

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK APPRAISAL

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THE CHALLENGE

Under the umbrella of the English Speaking Nation initiative, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education (MoPSE) envisions a transformative educational system. By 2030, this system aims to foster grade 11 graduates who possess at least a B1 level proficiency in English as measured by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages.

To realize this ambitious goal, MoPSE acknowledges the importance of enhancing both the language proficiency of English educators and the effectiveness of their teaching methods. Additionally, the Ministry is committed to providing students and teachers with a comprehensive, high-quality suite of English teaching and learning materials. These materials will be meticulously interconnected across different grades and levels, providing a cohesive learning experience aligned with national standards. Leveraging the significant contributions made by MoPSE partners, the USAID Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program (UEEP) was strategically designed to enhance and support current initiatives.

THE SOLUTION

The MoPSE requested English language series from five renowned international publishers. The EFL technical experts embarked on an exciting journey, immersing themselves in each series. They carefully dissected and analyzed, employing their expert skills to ensure the utmost relevance for the students and dedicated teachers of Uzbekistan. The EFL experts narrowed down their selection to two extraordinary series. But their work had just begun. The experts wielded a powerful arsenal of mixed methods data collection tools, using 78 meticulously chosen assessment items. They crafted their analysis, taking into account the hopes and dreams of every student and teacher. They sought a series that aligned with the educational objectives and provided a rich diversity of teaching and learning materials. It had to be a series that breathed life into classrooms, igniting the flames of curiosity and fostering engagement through innovative teaching methods. In this quest for the perfect series, the EFL experts understood the importance of identifying a dynamic and captivating learning experience for every student in Uzbekistan. And in the end, they presented a series for the Ministry's approval that embodied the spirit of English language instruction.

Shukhrat Sattorov, Director of the Republican Education Center, stated:

"The [MoPSE] aims to improve English language instruction by enhancing the curriculum with modern methodologies and student-centered and standards-based approaches. Our partnership with USAID provides us with valuable international technical assistance to enhance our educators' understanding of modern educational trends and support a vision of graduates with practical skills for future learning and employment opportunities."

OVERVIEW OF THE IN DEPTH-APPRAISAL PROCESS

Step 1

Orientation - the EFL experts reviewed the mission of the group to determine individual roles, group roles, and the goals of the process. Experts defined the timeline of activities and the dates to submit deliverables. The experts reviewed the tools and sources of information, practiced using the established Moodle website where all the appraisal tools, books, and any other relevant content were located. The experts discussed considerations for feedback that would be helpful for completing the appraisal tool, building a better understanding of the task, and being efficient at reviewing the textbooks using the appraisal form.

Step 2

Experts embarked on a comprehensive review of their prior appraisal experiences, identifying any challenges encountered when responding to appraisal questions. They further conducted a poll, gathering insights on the time required to complete book set appraisals and gauging the level of ease or difficulty encountered by appraisers. To enhance their proficiency, experts engaged in practice appraisals using pilot assessment tools, working with diverse sets of student's and teacher's books across multiple grades. This rigorous process aimed to refine their skills, ensure consistency, and improve their ability to assess book sets effectively, addressing any potential difficulties in the appraisal process.

Step 3

Review two international series - EFL experts reviewed series A, Grade 6, and series B, Grade 8. Appraisal forms were collated and shared. Experts discussed each assessment item and provided the final "consensus score."

Step 4

Developed Recommendation - Experts reviewed all data collected from the collated appraisal forms (including consensus scores) and results of data analysis. The experts discussed the results, and considerations for customization of each of the publisher's materials. Experts compiled their assessment submission for the Ministry including the following information:

- Summary of findings (data from appraisals) for decision-making
- Rationale for selecting a preferred series
- Potential challenges for customization of books and the needs, aspirations, and capacity of teachers and students in Uzbekistan
- Recommendations for the MoPSE



CAPACITY TO EVALUATION INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM MATERIALS ENHANCED

- Experts used new technologies, such as Moodle to increase access and organization of large amounts of materials and collection and review assessment data. In addition, the use of technology solutions helped to store and keep information organized.
- Experts developed assessment tools to guide review and reached consensus on each of the items. The use of a single collated form, on the Moodle site, enabled all team members to see all the scores and the average score. Experts discussed the responses with greater deviation and entered a final consensus score.
- Experts identified good practice during the process, including the use of sub-score for each of the categories of the appraisal form, examples of “what to look for” under each category and item in the appraisal form, and two separate columns for “comments/rationale” and “customization notes”



