

PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL PROFICIENCY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN MODERN PEDAGOGY**Xilola Nurmuratova**

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Abstract

This article examines problems in developing professional proficiency among foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan. Using a mixed-methods synthesis of national statistics, international reports, and recent project evaluations, the study identifies key barriers: insufficient practical training and mentoring, uneven in-service professional development (CPD) coverage, gaps in digital pedagogy competence, and imperfect alignment of teaching materials with modern communicative approaches. The analysis uses official statistics (State Statistics Committee; Kun.uz), sectoral analyses (World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF), and project survey data (RTI/UEEP teacher survey, British Council review, UNICEF Eduten pilot) to produce evidence-informed recommendations: extended practicum and mentoring, a national CPD framework aligned with CEFR and communicative methodology, mandatory digital pedagogy certification, and structured classroom coaching. These measures aim to translate policy reforms into improved classroom practice and learner outcomes.

Keywords

foreign language teachers, teacher proficiency, Uzbekistan, CPD, practicum, digital pedagogy, CEFR

Introduction

Teacher professional proficiency is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management, assessment literacy, and, increasingly, digital competence. For foreign language teachers—particularly English teachers—proficiency also requires communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and facility with student-centered, task-based methodologies (Richards, 2016; Harmer, 2018).

Uzbekistan has undertaken ambitious education reforms since 2019 that include a new national curriculum, systemic textbook renewal, and teacher training cascades designed to modernize pedagogy and align instruction with international frameworks such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) (Ministry of Public Education; British Council, 2021). However, implementation is uneven: administrative statistics show high formal qualification rates among teachers, but project-based surveys and independent analyses reveal important gaps in classroom practice, sustained mentoring, and digital readiness that impede improvements in teaching quality (World Bank, 2018; RTI/UEEP reports). This paper diagnoses the leading problems affecting the development of professional proficiency among foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan and proposes pragmatic, evidence-informed solutions.

International teacher-quality research emphasizes the importance of coherent pre-service training (including extended practicum), structured induction and mentoring for novice teachers, and sustained CPD that combines content, pedagogy, and reflection (Tomlinson, 2019; Farrell,

2015). For language teachers specifically, communicative methodologies, materials development, and digital pedagogy are essential components (Littlewood, 2014; Dudeney & Hockly, 2017).

Regional and national analyses of Uzbekistan's education sector document significant policy momentum: curriculum revision since 2020, national textbook distribution campaigns, and coordinated CPD initiatives with international partners (British Council, 2021; USAID collaboration, 2022). The World Bank's 2018 Education Sector Analysis highlighted systemic challenges in monitoring and measuring education quality, which remain relevant to assessing teacher competence. More recent project reports—RTI/UEEP's teacher survey (n = 2,363 English teachers), UNICEF Eduten pilot (2025), and UNESCO Tashkent teacher programs—provide granular insights into teachers' self-reported needs and the outcomes of pilot interventions (RTI Shared project; UNICEF, 2025; UNESCO Tashkent, 2023).

Taken together, the literature suggests that policy reform alone is insufficient: targeted implementation strategies that prioritize classroom practice, mentoring, and digital capacity are needed to build professional proficiency.

Methodology

This paper uses a mixed-methods synthesis approach appropriate for policy analysis and program design:

1. Secondary data analysis of official statistics and public releases (State Statistics Committee; Stat.uz; Kun.uz) to establish baseline workforce figures and qualification indicators.
2. Synthesis of sectoral reports and evaluations by international organizations and project implementers (British Council curriculum review; World Bank education sector analysis; UNICEF Eduten pilot; UNESCO program accounts; USAID/Ministry project press releases).
3. Integration of project survey evidence, especially the RTI/UEEP teacher survey of English teachers in public schools (n = 2,363) and other large-scale program monitoring findings.
4. Conservative assumptions and triangulation: where direct national data on specific indicators (e.g., hours of practicum per teacher) were not publicly available, the paper uses conservative, evidence-linked assumptions validated against multiple sources and project reports.

This synthesis is not an original field survey but a policy-oriented analysis intended to inform practicable recommendations for the Uzbek context.

Results

1. Teacher workforce and qualification snapshot

Total teachers (all education levels): Official reporting referenced in national media and State Statistical releases indicated approximately 664,771 teachers as of January 1, 2021, with roughly 72% women and 28% men (State Statistics Committee; Kun.uz, 2021).

Formal qualification rates: Historical administrative series record very high rates of formally trained teachers (e.g., secondary education trained teacher proportions around 97–100% in official series between 2006–2017), though these metrics refer to formal qualification rather than continuous pedagogical competence (CEIC; national statistics series).

Interpretation: High formal qualification rates do not guarantee up-to-date pedagogical competence or mastery of communicative and digital methodologies.

2. Practicum and pre-service preparation

Project surveys and curriculum review documents show variation in the length and quality of pre-service practicum. While reforms emphasize practical skills, many novice teachers report limited sustained classroom placements and mentoring. RTI/UEEP project documentation, which analyzed responses from 2,363 English teachers, highlights variability by region and points to insufficient mentorship and limited microteaching practice for many graduates.

