

# Refining Qualitative Research Instruments Through Participant Involvement: An Interview Protocol Refinement Process for ELT Curriculum Research in Uzbekistan

## ABSTRACT

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This paper describes an Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) process conducted as a preparatory phase for a qualitative research that explores the perceptions of Uzbekistan's university lecturers regarding curriculum development and evaluation methods of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum implemented at private universities. The purpose of this qualitative phase is to systematically refine semi-structured interview protocol to maximize the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collection in the main study. This article reports and describes on four stages of the IPR process: (1) brainstorming the questions and aligning them with the research questions using the matrix, (2) conducting external review with the experts, (3) conducting internal review with university lecturers, (4) piloting interview questions study as a final stage of the IPR process. This paper demonstrates how the involvement of the perspectives of research participants and experts enhanced the rigor and quality of the research instrument. The paper provides a detailed examination of each stage, specific weaknesses in question design, alignment of the questions with objectives of the main study, appropriate sequencing, word choice which are systematically addressed through revision stages. The preparatory phase clearly illustrates that qualitative research is a cyclical process and that stakeholder engagement in an instrument development stage could improve the quality of subsequent data collection. The findings might serve as contribution to further methodological discussions and systematic approaches for qualitative instrument development, offering a practical guidance for research designing semi-structured interview protocols.

**Keywords:** Pilot Studies, Interview Protocol, Review, Research Instrument, Researcher Bias, University, Lecturers, ELT, Curriculum Evaluation, Uzbekistan

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Changes in Higher Education Sector in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is the country located in Central Asia with a population of approximately 38 million people. The country was a part of the Soviet Union till 1991. After gaining its independence, investments in education has become Uzbekistan's top priority in enhancing its economic and social development (World Bank Report, 2023). However, at the beginning, higher education experienced multiple challenges such as insufficient funding, issues in educational quality, out-dated programs and curriculum that failed to align with the needs of evolving economic and industrial demands of the country. This subsequently resulted in low education enrolment and interest in local universities among Uzbek youth (World Bank Report, 2023). Nevertheless, population growth and changing economic conditions of the country, steadily increased the demand for educational reforms in Higher Education Institutions (Ruziyev & Burkhanov, 2018). During the Soviet Union era, there were only 43 Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), but since independence this number significantly grew to 222, including private and branches of international universities (UzDaily, 2025). A Presidential resolution endorsed in 2017, PQ-2909, outlined key provisions to develop the higher education system in Uzbekistan. The resolution details the measures for modernizing infrastructure, reforming curriculum, enhancing faculty qualifications, and establishing cooperation with leading international universities (Lex.uz, 2017).

The core changes in the higher education sector began with the establishment of a systematic reform "The Concept of Development of Higher Education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030", the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-4391, dated 2019 (Lex.uz, 2019). This strategic document has brought many positive changes in the higher educational system (Rasulov, 2024). The universities have started transitioning to a credit-modular system based on the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ECTS), 40 local universities have been granted academic and financial autonomy which allowed them to make their decisions independently regarding their programs, curriculum, financial and qualifications requirements (Rasulov, 2024). Another significant reform was the change in licensing process for private educational establishments that has led to a boom of private universities. The pioneer private university was Akfa University (now Central Asian University), founded in 2019. Currently, the number of private universities has reached 70, demonstrating a rapid expansion of private higher education institutions in the country (Erasmus+ National Office in Uzbekistan, 2024).

On the other side of the spectrum, this surge necessitates maintaining rigorous quality standards in private universities during this short period of expansion. All private universities face a critical need to develop effective programs and curricula due to heightened competition and increasing interest in the private education sector. As private universities are newly established organizations, the majority of them have not enhanced their robust quality control and quality assurance mechanisms in terms of curriculum development and evaluation yet (Shadieva et al., 2025). Moreover, most university programs do not possess their own curriculum which is tailored to the context of a private university. Curriculum is mainly adopted or adapted from public universities which are not quite aligned with the requirements in the private educational sector and do not meet the demands of the stakeholders who choose private universities.

