



## Problems and Solutions in Testing Future Teachers' Knowledge in the National System of Foreign Language Proficiency

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### **Abstract**

This article is devoted to the analysis of the test National System of Assessment of Foreign Language Proficiency, taking into consideration its importance on future foreign language teachers. It also concentrates on the requirements for foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan and the exercises which are essential for the professional development of prospective teachers. Apart from that, it shows the module "Types and criteria for assessing language skills". Last, it covers suggestions on how to improve the students' knowledge and skills.

**Keywords:** *National System of Assessment of Foreign Language Proficiency; State Education Standards; Non-professional Competence Exercise; Conditional Professional Competence Exercises; Discourse Completion Task*

### **Introduction**

In recent years, because of reforms in education, in particular, the adoption of regulations and other by-laws to improve the activities of the State Testing Center under the Cabinet of Ministers, more attention is paid to testing the knowledge of teachers and students and improving the quality of foreign language teaching. This led to the development of the National System of Assessment of Foreign Language Proficiency (NSAFLP) by the State Testing Center in two different forms based on the CEFR document. Both forms of testing are based on the order of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated October 10, 2013, 01-339 "On the procedure for testing to determine the monthly increase in the basic salary of foreign language teachers" and December 31, 2013, on the procedure for issuing a qualification certificate".

### **Main part**

To ensure the quality of foreign language teaching at all stages of the system of continuing education and to provide benefits and incentives to students and teachers, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 11, 2017 No 610 "On measures to further improve the quality of teaching foreign languages in educational institutions" came into force. According to this, starting from the 2017-2018 academic year, a system for developing and implementing a mechanism for assessing the level of foreign language acquisition at all stages of the system of continuing education based on the skills "Listening", "Reading", "Writing", "Speaking" set in motion.

We know that from now on not only teachers but also students are required to pass the test "National Assessment System of Foreign Languages" and be exempted from the subject of foreign languages in the entrance exams organized by the higher education institution. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated May 13, 2019 No 395 "On measures to implement the certificates of national and international assessment systems in admission to higher education" and various benefits for entrants. According to this, IELTS, TOEFL IBT, FCE in English, JLPT in Japanese, DSD in German, DAF, DELF in French, TCF and other languages with B2 level national certificates without exams will be given maximum scores.

The above National System of Assessment of Foreign Language Proficiency (NSAFLP) test has two forms: setting a monthly increase in the basic salaries of teachers ". In both, the lexical competencies considered in the CEFR program are assessed, including "Listening Comprehension", "Reading", "Writing", "Lexical Competences" and "Speaking". The level of time, demand and complexity of the tests will vary depending on the level chosen by the applicant. Kamil Jalilov's book "Exam skills for teachers and learners of English" describes the "Test specifications" of both tests. The maximum score for each section of the test is 30 points and the maximum score for all sections is 150 points. Teachers who score at least 60 per cent of the set maximum score are considered to have passed the test.

Therefore, because of the above legislation and reforms, there are currently requirements for foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan, which can be seen in the table below (see Table 1):

**Table 1**  
**Requirements for foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan:**

<b>Positions</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Foreign language teachers working in primary schools	Availability of a bachelor's degree or higher and a CEFR B2 qualification certificate
Foreign language teachers working in secondary schools	Availability of a bachelor's degree or higher and a CEFR B2 qualification certificate
Foreign language teachers working in higher education	Presence of a master's degree or higher and a CEFR C1 level qualification certificate
Foreign language teachers working in international or private schools and language centres	For students of different levels and depending on the location (urban, suburban) usually IELTS * 6.0 and above and the availability of a qualification certificate

The requirements listed above are currently being used in the selection of foreign language teachers in educational institutions across the country. 4th-year students and masters who are prospective teachers must have a CEFR B2 or C1 qualification certificate besides their diploma upon graduation. The reason we address these requirements is that we need to train future teachers as mature personnel who meet international standards.

We, in our analysis of the second chapter of our dissertation, in our initial questionnaires, in our interviews with teachers, after reviewing the curriculum, syllabus, and working programs, have certainly concluded that the results are not bad. However, as mentioned, the number of hours devoted to studying the CEFR program and developing the communicative competence envisaged in it is small and they do not improve the professional skills of future teachers. In addition, the analysis of the textbooks stated in the science program showed that there is only theoretical literature written by foreign authors on this subject, and there are no practical textbooks. We need to focus on teaching prospective teachers not only their linguistic knowledge but also the general and communicative competencies provided for in the CEFR program in enhancing their professional competence. We also need to focus not only on improving our knowledge, given that they are future teachers, but also on how to teach and evaluate communicative competence.

## Results and Discussions

Having studied all the above problems and ideas, we have created a textbook called "Integrated course of teaching foreign languages" about "Integrated course of foreign language teaching" for the 4th year. This manual can be used not only by students but also in advanced training institutions and independently.

