

The role of the Uzbek State University of World Languages in the development of foreign languages in the higher education system (1992-2024)

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Abstract

This article examines the pivotal and transformative role of the Uzbek State University of World Languages (UzSWLU) in the development of the foreign language education system in Uzbekistan's higher education from its independence in 1992 to 2024. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan embarked on a nation-building project that identified foreign language proficiency as a critical component for economic development, international integration, and cultural sovereignty. This paper argues that UzSWLU has served not merely as a premier educational institution but as the primary methodological, pedagogical, and policy-implementing engine driving this national agenda. The analysis is structured chronologically, tracing the university's evolution through distinct phases: its foundational years focused on overcoming the Soviet legacy; a period of standardization and curriculum development; a reform-driven era marked by the adoption of international standards like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); and its current status as a modern center for research and innovation. The article concludes that UzSWLU has been indispensable in professionalizing language teaching, modernizing pedagogical approaches, and supplying the nation with highly qualified specialists, thereby acting as the cornerstone of Uzbekistan's strategy to cultivate a globally competitive, multilingual generation.

Keywords: Uzbek State University of World Languages, Uzbekistan, foreign language education, higher education, language policy, national reform, teacher training, CEFR, multilingualism.

The declaration of Uzbekistan's independence in 1991 marked a profound turning point, initiating a comprehensive reimagining of its national identity, economic strategy, and global posture. Central to this transformation was the sphere of education, which required a decisive break from the Soviet model to align with the aspirations of a sovereign state seeking open engagement with the world. In this new paradigm, foreign languages, particularly English, transitioned from being peripheral subjects to strategic assets essential for diplomacy, international trade, technological advancement, and cultural exchange. It was within this context of urgent national need that the Uzbek State University of World Languages (UzSWLU) was established in 1992 through the merger of two prominent language institutes. Over the subsequent three decades, from 1992 to 2024, UzSWLU evolved from a fledgling post-Soviet institution into the undisputed flagship of foreign language education in the nation. It has functioned as the primary architect of pedagogical change, the main supplier of qualified language educators, and the key implementing body for state-led educational reforms, fundamentally shaping the trajectory of foreign language learning within Uzbekistan's entire higher education system. Its influence extends far beyond its own campus, defining curricula, setting professional standards, and spearheading the modernization of teaching methodologies across the country.

In the foundational years following its establishment, from 1992 through the early 2000s, UzSWLU was tasked with an immense and critical mission: to dismantle the rigidities of the Soviet pedagogical legacy and construct a new framework for language education suited to an

independent nation. The Soviet approach was heavily characterized by the grammar-translation method, which produced students with strong theoretical knowledge of grammatical structures but limited practical communicative competence. The immediate priority for the newly formed university was to pivot towards communicative language teaching methodologies that emphasized functional language use. This period was fraught with challenges, including a scarcity of modern textbooks, a lack of exposure to native-speaking environments, and a teaching corps trained in outdated methods. UzSWLU tackled these obstacles by becoming a hub for retraining and professional development. It initiated the laborious process of creating new curricula, developing culturally relevant teaching materials, and fostering the first generation of translators, interpreters, and teachers who could meet the demands of emerging international partnerships. The university's graduates from this era were pioneers, filling crucial roles in government ministries, burgeoning private enterprises, and educational institutions, effectively serving as the linguistic bridge between Uzbekistan and the outside world. This period solidified UzSWLU's reputation as the nation's premier center for linguistic expertise and the primary source of human capital for the country's internationalization efforts.

As Uzbekistan consolidated its statehood in the 2000s, the focus of its educational policy shifted towards systematization and the creation of unified national standards. During this phase, UzSWLU's role expanded from being a leading university to becoming the de facto methodological headquarters for foreign language instruction across the entire educational vertical, from secondary schools to other higher education institutions. The university's expert faculty were instrumental in drafting the State Educational Standards for foreign languages, which provided a coherent framework for curriculum design, learning objectives, and assessment criteria nationwide. This ensured a level of consistency and quality that was previously absent. Furthermore, UzSWLU diversified its linguistic portfolio, expanding beyond its traditional strengths in English, German, and French to include a greater emphasis on Eastern languages such as Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. This strategic expansion reflected Uzbekistan's evolving geopolitical and economic priorities, particularly its "Look East" policy (Juraev, 2018). The university was not just teaching languages; it was actively responding to and shaping the nation's foreign policy orientation by producing specialists proficient in the languages of key strategic partners. It became the central node in a network of language education, providing guidance, resources, and expert consultation to regional universities, thereby ensuring that the modernization of language teaching was not confined to the capital but disseminated throughout the republic.

