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Level teaching of the English language in schools of Kazakhstan: planning and teaching practice

This article is devoted to the analysis of the current state of level teaching of the English language in schools of Kazakhstan. The transition to level education in the Republic of Kazakhstan required significant changes in the entire educational process for teaching foreign languages: the introduction of new, more effective teaching technologies that simulate linguistic conditions of the country of the target language, the creation of new documentation, the training of teachers, the development of a new system for assessing student results. The main change was the transition from traditional teaching, focused on teaching grammar and vocabulary, knowledge of the rules of using the language, to teaching based on teaching communication skills, competencies. This article is a study on the impact of the practical application of the CEFR principles, as a recommended document, on the level teaching of the English language in Kazakhstani schools. Our study attempted to examine the impact that CEFR postulates have on teaching and lesson planning practice, and the extent of this change, by examining the practice of English teachers who have participated in CEFR-related advanced training, and professional training related with updated educational content and a communicative approach in teaching foreign languages. The results showed that training, as one of the scientific and methodological conditions for the transition to level education, has a positive impact on the area of planning and teaching. The obtained data show that the transition took place not only formally on paper, but also in classrooms.

Keywords: level language teaching, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, activity approach, assessment system, language competences, competence-based approach, activity-oriented approach, trilingualism.

Introduction

The transition to level teaching of the English language at school is dictated by the challenges of the time and has a scientific basis. The basis for using the level-based education is represented by the philosophical ideas of moving from simple to complex, from lower to higher. Level learning is based on the principles of consistency, the gradual complication of the problems of all aspects of speech activity. The continuity and consistency of teaching foreign languages is also of great importance. In the Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), students' knowledge and skills are divided into three broad categories, which are further divided into six levels [1]. German scientist D. Trim also names six main levels: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency), C2 (Mastery) [2, 45]. The experts developed both a system of language proficiency levels and a system of descriptors (descriptions of these levels) using standard categories. These two complexes create a single network of concepts that can be used to describe any certification system, and therefore, any training program. For each level, knowledge and skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing, which a student must possess, are described.

Level-based English language teaching in schools of Kazakhstan

Level-based teaching of English in a Kazakhstani secondary school is based on the following methodological approaches:

- a communicative approach, which primarily focuses not on the correctness of linguistic structures, but on such parameters as awareness of possible options for the development of dialogues, achieving a common communicative goal, and developing the skill of paraphrasing;
- activity-oriented approach, which is based on «learning by doing», the acquisition of knowledge through their practical application.
- an intercultural and communicative approach, which implies the formation of skills and abilities necessary for the implementation of intercultural communication. Pupils receive the necessary knowledge for the formation of cultural values, love for the Motherland, and other social values.

Considering these approaches, the level teaching of the English language is based on the following principles:

- the principle of co-study of language and culture, it means that the teaching languages forms an attitude towards language not only as a mean of intercultural communication, but also as a social value, as a reflection of the national and cultural heritage, an instrument of cognition of the surrounding reality;
- the principle of balancing target languages in the content of education;
- the principle of «double entry of knowledge», it means that, firstly, the language in the educational process acts both as a means of teaching and as a subject of study: as a subject of study, the language is mastered within the framework of curricula in the «English language» subject (1- 11 grades) in all schools, regardless of the language of instruction; secondly, as a means of teaching, language acts as a mechanism for integrating linguistic subjects with other subjects, therefore, regardless of the language of instruction in basic school in the senior grades, the study of Science block such as «Natural Science», «Computer science», «Physics», «Chemistry», «Biology» is in English; Here, the use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) technology is prescribed as the main tool for teaching target languages within the framework of the implementation of the classical didactic principle of «double entry of knowledge».