Another significant issue identified is that universities in Uzbekistan implement "top-down" to "bottom-up" curriculum development and evaluation approach (Bezborodova, 2022), which fails to provide "clear guidance", authentic communication and support to the main stakeholders (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022; Zhang et al. (2025) who are university lecturers and students. The curriculum in HEIs is designed by "the authority" and "limited pool of persons" (Mandel, 2015). Lack of communication between "top" - who are curriculum developers, experts or Ministry of Higher Education and "bottom" who are lecturers, the main implementers, "actors" (Zhao, 2011) in curriculum

changes leads to the gaps in curriculum development and implementation (Khan et al., 2023). As a result, another challenge has been faced by private universities - maintaining the balance of the needs among various stakeholders (students, lecturers, parents, curriculum developers, Ministry of Higher Education, employers) in designing and evaluating the curriculum. Each group of stakeholders might prioritize different outcomes which makes it challenging to establish a consistent and clear process of curriculum development and evaluation (Khan et al., 2023). Implementing only “top-down” curriculum development approaches have brought misalignments between content sequencing, assessment strategies, and curriculum outcomes and objectives (Cheema, 2021; Hafeez et al., 2021).

Most studies highlight the importance of lecturers’ role in curriculum development and evaluation (Louvel, 2013; McGrath et al., 2016; Micallef, 2025; Stephens et al., 2008; Van der Heijden et al., 2015). Lecturers are defined as “agents of change” (Nieveen, 2011; Priestley, 2011), who can contribute significantly to the continuous improvement of curriculum alongside curriculum experts. This paper describes the first phase of qualitative research on exploring the perspectives of university lecturers regarding English Language Teaching (ELT) pre-service teacher education curriculum development and evaluation at private universities in Uzbekistan. The first phase of the study was focused on Interview Protocol Refinement and pilot study that prioritizes the perspectives of “bottom-up” curriculum implementers (lecturers) who directly work with and are aware of the needs of the target population of the ELT curriculum (pre-service teachers). This phase of the research actively involves lecturers into the research instrument development and improvement, revealing the expectations of stakeholders and qualities of a market-responsive curriculum that meets the needs of pre-service teachers and employers.

## **1.2. The focus of the Primary Study**

This qualitative research explores the perceptions of lecturers who are described as the “product implementers” (Zhao, 2011), and those who can share “information-rich” (Patton, 2015) data and meaningful perspectives because of being constantly engaged with the curriculum. The primary research explores two important aspects of the ELT curriculum for pre-service teacher education. First, the quality and essential attributes of the well-designed ELT curriculum. Second, how the ELT curriculum should be evaluated in a context of Higher Educational Institutions, focusing on the criteria and approaches of the curriculum evaluation process.

The initial phase of the research serves to improve the core research instrument of the study - the interview protocol, and consists of the following aims:

- to enhance the interview protocol of the research by involving university lecturers into the internal review and pilot study stages
- to apply the changes and modify the interview questions after each phase

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Integrating Lecturer Insights into Curricular Governance**

In the context of HEIs, curriculum development is defined as a comprehensive decision-making process and the “compilation of diverse individual contributions” that needs constant improvement and innovation (Gordon et al., 2019). Karkkainen (2012) emphasizes that lecturers should be involved to review curriculum and become curriculum innovators that further enhance the quality of teaching and learning. He also strongly suggests that change in curriculum could be a turning point for innovation in education. Ball (1990) describes lecturers as “knowledgeable people” with extensive understanding of the field due to their professional role, expertise and experience. Many studies found the benefits of collecting data from lecturers to enhance the curriculum in HEIs, leading to effective achievement of educational reforms (Carl, 2009, Fullan, 1991; Handler, 2010; Van der Heijden et al., 2015).

