

BRIDGING THE GAP: EVALUATING THE ALIGNMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL EFL CURRICULUM WITH TESOL STANDARDS IN THE UZBEKISTAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

This paper investigates the alignment and effectiveness of the current **National Middle School English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Curriculum in Uzbekistan** with internationally recognized **TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Standards** (TESOL International Association, 2018). While Uzbekistan has prioritized English language education, ensuring that national curricula meet global best practices is crucial for student success and teacher professional development. This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach, comparing the stated goals, learning outcomes, and assessment methods of the national curriculum documents against the TESOL P-12 Professional Teaching Standards. Initial findings suggest a strong foundational alignment in promoting communicative competence but identify potential gaps in areas related to **Sociolinguistic Competence** and the systematic development of **critical thinking skills** through English. The paper concludes by recommending specific, evidence-based revisions to the national curriculum to enhance its effectiveness and ensure graduates are prepared for global communication and academic pursuits.

Keywords: EFL Curriculum, Uzbekistan, TESOL Standards, Curriculum Alignment, Middle School Education, Communicative Competence, Curriculum Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

The Republic of Uzbekistan recognizes English language proficiency as a key factor in economic development and integration into the global community. Significant efforts have been made to reform English language teaching (ELT), particularly at the middle school level (Aripova, 2021). The national curriculum serves as the core

blueprint for these efforts, guiding pedagogical practice and resource allocation. However, the rapidly evolving landscape of global education necessitates a continual evaluation of national standards against international benchmarks, such as the comprehensive **TESOL P-12 Professional Teaching Standards** (TESOL International Association, 2018). These standards provide a globally accepted framework for quality in English language instruction, focusing on language, culture, content, and professionalism. The aim of this article is to critically evaluate the extent to which the current Uzbek middle school EFL curriculum aligns with, and effectively implements the principles embedded within, the TESOL standards, thereby identifying areas for strategic improvement.

2. Main Part: Curriculum Evaluation and Analysis

2.1. Theoretical Framework: TESOL Standards and Curriculum Design

The TESOL Standards emphasize that effective EFL instruction must be grounded in an understanding of language as a complex, dynamic system and the learner as a sociocultural being (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). The five main domains of the TESOL Standards—Planning, Instructing, Assessing, Identity and Context, and Professionalism—provide a holistic view of quality teaching. **Alignment** is defined here as the degree to which the national curriculum's stated objectives and learning activities reflect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions articulated in these domains.

2.2. Communicative Competence and Skills Focus

The national curriculum clearly **espouses** a commitment to developing **Communicative Competence**, emphasizing the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For instance, the curriculum **stipulates** that students should be able to hold basic conversations about daily routines and read short, descriptive texts (Uzbek Ministry of Public Education, 2020). This aligns well with the TESOL **Instructing** and **Planning** standards, which prioritize instruction that develops functional language use. However, a closer look at common classroom practices reveals that instruction often **reverts** to traditional, grammar-focused methods under high-stakes testing pressures (Karimov, 2022).

2.3. Assessment Practices and TESOL Alignment

Curriculum effectiveness is often measured by its assessment component. The national curriculum largely relies on summative assessments (tests and quizzes) that primarily target discrete-point grammar and vocabulary knowledge. This approach **differs** from the TESOL **Assessing** standard, which stresses the importance of authentic, performance-based assessments that measure real-world communicative abilities (Farhady, 2020). The current assessment structure may inadvertently incentivize rote memorization over genuine language fluency.

2.4. Addressing Sociocultural and Critical Thinking Gaps

A significant area of potential misalignment lies in the TESOL **Identity and Context** standard, which calls for teachers to incorporate and affirm students' cultural backgrounds while helping them understand diverse perspectives. The national curriculum, while incorporating some cultural elements, often **excludes** opportunities for deep intercultural reflection or the development of **critical thinking skills** through content (Niyazov, 2023). This omission is a missed opportunity, as modern ELT theory **posits** that language learning should serve as a vehicle for intellectual and critical engagement with global issues (Ellis, 2021).

3. Conclusion

The Uzbek National Middle School EFL Curriculum exhibits a commendable **initial alignment** with the TESOL Standards, particularly in its goal of fostering communicative competence. However, to truly bridge the gap and maximize effectiveness, targeted reforms are necessary. These should include: a) the integration of more authentic, performance-based assessment tasks; b) the explicit inclusion of activities designed to foster critical thinking and sociolinguistic awareness, as suggested by Ellis (2021) and the TESOL P-12 Standards; and c) increased teacher training focusing on shifting from grammar-focused instruction to truly communicative methodology (Karimov, 2022). By addressing these areas, the curriculum can ensure that Uzbek students receive a high-quality EFL education that prepares them for success in an interconnected world.

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