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## **APPLICATION OF THE CRITERION-BASED ASSESSMENT METHOD IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

**Abstract:** This article describes the conditions of modernization changes in the field of higher education concerning the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and criterion-based assessment (CA) in teaching a foreign language at a technical university. The purpose of the study is to substantiate the need and effectiveness of using CA in the process of teaching foreign languages to students of technical educational programs, as well as to identify the problems and prospects for its implementation in the practice of higher education. The prerequisites for the introduction and successful use of criterion-based assessment of students' educational results are delineated. The study reports that criterion-based assessment is a process based on clearly defined criterion that provide rational assessment of students' achievements and formation of their competencies necessary for the use of a foreign language in professional activities.

The article presents a review of the works of foreign and domestic scholars, discusses their views and ideas, which are the theoretical basis for this study. The characteristics of the structure of criterion-based assessment are given, including its main concepts, purpose, tasks and functions. The article presents an analysis of a survey of the faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages on the introduction and implementation of criterion-based assessment in teaching English to students of technical specialties at the Karaganda Technical University named after A. Saginov. The difficulties that appeared during the introduction of criterion-based assessment are identified, recommendations are proposed for solving the problems that have arisen and further improving the application of the criterion-based assessment method in the educational process.

**Keywords:** criterion-based assessment, CEFR, higher education, technical university, foreign language, criterion, rubrics, descriptors, competencies, academic achievements, learning outcomes.

### **Introduction**

By now, significant changes have occurred in the field of teaching foreign languages at the university, caused by a number of reasons concerning the competence-based approach to teaching a foreign language and the transition to level-based learning in order to obtain educational results comparable at the international level. The main provisions of level-based learning of foreign languages of the CEFR system (Common European Framework of Reference) were developed back in 2001, the purpose of which was to determine the level of proficiency of a student in a foreign language, according to the formed language competencies at each stage of learning a foreign language. Moreover, this system became the basis for the development of educational standards and programs, textbooks, curricula and collections of tests, and also helped in overcoming difficulties in the process of interaction with various education systems

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the transition to level-based teaching of foreign languages at a university began in 2008 with the introduction and implementation of the national cultural project "Trinity of Languages". Today, according to the State Compulsory Standard of Higher and Postgraduate Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (State

compulsory standard, 2022) "Foreign language" is a part of general education disciplines and is an integral element of higher professional education. Consequently, the modern problem is to increase the effectiveness of training students of technical specialties to use a foreign language, which can be solved by choosing the right content of language training and a methodological strategy covering various aspects of language teaching. Since modern education is a continuous process of upbringing and training, carried out for the purposes of moral, intellectual, cultural, physical development and the formation of professional competence (Law on Education of RK, 2023), it is necessary to develop professionally oriented foreign language competence at all levels of foreign language teaching. This strategy will ensure continuity and consistency in the formation of not only communicative, but also professional competence in a foreign language. Proficiency in a foreign language will also open up more opportunities for Kazakhstani students to participate in academic mobility and receive an education that meets international standards without leaving their university. In addition, educational results will be comparable at different levels, which will improve the university's rating and increase the attractiveness of the university for foreign scientists and students.

Undoubtedly, the modernization of the learning process necessitates the optimization of the system of assessment of educational achievements. In the provisions of the State Compulsory Standard of Higher and Postgraduate Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated from July 20, 2022 (State compulsory standard, 2022) clearly sets out the requirements for the criterion-based assessment system, which is also reflected in the Academic Policy of the Karaganda Technical University (Regulation on the Academic Policy, 2023).

### **Literature review**

The issues of assessing educational achievements are of great significance in pedagogical research, attracting the attention of both domestic and foreign scientists. A significant contribution to the study of criterion-based assessment was made by foreign researchers D. Wiliam and P. Black (Black et al., 2009), who developed the concepts of formative assessment aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the educational process, as well as L. Shepard (Shepard, 2000), who studied the impact of assessment practices on student motivation. B. Bloom (Bloom, 1968). laid the foundations for the taxonomy of educational goals, which formed the basis of the criterion-based approach to assessment, focusing on measuring various levels of cognitive development.