Datnow & Hubbard (2016) highlight that collecting reliable data from lecturers enables educational leaders to obtain authentic and comprehensive information regarding the program and the main stakeholders such as students, parents and industry representatives. This, in turn, leads to identifying strengths and weaknesses, and areas for improvement of curriculum more accurately. As a result, educational leaders can gain practical evidence, develop targeted strategies to address the needs of students, and improve the quality of the program (Halverson et al., 2007). McGrath et al., (2016) point out that HEIs leadership who often ignore the insights of lecturers has a high possibility of delivering curriculum that fails to meet contemporary industry expectations and student needs. Therefore, curriculum development, revision and evaluation cycles should incorporate formal mechanisms for lecturers' input and contributions (Louvel, 2013; Mandel, 2015).

## **2.2. Curriculum evaluation in English Language Teaching Pre-service Teacher Education**

According to Peacock (2016), it is crucial for every teacher-training program to have a system for regular internal evaluation. Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998) also emphasize “the importance of having systematic evaluation at the heart of a programme”. Peacock (2016) mentions that there seem to be only 'few detailed descriptions' on how to evaluate current ELT programs. To determine if a curriculum is equipped with all necessary skills and to identify the shortcomings of ELT programs, there is a need for a model that can be adapted to the context and can evaluate the effectiveness of teacher education programs. Having an effective ELT program evaluation can contribute to “program improvement” (Lynch, 2003). Yang (2009) suggests that there should be a clearly stated philosophy and that “program content should reflect it”.

## **2.3. Benefits of IPR and Piloting Studies to Enhance the Research Instrument**

The quality of obtained data depends significantly on well-designed research instruments. Every novice and emerging qualitative researcher needs support and guidance in designing effective research instruments that help “produce valid, reliable, unbiased, and complete” results (Cohen, 2003) to ensure methodological rigor. When qualitative research employs in-depth interviews as the primary research instrument, researchers should make sure that interview protocols are “carefully designed and structured” “to enhance validity and reliability” and to reduce bias (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A comprehensive and well-designed interview protocol leads to obtaining insightful and information rich data while equipping a researcher with clear structure, consistency and guidance throughout the data collection process (Jones et al., 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

Qualitative studies focusing on exploring perceptions of individuals are often complex and challenging to investigate through interviews due to a variety of factors such as not thinking deeply or explicitly about their beliefs (Braaten, 2020). Therefore, researchers should plan their interviewing approaches purposefully to provide interviewees with adequate space and prompting that gives opportunity for deeper reflection. Additionally, Braaten et al., (2020) suggests researchers to systematically gather data by “organizing the interview in a way that will allow them to answer their research questions”.

Castillo-Montoya (2016) highlights the benefits of creating a matrix prior to designing an interview protocol that demonstrates the alignment of interview questions and research questions. This alignment “can increase the utility of interview questions, confirm their purpose” and visually demonstrate the value of each question, keeping necessary questions and eliminating unnecessary ones (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This process is considered as an initial step of Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPR). Thus, to enhance reliability of interview protocols, implementing Interview Protocol Refinement Framework suggested by Castillo-Montoya (2016) could serve as a tool of "rigorous steps to interview protocols and ensure their congruency" (Jones et al., 2014). The IPR framework includes four essential stages (Castillo-Montoya, 2016):

- Stage 1: Aligning interview questions with research questions
- Stage 2: Constructing an inquiry-based conversation
- Stage 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocols
- Stage 4: Piloting the interview protocol

The piloting stage of the IPR strengthens the quality of the questions by enhancing their clarity, and identifying possible issues with timing. Kvale (2007) claims that pilot studies can assist to detect weaknesses and limitations in interview design, providing an opportunity for a researcher to make adjustments prior to applying in the main study (Kim, 2010). Like the other three stages of the IPR, the piloting stage serves to refine research instruments through testing (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Kim, 2010; Yin, 2014) and to evaluate the feasibility of recruitment protocols (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Secomb & Smith, 2011; Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). In other words, this final stage of refinement allows researchers to test whether participant selection criteria are appropriate and whether effective participants who can help answer the research questions are being reached (Maxwell, 2013). This stage also reveals if the order of the questions is effective and appropriately placed or needs modification (Merriam, 2009), and provides information about the complexity of the questions and whether participants are able to answer them (Maxwell, 2013).

