

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS RUSSIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The parents who desire their children to go to Russian-only instruction classes in any educational settings have been on the increase recently. After becoming independent states, countries in Central Asia established their laws to protect their languages and promote their use in all aspects of life. This has led to the increase of the Uzbek language influence in the society, internal and international affairs of the country. Over time, life experience, challenges showed that the status of Russian cannot be undervalued. The language is wide-spread in all spheres of life: politics, education, economics, international affairs, medicine, etc. In the last decade, the role of Russian has been huge in an internal and international arena. It is no way to devalue the Russian language in Uzbekistan since it has a vital historical and cultural integrity with Central Asian counties.

Keywords: *Russian-language instruction, Uzbek-language instruction, Uzbek, Russian, English*

Introduction

Throughout my teaching experience at the university, I have noticed that students who speak two languages fluently do better than those who are monolingual. In my context, students speak Uzbek and Russian well. In other words, they are native speakers of these languages. Ethnically they are Uzbek but they went to kindergarten and school in which the language of education was Russian. At the university we I teach these students, this trend continues. The group in which they are officially

registered is called “European” which means the language of instruction is Russian. Another type of group is called “Uzbek”. Only Uzbek is used as a language of instruction. They are monolingual. They learn Russian as a second language and English as a foreign language.

Literature review

Since the decline of the former Soviet Union, the former president of Uzbekistan did his best to limit the influence of the Russian language in the mid-1990s (Bekmurzaev, 2019). Huge shifts in education occurred just after independence in 1991. This separation did not affect modern Russia negative in any way. Russia still maintains its overwhelming presence in Central Asia through political and cultural relations. If not, the USA can enter this region to establish its hegemony (Roy, 2001).

Independence in 1991, has led to dramatic reforms in education sector (OSCE, 2003). Currently, there are no purely Russian-language schools in Uzbekistan. There are only Uzbek-language schools and mixed Russian-Uzbek-language schools (Khalikov, 2006). One cannot find exclusively Russian-language schools if not private-led schools. Exception can be those Russian-only schools where the language of instruction is exclusively Russian.

Recently, the number of parents who opt for Russian as the language of education for their children has been increasing as they believe that the Russian language gives their children a priority over their peers in their future career. According to Khalikov (2006), ethnic Uzbeks desire their children to go to Russian-only instruction classes. The findings from the qualitative research students in Kyrgyz university preferred Russian for the same reason as they would call it “concern for the future” (Gul, 2019).

Gul (2019) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study on exploring the views of students over their preferences to choose Russian as a language of instruction. In total, 42 students participated in the interview in the fall semester in the year of 2017-18. The researcher used a semi-structured interview technique to collect data. The data was collected to answer the question of the reasons why university students preferred to receive education in Russian though they were Kyrgyz. There were given

a few reasons for choosing Russian. First, students believe that knowledge of Russian will open big opportunity in their future career. The recruitment procedures are carried out in Russian. Employers speak Russian and they would like to employ those who are good at Russian. Another reason was that the materials available in Kyrgyz were not enough to study. It is a big problem to find reliable and ample materials to prepare for lessons, or lectures. Moreover, they stated that there is pressure from society, family and community. It is a must to learn Russian because your friends, relatives speak Russian. Interestingly, the Russian language is an official language in Kyrgyzstan. It is a psychological pressure that all students consciously have to conform to it. Last but not least, there is a common belief that teachers, educators, academicians are way more polite, kind and sympathetic if they took education in Russian. Students believe that if you speak Russian you belong to a modern, civilized society.

Results/Interpretation

Thirty students were interviewed to answer these three questions. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted. The findings are categorized into main themes (see Table 1):

- 1) Do you consider Russian to be your native language or second language? Why?
- 2) What are the merits and demerits of studying in Russian language instruction classes?
- 3) Should young children be educated in Russian or Uzbek when they go to kindergarten or school?

Students in Russian-language instruction classes

We can see that students' views (see Table 1) are different in each language instruction type. Students in Russian-language instruction class tend to be happy with their knowledge of Russian and studying subjects in this language. They can see their prospective future with it. Interestingly, they speak Russian fluently and are closely intertwined with its culture and literature. They are in favor of any activities that connects with this language.

Table 1. Qualitative data from the interview: Students' views

Questions	Students in Russian-language instruction	Students in Uzbek-language instruction
1 Do you consider Russian to be your native language or second language? Why?	They consider Russian as native language since they went to kindergarten and school where the instruction was only in this language. Plus, their parents use Russian as a primary means of communication at home. Very rarely they would use Uzbek at home. Sometimes, around close friends and relatives parents would switch to Uzbek. Some students could barely speak Uzbek fluently though they are ethnically Uzbek. Majority of them would speak both Uzbek and Russian as native language. English is a second language or a foreign language.	They would consider Russian as a second language. English is a foreign language. They speak Russian at home and their parents do not use it as they are not good at it. Russian is taught at school and at university as a second language.
2 What are the merits and demerits of studying in Russian language instruction classes?	Majority of them support Russian language instruction since it is easier to understand content. They have been instructed in all	They have had Russian lessons at school and at university. But they are not exposed to Russian as much as they need.

	classes in Russian since they were young. They would have access to many sources in Russian, in all aspects of life including literature, medicine, IT, etc. There are limited materials available in Uzbek.	They have lessons two or three times a week. It is not enough to produce fluent Russian. Their friends who speak Russian well have better future prospects. Thus, they express their desire to learn Russian.
3 Should young children be educated in Russian or Uzbek when they go to kindergarten or school?	They said that knowing Russian well gives a lot of opportunities: Successful career prospects. Saves money and time to learn a new language.	They would love to educate their children in mixed Russian-Uzbek schools. They understand the role of Russian is huge. Some of them regret not going to classes where Russian is a language of education.

Students in Uzbek-language instruction classes

In this type of class (see Table 1), students express their regret not going to Russian-language instruction. They understand this later though not blaming their parents. In fact, they also consider Russian as vital for their future life. What is more, they are ready to educate their children in the system of Russian language teaching because they can see its prospect and priority over Uzbek.

Conclusion

To sum up, students are capable of learning new languages at universities. They have been provided with many opportunities for this. However, if they are exposed to new languages when students are very young, the outcome is huge. Learners are not

conscious of this situation when they are children. Being bilingual, gives more privileges over monolinguals. In the case of Russian as a language of instruction has been positive for students' cognitive abilities, mental well-being and career prospects.

Recommendations

The fact that students in Russian-language instruction classes outperform considerably over Uzbek-language instruction classes is common knowledge among public university teachers. It is advisable for researchers to explore merits of Russian-only instruction classes. The findings can be implemented into Uzbek-only instruction classes. In this direction, the following suggestions could be made:

1) Language departments of state universities should design research questions and research procedures to investigate the merits behind two types of classes. University administration must fully support researchers to conduct research. The findings should be collected neatly, analyzed appropriately, and interpreted. Later, important takeaways from the results can be shared with departments to implement into classes.

2) Parents should encourage their children to learn new language when they are young. This will help children to develop in many aspects of life. Critical and creative thinking abilities will improve. Cognitive abilities will improve.

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