The theoretical foundations and justification of the need for criteria-based assessment in the educational process are presented in the works of Russian scientists. A.A. Krasnoborova (Krasnoborova, 2010) developed the methodological principles of criterion-based assessment, emphasizing its role in ensuring the objectivity and transparency of knowledge assessment. E.N. Zemlyanskaya (Zemlyanskaya, 2020) studied the issues of integrating the criterion-based approach into school practice, focusing on its influence on the formation of educational motivation. M.I. Shakirov (Shakirov et al., 2012) [9] contributed to the development of criteria for assessing competencies adapted to modern educational standards.

Foreign researchers H. Goodrich Andrade, J. Marzano and J. Popham focused on the practical aspects of using criterion-based assessment. H. Goodrich Andrade (Goodrich Andrade, 2000) developed approaches to using rubrics to assess academic achievements, J. Marzano (Marzano, 2006) proposed models for integrating criterion-based assessment into curricula, and J. Popham (Popham, 2008) concentrated on the development of reliable and valid assessment criteria.

Special attention to the issues of criterion-based assessment is paid by Kazakhstani researchers O.I. Mozhayeva, A.S. Shilibekova and D.B. Ziedenova (Mozhayeva et al, 2017), whose works contain extensive practical material on the implementation of the criterion-based approach in the educational process. Their research includes an analysis of the effectiveness of

criterion-based assessment in schools in Kazakhstan and the development of methodological recommendations for teachers. R.O. Kenzhetayeva (Kenzhetayeva, 2021) focused on studying the impact of criterion-based assessment on the development of students' meta-subject competencies, and A.T. Aitpukeshev (Aitpukeshev, 2014) proposed approaches to adapting criterion-based assessment in the context of digitalization of education, including the use of digital tools for monitoring academic achievements.

The contents of works by these researchers underline the importance of criterion-based assessment as a tool for improving the quality of education, ensuring objectivity, transparency and motivation of students. Their contribution forms the theoretical and practical basis for further improvement of assessment practices in the educational system.

Thus, criterion-based assessment can be defined as a process based on comparing the educational achievements of students with clearly defined, developed criterion known in advance to all participants in the educational process, corresponding to the goals and content of education, contributing to the formation of key competencies of students (Concept of implementing the criterion-based assessment system, 2012). The purpose of criterion-based assessment is to obtain objective information on the learning outcomes based on the assessment criterion and provide it to all interested participants for further improvement of the educational process (Patton, 1990). It is noteworthy that the purpose of criterion-based assessment is set in advance, it is difficult to falsify, since it is strictly conditioned by the criterion representing the expected educational outcome.

In the process of criterion-based assessment, it is necessary to solve a number of tasks:

- creation and functioning of an objective assessment system;
- creation of unified assessment mechanisms that meet international standards;
- organization of conditions that promote independence and responsibility of students in achieving educational results;
- providing objective feedback to all participants in the criterion-based assessment process;
- involvement and subjectification of students directly in the process of criterion-based assessment;
- creation of a bank of template tasks that allow for objective assessment of learning outcomes;
- monitoring the academic performance of each student in accordance with developed criterion;
- conducting an analysis of learning results with the aim of further improving the criterion-based assessment system.

Having analyzed the available published works and studies on this topic, it became obvious that most of the works are devoted to criterion-based assessment in the field of secondary education. In many such works, the authors offer practical lesson plans, share their teaching experience and give valuable recommendations for solving the problems that have arisen. As for criterion-based assessment in higher education, it is still at the stage of development and implementation, which raises a number of questions and difficulties and thus requires further research. For example, some authors have doubts about whether formative assessment is necessary in higher education, how to make the transition of assessing the formed skills and abilities from control to motivation, to self-education and professional self-development (Zemlyanskaya, 2020). There are a small number of works offering various methods and examples of criterion-based assessment in higher education, such as the portfolio method, the case method, the interactive lecture method, the project methodology, the interview and presentation method, mutual assessment and self-assessment of students, etc. However, there are extremely few scientific developments and theoretically sound recommendations for assessing students' academic achievements.

