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DEVELOPING B1 WRITING THROUGH SOCRATIC SEMINARS: A RESEARCH-ENGAGED CPD FRAMEWORK FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Abstract: Learners at CEFR B1 level can usually state an opinion in writing, yet their essays often contain few reasons and little development. Socratic seminars, where learners discuss a text or question in response to open questions, give them a chance to work out their ideas before writing. Teachers, however, need practice and feedback to run such seminars and to connect them to writing tasks, and short lecture-based courses, still the usual form of continuing professional development (CPD) for English teachers in Uzbekistan, rarely provide this. This conceptual paper proposes a Research-Engaged CPD framework for teachers who want to use Socratic seminars with B1 writers. Teachers move between reading research, trying seminars in their own classes, and investigating questions that arise from that work.

Keywords: Socratic seminars; B1 writing; continuing professional development; teacher research; exploratory action research; Uzbekistan

Annotatsiya. Tillar bo‘yicha umumyevropa mezonlariga (CEFR) ko‘ra B1 darajasidagi til o‘rganuvchilar odatda o‘z fikrini yozma shaklda ifodalay oladilar, biroq ularning esselarida fikrni asoslovchi dalillar kam uchraydi va mulohazalar yetarlicha rivojlantirilmaydi. Sokratik seminarlarda o‘rganuvchilar ochiq savollar asosida matn yoki muammoni muhokama qilib, yozishga kirishishdan oldin o‘z fikrlarini shakllantirib, aniqlashtirish imkoniga ega bo‘ladilar. Bunday seminarlarni olib borish va ularni yozma topshiriqlar bilan bog‘lash uchun o‘qituvchilarga amaliy mashg‘ulotlar va o‘z faoliyati yuzasidan fikr-mulohaza zarur. O‘zbekistonda ingliz tili o‘qituvchilarining uzluksiz kasbiy rivojlanishida hanuz keng qo‘llanadigan qisqa muddatli ma’ruza kurslari bunday imkoniyatlarni kamdan-kam taqdim etadi. Ushbu konseptual maqolada B1 darajasidagi til o‘rganuvchilarning yozuv ko‘nikmalarini rivojlantirishda Sokratik seminarlardan foydalanmoqchi bo‘lgan o‘qituvchilar uchun tadqiqotga asoslangan uzluksiz kasbiy rivojlanish modeli taklif etiladi. Model doirasida o‘qituvchilar ilmiy tadqiqotlarni o‘rganadilar, o‘z darslarida seminarlarni sinab ko‘radilar va ushbu tajriba davomida yuzaga kelgan savollarni tadqiq etadilar.

Kalit so‘zlar: Sokratik seminarlar, B1 darajasida yozuv ko‘nikmalari, uzluksiz kasbiy rivojlanish, o‘qituvchilarning tadqiqot faoliyati, izlanishga asoslangan amaliy tadqiqot (exploratory action research), O‘zbekiston.

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Аннотация. Изучающие иностранный язык на уровне B1 по общеевропейской шкале CEFR обычно способны выразить своё мнение в письменной форме, однако в их эссе часто приводится мало аргументов, а высказанные мысли остаются недостаточно развитыми. На сократических семинарах обучающиеся обсуждают текст или проблему с помощью открытых вопросов, что позволяет им сформулировать и уточнить свои мысли до начала письменной работы. Для проведения таких семинаров и их интеграции в обучение письму преподавателям необходимы практический опыт и обратная связь. Краткосрочные лекционные курсы, которые в Узбекистане по-прежнему остаются распространённой формой непрерывного профессионального развития преподавателей английского языка, редко предоставляют такие возможности. В данной концептуальной статье предлагается модель непрерывного профессионального развития, основанная на исследовательской деятельности преподавателей, которые стремятся применять сократические семинары для развития навыков письма у обучающихся уровня B1. В рамках модели преподаватели знакомятся с научными исследованиями, апробируют семинары на собственных занятиях и изучают вопросы, возникающие в ходе этой работы.

Ключевые слова: сократические семинары, навыки письма на уровне B1, непрерывное профессиональное развитие, исследовательская деятельность преподавателей, поисковое исследование действием (exploratory action research), Узбекистан.

