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COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE (CEFR) IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF UZBEKISTAN

This article presents the growing influence of the CEFR to the educational system of Uzbekistan.

Within six months two decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan were promulgated. Both of them concern the issue of improving teaching foreign languages in the country. The analysis of the current system of teaching foreign languages showed that State educational standards, curricula, teaching materials, methodology, advanced information and media technology, in-service teacher training, do not meet the modern international requirements. The mentioned Decrees of the President criticise the teaching of foreign languages under unfavorable conditions and, as a result, university graduates are not always competent enough in using the foreign language in everyday life. There are many reasons for this: partly, it is because of insufficient time allocated for language instructions; mixed-ability classes as a result, teachers often have a hard time providing the appropriate level of instructions in such classes and some others. All these caused the fundamental changes in teaching foreign languages in the country. It is important to point out that from the current academic year foreign languages are taught starting in the first grade at schools. So far foreign languages were taught from the fifth grade. Now one can see what changes are going to be done in the country's educational institutions. The State Education Standards will have to be reconsidered, actually new syllabuses and curricula, course-books will have to be developed, approved formally by government organizations and published. The

general foreign language (I mean basic and general English, German, and French and so on) is planned to finish at school and starting from lyceums and colleges including Universities foreign languages for special purposes will be taught. One more positive thing is the implementation of CEFR in teaching foreign languages. Now it is officially established that the requirements of A-1 and A-2 will be met by the end of the ninth grade at school, B-1-within three years in academic lyceums and professional colleges, B-2- at non-philological Universities and C-1 at special philological Universities where teachers of foreign languages are trained.

The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching and Assessments (CEFR) were accepted by the Council of Europe in 2001.

It is well-known that CEFR is intended to provide a basis for the development of syllabuses, curricula, textbooks and tests. The impact of this document has been very deep in a range of areas in language teaching and testing. Actually all the aspects connected with foreign language teaching are covered by CEFR. Since the Uzbekistan State World Languages University was defined by the mentioned decrees as the basic higher educational institution in the field of teaching foreign languages in the country we had to organize several workshops and video-conferences for the teachers of foreign languages on this system.

The familiarization stage at ensuring that all the specialists of foreign languages had a deep understanding of the Common European Framework of Reference took about four- five months.

It is well-known that the system of education is different in the countries. The countries are characterized by their diversity of education systems, socio-cultural traditions, languages, aspirations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality assurance impossible. In our country there are two ministries of education: one is the Ministry of Public Education (for schools) and the second- the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education, i.e. the Ministry of lyceum and colleges and for the universities. So far there was not a single organization to provide succession and continuity in teaching foreign languages. Taking this situation into account the decree has foreseen setting up “National Research Centre for the Development of Innovative

Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages” at our university. There are such departments there as:

1. Department of Innovative Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages;
2. Department of the Organization of Distant Learning and Materials Design for this Purpose;
3. Department to Develop State Educational Standards, Syllabuses and Curricula;
4. Department to Develop New Generation of Books and Other Materials for Foreign Languages Teaching;
5. Department of Implementation of “Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching and Assessment”.
6. Department of In-Service Teacher Training and Upgrading Courses for Translators/Interpreters;
7. Department of Quality Assurance, Knowledge Assessment and Testing;
8. Department of Teaching Foreign Languages in Academic lyceums and professional colleges and some others.

As you see it is this new Centre which will implement the requirements of CEFR. Now we pay special attention to quality assurance exploiting “can do” statements of Common European Framework of Reference.

The objective of using “I can do” statement in teaching foreign languages connected with development of students’ confidence in their ability to achieve the communicative competence. It is well-known that development of learners’ confidence should be a priority for trainers of schools, lyceum and colleges as well as for teachers. Why CEFR suggests “I can do” statements?

According to F.MacDuff and others this statement serve to motivate the students in:

- (a) providing students with an opportunity to recognize their own accomplishments;
- (b) encouraging students to take initiative in their learning, particularly when they are able to formulate their own “I can do” statements;

(c) providing students with a visual means of proudly sharing their progress with others;

(d) being applicable for students of all ages and all levels of language proficiency from primary through college;

(e) being possible as a systematic means of rallying one's own progress;

(f) can be a means by which students gauge their own perceived level of language proficiency.¹

Quality assurance in education is the concern of all the educational Institutions in the world. If we want to achieve our aspiration to be one of the most dynamic countries in improving teaching foreign languages we shall need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its teaching system, state standards, curricula, course books, teaching staff seriously and to put into place other means of assuring and demonstrating that quality.

