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TEACHERS AND TEXTBOOKS AS KEY MEDIATORS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article examines the role of teachers and textbooks as mediating mechanisms between foreign language education policy and classroom practice in secondary schools in Uzbekistan. It revisits the empirical component of the author's 2020 Master's research and focuses specifically on two policy instruments: teacher professional-quality measures and curriculum/textbook reform. The study employed a mixed-method design, combining an online questionnaire completed by 150 upper-secondary students with 20 semi-structured interviews involving language teachers, parents, a student and school administrators. Data were collected in February–March 2020. The findings show a dual pattern. On the one hand, participants recognized meaningful improvements associated with the post-2012 reform trajectory: foreign-language teaching began earlier, new CEFR-oriented curricula and textbooks were introduced for the reform generation, and financial incentives encouraged foreign-language teachers to obtain recognized proficiency certification. On the other hand, the implementation of these measures remained uneven. Only 43% of questionnaire respondents agreed that their school English teacher had good knowledge in the relevant teaching areas, while approximately 40% identified poorly qualified teachers as a problem. Textbook problems were concentrated in upper-secondary grades, where materials were either outdated or insufficiently aligned with learners' actual language levels and educational trajectories. Teachers consequently acted as policy mediators by adapting, supplementing or bypassing prescribed materials. The article argues that textbook quality and teacher qualification should not be treated as separate policy variables: their effectiveness is relational. A well-designed textbook requires teachers with the linguistic and pedagogical capacity to enact it, while teacher development is more likely to produce classroom change when supported by appropriate materials, coherent curriculum and realistic learner pathways.

Keywords: language education policy; teacher policy; textbooks; policy enactment; English language teaching; CEFR; Uzbekistan; secondary education

Key empirical indicators from the 2020 study

Indicator	Result
Questionnaire respondents	150
Semi-structured interviews	20
Total participants	170
Students rating school FLE quality excellent/good	80%
Students agreeing their English teacher had good teaching knowledge	43%
Students identifying poorly qualified teachers as a problem	≈40%
Students reporting textbook difficulty/irrelevance as a problem	30%
Students attending extra-curricular language courses	73%

1. Introduction

Language education policy is ultimately experienced not in policy documents but in classrooms. Government decisions may determine when foreign-language instruction begins, which proficiency framework is adopted, what textbooks are produced and how teachers are incentivized. Yet these decisions do not automatically become classroom practice. Teachers interpret policy, select and adapt materials, respond to learner needs and negotiate the practical constraints of schools. Textbooks, meanwhile, are among the most visible material expressions of curriculum policy: they translate curricular intentions into topics, tasks, language input and expected learning outcomes.

This relationship is particularly important in Uzbekistan, where foreign-language education underwent substantial reform during the 2010s. The 2012 Presidential Decree PQ-1875 introduced foreign-language instruction from the first grade beginning with the 2013/2014 academic year, promoted CEFR-oriented curriculum and textbook development, and established financial incentives for foreign-language teachers who demonstrated an appropriate level of proficiency. The 2017 reform trajectory further strengthened assessment and foreign-language policy. The reforms therefore attempted to influence several parts of the educational system simultaneously.

The present article does not evaluate the entire foreign-language reform. Instead, it isolates two actors and instruments that stand between policy design and learner experience: teachers and textbooks. The central argument is that policy outcomes depend on the interaction between the two. The original empirical study found that redesigned textbooks were generally perceived positively for learners who entered school under the new program, while upper-secondary materials generated substantial difficulties. At the same time, teacher quality remained uneven despite financial incentives and professional-development initiatives. These findings suggest that the question is not simply whether textbooks are good or teachers are qualified, but whether teachers, materials and learner trajectories are aligned.

The article addresses three questions: (1) How did teachers and textbooks function as mediators of foreign-language education policy in the studied schools? (2) What evidence indicates improvement in teacher quality and textbook provision following the reforms? and (3) Where did implementation gaps remain, particularly across different student cohorts?

