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Level teaching of the English language within the framework of the updated content of secondary education in the Republic of Kazakhstan

This article aims at analysing the way that compulsory schools in Kazakhstan approach the level based teaching of the English language in the framework of the updated content of secondary education. English language teaching is changing its paradigm in favor of level education, which is theoretically justified, and this transition in education became possible thanks to the consolidation of the experience of foreign countries and our own domestic experience. This study provides an overview of the existing policy in English language teaching, it gives an insight into the implementation of the new program taking into consideration language learning curricula or guidelines, teachers' qualifications, textbooks, examinations, and syllabuses. This study is an attempt to analyze the process of transition to level teaching of the English language within the framework of the updated content of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, using the available data on the language policy of Kazakhstan, regulatory documents in the sphere of language education. The results of the study show that the transition to level teaching of the English language can be successful if certain scientific and methodological conditions are met. The research results are presented in the form of a case study report, taking into account the factors that positively or negatively affect the process of implementing the language program.

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 socio-economic and cultural-linguistic development of the state is inextricably linked with improvement of the quality of education and search for new forms of education, which in turn are dictated by order of the state, the transition to a new technological era and open society. Accordingly, changes are taking place in teaching languages in Kazakhstan, where the target languages are Kazakh, Russian, English, the trilingual program is adopted and multiculturalism and linguistic diversity becomes natural and organically existing. Teaching the English language is changing its paradigm in favor of level education, which is theoretically justified, and this transition in education became possible thanks to the consolidation of the experience of foreign countries and our own domestic experience. In Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) and in pilot schools in Kazakhstan, level teaching of languages has passed practical testing and has established itself as a successful innovative approach that contributes to the development of a multilingual and multicultural personality. Of course, the depth and strength of students' possession of educational material depends not only on one or another system of organizing the educational process, but also on the content of training, on how

teachers present educational material, what is a teacher's personal influence on a student and on many factors and conditions.

In the context of the updated content of education and taking into account the practical application of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1], as well as the development of the domestic "Unified Language Standard for Teaching Three Languages" [2], it became possible to introduce the Kazakhstani language teaching model, which covers levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, into practice. Thus, in Kazakhstan the first four levels of language proficiency, which are adapted and have their own sublevels and differences at various stages of education, are proposed. They are developed on the basis of age characteristics and took into account the multicultural environment of Kazakhstan.

Level learning of the English language, based on the communicative-activity approach, is relevant for modern Kazakhstan, since, according to the state compulsory education standards, the transition to English as medium language for teaching a number of subjects of the natural and mathematical cycle is provided for by the "100 Steps" Program, named by the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev's "Plan of the Nation", the implementation of which should become "number one" task for the next 10-15 years [3]. At the same time, the main goal, as indicated in step 79 "Gradual transition to English in the education system: in schools and universities", is to increase the competitiveness of graduates and increase the export potential of the educational sector. The achievement of this goal was reflected in the State Program for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016–2019, in addition, in 2015 the Roadmap for the development of trilingual education for 2015–2020 was adopted [4]. However, the phased transition began back in 2013 when English was introduced into the first grade curriculum. In 2018-2019 academic year the experiment continued in teaching subjects in English. In 2019, it was allowed to study Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computer science in upper grades of schools by decision of teachers' councils and parental committees (provided that schools are ready for such training). In 2019-2020 academic year, all schools of regional centers have introduced teaching from 1 to 4 subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computer science) in English in grades 10-11 according to content and language based integrated learning (CLIL). From 2020-2021 academic year as soon as teachers, students and educational resources are ready, one or more of the four specified subjects will be studied in English (with parental consent) in schools of regional centers, single-industry towns and large villages. From 2021-2022 academic year, as soon as they are ready, rural and small schools will be transferred to teaching individual subjects in English. In 2017-2018 academic year, out of 800 schools that expressed a desire to switch to CLIL, 153 schools were selected for the Pilot Project, where subjects are taught by teachers who speak English at B1, B2 levels. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan annually conducts professional training courses for teachers of Science subjects on learning English, the level of language proficiency must be at least B2 [5–7].

Experimental

This article makes an attempt to analyze the process of transition to level-based teaching of the English language within the framework of the updated content of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This research study is a descriptive one based on quantitative research methods. In this study, an attempt was made to describe an existing situation. Using the available data on the language policy of Kazakhstan, the regulations governing language education, this study seeks to assess the success of the transition to level language education. The results of the study show that the transition to level teaching of the English language can be successful if certain scientific and methodological conditions are met. The research results are presented in the form of a case study report, taking into account the factors that positively or negatively affect the process of implementing the language program.

