

TEACHING ENGLISH IN UZBEKISTAN'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A DECOLONIAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This article explores decolonial approaches to English language teaching (ELT) in Uzbekistan's secondary schools, balancing global language learning with cultural sovereignty in a post-Soviet context. It examines challenges and opportunities in creating culturally responsive English education that preserves indigenous values while preparing students for global engagement. The study highlights strategies such as integrating local literature, fostering critical media literacy, community-based learning, and digital cultural exchange. Case studies show that decolonial methods enhance both language skills and cultural identity. The article concludes with policy recommendations to support linguistic competence without cultural loss, positioning English education as a means of cultural affirmation.

Key words: *Decolonial approaches, English language teaching (ELT), Cultural sovereignty, Indigenous values, Critical media literacy, Community-based learning, Digital cultural exchange, Cultural identity, Policy recommendations, Linguistic competence*

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada O'zbekiston umumta'lim maktablarida ingliz tilini o'qitishga (ELT) dekolonial yondashuvlar ko'rib chiqiladi hamda global til o'rganish va madaniy mustaqillik o'rtasidagi muvozanat post-sovet kontekstida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot madaniy qadriyatlarni saqlab qolish bilan birga o'quvchilarni global hamkorlikka tayyorlovchi, madaniyatga moslashtirilgan ingliz tili ta'limini yaratishdagi muammo va imkoniyatlarni o'rganadi. Maqolada mahalliy adabiyotlarni o'quv jarayoniga kiritish, tanqidiy media-savodxonlikni rivojlantirish, jamiyat bilan bog'langan ta'lim hamda raqamli madaniy almashinuv kabi strategiyalar alohida qayd etiladi. Amaliy misollar orqali, dekolonial metodlarning til ko'nikmalari hamda madaniy o'zlikni rivojlantirishdagi samarasi ko'rsatiladi. Maqola madaniy yo'qotishlarsiz til kompetensiyasini qo'llab-quvvatlash yuzasidan ta'lim siyosatiga oid tavsiyalar bilan yakunlanib, ingliz tili ta'limini madaniy tasdiqlash vositasi sifatida qayta baholashga chaqiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Dekolonial yondashuvlar, Ingliz tilini o'qitish (ELT), Madaniy mustaqillik, Mahalliy qadriyatlar, Tanqidiy media-savodxonlik, Jamiyat bilan*

bog'langan ta'lim, Raqamli madaniy almashinuv, Madaniy o'zlik, Siyosiy tavsiflar, Til kompetensiyasi.

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются деколониальные подходы к преподаванию английского языка (ELT) в средних школах Узбекистана, направленные на баланс между освоением глобального языка и сохранением культурного суверенитета в постсоветском контексте. Анализируются проблемы и возможности создания культурно ориентированного обучения английскому языку, которое сохраняет национальные ценности и одновременно готовит студентов к участию в глобальном сообществе. Исследование подчеркивает стратегии, такие как интеграция местной литературы, развитие критической медиаграмотности, обучение, связанное с сообществом, и цифровой культурный обмен. Примеры успешных программ показывают, что деколониальные методы способствуют как овладению языком, так и укреплению культурной идентичности. В статье даны рекомендации по разработке учебных программ, подготовке учителей и созданию материалов, которые поддерживают языковую компетенцию без утраты культуры, позиционируя обучение английскому языку как средство культурного самоутверждения.

Ключевые слова: Деколониальные подходы, Преподавание английского языка (ELT), Культурный суверенитет, Коренные ценности, Критическая медиаграмотность, Обучение на основе местного сообщества, Цифровой культурный обмен, Культурная идентичность, Политические рекомендации, Языковая компетенция.

The teaching of English in Uzbekistan presents a complex educational landscape where pedagogical practices intersect with questions of cultural identity, historical legacy, and global connectivity. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone significant educational reforms aimed at modernizing its education system while simultaneously reclaiming and reinforcing national cultural identity (Abdullaeva, 2021). English language education sits at this critical junction—providing essential skills for global participation while potentially reinforcing colonial mindsets if implemented without cultural sensitivity and awareness.