The domestic model of level teaching of the English language at school is reflected in the following regulatory documents:

1. State compulsory standards of primary, secondary and general secondary education, approved by order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 604 dated October 31, 2018 (with amendments and additions No. 182 dated May 5, 2020) [3, 4];
2. Unified language standard for teaching three languages. — Astana, 2017. Recommended for publication by the decision of the Academic Council of the National Academy of Education named after I. Altynsarina (minutes No. 9 dated October 20, 2016)
3. Typical curricula for primary, basic secondary and general secondary education, approved by order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated November 8, 2012, No. 500 (as amended and supplemented on September 4, 2018, No. 441) [5];

The transition to level education in the Republic of Kazakhstan required significant changes in the entire educational process for teaching foreign languages: the introduction of new, more effective teaching technologies that simulate linguistic environmental conditions of the country of the target language, the creation of new documentation that controls the learning process, the training of teachers, the development of a new system for assessing student results. The main change in teaching English was the transition from traditional teaching, focused on teaching grammar and vocabulary, knowledge of the rules of using the language to teaching based on teaching communication skills, teaching competencies.

In foreign scientific sources, a lot of research is devoted to the transition from the traditional grammar-translational method of teaching English to a communicative, activity-oriented approach to teaching. Research results are highly controversial. Some sources indicate that the transition took place formally, only on paper [6, 7], however, most of the facts indicate an effective transition to teaching foreign languages based on a communicative approach [8–10]. Teachers in a number of countries reported that, in addition to using CEFR-recommended textbooks, the updated curriculum inspired them to adopt a communicative and competency-based approach in their teaching, focus more on language use and development of oral skills, and encourage learners to play a more active role in their training [11, 12].

The works of such scientists as S.S. Kunanbaeva, B.A. Zhetpisbaeva [13, 14], B.M. Aitbaeva [15] and others are devoted to the problems of scientific and methodological support of multilingual education in Kazakhstan. Many linguistic teachers believe that the basis of multilingual education should be a properly structured system of teaching languages, corresponding to the real situation of the development of the scientific and methodological base of languages [16–20]. However, in scientific sources, there are practically no studies devoted to studying the impact of the practical application of the CEFR principles in the level teaching of the English language in Kazakhstani schools. Our study will attempt to examine the impact that CEFR postulates have on teaching and lesson planning practice, and the extent of this change, by examining the practice of English teachers who have participated in CEFR-related advanced training, courses on updated educational content and on communicative approach used in teaching foreign languages.

Experimental

Our research is based on the data posted on the websites of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, JSC «National Center for Advanced Studies» Orleu «(hereinafter referred to as JSC NCAL» Orleu) and their territorial offices, the National Academy of Education named after S. Altynsarin and other sources, which publish information on the timing, topics and results of advanced training courses

for English teachers. It should be noted here that courses for English teachers are based on the use of modern technologies, principles and methods of level teaching of the English language. Together with these data, our study is based on the results of a questionnaire survey of teachers, to examine the impact of professional training on the practice of teaching English in schools. The survey was sent out and tracked using the Survey Monkey platform. The online teacher survey, available in Russian / Kazakh and English, consisted of three sections. In the first section, teachers were asked to provide general information about themselves, such as total teaching experience, the number and timing of vocational training courses taken. In the remaining 2 sections, teachers were asked to answer a series (5 questions per 2 sections, respectively) of closed and open questions related to such aspects of work as lesson planning and the teaching practice before and after vocational training. The teachers indicated the frequency of using certain practices on a scale from zero to five, where zero means «useless» and five means «most frequent use». These two extremes of the scale were assigned the verbal descriptors «never» and «often» in the survey.

The questionnaire was answered by English teachers from 6 secondary schools in Nur-Sultan and Karaganda.

For the validity of further research on this topic, it is recommended to include in the analysis data obtained from all regions of the country with the participation of teachers from both urban and rural schools.

Results and Discussion

The research results are processed and presented below separately in the sections «planning» and «teaching». A similar study on the section «assessment» has already been carried out by us earlier and the results were published in a separate article [21]. The teachers' answers are presented according to the different questions asked in each section.

In the first section of the questionnaire, general information was collected, reflecting such parameters as work experience, the number and frequency of advanced training courses, the types of courses taken. Table 1 below is presented in the form of processed data for the introductory section of the questionnaire.