Case study is a data collection research method aimed at studying a specific situation, a particular case that exists in reality. The use of this method is also legitimate in foreign pedagogy. The main feature of the case study is a detailed, contextual study of a particular case in its "uniqueness, originality, irreproducibility in other conditions as an individual self-valuable, integral phenomenon in the entire set of connections that form it" [8]. This research method allows to get closer to the real state of affairs with all its versatility. Without pretending to be statistically reliable and the possibility of extending the conclusions to a large number of phenomena, the case study method is aimed at in-depth study of the problem, concentrating on the details of what is happening and their interrelationships. In our work, we processed regulatory documents using the method of a comparative analysis. A parallel was drawn between the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as the most applicable scale of levels of foreign language

proficiency in modern language education, and regulatory documents in the field of teaching English in comprehensive schools of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main advantage of this research method is that the information obtained through the analysis of documents serves as the basis for hypotheses and further verification of the data obtained by other methods.

The regulatory legislative documents in the field of level language education served as the instruments of the study, together with school curricula and teaching materials as data collection tools. The level scale by grades of the standard curriculum as well as the scale of expected results for each level have been used to determine the ultimate goals for each of the levels of language proficiency.

Results and Discussion

The normative legal acts governing the level teaching of the English language at school include:

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 dated October 31, 2018 No. 604 (with amendments and additions No. 182 dated May 5, 2020) [9, 10];

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. Altynsarin (minutes No. 9 dated October 20, 2016)

3. Standard 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 (with amendments and additions made as of September 4, 2018 No. 441) [11];

4. Instructional and methodological letter of the National Academy of Education named after I. Altynsarin "On the features of the educational process in educational institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic year" [12].

The main idea of all level education is to progressively implement the tasks set for the teacher, to combine it with the aim of teaching students according to the updated curriculum and the formation of their lexical and grammatical skills based on the achievement of high results at each level of English proficiency (from elementary to advanced) and in every type of speech activity (listening, speaking, reading, writing). In the context of the updated content of education an important concept is related to the level of language proficiency, which includes a certain degree of development of the student's communicative competencies in accordance with the stages of learning (grades 1-11) from the point of view of the process of his interaction with representatives of other linguistic cultures in a multilingual context. The term "level" is used in the phrase "level system of language proficiency" for training students in teaching English, which takes into account the scale of mastering the level of verbal communication for all four types of speech activity, as well as taking into account the age characteristics of students. Further they are presented in tables, recommendations, appendices. The level-based approach allows us to consider any process of development of a linguistic personality as a transition from one level to another, more complex and qualitatively higher, as evidenced by the communication skills mastered by students at the exit (that is, upon completion of each stage of education from grades 1 to 11) [13].

Using the experience of various countries, Kazakhstan has developed its own scale of level education in accordance with the Unified language standard for teaching three languages and other Kazakhstani documents (Table 1).

It is known that the peculiarities of the natural multicultural linguistic environment of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the transition to the updated content of education as a requirement of globalization and the digital era contributed to the emergence of prerequisites for the transition to level-based language teaching. Modern technological progress, innovations in the economy, construction of open society, active migration processes (internal, external), interaction of languages and cultures require from modern youth, whose main learning activity falls on school time (from 1 to 11 grades), to activate critical thinking, skills and abilities to analyze and evaluate situations that students encounter in everyday life, such as the ability to generate ideas and independently search for information in the global Internet space, as well as the development of personal qualities and teamwork skills, emotional and aesthetic perception of real life. All this has become possible as a result of new educational trends, which are presented as level teaching of the English language. The abovementioned prerequisites for the transition to level education are taken into account when teaching the subject and allow to pay attention to the features of learning English and the principles and teaching methods used in this.

Table 1

Level scale by grades of the Standard curriculum in the "English language" subject of the updated educational content

European level scale (CEFR)	Level scale by grades of the curriculum in the "English language" subject of the updated content of education	
A1 (Breakthrough)	1 grade	A1 working towards
	2 grade	A1 low
	3 grade	A1 mid
	4 grade	A1 high
A2 (Waystage)	5 grade	A2 low–mid
	6 grade	A2 mid–high
B1 (Threshold)	7 grade	B1 low
	8 grade	B1 mid
	9 grade	B1 high
B2 (Vantage)	10 grade	B2 low–mid
	11 grade	B2 high

It is necessary to understand that for various reasons, the level of language competence of students may be different. Among the factors affecting this can be different socio-economic, family and living conditions, different language environments, for example, the opportunity to attend private lessons, classes in preschool institutions with in-depth language training, or the use of the language with native speakers during traveling, online communication, etc. Thus, the introduction of level teaching of the English language, proposed in the Unified Language Standard for teaching three languages in the curricula, is primarily associated with a different degree of language skills proficiency.

