

**IMPROVING ASSESSMENT IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING ALIGNING WITH TESOL STANDARDS EVIDENCE FROM SPECIALIZED SCHOOLS UNDER THE SPECIALIZED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AGENCY**

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**Abstract**

*Project-Based Learning (PBL) has become an essential instructional approach in Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency of Uzbekistan, reflecting the country's broader commitment to educational modernization and global competitiveness. PBL is widely recognized for fostering not only subject knowledge but also creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communicative competence (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Thomas, 2000). However, the effectiveness of PBL depends largely on the quality, validity, and transparency of assessment practices (Black & Wiliam, 2009).*

*Despite the growing implementation of PBL in Specialized Schools, project assessment remains predominantly score-based, typically relying on fixed numerical scales (e.g., 25-point systems) without clearly articulated performance descriptors. Such systems often prioritize language accuracy over integrated skill development, sociocultural awareness, and higher-order thinking, thereby limiting alignment with the competency-based philosophy of PBL (Bell, 2010).*

*This article argues that project assessment criteria in Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency should be systematically revised and aligned with TESOL Standards to enhance reliability, fairness, and international comparability. Drawing on international practices from the United States, Canada, Singapore, and Finland, the paper proposes a TESOL-aligned analytic and holistic rubric framework tailored to the Uzbek context. The study concludes that standards-based assessment reform would strengthen instructional coherence, promote formative feedback, and support Uzbekistan's integration into global educational benchmarks.*

**Keywords:** *Project-Based Learning, TESOL Standards, assessment reform, Specialized Schools Uzbekistan, rubric-based evaluation, standards-based education*

**1. Introduction**

In recent decades, learner-centered approaches have increasingly shaped educational reform worldwide. Among these approaches, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has gained prominence as an instructional methodology that promotes deeper conceptual understanding, authentic problem-solving, and integrated language use (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). Unlike traditional teacher-centered models, PBL encourages learners to engage with real-world issues, collaborate in teams, and demonstrate knowledge through meaningful products and presentations (Thomas, 2000).

In Uzbekistan, Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency were established to provide academically rigorous education for high-achieving and gifted students. These institutions serve as flagship models within the national education system and play a strategic role in preparing learners for international academic environments. In recent years, PBL has been increasingly adopted in these schools as part of broader reforms aimed at developing 21st-century skills, including communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

However, while instructional practices have evolved, assessment systems have not been systematically updated to reflect the multidimensional nature of PBL. Project work in many Specialized Schools continues to be evaluated using fixed numerical scoring systems without detailed analytic descriptors or performance-level classifications. As a result, assessment often emphasizes grammatical accuracy and content completion rather than communicative competence, sociocultural relevance, and collaborative performance. Such practices risk reducing PBL to a task-oriented activity rather than a standards-based pedagogical framework (Bell, 2010).

Research in formative assessment demonstrates that clearly defined criteria and performance descriptors significantly enhance learner motivation, transparency, and academic growth (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Similarly, rubric-based assessment improves reliability and reduces subjectivity by providing structured analytic and holistic evaluation mechanisms (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Weigle, 2002). In this regard, the TESOL Standards offer a comprehensive framework encompassing language knowledge, sociocultural awareness, instructional planning, assessment literacy, and professional competence.

Given the strategic importance of Specialized Schools in Uzbekistan's educational modernization agenda, aligning project-based assessment with TESOL Standards represents not merely a technical adjustment but a systemic reform. By integrating analytic and holistic rubrics grounded in international standards, assessment practices can better differentiate between learners who meet expectations and those who exceed them, while also supporting formative development.

This study therefore seeks to examine the limitations of the current score-based assessment model in Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency and to propose a TESOL-aligned rubric framework informed by international best practices.

## **2. Limitations of the Current Assessment System**

In Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency, project assessment is commonly conducted using a fixed-point system, often with a maximum score of 25. While categories such as content, language use, and presentation skills are included, their weighting is frequently inconsistent and lacks clear justification. For example, language use may receive more points than content or creativity, which contradicts the fundamental goals of project-based learning (Thomas, 2000).