Moreover, this stage generates preliminary data (Janghorban et al., 2014) and increases confidence of a novice researcher in conducting in-depth interviews (Ismail et al., 2018; Janghorban et al., 2014). Stage 4 of the IPR identifies potential improvements and makes final revisions of interview protocols (Maxwell, 2013). The IPR framework is defined as an effective methodology for generating robust interview protocols that serves to collect “rich, focused, and meaningful data that captures participants’ lived experiences” (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) that fully aligns with the purpose of this research. This qualitative research focuses on lecturer perceptions regarding ELT curriculum development and evaluation, emphasizing their experiences and key contributions toward enhancing the curriculum at private universities. The lecturers were also actively involved in the IPR process, which constitutes the initial phase of the research.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. The Stages of the Pilot Study

To enhance the quality of the research instrument, qualitative research employed the IPR framework as the preliminary phase of the data collection (Figure 1).

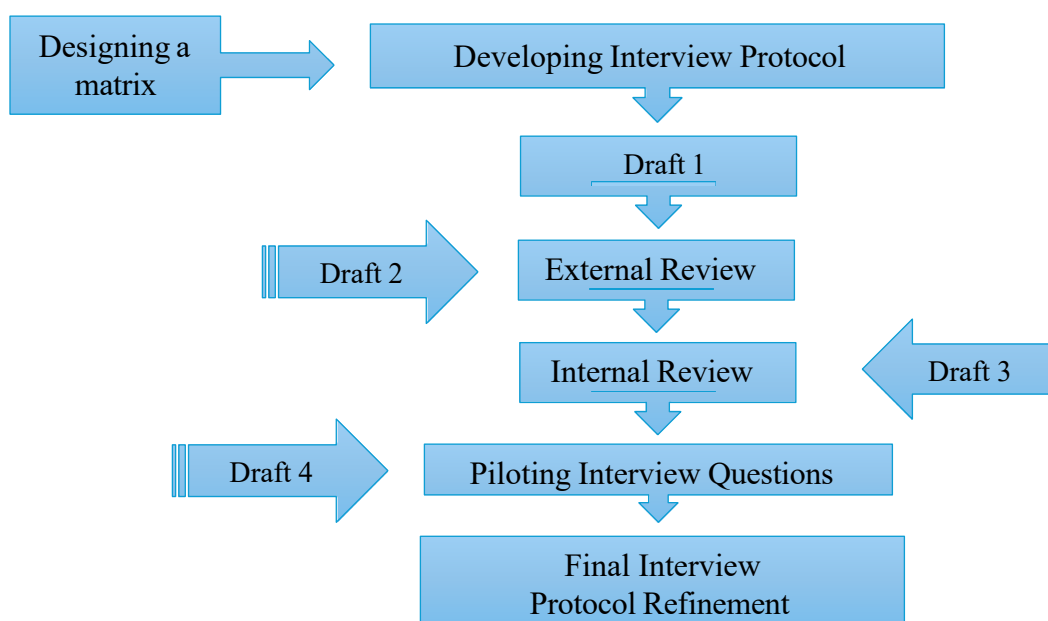


Figure 1. The stages of the IPR

This qualitative research explores the perceptions and perspectives of the main "actors" (Zhao, 2011) in ELT curriculum development and evaluation. Research question 1 focuses on lecturers' perspectives on the ELT curriculum content and components, while research questions 2 and 3 aim to explore lecturers' insights on curriculum evaluation quality and approaches they consider to be effective. In-depth semi-structured interviews serve as the core data collection method. The study modifies an existing framework by integrating a robust review Leadership Competencies process that involves lecturers as reviewers as well as pilot study participants who help enhance the research instrument. Prior to constructing the interview protocol, I addressed the following questions (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2018; Kvale, 2007) that helped in preparing the qualitative interview protocol:

- What do I need to know to answer my research questions?
- What are possible topics that need to be covered in the interview questions?
- What do I know about the context?
- Who are the participants?
- What do I know about the setting?
- What type of question could be useful to answer the research questions: general or specific?
- What language should be used?
- How can I avoid the questions that are leading and biased?