Level learning is based, as already emphasized, on the achievements of domestic and foreign theory, practice and linguodidactics. Pedagogical, philological, scientific and methodological studies of the past and present centuries constitute a reliable theoretical and methodological base that allows to follow the achievements in this area and show how, with the development of communications and technological progress, attitudes towards language learning are changing and new ways of teaching appear, taking into account the multilingual state of society, changes in the language situation and the influence of globalization processes.

Below are the levels describing knowledge and skills that students must have in reading, listening, speaking and writing.

Table 2

Expected results for each level in the program of "English language" subject of the updated educational content

Level	Descriptors of the European level scale (CEFR)	Expected results for each level in the program of "English language" subject of the updated educational content
1	2	3
A1	I understand and can use familiar phrases and expressions in my speech that are necessary to accomplish specific tasks. I can introduce myself / introduce others, ask / answer questions about the place of residence, acquaintances, property. I can engage in a simple conversation if the other person speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to help.	Grade 1 Students: - know and understand basic questions, general personal questions, common names and place names; - have the simplest communication skills for talking about people and objects.
		Grade 2 Students: - recognize the main points of short, slow conversations, such as color and number, short main questions and stories; - can make basic suggestions about personal information, people and objects, ask questions to meet basic needs.
		Grade 3 Students: - recognize the content of short conversations, brief instructions and questions that ask for personal information; - provide concise information about people and objects; - begin to read very short, simple fiction and popular science texts.

		Grade 4 Students: - understand and support the conversation about themselves and others; - can briefly describe people and objects; - answer questions and express likes and dislikes.
A2	I understand individual sentences and common expressions related to the main areas of life (for example, basic information about myself and my family members, shopping, getting a job, etc.). I can perform tasks related to the simple exchange of information on familiar or everyday topics. In simple terms, I can tell about myself, my family and friends, describe the main aspects of everyday life.	Grade 5 Students: - understand the basic questions that ask for personal information, the main points of supported conversation; - can tell basic information about themselves and others, opinion at the proposal level, ask simple questions; - can plan, write and edit at the text level. Can make factual text-based descriptions of people, places and objects;
		Grade 6 Students: - respond to more complex questions that require personal information, understand the main points of extended conversation; - tell basic information about yourself and others, stories and events; - reflect personal feelings and opinions in a letter.
B1	I understand the main ideas of clear messages made in the literary language on various topics that typically arise at work, study, leisure, etc. I can communicate in most situations that may arise during my stay in the country of the target language. I can compose a coherent message on topics that are known or of particular interest to me. I can describe impressions, events, hopes, aspirations, state and justify my opinion and plans for the future.	Grade 7 Students: - understand the main points, the most specific information and most of the argument in extended conversation; - give opinions and participate in discussions; - interact with peers to negotiate; - observe literacy and punctuation in written works at the text level, give written arguments according to examples.
		Grade 8 Students: - understand most of the implied meaning in extended conversations and texts; - interact with peers to negotiate, agree and organize priorities and plans for completing classroom tasks; - describe and retell some extended stories and events.
		Grade 9 Students: - understand the main points, the most specific information and details in extended conversations and texts; - know how to ask complex questions, can explain and substantiate their own point of view; - can write coherently at the text level using different connectors.
B2	I understand the general content of complex texts on abstract and specific topics, including highly specialized texts. I speak quickly and spontaneously enough to constantly communicate with native speakers without too much difficulty for either party. I can make clear, detailed messages on various topics and present my views on the main problem, show the advantages and disadvantages of different opinions.	Grade 10 Students: - understand the main content of free discussion, specific information and details of the argument in a long discussion; - use formal and informal styles of speech, explain and substantiate their own and other people's point of view, evaluate and comment on the opinions of other people; - understand the basic idea of long texts, recognize specific information and details from long texts of various styles and genres. Use scan reading of long texts in order to determine the content of the texts. Read a variety of texts of fiction and scientific literature on familiar and unfamiliar topics, as well as on topics from the curriculum; - write grammatically correct texts using speech style to achieve an appropriate degree of formality. Formulate logical arguments and, if necessary, examples and reasons.
		Grade 11 Students: - understand the main idea, specific information, details of the implied meaning of the argument during free discussion on various topics from the curriculum; - use a formal and informal style of speech in the discussion; explain and substantiate their own and other people's point of view, evaluate and comment on the opinions of other people, interact with peers to put forward hypotheses and evaluate alternative proposals for familiar and some unfamiliar

