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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE AT VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

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Abstract

The article examines how CEFR standards are implemented at vocational colleges in Uzbekistan with clear emphasis on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) lessons. It highlights the role of CEFR in defining language proficiency standards, especially the B1 level required of vocational college graduates. The paper discusses how CEFR has reshaped language teaching objectives, assessment practices, and teacher responsibilities within the system of continuous education. Furthermore, it indicates the shift toward communicative language teaching and student-centered approaches to meet professional and real-life communication needs.

Key words: CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), vocational college, authentic materials, communicative competence, English for Specific Purposes, academic lyceum.

Vocational colleges in Uzbekistan are mostly confined to ESP courses in which students are exposed to learning English pertaining to specific field. College graduators are patently required to demonstrate their knowledge in English while graduating from a college. In fact, certain demands and standards have been set for college students of Uzbekistan to prove that they have learnt the language

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adequately during three years. One of those standards is to learn the English language on B1 level in accordance with CEFR. So, prior to describing some features of B2 level, it is supposed to give a concise explanation about CEFR.

CEFR which stands for the Common European Framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment has been developed by Dr John Trim, Dr Brian North, Professor Daniel Coste and Mr Joseph Sheils. It has been informally published in two versions so far: an initial version in 1996, and after consultation, a revised version in 1998, known as Draft 2. It is one of the most prominent assessment systems for ESL learners in Europe. When it comes to the description of the CEFR, it is stated that the Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis (CEFR 2001). In other words, this Common European Framework of Reference measures learners' proficiency level in terms of English and enables teachers and language instructors to draw vital conclusions about their students' performance within this target language.

The implementation of CEFR in Uzbekistan paves the way for young generation to meet high world standards in foreign language acquisition. Now, every graduator of any academic institution is clearly aware of what level he/she should reach at this stage. According to The CEFR, the levels which range from

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A1 to C2 progress as learners move from one institution into another. To get a clear image of the CEFR levels, the following table is illustrated:

The learning of foreign languages in the system of continuous education in
Uzbekistan

Forms of Continuous Education	Graduates	CEFR Level
General secondary education	Graduates of primary schools	A 1
	Graduates of 9 form	A 2
	Graduates of 9 form of state specialized Secondary schools of learning foreign languages	A 2+
Secondary specialized and vocational training	Graduates of academic lyceums with non language learning	B 1
	Graduates of vocational colleges	
	Graduates of academic lyceums with language learning purpose – the second foreign language.	

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Higher education	Graduates of academic lyceums with language learning purpose	B 1 +
	Graduates of bachelor degree of non philological departments	B 2
	Graduates of bachelor degree of philological departments- the second foreign language	
	Graduates of master's degree of non philological departments	
	Graduates of bachelor degree of philological departments	C 1

Taken from “The State Educational Standards of Continuous Education in Uzbekistan (requirements to the content and level of learners on foreign languages”).

According to the CEFR, students of B1level can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. They can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest, and describe experiences and

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events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

As it is seen from the table, graduates of vocational colleges have to get B1 level and perform in the target language as it is asserted by the Common European Framework of Reference. The implementation of this assessment system set a number of demands not only for college students but also teachers. At a time when a college student should strive to become aware of course materials in accordance with state standards, teachers should also try hard to search for new methods of how to exert vitality into classroom and motivate students to learn the language. To learn a language just for everyday communication is no more enough for college students; conversely, they should be able to make utterances, express their opinions in debates and make a research in their major sphere. Therefore, teaching methods have been reformed to elevate students' level into higher ones at colleges. Most language experts admit that lesson goals and objectives have also been refined at colleges due to modern teaching requirements. To illustrate, A.Tajieva who is an author of an article entitled "Educational Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan in Operation" asserts her own opinions about teaching English at secondary special and vocational institutions. She claims that the general aim of the subject "Foreign Languages" at the academic lyceums is to develop learners' ability to use the appropriate language in different social contexts and to express viewpoints on political, economic and social life of Uzbekistan and abroad countries. According to the Educational Standard, learners of academic lyceums and vocational colleges should also acquire knowledge and abilities in the future professional sphere and be able to interact with others on professional topics using the appropriate discourse.

