

A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing the Professional-Methodological Preparation of Pre-Service English Teachers

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Abstract: This article substantiates a conceptual framework for improving the professional-methodological preparation of pre-service English teachers in higher education. The study treats professional-methodological preparation as an integrated system in which pedagogical knowledge, language-teaching concepts, methodological decision-making, reflective practice, value orientations, and digital-pedagogical competence interact rather than function as isolated course outcomes. On the basis of teacher-knowledge research, language teacher cognition, reflective pedagogy, the CEFR action-oriented perspective, and contemporary approaches to technology integration, the paper proposes four interrelated components: motivational-value, cognitive-conceptual, operational-methodological, and reflective-evaluative. The conceptual approach is interpreted as the deliberate organization of teacher education around system-forming concepts and the relationships among them, so that future teachers can explain why a method is selected, adapt it to learner needs, and evaluate its effectiveness. The article also identifies pedagogical conditions, instructional mechanisms, and diagnostic indicators for implementing the framework. The proposed structure provides a theoretically grounded basis for redesigning methodology courses, practicum tasks, and assessment procedures in English language teacher education.

Keywords: Conceptual approach, pre-service English teacher, professional-methodological preparation, teacher cognition, pedagogical content knowledge, reflective practice, CEFR.

Introduction: The quality of foreign language education depends to a considerable extent on the professional capacity of the teacher to transform linguistic and pedagogical knowledge into justified instructional decisions. In Uzbekistan, this requirement has acquired particular importance in the context of reforms aimed at improving the quality, continuity, and international alignment of foreign language education. The Presidential Resolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-5117 of 19 May 2021, "On measures to bring activities for promoting the study of foreign languages in the Republic of Uzbekistan to a qualitatively new level," identifies the development of modern teaching skills among foreign language teachers and the introduction of internationally recognized programmes

and materials as priority directions [1]. Consequently, teacher education programmes are expected to prepare future English teachers not only to reproduce established techniques, but also to understand the conceptual foundations of language teaching and to make context-sensitive methodological choices.

A persistent problem in methodology courses is the fragmentation of professional knowledge. Students may study communicative language teaching, task-based learning, assessment, lesson planning, classroom management, educational technology, differentiation, and reflective practice as separate topics. When these topics are not connected through a coherent conceptual system, pre-service teachers often demonstrate declarative knowledge but experience

difficulty when they must justify lesson aims, select activities, sequence tasks, anticipate learner difficulties, or evaluate learning evidence. A conceptual approach addresses this gap by making the relationships among methodological concepts explicit and by requiring students to use these relationships in professional problem solving.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume emphasizes the learner as a social agent, action-oriented learning, mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and online interaction [2]. These categories broaden the methodological responsibilities of the English teacher. The teacher must be able to design activities that integrate reception, production, interaction, and mediation; select descriptors appropriate to learner level; build formative assessment into instruction; and organize collaborative meaning-making. Such responsibilities cannot be reduced to a list of techniques. They require conceptual understanding that links goals, content, interaction, assessment, and reflection within a single instructional logic.

The purpose of this article is therefore to substantiate a conceptual framework for enhancing the professional-methodological preparation of pre-service English teachers. The paper synthesizes established teacher-knowledge and language-teacher-education theories, defines the structural components of professional-methodological preparation, and specifies pedagogical conditions and diagnostic indicators suitable for higher education methodology courses.

The conceptual approach used in this study rests on the premise that professional competence develops when knowledge is organized into meaningful systems that guide perception, explanation, and action. In teacher education, conceptual knowledge differs from the memorization of terminology. A concept such as communicative competence, scaffolding, mediation, formative assessment, learner autonomy, or differentiation functions professionally only when the future teacher understands its defining features, its relationship with adjacent concepts, and the conditions under which it changes instructional decisions. Thus, conceptualization is simultaneously cognitive and practical: it structures professional thinking and directs pedagogical action.

Shulman's formulation of pedagogical content knowledge established an important foundation for viewing teacher knowledge as more than mastery of subject matter [3]. The teacher must transform content into forms that are pedagogically comprehensible and appropriate for particular learners. In language teacher education, Freeman and Johnson further argued that the knowledge base should focus on the activity of teaching, the teacher who learns to teach, and the social and institutional contexts in which teaching takes place [4]. These positions are highly compatible with a conceptual approach because they reject a simple transmission model of methodology and treat professional knowledge as situated, interpretive, and connected to practice.

