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Understanding Linguistic Diversity and Pedagogical Strategies in a Multilingual Classroom in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: *This article explores the linguistic, social, and cultural dynamics of a multilingual 9th-grade classroom in Uzbekistan. The learners, who study in a Russian-medium school, come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Russian, Uzbek, and Tajik. The study identifies two main subgroups Tajik-speaking students learning through Uzbek and Russian-speaking students learning through Russian and examines how these backgrounds affect English language acquisition. Drawing on sociolinguistic perspectives, the article discusses the roles of gender, ethnicity, and identity in shaping classroom interaction and participation. It also outlines pedagogical and assessment implications, emphasizing inclusive teaching strategies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The findings highlight the importance of adapting instruction and assessment to students' multilingual realities to promote equitable and effective learning.*

Keywords: *ultilingualism; language learning; sociolinguistics; ethnicity; gender; classroom interaction; Uzbekistan; CLT; TBLT; language assessment.*

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Introduction

This article examines a group of 9th-grade learners in a Russian-medium school in Uzbekistan, focusing on how linguistic diversity, ethnicity, and gender influence language learning. The class consists of 15 students from varied social and linguistic backgrounds, all of whom speak Russian, while many also use Uzbek and Tajik. English is taught as a foreign language, primarily through Russian, with some Uzbek support. Students demonstrate an intermediate level of English proficiency (approximately IELTS bands 3–4). Differences in access to educational resources, as well as cultural norms, further shape classroom dynamics and learning outcomes.

Learner Subgroups and Linguistic Backgrounds

Two key subgroups can be identified within this classroom.

The first group includes students from Tajik-speaking households who receive instruction in Uzbek. For these learners, English acquisition is more complex because Uzbek is not their first language. The linguistic distance between Tajik, Uzbek, and English creates additional cognitive demands, particularly in understanding grammar, sentence structure, and case marking. Despite these challenges, these students often develop strong metalinguistic awareness due to their multilingual experience, which can support long-term language learning (Deumert, 2011). However, they may also face identity-related challenges as they navigate multiple linguistic systems (Schilling, 2011). The second group consists of students from Russian-speaking households who learn English through Russian. These learners generally face fewer structural difficulties because Russian and English share some similarities. However, they may demonstrate limited engagement with other local languages such as Uzbek or Tajik. Their linguistic identity is often closely tied to Russian, which can influence their attitudes toward peers and classroom participation (Fought, 2011).

Gender and Classroom Interaction

Gender plays a significant role in shaping classroom interaction. Some female students participate less actively due to traditional cultural expectations regarding gender roles. These norms may limit their willingness to engage in discussions or take leadership roles in group activities. At the same time, gender should be viewed as a flexible and socially constructed concept, requiring teachers to foster inclusive participation (Schilling, 2011). Discussions of sexuality are not present in the classroom due to cultural and institutional constraints. While this limits certain aspects of sociolinguistic exploration, it reflects the broader educational context (Deumert, 2011).

Ethnicity and Identity in Language Learning

Ethnicity is closely connected to language use and identity in this classroom. Students identify with different ethnic groups, such as Uzbek, Tajik, and Russian, and these identities influence their learning experiences. For example, Tajik-speaking students may struggle with English grammar due to structural differences between languages, while Russian-speaking students may benefit from linguistic similarities. Ethnic identity also affects social dynamics within the classroom. Students may form groups based on shared language and cultural background, which can impact collaboration and participation. Language both reflects and constructs ethnic identity, shaping how students position themselves socially and academically (Fought, 2011; Schilling, 2011).

Pedagogical Implications

To address the needs of this diverse classroom, communicative and task-based teaching approaches are particularly effective. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) encourages interaction through group work, discussions, and role plays, allowing students from different backgrounds to collaborate and practice English in meaningful contexts. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) further supports learning by engaging students in real-world tasks that require communication. These approaches help bridge linguistic differences and promote inclusivity, especially in multilingual settings (Deumert, 2011). Additionally, providing bilingual or trilingual resources such as vocabulary lists in English, Russian, and Uzbek can support comprehension and language transfer. Visual aids, including images and videos, are also valuable tools for making content accessible to all learners.

Language Assessment Considerations

Assessment practices must reflect the linguistic diversity of the classroom. Standardized tests designed for Russian-speaking learners may disadvantage students from Tajik or Uzbek backgrounds. Therefore, assessments should include clear instructions, simplified language where appropriate, and additional support mechanisms. It is also important to recognize that features such as code-switching or non-standard grammar are natural aspects of multilingual communication rather than errors. These reflect students' linguistic repertoires and identities (Schilling, 2011). Pre-assessment activities can help students understand language expectations and adapt their language use accordingly.

Conclusion

This multilingual 9th-grade classroom illustrates the complex interplay between language, identity, and learning. Students' linguistic backgrounds, ethnic identities, and gender roles all influence their educational experiences. By adopting inclusive pedagogical strategies and fair assessment practices, teachers can create a supportive environment that values diversity and promotes effective language learning.

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