Table 1

Participation of teachers in professional training courses on level teaching of the English language within the framework of the updated educational content

Course name	Organizer	Teachers (%)
«The content and methods of teaching English from the first grade in the context of the implementation of the state compulsory education standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan»	JSC National center for advanced learning «Orleu»	89
«Development of professional competencies of an English teacher» for English teachers of grades 1–4 / 5–11 of primary and secondary education organizations with Kazakh and Russian languages.	JSC National center for advanced learning «Orleu»	84
Advanced training course «CELTA»	Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools	16
English Teacher Webinars	Association of teachers of the English language of the Republic of Kazakhstan «KazTEA»	25
Seminars, trainings organized by the universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Universities of the RK	27
Seminars / trainings organized by schools	Schools	15
Self-education		34
Others		8
Not trained		-

The State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 indicates that 73.3 thousand teachers must undergo advanced training annually [22]. In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Education», each teacher must advance their qualifications at least once every five years. The information about the attended courses was requested for the last 5 years, i.e. from 2015–2020, however, a phased transition to level-based English language training began in 2013. The teaching experience of the teachers who took part in the survey ranged from 8 to 34 years. As can be seen

from the data in Table 1, the majority of teachers took part in the courses organized by the JSC National center for advanced learning «Orleu» (89 and 84 %). This is due to the fact that this center was formed as a result of the reorganization of the republican system of advanced training of scientific and pedagogical workers and is a leader in advanced training of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The second highest indicator was the number of teachers who independently attended vocational training courses (34 %). Among the answers were such sources as Macmillan Education, Cambridge University Press, British Council, American English LIVE Teacher development series, etc. This tells us about the possibilities of distance learning, which during the COVID-19 pandemic became possible on most of the e-learning platforms of the world's training centers. Among the respondents' answers other long-term and short-term vocational training courses / seminars (webinars) were indicated, organized by «KazTEA» — the Association of Teachers of English of the Republic of Kazakhstan, NIS, universities and schools (25 %, 16 %, 27 %, 15 %, respectively). Among the respondents there were also those who indicated several names of courses at once during the specified period, therefore, here and in other parts of this article, the percentage of open questions does not necessarily amount to 100 %.

Lesson planning

Teachers were asked to answer 5 questions in order to describe the practice of lesson planning before and after advanced courses.

«What elements figured in your planning for the development of language competencies, and how often did you use each element in your planning BEFORE and AFTER your training?»

On the first question, respondents reported that during lesson planning, the main emphasis was on the development of students' language competencies (average score 4.2 out of maximum 5). On the contrary, after the training, teachers began to use a more balanced approach in their planning and reported that they pay attention to the use of each of the target learning elements, and not only to the development of language competencies (Figure 1).

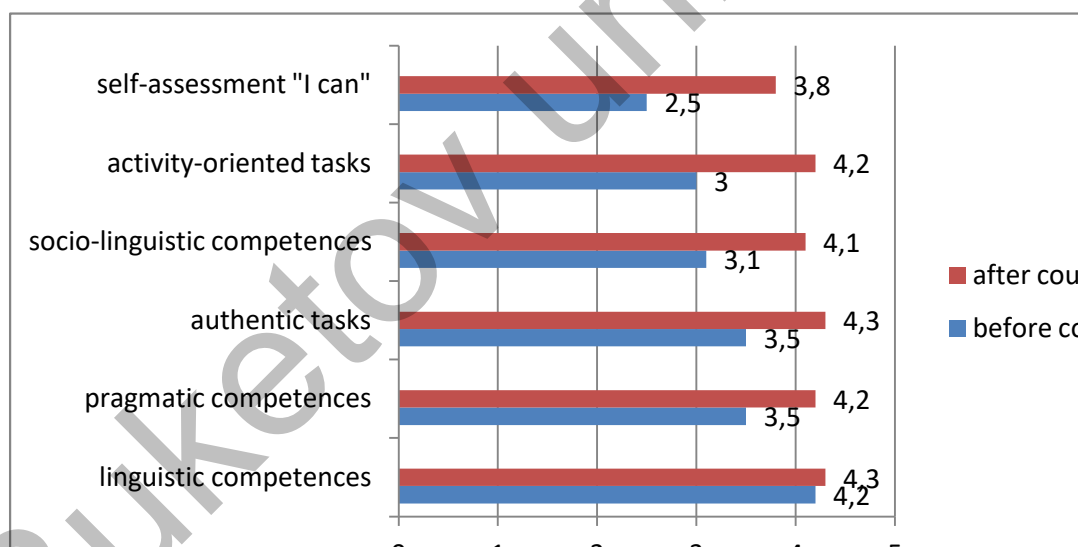


Figure 1. Frequency of using teaching elements when planning a lesson BEFORE and AFTER training (in %)

«What percentage of the study time did you spend on developing each language skill in planning BEFORE and AFTER your training?»

