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FROM THE HISTORY OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN UZBEKISTAN AFTER INDEPENDENCE: NORMATIVE-LEGAL BASIS, INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS AND METHODOLOGICAL UPDATES (1991–2024)

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Abstract

This article examines the history of foreign language teaching in Uzbekistan after independence (1991–2024) through a historical-pedagogical lens. It discusses the normative and legal framework, the evolution of curricula and standards, teacher training mechanisms, updates in textbooks and methodological support, and the impact of international cooperation on classroom practice. The paper traces the gradual expansion of foreign language instruction (primarily English) across general secondary, secondary specialized, and higher education, highlighting the introduction of competence-based approaches, improvements in assessment, and institutional models of in-service teacher development.

Key words

post-independence period, foreign language education, educational reforms, state educational standards, competency-based approach, textbooks, teacher qualifications, international cooperation, CEFR, historical-pedagogical analysis.

INTRODUCTION

After independence, the modernization of the education system in Uzbekistan has become an important component of socio-economic development strategies. Foreign language teaching has become one of the practical “bridge” directions of this process, inextricably linked to factors such as international dialogue, scientific information exchange, competitiveness in the labor market, and education export. Therefore, the history of foreign language teaching in the post-1991 period is seen not only in the framework of the development of methodology, but also through the expansion of the regulatory and legal framework, inter-institutional relations, the renewal of educational and methodological complexes, and the formation of assessment and certification systems. The relevance of this topic is that decisions on foreign language teaching, state educational standards and programs arose in response to social needs in due time, and were later brought into balance with the internal needs of education (teacher resources, quality of textbooks, class loads, assessment criteria). Historical-pedagogical analysis allows us to determine to what extent this balance was ensured, at which stages the system relied more on institutional changes, and at which stages on methodological renewal. The purpose of the study is to divide the history of foreign language teaching in Uzbekistan after independence into stages, to show the main features and driving factors of each stage based on sources. Tasks: to analyze the impact of regulatory legal acts and program decisions on educational practice; to describe changes in the content and methodology of foreign language teaching in general secondary, secondary specialized and higher education; to highlight the evolution of the infrastructure for teacher training and advanced training; to show updates in textbooks and educational and methodological support in historical dynamics; to discuss the role and limitations of international cooperation and standardization (including CEFR).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The source base of the study consisted of regulatory legal acts, state educational standards and conceptual documents, as well as a set of pedagogical literature and methodological manuals. The main sources were the Laws on Education, the National Program for Personnel Training, resolutions and decrees on foreign languages, as well as methodological publications on the CEFR. Regulatory documents were systematically analyzed and their impact on practice was compared across periods. Methodologically, a historical-chronological approach (step-by-step review of 1991–2024), historical-typological analysis (identification of common features within stages), and content analysis (the main categories found in documents and methodological texts: “competence”, “standard”, “assessment”, “qualification”, “textbook”) were used. Also, in the study of the history of education, “institutional changes” (organizational structures, stages of education) and “didactic changes” (teaching content, methods, assessment) were paralleled. The number of references and citations was limited (based on the principle of not exceeding 10): citations were given where it was necessary to clearly indicate the requirements strictly formulated in regulatory documents. The author's position was added to some citations, and the content of the document text was interpreted in connection with historical circumstances.

Results

1. 1991–1997: the first years of independence and the formation of legal foundations. At the initial stage of independence, foreign language teaching was carried out within the framework of the inherited structures of the general education system. An important sign of this period was the creation of the main legal foundation of the new state in the field of education and the growing need to revise the personnel training system. In the practice of foreign languages, the main attention was paid to the coordination of curricula and textbooks with the national education strategy: factors such as the distribution of hours, the number of groups in schools, the shortage of teachers, and the limited methodological resources determined the real results of foreign language teaching. The Law “On Education” and the “National Personnel Training Program” adopted in 1997 opened a conceptual path for a gradual renewal of the education system. The national program considered education as a continuous system and envisaged the restructuring of content and management mechanisms. The idea of “continuous education” in this document also directly applies to foreign language teaching and serves as a normative basis for strengthening the coherence between the stages of education in the subject. It should be noted that the strategic goals in the documents required time and resources to be fully translated into practice; this situation brought the issues of textbooks and teacher training to the forefront in the subsequent stages. 2. 1997–2004: the concept of continuous education and the restructuring of educational and methodological systems. After 1997, the institutional framework for teaching foreign languages expanded. The continuous education model aimed at the continuous development of a foreign language, starting from school and continuing to the subsequent stages. During this period, institutional mechanisms for teacher training and retraining were strengthened, and attention to foreign language methodology in higher pedagogical education increased. However, due to the real capabilities of the system (lack of personnel in schools, uneven provision by region), the results were manifested by regional differences. From a methodological point of view, at this stage, the tendency to switch to a communicative approach intensified. This necessitated the updating of textbooks, the emphasis on developing skills such as listening comprehension and oral speech. Also, factors such as the number of students in the classroom, the availability of classroom

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equipment, and the availability of audio materials limited the choice of teaching methods. Nevertheless, this period can be considered a historical stage of a gradual departure from the "only grammar-translation" paradigm in foreign language teaching.

