



# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CEFR AND IELTS WITH REFERENCE TO UZBEKISTAN

Sharopova Charos

**Annotation** *This article examines the relationship between the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), focusing on their structures, objectives, and complementary roles in language education and assessment. It highlights similarities and differences between the two systems and explores their implementation in Uzbekistan, where CEFR has been integrated into national educational policy and IELTS has become increasingly prominent as a high-stakes English proficiency exam. The paper discusses challenges related to test integrity, resource allocation, and disparities between urban and rural areas. Recommendations are provided for policymakers, educators, and learners to improve alignment between CEFR-based language education and IELTS-focused certification.*

**Keywords:** CEFR, IELTS, English proficiency, language assessment, Uzbekistan

## Introduction

Language proficiency assessment plays a vital role in modern education systems and is essential for global mobility, higher education admissions, and professional certification. Among the most widely recognized systems for assessing language ability are the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). While CEFR provides a descriptive and flexible framework applicable to multiple languages, IELTS functions as a standardized test designed specifically to measure English proficiency.

In Uzbekistan, the growing importance of English in higher education, international employment, and migration has driven significant reforms in language teaching and assessment. Since the adoption of Presidential Decree No. 1875 in 2012, foreign language education in Uzbekistan has been guided by CEFR standards, while IELTS has become a key certification tool for students and professionals seeking opportunities abroad (Rakhmonova, 2023). Understanding the relationship between these two systems is critical for aligning local educational practices with global standards and ensuring equitable access to language learning opportunities.

## Overview of CEFR

The CEFR, developed by the Council of Europe, provides a comprehensive framework for describing and assessing language proficiency. It categorizes proficiency into six levels: A1 and A2 (basic user), B1 and B2 (independent user), and C1 and C2 (proficient user). These levels are defined through detailed “can-do” descriptors, which specify what learners are able to accomplish in listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Council of Europe, 2020).



One of the CEFR's strengths is its flexibility and adaptability to different languages and educational contexts. It serves as a foundation for curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment. For example, a learner at the B1 level should be able to understand the main points of clear, standard input on familiar topics, whereas a learner at the C1 level demonstrates effective and flexible use of language for academic and professional purposes. CEFR does not function as a test but rather as a descriptive model to guide educational policy and practice.

### **Overview of IELTS**

IELTS is a high-stakes standardized test jointly administered by Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council, and IDP: IELTS Australia. It is recognized worldwide by universities, professional organizations, and immigration authorities. IELTS assesses four key language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, with scores reported on a nine-band scale. Band 1 represents a “non-user,” while Band 9 indicates an “expert user” (British Council, 2024).

Two main versions of the exam are available. The Academic module is primarily used for university admissions and professional registration, while the General Training module serves migration and workplace purposes. Unlike CEFR, which is descriptive, IELTS provides a precise numerical score, offering institutions and individuals a verifiable measure of English proficiency. This score plays a crucial role in admission decisions and immigration eligibility.

### **Mapping CEFR Levels to IELTS Scores**

Given the widespread use of both CEFR and IELTS, approximate equivalence tables have been developed to relate IELTS scores to CEFR levels. According to Cambridge English (2023), IELTS scores between 4.0 and 5.5 align with CEFR level B1, while scores between 5.5 and 6.5 correspond to B2. Scores between 7.0 and 8.0 map to C1, and scores above 8.5 indicate proficiency at the C2 level.


For instance, many universities in English-speaking countries require an IELTS score of at least 6.5, equivalent to CEFR B2 or lower C1, for admission to academic programs. In Uzbekistan, CEFR levels are often used as benchmarks in schools and universities, while IELTS scores remain necessary for students seeking to study abroad or obtain international certification (Turdiyeva, 2025).

### **Similarities and Differences Between CEFR and IELTS**

Both CEFR and IELTS emphasize the development and assessment of the four core language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. They are internationally recognized and widely adopted as benchmarks of language proficiency. Additionally, both systems emphasize practical, communicative competence rather than simply measuring theoretical knowledge of grammar or vocabulary (Council of Europe, 2020; British Council, 2024).

Despite these similarities, CEFR and IELTS differ significantly in their nature and application. CEFR is a descriptive framework that provides broad proficiency levels,





making it suitable for curriculum development, progress tracking, and teacher training. In contrast, IELTS is a formal, standardized examination that yields specific, numerical scores and is used primarily for high-stakes decisions such as university admissions and immigration (Turdiyeva, 2025). While CEFR can be applied to any language, IELTS is specific to English. Together, they complement each other by offering both descriptive guidance and precise measurement.

### **The Role of CEFR and IELTS in Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan has made substantial progress in adopting CEFR as the foundation of its foreign language education policy. Following the 2012 reforms, CEFR standards were incorporated into school curricula, teacher training programs, and university exit requirements (Rakhmonova, 2023). This alignment has improved transparency in language education and allowed Uzbekistan to benchmark its educational practices against international standards. However, challenges persist, including disparities in resources between urban and rural schools, limited access to high-quality materials, and the need for ongoing professional development for teachers (Turdiyeva, 2025).

Simultaneously, IELTS has become increasingly popular among Uzbek learners. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of young people achieving IELTS scores of 5.5 or higher increased fivefold, while those attaining C1-equivalent scores (Bands 7.0–8.0) rose sevenfold (Kun.uz, 2024). This surge reflects a growing demand for international education and career opportunities. In July 2025, Uzbekistan transitioned fully to computer-based IELTS testing following concerns about the security of paper-based exams, which were compromised by answer leaks (Kun.uz, 2025a). This shift aligns with global trends toward digitalization and enhances the reliability of testing systems.

Despite these developments, Uzbekistan's overall English proficiency remains moderate. According to the EF English Proficiency Index, the country ranked 98th globally in 2024, with an average proficiency level corresponding approximately to CEFR B1 (Monitor.kun.uz, 2024). Urban centers such as Tashkent and Andijan demonstrate higher proficiency levels, while rural regions continue to face barriers to language education access.


### **Implications for Stakeholders**

For policymakers, strengthening CEFR implementation should remain a priority, with particular focus on teacher training and equitable distribution of resources. The nationwide transition to digital IELTS exams represents a significant step toward enhancing test security and fairness, but further measures are needed to ensure transparency and accessibility.

For higher education institutions, clear communication of admission requirements in both IELTS scores and their CEFR equivalents is essential to avoid confusion. Using CEFR descriptors to design curricula can help ensure that students develop the skills necessary to meet international standards.

For learners, understanding the relationship between CEFR levels and IELTS scores can inform goal-setting and preparation strategies. For example, a student aiming to study





abroad should target an IELTS score of at least 6.5, corresponding to CEFR B2 or C1, while also working to develop the communicative competencies outlined by CEFR.

### Conclusion

CEFR and IELTS are distinct yet interconnected tools in the assessment and development of language proficiency. CEFR provides a universal descriptive framework that supports curriculum design and policy development, while IELTS serves as a standardized test offering precise, verifiable measurements of English proficiency. In Uzbekistan, the integration of CEFR into national education reforms and the increasing prevalence of IELTS reflect the country's commitment to aligning its language education system with international standards. As English proficiency becomes ever more important for academic and professional mobility, a balanced approach leveraging both CEFR and IELTS will be essential for learners, educators, and policymakers seeking to foster equitable and globally competitive language education.

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