The textbook is intended for teachers, students of 4th level and independent learners, it contains interactive tasks, exercises, tests and glossaries aimed at practical strengthening of theoretical knowledge in the subject, and the manual serves to develop students' communicative language competencies. The information in it not only develops students' listening, reading, writing and speaking skills, but also helps them to develop their linguistic knowledge and communicative competencies and to use the information and new methods mentioned in the manual as a future teacher.

As our research is directly related to the CEFR document, we researched the curricula of 4th-year undergraduate students in foreign language and literature who are future foreign language teachers, and the CEFR document course only covers the "Integrated Foreign Language Teaching Course" course, "Types and criteria for assessing language skills".

Below, we have made the following proposal based on the model curriculum (see Table 2):

**Table 2**  
**"Types and criteria for assessing language skills"**

<b>№</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Hour</b>	<b>Hours of ind study</b>
1.	Practical	Types of assessment	2	1
2.	Practical	The key principles of assessment	2	1
3.	Practical	Self-assessment and the CEFR	2	1
4.	Practical	Stages of test development	2	1
5.	Practical	Teaching and testing listening	2	1
6.	Practical	Teaching and testing reading	2	1
7.	Practical	Teaching and testing writing	2	1
8.	Practical	Teaching and testing speaking	2	1
9.	Practical	Teaching and testing grammar and vocabulary	2	1
10.	Practical	Teaching and testing pragmatic competence	2	1
11.	Practical	Teaching and testing sociolinguistic competence	2	1
12.	Practical	Alternative types of assessment	2	1
13.	Practical	The TKT and the NSAFLP test	2	1

The topics we propose are structured according to the topics given in the sample syllabus, in which we emphasize not only the assessment of skills but also their ways of teaching. An important aspect of the topics we propose is that they cover all components of communicative competence. We have developed a system of exercises in them aimed at developing this competence. The proposed system of

exercises will not only expand the knowledge of future teachers but also improve their skills of teaching and evaluating communicative competence.

We can also use the textbook to prepare future teachers for the now-required National Language Assessment System test. The reason is that we aim the exercises at developing the skills that are assessed in the test, such as "Listening", "Reading", "Writing", "Lexical competencies" and "Speaking". Therefore, prospective teachers develop both communicative and professional competencies through the textbook, as well as increase their knowledge of CEFR and are indirectly ready to receive a qualification certificate.

It followed the following principles in the development of teaching aids:

- Ensuring the principle of growing the system of exercises from simple to complex, which serves to develop students' communicative competencies;
- ensure the continuity of the topics covered in the work program and pay attention to authenticity and demonstration in the choice of material;
- application of a communicative approach based on modern pedagogical technologies in preparing exercises and assignments and the development of their worldview;
- Create exercises and assignments aimed at developing students' thinking skills and developing independent learning skills.

According to the State Education Standards of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to meet the requirements for the CEFR international language proficiency levels A1 to C1, first, the future teacher must have sufficient qualifications. They must first master general, communicative and professional competencies and know-how to put them into practice.

The exercises we offer aim at systematically developing these competencies and using authentic materials. Before analyzing them, we take a brief look at the typology of exercises and provide examples from the definitions given to them in studies conducted by scientists. Most researchers divide exercises into two or three types:

- ✓ Skill development (70-б) [9];
- ✓ Language and speech exercises [10];
- ✓ Preparatory and speaking exercises (687-689-б) [3];
- ✓ Forming, developing and improving exercises (14-б.) [4];
- ✓ Real-communicative and conditional communicative exercises (91-бет) [7].

In language education, scholars, researchers, and methodologists are involved in receptive and reproductive, aspect and complex exercises, learning and pure communicative exercises, preparation and control exercises; according to performance - oral and written, monolingual and bilingual, mechanical and creative, class and home exercises, solo, double, chorus exercises; based on the selected material - suggested classification as dialogic and monologue speech exercises [10].

Because of the study of exercises, we found that many types of exercises aimed at improving students' linguistic competencies. Since the purpose of our research is to form and develop the professional skills of future foreign language teachers through CEFR, methodological support on the subject "Integrated course of foreign language teaching" was created for 4th-year students. The purpose of education is to develop the professional competencies of future teachers. Therefore, the purpose of the exercises and tasks given to graduate students is to develop communicative competence and its effective use in practice. We were interested in the typology of exercises in the research of scientists, as the goal of our work was to create an exercise system to develop the professional skills of future teachers. As a result, we have witnessed that the existing typology of exercises to date aimed at developing students' language and speech skills in a foreign language. Then there was a need to create a system of exercises aimed at developing the professional competence of students.

We also focused on three types of exercises, mentioned by K. Muradkasimova as well. The first of which is non-professional competence exercises (preparatory), which aim at mastering the material used in professional activities. The next is conditional professional competence exercises (training professional competence), which includes simulation and modelling exercises. The third is the original professional competence exercise (natural professional competence), which includes exercises that develop professional competence [6]. Below we look at examples for each exercise system.