On the second question, the respondents' answers showed that after training, the amount of time allocated for the development of oral speech skills such as listening and speaking increased (27 % and 31 % of the time, respectively), while before training, the emphasis was on developing writing and reading skills (2 % and 34 %) (Figure 2).

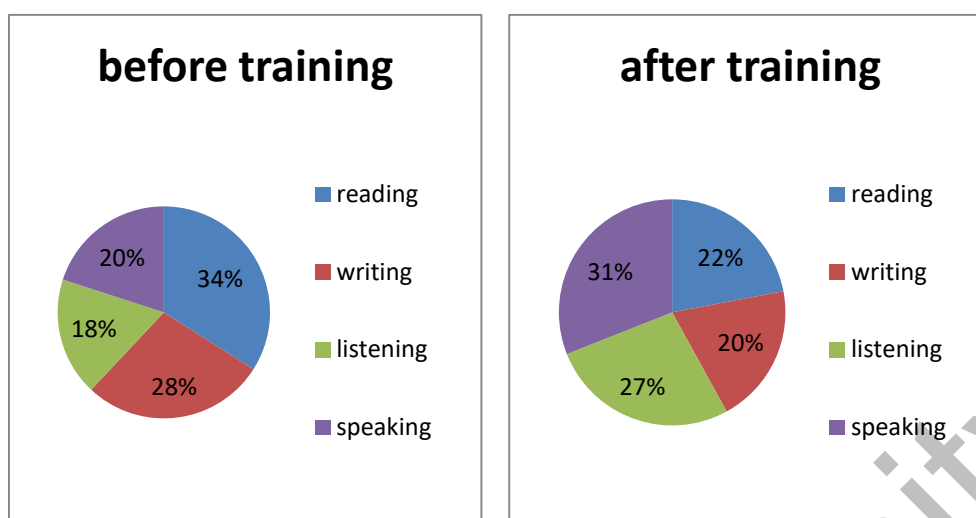


Figure 2. Distribution of time spent on developing language skills when planning lessons BEFORE and AFTER learning (in %)

«Which language skill development was the most important in your planning and why?»

On the third question (open-ended question), in planning, teachers focused on developing oral communication skills (33 % of teachers), using authentic assignments (30 %), using the structure «I can» (15 %) and developing listening skills (12 %). Among the responses there also were: the importance of using activity-oriented assignments (7 % of teachers), the assessment process (8 %), the development of reading and writing skills (6 %) and the adoption of a balanced approach with an emphasis on the development of all four speech skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening (9 %). Here, as mentioned above, teachers have indicated the use of more than one of the specified categories, so the percentage is not necessarily 100 %.

«How has your learning influenced lesson planning?»

In their answers to the fourth question, respondents indicated that learning most often prompted them to reconsider their planning (76 % of teachers), to understand the importance of oral understanding and reproduction (25 %), and to reconsider the expectations that they place on their students and methods they use to rate them (25 %). Most of the answers indicated the importance of the balanced development of all speech skills, the use of a competence-based approach in teaching (34 %).

«What changes, if any, have you made to the learning resources that you use in your teaching after taking the courses?»

The fifth question revealed the following: the majority of teachers (88 %) responded that training courses prompted them to make changes in the resources they use in their teaching. Teachers reported on the use of educational complexes recommended for use by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, specially compiled within the framework of the updated educational content. In addition to these educational complexes, a part of the respondents noted the use of other authentic materials, tasks based on the activity-oriented approach (30 % of teachers), performing tasks that help students develop listening and speaking skills (21 %). The respondents also mentioned the use of technology (for example, the Internet) for playing audio / video clips (18 % of teachers), interactive learning platforms such as Kahoot (10 %), a wider range of reading materials (9 %), fewer resources oriented on grammar (9 %), as well as resources that they create themselves (15 % of teachers). All these resources, according to the teachers, contribute to the increase in communicative and cognitive motivation, form linguistic and cultural and intercultural competence, have a positive effect on the personal and emotional state of students, and provide an opportunity to simultaneously address the language and culture.