Introduction: According to the CEFR, B1 writers can produce connected texts on familiar topics and give reasons for their views (Council of Europe, 2020). In my experience of teaching first-year students in Uzbekistan, many learners at this level state a position clearly but support it with one or two general reasons, seldom mention an opposing view, and move from point to point without a plan. They often begin writing before they have thought the topic through.

Socratic seminars address this directly. Learners discuss a text or question, respond to open questions with reasons and evidence, and react to what their classmates say (Tredway, 1995). Reznitskaya et al. (2001) found that students who took part in such discussions later wrote argumentative essays containing more arguments and counterarguments than those who did not. In other words, the discussion supplies ideas, and some of the language, that learners can draw on when they write.

The difficulty lies with the teacher. A seminar depends on well-chosen questions, follow-up prompts and a clear link to the writing task that comes after it. Teachers usually develop these skills by trying them, being observed and talking about what happened (Cordingley et al., 2015). In Uzbekistan, though, CPD for English teachers is still organised mainly around short courses and certificates, and has weak links to what happens in classrooms (NILE, 2023).

This paper looks at how teachers in Uzbekistan could learn to use Socratic seminars for B1 writing in a more practice-based way. Two questions guide it:

RQ1. What does research say about Socratic seminars, writing, and research-engaged CPD?

RQ2. How can English teachers in Uzbekistan learn to use Socratic seminars for B1 writing through research-engaged CPD?

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Section 2 reviews the relevant research, Section 3 describes the Uzbek context, and Sections 4 and 5 present the framework and an example of how it might work.

Analyze and methods: In a Socratic seminar the teacher opens with a question about a shared text or topic, and learners respond with reasons, build on or challenge each other's points, and sometimes change their minds (Tredway, 1995). The teacher steers the talk but does not supply a correct answer. Paul and Elder (2006) group the questions used in such discussions into types, such as questions about evidence, assumptions, alternative viewpoints and consequences. Polite and Adams (1997) reported gains in critical thinking among students who took part in Socratic seminars.

Several studies link this kind of talk to writing. In the study by Reznitskaya et al. (2001), the essays written after group discussions included more reasons, counterarguments and rebuttals. In an earlier paper (Tillaeva, 2022) I argued that critical thinking activities, Socratic seminars among them, can improve the coherence, cohesion and task achievement of EFL learners' essays. For B1 learners, whose spoken English is often ahead of their written argument, talking a topic through first appears to make the writing task more manageable.

Reviews of teacher professional development point to similar features: a focus on subject teaching, activity spread over time, collaboration, and repeated chances to try something in class and look at the results (Cordingley et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). Kennedy (2014) notes that one-off courses tend to support compliance with requirements more than changes in practice.

Borg (2010) separates engagement *with* research, meaning reading and using it, from engagement *in* research, meaning teachers studying their own teaching. Cordingley (2015) reviews evidence that both help teachers learn, particularly when a mentor is involved. Language teaching already has several small-scale forms of teacher inquiry, including action research (Burns, 2010), Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003; Hanks, 2017) and exploratory action research (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). None of them needs special funding, and they rely on material teachers already collect, such as students' written work and lesson notes.

Teachers, for their part, often regard research as the business of academics (Borg, 2009), and they mention lack of time, access and support as obstacles. Any attempt to bring research into CPD has to deal with these practical issues as well as with teachers' skills.

English teaching has been a national priority in Uzbekistan since 2012. Since 2013, all universities that train English teachers have used the PRESETT pre-service curriculum (British Council Uzbekistan, n.d.), and practising teachers are required to collect 18 CPD credit points a year (NILE, 2023).

A national survey of 2,508 English teachers (NILE, 2023) found that CPD was often associated with certificates and salary bonuses, and that most approved CPD activities were individual courses with little connection to classroom practice. Only 31% of teachers worked in schools with a regular methodology day, and professional reading did not count among the official CPD options. Nazirova et al. (2023) add large classes, shortages of materials and few opportunities for ongoing development to this picture.

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Under these conditions, a teacher may hear about Socratic seminars at a training session but has little time to try them, no one to give feedback, and no credit for the effort. It is unlikely that the practice would survive beyond a few lessons.

The framework (Table 1) combines three levels of research engagement with five conditions that make them possible. Teachers do not have to pass through the levels in order, and many may work mostly at the first two.