In this regard, the authors of this article conducted a study on the introduction and implementation of criterion-based assessment at the Karaganda Technical University named after A. Saginov.

### **Research methodology**

The research methods: literature review, observation, survey questionnaire, survey and reporting documentation analysis.

The survey questionnaire was prepared using the method of targeted selection of respondents according to the instructions of Patton M.K. (Patton, 1990), which recommends this method as a process for selecting respondents who have sufficient information on the topic of interest, capable of providing reliable data for conducting the planned study. As a result, a selection of the survey audience was carried out, which mainly included the teaching staff of the Department of Foreign Languages of the Karaganda Technical University named after Abylkas Saginov, where the criterion-based assessment of students' academic achievements in mastering the English language was introduced and is being implemented. The survey procedure included notifying respondents about the planned event, later the questionnaire was sent according to the link to the online GOOGLE FORM PLATFORM, the deadline for sending the completed questionnaires was determined.

The purpose of the survey was to identify teachers' understanding/misunderstanding of the essence of criterion-based assessment, the methods and tools used, the methods used to provide feedback to students, as well as the difficulties and problems that arise when conducting criterion-based assessment.

### **Results and discussion**

Respondents were asked to answer 13 questions, 9 of which were with a choice of answers from a list, 4 questions assumed a detailed answer from respondents. The respondents' answers were ordered and analyzed in the way to reflect the attitude of the department staff to this type of assessment, its real practical application.

According to the results of the first question, "How often do you use criterion-based assessment of English language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?" 69.2% of respondents indicated that criterion-based assessment is often used in their teaching activities. 15.4% of teachers claim that this assessment system is always used. The remaining 15.4% are ready to use criterion-based assessment only sometimes. The frequency of using CR was approximately 65%, excluding the answer rarely or never.

When answering the second question, "What methods and tools do you use when conducting criterion-based assessment," where respondents were asked to independently indicate the assessment methods used, the following methods were suggested by teachers among the answers:

- Analytical rubrics. Create analytical rubrics that include specific criterion and levels of performance for each criterion. Assessors use the rubric to assign grades.

- Rating on a scale. Using numerical ratings (e.g. 1 to 5) or letter ratings (A, B, C, etc.) for each criterion in the rubric.

- Sample comparison. Comparison of students' work with samples of work that demonstrate different levels of performance. This helps assessors better understand what grade to assign.