Teaching practice

«Please note the following strategies for English language teaching practice and indicate how often you have used each element BEFORE and AFTER your professional training.»

Figure 3 shows that prior to vocational training courses, respondents indicated that their teaching focused most often on learning language structures (average response 3.7 out of a maximum 5 points) and correcting student errors as they appeared (3.5 out of 5). On the contrary, after training courses, the most frequent in teaching practice was the use of authentic oral, written assignments based on / close to real language

situations (4.2 and 4.1 out of 5 points). The most significant change in the frequency of use in teaching practice was the encouragement / motivation of students to independently determine the competencies necessary to complete a particular task (2.1 before and 3.8 after).

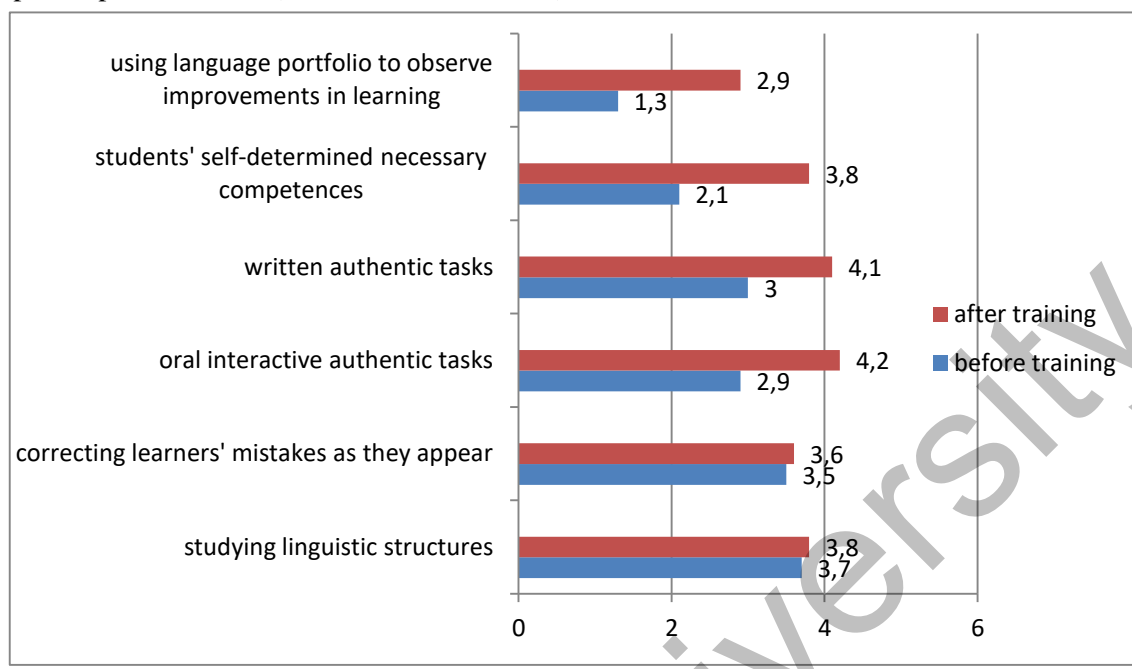


Figure 3. Frequency (0–5) of using learning elements in teaching practice BEFORE and AFTER vocational training

«Please indicate how much attention you paid to the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies, while working on the development of receptive and productive speech activities of students BEFORE and AFTER your education.»

As shown in Figure 4, teachers reported that while focusing on developing receptive (e.g. listening or reading) or productive skills (e.g. speaking or writing) prior to vocational training courses, the greatest emphasis was placed on developing linguistic competence (GPA 3.5 out of maximum 5 for receptive skills and 3.6 out of 5 for productive skills), less emphasis was placed on the development of pragmatic competence (receptive types of speech activity — 3.2; productive — 3.4) and the least attention was paid to sociolinguistic competence (receptive — 2, 6 points; productive — 3.0). In contrast, after training, regardless of whether they focused on developing receptive or productive skills, teachers reported increased attention to all three competencies, especially sociolinguistic (receptive — 3.9; productive — 3.9). The results show that after vocational training courses, there is a tendency towards a balanced development of all three competencies.

