



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

Building Capacity Through Cascading ELT Professional Development: A Year in Uzbekistan

by [Heidi Faust](#)



[Shah-i-Zinda](#), Necropolis of Mausoleums, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

This is the story of how TESOL International Association, together with George Mason University (GMU) and American Councils for International Education, designed a cascading professional development program to reach approximately 15,000 secondary English teachers across multiple regions of Uzbekistan.

The English Speaking Nation Secondary Teacher Training Program

In late 2019, TESOL and GMU were each granted subawards of the English Speaking Nation (ESN) Secondary Teacher Training Program in Uzbekistan, a program funded by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy Tashkent and administered by American Councils for International Education, to advance the English proficiency and English language teaching (ELT) pedagogy in secondary public schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Education.

The program began with a context analysis led by GMU in collaboration with TESOL to help us understand the opportunities, resources, challenges, and areas of need. This article highlights key aspects of the program, which will continue through September 2022.

Context

Understanding the teaching, learning, and cultural context in Uzbekistan was essential to our planning and development.

Culture and Language

Like other countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan is a former Soviet Republic where plurilingualism is common. Uzbek and Russian languages are used in state and business matters, as well as several other regional languages, such as Tajik and Karakalpak. A large majority of the population are Muslim, and traditional familial gender roles and hierarchical relationships are commonly observed in the regions.

Teaching and Education

Female teachers often have extensive responsibilities in the home that sometimes compete with professional development opportunities, especially those involving travel. Classrooms are generally hierarchical with the teacher and the textbook at the center of knowledge, and curriculum can be highly regulated with limited teacher and student autonomy. Public school teachers also work 6 days a week in most settings and commonly take on additional private tutoring or extra jobs to supplement their salaries. In rural areas, English-speaking environments can be hard for teachers and students to access, and English teacher proficiency levels typically range from A2–B2 levels on the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#).

Other Considerations

Frequent interruptions to electricity along with limited or expensive internet access have created barriers to the development of digital literacy skills, with a primary reliance on cell phones as a digital tool for communication and learning. Running the program during the COVID-19 pandemic added more layers of complexity to our program.

All of these factors impacted where, when, and how teacher development opportunities were delivered.

Cascading Structure

To build capacity in the program and to make it scalable, we planned to implement a cascading training model, which included engaging local ELT professionals supported by TESOL and GMU instructors, TESOL coaches, and ESN coaches from American Councils:

- **Core Trainers (CTs):** teachers with the strongest English skills and capacity for facilitating professional development, who will have earned the TESOL Core Certificate
- **Regional Peer Mentors (RPMs):** high-performing teachers with strong potential for facilitating professional development
- **Mentees:** teachers from secondary public schools from regions with a high need for ELT capacity building

The first phase of the program focused on the development of the core trainers and subsequently approximately 300 regional peer mentors who took the [TESOL Core Certificate Program™](#)

(TCCP), and many also participated in the [Teaching English Through English](#) online course developed and facilitated by the GMU team, led by Dr. Joan Kang Shin.

To enhance the English proficiency levels in classroom and professional English, some RPMs also participated in the National Geographic [EL Teach](#) program. Approximately 220 CTs and RPMs participated in one of two weeklong ELT development training of trainers programs following the TCCP and Teaching English Through English course to prepare for cascading training to the other RPMs, who will mentor the mentees in the final phase of the program. Figure 1 shows the cascading structure, which will ultimately reach approximately 15,000 teachers from secondary public schools, with the first wave of cascading beginning Spring 2022.