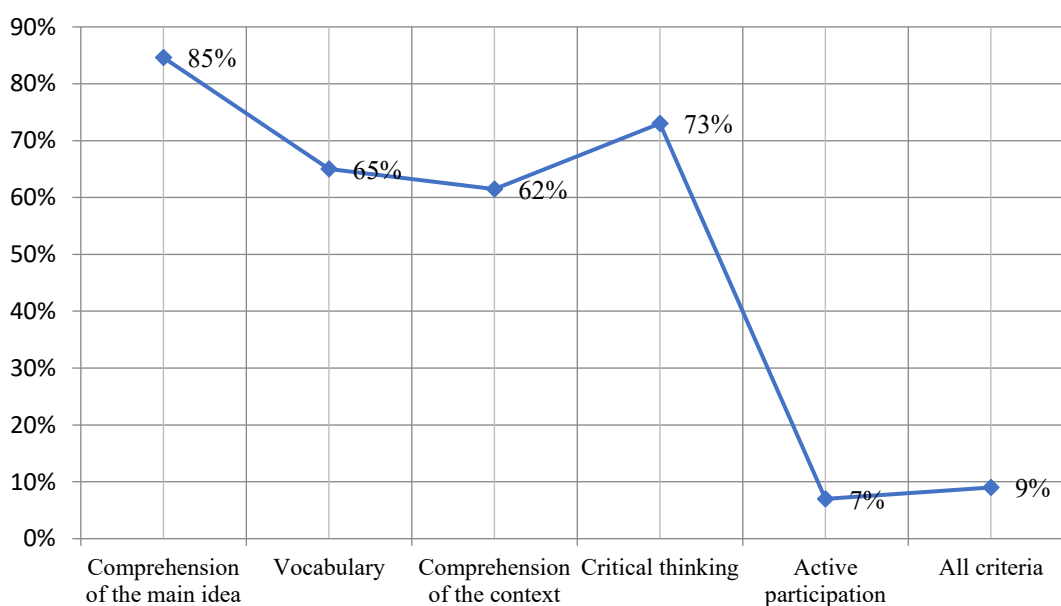
- Grade moderation, where multiple assessors compare their grades to ensure consistency and fairness in the assessment.

- Electronic assessment systems. Use of specialized software products for assessment and recording of results. These systems help to automate the assessment process and ensure data safety.

- Feedback and comments. Provision students with detailed feedback based on criterion and rubrics so they understand where they have possibilities for improvement.
- Descriptors / Reflection / Peer-assessment
- Developed rubrics for reading, speaking and writing.
- Method of uncompleted sentences, self-assessment, peer-assessment
- Listening, testing, essay
- Testing, project work

The diagram in Figure 1 shows that the assessment of reading skills is distributed among the following criterion and rubrics accordingly: the main percentage of 85% use understanding the main idea of the text as a criterion for assessing text comprehension. 65% of respondents take into account the use of the student's vocabulary, 62% also take into account the students' understanding of the context of what they read. The above criterion "logical inference and critical thinking" is used by 73% of respondents. 7% of respondents assess student's ability to give feedback, participate in a discussion. 9% of respondents periodically use all of the above. In this question, each respondent was allowed to select multiple response options.

**Figure 1**  
*Reading Skills Assessment*



The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates attitudes towards criterion-based assessment. The diagram shows that 96% of respondents believe that criterion-based assessment is fair and reliable for assessing students' writing skills. However, 4% of respondents disagree with this opinion.

