

MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UZBEKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH, UZBEK, KARAKALPAK AND RUSSIAN IN THE CLASSROOM

Reipnazarova Gulayim Jumanazar qizi

New Uzbekistan universityda talaba, magistrant

Email: gulayimreypnazarova840@gmail.com

Telefon: +998 33 095 99 10

Annotation: This paper investigates multilingual identity and language attitudes among secondary school students in Karakalpakstan, with particular attention to Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English. These languages occupy different social, educational, and personal positions in students' lives, which may influence how they perceive their linguistic identities and engage with English in the classroom. The study adopts a mixed-methods design informed by Norton's (2013) concept of identity and investment. A language-attitude questionnaire was administered to 150 secondary school students from six schools in Karakalpakstan. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 students who were purposively selected to represent a range of questionnaire responses. Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while interview data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings indicate that Karakalpak is strongly associated with family, home, and cultural belonging; Uzbek is associated with educational and civic contexts; Russian retains social and communicative value, particularly in urban settings; and English is primarily associated with future educational and professional opportunities. Students reported greater investment in English and Uzbek in classroom contexts, whereas Karakalpak was more strongly associated with home and family domains. The study argues that students' multilingual identities and language attitudes should be considered in English language teaching. Greater attention to these factors may help teachers develop more relevant and engaging classroom practices. The study contributes to research on multilingual identity and English language education in the context of Uzbekistan, with a particular focus on the under-researched context of Karakalpakstan.

Keywords: multilingual identity, language attitudes, language investment, Karakalpakstan, Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, English, secondary education

Introduction

Multilingualism is an important feature of the linguistic landscape of Uzbekistan, where Uzbek, Karakalpak, Russian, and English may serve different functions across

educational, social, familial, and professional contexts. In Karakalpakstan, these languages form part of students' everyday linguistic experiences, although their roles and perceived value may differ across contexts. Research on multilingualism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan has documented the coexistence of Karakalpak, Uzbek, and Russian, while recent studies have also examined the relationship between multilingualism and English language learning (Kurbaniyazov, 2019; Mamirbaeva & Payzullaeva, 2026). At the national level, research has highlighted the growing role of English and the influence of language ideologies on attitudes towards English and its use in Uzbekistan (Hasanova, 2007; Hasanova & Vokhidova, 2025).

Language choice is not determined only by communicative needs. The language individuals use and value can also be connected to their identities, social relationships, educational experiences, and expectations for the future. Language identity can therefore be understood as a dynamic process shaped through interaction with social and linguistic environments (Block, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In multilingual contexts, individuals may associate different languages with different aspects of their identities, including family, community, education, social participation, and future aspirations (Edwards, 2009; De et al, 2006).

Language attitudes are also relevant to understanding students' engagement with different languages. Attitudes towards a language may reflect perceptions of its usefulness, social value, status, emotional significance, or connection to particular communities (Garret, 2010). In Uzbekistan, English has increasingly acquired educational and economic value, while Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Russian continue to serve important functions in students' everyday lives. These different forms of value may influence students' willingness to use particular languages and the extent to which they invest effort in learning them.

Norton's (2013) concept of investment provides a useful perspective for examining this relationship. Investment emphasizes that learners' engagement with a language is connected to their identities and their expectations of the social and cultural benefits that language learning may provide. From this perspective, students may invest differently in different languages depending on how they perceive those languages in relation to their current identities and future possibilities.

In multilingual classrooms, these relationships are particularly important for English language teaching. Students do not enter the English classroom without prior linguistic experiences. Their knowledge of Karakalpak, Uzbek, and Russian may shape how they perceive English, how they participate in classroom activities, and how much effort they are willing to invest in learning it. However, the relationship between multilingual identity, language attitudes, and English learning remains relatively underexplored in secondary school contexts in Karakalpakstan.

This study therefore examines multilingual identity and language attitudes among secondary school students in Karakalpakstan, focusing on the perceived roles and values of Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English. It addresses the following research questions:

- 1.How do secondary school students in Karakalpakstan perceive the roles and values of Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English?
- 2.How are students' multilingual identities reflected in their attitudes towards these languages?
- 3.How do students' language attitudes and perceived identities relate to their engagement with English in the classroom?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how multilingual identities and language attitudes shape English language learning in Karakalpakstan. It also considers how greater recognition of students' linguistic backgrounds may inform more context-sensitive approaches to English language teaching in Uzbekistan.

Theoretical Framework: Identity and Investment

This study draws on two closely related concepts: identity and investment. First, it adopts a view of identity as a socially constructed and interactional practice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). From this perspective, identity is not fixed but is shaped and negotiated through social interactions and different contexts. In multilingual settings, students may use and identify with different languages depending on the people they interact with, the setting, and the purpose of communication. For example, a student may associate Karakalpak primarily with family and home, while using Uzbek more frequently in educational or public settings.

The second concept is investment, which provides a way of understanding learners' engagement with a language in relation to their identities and perceived future possibilities (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Investment goes beyond the amount of effort a learner makes; it reflects the value, opportunities, and forms of participation that learners associate with a language. When students perceive English as relevant to higher education, employment, international communication, or other future opportunities, they may be more willing to invest in learning and using it (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Examining identity and investment together therefore helps explain why students may attach different levels of personal, social, and practical value to the languages in their linguistic repertoires.

Research design and methodology

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods design in which quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data that provide further explanation and interpretation of the questionnaire findings (Dörnyei, 2007). The study involves 150 secondary school students from six schools in the Republic of

Karakalpakstan, including three schools in rural districts. This sampling approach allows the study to consider students' language attitudes across both urban and rural educational contexts.