A LOOK AT THE IN DEPTH-APPRAISAL FORM

The appraisal form facilitated the process of reviewing the content of the student’s books and teacher’s guides. The categories were selected based on the best practices of EFL instruction, relevance and appropriateness of content to the grade levels, instructional time, standards of learning, local context, and available classroom resources (see Table 1). In the form, the listed categories are followed by examples of what to look for in the books, including alignment with target CEFR levels and instructional hours per grade level in Uzbekistan (see Table 2). Even though the added explanations made the appraisal form lengthy, the appraisers acknowledged that the examples helped them understand what the categories meant and made the process of reviewing the content of the books more efficient.

Table 1. In depth-appraisal form with a list of categories of what to look for in the books

Student’s book (total 13 categories and 39 questions)	Teacher’s book (total 4 categories and 39 questions)
1. Country and Cultural Appropriateness (4) 2. Structure and Organization (2) 3. Layout and Accessibility (2) 4. Content (7) 5. Pacing of Content (1) 6. Learning (6) 7. Language and Readability (4) 8. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (1) 9. Comprehensiveness of Student Resources (1) 10. Universal Design for Learning (3) 11. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) (3) 12. Multiculturalism and Interculturalism (2) 13. Assignments and Assessments (3)	1. Overall Content (7) 2. Design (8) 3. Instructional Support (18) 4. Assessment (6)

The form included a four-point scale for each question within the various categories. Appraisers checked a number on the scale and entered their comments with rationale for their scores and notes for later customization of the books. The form was shared as an Excel spreadsheet with locked areas for content, allowing everyone to enter their scores and comments without changing the questions.

The individual responses were collated and shared anonymously. Appraisers met and discussed and arrived at a consensus score that was used as a final score during data analysis.

Using the form helped appraisal teams review data across category averages, by textbook score, by textbook guide, by grand total, etc. The appraisal and discussions allowed the teams to draw conclusions based on data and provide recommendations for selecting the publisher that best fit the needs and competence levels of English teachers and learners in Uzbekistan.

WHICH WAS THE PREFERRED PUBLISHER?

Books that captivate through compelling layout and alluring visuals were the focal point of the experts' evaluation. They also assessed the degree to which these books facilitated student engagement through interactive exercises. Simultaneously, they sought out resources that provided educators with clear, user-friendly instructions.

A comprehensive review was also undertaken to compare the educational standards of Uzbekistan with those incorporated in international series. The purpose of this was to ensure alignment and relevance, thereby enhancing the teaching and learning experience.

The level of supplementary materials associated with a student's book set or teacher's manual was another crucial criterion that EFL experts scrutinized. They analyzed the availability of supporting resources like workbooks, audio and visual files, as well as accessibility to downloadable assessment tests. This approach was essential to guarantee a well-rounded, interactive, and immersive language learning experience.

Equally important was the ability of publishers to tailor their materials to Uzbekistan's specific requirements. The experts gave preference to those who demonstrated flexibility in customizing resources to meet the unique cultural and educational needs of Uzbek students, thereby making the learning experience more effective and personalized.

FINAL SELECTION OF INTERNATIONAL SERIES OF TEXTBOOKS

The MoPSE selected the Cambridge *Guess What!* series for grades 1-6 and *Prepare* series for grades 7–11 based on the factors mentioned above. These textbook series provide a solid basis for the teaching, learning, and assessment of EFL in Uzbekistan and provide an excellent starting point for reaching the country's goal of becoming an English-speaking nation by 2030.

Program Summary:

USAID partners with the Government of Uzbekistan to enhance student learning in English, information and communication technology, reading and mathematics. The USAID UEEP supports the MoPSE to revise student learning standards, provide new teaching and learning materials and comprehensive teacher training aligned to these standards, and conduct rigorous monitoring and research. Working closely with the Ministry, our consortium – led by RTI International includes Florida State University and Mississippi State University – brings the experience and expertise of international and local experts to drive effective Program implementation. Together, we aim to foster student engagement and improve learning outcomes.