

INCREASING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL AT PRIMARY GRADES

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Annotation: English has become the primary and dominant foreign language in Uzbekistan. Since 2012, there have been considerable modifications to the foreign language curriculum. In accordance with the Decree of the President dated December 10, 2012 N PP-1875, from the 2013/2014 academic year, the study of foreign languages, mainly English, from the first grade of secondary schools was gradually introduced throughout the republic. On the other hand, there are some flaws that need to be addressed. This research puts forward an LPP proposal to increase English proficiency level at primary grades (1-4) of secondary school N 271 in Yunusabad district of Tashkent city and bring it from current A1 to B1 level according to CEFR in public education.

Keywords: LPP proposal, foreign languages, hours, curriculum.

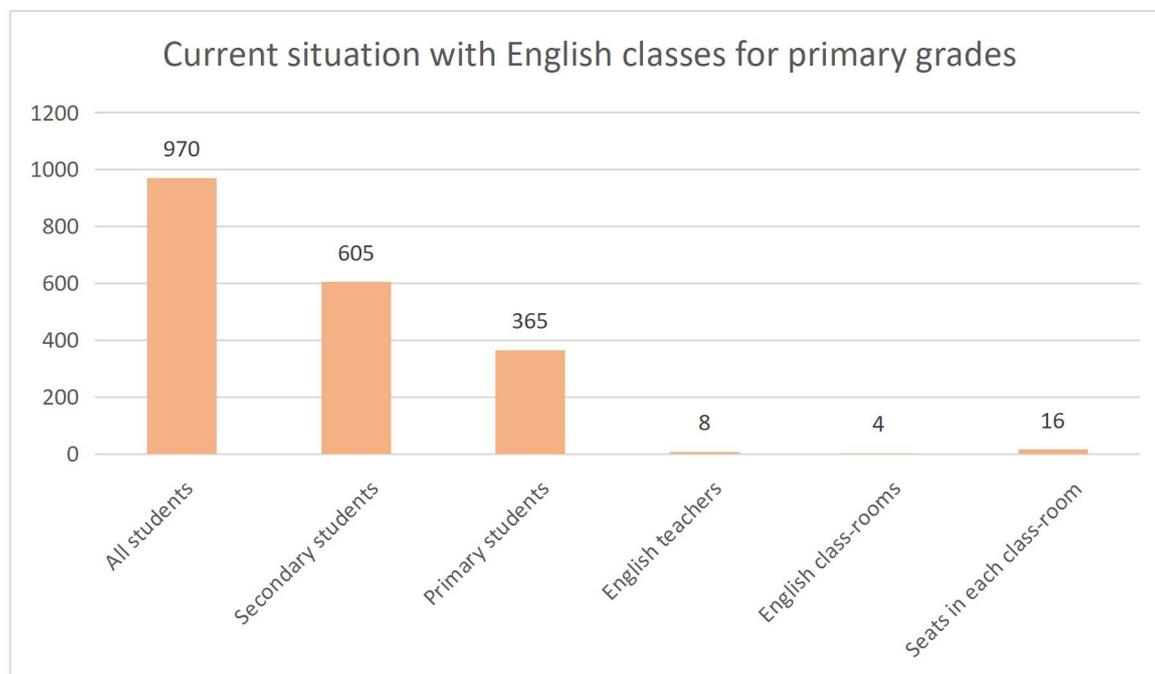
Knowing English language skills is becoming increasingly vital in our globalized environment. It has more advantages for learners to be fluent in English. For example, students can study abroad or make some research in this language. After graduation, they have more job opportunities compared to their peers, who are not fluent in English. Consequently, the majority of those students, who are not proficient enough are enrolled in English courses in various language learning centers in order to obtain the appropriate certificates required for applying to foreign universities. Current curriculum for teaching English at primary grades of school is not providing the expected English proficiency level. One of the main aims in any educational system is to strengthen and improve learners' thinking skills, which is accomplished by the incorporation of these concepts within the curriculum (Parirokh & Fattahi, 2005). There is a lack of attention towards speaking, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary etc. According to Yuzawa (2007), "Intelligible English pronunciation is a basic and essential skill required for those who want to use English communicatively" (p. 95-96). The old methods (especially grammar translation method) are still dominant in teaching. Based on principle "the younger the better" I would like to propose new methods (like suggestopedia, CLT, TPR, cooperative learning etc.) and more interactive ways of teaching English to young learners at primary grades (1-4) of school. Basically, student-centered strategy has to be applied and more practical lessons are needed.