The reason is obvious. We cannot but agree with the opinions of many leading specialists when they say that learners want to know how they are progressing, and want some formal feedback. Parents want to know that their children are receiving effective instructions, stakeholders and other government organizations want to know that teachers are not wasting precious resources by self-indulgence or laziness. Another very important point here is: teachers and teacher educators will look for the best available information on successful teaching styles, procedures and curriculum organization.

These demands pose special problems for a number of subject areas, and particularly for those where success is not easily defined. We'll have to do our best to stay away from the subjective assessment. Most often this type of assessment unavoidably brings to the personal characteristics of the learner.

To provide an objective assessment of knowledge there's an urgent need to work out special national published criteria, regulations and procedures which are professionally carried out and which must be applied consistently.

¹ F.MacDuff, Kh. AlHayki, and C.Linse. Using Progressive I. Can Statements to Promote Learner Confidence in Writing. English Teaching Forum. Volume 48. Number 4.2010.

All the above-mentioned departments of the Innovation Centre will do their best to keep strictly to the requirements of CEFR in creating the national system of knowledge assessment. Relating syllabuses, curricula, teaching materials, course-books, teaching methodology, assessment, to the CEFR is beneficial not only to students but to the teachers as well, because this will serve to the objective evaluation of the teaching situation in the country and the qualification of the teaching staff.

It is very difficult to overestimate the implementation of the European standard to the educational system of our country because now it is CEFR that will serve as an official foreign language knowledge measurement in defining not only achievement or progress indicator of a student, classroom or some institution but as an indicator of the work of schools, lyceum, colleges and higher educational Institutions CEFR has become an instrument of assessment to help the stakeholders to judge the degree of success of above- mentioned educational Institutions in achieving their obligations (I mean A-1 and A-2 for schools, B-1 for secondary special, professional education and so on) and to identify their shortcomings and weaknesses.

The main goal of the both Presidential Decrees is to reach communicative competence which means that we shall have to teach foreign languages not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to develop students' ability, when and where to use these sentences and to whom. The aim is evident: a graduate student must be competent in

- a) using grammar and vocabulary;
- b) knowing rules of speaking, i.e. how to begin and end conversations, what topics may be talked about in different types of speech events, which address forms should be used with different persons one speaks to and in different situations;
- c) knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts, such as requests, apologies, thanks, and invitations.

This means that there's still necessity to reconsider our curriculum and syllabuses taking into account everything mentioned though some changes have already been done.

There's another issue I'd like to draw your attention to. It is multimedia technology that we shall have to develop urgently.

Multimedia technology is one of the most important alternatives to take advantage of. It is well-known that implementation of modern technology will not replace the teacher, course books but it is sure to develop the mastery of reading, listening, speaking and maybe even writing skills as well. It is a challenge for educational Institutions to implement modern multimedia technology. The Decrees foresee the allocation of necessary financial support to provide the schools, lyceums, colleges and universities with the necessary modern equipments. If we want to increase the motivation of students, to support students' self monitoring and self assessments of their knowledge we'll have to expedite the implementation of multimedia technology as well which will undoubtedly serve to improve considerably the qualification of trainers and students.

One of the most important advantages of integrating this technology is an overall lack of native foreign language speakers for students to interact with. The integration of multimedia technology will give an excellent opportunity to experience' real-life language situations and meaningful communicative contexts which will expose students and trainers to authentic language in natural situations.

Another very important contribution of using multimedia in teaching foreign languages is an opportunity for students to self-evaluation of their knowledge and thus monitors constantly their progress. One of the requirements of implementation of CEFR as has been mentioned above is quality assurance and knowledge assessment.

Since it is so we'll have to encourage our specialists together with the representatives of foreign countries who come to our country to render assistance in improving both pre-service and in-service teacher training and expediting the development of students' knowledge assessment system and integrate it into the educational institutions of the country.