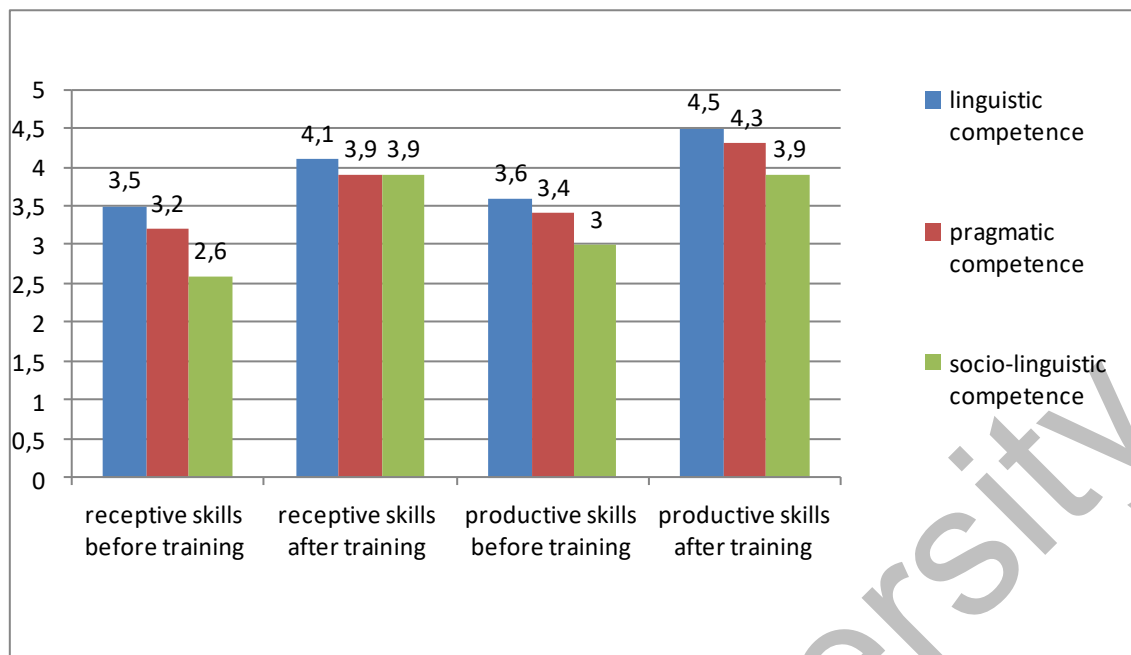


Figure 4. Distribution of attention (0–5) on the development of competencies in the field of receptive and productive skills BEFORE and AFTER vocational training

«Please select the statement that best reflects how you introduced the new material BEFORE and AFTER training».

Before vocational training, teachers most often presented the language in isolation or scattered (27 %) and thematically (44 %). On the contrary, after completing vocational training, teachers reported an almost complete revolution: almost 80 % of respondents introduce new material on demand (41 %) and through speech acts (38 %).