Having answered these questions, I compiled a list of topics related to ELT curriculum development and evaluation. The topics were logically organized, progressing from general to specific - beginning with ELT methodology and assessment, then moving to curriculum design, finally addressing curriculum evaluation. Subsequently, I constructed the questions that “flow reasonably well” with the topics, acknowledging the possibility that “the order of the questions could be changed during the actual interview” (Bryman, 2012). This process was a preliminary stage - brainstorming of the questions that could help me answer the research questions. I ensured that the language used in the questions was “comprehensible and relevant to the people I am interviewing” (Bryman, 2012; Kvale, 2007), who are lecturers of the ELT program and familiar with ELT methodology, language testing and assessment, curriculum design and evaluation. Following this, I created a matrix that “mapped interview questions onto research questions” (Castillo-Montoya, 2016), visually demonstrating the alignment of each interview question with the research questions. During this stage, the questions were filtered, eliminating those which are unlikely to contribute to collecting meaningful data (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The original matrix suggested by Castillo-Montoya (2016) included interview questions, background information and research questions (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Matrix (Castillo-Montoya, 2016)

	<b>Background Information</b>	<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Research Question 2</b>	<b>Research Question 3</b>
Interview Q1	X			
Interview Q2	X			
Interview Q3		X		
Interview Q4		X	X	X

However, the matrix I constructed contains additional elements. It includes three research questions, topics addressed in those research questions, interview questions and rationales (Table 2). Integrating rationales explicitly indicates my position as a researcher, demonstrating one of the qualities of “a good qualitative inquirer” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This matrix helps maintain the trustworthiness

of the research procedure, increasing credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It serves to document every decision made and encourages researcher reflexivity (Maxwell, 2013). The matrix also assists to track the balance of the questions related to each research question, identify gaps, evaluate, adjust, add or eliminate certain questions. The interview protocol was divided into three sections: opening questions, core questions, and closing questions. The opening section included five questions that were used for rapport-building and essential information collection that covers facesheet information, and background information. The core questions section consists of three sub-sections, each reflecting one of the three research question:

- i. Curriculum experience
- ii. Perceptions of effective curriculum
- iii. Criteria and approaches for curriculum evaluation

Each sub-section contains 2 to 4 main questions and 2 to 5 prompts and follow-up questions. The final section includes three questions on challenges, identification of barriers, and a question that encourages sharing additional reflection and insights of participants.

Table 2. Sample Matrix

Topics covered	RQs	Core Questions	Prompts & follow-up questions	Rationale
ELT curriculum, content of the curriculum, assessment practices	RQ 1	What key elements do you believe should be part of an effective ELT curriculum? (to meet the needs of pre-service teachers)	<p><i>a. Could you describe a particular component of the ELT curriculum that is the most effective and/or ineffective?</i></p> <p><i>b. To make the curriculum more effective, what courses do you consider the most useful for preparing future English language teachers?</i></p> <p><i>c. What specific assessment methods (e.g., portfolio, observed lessons, self-reflection journals) do you believe are most effective for evaluating a student teacher's readiness?</i></p>	<p>The questions progress from general to specific, highlighting what elements should be inside the curriculum. The first follow-up question encourages obtaining broad and diverse perspectives of participants. Next questions are more specific, asking about the necessary courses, assessment, and skills that should be integrated inside the ELT curriculum that prepares pre-service teachers for real teaching context</p>