2. Conceptual Framework

The analysis is grounded in the understanding of language policy as involving language practices, beliefs and management (Spolsky, 2004). In this study, governmental decrees and institutional measures represent policy management; students', parents' and teachers' evaluations reveal beliefs about the effectiveness of the policy; and classroom use of textbooks, teaching practices and participation in additional language education provide evidence of policy enactment.

Shohamy (2006) emphasizes that educational institutions are important sites through which formal language policy can become de facto language practice. From this perspective, a curriculum or textbook is not itself the final outcome of policy. Its effect depends on how it is interpreted and used. The teacher is therefore not a passive implementer. Teachers may follow, reinterpret, adapt or compensate for policy prescriptions depending on their professional knowledge, available resources and perceptions of learners' needs.

The role of textbooks is equally significant. Richards (2001) treats textbooks as a major component of language programs because they provide structured content, sequencing, activities and linguistic input. In a centrally coordinated reform, textbooks can also function as a practical mechanism for translating national curricular standards into classroom routines. However, the original study demonstrates that textbook effectiveness is conditional: a material may be well designed in relation to CEFR expectations but poorly matched to a cohort whose previous learning history does not correspond to those expectations.

Accordingly, this article uses a relational model: policy design → teacher/material provision → teacher mediation → classroom use → learner experience. Within this model, teachers and textbooks are not independent variables. They form a mediating pair through which policy is interpreted and enacted.

3. Methodology

The article revisits the empirical data from the author's Master's dissertation. The original study used a mixed-method design. Data were collected in February and March 2020. The quantitative component consisted of an online questionnaire completed by 150 students, while the qualitative component consisted of 20 semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire was designed in Uzbek, Russian and English and distributed among students in grades 9–11 in Khorezm region and Tashkent city. Participants were predominantly 15–20 years old; 54.4% were male and 45.6% female. Ninety-two percent reported Uzbek as their mother tongue, and 92% reported studying English and Russian as foreign languages at school. The questionnaire focused on attitudes toward foreign-language education and perceived problems in the existing system.

The 20 interviews included five parents, one 11th-grade student, two school administrators and twelve language teachers working with Uzbek, Russian and English. Nineteen interviews were conducted in Uzbek and one in English; interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audio-recorded. Real names were replaced with pseudonyms in the original research.

For the present article, the analysis is intentionally narrower than that of the dissertation. It concentrates on evidence concerning teacher qualification, teacher professional development, textbook design and textbook use. Quantitative findings are reported descriptively. Interview evidence is used to contextualize the questionnaire results and to identify mechanisms of policy enactment. The sample is not nationally representative, and the findings describe perceptions and practices in early 2020 rather than the current state of Uzbek education.

4. Policy Context: Teachers and Textbooks as Reform Instruments

The 2012 reform made teacher quality and learning materials explicit components of foreign-language education policy. According to the policy framework examined in the original study, foreign-language teachers could receive additional monthly allowances conditional on demonstrating B2-level proficiency under the relevant certification mechanism. The dissertation records the allowance as 30% in rural areas and 15% in urban areas. The underlying policy logic was that financial incentives would encourage teachers to improve their language proficiency and, consequently, the quality of foreign-language instruction.

The reform also required the redesign of foreign-language curricula and textbooks in accordance with CEFR principles. New materials were developed for the generation that entered school after the implementation of the reform. The dissertation's teachers generally viewed the new primary and lower-grade materials positively, describing them as more modern, connected to real life and oriented toward multiple language skills. However, the reform created a temporal problem because cohorts already in the school system continued to follow the previous trajectory.

This cohort dimension is essential. A textbook designed for learners who have studied English from the first grade cannot automatically be expected to work for students who began foreign-language education later and who have accumulated a different linguistic background. The original research therefore provides an opportunity to examine not only textbook quality but also the alignment between textbook level, learner trajectory and teacher capacity.