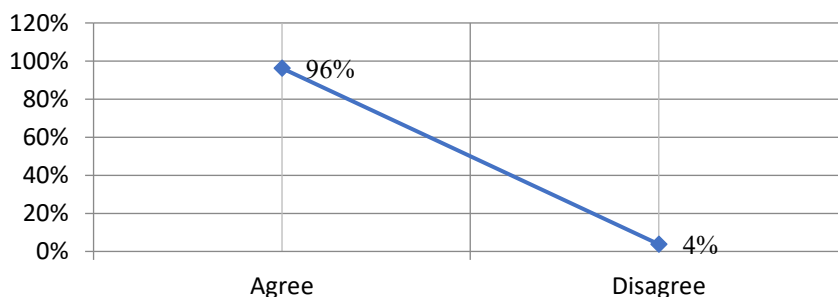
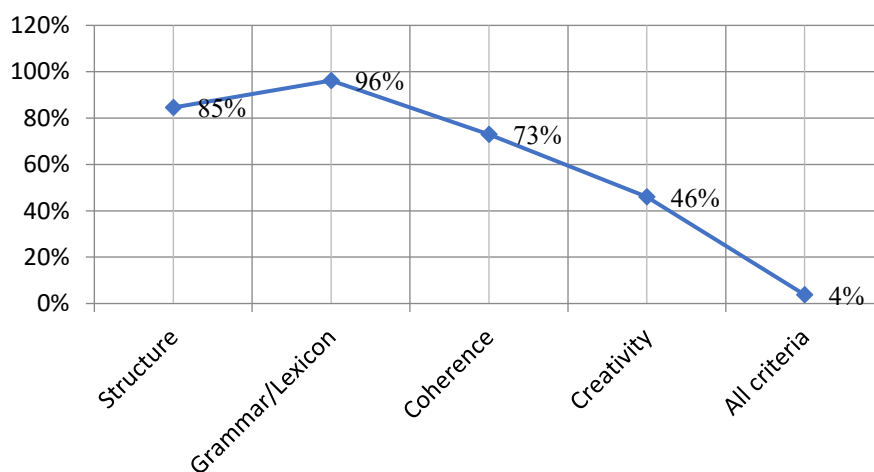
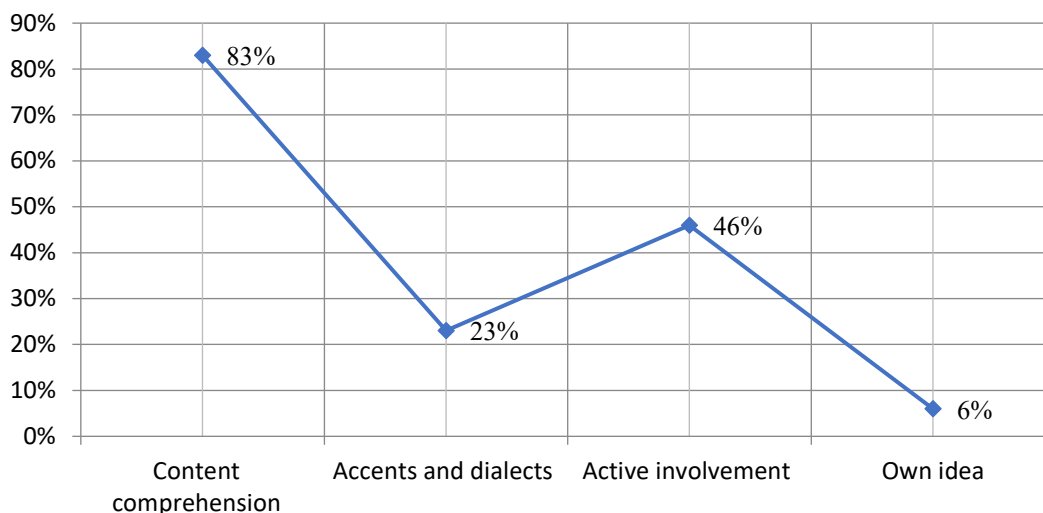
**Figure 2***Attitudes towards criterion-based assessment*

Figure 3 shows the criteria or rubrics that teachers use when assessing students' writing skills. 85% of respondents primarily pay attention to the organization and structure of the written statement. 96% continue to assess the grammatical and lexical components of the text. For 73%, criteria such as clarity and coherence of the written response are important. Creativity and originality of writing play an important role for 46% of respondents. And only 4% of teachers use all of the above rubrics when assessing.

