

An Overview of Curriculum Requirements for Developing Key Competencies in Preschool Learners in English Lessons

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Abstract: This article explores the curriculum requirements for the development of core (key) competencies in preschool learners through English language instruction. Rooted in the competency-based approach of Uzbekistan's State Preschool Education Curriculum, the article outlines the nature and significance of key competencies in early childhood education, particularly within English language classes. It examines the theoretical foundations of communicative, social, personal, cognitive, and creative competencies, and provides examples of classroom practices aimed at nurturing these skills in children aged 6–7. The integration of these competencies is essential for ensuring children's holistic development and smooth transition into primary education.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Competency-Based Curriculum, Key Competencies, English Lessons, Cognitive Development, Social-Emotional Learning, Uzbekistan Education System

Introduction

Preschool education serves as the foundation for developing key competencies that children continue to build throughout their academic journeys and personal lives. According to Uzbekistan's national curriculum *Ilk Qadam (First Step)*, a competency-based approach underpins the goals and practices of preschool instruction (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023). In this context, competency refers to an integrated set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and values that enable a child to function effectively and independently in various real-life situations.

Competency-based education (CBE) has emerged as a vital paradigm in early childhood education globally (UNESCO, 2019), including within Uzbekistan's system (Ziyodullaeva, 2022). At its core, CBE emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the application of that knowledge—combined with attitudes and values—within developmentally appropriate and socially relevant contexts.

The competency-based approach is grounded in constructivist learning theories, particularly those of Vygotsky, which assert that children learn best by constructing

knowledge through active engagement with their environment and peers (Vygotsky, 1978; Ashurova, 2020). Accordingly, preschool education should be experiential, play-based, and child-centered, enabling learners to explore, ask questions, solve problems, and reflect. These processes help internalize competencies that go beyond academic readiness to support emotional, social, and moral development (Epstein, 2007).

Methodology

In Uzbekistan's *Ilk Qadam* curriculum, the competency-based approach is tailored specifically to the developmental needs of young children. It aligns with global early childhood education frameworks (OECD, 2020) while also preserving cultural and national values (Ashurova, 2020). The primary aim is not merely to prepare children for school but to establish the foundation for lifelong learning, personal growth, and active social engagement.

Competency-based preschool education emphasizes the balanced development of the following core domains (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023):

- Cognitive development – fostering curiosity, reasoning, and knowledge acquisition;
- Social and emotional development – managing emotions, building relationships, adapting socially;
- Physical development – promoting healthy habits, fine and gross motor skills;
- Language development – enhancing communication in both mother tongue and foreign languages (e.g., English);
- Moral and cultural development – instilling ethical values, social norms, and cultural awareness.

Each domain is associated with competencies children should demonstrate by ages 6–7. These are cultivated through age-appropriate, play-based, and integrated activities (Ziyodullaeva, 2022; Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

English language instruction in preschool provides a dynamic platform for developing key competency domains in young learners. Communicative competence, which involves expressing ideas, listening actively, and interacting effectively, is nurtured through storytelling, songs, and classroom conversations that encourage children to use simple English phrases in meaningful contexts. Social competence, encompassing cooperation, empathy, and adherence to group norms, is supported by role-plays and games that promote turn-taking, polite expressions, and collaboration in English. Personal competence, which relates to self-awareness, emotional regulation, and independence, is fostered through morning routines and reflective discussions where children express feelings and preferences using phrases like “I feel happy” or “I like apples.” Cognitive competence is strengthened through inquiry-based English activities that stimulate curiosity, problem-solving, and logical reasoning—such as using English vocabulary to explore science concepts like “sink” and “float” during simple experiments. Creative competence is developed through artistic and imaginative activities conducted in English, including drawing, dramatization, and holiday-themed projects where children describe their work using newly acquired vocabulary. These competencies are not taught in isolation;

rather, they are integrated through child-centered, play-based learning that aligns with developmental psychology and educational theory. As such, English language instruction becomes a vehicle for holistic growth, allowing children not only to acquire a new language but also to strengthen vital skills for personal, social, and academic success.

The integration of competency domains through English language instruction in preschool is essential for fostering holistic child development and ensuring that language learning supports a wide range of developmental goals. Rather than treating language as an isolated subject, effective English instruction purposefully weaves communicative, cognitive, emotional, physical, and creative competencies into everyday learning activities (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023). For instance, physical development can be supported through action-based games like “Simon Says,” where children follow English commands such as “jump,” “clap,” or “sit,” thereby strengthening motor coordination while acquiring new vocabulary. Social and emotional competencies are addressed through role-play scenarios and drama activities in English, allowing children to practice empathy, resolve conflicts, and articulate their emotions using age-appropriate phrases (Ashurova, 2020). Language and literacy skills are built through interactive storytelling, phonics songs, and alphabet games, helping children recognize letter sounds, build vocabulary, and begin to express themselves in writing. Cognitive development is enhanced through discovery-based tasks where children explore topics such as nature, numbers, and patterns using English terminology, supporting their reasoning and classification abilities (Ziyodullaeva, 2022). Meanwhile, creative expression is encouraged through arts and crafts, singing, and dramatization, with English used as the medium to communicate ideas, tell stories, and present projects. This integrated approach ensures that learning English is not just about memorizing words, but about engaging the whole child—emotionally, intellectually, socially, and physically—in ways that reflect the aims of the *Ilk Qadam* curriculum (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023). It enables children to make meaningful connections between what they learn in English and their broader developmental experiences, preparing them for successful transitions into primary education and lifelong learning.