The next stage of the IPR was significant in terms of detecting bias, leading questions and assessing the effectiveness of the interview protocol externally and internally. This review process involved six experts,

three external and three internal reviewers. Selected external reviewers were the researchers with more than 10 years of experience and expertise in the field of educational research and ELT curriculum development. The experts hold PhD degrees in education and are university lecturers with “a track record of research and published work in the relevant field” (Scorsolini-Comin, 2020). The experts were selected according to the following criteria:

Academic qualifications: Holding PhD Degree in Education

- Extensive experience in research: More than 15 years of experience in educational research
- Subject matter experience: Having knowledge and expertise in the field of Education, ELT or Curriculum Development and Evaluation
- Employment: Currently working as a lecturer in ELT or Language Education Department
- Institutional diversity: Being from different universities to avoid bias and maintain objectivity and neutrality

Table 3 provides brief information about the external experts.

Table 3. External Experts

External Experts	Degree/Position	Experience	University	Field of expertise
Expert 1	PhD, Associate Professor and Deputy Head of Research	15	New Uzbekistan University, Uzbekistan	ELT, Curriculum Development
Expert 2	PhD, Lecturer	11	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China	ELT
Expert 3	PhD, Lecturer	15	McGill University, Canada	Education

The experts suggested the characteristics of a good qualitative interview and designed the criteria for evaluation. The core purpose of the review was to examine the overall quality of the questions. They reviewed the protocol based on the following criteria (Bryman, 2012; Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Coker & Akande, 2025; Maxwell, 2013; Kvale, 2007):

1. Clarity of wording
2. Relevance of questions
3. Coverage of questions
4. Sequencing and flow
5. Language appropriateness
6. Ethical considerations
7. Overall suitability of the protocol

The protocol was also reviewed in terms of methodological alignment to ensure the questions are consistent with the selected qualitative approach, allowed for detailed and rich responses, encouraged storytelling and examples and can be easily adapted or reordered during the interview if it is appropriate.

Internal reviewers were selected based on the following criteria:

- Academic Qualifications: MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), PhD in TESOL or Curriculum and Instruction
- Subject matter expertise: Knowledge in the field of ELT and Curriculum Development
- Methodological experience: Experience in qualitative research

- Employment: Currently working as a lecturer in an ELT department

The internal reviewers involved in the process were three lecturers who work at a private university ELT program, each with more than five years of teaching experience in HEIs. All three reviewers were lecturers who work at the ELT department. In addition to their teaching roles, two of the reviewers had experience in ELT curriculum development and are currently pursuing their PhDs in the field of Curriculum and Instruction and TESOL. The third reviewer holds a PhD in TESOL and is currently working as a Senior Lecturer. Table 5 provides detailed information about the internal reviewers.

Table 5. Internal Reviewers and Pilot Study Participants

Internal Reviewers	Qualifications/Position	Experience in research	University	Field of expertise
Reviewer 1	PhD in TESOL, Senior Lecturer	15	Kimyo International University, Uzbekistan	ELT, TESOL
Reviewer 2	PhD candidate in Curriculum and Instruction, Senior Lecturer	7	New Uzbekistan University, Uzbekistan	ELT, Curriculum and Instruction
Reviewer 3	PhD candidate in TESOL, Senior Lecturer	8	Webster University in Tashkent	ELT, TESOL, Curriculum and Instruction

Reviewing and getting feedback from fellow colleagues led to modifications and improvements in the quality of questions. I constructed the checklist (Table 4) based on the recommendations by Bryman, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; and Patton, 2015. The checklist consisted of seven criteria, and questions and prompts were asked to be examined using the checklist and the reviewers' expertise as lecturers. The main purpose of the review was to examine the questions in detail and determine suitability of providing rich information. Using the checklist, reviewers provided comments on whether the questions are not too broad or vague, follow logical sequence, language appropriateness, neutrality of questions, practical considerations, and ethical considerations.