3. In-service professional development (CPD)

Uzbekistan has implemented multiple CPD initiatives in collaboration with international partners (British Council, USAID, JICA, UNESCO). However, evidence from project reports indicates uneven CPD coverage and variation in content quality. Cascade training models have been widely used during textbook distribution campaigns (USAID/Ministry collaboration, 2022), but cascade delivery can produce variability in training fidelity unless closely monitored and supported.

4. ICT readiness and digital pedagogy

Digital initiatives, including the UNICEF Eduten pilot (2025) and national digitalization efforts in higher education, reveal mixed readiness: some schools and teachers have good access to devices and connectivity, but many—especially in remote and rural areas—face connectivity constraints, limited devices, and limited prior training in digital pedagogy (UNICEF Eduten, 2025; ResearchGate analyses). Pilot projects show gains where teacher support was intensive, indicating the importance of pairing technology with teacher capacity-building.

5. Materials and curricular alignment

The British Council's national English curriculum review (2021) and Ministry materials updates document a major shift toward communicative, CEFR-aligned materials. However, implementation challenges remain: teacher guides need updating, and many teachers require training to adopt student-centered approaches effectively.

Discussion

The synthesis indicates that policy frameworks and resources are in place, but the translation into improved classroom practice is constrained by several interrelated factors:

1. **Practique versus certification gap.** Administrative statistics show very high formal qualification rates, but surveys indicate insufficient practical experience and mentoring. Formal qualifications do not always equate to classroom-ready competencies for communicative language teaching.
2. **CPD access and quality.** Cascade models and ad-hoc in-service events are widespread, yet fidelity and depth of CPD vary. Ongoing professional learning (sustained, job-embedded CPD) is less common than one-off workshops.
3. **Digital divide.** Technology pilots produce positive learning outcomes in supported contexts (UNICEF Eduten), but scalability requires reliable infrastructure, device access, and mandatory teacher training in digital pedagogy.

4. Materials and pedagogy alignment. Curriculum documents and new textbooks are necessary but not sufficient. Teachers need structured support (lesson models, observed practice, and feedback cycles) to shift from teacher-led grammar/translation to student-centered communicative practice.

The policy implication is clear: continue reform but reallocate implementation attention and funding to extended practicum and mentored induction, coherent national CPD aligned with CEFR, and scalable digital pedagogy training combined with infrastructure investment.

Practical Evidence (Selected Data & Table)

Table 1. Snapshot of selected teacher-related indicators (Uzbekistan, synthesized)

Indicator Value / Estimate Source (year)

Total number of teachers (all levels) \approx 664,771 State Statistics Committee; Kun.uz (2021)

Percent formally trained (secondary; historical series) \approx 97–100% (2011–2017 data series) CEIC / national series (2017)

English teachers surveyed (project) 2,363 respondents RTI Shared project (2022–23)

Schools in UNICEF Eduten pilot Pilot sample (2025) UNICEF Eduten report (2025)

Major CPD cascade textbook rollout National cascade since 2020 USAID / Ministry press (2022)

(Notes: values are derived from public statistical releases and project reports. Where a single national statistic for a particular indicator is not publicly available, the table presents conservative, evidence-linked estimates.)

Recommendations

Based on the evidence synthesis, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen professional proficiency among foreign language teachers in Uzbekistan:

1. Extend and strengthen pre-service practicum and induction.

Implement a semester-long in-school practicum for teacher-education graduates with structured observation, coaching, and summative assessment.

Provide school-based mentors who receive training and modest compensation; require mentor-mentee logs and reflection journals.

Ensure micro-credentialing and recognition for progression (career incentives linked to CPD completion).

3. Mandate digital pedagogy certification and ensure infrastructure.

Require a baseline digital pedagogy certificate for all in-service teachers within a defined timeframe (e.g., 2-3 years), delivered through blended training.

Prioritise device and connectivity investment for rural schools via targeted grants and public-private partnerships.

4. Introduce sustained coaching and classroom observation systems.

Develop regional coaching teams (from teacher-education institutions and CPD centres) to provide classroom observation, feedback cycles, and support for at least the first two years of teachers' careers.

5. Align materials and assessment with CEFR and classroom practice.

Continue to update teacher guides and provide lesson exemplars; integrate formative assessment techniques and task-based lesson sequences.

6. Strengthen monitoring and research.

Create a national teacher competency monitoring dashboard that tracks CPD completion, practicum hours, mentoring engagement, and selected classroom indicators.

Implementation of these recommendations should be accompanied by a clear funding plan and phased rollout, starting with regions and schools where pilot projects suggest high readiness and demonstrable impact.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan's recent education reforms, curriculum modernization, and international partnerships have created favorable conditions for improving the professional proficiency of foreign language teachers. The available evidence, however, points to persistent gaps in translating formal qualifications into consistently high classroom practice—especially regarding practical experience, mentoring, sustained CPD, digital pedagogy, and materials alignment. Addressing these gaps requires a focus on sustained, job-embedded teacher development (extended practicum, mentoring, national CPD pathways) and a committed scale-up of digital pedagogy training paired with infrastructure investment. With targeted implementation and monitoring, policy ambitions can be converted into improved teaching practice and learner outcomes.

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