

TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH CAN BE DIFFERENT: INTRODUCING NEW METHODOLOGY CURRICULUM

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The article presents the main stages of introducing new methodology curriculum designed within New Generation School Teacher Project. The Project is an innovative initiative supported by British Council Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (since 2013). The article gives an outline of the following project stages: baseline study, study visits, the Curriculum design, piloting the Curriculum, and the Project monitoring. The baseline study (2013-2014) proved the necessity for the change in pre-service teacher education. The study visits to University of Modern Languages (Tashkent, Uzbekistan) and Norwich Institute of Language Education (Norwich, England) (2014) gave the possibility to observe and study the best practices of English teaching methodology. The Curriculum design stage (2014–2015) became the way of introducing innovative approaches, content, modes of teaching and learning, modes of interaction and new place of school experience into the programme of Pre-service teacher training. The piloting stage that embraced 10 Ukrainian pedagogical universities gave the possibility to implement the Curriculum innovations in the methodology course. The Project monitoring (2016-2017) was based on students' online questionnaires, project team members' monitoring visits which included meetings with rectors, deans, heads of the departments, methodology teachers; students' focus group discussion, demonstration lesson analysis. The Project monitoring programme provided data for evaluating the first year results. The results supported previous hypothesis that the introduction of the new curriculum would have a positive influence on the students in terms of developing 21st century skills as well as their motivation to choose teaching as a career.

Key words: new methodology curriculum, New Generation School Teacher Project, British Council Ukraine, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, baseline study, Curriculum design, Project monitoring.

Nowadays English is considered to be the language of trade, travel, education and international relations. The need for higher standards of English among the Ukrainian citizens has been brought into focus as the country sees its future as an inseparable part of the world community. Long-established traditions in English language teaching in Ukraine presupposed emphasis on knowledge of grammar and vocabulary with little or no need to see the language as a means of active communication or as a life skill. Such tradition of teaching English is now neither relevant nor sufficient. The improvement that is needed can only be achieved if standards of English teaching are raised at every educational level.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a tool for setting internationally accepted standards for proficiency in foreign languages is seen as an important educational aspiration and a key plank in economic development. Like other countries Ukraine has begun to use this document as a reliable reference for setting the standards that need to be achieved. Secondary school has English as obligatory part of curriculum, thus giving its students the chance to master English from the start to at least B1 level. School beliefs and practices of teaching and learning English also play a significant role in the students' attitudes towards English.

Consequently, the change can be implemented only if the teachers of English are trained differently and serve as agents of change. This inevitably led to understanding that pre-service EFL teacher training should undergo some change in its turn. This understanding brought together two institutions equally interested in the quality of teaching English in Ukraine: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and British Council Ukraine. In 2013, they started The New Generation School Teacher Project (NGST Project) with the principal focus on introducing change to the initial teacher education system in Ukraine.

The NGST Project that has been on for five years already has brought about some reflections and thoughts of what can be done to improve English as a medium of international communication in any field. So far, the Project has had the following stages: baseline study, study visits, the Curriculum design, piloting the Curriculum, and the Project monitoring. As the authors think, providing more information about each stage might give a ground for further improvements in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching.

Baseline study (2013 - 2014). A sound understanding of the situation and of future needs was gained by means of conducting baseline study in 2013-2014. The Project team collected and analysed documents governing the preparation of future teachers of foreign languages: standards, curricula, and syllabi. They also studied the interests, needs and influence of interested parties in the project. The primary beneficiaries were defined as students and school teachers, as well as university students and lecturers. Ministry of Education and Science Ukraine, Departments of Education, Rectors of Universities were defined as secondary beneficiaries. The team conducted a survey of stakeholders' attitudes to the state of methodological training of student-teachers. The Report on the Baseline Study was published in 2014 [1].

