recently, applicants seeking admission to master's and doctoral programs were required only to submit a foreign language proficiency certificate; however, from May 2026, this requirement was officially abolished. Under the new procedure, applicants are now required, instead of a



foreign language certificate, to pass a test assessing their proficiency in the state language and obtain the corresponding certification.

The introduction of this measure was highly necessary, as many young researchers today make serious grammatical and stylistic errors even in their academic works written in Uzbek. Making the state language certification mandatory compels applicants to develop a thorough understanding of Uzbek orthographic norms and to study the national stylistic system in depth, which in turn serves as an important factor in ensuring the purity and prestige of the Uzbek academic language in the future.

References:

1. Маҳмудов Н. Тил мавқеи – эл мавқеи / Ёшлик. – Тошкент, 1989. №6. – Б. 15 – 17.
2. Тоғ‘аев Т. Sho‘rolar hokimiyatining dastlabki davrlarida O‘zbekistonda til siyosati / “O‘zbek tili taraqqiyoti va xalqaro hamkorlik masalalari” mavzusidagi xalqaro ilmiy-amaliy konferensiya materiallari. – Toshkent, 2022.
3. Tursunov M. XX asr birinchi yarmida O‘zbekistonda o‘zbek tili ta’limi manzarasi / Yosh olimlar ilmiy-amaliy konferensiyasi. – Toshkent, 2025. – B. 57 – 62.