This article explores how a decolonial approach to English language teaching (ELT) in Uzbekistan's secondary schools can foster language acquisition while honoring and preserving local cultural values. Decolonial pedagogy seeks to dismantle the power structures embedded in traditional language education by challenging Western-centric knowledge systems and integrating indigenous

knowledges and experiences (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). By applying these principles to the Uzbekistani context, this article offers practical strategies for educators seeking to navigate the complex terrain of language teaching in a post-colonial environment.

Understanding the current state of English language education in Uzbekistan requires examining its historical context. During the Soviet era, Russian was the dominant second language, with English taught as a foreign language with limited practical application (Hasanova, 2017). Following independence, Uzbekistan's language policy shifted dramatically, establishing Uzbek as the state language while recognizing the importance of English for global integration.

The Presidential Decree No. 1875 "On measures to further improve foreign language learning system" issued in 2012 marked a watershed moment in English education, establishing English instruction from the first grade of primary school (Isakova, 2020). This policy shift reflected the government's recognition of English as crucial for economic development and international relationships. However, this rapid transition created challenges, including teacher shortages, methodological inconsistencies, and tensions between educational innovation and cultural preservation.

Theoretical Framework: Decolonial Approaches to Language Education

Decolonial theory provides valuable insights for reconceptualizing English language education in Uzbekistan. Decoloniality challenges the Eurocentric assumptions underlying traditional language education, questioning notions of linguistic superiority and cultural hierarchy (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In language education, this translates to pedagogies that:

Recognize and validate multiple knowledge systems

Center local experiences and cultural practices

Kumaravadivelu's (2016) post-method pedagogy offers a practical framework for decolonial language teaching through three key principles: particularity (context-sensitivity), practicality (theory-practice integration), and possibility (social transformation). These principles can guide Uzbekistani English teachers in developing approaches that respect cultural sovereignty while facilitating effective language acquisition.

Current Challenges in Uzbekistan's English Education

Several challenges currently face English education in Uzbekistan that must be addressed within a decolonial framework:

Many English teachers in Uzbekistan were trained in Soviet-era methodologies or through hastily implemented Western programs that may not align with local educational culture (Hasanova & Shadiyeva, 2019). Decolonial

teacher education would focus on developing educators who can critically engage with both Western and local pedagogical traditions, adapting methodologies to suit the Uzbekistani context.

Research by Djuraeva (2021) found that 78% of English teachers in rural secondary schools expressed feeling caught between traditional teaching expectations and imported communicative methodologies, creating professional identity conflicts. This suggests the need for teacher development programs that help educators integrate diverse methodological approaches while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Teaching Materials and Cultural Representation

Textbooks and teaching materials often present Anglo-American cultural norms as universal, reinforcing colonial hierarchies (Kamilova, 2020). A decolonial approach would ensure materials represent diverse cultural perspectives, including robust representation of Central Asian experiences and values.

Kamilova's (2020) analysis of English textbooks used in Uzbekistan found that only 12% of cultural content referenced Central Asian contexts, while Western cultural references dominated the remaining content. This imbalance limits opportunities for students to develop bicultural competence that honors their own cultural identity.

Practical Strategies for Decolonial English Teaching in Uzbekistan

Integrating Local Literary and Cultural Traditions

Uzbekistan possesses a rich literary heritage from figures like Alisher Navoi, Babur, and contemporary writers. Incorporating translations of Uzbek literature into English classrooms creates opportunities for cultural pride while developing language skills (Turdiev, 2018). Kurbanova (2023) describes a successful secondary school project where students created bilingual digital stories based on Uzbek folk tales, developing English proficiency while deepening their understanding of cultural narratives. The project resulted in both improved language outcomes and increased cultural identity scores among participants.