The development of key competencies in preschool learners can be effectively supported through English language instruction when it is thoughtfully aligned with core developmental domains (see table 1).

Table 1. Alignment of Key Preschool Competency Areas with English Language Instruction

Competency Area	Definition	How English Language Instruction Supports It	Sample Activities
Communicative	Ability to effectively express thoughts, listen actively, and interact with others.	Encourages listening, speaking, asking questions, and responding using simple English phrases.	Storytelling, greetings, action songs, naming objects, asking "What is this?"
Social	Skills for cooperation, group work, and understanding social norms.	Promotes turn-taking, using polite expressions, and participating in group tasks in English.	Role-plays, cooperative games, "Please" and "Thank you" routines, group storytelling
Personal	Development of self-awareness, self-regulation,	Encourages children to express emotions,	"How do you feel?" discussions, morning

Competency Area	Definition	How English Language Instruction Supports It	Sample Activities
Cognitive	and independent decision-making. Exploration, reasoning, problem-solving, and learning how to learn.	preferences, and personal choices in English. Introduces vocabulary and concepts (e.g., shapes, numbers, nature) that support inquiry.	circle check-ins, self-introduction activities Sorting and classifying in English, basic science experiments with English instructions
Creative	Ability to generate original ideas and express oneself aesthetically.	Offers opportunities for creative expression through English songs, stories, and projects.	Puppet shows, drawing with English prompts, singing themed songs, storytelling
Physical (Motor)	Coordination, motor skills, healthy habits, and body awareness.	Supports physical movement through action-based English games and routines.	“Simon Says” in English, TPR (Total Physical Response) games, yoga with English cues
Emotional and Social	Understanding and managing emotions, empathy, and social adaptation.	Develops empathy through stories, and helps label emotions and social roles in English.	Feelings chart in English, drama activities, resolving conflicts through role-play
Language and Literacy	Development of listening, speaking, pre-reading, and early writing skills.	Strengthens phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and interest in written language using English.	Alphabet songs, tracing letters, phonics games, storytelling with visual support

The table provides a comprehensive overview of how key preschool competency areas align with English language instruction, highlighting how language learning can support the holistic development of children. Each row corresponds to a specific competency area such as communicative, social, personal, cognitive, creative, physical (motor), emotional and social, and language and literacy and outlines its definition, the way English instruction contributes to it, and practical classroom activities that reinforce the competency through English. For example, communicative competence, defined as the ability to express thoughts and interact effectively, is supported through activities such as storytelling, greetings, and action songs that encourage children to use simple English phrases. Social competence is fostered through cooperative games and routines that emphasize taking turns and using polite expressions like “please” and “thank you.” Personal competence, which involves self-awareness and decision-making, is enhanced through discussions like “How do you feel?” where children express their emotions in English during morning check-ins.

Cognitive competence is addressed through concept-based English tasks that promote reasoning and classification—such as identifying shapes or conducting simple science experiments with English instructions.

Creative competence is encouraged via expressive activities such as puppet shows, themed songs, and drawing tasks where children describe their work in English.

The table also illustrates how physical development is integrated through movement-based learning, using commands like “jump” or “sit” in games such as “Simon

Says.” Additionally, emotional and social competencies are developed through English-language drama and role-play, helping children recognize and verbalize feelings and resolve conflicts. Finally, language and literacy development is strengthened through exposure to phonics games, alphabet songs, and storytelling that support both listening and early writing skills in English.

Overall, the table emphasizes the interdisciplinary value of English lessons in preschool. It shows how well-designed English instruction can go beyond language acquisition to support the full range of developmental goals outlined in the *Ilk Qadam* curriculum, promoting well-rounded, competent learners ready for primary education.

By the end of preschool (ages 6–7), children are expected to demonstrate a set of well-rounded competencies: coordinated physical movement and healthy habits; the ability to express and regulate emotions and interact socially; foundational language and literacy skills with curiosity about foreign languages; cognitive skills such as reasoning and awareness of the natural world; and the capacity to participate in imaginative activities while appreciating cultural values (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023). These outcomes emphasize the holistic role of English lessons in shaping competent, confident, and socially engaged young learners.

Result and Discussion

By the end of preschool, children are expected to demonstrate well-rounded competencies across all developmental areas (Agency for Preschool Education, 2023). These include:

- -Coordinated movement and healthy habits;
- -Emotional regulation and social adaptability;
- -Curiosity about foreign languages and basic literacy skills;
- -Problem-solving and environmental awareness;
- -Artistic creativity and appreciation of cultural values.

English lessons, when designed around these competencies, not only support language learning but also reinforce developmental readiness. As shown in the literature (Cambridge English, 2018; Wood & Hedges, 2016), early exposure to foreign languages within competency-based frameworks enhances children's cognitive flexibility, empathy, and global awareness.

Moreover, this integrated approach prepares children to meet the complex demands of modern education systems, where cross-cutting skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and digital literacy are increasingly emphasized (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2019).

Conclusion

Competency-based English language instruction in preschool represents a progressive shift in early education. It enables children to learn not only *about* language but *through* language—building competencies essential for lifelong learning. English lessons grounded in Uzbekistan's *Ilk Qadam* curriculum contribute meaningfully to each child's social, emotional, cognitive, and moral growth.

Educators are called upon to design lessons that are not only linguistically appropriate but developmentally enriching, playful, and responsive to children's cultural and individual contexts (Epstein, 2007; Bodrova & Leong, 2007). As Uzbekistan continues its education reforms, investing in teacher training, research, and resource development in early English education will be crucial for long-term success.

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