Context

For this proposal I chose School N 271. It is a public secondary school situated in Yunusabad district of Tashkent city. There are two main grade divisions: primary grades (1st-4th grades) and secondary grades (5th-11th grades). As of today, 970 students study at this school, 365 of them are primary grade students and remaining are secondary grade students. English language is taught as a foreign language here. Based on the Decree of the President dated December 10, 2012 N PP-1875, the school curriculum requirement was adapted to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

standard. State educational standards for the study of foreign languages in the system of continuous education were developed on the basis of the norms of the international standards of the "Common European Framework of Reference for Foreign Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment" (CEFR). A curriculum that provides 2 hours a week for the study of foreign languages in primary (1-4) grades was approved. This curriculum was introduced in stages, starting from the 2013-2014 academic year from Grade 1. In particular, students after completing 4th grade should have the English proficiency level of A1 according to CEFR standards. School syllabus accordingly includes required learning material to reach this level. However, in practice, it is not being properly implemented and what is more important, it is not ambitious enough, since the English proficiency level of students at the end of 4th grade should not be less than B1 (CEFR).

Currently, the existing situation with primary grade students with respect to English classes at School N 271 is as follows:



Main problems:

- 365 primary grade students with English proficiency level of A1 and lower
- Only 4 English class-rooms
- 16-18 seats in each class-room and students are divided into 2 groups during English classes
- English class-rooms are out-of-date and do not like English class-rooms
- 8 English teachers: one teacher with C1 level and one teacher with B2 level. Remaining six teachers have only B1 level.
- 2 old white-boards, no speakers, 1 broken projector, no desktop computers, no TV sets
- Lack of printers
- Lack of internet connection

English classes need new methods of teaching using CLT, TPR, Suggestopedia and other effective methods. Realia should be used to improve vocabulary at primary grades. Up-to-date technology tools have to be used during the lessons (laptops, different screens, projectors and other multimedia tools). The focus in teaching English has to be widened to cover pronunciation as important as grammar or vocabulary using, among others, drilling method and imitating. Speaking skills of the students need can be improved via watching cartoons as well as using a variety of other methods.

Goals and objectives

The main objective is to increase English proficiency level at primary grades (1-4) of school and bring it from current A1 to B1 level according to CEFR.

- To improve learning process
- To reorganize the current curriculum and syllabus to match the needs and requirements
- To improve the students' minimum required proficiency level to understand the materials
- To arrange enough classes per week
- To widen the focus in teaching English to cover pronunciation as important as grammar or vocabulary using, among others, drilling method and imitating
- To improve speaking skills of the students via story telling technique, watching cartoons and other methods
- To teach classes using CLT, TPR, Suggestopedia and other effective methods
- To use realia to improve vocabulary at primary grades
- To use up-to-date technology tools during the lessons (laptops, different screens, projectors and other multimedia tools).

Target skills: special measures for each language skill and aspect: grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Inventory

N	Current situation	Proposed
1	4 English class-rooms	6 English class-rooms
2	16-18 seats in each class-room and students are divided into 2 groups during English classes	18-20 seats in each class-room
3	English class-rooms are out-of-date and do not like English class-rooms	Modern class-rooms with appropriate furniture and materials
4	8 English teachers: one teacher with C1 level and one teacher with B2 level. Remaining six teachers have B1 level.	12 English teachers with B2 or higher
5	2 old white-boards, no speakers, 1 broken projector, no desktop computers, no TV sets	6 white-boards, 6 laptops, 6 projectors, 6 pair of speakers, 6 Smart TV sets
6	Lack of printers	6 color printers to print hand-outs

		and additional materials
7	Lack of internet connection	Fiber-optic internet connection

- Most teachers at primary grades (1-4) of school do not use English continuously (non-stop) during the lesson;
- Books are too heavy on grammar. There are almost no exercises on practicing pronunciation;
- There is no balance between teaching main skills in English (Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking);
- Grammar translation method is still widely used as one of the main methods of teaching English. It is one of the oldest methods used since the first half of 19th century;
- Lack of multimedia resources, almost no white boards, smart TVs with internet etc.

Recommendation

As an outcome, the level of learners at the end of 4th grade will increase.

- Provide necessary language materials (textbooks, video and audio materials, hand-outs, online resources, etc.)
- Apply interactive methods of teaching to boost interest in learning English and improve efficiency
- Teach classes using CLT, TPR, Suggestopedia and other effective methods
- Redevelop and reorganize curriculum and syllabus
- Enroll teachers in training courses
- Increase teachers' proficiency level to at least B2 (CEFR) level

Advantages of CLT include, among others, the comprehensible input-based approach by Krashen (1981). Combining "Comprehension Hypothesis" and the "Affective Filter Hypothesis" Krashen contends that "(w)e acquire language when we receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation," rather than "by learning about language, by study of the rules and by memorizing vocabulary" (Krashen, 2003, p. 3).