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Virtually, a premise towards teaching a language has changed much alongside with new requirements for students to learn in depth as well as teachers to conduct lessons more successfully. To learn a language was previously regarded as knowing grammar structure of that language. Indeed, learners could not communicate in the language freely due to most attention on theoretical issues of the language and a lack of practical application. However, communicative language teaching (CLT) created an opportunity for students to eliminate the barrier towards using a language successfully. Nowadays, CLT has enabled learners to utilize the language in real life situations, to be more precise, to put theoretical knowledge into practice. As CLT encompasses a number of vital aspects including linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation), pragmatic competence (discourse) or sociolinguistic competence (register), it helps to enhance students' communicative competence. Communicative language teaching is mostly concerned with engaging learners into real communications in the sphere of the target language.

So, a number of demands towards teaching ESP students have been made by educational standards of Uzbekistan. Firstly, it is claimed that most attention should be paid to using a language in real situations (in practice) rather than language theories. Secondly, not an ESP practitioner but students should be at central point of the lesson which is known as a student centered approach (teachers should act as facilitators during a lesson). Moreover, to develop students' critical thinking by illustrating real life examples should be a primary aim of a language instructor. Finally, an ESP instructor should bring wide range of appropriate sources including innovative technologies into classroom.

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The importance of student centeredness is claimed by a number of ESP specialists who have toiled in teaching English for a long time. These language instructors firmly believe that student centered approach should replace teacher centered approach in modern methodology. To illustrate experts' opinions on the issue worldwide, David Ross, from Houston Community College, finds the importance of student-centeredness in the change in the role of the teacher as a facilitator of students' learning and no more as a resourceful authority. Lola Katz, the cross cultural communication consultant from Israel, emphasizes "the appropriateness of the tasks and activities to the level and learning style of the learners and their knowledge, at all times, of the reasons for what they are doing." Casy Peltier from George Mason University Language Institute, however, claims that "younger students rarely know what is good for their language development, thus limits student-centeredness to older ones." Jim Williams, academic coordinator from Pacific Rim Language Institute, says "student-centeredness primarily as a process of customizing and constantly updating traditional policies and tried-and-true applications." John Harbord from Central European University in Hungary sums up "the gist of student-centeredness as teachers' professional judgment to decide what the best is they can do while they may sometimes make concessions regarding the students' demands only not to give them the impression that they have been totally ignored." According to Anthea Tillyer, from City University of New York, there is so much disagreement on the meaning and implementation of the student-centered classroom. To her, "what really matters is the fact that learning and the needs of the learners should determine our teaching objectives." Finally, Bill Snyder declares that "a student-centered educational program is not one in which the students run the show or one in which their every whim is catered to. Rather, it is one run for the benefit of them, where the focus of

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all participants is on helping students acquire what is needed based on a consideration of all viewpoints.” Therefore, in this perspective, the views of students are taken into account, but they are balanced against others’ perceptions. Snyder continues to say that “ignoring student’s wants, even when they do not contribute to their primary objectives, may lead to resentment and lack of motivation.” It is only when the students are not considered or included in the process, and not informed about why they are doing what they are doing that curricular decision-making becomes administrative fiat.

To sum up, it can be asserted that teaching ESP at colleges requires directing learners towards a professional sphere. Bearing in mind the fact that college graduates in Uzbekistan have a high tendency to get involved in workplaces subsequent to their graduation, they should experience language application in real situations. Students should get involved more in real English communications, and encouraged to become aware of lexicon pertaining to their major. Obviously, to reach this goal during a lesson an ESP instructor is required to create a needed atmosphere by emboldening students to make utterances in English and participate in lessons more actively.

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