Table 4. Sample checklist (Bryman, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; and Patton, 2015)

<b>Research Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions directly contribute to answering the research questions</li> <li>• Questions cover all key aspects needed to address research objectives</li> <li>• Questions have clear purpose (descriptive, exploratory, explanatory)</li> <li>• Questions are sufficiently open but not too broad or vague</li> <li>• Questions follow a logical sequence or progression</li> </ul>
<b>Language Appropriateness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language is comprehensible to target participants (avoids jargon or technical terms unless appropriate)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary is relevant to participants’ experiences and context</li> <li>• Questions are culturally appropriate and sensitive</li> <li>• Language is clear and unambiguous</li> <li>• Questions are concise and focused (not overly complex or double-barreled)</li> <li>• Reading level is appropriate for participants</li> </ul>
<b>Neutrality and Balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions avoid leading participants toward specific answers</li> <li>• Questions don’t contain implicit assumptions</li> <li>• Questions are free from value-laden terminology</li> <li>• Questions allow for a range of possible responses (positive, negative, neutral)</li> <li>• Questions don’t suggest “correct” or socially desirable answers</li> </ul>
<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions respect participant privacy and dignity</li> <li>• Potentially sensitive topics are approached carefully</li> <li>• Questions don’t create undue psychological stress</li> <li>• Participants can reasonably decline to answer without discomfort</li> </ul>

The final stage of the IPR was piloting the interview protocol, once more involving lecturers in the study. The primary objective of the pilot study was to complete refinement of the interview protocol. Participants for this pilot stage were recruited through purposive sampling. The recruitment process proceeded through the announcement of the pilot study on social media (LinkedIn page) professional network channel. 15 university lecturers expressed their initial interest and requested full information about the study. The detailed information sheets about the study and a consent form were sent to 10 out of 15 who were lecturers currently working at a private confirmed their participation. Finally, four of them were selected based on the following inclusion criteria. university. After receiving the full information about the study and the consent form, 6 lecturers confirmed their participation. Finally, 4 participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Academic Qualifications: MA in TESOL, PhD in TESOL
- Subject matter expertise: Knowledge in the field of ELT and Curriculum Development
- Experience: Having more than 5 years of working experience in the ELT Department of HEIs
- Employment: Currently working as a lecturer in an ELT department
- Institutional diversity: Representing different universities

The primary purpose of this stage was to assess the consistency, flow and timing. The pilot study also revealed whether the questions were biased, leading, loaded, universal, lacking conceptual clarity, or asking for presumed expertise. This stage showed how questions might be comprehended and interpreted, how probes retrieved information, and the appropriate length of questions.

Table 6. Pilot Study Participants

Pilot study Participants	Qualifications/Position	Experience in working in the ELT	University. Department	Field of expertise
Lecturer A	MA in TESOL, PhD Candidate, Senior Lecturer	10 years	Kimyo International University, Uzbekistan, English Education	ELT
Lecturer B	MA in TESOL, Lecturer	8 years	Kimyo International University, Uzbekistan, English Education	ELT
Lecturer C	MA in TESOL, Senior Lecturer	6 years	Central Asian University, Uzbekistan	ELT
Lecturer D	MA in TESOL, Lecturer	6 years	Central Asian University, Uzbekistan	ELT

The research employs instrumental case study design (Yin, 2014), and pilot study serving to test the methods and procedures intended for use in the main qualitative study. Following the interview protocol, I conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview with participants, transcribed the interview and completed a reflexivity log to track emotions, bias and preconceptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I position myself as an insider researcher in this study, as I belong to the HE context, being a lecturer in the ELT department. The reflexivity log contained two sections where I addressed my personal and interpersonal experiences before, during and after the interviews. To avoid researcher bias and help me reshape my research practice (Koopman et al., 2020), after each pilot interview, I recorded my responses to the questions: “How are my unique perspectives influencing the interview process?”, “How does my professional and personal background shape my interest in this topic?” (Olmos-Vega et al., 2018). Regarding interpersonal reflexivity, I addressed these questions: “What relationships exist and how do they influence the interview and the participants involved?”, “How are power dynamics operating for myself and pilot study participants?” (Olmos-Vega et al., 2018; Walsh, 2003). This reflexivity process helped me analyze my position and provided useful insights into participants’ responses, revealing “implicit biases in the researcher’s approach” (Finley, 2017).