The key findings of the Baseline Study were as follows:

- a wide variation in the number of hours allotted to language improvement and to methodology among the eight universities surveyed
- average proportion of total programme hours devoted to methodology was found to be less than 4%
- methodology usually delivered in Ukrainian or Russian
- methodology widely taught and assessed as a theoretical discipline, with courses delivered as lectures devoid of interaction
- methodology courses pay insufficient attention to a number of essential aspects of language teacher preparation, for example Intercultural Awareness, Developing Independent Study Strategies, Developing ICT Competence and Learner-Centred Approaches.
- insufficient attention to modern ways of assessing progress and achievement in a foreign language
- in some cases, little or no connection between theory and practice (here between the methodology course and the practicum in schools)
- no unified approach to the final assessment of student teachers [1].

On completion of the Baseline Work, a Ukrainian consultant (Oleksandr Shalenko) and a UK consultant (Rod Bolitho, Norwich Institute for Language Education) were taken on to guide the team through the design of the new curriculum.

Study Visits (2014). The team made two study visits as part of their research: to Uzbekistan where the PRESETT project had been running for over seven years and the first graduates were already teaching at schools, and to the UK to look into the preparation of foreign language teachers in universities.

The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of Uzbekistan working with British Council Uzbekistan implemented a joint project to improve the quality of Uzbek teachers of English pre-service training. This joint project is referred to as PRESETT (2008 – 2012). Data from the Baseline Study persuaded high-ranking officials to introduce some changes in the system of PRESETT. It resulted in adopting Presidential Decree on foreign-language teaching (2012).

Some of the main points of the Decree may be summarized as follows:

- Foreign languages should be taught to international standards to meet the commercial, industrial, scientific and academic needs of Uzbekistan.
- Foreign languages, mainly English, are to be taught from the first year of schooling.
- The communicative approach is to be adopted.

- National standard should go in align with international standards, particularly with CEFR.

The document envisaged the total reform of the teaching of foreign languages, especially English, in Uzbekistan. The PRESETT project is considered by many experts as the mechanism to deliver the reforms set out in the decree. At the outset (2008 – 2009 academic year) the project was implemented in a few experimental groups of the University of World Languages. As part of the pilot project the quantity of groups in the University of World Languages increased every year. In 2013 – 2014 academic year it reached 100%. The experience of PRESETT is being shared with other Uzbek universities (18) training EFL teachers. The teachers from different regions of Uzbekistan engaged in implementing the PRESETT Curriculum are regularly trained, supported with resources and supervised by PRESETT team members. Successful completion of the courses enables them to become trainers themselves. The National Professional standards for EFL teachers have been recently adopted for both Bachelor and Master levels.

The Government of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Public Education have provided an appropriate legal framework to facilitate changes in national higher education and management. The European dimension has been incorporated into the national higher education context: higher education degrees of Bachelor, Master and Doctor have been introduced; the national education standards for EFL teacher training have been adopted. The national policy on language education has undergone considerable positive changes. Professionally oriented courses and methodology of teaching a foreign language are taught through both language strand and methodology strand.

The study visit to Norwich Institute of Language Education (NILE, England) took place on March 24-26, 2014. The project team studied and analysed the ways the foreign language teachers are trained in England. The most common way to get a qualification of a teacher of English as a second language in particular is to take up Master's Degree in Education on completing Bachelor's programme in Arts or Humanities. Among others, offered by NILE there were such courses as Cambridge English CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and Delta, Professional development programmes for EL teachers, trainers and other education professionals. The striking peculiarity of such programmes to team members was the number of hours allotted to teaching practice which constitutes up to 70% of all duration of training.

These visits served to reinforce the conclusions from the in-Ukraine research.

Curriculum design. Taking into account the results of the baseline study and study visits to Uzbekistan and Great Britain, the team started thinking about the way the Methodology Curriculum should be organised. It was agreed that the curriculum should be based on the following principles [5, p. 2-3] :

1. *Methodology as the key to the preparation of student teachers.* According to this principle Methodology is considered to be the core of language teacher education which provides a bridge between theory and practice. Methodology in this curriculum is concerned with the application of knowledge in real situations rather than about knowledge itself. The curriculum includes a profile of a newly qualified teacher of English, which is effectively the intended overall target of the methodology curriculum.

2. *Delivery in English.* The curriculum is developed in English and taught through the medium of English. The delivery in English promotes the development of students' language and professional competences. As the Methodology course starts in Semester 3, the students have a possibility to improve their language level and their professional competence.