Research on language teacher cognition strengthens this perspective. Borg defines teacher cognition in relation to what teachers think, know, and believe and to the relationship between these mental constructs and classroom practice [5]. Pre-service teachers enter methodology courses with prior experiences as language learners, implicit beliefs about good teaching, preferred models of classroom authority, and assumptions about error correction or assessment. Unless these existing conceptual schemes are surfaced and critically examined, new methodological knowledge may remain superficial. Conceptual preparation should therefore include activities that elicit prior beliefs, compare them with theoretical principles, and reconstruct them through observation, teaching practice, and reflection.

Methodological pluralism increases the need for conceptual competence. Contemporary language teaching does not rely on one universal method; approaches differ in their views of language, learning, roles, materials, and procedures [6]. For pre-service teachers, the goal is therefore to develop criteria for selecting and adapting principles. Jalolov likewise presents foreign language teaching as a system in which aims, content, principles, methods, exercises, and lesson organization are interrelated [7].

Constructive alignment offers an additional organizing principle. Biggs and Tang argue that intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment should be aligned so that all components support the same educational aims [8]. Applied to English teacher education, this means that a

methodology course cannot claim to develop methodological decision-making if students are assessed mainly through reproduction of definitions. Assessment must require lesson analysis, task design, adaptation, microteaching, evidence-based justification, and reflection. Conceptual development becomes measurable when students can use concepts to explain and improve professional action.

Within the proposed framework, professional-methodological preparation is represented by four interrelated components: motivational-value, cognitive-conceptual, operational-methodological, and reflective-evaluative. The components are analytically distinct but function as a dynamic system. A future English teacher may know a methodological principle but fail to apply it without professional motivation; may perform a familiar technique but be unable to justify it without conceptual understanding; or may design an effective lesson yet fail to improve practice without systematic reflection. Accordingly, the target of teacher education is integration rather than accumulation.

The motivational-value component reflects the future teacher's orientation toward the profession, responsibility for learner development, openness to methodological innovation, respect for learner diversity, and commitment to continuous professional learning. This component is important because methodological choices have ethical and educational consequences. Decisions about participation, correction, grouping, assessment, use of learners' linguistic resources, or digital tools influence access to learning and the classroom climate. Professional values therefore provide criteria that constrain and direct methodological action.

The cognitive-conceptual component includes knowledge of language-learning theories, principles of foreign language teaching, communicative and action-oriented perspectives, lesson and task design, language skills integration, assessment literacy, classroom interaction, differentiation, educational technology, and the conceptual relationships among these areas. Its central feature is not the quantity of information but the structure of knowledge. Students should be able to explain, for example, how a communicative objective determines task conditions; how scaffolding changes across proficiency levels; how formative assessment evidence informs subsequent instruction; and how

CEFR descriptors can support the formulation of observable outcomes [2].

The operational-methodological component concerns the ability to convert concepts into professional actions. It includes analysing learner needs, formulating outcomes, selecting and sequencing content, designing tasks, choosing interaction patterns, adapting materials, using digital tools purposefully, monitoring learning, providing feedback, and managing classroom processes. This component also includes methodological flexibility. The future teacher should be able to modify a plan when learner response differs from expectations rather than follow a procedure mechanically. Such flexibility is possible when practical decisions are supported by conceptual criteria.

The reflective-evaluative component enables the future teacher to examine the relationship between intention, action, and learning evidence. Schön's distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action is relevant because teaching requires both immediate adjustment and retrospective analysis [9]. Farrell's framework for reflective practice further demonstrates that reflection can connect philosophy, principles, theory, classroom practice, and wider professional considerations [10]. In a conceptual model, reflection is not an additional stage after teaching; it is the mechanism through which conceptual understanding is tested, revised, and personalized.

The four components are connected through system-forming concepts such as learner, objective, communicative action, interaction, task, scaffolding, feedback, assessment evidence, differentiation, mediation, and reflection. These concepts should be revisited across modules so that each new topic extends the same professional knowledge network rather than forming an isolated block.

The technological dimension can be further clarified through the technological pedagogical content knowledge framework. Mishra and Koehler conceptualize effective technology integration as an interaction among technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge [11]. In English teacher education, this principle helps prevent tool-driven methodology. Future teachers should first identify the learning objective and pedagogical process, then evaluate whether a digital tool enhances interaction, feedback,

access, practice, or evidence collection. This reasoning pattern is fundamentally conceptual because it requires relationships among multiple knowledge domains.