Methods of teaching English at primary grades in Uzbekistan are also discussed by Tajibev, G. S. (2019). He gives the insight towards core curriculum and statistics related to teaching foreign languages at primary grades in Uzbekistan.

One more similar project was discussed by Carrier, M. (2018) with an emphasis on the issues in teaching English language in Latin America and main factors that hinder success. It also shows major causes and solutions for it.

Timeline

The proposal can be implemented within 5 years and in 2 stages:

Stage 1 (1 year):

- Providing schools with necessary equipment (laptops, smart TVs and internet);
- Training teachers to use new ways of teaching and interactive methods and increase their English proficiency level to at least B2 (CEFR);

At the end of the year 2022/2023, schools will have all the necessary equipment and teachers will have reached the minimum English proficiency level of B2 or higher.

Stage 2 (4 years):

- Implementation;

During the implementation learners' progress is constantly monitored and their English proficiency level at the end of 4th grade (by 2025/2026) should not be less than B1 according to CEFR.

Main actors here in various levels are:

Macro level:

1. Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
2. Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
3. UzTEA - the Association of Teachers of the English Language of Uzbekistan;

Meso level:

4. City and district level departments of public education;
5. Deputy directors of secondary schools responsible for education;

Micro level:

6. Teachers of primary grades (1-4) at secondary schools;
7. Primary grade (1-4) learners at secondary schools.

Target language

Target language is English. The improvement of all target skills is addressed. Special measures for each language skill and aspect to be implemented: grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

- CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and PBL (Project Based Learning) are addressed
- Students have to be able to understand and speak English at B1 level
- Widening the focus in teaching English to cover pronunciation as important as grammar or vocabulary using, among others, drilling method and imitating
- Improving speaking skills of the students via story telling technique, watching cartoons and other methods
- Teaching classes using CLT, TPR, Suggestopedia and other effective methods
- Using realia to improve vocabulary at primary grades
- Using up-to-date technology tools during the lessons (laptops, different screens, projectors and other multimedia tools).

Assessment

- Diagnostic test to help organize the lesson content and teaching methods
- Motivation and self-assessment are also encouraged in formative assessment

- Assessment tools to address and keep track of students' progress in learning the full range of target language skills and all language aspects
- Assessment tool has to give a proper feedback on learners' knowledge of content as well as effective use of target skills
- Assessment mechanisms should address the outcomes and monitor the learning strategies and processes
- A number of assessment mechanisms are to be implemented to analyze the students' language acquisition during the whole program
- Formal and informal assessment mechanisms to be used to monitor progress like formative assessment and provide appropriate feedback
- As a result, CEFR exam for B1 level to be carried out as part of the summative assessment and the outcomes to be provided to Yunusabad district as well as city level department of public education, Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan for further actions and monitoring at meso and macro level.

Culture

The current LPP proposal is designed to support students with various cultural backgrounds learning English language. They will be divided into groups according to their levels after placement test. Teachers will take care of the learners' culture and traditions as well as their age to support the lesson quality and give confidence to each learner.

Further they will identify the students' specific cultural aspects and meet the needs of all learners (considering demographics and other features in educational setting).

Funding

Funding is to be done by the Government of Uzbekistan. Private sector sponsors can also be attracted. The government can offer various tax incentives for those companies funding such proposals in education sector.

N	Name	Quantity	Unit price (in USD)	Total (in USD)
1.	Teachers' salary	12	600	7 200
2.	Class-room renovation and overhaul	6	5 000	30 000
3.	Books	365	30	10 950
4.	Projector and screen	6	1000	6 000
5.	White board	6	50	300
6.	Smart TV set	6	500	3 000
7.	Laptop	6	700	4 200
8.	Speakers	6	50	300
9.	Color printer	6	300	1 800
Total				63 750

Resource allocation

The resources used within the current LPP proposal are to be used at School N 271 on permanent basis, even after the project is completed. They will stay at School N 271 and not purchased by anyone.

6 laptop computers will be used during the English classes to teach primary grade students required materials and connect them with projector as well as Smart TV sets. Color printers to be used for printing hand-outs and additional materials. Acquired textbooks (English File Student's Book 3rd edition Oxford University Press, 2013) will be used according to the levels of primary grade students from beginner till pre-intermediate.

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