5. Findings

5.1 Teacher policy: evidence of improvement and continuing gaps

The empirical findings show a mixed picture of teacher policy. On the positive side, the financial incentive mechanism was perceived by several participants as contributing to greater teacher motivation and language proficiency. A parent interviewed in March 2020 compared two

children studying in different cohorts and attributed the younger child's stronger English to the broader reform, including improved teacher qualification and redesigned textbooks. The dissertation also notes a growing interest among teachers in obtaining CEFR certification, citing Musoeva (2019) as supporting evidence.

However, the quantitative data indicate that improvement was not uniform. Only 43% of questionnaire respondents agreed with the statement that their school English teacher had good knowledge in the relevant teaching areas; 40% selected a neutral response and 17% disagreed. In a separate open-ended question, approximately 40% of students identified poorly qualified teachers as a problem in the foreign-language education system. Thus, the policy produced signs of improvement while leaving a substantial group of learners unconvinced about teacher quality.

This result is important because it distinguishes policy provision from policy effect. The existence of a financial incentive does not itself establish effective teaching. A certificate or proficiency threshold may strengthen teachers' linguistic resources, but classroom effectiveness also depends on pedagogical knowledge, curriculum interpretation, classroom management and the ability to work with particular materials and learner levels.

The interviews reinforce this interpretation. Teachers emphasized that new textbooks could not demonstrate their full potential if teachers lacked sufficient English proficiency or professional development. In this sense, teachers were described not merely as beneficiaries of reform but as policy enactors: they determined whether prescribed materials became usable classroom resources. The teacher therefore represents a critical link between formal policy and educational practice.

5.2 Textbooks as material mediators of policy

Textbook reform was one of the most visible achievements identified in the original study. Teachers generally evaluated the redesigned textbooks for younger cohorts positively. They described them as more interesting, modern and connected to learners' everyday lives. One teacher noted that some tasks involved smartphones and other devices, which students found engaging. Another emphasized that the new books supported the development of four language skills simultaneously.

At the same time, the findings reveal a major problem in upper-secondary education. The dissertation reports that more than half of the interviewed English teachers and over a quarter of student respondents identified upper-secondary textbooks as problematic. The problem had two different forms. Materials for grades 8–9 were described as outdated because those cohorts remained within the previous system, while materials for grades 10–11, although redesigned and more closely connected to CEFR standards, were considered too demanding for students who had not studied English continuously from the first grade.

The distinction between material quality and material appropriateness is central. Teachers did not necessarily regard the redesigned books themselves as poor. Rather, they argued that the books were inappropriate for particular cohorts. This means that textbook policy cannot be evaluated solely by asking whether new materials have been produced or whether the materials reflect an international framework. Their effectiveness also depends on the starting level of learners and the continuity of the curriculum.

The problem was intensified by examination pressures. Approximately 30% of questionnaire respondents identified textbook difficulty or irrelevance as a problem, and interviewed teachers reported that upper-secondary students often regarded school textbooks as insufficiently useful for university entrance preparation. As a consequence, teachers frequently turned to alternative or supplementary materials. This practice illustrates policy mediation: teachers modified the material pathway when the prescribed textbook did not correspond to learners' perceived goals or levels.

5.3 Teachers adapting textbooks: policy enactment in practice

The most significant contribution of the findings is the way they connect teacher quality and textbook use. Teachers were not simply implementing a fixed textbook. They were interpreting the

material in relation to learner ability, examination requirements and their own professional knowledge. When the prescribed material was considered too difficult or insufficiently relevant, teachers reported using another textbook or supplementary resources. Such adaptation is evidence that classroom policy is negotiated rather than mechanically transmitted.

The dissertation records one teacher's observation that the full effectiveness of a textbook depends on whether the teacher can use it appropriately. This observation is consistent with the wider policy-enactment perspective: the textbook embodies a curriculum, but the teacher determines how that curriculum becomes a sequence of classroom activities. Consequently, teacher professional capacity is part of the material's effectiveness rather than an external factor added afterward.

This relationship also explains why the same reform can produce different experiences across cohorts. Younger learners who entered school under the new program were exposed to earlier foreign-language instruction, redesigned materials and teachers adapting to the new framework. Older learners inherited a mixture of previous curriculum, older materials and new expectations. Teachers working with these students therefore had to compensate for structural discontinuity.