The effectiveness of the conceptual approach depends on several pedagogical conditions. The first is explicit conceptualization. Teacher educators should name core methodological concepts, define their boundaries, compare related concepts, and model the reasoning that connects them to classroom decisions. Visual conceptual maps, comparative matrices, problem-based cases, and “why this choice?” prompts are useful because they externalize professional thinking. Students should be required to represent not only what they know, but how ideas are related.

The second condition is systematic movement from concept to action and from action back to concept. Each theoretical construct should be operationalized in a professional task. After studying scaffolding, students can redesign an activity for two proficiency levels and justify the changes. After studying formative assessment, they can identify evidence of learning in a lesson transcript and propose a next instructional step. After studying mediation, they can design a task in which learners transform information for a different audience. These tasks prevent conceptual learning from remaining abstract.

The third condition is the use of approximations of practice: lesson analysis, video observation, microteaching, rehearsal, simulated parent or learner consultations, materials evaluation, and supervised practicum. Loughran argues that the pedagogy of teacher education should make the processes of teaching about teaching visible and explicit [13]. When pre-service teachers participate in approximations of practice, teacher educators can pause the activity, ask for a decision rationale, compare alternatives, and draw attention to the conceptual basis of action. This creates a bridge between university coursework and school practice.

The fourth condition is structured reflection supported by evidence. Reflection should move beyond general statements such as “the lesson was good” or “students were active.” Students need prompts that connect evidence with concepts: What learner behavior indicated understanding? Which task condition supported interaction? Where was scaffolding

insufficient? What evidence justified the feedback strategy? Which alternative would better align with the objective? Korthagen emphasizes the importance of connecting theory and practice in teacher education through realistic and reflective processes [12]. Evidence-based reflection makes this connection explicit and assessable.

The fifth condition is dialogic professional learning. Peer review, collaborative task design, and post-microteaching discussion require students to explain and defend decisions in relation to learner needs, learning goals, theoretical principles, and observable evidence. This develops the language and logic of professional reasoning.

Implementation can follow a recurring cycle of conceptual orientation, problem analysis, design, enactment, evidence collection, reflection, and conceptual revision. Students first study a core concept, then use it to solve a realistic teaching problem, test the solution through microteaching or practicum, analyse learner evidence, and revise the concept. Repetition of this cycle across modules gradually increases methodological independence.

A conceptual approach requires assessment criteria that capture the quality of professional thinking. Motivational-value indicators include professional responsibility, openness to revision, and responsiveness to learner diversity. Cognitive-conceptual indicators include conceptual accuracy, meaningful relationships among concepts, and transfer to unfamiliar situations.

Operational-methodological indicators include alignment of objectives, tasks, interaction, and assessment; appropriate method selection; adaptation to learner characteristics; purposeful technology use; and evidence-informed feedback. Reflective-evaluative indicators include identifying problems from evidence, explaining links between teaching decisions and learner response, proposing alternatives, and setting priorities for further development. Portfolios, annotated lesson plans, concept maps, microteaching rubrics, reflective commentaries, and practicum observations can be used as evidence.

Development can be viewed as a progression from reproducing isolated concepts and model procedures, through connecting concepts and justifying familiar decisions, to integrating multiple considerations,

adapting principles to complex situations, evaluating alternatives, and revising one's own conceptual framework on the basis of evidence.

The conceptual approach provides a coherent basis for enhancing the professional-methodological preparation of pre-service English teachers. Its central contribution is to reorganize methodology education around relationships among professional concepts rather than around disconnected topics or techniques. The proposed framework integrates motivational-value, cognitive-conceptual, operational-methodological, and reflective-evaluative components and connects them through repeated cycles of conceptualization, pedagogical action, evidence collection, and reflection.

For English teacher education, the practical implication is clear: students should be assessed not only on whether they know methodological terminology, but on whether they can use concepts to design, justify, adapt, and evaluate instruction. Alignment with the CEFR action-oriented perspective, teacher cognition research, reflective practice, and technologically informed pedagogy strengthens the relevance of the framework to contemporary language education. The conceptual approach can therefore serve as a foundation for curriculum design, practicum organization, diagnostic assessment, and further empirical research on the professional development of future English teachers.

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