**Figure 3***Writing skills assessment*

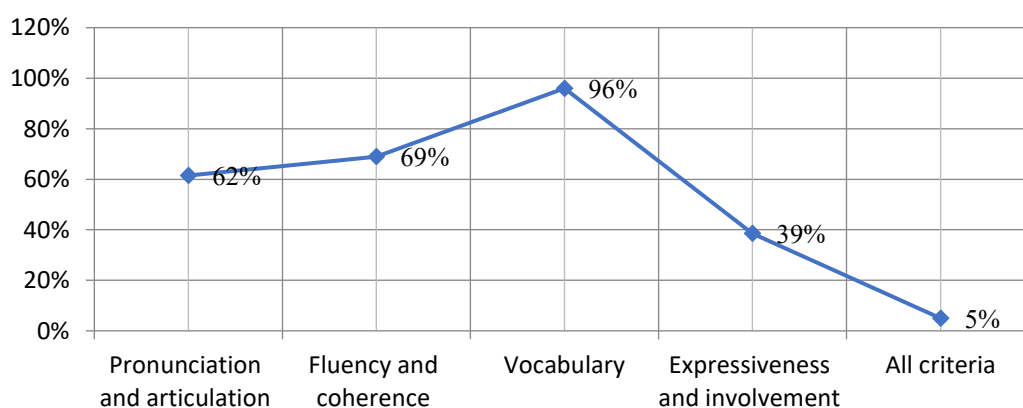
The diagram in Figure 4 shows the percentage ratio of various criteria for assessing listening comprehension. When assessing listening skills, the most important thing for respondents is understanding the content of the audio material, which is 83% of respondents. Accuracy in understanding accents and dialects and the ability to see notes scored the same percentage, namely 23%. Active involvement and response is assessed by 46% of teachers. 6% offered their own option, indicating that if this form of work is for understanding the main idea of the content (Listening for gist), then understanding the context is assessed. If the goal of the task is a detailed understanding of the listened material (Listening for details), then the examiner takes into account the understanding of the detailed content of the audio text when assigning a grade.

**Figure 4**  
Criteria for assessing listening comprehension



The use of criteria and rubrics and their application by teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages to assess speaking skills in percentage terms can be traced using the data in the diagram in Figure 5. Pronunciation and articulation are the main criterion for 61.5% of respondents. 69% of teachers assess the student's oral speech, paying special attention to fluency and coherence of speech. The most popular answer, which scored 96%, is the use of vocabulary and choice of words. Expressiveness and involvement are important for 38.5% of respondents. 3.8% of interviewees use all the above criterion depending on the purpose of the statement, actively paying attention to the word order in the sentence, the correctness of grammar and the content of the topic of the statement.

**Figure 5**  
Speaking skills assessment



According to the answers to the eighth question, "Do you differentiate tasks by difficulty with the corresponding number of points when conducting criterion-based assessment?" 70% of respondents answered "yes", 30% chose the answer "sometimes". The answers "no" and "rarely" were not used.

The ninth question was related to the use of the grading scale, where the respondents gave the following answers: 57.7% use a ten-point system, 34.6% use a rating in the range from

0 to 100 points, the five-point system is not used by teachers. 7.7% of respondents use the Bloom pyramid to assess students' language skills.

The next question in the questionnaire was open-ended: “How do you provide feedback to students based on assessment results and do you think it is effective?” The following response options were received:

1. “I take into account the individual needs and level of preparation of each student. Some students may require more detailed explanations, while others may require more complex tasks”.

2. “Provide feedback within a reasonable time after the assignment is submitted. This allows students to use the information to improve their work”.

3. “I help students develop self-assessment and self-control skills so that they can analyze their mistakes and learn from them on their own. I think this is effective”.

4. “Upon completion of the control, immediately, orally. Yes, I consider it to be effective”.

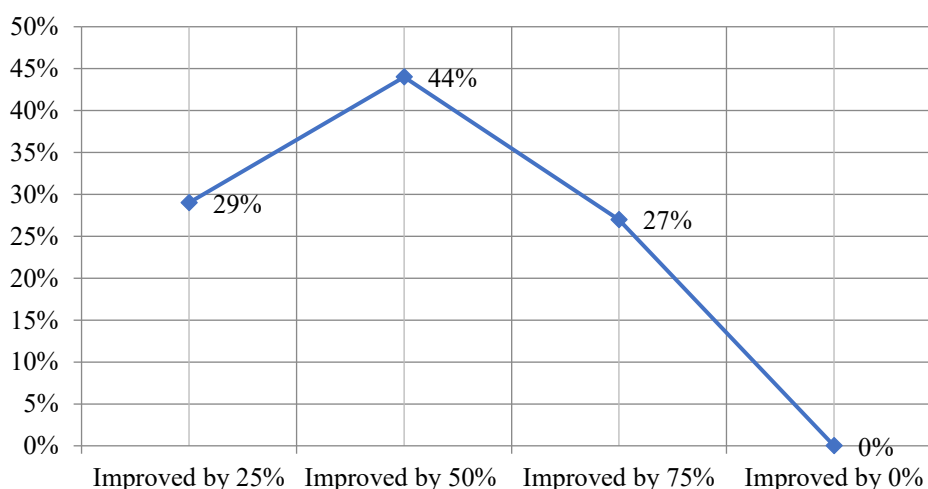
5. “I write down the student’s mistakes and the points they succeeded and voice them at the end of the lesson”.