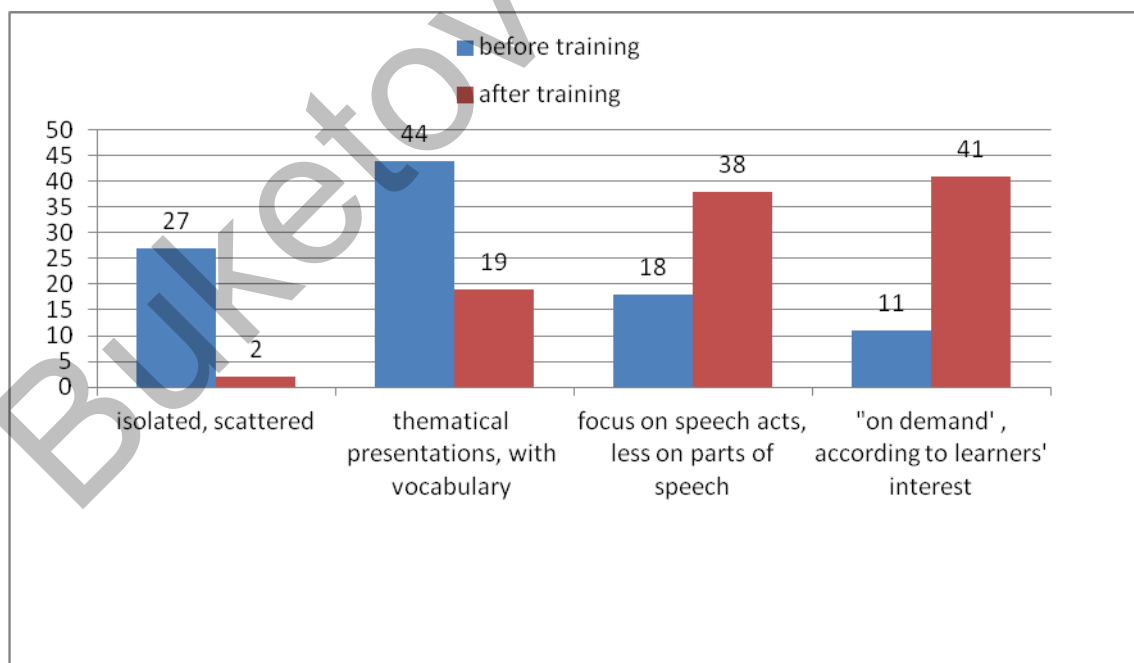


Figure 5. Introduction of language material (%) BEFORE and AFTER vocational training

«Please describe one effective action that you use to stimulate authentic, spontaneous speech interactions between students (after participating in professional training)».

The actions that, according to the respondents' answers, stimulated / motivated students to authentic, spontaneous, verbal interaction, included acting out authentic situations (36 % of teachers), conversations in the class with a guide (22 %), as well as working with a partner or group, including peer assessment / parsing (22 %). Teachers also mentioned the use of audio / visual cues used to exchange opinions and motivate discussion (12 %). 10 % of teachers mentioned activities that included using language in context, inquiry-based learning activities, and projects based on «I can» statements.

«What change in your teaching practice as a result of vocational training do you think has had the greatest impact on improving the knowledge of your students?»

The respondents believe that the increase in the level of knowledge of their students was most influenced by the provision of more tasks for the development of listening and speaking skills (44 % of teachers), less focus on the use of decontextualized grammar, more focus on language competencies in context (18 %). and the use of authentic situations and resources (17 %). Teachers also noted the positive impact of setting clear criteria and goals (21 %).

Conclusions

This study attempted to examine the impact of advanced training on teaching practice and lesson planning for proficient English language instruction in mainstream schools. The results showed that vocational training, as one of the scientific and methodological conditions for the transition to level-based training, has a positive impact on the area of planning and teaching. The findings show that the transition took place not only formally on paper. Teachers reported that there have been many changes in teaching English, ranging from the way they introduced language material, from isolated and disparate ways that were privilegedly focused on developing linguistic competence and that concentrated primarily on developing writing skills, to language presentation through verbal actions and based on the needs of students, paying attention not only to linguistic, but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies, and with particular attention to the development of communication skills. The changes also affected the planning of lessons, setting goals and objectives. The main emphasis is on the use of authentic language situations; more even distribution of attention in planning between linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences; an increase in the amount of study time, for the development of speaking and listening. This new focus in planning contrasts with the previous one, which focused on developing, above all, linguistic skills, especially in writing.

Changes have also taken place in the use of learning resources. If previously most of the time was devoted to memorizing grammatical and lexical units out of context, now teaching is based on the use of resources related to the postulates of the CEFR, authentic teaching materials, activity-oriented tasks, activities that help students develop listening and speaking skills. Also, among the resources, technologies (media resources, the Internet), a wider range of reading materials, as well as many of own resources based on the development of communicative competencies occupy a significant place.