- ***Non-professional competence exercise (prep)*** - a type of exercise for the cognitive level of memory:

E.g. **Vocabulary. Match the words with an appropriate definition.**

- ***Conditional professional competence exercises*** - a type of exercise for the cognitive level of application (simulation and modelling exercises). In doing so, we turned to question-and-answer exercises as we explored the new topic. To do this, after being introduced to the topic, five to ten questions about the text were asked using the pair work technique. The reason is that through this type of exercise, students develop skills and the text is strengthened; During the application phase, skills are developed through discussion of the text, exchange of ideas (108 p.) [5]. This type of exercise is a conditional professional competence exercise, which serves to develop in students not only communicative competence but also analytical skills. E.g. **Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.**

**Activity 1. Speaking. Work in pairs and answer the following questions.**

- ***Original professional competency exercise*** is a type of exercise for the cognitive level of creation.

E.g. **Write an essay about the following question;**

**Make a quiz according to any topic; Read an article, etc.**

A system of exercises of the same type is repeated in each subject and is systematically complicated from easy to difficult, i.e., they are arranged in a sequence from knowledge to competence. While the first type of exercise does not form skills and competencies, it provides information remembering, explaining, comparing, and knowing. The second type of exercise helps to form skills and competencies and teaches processing, comparison, analysis, comparison, differentiation, and so on. As for the third type of exercise, they help develop professional competence, apply it and shape analytical, evaluative, and creative skills.

We not only used these three types of exercises but also used exercises that develop communicative competence and addressed authentic learning materials. In doing so, we included conditional communicative exercises, i.e., videos, and "materials that can be used both in the audience and in real-life (p. 53)"[2].

In selecting authentic video materials, we focused on the following, i.e., increasing students' interest in learning a foreign language; the relevance of the video material; selection of video material depending on the topic and purpose of the lesson; increasing students' vocabulary; develop listening skills; sound and appearance conditions meet the requirements; the relevance of the video product to the learning goals and objectives. In addition, we also consider the novelty and conciseness of information in the selection of authentic video materials; We also stressed the importance of the student's level of knowledge of a foreign language, as well as the vitality of the content of the video [11].

E.g. **Activity 2. Listening. Watch TED talks by Linda Darling-Hammond "Testing, testing" make notes on Cornell note-taking worksheet while watching.**

P. Omanov's view of authentic material is so important that it "creates the conditions for the presentation of authentic materials through video to hear and see linguistic and non-linguistic means, and equips students with skills essential for their future careers" (p. 56) [8].

In the CEFR international program, this competency is presented as audio-visual comprehension, which includes watching television, film or video, and in the revised CEFR, its comprehension levels (Pre-A1-C2) are given. It comprises: changing the topics presented in the video and finding the main idea; comprehension of details and understanding of meaning; and easy-to-understand comprehension (slang and phrases) (p. 52) [1].

We have also included topics such as the teaching and assessment of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies, a type of communicative competence listed in the CEFR, as a novelty in the textbook. In teaching them, we used original professional competence exercises. Examples include:

#### **Activity 5. DCT: Pragmatics Test: Apology and Request**

Please read each of the following situations and decide which one is the BEST in each situation.

Situation 1. Suppose you are late for an important meeting with your dean and he is a very strict person. How would you express your apology in this situation? The Dean: This is the third time you're late for the meeting. Next time I won't let you in. You.....

- a. Sorry for this, it won't happen again.
- b. I was late because of a traffic jam, I am so sorry.
- c. Sometimes in life such situations are normal as we are people.

#### **Activity 5. DCT: Apologies, requests, sympathy, condolences, and refusals.**

Please read the following situations and write about what would you say in an actual situation.

Situation 1. You want to go to the wedding party and you have to ask permission from your father to go there as it is your best friend's party ...

Situation 2. Your neighbour's old grandmother died and you want to say your condolences to her. What would you say when you visit her...

Situation 3. Your group mate asked for your notebook for one day but you need it for the next class tomorrow. How would you refuse her politely...?

### **Conclusion**

Although the system of exercises we propose does not directly prepare students for the test, it indirectly leads to the development of their communicative language competencies and their professional competencies. In addition, the authentic materials devoted to the study and teaching of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies, which are not provided for in the test "National Assessment System of Foreign Languages" or equivalent international tests, provide future foreign language specialists with a closer knowledge and study of socio-cultural life.

In conclusion, the scale of reforms in foreign language teaching in recent years is unparalleled, and their primary goal is to raise the country's prestige in the world, to train the younger generation at a more mature and qualified level. This, of course, requires the development of communicative and professional competencies in future teachers, bringing them to the level of a professional who can meet the requirements.

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