6. “I think it is effective. Students are familiar with the 10-point system. I always explain what exactly I am assessing in a particular task”.

The eleventh question is reflected in the following diagram in Figure 6. Here, we can see how much the quality of teaching has improved with the use of the criterion-based assessment method according to the teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages, 29% of those who believe that it has improved by no more than 25%. 44% are of the opinion that the quality of teaching has increased by 50%. 27% of respondents answered that the quality of teaching has changed by 75%. None of the respondents believes that there is no improvement in the quality of education when using a criterion-based assessment. The 0% improvement option was not selected.

**Figure 6**

*Teaching improvement by means of the criterion-based assessment method*



The analysis of respondents' answers allowed us to determine how efficiently and effectively the criterion-based assessment method is applied in the educational process of the university. According to the survey data, most of the department's teachers regularly apply the criterion-based assessment method of students' knowledge. However, certain difficulties and shortcomings remain, mainly related to the development of universal headings and criteria for



assessing all four types of speech activity (listening, speaking, reading, writing). In addition, the problem of implementing an individual approach to students, taking into account their psychological and pedagogical characteristics, remains relevant.

The findings are consistent with the findings of H. Goodrich Andrade, who emphasizes that "rubrics not only make teachers' expectations transparent, but also help students understand what quality work looks like" (Andrade, 2000). As the survey showed, the department's teachers face similar challenges related to the need to increase the transparency and predictability of assessment. The use of rubrics facilitates more objective and understandable feedback, which, in turn, increases student motivation and helps them better understand the goals of learning.

Respondents also pointed out the need to introduce formative assessment at the university, constant monitoring of knowledge acquisition and the use of the criterion-based assessment not only as a means of control, but also as a tool for motivating and developing self-education skills and professional growth of students. These provisions are reflected in the concept of J. Marzano, who claims that "formative assessment is one of the most powerful tools for improving student achievement" (Marzano, 2006), since it provides students with regular feedback and promotes active participation in the learning process.

The survey pays special attention to the role of students as active participants in the assessment process. According to the CEFR principles, students should become subjects of educational activity, and not just objects of assessment. This idea is reflected in the provision of feedback by department teachers and in the practice of involving students in self- and peer assessment, which is confirmed by the position of J. Popham: "students must be active participants in assessment if it is to support learning" (Popham, 2008). He emphasizes that the criteria should not only be valid and reliable, but also understandable to the students themselves. This contributes to the development of students' ability to self-reflect and critically understand their progress.

Thus, the analysis of empirical data confirms the relevance and productivity of theoretical approaches proposed by foreign researchers. The practical application of the criterion-based assessment in teaching English at a technical university demonstrates a high degree of compliance with modern requirements for the quality of education. At the same time, the identified problems indicate the need for further research and methodological developments aimed at creating adapted headings, formative strategies and mechanisms of a personalized approach in the context of technical higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Criterion-based assessment allows obtaining objective information about the results of the acquired knowledge by students. It is aimed at motivating students and their direct and regular participation in this process to achieve the desired results. The development of generally accepted criterion, norms and mechanisms to ensure the reliability, transparency, objectivity and validity of the results will certainly improve the quality of the assessment procedure and its compliance with both international standards and the needs of students.