3.2004–2012: a stage focused on standardization, assessment and resource renewal. In the second half of the 2000s, issues of quality management in education intensified, and the need to measure and compare learning outcomes in foreign languages increased. During this period, along with the improvement of state educational standards and curricula, the processes of creating a new generation of textbooks and methodological manuals accelerated. In organizing the educational process, attention was paid to the practical skills of the student, and the issue of the continuity of language learning at the school and college/lyceum levels was again raised. As a result of this period, foreign language teaching began to be more closely linked to the chain of "systemic support" (standards–programs–textbooks–assessment). At the same time, in practice, full compliance of assessment with content was not always ensured: in some cases, the test orientation increased, and some types of speech activity (especially fluent speaking) could remain secondary. Such contradictions served as an impetus for deepening the competency-based approach at subsequent stages. 4.2012–2017: strategic turn in foreign languages and teaching from an early stage. 2012 was a special turning point in the history of foreign language teaching. Decisions to further improve the system of learning foreign languages, especially teaching a foreign language from an early stage (primary grades) in general secondary education, accelerated the issues of updating educational and methodological complexes and improving the qualifications of teachers at the institutional level. The tasks set out in the legislative and regulatory text are distinguished by the fact that they also provide for specific implementation mechanisms. For example, the relevant resolution redefined the goals and objectives of foreign language teaching at the state level, expressing such directions as "Further improvement of the system of learning foreign languages, gradual introduction of their learning from an early age" (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2012). This quote is important because it shows the "accelerated modernization" stage of the historical process through the language of the document; at the same time, in practice, such acceleration placed high demands on the quality of teaching resources and textbooks, requiring a large amount of methodological work in a short period of time.

At this stage, the content of education is characterized by trends in compliance with the principles of the CEFR, the gradual formation of communicative competencies, as well as the expansion of the use of multimedia resources. As a result, an increase in the share of listening comprehension and oral speech in the lesson process was noticeable, but interregional resource differences remained. 5.2017–2024: strengthening the competency-based approach, certification and digital education factors. In the period after 2017, modernization processes in the education system intensified, including in areas such as effectiveness and transparency of assessment in foreign language teaching, teacher motivation, and the expansion of international certification practices. The state educational standard for general secondary education, approved in 2019, strengthened the competency-based approach, which strengthened the role of the criteria of "application" rather than "knowledge" in foreign language teaching. The text of this standard seeks to define learning outcomes in the form of competencies (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019), which, from a historical point of view, means a change in the language of management of education: now the outcome will move from "what does the student know?" to "what can the student do?" The normative updates of 2021 have also strengthened inter-institutional coordination in the teaching of foreign languages. In particular, within the framework of the resolutions on the popularization of foreign languages,

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such areas as certification, teacher training, and the establishment of resource centers have taken on an important role (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021). This process has strengthened the tendency to view language education not only as a subject within a school or university, but also as a competency related to the labor market, public services, scientific publications, and international cooperation.

The digital education factor also gained momentum in 2017–2024: online platforms, distance learning courses, and digital content created an additional environment for language learning. However, historical and pedagogical analysis shows that digital resources have not always been integrated with the methodological system at the same speed; in some cases, although the technology is available, the teacher's methodological competence may not have been sufficiently developed to use it effectively. Therefore, while assessing this stage as a synthesis of "digital opportunities + institutional incentives", it is also necessary to present the issue of "methodological adaptation" as relevant.

Discussion Summarizing the history of foreign language teaching in Uzbekistan after independence, it can be conditionally viewed in five stages: 1991–1997: the formation of legal frameworks and the need to revise the system; 1997–2004: the concept of continuing education and institutional restructuring; 2004–2012: standardization and updating of resources; 2012–2017: early education and modernization focused on the CEFR; 2017–2024: a competency-based approach, certification and the rise of digital education. The scientific significance of this periodization is that, on the one hand, it corresponds to the sequence of regulatory documents (law-resolution-standard), and on the other hand, it is confirmed by practical and methodological changes (textbook updates, changes in assessment, teacher qualifications). In particular, the strategic shift of 2012, by introducing a foreign language at an earlier stage of school education, expanded the “time resource of education”: students could study the language for more years. However, this achievement placed high demands on the “human resource”; if the teacher training system does not adapt quickly enough, the quality of lessons will likely differ across regions. A balanced approach is also needed when it comes to relying on the CEFR. The didactic convenience of the CEFR is that it provides a clear “roadmap” for levels and serves to standardize assessment criteria. At the same time, the mechanical implementation of the CEFR may overshadow some contextual issues: the number of students in the classroom, the workload of the teacher, the lack of a language environment, and the limited extracurricular practice. Therefore, these criteria are most effective when used in conjunction with methodological solutions suitable for the conditions of Uzbekistan (local content, communicative tasks, mixed assessment). The history of textbooks and methodological support also requires a separate discussion. The generational change of textbooks often accelerates after normative changes; this shows that the chain “document → program → textbook → practice” does not always work in a synchronous manner. From a practical point of view, the teacher is forced to selectively use resources outside the textbook (audio, video, online exercises). On the one hand, this situation can enhance creative methodological research, but on the other hand, it can increase resource inequality between schools. In the history of teacher training, along with institutional strengthening, the issue of “substantive renewal” remains constant. Advanced training courses, certificate requirements, and incentive mechanisms encourage teachers to develop. However, for quality results, courses are effective when they are enriched not only with theoretical information, but also with mechanisms such as “microteaching”, lesson observation, and portfolio assessment that are appropriate for classroom practice. These aspects once again confirm the connection between "institutional decisions" and "methodological practice" in the history of foreign language teaching.

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CONCLUSION

The history of foreign language teaching in Uzbekistan after independence in 1991–2024 is characterized by the creation of legal frameworks, strengthening the concept of continuous education, improving standards and programs, introducing language teaching from an early stage, methodological renewal focused on the CEFR, strengthening the competency-based approach, and expanding certification and digital resources. As a result of the study, a 5-stage periodization was proposed and the institutional and methodological drivers of each stage were indicated. In practice, historical analysis shows that major changes in foreign language education give sustainable results only when they are coordinated, first of all, with teacher resources and methodological support. For future research, it is appropriate to separately deepen the evolution of textbooks (over generations), regional differences in practice (based on statistical and archival materials), and changes in the assessment system (tests and competency indicators).

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