Critical Media Literacy

Developing critical media literacy helps students analyze how English-language media represents different cultures and reinforces power relationships. Activities might include analyzing news coverage of Central Asia in Western media, comparing it with local perspectives, and discussing the implications of these representations.

Implementing media literacy activities requires careful scaffolding. Rakhimov (2022) suggests a three-phase approach:

1. Guided analysis of explicit cultural messages

2. Collaborative exploration of implicit assumptions
3. Independent creation of counter-narratives that challenge misrepresentations

Community-Connected Language Learning

Connecting language learning to community concerns and local knowledge systems helps students see English as a tool for expressing their own realities rather than adopting foreign identities (Abdullaeva, 2021). Service-learning projects where students use English to address community needs can foster this connection. Successful examples include students in Samarkand creating English-language guides to local historical sites, incorporating traditional knowledge often overlooked in official tourism materials (Khamidova, 2022). This approach positions students as cultural ambassadors rather than passive recipients of foreign cultural norms.

Digital Cultural Exchange

Technology enables direct communication between Uzbekistani students and English speakers globally, challenging the traditional unidirectional flow of cultural influence. Structured exchanges can help students develop intercultural competence while maintaining cultural pride. Shadiyeva's (2021) study of virtual exchanges between Uzbekistani and Malaysian English learners demonstrated that such connections can reduce linguistic hierarchies, as both groups positioned themselves as legitimate English users navigating cultural difference rather than aspiring to native-speaker norms.

Reclaiming Linguistic Sovereignty Through Local Varieties

Encouraging awareness and acceptance of Uzbek English as a legitimate variety with its own features helps students claim ownership of the language (Hasanova, 2017). Teachers can explore concepts like "World Englishes" and linguistic hybridity to validate students' developing interlanguage as creative adaptation rather than deficient approximation.

Kachru's (1992) Three Circles model of World Englishes provides a useful framework for helping students position themselves not as perpetual learners of a foreign language but as legitimate users adapting English for their own communicative purposes.

Curriculum Development with a Decolonial Lens

Developing English curricula with a decolonial perspective requires systematic attention to several key elements:

Cultural Content Balance

Curriculum materials should maintain at least equal representation of local and global cultural content, with particular attention to presenting Uzbekistani

culture through an asset-based rather than deficit-based lens. This means moving beyond superficial cultural representations (foods, festivals, folklore) to engage with contemporary Uzbekistani experiences, achievements, and perspectives.

Davronova (2022) proposes a "cultural spiraling" approach where each language unit interweaves global themes with increasingly complex aspects of local culture, helping students develop sophisticated vocabulary for discussing their own cultural realities in English.

Critical Language Awareness

Curricula should incorporate critical language awareness, helping students understand how language choices reflect and reinforce power relationships. This includes examining how certain varieties of English gained prestige, how language policies impact social opportunities, and how translation choices influence cultural representation.

Authentic Assessment

Assessment should reflect real communicative contexts relevant to students' lives and potential language use scenarios. Rather than focusing exclusively on standardized tests based on Western norms, evaluation might include projects where students use English to address local issues or communicate aspects of Uzbekistani culture to global audiences. Sarkar's (2019) research on assessment in postcolonial contexts suggests incorporating multimodal assessment practices that value students' full communicative repertoires and cultural knowledge, not just grammatical accuracy or pronunciation conformity.

Case Studies: Successful Decolonial Practices in Uzbekistan

The Tashkent Integrated Curriculum Project

This pilot program in selected Tashkent secondary schools integrated English language learning with local history, literature, and environmental studies (Khamidova, 2022). Students developed bilingual materials documenting local ecological knowledge while learning environmental vocabulary in English. The project demonstrated that content integration can enhance both language acquisition and cultural knowledge, with participating students showing higher motivation and cultural identity measures than control groups.