3. *Standardisation of basic requirements.* The number of hours for methodology set at the same level at all PRESETT institutions. Course modules are standardised in terms of aims, content, outcomes and assessment specifications.

4. *Language courses to complement methodology courses.* Language classes to be taught in a way that exemplifies good practice, thereby illustrating the principles underlying the Methodology courses.

5. *Variety of approaches to teaching.* The project team thinks that traditional lecturing is not an efficient way of delivering content on a practical course. Accordingly, the new curriculum suggests a range of modern teaching approaches, including task-based learning, the use of case

studies, simulations, group projects and problem-solving. All of these approaches are intended to promote high levels of interaction and students involvement in their own learning processes.

6. *Carefully phased school experience.* Students undertake school practice throughout the whole methodology course applying the sandwich approach.

7. *Continuous assessment throughout the programme.* Assessment in the Methodology Curriculum consists of two main components: continuous assessment and final assessment.

Curriculum Outline and its Main Characteristics. The curriculum is made up of six modules (Understanding learners and Learning; Preparing to Teach 1; Preparing to Teach 2; Preparing to Teach 3; Specialised Dimensions; Professional Development). Each module represents a broad area of methodology, and contains a number of units, each of which covers an essential specialist topic for English teachers in training [3, p. 1-4].

Some topics are reconceptualised and some are totally new and have been introduced into the Curriculum owing to their importance to the school needs. The table below represents the content areas of the PRESETT Curriculum.

Table 1. Content Areas of PRESETT Curriculum

Reconceptualised Topics	New Topics
Principles of Communicative Language Teaching	Psychological Factors in Language Learning
Teaching Grammar in Context	Second Language Acquisition
Teaching Vocabulary in Context	Developing Learner Autonomy
Language Skills – Teaching Listening	Classroom Management
Language Skills – Teaching Speaking	Working with Materials
Language Skills – Teaching Reading	Error Analysis and Dealing with Errors
Language Skills – Teaching Writing	Classroom Investigation 1
Planning Teaching	Catering for Special Educational Needs
Testing and Assessment	Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Learning and Teaching English
Teaching Young Learners	Classroom Investigation 2
Developing Intercultural Competence	Planning for Continuing Professional Development

Each unit has an allocation of 18 hours of class contact time and 12 hours of self-study. Module descriptions include aims, learning outcomes and recommended assessment specifications. Unit descriptions contain detailed objectives, indicative content and recommended reading references.

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Students undertake school practice throughout the whole methodology course. There are three phases to students' school experience: guided observation; teacher assistantship; observed teaching [6]. *Guided observation* takes place in Semesters 3 and 4. It gives students an opportunity to observe experienced teachers at work and to make connections with their learning during the first year of the methodology course. To help in this process they complete specially designed observation tasks. Guided observation takes place once a fortnight (one full day of at least 4 class hours) throughout Year 2. During *Teacher assistantship* in semesters 5 to 7, students act as teacher assistants, planning teaching, undertaking microteaching and generally supporting the English teachers. Modules in these semesters also include observation tasks aimed at linking methodology classes to school experience. It is recommended that students spend one day (minimum 4 hours) in classes at school with no classes timetabled at the university. Observed teaching in semester 8 puts students into the role of teacher under the supervision of school-based mentors and university tutors. Students spend six weeks full-time in schools. During the *observed teaching*, students have

weekly meetings with tutors to discuss and reflect on their experience. The Ministry guidelines specify a total of 17 credits for school experience, 6 of which are allocated to observed teaching. However, only observed teaching counts towards final assessment. Observation tasks during Modules 1 to 5 feed into continuous assessment. Overview of School Experience is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of School Experience

Semester	Module	School Experience	
		Stage	Frequency
3	1 Understanding Learners and Learning	Guided observation	Once a fortnight
4	2 Preparing to Teach 1	Guided observation	Once a fortnight
5	3 Preparing to Teach 2	Teacher assistantship	Once a week
6	4 Preparing to Teach 3	Teacher assistantship	Once a week
7	5 Specialised Dimensions	Teacher assistantship	Once a week
8	6 Professional Development	Observed teaching	6 weeks full time

