

ENHANCING THE SOFT SKILLS COMPONENT IN ECONOMICS EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM, SYLLABI, AND ENGLISH- LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the curriculum, syllabi, and English-language textbooks used in Economics programmes at selected universities in Uzbekistan from the perspective of soft skills development. The findings show that these materials are mainly focused on linguistic competence, while critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and intercultural communication are not systematically integrated. The article proposes ways to strengthen the soft skills component in teaching English to future economists.*

Keywords: *soft skills, Economics education, curriculum, syllabus, textbook analysis, English language teaching, employability, higher education, Uzbekistan*

IQTISODIY TA'LIMDA YUMSHOQ KO'NIKMALAR KOMPONENTINI TA'MINLASH: O'ZBEKISTONNING ANALIZATSIYA UNIVERSITETLARIDA O'QUV REJASI, O'QUV DASTURI VA INGLIZ TILIDAGI DARSLIK LARNING TAHLILI

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada O'zbekistonning ayrim oliy ta'lim muassasalarida iqtisod yo'nalishi bo'yicha qo'llanilayotgan o'quv dasturi, sillabus va ingliz tili darsliklari "soft skills"ni rivojlantirish nuqtai nazaridan tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot natijalari ushbu hujjatlar asosan lingvistik kompetensiyalarni shakllantirishga yo'naltirilganini, tanqidiy fikrlash, muammoni hal qilish, jamoada ishlash, liderlik va madaniyatlararo muloqot kabi ko'nikmalar esa yetarli darajada tizimli integratsiya qilinmaganini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada iqtisod yo'nalishida ingliz tilini o'qitishda "soft skills" komponentini kuchaytirish bo'yicha takliflar ilgari suriladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *soft skills, iqtisod ta'limi, o'quv dasturi, sillabus, darslik tahlili, ingliz tilini o'qitish, bandlikka tayyorlik, oliy ta'lim, O'zbekiston*

МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ЧУВСТВА ПАТРИОТИЗМА И УВАЖЕНИЯ К ПРЕДКАМ У УЧАЩИХСЯ НАЧАЛЬНОЙ ШКОЛЫ

Аннотация. *В статье анализируются учебная программа, силлабусы и учебники по английскому языку, используемые в экономическом направлении в отдельных вузах Узбекистана, с точки зрения развития soft skills. Результаты исследования показывают, что данные материалы в основном ориентированы на формирование языковой компетенции, тогда как критическое мышление, решение проблем, командная работа, лидерство и межкультурная коммуникация*

интегрированы недостаточно системно. В статье предлагаются пути усиления компонента soft skills в преподавании английского языка студентам экономических направлений.

Ключевые слова: *soft skills, экономическое образование, учебная программа, силлабус, анализ учебников, преподавание английского языка, трудоустраиваемость, высшее образование, Узбекистан*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of higher education today is increasingly shaped by the need to align disciplinary knowledge with employability, adaptability, and lifelong learning. In Uzbekistan, this need is also connected with the policy principle of continuity across educational stages, reinforced in Presidential Resolution PQ-4884, which emphasizes the coherence of educational programmes from preschool to higher education. At the international level, UNESCO curriculum frameworks treat curriculum as a central mechanism that organizes what learners study, how teaching is delivered, and how achievement is assessed. In parallel, global labour-market evidence shows that skill demands are changing rapidly: employers expect substantial disruption in core skills by 2030, while analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, leadership, and social influence remain among the most valued capabilities. The International Labour Organization also stresses that young people often lack core employability skills and that quality education should develop both technical and transferable competencies.

These developments are especially relevant for economics education. Future economists are expected not only to possess subject-specific analytical knowledge, but also to communicate persuasively, negotiate, work in teams, solve problems, interpret information, and function effectively in multilingual and multicultural environments. Recent UNESCO analysis similarly points to growing mismatches between university training and labour-market expectations. At the same time, the official qualification requirements for the Economics programme in Uzbekistan already contain a number of competencies closely related to soft skills, including creative thinking, negotiations, business correspondence, online communication, leadership, planning, and practical training. This indicates that the normative basis for integrating soft skills already exists, but its pedagogical realization remains uneven.