However, this study has its limitations that may affect the validity of its results. First, as a result of the sample used, only teachers from urban schools took part in the survey who are interested, active and more aware of the importance and effectiveness of advanced training. Second, the findings of the study are based on retrospective self-reports of teachers about their teaching practice before and after vocational training, and not on direct observations of their work in the classroom, which, as such, should be viewed in this light. The findings of this study, nonetheless, provide informative and valuable insights into how learning and development successfully inspires teachers to make changes in their planning and teaching methods that are in many ways consistent with the goals and principles of proficiency in level-based English language learning, which in turn, moves from «paper to practice» towards competence-based, activity-oriented communicative learning.

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Қазақстан мектептерінде ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқыту: сабақты жоспарлау және оқыту тәжірибесі

Мақала Қазақстан мектептеріндегі ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқытудың қазіргі жағдайын талдауға арналған. Қазақстан Республикасында деңгейлік білім беруге көшу шетел тілін оқытудың бүкіл оқу процесінде елеулі өзгерістерді қажет етті: оқытылатын тіл елінің шартына ұқсас оқытудың жаңа, неғұрлым тиімді технологияларын енгізу, жаңа құжаттама жасау, мұғалімдердің біліктілігін арттыру, оқушылардың нәтижелерін бағалаудың жаңа жүйесін құру. Негізгі өзгеріс грамматика мен сөздік қорды үйретуге, тілді қолдану ережелерін білуге, дәстүрлі оқытудан коммуникативтік дағдыларға, оқыту құзыреттіліктеріне негізделген оқытуға бағытталған көшу болды. Мақала CEFR қағидаттарын іс жүзінде қолданудың ұсыныс құжаты ретінде қазақстандық мектептерде ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқытудағы әсерін зерттеу. Зерттеуде CEFR-ге, жаңартылған білім беру мазмұны мен коммуникативті тәсілді қолдануға байланысты кәсіптік оқытуға қатысқан ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің тәжірибесін,

сонымен бірге CEFR постулаттарының оқыту мен сабақты жоспарлау тәжірибесіне әсерін және өзгерістің дәрежесін көрсетуге тырысқан. Нәтижелер кәсіптік оқыту деңгейлік білім беруге көшудің ғылыми-әдістемелік шарттарының бірі ретінде жоспарлау мен бағалау саласына оң әсер ететіндігін көрсетті. Алынған деректер көрсеткендей, көшу тек қағаз жүзінде ғана емес, сонымен қатар сыныптарда да болған.

Кілт сөздер: тілдерді деңгейлі оқыту, шет тілдерін меңгерудегі жалпы еуропалық құзыреттілік, белсенділік тәсілі, бағалау жүйесі, тілдік құзыреттілік, құзыреттілік тәсіл, белсенділікке бағытталған тәсіл, үштілділік.

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Уровневое обучение английскому языку в школах Казахстана: практика преподавания и планирования занятий

Статья посвящена анализу современного состояния уровневого обучения английскому языку в школах Казахстана. Переход к уровневому обучению в Республике Казахстан потребовал значительных изменений всего учебного процесса по обучению иностранным языкам: внедрения новых, более эффективных технологий обучения, имитирующих условия страны изучаемого языка, создания новой документации, подготовки преподавателей, разработки новой системы оценивания результатов учащихся. Основным изменением стал переход от традиционного преподавания, ориентированного на обучение грамматике и лексике, знание правил употребления языка к преподаванию, основанному на обучении коммуникативным навыкам, обучении компетенциям. Статья представляет собой исследование, изучающее влияние практическое применение принципов CEFR, как рекомендательного документа, в уровневом обучении английскому языку в казахстанских школах. В данном исследовании предпринята попытка изучить влияние, которое постулаты CEFR оказывают на практику преподавания и планирования занятий, а также масштабы этого изменения, путем изучения практики учителей английского языка, которые участвовали в профессиональном обучении, связанном с CEFR, с обновленным содержанием образования и коммуникативным подходом в обучении иностранным языкам. Результаты показали, что профессиональное обучение, как одно из научно-методических условий перехода на уровневое обучение, оказывает положительное влияние на область планирования и преподавания. Полученные данные показывают, что переход случился не только формально на бумаге, но и в классах.

Ключевые слова: уровневое обучение языкам, общеевропейские компетенции владения иностранным языком, деятельностный подход, система оценивания, языковые компетенции, компетентностный подход, деятельностно-ориентированный подход, трехязычие.

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