A watershed moment in the university's history and for foreign language education in Uzbekistan arrived with the Presidential Decree No. PP-1875 of December 10, 2012, "On measures to radically improve the system of learning foreign languages." This landmark decree was a catalyst for profound and systemic reform, formally designating UzSWLU as the head institution responsible for coordinating all scientific and methodological work in this domain. This mandate triggered the most intensive period of transformation in the university's history. Central to this reform was the nationwide adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard for describing language ability. UzSWLU was at the vanguard of this massive undertaking. It spearheaded the development of CEFR-aligned curricula, assessment tools, and teaching materials. It launched extensive, nationwide retraining programs to equip tens of thousands of teachers with the principles of competency-based instruction and the skills to teach and assess according to CEFR levels. Under the university's umbrella, the Republican Scientific and Practical Center for the Development of Innovative Methods in Teaching Foreign Languages was established, institutionalizing its role as a permanent think tank and innovation hub. This era witnessed a paradigm shift from knowledge-based learning to skills-based proficiency, with a heavy emphasis on integrating modern information and communication technologies (ICT) into the language classroom. UzSWLU effectively served as the government's primary agent in

executing this ambitious reform, ensuring its successful implementation and fundamentally elevating the quality and international compatibility of language education in Uzbekistan. The evolution of the university's role in alignment with national priorities can be summarized as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1: Key Stages in the Development of Foreign Language Education in Uzbekistan and the Evolving Role of UzSWLU (1992-2024)

Period	National Context & Priorities	Key Governmental Initiatives	Primary Role and Contribution of UzSWLU
1992-2000	Foundation & Nation-Building: Post-Soviet transition; establishing sovereignty; opening to the world; need for diplomatic and economic specialists.	Establishment of UzSWLU (1992); Law "On Education" (1997); National Program for Personnel Training (1997).	Pioneer & Curriculum Developer: Overcoming Soviet pedagogical legacy; introducing communicative language teaching; developing first national textbooks; training the first cohort of translators and modern teachers.
2001-2011	Standardization & Diversification: Economic stabilization; strengthening state institutions; development of "Look East" foreign policy.	Introduction of National State Educational Standards for foreign languages; expansion of international agreements in education.	Methodological Center & Standard-Setter: Led the development of national standards; diversified language offerings (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese); acted as a methodological guide for regional universities.
2012-2017	Intensive Modernization & Reform: Drive for global integration; focus on human capital as a strategic resource; demand for internationally benchmarked skills.	Presidential Decree PP-1875 (2012) "On measures to radically improve the system of learning foreign languages."	Lead Implementing Agency & Reform Engine: Designated as the base HEI for language education; spearheaded the national implementation of CEFR; conducted mass teacher retraining programs; developed new assessment systems.
2018-2024	Internationalization & Innovation ("New Uzbekistan"): Aggressive reforms across all sectors; attracting foreign investment; enhancing global competitiveness and academic autonomy.	"Strategy of Actions for 2017-2021"; Concept for Development of Higher Education until 2030; Presidential Decree on "New Uzbekistan."	International Hub & Research Center: Established extensive partnerships with foreign universities; focused on joint research and publications; integrated digital technologies and innovative pedagogies; promoted Uzbek language and culture abroad.

In the most recent period, from the late 2010s to 2024, coinciding with the "New Uzbekistan" reforms, UzSWLU has solidified its position as a modern, internationally-oriented research university. Its role has transcended that of a national methodological guide to become a significant participant in the global academic community. The university has actively pursued

and established robust partnerships with leading international institutions and organizations, such as the British Council, the Goethe-Institut, KOICA, JICA, and numerous universities across Europe, Asia, and North America. As noted in joint reports, these collaborations have been vital for faculty development, student exchange programs, joint research projects, and the continuous modernization of its educational programs (British Council Uzbekistan, 2022). The focus has broadened from mere linguistic competence to cultivating graduates with a holistic skill set, including intercultural communication, critical thinking, digital literacy, and research skills, a goal explicitly stated in national development strategies (Shayusupova & Rustamov, 2021). The university has become a center for advanced academic inquiry, hosting international conferences and publishing scholarly journals that contribute to the global discourse on linguistics and language pedagogy (Madumarov, 2023). Simultaneously, UzSWLU has embraced its role as a promoter of Uzbek culture and language abroad, leveraging its international networks to foster a deeper understanding of Uzbekistan globally. In this contemporary phase, the university is not only adapting to global trends but is also actively shaping them, producing graduates who are not just fluent speakers but globally competitive professionals prepared to navigate the complexities of an interconnected world. In conclusion, the trajectory of the Uzbek State University of World Languages from 1992 to 2024 is inextricably linked with the development of the Republic of Uzbekistan itself. It has been the primary institutional force translating national ambitions for global integration into educational reality. From its initial task of overcoming a restrictive Soviet inheritance, it grew to become the standard-bearer for pedagogical quality, the chief architect of national curriculum design, and the principal engine for implementing sweeping, state-mandated reforms. By championing communicative methodologies, driving the nationwide adoption of the CEFR, and fostering a culture of continuous professional development, UzSWLU has profoundly elevated the standards of foreign language proficiency across the higher education system. It has consistently provided the nation with the essential human resources—teachers, translators, diplomats, and business professionals—required to engage confidently on the international stage. More than just a university, UzSWLU has served as the vanguard of Uzbekistan's linguistic and cultural opening to the world, and its enduring legacy is the creation of a multilingual educational foundation upon which the nation's future prosperity and global competitiveness will continue to be built.

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