Against this background, the present study examines the curriculum, syllabi, and English-language textbooks used in selected universities of Uzbekistan offering Economics or closely related business-management programmes. The purpose of the study is to determine to what extent these documents and materials cover both professional competencies and extra-disciplinary life skills, and to identify directions for improving the soft skills component in the English-language training of future economists.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed qualitative document analysis. The document corpus consisted of English-language course programmes and syllabi approved in August 2024 in five higher education institutions of Uzbekistan: Tashkent State University of Economics, Gulistan State University, Bukhara State University, Samarkand State University, and Jizzakh Polytechnic Institute. The corpus also included the main textbooks and teaching manuals used in these institutions, such as *The Business 2.0*, *Scale Up*, *Interactive*, *Face2Face*, *Headway*, *Straightforward*, and locally produced Business English materials.

The analysis was organized at three interconnected levels. First, curriculum-level analysis focused on official course purposes, expected learning outcomes, and the degree to which professional and life skills were represented. Second, syllabus-level analysis examined the structure of learning outcomes, teaching formats, independent-study tasks, and assessment procedures. Third, textbook-level analysis explored both the potential opportunities and the practical limitations of the selected materials for developing communication, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, leadership, reflection, and intercultural competence.

The analytical lens was informed by recent higher education scholarship, which identifies communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and reflective self-management as core soft skills, and recommends experiential, collaborative, project-based, and rubric-supported learning for their development and assessment.

RESULTS

Curriculum-level findings

The analysis of the reviewed English-language course programmes showed that their goals are mainly formulated around linguistic and informational outcomes. In particular, the programmes prioritize: achieving B2-level proficiency according to the Common European framework; reading and understanding specialty-related texts and translating them into the native language; becoming familiar with advanced technologies, scientific achievements, and innovations in the field through foreign-language sources; using grammar and vocabulary correctly in professional, everyday, and social situations; and cooperating with foreign specialists and using foreign-language sources directly.

These aims are professionally meaningful, yet they position English primarily as a support subject for language acquisition and information access. The curriculum does not explicitly formulate the development of 21st-century soft skills in future economists as a separate and measurable target. Consequently, soft skills remain implied rather than intentionally embedded in the design of the programme.

Syllabus-level findings

The syllabus analysis demonstrated that knowledge-oriented indicators dominate course purposes and expected learning outcomes. Skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, leadership, and initiative are not clearly articulated as explicit competencies. In most cases, the syllabus language remains focused on language mastery rather than on performance in authentic professional interaction.

The reviewed syllabi also show that teaching formats are generally limited to practical classes, teacher-guided instruction, and independent study. This structure reflects a traditional teaching model and does not sufficiently prioritize interactive methods that require students to participate actively, take initiative, negotiate meaning, and make collective decisions. As a result, the natural development of communicative, collaborative, and leadership-related soft skills is constrained.

Independent-study tasks were found to be predominantly reproductive in nature. They are largely aimed at mastering theoretical materials, preparing notes, and giving written answers to questions. Such tasks do not systematically cover activities that require students to analyze real economic situations, develop alternative

solutions, justify decisions, or demonstrate creative thinking. This weakens the opportunities for building analytical and critical competences.

Assessment practices are mostly centered on current, midterm, and final controls aimed at determining the level of knowledge acquisition. Criteria for evaluating teamwork, initiative, problem-solving, communication, or leadership are not clearly incorporated. In addition, the near absence of reflective and self-assessment elements limits students' ability to understand and monitor their own development.

Textbook-level findings: developmental potential

The analysis of the main textbooks and teaching manuals revealed several potentially useful features for soft skills development. First, most of the reviewed materials include elements of the communicative approach. Compared with many earlier-generation textbooks, they attempt to move beyond a purely grammar-focused model and incorporate more interaction-oriented tasks.

Second, many of the books include pair-work and group-work exercises. Although such tasks are not always developed systematically, they still create opportunities for cooperation and interpersonal communication. Since many soft skills depend on effective interaction with others, this represents a valuable starting point.

Third, some materials, especially those used in Tashkent and Bukhara, include situational tasks, choice-based tasks, and role plays that can partially support the development of problem-solving and critical thinking. In several cases, textbooks also contain elements associated with project-based learning, such as end-of-unit tasks, short discussions, real-life situations, oral presentations, and group activities. These features indicate that the materials are not entirely incompatible with soft skills development.