		general and educational goals, manage the course of discussion and use paraphrasing; - understand complex and abstract ideas, specific information and details in the context of long texts; - individually plan grammar-compliant writing on a variety of general and academic topics using speech styles to achieve an appropriate degree of formality within written genres on general and academic topics.

With reference to the CEFR, a series of English curriculum reforms were undertaken that were designed to address the problems of the previous English curriculum, such as lack of set goals or outcomes for learners' English levels, and lack of course consistency so there was no opportunity to develop skills received in the previous class. More detailed and specific expected learning outcomes were prepared for each grade. To create such learning outcomes, the scaled descriptors in the respective language exercises listed in the CEFR have been modified to match the class-specific English curriculum of the updated curriculum.

The updated program provides the continuity of the content of language education based on the level model of English language acquisition in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As can be seen from the above tables, the curriculum indicates that primary school students must master English at A1 at elementary level. It is assumed that students in grades 5-7 will reach level A2, grades 8-9 level B1 and grades 10-11 level B2. In the updated English language program each of the 4 levels has sublevels: low, medium, high. Fundamentally new in this program was the designation of the requirements for practical language proficiency in four types of speech activity in the form of the expected objectives of teaching the subject. Specific learning outcomes are important components of the course program. They are the foundation upon which daily classroom assignments, language activities and teaching materials are developed, as well as the basis for both teacher assessment and self-assessment. Consistency throughout the curriculum is ensured by setting clear objectives for each of the 4 levels. The goals become more complex from one class to another as skills of speech are developed.

Distinctive features of the curriculum are:

- the principle of helicity. This principle assumes a gradual increase in knowledge and skills from topic to topic, from class to class, provides the study of goals and topics again at regular intervals (within the academic year or in subsequent classes), including knowledge and skills that gradually expand in depth, volume and complexity.

- focusing on learning goals based on the formation of students' thinking skills from elementary (knowledge, understanding, application) to a high level (analysis, synthesis, assessment). Achieving goals for speech skills assumes that the development of mental activity in progression proceeds from “knows, understands” to “distinguishes, compares”. Knowledge, skills and abilities are formed and developed through thinking skills from the most elementary to high-order thinking skills (according to Bloom's taxonomy).

- the presence of “cross-cutting topics” at the primary level of education and the presence of topics that provide interdisciplinary connections at the basic and general secondary levels of education, which allows to organize the learning process as efficiently as possible. Obviously, in order to implement these requirements in the modern methodology of teaching English, it is necessary to determine the methodological foundations, among which such a category as approach occupies a special place.

The CEFR is a document of recommendational character on the basis of which the EU member states should develop educational programs compulsory for educational institutions. Nevertheless, we are not talking about blindly copying the experience of foreign colleagues. The importance of teaching foreign languages was considered by our researchers back in the days when socio-economic conditions coupled with public criticism did not allow the use of the data obtained by science in practice, although experiments on the need for an early start of teaching FL for propaedeutic and developmental purposes were carried out in the early 2000s, and they were recognized as successful.

Despite the coinciding methodological postulates of the State Compulsory Standard of Education, the Unified Language Standard for Teaching Three Languages and the CEFR, these documents are comparable only if the socio-cultural context and the realities in which these standards are applied are understood. CEFR is a supranational document written with the aim of developing a specific methodological line for teaching foreign languages and subsequent assessment of the level of formation of students' communicative competence.

With a detailed analysis of the State Compulsory Educational Standard, its differences from CEFR in terms of language education become obvious. First, teaching foreign languages is linked not only with subsequent study periods, but also with the subjects of the general education program, since the document embeds FL teaching into the general education system. In the modern world of technological and communicative progress the following thesis is becoming more and more relevant: whatever the content of education, the main instrument of its transmission and reception was and will be a language as the basis for the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional development of schoolchildren. Therefore, teaching English is built through the assimilation of all levels on the basis of four types of speech activity (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and through subjects in this language of instruction (for example, science subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc. in English). Integration with other studied subjects in school at all stages of education allows to turn to the program content of these subjects in order to select lexical material and use it in work. Particular attention should be paid to the need for the formation of research skills and the development of students' creative abilities. They are essential skills required for modern education and effective entry into the new technological and communication space.

