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## THE ROLES OF ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES IN UZBEKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the importance of English, Russian and local languages in Uzbekistan based on the relevant literature. People's attitudes towards English as a global language and foreign language policy as well as the role of British and American agencies in enhancing teaching and learning English will be discussed. Furthermore, the use of English outside of educational settings will be focused on.

### KEYWORDS

Multilingualism, language policy, education, language attitudes, international relations, linguistic landscape.

### INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is a multinational country with more than 130 nationalities and most of the population are bilingual. Uzbek is the first and state language in the country, together with Karakalpak being an official language in autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. Russian is not formally declared as official language, but it is widely used in all branches of society although it lost its glory as a dominant language because of the

demise of the USSR (Liddicoat, 2019). Among other foreign languages taught in the country, English is the most prestigious one opening doors to the world community (Hasanova, 2007a). In this essay I focus on the status of English, Russian and some local languages in Uzbekistan.

### People's attitude towards English

The last two decades have seen a growing trend towards learning English as the most preferred foreign language in Uzbekistan and many people tend to associate their future with this language. English is used extensively in education, trade, and business, as a result of the growth in international relations (Hasanova, 2007a). The research done by Hasanova (2007b) shows that more than half of the Uzbek students in the project regard English as a key opportunity to better careers. As an observer she mentioned that students were highly motivated and eager to learn English both in the classroom and outside. According to the study carried out by Djuraeva (2021), English is seen to play a more important role in Uzbek students' future than their local languages. Taken together, these results support the idea that Uzbek youth are very positive about English and its role in their life.

### **Foreign language policy**

The government also pays a special attention to teaching English in all levels of education system, from pre-school to tertiary institutions. The language policy, highly supported with presidential decrees, is aimed at creating better opportunities and taking language teaching to a quality level. According to the decree of the president (PQ-5117, 2021), foreign language teachers who have obtained C1 level certificate on national or international tests qualify for 50% monthly bonus on their salaries. Moreover, the Presidential

Award is established and given to the schools which have the best results in teaching English. Moreover, from 2022 the ability to speak a foreign language will be one of the compulsory requirements in applying for a job or a higher position in government agencies.

### **The role of British and American Agencies**

It should be noted that, British Council and the US Embassy in Tashkent have provided great opportunities to enhance teaching and learning English through several training courses and projects. For instance, British Council launched Higher Education for Employability programme, English as a medium of instruction being an essential part, in order to implement best practices of the UK educational system in the universities of Uzbekistan. This program works jointly with Norwich Institute for Language Education and representatives from local 16 HEIs (British Council, 2021).

The US Embassy has started English Speaking Nation: Secondary Teacher Training program which aims at improving English teachers' language and teaching skills through trainings in cascade form. More than 15000 secondary school teachers and 1000 trainers are involved in this three-year program (American Councils for International Education, 2021).

Moreover, several branches of foreign universities were opened, in most of which English is a medium of instruction. According to Bezborodova (2021), some

local universities are also starting to provide instructions in English. Linn (2021) holds the view that the increase in the number of tertiary level institutions with EMI and attention to teacher training brought in important shifts to foreign language teaching and learning in the area.

### **Immersion in English**

In my opinion, the use of English outside schools is improving gradually. The internet, television, movies, music, journals, magazines and clubs in English enable people to learn the language in a naturalistic way. Not only students and educators are speaking English but also people who work in other fields are widely communicating in this global language. As Hasanova (2007a) points out, this is the result of further developments in IT, tourism industry, international business and relations, research and science. It has become common to see English words in the streets of cities and towns. People tend to regard this as a sign of modernity and superiority. According to the findings of the study carried out by Hasanova (2010), the majority language for store and service names in Uzbekistan is English, despite government initiatives to encourage the use of Uzbek on public signs.

### **The importance of local languages**

The linguistic landscape in Uzbekistan, in the light of independence, has been continuously changing. The importance of Uzbek language is highlighted and

several government reforms can prove this. However, it does not mean that other local languages are underestimated, on the contrary, a number of projects are being carried out to preserve those languages. There are Tajik, Tatar, Kazakh, Turkmen, Karakalpak and Persian cultural centres whose primary functions include language maintenance. Although Uzbek is the most common language of education, there are many Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, and Turkmen schools throughout the country.

### **The role of Russian**

As mentioned above, Russian is not dominant language anymore in the country, however, it is used in official documents, in the media and serves as an interethnic language among different nationalities. Russian also serves as a medium of instruction in many schools and universities. Liddicoat (2019) states the idea that there is more preference to Russian medium schools in the country and links this with employment opportunities abroad where the Russian Federation is a major power. In Bezborodova's opinion (2021), in addition to labour migration, the continuous interest in learning Russian can be viewed from other perspectives including large numbers of literature in Russian, television and radio programmes, strategic location and international political relations. To my mind, interest in Russian is generally seen as a factor related to career promotion inside the republic, working and studying in Russia.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the popularity of English is increasing in Uzbekistan due to its key importance in quality education and better employment opportunities to a greater extent. Although Russian lost the prestige it had in the past, it has deep roots in the life of Uzbek people. And there is a competition going on between English and Russian, in which the former seems to be overtaking the latter in most cases due to its global importance. However, it is impossible to predict the final stage and as Liddicoat claims (2019), it largely depends on the subsequent linguistic policy in this area.

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