The Digital Heritage Initiative

Secondary schools in Bukhara participated in a project where students researched architectural heritage sites in their community, developing digital presentations in English (Rakhmatullaeva, 2021). The project reversed traditional knowledge flows by positioning students as cultural experts sharing their heritage with English-speaking audiences. Assessment focused on communicative effectiveness and cultural accuracy rather than adherence to native-speaker norms.

Teacher Development for Decolonial Practice

Implementing decolonial approaches requires intentional teacher development focused on: Teachers need opportunities to examine their own assumptions about language, culture, and pedagogy. Structured reflection activities can help teachers identify internalized colonial attitudes and develop more culturally responsive practices (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). Developing teachers' ability to conduct classroom research empowers them to generate contextually relevant knowledge rather than relying exclusively on imported methodologies. Teacher research networks across Uzbekistan can facilitate sharing of locally developed practices (Hasanova & Shadiyeva, 2019). Teachers need support in adapting and creating materials that reflect local realities while developing language skills. Workshops on critical materials analysis and adaptation can help teachers transform standard textbooks into more culturally responsive resources (Kamilova, 2020).

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the preceding analysis, several policy recommendations emerge for advancing decolonial English education in Uzbekistan:

Develop national standards for culturally responsive English education that explicitly value local knowledge and cultural preservation alongside language acquisition.

Establish research centers focused on developing locally appropriate language teaching methodologies that draw on both global best practices and Uzbekistani educational traditions.

Create mechanisms for teacher input into curriculum development, ensuring that materials reflect classroom realities and local cultural contexts.

Support the development of Uzbekistan-specific English teaching materials that accurately represent local culture while building language skills.

Reform teacher education programs to include critical perspectives on language, power, and culture alongside methodological training.

Teaching English in Uzbekistan's secondary schools through a decolonial lens offers a path toward educational sovereignty—where language learning becomes a tool for cultural affirmation rather than assimilation. By integrating local knowledge systems, critically examining power relationships in language education, and centering Uzbekistani experiences, teachers can help students develop English proficiency while maintaining strong cultural identities.

As Uzbekistan continues its educational reforms and deepens its global connections, attention to decolonial approaches in English teaching will become increasingly important. The strategies outlined in this article provide starting points

for educators seeking to navigate the complex terrain of language teaching in a context of cultural reclamation and global participation.

Through thoughtful implementation of decolonial approaches, English education can contribute to Uzbekistan's vision of modernization that honors rather than erases cultural heritage. In this way, language learning becomes not a process of adopting foreign values but of expanding students' capacity to express their own cultural identities in a global context.

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O'ZBEKISTONDA INKLYUZIV TA'LIMNING RIVOJLANISHI VA ISTIQBOLLARI

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Annotatsiya.

Maqolada inklyuziv ta'limning O'zbekistondagi rivojlanishi, inklyuziv ta'limning huquqiy-me'yoriy asoslari, ushbu sohada maktab va mnaktabgacha ta'lim tashkilotlarida olib borilayotgan islohotlar va inklyuziv ta'limning O'zbekistonda rivojlanishi va istiqbollari xususida so'z yuritiladi. Maqolaning kirish qismida inklyuziv ta'limga oid prezident qarorlari, farmonlari keltirilib, ushbu qarorlarning ijrosi va olib borilayotgan ishlar haqida fikr bildirilgan. Adabiyotlar tahlili qismida esa ko'plab adiblarimizning maqolalari, hamda inklyuziv ta'lim haqidagi asarlari qiyoslangan. Metodologiya qismida empirik tahlil hamda suhbat usullari haqida ma'lumot berilib, bubusullar orqali inklyuziv ta'limni samaradorligini oshirishda foydalanilgan va natijalar qismida Qo'qon shahridagi 5-sonli maktab-internatida olib borilgan mashg'ulotlar jarayonida erishilgan samaradorlik natijalari ko'rsatib berilgan. Muhokama qismida inklyuziv ta'limni joriy qilishda qaysi ustuvor yo'nalishlardan foydalanish to'g'risida fikrlar o'rganilib, qiyoslangan.