Conclusion

The introduction of level language teaching in Kazakhstan has become undoubtedly a positive reform in the educational process:

– the transition to level teaching of foreign languages was carried out with a focus on international exams;

– the quality of teaching foreign languages has significantly improved, as a result of which students have the opportunity to participate in international competitions, projects, exchange programs and study abroad;

– the transition to competence-based, activity-based and student-oriented approaches demanded that teachers search for new teaching technologies and improve pedagogical skills;

– the success of the teaching program increased the motivation of students.

The level-based approach to teaching English has a number of positive characteristics that a teacher must learn as mandatory rules in their work, for example:

1) a clear understanding of the ultimate goals for each of the levels of language proficiency;

2) the possibility of ensuring the continuity of training;

3) transparency and objectivity in assessing knowledge of students within each level;

4) possibility for learners to check and evaluate themselves in accordance with the descriptors;

5) compliance with global trends in teaching a foreign language and in the future to be harmoniously included in the general system of the diverse linguistic space of the world and the requirements of employers.

The attractiveness of the level-based model and the development of language proficiency scale of levels are determined by the following:

– its suitability for all foreign languages;

– focus on the practical mastery of the language due to the activity-based approach in teaching laid in its foundation;

– reflection of the interests of various professional and age groups of students;

– the opportunity to join the global processes of teaching languages and adhere to the principle of "teach to learn" and "unity in diversity", "Program of the trinity of languages".

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Қазақстан Республикасындағы орта білім берудің жаңартылған мазмұны аясында ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқыту

Мақала Қазақстан мектептеріндегі ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқытудың қазіргі жағдайын талдауға арналған. Ағылшын тілін оқыту өзінің парадигмасын деңгейлі білім берудің пайдасына өзгертеді, ол теориялық тұрғыдан негізделген, ал білім берудегі бұл ауысу шет елдердің тәжірибесі мен біздің отандық тәжірибемізді шоғырландырудың арқасында мүмкін болды. Әртүрлі елдердің тәжірибесін қолдана отырып, Қазақстан үш тілді оқытудың Бірыңғай тілдік стандартына және басқа да мемлекеттік құжаттарына сәйкес өзінің тілді меңгерудің деңгейлерін жасады. Сонымен қатар, Қазақстан жағдайында тілді меңгерудің алғашқы төрт деңгейі бейімделіп, білім берудің әртүрлі кезеңдеріндегі айырмашылықтары бар өзіндік ішкі деңгейлері ұсынылған. Авторлар Қазақстанның тіл саясаты туралы қолда бар деректерді, тілдік білім беруді реттейтін нормативтік құжаттарды пайдалана отырып, Қазақстан Республикасындағы білім берудің жаңартылған мазмұны аясында ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқытуға көшу процесін талдауға талпыныс жасаған. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, белгілі бір ғылыми-әдістемелік шарттар орындалған жағдайда ағылшын тілін деңгейлеп оқуға көшу сәтті болады. Зерттеу нәтижелері тілдік бағдарламаны іске асыру процесіне оң немесе теріс әсер ететін факторларды ескере отырып, *case study* есебі түрінде ұсынылды.

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 рамках обновленного содержания среднего образования в Республике Казахстан

Статья посвящена анализу современного состояния уровневого обучения английскому языку в школах Казахстана. Обучение английскому языку меняет свою парадигму в пользу уровневого обучения,

что оправдано и теоретически обосновано, и этот переход в образовании стал возможен благодаря консолидации опыта зарубежных стран и собственного отечественного опыта. С использованием опыта различных стран в Казахстане разработана своя шкала уровневого обучения в соответствии с Единым языковым стандартом обучения трем языкам и другим казахстанским документам. Причем в контексте Казахстана предложены первые четыре уровня владения языком, которые адаптированы, имеют свои подуровни, отличия на различных этапах обучения. Авторами предпринята попытка проанализировать процесс перехода на уровневое обучение английскому языку в рамках обновленного содержания образования в Республике Казахстан, используя имеющиеся данные о языковой политике Казахстана, нормативные документы, регулирующие языковое образование. Результаты исследования показывают, что переход на уровневое обучение английскому языку может быть успешным при соблюдении определенных научно-методических условий. Результаты исследования представлены в виде *case study* отчета с учетом факторов, которые положительно или отрицательно влияют на процесс реализации языковой программы.

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

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