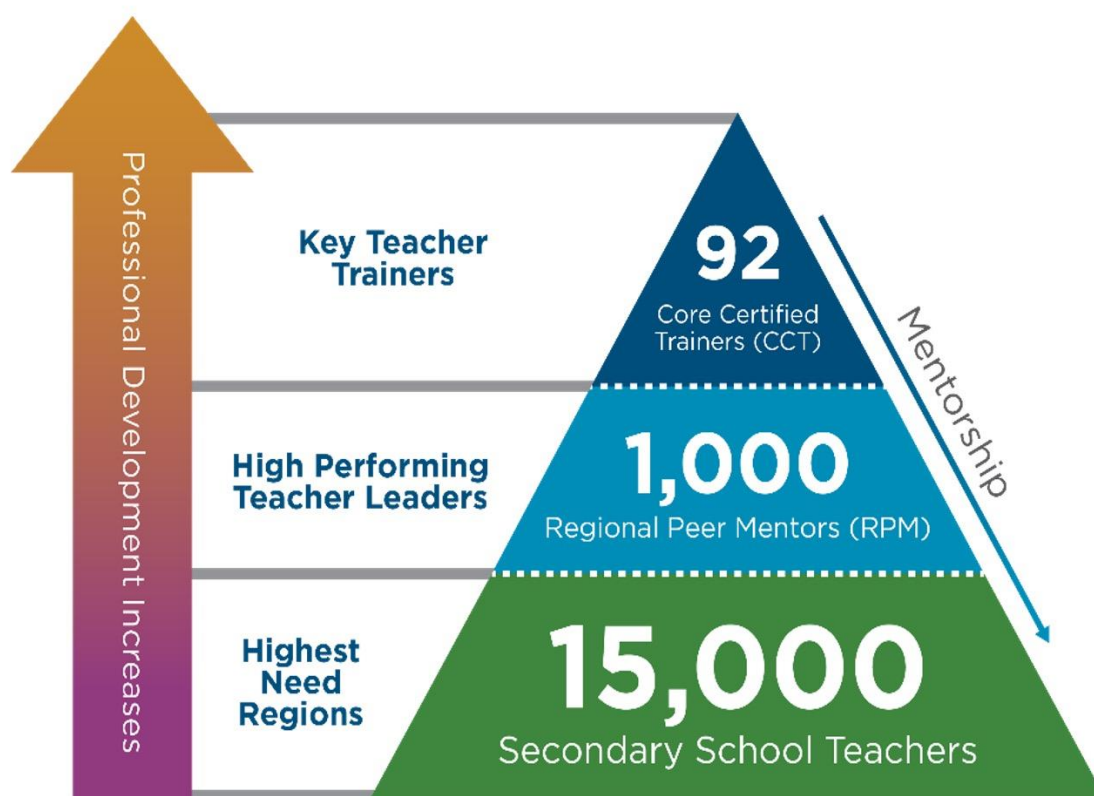


Figure. Cascading structure of the English Speaking Nation Secondary Teacher Training Program (Source: American Councils and ESN Program)

Throughout these professional development programs, teachers collaborated regionally and nationally, enhanced their English language and teaching pedagogy, and began to prepare to facilitate professional learning with their colleagues. Professional development was designed and delivered by expert TESOL instructors and coaches, George Mason University Faculty, and ESN coaches from American Councils.



Training of Trainers participants share the certificates they earned in the TESOL Core Certificate Program courses.

TESOL Core Certificate Program

The TCCP is an internationally recognized 140-hour short-term certificate program that includes 120 hours of coursework delivered in two 60-hour courses: Foundations of TESOL and a specialty course, in this case Teaching and Assessing Adolescent Learners. Teachers also complete a 20-hour practicum, which includes 10 hours of observation and 10 hours of teaching.

The TCCP is typically offered online asynchronously. In consideration of the context and challenges presented in virtual learning, we adapted the courses for face-to-face delivery and employed strategies for content-based instruction to support teacher comprehension of the more theoretical and academic aspects of the course in English. We were prepared to teach the first cohort of CTs in spring of 2020 but postponed until summer because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several more sessions were planned and postponed until we pivoted back to virtual instruction and [offered the first 40 hours](#) of the Foundations of TESOL course to the CTs in November 2020, with the hope of finishing in person, but ultimately conducted the remainder of the first course virtually.

“This course has changed my teaching style. I have learned about learner autonomy, different methods of teaching, monitoring, classroom management, learning a foreign language through communication.”

–Lola Sattorova,
Regional Peer Mentor

Online Course Adaptations

Our instructional development team drew on the expertise of Dr. Gena Bennett, Dr. Nancy Ackles, Lisa Mann, and Elise Brittain, all of whom had experience working in the region. In order to consider contextual challenges and scaffold the virtual learning experience, we made several adjustments to the delivery and content of the online Foundations of TESOL course, which included providing scaffolds for the language, content, and technology of the course:

- We moved the course to [Google Classroom](#) to allow for easy storage and access to documents, but also relied heavily on the [Telegram messaging app](#) for course communications, discussions, and sometimes assignment submissions.
- To support language development and access to the content, we created video lecture PowerPoints from academic readings to reduce the linguistic demands and provide multiple listening and reading opportunities.
- We utilized online vocabulary tools and games like [Quizlet](#) to support course vocabulary practice, while also embedding tools teachers could use with their students.
- We doubled the length of each module to be delivered over 2 weeks instead of 1 to provide more time to digest the content.
- We added synchronous online sessions each week to support engagement, speaking practice, and modeling of key course concepts.
- For assignment completion, we provided a variety of high tech/low tech options. For example, teachers could choose to summarize their learning by creating a digital infographic, or they could hand draw a graphic organizer and submit a picture of it.

This model stretched us as developers and instructors, and also stretched the CTs, many of whom engaged in an online course for the first time.

“Not only TCCP has changed my teaching practice, but admittedly it has changed my life by changing my attitude to life. TCCP has helped me to overcome the fear inside me. Now I believe that I can be the best teacher and the happiest person. Now there is the reason to stand. Thank you all.”

–Dildora Uljaboyeva,
Regional Peer Mentor

In-person Courses

We delivered the Adolescent Learners course of the [TCCP in-person for the core trainers](#), employing an experiential and inquiry-based approach that modeled learner-centered and communicative pedagogies. With the support of American Councils, 13 sections of the TCCP were offered, two blended, and the rest fully in person [across 6 regions](#) of Uzbekistan during 2021. COVID-19 precautions included preentry COVID-19 tests, daily temperature checks, and use of masks.