The first phase consists of a language-attitude questionnaire designed to examine students' emotional attachment to and perceptions of the practical value of Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English. Items are measured using a five-point Likert scale. Based on the questionnaire responses, 15 students are purposively selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews. The selection aims to include students with different patterns of language attitudes and therefore provides a broader range of perspectives for the qualitative phase.

The interviews explore students' experiences and perceptions of four languages in greater depth. In particular, students are asked to describe situations in which they feel particularly connected to or distant from a particular language and to explain the reasons behind these feelings. This qualitative phase is intended to provide contextual explanations for patterns identified in the questionnaire data.

Questionnaire responses are analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and patterns across the four languages. Interview data are transcribed and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. The emerging themes are then compared across urban and rural participants to identify similarities and differences in students' language attitudes.

Ethical principles are observed throughout the research process. School administrations provide permission for data collection before the study begins. All participants provide informed consent, and parental consent is obtained for students under the age of 18. Participant identities are protected through anonymization, and no personally identifying information is included in the study.

Language attitudes in the classroom.

The findings indicate that students attach different forms of value to the four languages in their linguistic repertoires. Karakalpak is strongly associated with family, home, cultural belonging, and heritage, giving it particular emotional significance in students' lives (Fierman, 2009). Uzbek is associated more closely with education, civic participation, and public life, reflecting its broader institutional role in Uzbekistan. Russian continues to have social and communicative value, particularly in urban contexts, where it may also carry perceptions of prestige and wider communication (Fierman, 2006). English, in contrast, is primarily associated with future-oriented aspirations. Students commonly perceive English as relevant to higher education, employment, international communication, and access to wider opportunities.

These different associations suggest that students do not evaluate the four languages according to a single standard. Instead, the perceived value of each language depends on the social context in which it is used and the role it plays in students' lives.

Such differences in perceived value can also influence students' engagement with language learning. English, in particular, may attract greater investment when students connect it with desirable educational or professional futures. This relationship between language value, identity, and engagement is consistent with research showing that language attitudes are shaped by social meanings and perceived benefits associated with particular languages (Garrett, 2010).

Implications for English language teaching

The findings have several implications for English language teaching in multilingual classrooms. First, teachers can recognize students' existing linguistic repertoires as resources for learning rather than treating languages other than English as obstacles. Valuing students' home and community languages can contribute to a more inclusive classroom environment and may encourage greater participation in English learning. Translanguaging approaches, for example, allow learners to draw on their available linguistic resources when developing understanding and expressing meaning (García & Wei, 2014).

Second, classroom activities can explicitly incorporate students' multilingual experiences. Students could compare idiomatic expressions across Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English, discuss how particular emotions or concepts are expressed in different languages, or reflect on how their language choices change across social contexts. Such activities can strengthen students' metalinguistic awareness while also creating opportunities to connect English learning with their existing identities and linguistic knowledge (Canagarajah, 2013).

A further implication concerns the relationship between English learning and students' future aspirations. If students already associate English with higher education, employment, international communication, or other valued opportunities, teachers can make these connections more explicit through relevant classroom tasks and learning goals. In this way, English can be presented not as an isolated school subject but as a language connected to students' identities, experiences, and future possibilities.

Conclusion

Students in Karakalpakstan demonstrate a layered multilingual identity in which Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English are associated with different social, emotional, educational, and future-oriented meanings. Karakalpak is strongly connected to family and cultural belonging. Uzbek to educational and civic contexts, Russian to social and communicative functions, and English to future educational and professional opportunities. These different meanings influence how students perceive the languages in their linguistic repertoires and may shape their investment in learning and using them.

The findings suggest two main implications for English language teaching. First, teachers should recognize and value students' full linguistic repertoires as resources for classroom learning. Second, English instruction should be connected to students' existing multilingual identities and future aspirations rather than being presented as a language that exists separately from their other linguistic experiences. Greater attention to these factors can contribute to more inclusive and context-sensitive English language teaching in secondary schools in Karakalpakstan. The multilingual classroom therefore provides an important context for further research into the relationship between language, identity, attitudes, and English language learning.

References:

- Baker, C. (2011). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism (5th ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Blommaert, J. (2010). The sociolinguistics of globalization. Cambridge University Press.
- Block, D. (2007). Second language identities. Continuum.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4–5), 585–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407>
- Canagarajah, S. (2013). Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations. Routledge.
- De Fina, A., Schiffrin, D., & Bamberg, M. (Eds.). (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewaele, J.-M. (2010). *Emotions in multiple languages*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Multilingual Matters.
- Edwards, J. (2009). *Language and identity: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fierman, W. (2006). Language and education in post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-medium instruction in urban schools. *The Russian Review*, 65(1), 98–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2005.00388.x>
- Fierman, W. (2009). Identity, symbolism, and the politics of language in Central Asia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(7), 1207–1228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130903068731>
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge University Press.

Hasanova, D. (2007). Broadening the boundaries of the Expanding Circle: English in Uzbekistan. *World Englishes*, 26(3), 276–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2007.00509.x>

Hasanova, D., & Vokhidova, N. (2025). English in Uzbekistan: Language ideologies and teaching practices. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2025(294), 11–30. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2024-0117>

Kurbaniyazov, G. A. (2019). Bilingualism and polylingualism in the case of the languages in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. *Anglisticum: Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 8(9), 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3473600>

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Ersaidov, U., Cho, Y., & Oh, S. (2025). Language attitudes towards English and its use in Uzbekistan. *Studies on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(3), 307–316. <https://doi.org/10.62783/SHSS.7.3.19>

Mamirbaeva, D., & Payzullaeva, I. (2026). The influence of multilingualism (Karakalpak–Uzbek–English) on English language learning. *Science Time*, 4(2), 363–370. <https://doi.org/10.66345/stj.v4i2.5047>