The findings suggest that textbook adaptation should not automatically be interpreted as policy failure. In some cases, teacher adaptation is a necessary form of responsive pedagogy. However, if adaptation becomes systematic because official materials are consistently misaligned with learners' levels or assessment demands, it becomes evidence of a policy-coherence problem. The distinction is therefore between productive professional adaptation and chronic compensation for systemic mismatch.

5.4 The interaction between teacher quality and textbook quality

The evidence supports a reciprocal relationship between teacher and textbook quality. On the one hand, teachers with stronger linguistic and pedagogical competence are better positioned to exploit the communicative, skills-based and CEFR-oriented features of redesigned materials. On the other hand, teachers cannot fully compensate for materials that are consistently inappropriate for learners' levels or educational objectives.

This interaction is visible in the contrast between the reform generation and upper-secondary cohorts. For students who entered school after 2012, the new curriculum and textbooks were broadly perceived as appropriate and beneficial. For older cohorts, teachers described greater difficulty. They had to simplify texts, choose other materials or orient classroom work toward examination requirements. Thus, the teacher's workload and the effectiveness of the textbook were both shaped by the degree of curricular continuity experienced by the learner.

The data also help explain why positive overall evaluations can coexist with serious local problems. The wider questionnaire showed that 80% of students rated the quality of school foreign-language teaching as excellent or good, while only 43% agreed that their teacher had good knowledge in the relevant teaching areas. These figures should not be treated as contradictory. They suggest that learners can recognize broad improvement in the system while simultaneously experiencing specific weaknesses in teacher expertise or materials.

From a policy perspective, the implication is that teacher development and textbook development should be planned as a single implementation system. Teacher training that introduces a new curriculum without intensive work on materials may leave teachers uncertain about enactment. Conversely, distributing new textbooks without sufficient professional development may result in superficial or selective use.

5.5 Private courses as an indirect indicator of school-based mediation

An additional finding helps situate teacher and textbook problems within the wider educational environment. Seventy-three percent of questionnaire respondents reported attending extra-curricular foreign-language courses, compared with 27% who did not. The dissertation

interprets this pattern in relation to the widespread perception that school-based English instruction alone is insufficient for high-stakes university entrance preparation.

Private tutoring should not be treated as direct proof that school teachers or textbooks are ineffective in every case. However, in the original study it functioned as an important indicator of learners' response to the perceived limits of school-based provision. When students and parents believe that additional courses are necessary, teachers and textbooks inside the school system face a competing set of expectations: they must satisfy the formal curriculum while students simultaneously seek examination-oriented language preparation elsewhere.

This finding further demonstrates the mediating role of teachers. Where school materials were considered insufficient for examination preparation, teachers could either adapt classroom content or accept that students would obtain the missing preparation outside school. The result is a fragmented learning pathway in which the official curriculum, textbook and private education sector jointly shape foreign-language learning.

6. Discussion

The findings support a view of teachers and textbooks as complementary mediators of language education policy. The Uzbek reform package successfully introduced visible changes in both domains: teacher incentives sought to raise proficiency, while curriculum and textbook reforms sought to operationalize CEFR-oriented standards. Participants recognized these changes, particularly for younger cohorts. Yet the data also demonstrate that formal reform does not guarantee uniform implementation.

First, teacher policy appears to have produced gradual improvement but not complete standardization of teacher quality. The 43% agreement rate on teacher knowledge and the approximately 40% identification of poorly qualified teachers as a problem indicate that a significant implementation gap remained in 2020. The evidence therefore supports a gradual-improvement interpretation rather than a simple success/failure judgment.

Second, textbook reform demonstrates the importance of temporal alignment. A reform implemented at the beginning of schooling creates a new learner trajectory, but students already in the system cannot immediately be transformed into members of that trajectory. Consequently, new textbooks may be perfectly aligned with the intended curriculum while remaining inappropriate for transitional cohorts. Policy design needs bridging arrangements when old and new curricula coexist.