TCCP courses were taught by TESOL instructors and coaches, ESN coaches, and one CT in [Tashkent](#), Fergana, [Namangan](#), [Bukhara](#), [Samarkand](#), and [Nukus](#). American Councils provided



Teachers engage in cooperative learning activities and summarize key concepts before giving group presentations.

agenda included activities to review and synthesize learning from the previous courses, a 2-day institute on [*The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners*](#)[®] which culminated with cooperative microteaching led by TESOL trainers Dr. JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall, Mary Scholl, Dr. Gena Bennett, and myself; introduction to training planning tools and best practices led virtually by George Mason faculty and facilitated by ESN coaches locally; and, finally, team action planning and workshop development in regional teams.

The TESOL 6 Principles training program included scaffolded facilitation plans and materials written to be accessible at the A2–B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, developed in collaboration with TESOL consultant and trainer Linda Wesley. The Training of Trainers program was also facilitated in collaboration with ESN coaches from the American Councils ESN U.S. Coaching Program. CTs and RPMs prepared action plans to conduct between 40–50 hours of training upon return to the regions.

TESOL Coaches

To provide continuity, language models, and classroom-based feedback and mentoring over time, TESOL selected five ELT coaches to go to Uzbekistan to work with CTs and RPMs in the regions for periods of 3–9 months. Arriving in time for the Training of Trainers program, several coaches were able to meet the CTs and RPMs and support the development of action plans and workshops for the cascading training of both the Teaching English

in-country logistical support. Following the 120 hours of coursework, CTs and RPMs began their practicum. Coaches provided model lessons and feedback on observations for CTs, who would in turn support RPMs in their practicums, yet another part of the cascading training and mentoring.

ELT Development Program (Training of Trainers)

The Training of Trainers program brought CTs and RPMs from the regions to Tashkent during one of two weeklong sessions held 20 September to 2 October 2021. The



ELT Development Program (Training of Trainers) TESOL Facilitators, TESOL Coaches, and ESN Coaches.

through English course and the 6 Principles. Additionally, coaches taught the final three sections of the TCCP and were able to support practicum observations immediately following the course completion by leading observation and feedback sessions at local schools with the presenting teacher and local CTs and RPMs.

In January and February of 2022, amidst a return of the pandemic and national school closings, coaches helped the CTs and RPMs in conducting virtual teaching and observation lessons on Zoom, supporting the preparation of cascading training plans and schedules, and developing proposals for the TESOL Regional Conference to be held in Tashkent in June. RPMs are finishing their practicums in February and plan to begin cascading in March.

TESOL Regional Conference

The [TESOL Regional Conference](#), entitled “Language Teachers as Innovators: Digital Literacies and Communicative Approaches,” will be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan 13–16 June 2022 and is expected to bring together approximately 600 ELT professionals in discussion of “ELT innovations in the advancement of learner-centered, communicative English instruction; digital and multiliteracies; and ELT professionalism within a Central Asian context” (TESOL International Association, 2022). CTs and RPMs have also worked with ESN and TESOL coaches to prepare proposals for the event.

“I am learning daily on this job. Cultural awareness is crucial in Uzbekistan thus every interaction brings a better understanding of what is appropriate, appreciated and expected. I have attended weddings and thank you events with participants which even though not directly connected to work, show their deep appreciation for the program. They are grateful for our hard work in seeing them through. They are also grateful for English language atmosphere we provide every time we interact. For some of them this is the first time they have been able to practice speaking English authentically.”

– Tamrika Khvtisiashvili,
TESOL Coach



TESOL Coaches, Left to Right: Lizabeth England, Tamrika Khvtisiashvili, Armen Kassabian, Laura Hancock (missing from photo is Yuta Otake).

Professionalism and Capacity Building

Through the work highlighted in this article, it was important to consider sustainability and capacity building. Though our PD programs aimed to lay a strong foundation for the advancement of ELT in Uzbekistan, we aspire to support teachers in their own continuous professional development.



Participants of the ELT Development Training of Trainers Program, Tashkent.

Through the ESN program, we provided TESOL memberships to 90 CTs and more than 300 RPMs. Important to the sustainability of the program was scaffolding the learning, mentoring, and facilitating process. As teachers have observed and provided collegial feedback in classroom teaching, developed training plans and cofacilitated professional development with their peers, and prepared proposals—and will soon present conference presentations—we hope they likewise will engage with ELT colleagues globally through the association and continue to contribute to the field of ELT, both in Uzbekistan and as global TESOL members.

Reference

TESOL International Association. (2022). *TESOL Regional Conference 2022*.
<https://www.tesol.org/attend-and-learn/tesol-academies-conferences-symposiums/upcoming-regional-tesol-conferences/tesol-regional-conference-2022>

Heidi Faust, Consultant on Grants and Special Projects for TESOL International Association, directs the TESOL English Speaking Nation Grant Subaward on behalf of TESOL, along with other blended professional learning projects. She has led international ELT capacity building projects in Peru, India, the Dominican Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and has developed and facilitated online and in-person professional learning programs with teachers from more than 100 countries.