Assessment in the Course. *Continuous assessment* is carried out by the methodology teacher during each module and is both progress- and achievement-focussed. Its main aim is to evaluate how successfully students achieved the learning outcomes for the module. Students complete assignments (including portfolios) for which they are given grades according to the detailed criteria in the assessment specifications for each module in the Curriculum. There is a wide range of assignment types in the Curriculum. These assignments are intended as learning experiences as well as ways of assessing students. Assignment types include: essays, reflective writing, report presentations, quizzes, lesson plans, case study materials, test design, a professional development plan, portfolio, etc. Assessment criteria vary according to assignment type. At the end of the course, all the scores for module assignments are averaged to yield a final grade [2, p.1].

Final assessment is carried out at the end of the methodology course. It is aimed at evaluating how successfully a student achieved the learning outcomes of the whole Curriculum as detailed in the Profile of a Newly-Qualified English Teacher. This assessment consists of the following components: Average score achieved in all module assessments (30%) Observed teaching (40%) Qualification paper (30%). Each component is assessed separately according to different criteria. To pass the Methodology course, students must be successful in all of the three components.

Piloting the Curriculum. The next important stage of the project is piloting the new curriculum "English Language Teaching Methodology". According to the Ministry order the piloting started in September 2016 and will cover the period between 2016 and 2019. Ten Ukrainian universities are currently participating in the curriculum piloting. 470 students, 53 university teachers, 188 school teachers from 46 schools are involved in pilot study.

In order to measure if the curriculum had been implemented in a proper way and was having the desired result, the project team developed monitoring and evaluation plan. Having chosen the indicators to measure the success of the curriculum, the team identified how the data would be collected, the frequency (monthly, annually, etc.), which tool would be used, where it would be reported, and how quality report would be managed. Thus, the following tools were used to collect data: monitoring visits and online questionnaires.

The monitoring visits were made by project team members in November and December 2016. The monitoring plan included focus group dialogues with rectors, deans, heads of the department, methodology teachers, students. To hold the dialogues, a set of questions for each stakeholder was designed. Demonstration lesson was an essential part of monitoring and evaluation plan. They were thoroughly analysed against a set of designed criteria.

The respondents to the online questionnaire were the students, studying FL Methodology according to the new curriculum; methodology teachers, piloting the curriculum and school teachers, supervising school experience. The first results of piloting the curriculum were got in June 2017. They were discussed on 12 October 2017 in the Ministry of Education and Science of

Ukraine and were highly appreciated by Lilia Hrynevych, the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine.

The findings of the Project Monitoring. The New Methodology Curriculum has been created, documented and extensively trialled through the collective actions of the Project team. Over a period of nearly two years, this Curriculum has been taught by an increasing number of institutions to an increasing number of students. Though the Curriculum has not had its first graduates yet, it received positive ratings when students were asked if they found it useful and motivating. More significantly, the students who had just returned from teaching practice reported that the the methods and techniques they had learned during their training were motivating for the students in the schools they had been attached to.

The examination of the situation in regard to its stakeholders – the Ministry of Education, Universities, schools and the British Council, it was concluded that support for the New Methodology Curriculum is high among all stakeholders.

Conclusion. The analysis of the main stages of the NGST Project implementation leads to the following conclusions:

- the new curriculum is a modern programme aligned with international standards, particularly the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

- the curriculum can be used as a tool for enhancing the quality of pre-service EFL teacher training in order to carry out the New Ukrainian School Reform set out by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

- the curriculum provides in-built mechanisms for applying its innovative principles in both methodology and language teaching and learning

- the curriculum offers a model for introducing international standards into Ukrainian universities as a mechanism for upgrading university education and meeting global standards. Thus, the need for replacing the traditional curriculum with the new one is feasible, desirable and urgent as it represents a major innovation in EFL teaching and learning in Ukraine. The New Methodology Curriculum contributes to international initiatives in curriculum design and methodology, so by adopting it, HEIs in Ukraine would be able to draw on all of the documents and resources of the Council of Europe and, more widely, the global language-teaching community.

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