Textbook-level findings: practical constraints

Despite these strengths, the reviewed textbooks also display considerable limitations. The most visible problem is the dominance of grammar- and vocabulary-oriented instruction. Even when communicative elements are present, soft skills development is usually indirect rather than explicitly planned.

Another limitation is the restricted context of many tasks. A large proportion of activities focus on everyday communication such as shopping, travel, or routine conversations. However, professional communication in economics—business etiquette, business correspondence, negotiation, reporting, presentation of data, and communication in organizational settings—is not addressed sufficiently. This reduces students' chances to develop soft skills in contexts close to their future professional lives.

In many books, dialogues and situations are highly standardized. Students are often placed in ready-made scenarios and are rarely asked to define problems independently, search for innovative solutions, or make complex choices. As a result, critical thinking and problem-solving remain limited.

Reflection is also weakly represented. Students are rarely asked to assess their own progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, or build strategies for self-improvement. This restricts the development of self-awareness and self-regulation, both of which are important soft skills.

Project-based learning elements are present only in a fragmented way. Small projects may appear, but they are generally designed for language practice rather than for systematic work on leadership, teamwork, or decision-making. The absence of clear criteria for evaluating project outcomes makes it difficult for teachers to assess whether soft skills are actually being developed.

Creativity tasks are often superficial and limited to formulaic instructions such as “make a poster” or “prepare a dialogue.” Intercultural communication is not sufficiently emphasized, leadership and initiative are scarcely targeted, and many imported textbooks are not adequately adapted to Uzbekistan's educational and socio-professional context. This weakens students' ability to connect classroom learning with the realities of local and regional economic life.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the current English-language teaching ecosystem in economics education is not devoid of soft skills opportunities, but these opportunities remain under-structured. Soft skills appear as hidden or potential elements inside communicative exercises, role plays, and occasional project tasks, yet they are not

built into a coherent pedagogical system that runs from curriculum goals to syllabus outcomes, textbook design, classroom practice, and assessment. This interpretation is consistent with recent higher education studies showing that soft skills are often acknowledged in principle but weakly embedded in course objectives, syllabi, and rubrics, while experiential and collaborative learning remain essential for meaningful development.

For future economists, this gap has serious consequences. Global employers increasingly value not only technical expertise but also analytical thinking, resilience, leadership, collaboration, and adaptability. At the same time, international organizations continue to note mismatches between university training and labour-market demands. Therefore, English-language teaching in economics should be reconceptualized not simply as language training, but as a structured space for employability-oriented competence development.

A more effective model would require integration on at least four levels. At the curriculum level, soft skills should be explicitly identified in programme outcomes. At the syllabus level, each unit should combine a language objective with a soft-skill objective and a measurable performance task. At the textbook level, tasks should be localized and redesigned around professional cases, business meetings, data commentary, negotiations, project work, reflection, and intercultural interaction. At the assessment level, rubrics should evaluate communication clarity, collaboration, initiative, leadership, creativity, and problem-solving together with linguistic accuracy. Such an approach also corresponds to Uzbekistan's continuity principle in education policy and to UNESCO's understanding of curriculum as an integrated design of learning objectives, content, pedagogy, resources, and assessment.

In practical terms, an improved English syllabus for Economics may include case-based discussions on market situations, structured debates on economic policy, team presentations of data, executive-summary writing, business-email tasks, role-based negotiations, reflective journals, and peer-assessment components. These changes would not replace linguistic goals; rather, they would deepen them by situating language use inside authentic professional and social performance.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the current curriculum, syllabi, and English-language textbooks used in selected universities of Uzbekistan for the Economics direction are still predominantly oriented toward linguistic competence. Although they contain several communicative and interactive elements, the development of soft skills—especially critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, reflection, creativity, and intercultural communication—is not yet systematic, explicit, or consistently assessed.

Therefore, improving the soft skills component in economics education requires more than adding a few interactive tasks. It calls for a coherent transformation of curriculum goals, syllabus logic, textbook content, teaching methods, and assessment criteria. Only in this way can English-language instruction become a genuine platform for preparing future economists for the demands of contemporary professional life and the global labour market.

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