Another major limitation is the absence of detailed descriptors explaining what each score represents. Research indicates that when students are not provided with clear performance criteria, assessment becomes subjective and less reliable (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Students

receive a numerical result but do not always understand why they earned a particular score or how they can improve. Consequently, assessment becomes teacher-centered rather than transparent and developmental (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Content &amp; Relevance</b>	Information is accurate, clear, and directly related to the chosen strange animal. All required points (appearance, habitat, diet, special features, interesting facts) are included.	<b>0–7</b>
<b>Organization &amp; Structure</b>	Ideas are logically ordered and easy to follow (clear introduction, body, and conclusion or sections). Smooth transitions between ideas.	<b>0–5</b>
<b>Language Use</b>	Vocabulary is appropriate for A2 level, includes some topic-specific words. Grammar is mostly accurate with minor mistakes that do not affect understanding.	<b>0–5</b>
<b>Creativity &amp; Presentation</b>	Work is visually attractive and/or presented in an engaging way (clear visuals, interesting delivery, creative layout).	<b>0–4</b>
<b>Effort &amp; Participation</b>	Shows clear effort in preparation and performance. On-time submission and active participation in presentation (if applicable).	<b>0–4</b>

### **3. The Need for Assessment Reform in Specialized Schools**

The current assessment model in many Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency relies on traditional criteria such as:

- Content
- Organization
- Language Use
- Creativity
- Participation

While these categories are pedagogically sound, they are not explicitly aligned with internationally accepted professional standards. Moreover, descriptors are often limited, making it difficult to distinguish between learners who meet expectations and those who exceed them.

Research on formative assessment emphasizes that clear criteria improve learner autonomy and academic performance (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Similarly, rubric-based evaluation enhances reliability and reduces subjectivity (Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Therefore, revising assessment criteria in Specialized Schools is not merely a procedural change; it is a structural reform aligned with Uzbekistan's broader educational modernization

goals.

**4. Rubric-Based Assessment as a Solution**

Research shows that analytic rubrics increase assessment reliability and help students identify specific areas for improvement (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Similarly, holistic scoring allows evaluators to capture the overall quality and impact of student performance (Weigle, 2002). Combining these two approaches provides both diagnostic feedback and global evaluation.

The proposed rubric model aligns with international assessment frameworks such as IELTS, where performance is evaluated through clearly defined band descriptors (Weigle, 2002). Such clarity enhances fairness and reduces scoring bias.

TESOL Standards–Aligned Rubric for Project-Based Learning Assessment

**1. Content & Relevance (0–7 points)**

Aligned with TESOL Standard 3 (Planning & Implementing Instruction)

Level	Descriptor	Points
Improvements needed	Content is incomplete, unclear, or lacks required elements; limited understanding of topic.	0–3
Approaches Standard	Basic coverage of required elements; some details missing or underdeveloped.	4
Meets Standard	All required components included (appearance, habitat, diet, special features, etc.); information accurate and relevant.	5–6
Exceeds Standard	Comprehensive, accurate, and well-developed content; demonstrates critical thinking and depth of understanding.	7

**2. Organization & Structure (0–5 points)**

Aligned with TESOL Standard 1 (Knowledge About Language – Discourse & Text Organization)

Level	Descriptor	Points
Improvements needed	Ideas lack logical sequence; weak or missing structure.	0–2
Approaches Standard	Some logical progression but transitions unclear.	3
Meets Standard	Clear introduction, body, and conclusion; logical sequencing and smooth transitions.	4
Exceeds Standard	Highly coherent and cohesive organization; strong discourse control appropriate to proficiency level.	5

**3. Language Use (0–5 points)**

Aligned with TESOL Standard 1 (Knowledge About Language – Form, Meaning & Use)

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Level	Descriptor	Points
Improvements needed	Frequent grammatical errors; limited vocabulary; meaning sometimes unclear.	0–2
Approaches Standard	Noticeable grammatical errors but meaning generally understandable; limited range of vocabulary.	3
Meets Standard	Grammar mostly accurate; vocabulary appropriate for A2 level; minor errors do not affect comprehension.	4
Exceeds Standard	Strong control of grammar; varied vocabulary including topic-specific language; fluent and clear expression.	5

