

IMPROVING FLUENCY AMONG MULTINATIONAL LEARNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Introduction

As Uzbekistan continues to experience economic growth and international cooperation, its education system faces the challenge of integrating a more diverse student population. The country's increasing ties with foreign nations have resulted in an influx of multinational families, bringing learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds into Uzbek primary schools. This presents unique challenges for teachers and educational institutions, especially in terms of fostering language fluency in a multicultural and multilingual environment.

Keywords: Language fluency Multinational learners Primary schools in Uzbekistan Language acquisition Interactive learning Scaffolded instruction Culturally responsive teaching Parental involvement Educational technology

Language fluency, which encompasses the ability to speak, understand, read, and write in the language of instruction, is essential for multinational learners' academic and social success. For many children in Uzbekistan, Uzbek is their primary language of instruction, while others may come from Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, or Korean-speaking homes, among others. As these multinational learners navigate the complexities of acquiring Uzbek as an academic language, educators must adopt strategies tailored to their specific linguistic needs. This article examines effective strategies for improving fluency in multinational learners within the context of Uzbekistan's primary schools, supported by examples and expert insights.

The Importance of Language Fluency in Uzbekistan's Primary Schools

In Uzbekistan, as in many other countries, fluency in the language of instruction is critical for learners to access the full breadth of the curriculum. Most schools in Uzbekistan teach in Uzbek, with Russian being widely used in certain regions and schools. For multinational learners, developing fluency in these languages is essential not only for academic success but also for social integration. Without fluency, multinational learners may struggle to keep pace with their peers, leading to gaps in understanding and communication, both inside and outside the classroom (Cummins).

The development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is particularly important for multinational learners in Uzbekistan. CALP refers to the ability to understand and use language that is necessary for academic tasks, such as

solving math problems, writing essays, and understanding complex scientific concepts. While many students may quickly acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), or the language used in everyday social interactions, CALP takes longer to develop. This means that educators in Uzbekistan must focus on strategies that support both social and academic language fluency (Cummins).

Interactive Learning Environments

One of the most effective ways to enhance fluency in multinational learners is by creating interactive learning environments that encourage active participation in the target language. In Uzbekistan’s primary schools, teachers can create situations where students are required to use Uzbek or Russian in practical, real-life contexts. Group work, role-playing, and classroom discussions provide learners with opportunities to practice language skills in a low-pressure, collaborative setting (Vygotsky).

For example, a primary school teacher in Tashkent might organize a role-playing activity where students take on different roles in a marketplace, negotiating prices and discussing products in Uzbek. This type of activity allows multinational learners to practice speaking fluently in a context that mirrors real-world communication. By actively participating in conversations and working with their peers, students gain confidence in using the language and develop a deeper understanding of its practical applications (Vygotsky).

According to Lev Vygotsky, social interaction plays a key role in language acquisition, as learners construct knowledge through dialogue and collaboration.

In the context of multinational learners in Uzbekistan, interactive learning environments not only promote fluency but also foster a sense of belonging, as students engage with both their peers and the language in meaningful ways (Vygotsky).

Scaffolded Instruction

Scaffolded instruction is another essential strategy for improving fluency among multinational learners. Scaffolding refers to providing temporary support to students as they learn new concepts or skills. In the context of language learning, scaffolding might involve breaking down complex language tasks into smaller, more manageable steps, or providing visual aids, sentence starters, or word banks to help students express themselves (Bruner).

In Uzbekistan, teachers can use scaffolding to support multinational learners as they work to develop fluency in Uzbek or Russian. For instance, during a writing exercise, a teacher might provide a word bank of common transition words and phrases that students can use to connect their ideas. By giving students the tools they need to structure their writing, the teacher reduces the cognitive load associated with generating new language, allowing students to focus on developing fluency (Bruner).

As students become more comfortable with the language, teachers can gradually remove these supports, encouraging greater independence. The goal of scaffolding is

to provide just enough support to help students succeed while fostering their confidence to eventually use the language fluently on their own (Bruner).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is an approach that recognizes and values the cultural backgrounds of all students. In a country like Uzbekistan, where students come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, this approach is especially important for supporting multinational learners. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating students’ cultural knowledge and experiences into the curriculum, which not only enhances learning but also validates students’ identities and encourages engagement (Ladson-Billings).

For example, in an Uzbek primary school with a significant number of Russian-speaking students, a teacher might integrate Russian folktales or historical events into a language lesson. This not only makes the material more relatable for Russian-speaking students but also allows them to draw on their existing cultural knowledge as they develop fluency in Uzbek or Russian. By connecting the curriculum to students’ cultural experiences, teachers create a more inclusive environment that supports language development (Ladson-Billings).

Incorporating cultural diversity into the classroom also fosters cross-cultural understanding and communication among students from different backgrounds. This is particularly important in Uzbekistan, where fostering national unity and cooperation among various ethnic groups is a key educational goal (Ladson-Billings).

Parental Involvement

Parents play a crucial role in supporting the language development of multinational learners. In Uzbekistan, many parents may speak a different language at home, such as Russian, Tajik, or Kazakh. While this linguistic diversity is valuable, it can also create challenges when children are learning Uzbek or Russian as their primary language of instruction. Research shows that when parents are actively involved in their children’s language development, students tend to perform better academically (Epstein).

One way to involve parents in the language learning process is by encouraging them to read with their children in their native language. This helps strengthen literacy skills, which can transfer to the second language, whether it be Uzbek or Russian. In Uzbekistan, schools can also provide resources and workshops for parents to help them understand how they can support their children’s language development, even if they do not speak the language of instruction themselves (Epstein).

For example, a primary school in Samarkand might offer a family literacy program where parents are encouraged to read bilingual books with their children. This type of program not only promotes language fluency but also strengthens the bond

between home and school, creating a more supportive learning environment for multinational students (Epstein).

The Role of Technology

Technology has the potential to significantly enhance language fluency among multinational learners. In Uzbekistan, as access to technology improves, more schools are incorporating digital tools into their language instruction. Language learning apps, online games, and interactive platforms provide students with additional opportunities to practice their language skills outside of the traditional classroom setting (Gee).

For instance, an Uzbek primary school might use language learning apps like Duolingo or Babbel to help multinational students practice Uzbek or Russian. These apps allow students to work at their own pace, practicing vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in a fun and engaging way. Furthermore, digital tools can provide immediate feedback, helping students identify areas where they need improvement (Gee).

Technology also allows for differentiated instruction, where students can receive personalized learning experiences based on their individual language needs. In a classroom in Bukhara, for example, teachers might use tablets with language learning software that adapts to each student’s level of fluency. This ensures that all students, regardless of their starting point, can make progress toward fluency (Gee).

Conclusion

Improving fluency among multinational learners in Uzbekistan’s primary schools is a multifaceted challenge that requires a range of strategies. By creating interactive learning environments, providing scaffolded instruction, embracing culturally responsive teaching, involving parents, and utilizing technology, educators can support multinational learners as they develop the fluency necessary for academic success and social integration. As Uzbekistan continues to grow and diversify, ensuring that all students have the language skills they need to thrive will be crucial to the country’s future.

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