Three levels of engagement

Level 1: Reading research. Teachers read short summaries of studies on Socratic seminars and writing and discuss them, for instance in a monthly journal club. Summaries in Uzbek or Russian make this possible for teachers whose English is not yet strong enough for academic texts.

Level 2: Using research. Teachers run seminars before essay tasks in their own classes, score the essays with the same B1 rubric before and after a series of seminars, and talk through the results with a mentor or colleague.

Level 3: Doing research. Teachers investigate a question that comes out of their own classes, such as why ideas raised in a seminar do not show up in students' essays. Following Smith and Rebolledo (2018), they explore the situation, try a change, compare the results and present them to colleagues. Over time, such projects can build up local knowledge about teaching writing in Uzbek classrooms.

Teachers need regular time for reading groups and planning, and methodology days are an obvious place for this. They also need access to research in a form they can use, which universities can provide by writing short summaries in local languages. Mentoring is a third condition: pedagogical universities have staff with experience of Socratic teaching and classroom research who could work with groups of teachers. Fourth, the work should be recognised in the credit-point system, so that a completed classroom inquiry earns at least as much as attendance at a course. Finally, a simple portfolio containing readings, seminar plans, student essays and short reflections, reviewed once a year, would allow both teachers and schools to see what has changed.

Table 1. The Research-Engaged CPD (RE-CPD) framework

Level	What teachers do	Example: Socratic seminars for B1 writing	Evidence for the CPD portfolio
1. Reading research	Read and discuss short, accessible studies related to their teaching	Journal club on studies of Socratic seminars and of how discussion shapes written argument; watching a recorded seminar	Reading log with short notes on what the study claims and whether it fits their context
2. Using	Try an	Running a seminar before	Seminar plan and

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Level	What teachers do	Example: Socratic seminars for B1 writing	Evidence for the CPD portfolio
research	evidence-informed practice in their own classes and check the results	each essay task; scoring essays with a shared B1 rubric; peer observation of seminars	questions, essays scored before and after, short reflection discussed with a mentor
3. Doing research	Carry out and share a full cycle of classroom inquiry	Exploratory action research on a puzzle, e.g. why seminar ideas do not appear in essays; presenting at a teacher association event	Inquiry report or poster; record of sharing with colleagues
Enabling conditions	Time, access, support, recognition, evaluation	Protected meeting time; research summaries; university mentors; credit points for each level; annual portfolio review	Reviewed annually by head teacher or mentor

Imagine four English teachers in one school who want their B1 learners to write better argumentative essays. In the first term they join an online journal club at a nearby pedagogical university, read summaries on Socratic seminars and watch a recorded seminar (Level 1). In the second term each of them runs a seminar before three essay tasks in one class; they score the essays with a shared rubric and observe one another's seminars (Level 2). By the third term, two of the teachers have noticed that ideas from the seminars often get lost in the essays. They add a brief note-taking and planning step between the discussion and the writing, compare the next set of essays, and report what they found at a regional teacher association meeting (Level 3). Each teacher's portfolio is reviewed by the head teacher and counted towards CPD credit. Apart from mentor time and a regular meeting slot, the year requires no extra funding.

At policy level, the three levels could be added to the list of approved CPD activities, together with protected time for school-based CPD. Pedagogical universities could work with schools as research partners, preparing summaries and training mentors, and could include Socratic seminars and basic classroom inquiry in pre-service methodology courses. Individual teachers do not need to wait for these changes; a single class and a small set of essays are enough to begin.

The framework has not yet been tested in practice. It is based on published research and reports, and the main source on CPD in Uzbekistan (NILE, 2023) relies on an online survey with acknowledged limitations. The following propositions could guide future empirical work:

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P1. Teachers who work at Levels 2 and 3 will use Socratic seminars more often and more effectively than teachers who only attend a training course.

P2. B1 learners' argumentative essays will improve more when their teachers learn Socratic seminars through research-engaged CPD than through a one-off course.

P3. Recognising research engagement in the credit-point system will increase teacher participation, especially where time is also protected.

Conclusion: Socratic seminars give B1 learners a chance to think a topic through before they write, but teachers need time, feedback and support to use them well, and short courses rarely offer these. The framework proposed here suggests how teachers could learn the approach by reading about it, trying it in their own classes and studying the results with colleagues and mentors. Whether this leads to better teaching and better essays is a question for the empirical studies outlined above.

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