#### 4. Creativity & Presentation (0–4 points)

Aligned with TESOL Standard 3 & 5 (Instructional Practice & Professionalism)

Level	Descriptor	Points
Improvements needed	Minimal creativity; presentation unclear or unengaging.	0–1
Approaches Standard	Some creative elements; presentation basic but understandable.	2
Meets Standard	Visually appealing and organized presentation; engages audience appropriately.	3
Exceeds Standard	Highly creative, innovative, and engaging presentation; demonstrates confidence and professionalism.	4

#### 5. Effort & Participation (0–4 points)

Level	Descriptor	Points
Aligned with TESOL Standard 5 (Professionalism & Collaboration)		
Improvements needed	Limited effort; incomplete preparation; minimal participation.	0–1
Approaches Standard	Adequate preparation; moderate participation.	2
Meets Standard	Clear effort in preparation; active participation; on-time submission.	3
Exceeds Standard	Exceptional preparation; leadership in collaboration; proactive engagement.	4

(Total: 25 points)

Level	Descriptor
<b>Exceeds the Standard</b>	Demonstrates advanced competence, creativity, and critical thinking beyond expectations
<b>Meets the Standard</b>	Achieves expected learning outcomes effectively
<b>Approaching the Standard</b>	Partial achievement; needs further development
<b>Improvements needed</b>	Does not meet minimum project requirements

### 5. Why TESOL Standards Provide an Appropriate Framework

TESOL International Association outlines five key professional standards:

2. Knowledge About Language
3. Sociocultural Context
4. Planning and Implementing Instruction
5. Assessment and Evaluation
6. Professionalism and Leadership

Project-Based Learning in Specialized Schools inherently intersects with these standards:

7. Projects require integrated language use (Standard 1).
8. Many projects address real-world sociocultural issues (Standard 2).
9. PBL depends on structured instructional design (Standard 3).
10. Transparent rubric-based scoring reflects assessment literacy (Standard 4).
11. Presentation and collaboration foster professional communication (Standard 5).

Aligning assessment criteria with TESOL Standards ensures that project evaluation reflects the multidimensional nature of language education.

### 6. International Examples of Standards-Based Project Assessment

#### United States

In many U.S. ESL programs, project assessment aligns with WIDA English Language Development Standards. Rubrics include performance descriptors across proficiency levels and emphasize discourse control, academic vocabulary, and integrated skills.

#### Canada

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) guide ESL project evaluation. Assessment includes detailed band descriptors that measure communicative competence and task fulfillment rather than isolated grammar accuracy.

#### Singapore

Singapore's national English curriculum integrates inquiry-based and project-based approaches. Analytic rubrics assess clarity, reasoning, linguistic precision, and audience awareness.

#### Finland

Finland employs competency-based assessment in multidisciplinary projects. Rubrics emphasize collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving, reflecting global educational priorities.

These examples demonstrate that high-performing education systems integrate standards-based frameworks when evaluating project work.

### **7. Implications for Educational Policy in Uzbekistan**

5. Reforming assessment criteria in Specialized Schools would:
6. Improve alignment with international quality benchmarks
7. Strengthen teacher assessment literacy
8. Promote fairness and transparency
9. Enhance student reflection and academic growth
10. Support Uzbekistan's integration into global educational standards

Given the strategic importance of Specialized Schools as flagship institutions, implementing TESOL-aligned PBL assessment could serve as a national model for broader reform. Research in formative assessment confirms that clear criteria significantly enhance student motivation and self-regulation (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Moreover, rubric transparency supports metacognitive awareness and reflective learning (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). By distinguishing between learners who meet the standards and those who exceed them, the proposed model also supports differentiated instruction and high-achiever development in specialized schools.

### **8. Conclusion**

As Specialized Schools under the Specialized Educational Institutions Agency of Uzbekistan continue to adopt Project-Based Learning, assessment practices must evolve accordingly. Aligning project assessment criteria with TESOL Standards ensures coherence between instructional goals and evaluation methods. International evidence demonstrates that standards-based assessment enhances educational quality and global comparability. Therefore, revising project assessment criteria in Specialized Schools represents a necessary and forward-looking reform within Uzbekistan's educational modernization agenda.

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