The regulatory documents on the organization of the educational process at the university (State compulsory standard, 2022; Regulation on the Academic Policy, 2023) recommend the comprehensive use of communication technologies (projects, debates, discussions, interviews, role-playing games, dramatizations, conferences, forums, competitions, etc.), as well as the active use of digital technologies and extracurricular activities. Such organization of educational activities helps to create conditions for increasing motivation to study disciplines, as well as increasing the cognitive activity of students, their verbal interaction and the development of creative potential. In this regard, it is important to regularly use educational technologies that allow simulating situations of verbal communication in a foreign language

and ensure the highest possible degree of independence of students in interpreting the phenomena of intercultural communication.

Based on the results of the survey, the authors of this article give the following recommendations for improving the system of level-based education, taking into account the international CEFR standard and criterion-based assessment of knowledge at the university:

1) Professional development. It is necessary to provide opportunities for training and education according to CEFR and criterion-based assessment for the university's teaching staff. The training should include familiarization with CEFR descriptors, examples of tasks and assessment rubrics, and methods of assessing language competence. This will help teachers better understand and apply the assessment standards and criterion.

2) Developing adapted materials. To develop teaching materials and tasks that correspond to the CEFR descriptors at different levels. To include a variety of tasks that assess different language skills, involving reading, writing, speaking and listening. To provide assessment rubrics so that learners can understand how their work is assessed against the CEFR criterion.

3) Regular assessment. To introduce regular assessment of students' language skills using the CEFR criterion. To ensure that assessment is transparent and objective so that students and teachers understand how their language learning progress is assessed.

4) Monitoring progress. To introduce systematic monitoring of students' progress at each CEFR level. To use formative assessment to identify where students need further support and development.

5) Feedback. To provide feedback to students and help them set clear goals to improve their language skills. To provide students with regular feedback on their progress against the CEFR criterion. To help students to be aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. To provide individual consultations and discussions so that students can ask questions and receive support in developing their language skills.

6) Involving students in the assessment and feedback process. To introduce them to the CEFR descriptors and assessment rubrics so that they can assess their own progress and participate in setting language targets. To provide opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment so that students can develop metacognitive skills and responsibility for their learning.

7) Partnerships with other institutions. To establish partnerships with other institutions or organizations that also use the CEFR. Sharing materials, experiences and best practices on the use of the CEFR and criterion-based assessment. To organize joint professional developments, training seminars and exchanges of experiences to jointly develop and improve the system of level-based learning.

8) Updating and adapting. Regular updating the level-based learning system and criterion-based assessment to take into account changes in the CEFR and new practices. To analyze the results of assessments and monitoring, collect feedback from teachers, students and other interested participants, and make necessary adjustments to the learning system. To involving students in the process of updating the system. To conduct surveys, focusing groups and discussions to find out their opinions on the learning system, assessment and language skills development. To use their feedback to make changes that meet their needs and improve the quality of education.

9) Resources and support. To ensure access to quality teaching materials, resources and tools that are aligned with the CEFR levels and assessment criterion. To promote the development and dissemination of educational resources that will help teachers and students work effectively within the CEFR framework.

10) Continuous improvement. The implementation of a level-based learning system using the CEFR and criterion-based assessment is a long-term and continuous improvement

process. To evaluate regularly the effectiveness of the system and its compliance with international standards. To analyze data on student progress, feedback from teachers and students, as well as examination and assessment results. To apply this data to identify areas for further development and improvement of the system.

Continuous improvement of the system of level-based teaching in accordance with the CEFR and criterion-based assessment will allow for a more accurate evaluation of students' language competencies and provide them with high-quality education.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interests regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article

### **Author Contributions**

Damira Jantassova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision; Anna Bogdanova: Original Draft Preparation, Data collection and curation, Resources, Validation, Writing; Kristina Arabadji: Visualization, Data Analysis, Writing, Editing, Reviewing.

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