Third, the study shows that teachers exercise agency. They select supplementary books, simplify or replace materials and respond to examination demands. This is not merely an implementation detail; it is a core part of how language policy becomes classroom practice. The official textbook may represent the intended curriculum, but the enacted curriculum is partly constructed through teacher decisions.

Finally, the findings indicate that policy coherence matters more than isolated interventions. Teacher incentives, textbook reform, CEFR standards and assessment mechanisms were introduced as parts of a broader reform agenda. Their effects were strongest when they reinforced one another. Where they were poorly aligned with learner trajectories or examination realities, teachers had to compensate. The key lesson is therefore not simply to improve teachers or rewrite textbooks, but to coordinate teacher policy, materials policy, curriculum progression and assessment.

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

1. Link textbook design to cohort trajectories. When a curriculum is reformed from an early grade, transitional cohorts require bridging materials and differentiated pathways. New materials should be piloted against actual learner proficiency rather than assumed to be appropriate because they follow an international framework.

2. Treat teacher certification as a starting point, not an endpoint. Financial incentives can motivate language-proficiency development, but continuing professional development should also address methodology, textbook use, assessment literacy and adaptation of materials to mixed-level classrooms.

3. Build teacher feedback into textbook policy. Teachers are the professionals who observe whether tasks are usable, whether texts match learner levels and whether materials support assessment demands. Systematic feedback mechanisms can make textbook revision more responsive.

4. Distinguish productive adaptation from systemic compensation. Teachers should have professional freedom to adapt materials, but widespread reliance on alternative textbooks should trigger curriculum and textbook review rather than being treated as a normal permanent solution.

5. Align school materials with assessment. The dissertation data show that examination preparation strongly influenced student and teacher perceptions of textbook usefulness. Curriculum materials should therefore be evaluated partly in relation to the skills and proficiency levels required by consequential assessments.

6. Evaluate teacher and textbook reforms together. Monitoring should not ask only how many teachers have certificates or how many textbooks have been distributed. It should also examine how teachers use the materials, what adaptations they make and how students experience the resulting instruction.

8. Limitations

The study has several limitations. The questionnaire was distributed online and relied on social networks and personal contacts; respondents were concentrated in Khorezm region and Tashkent city. The qualitative sample was purposive and relatively small. The quantitative analysis was descriptive rather than inferential. In addition, all empirical data were collected in February–March 2020. The findings therefore should not be presented as a current national evaluation of Uzbekistan's education system in 2026. The article is best understood as a focused empirical case study of teacher and textbook mediation during a particular stage of the reform trajectory.

9. Conclusion

The evidence from the 2020 study shows that teachers and textbooks occupy a central position between foreign-language education policy and classroom reality in Uzbekistan. The post-2012 reform trajectory generated important changes in teacher incentives, curriculum orientation and textbook provision. Participants generally perceived the new materials and younger reform cohorts positively, and there were signs of gradual improvement in teacher proficiency.

At the same time, implementation remained uneven. Teacher qualification was still a concern for a substantial proportion of students, while upper-secondary textbooks were frequently reported as outdated, too difficult or insufficiently relevant to learners' educational trajectories and examination goals. Teachers responded by adapting or replacing materials, demonstrating their role as active policy enactors.

The central conclusion is therefore relational: teacher quality and textbook quality cannot be evaluated independently. The effectiveness of a textbook depends partly on the teacher who mediates it, while the effectiveness of teacher development depends partly on the curriculum and materials through which new knowledge is enacted. For language education policy to move successfully from formal design to classroom practice, these elements must be developed as a coherent system.

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10. Author's Note
11. This manuscript is a substantially restructured article based on the author's Master's dissertation, Foreign and National Language Policy in Secondary Education in Uzbekistan, HSE University, Moscow (2020). The empirical findings reported here come from the original study and were collected in February–March 2020. The article intentionally does not present these data as evidence of the current 2026 situation. Before journal submission, the reference details for sources inherited from the dissertation should be verified and the literature review should be updated with post-2020 scholarship.