Before data analysis, the transcriptions were sent to the interview participants for member checking (Creswell, 2018). Member-checking is a process where the research participants are involved in the research process by reviewing data transcripts and providing feedback (Birt et al., 2016; Varpio et al., 2017). The participants reviewed the transcripts and confirmed the accuracy of the information. However, Lecturer A and Lecturer D requested some changes. Lecturer A asked for the removal of information related to the university policy due to sensitivity concerns, while Lecturer D wanted to add some examples to the question about the important components of the ELT curriculum. As a result, the researcher decided to include an additional follow-up question to Section A (Curriculum Experience), asking participants to provide some examples or cases to support their answers.

## 2.2. Ethical Standards of the Pilot Study

This pilot study received ethical approval from the Central Asian University Institutional Review Board (IBR) under approval number CAUIRB2025057 granted on 17 September, 2025. The participants of the pilot study were presented with an informed consent form. The form includes a brief introduction to the research, the benefits to the subject and investigator, and some possible risks. The consent form also informs participants about their right to withdraw from this study at any time, and that all the information they provide will remain private and confidential (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Along with the consent form, the participants were also provided with a document that contains the information about the purpose and procedure of the research including the research questions, aims of the pilot study stage,

and time frame. The list of possible topics of the interview questions were also introduced in the document.

Regarding data storage and retention, to protect the participants from embarrassment, harm or stress, anonymization is a significant part of this pilot study (Creswell, 2018; Thomas, 2021). All the data of the pilot study, including consent forms are stored and managed according to the best practices for managing qualitative data (Corti et al., 2020). The transcripts are stored into a separate folder that is protected with a password, and the names of the participants are pseudonymized and used as the file names (Creswell, 2018). The drafts and improved versions of interview protocols, video recordings, and transcriptions of pilot interviews are also stored in a password-protected (Creswell, 2018) files, put in chronologically organized folders named by numeral identifier (Neale, 2021; Saldana, 2003). The data of the pilot study will be retained for a minimum of 6 years after publication (UK Data Service, 2023). This period of retention enables the verification of findings, possible secondary analysis, being complied with research integrity standards (Resnik et al., 2015). Researchers interested in accessing the documents might contact the author with a formal request which describes the purpose and objectives of their research.

### 3. Results of Modification

#### 3.1. Refinements After External Review

The interview protocol underwent three major refinements which happened after external review by expert researchers, internal review by private university lecturers, and after pilot study. In terms of clarity of wording and language appropriateness, the experts recommend shortening the lengthy questions (*e.g., What courses, teaching methods, approaches, and techniques do you consider the most useful that should be integrated into the ELT curricula?*), break down complex questions into two separate questions, and simplify terminology (Table 6), as long questions can overwhelm or confuse the interviewees (Bryman, 2012). One of the experts commented on the topics covered in the questions related to curriculum development and evaluation that it lacks questions that ask the elements of the curriculum such as learning outcomes, objectives and syllabi. The reviewers also suggested modifying the tone of some questions as they sound like evaluating performance of lecturers (*e.g., What formal or informal methods do you use to evaluate the courses you teach?*) rather than asking for their insights. It was suggested to link the question back to the curriculum evaluation by adding “...and how does this relate to evaluating the curriculum as a whole?”. Another important suggestion was related to the sensitivity of some questions that ask what the participants would like to change in the current curriculum or share certain weaknesses of the curriculum. This type of questions requires verbal or written assurance of confidentiality (Creswell, 2018). Reviewers also recommended including a debriefing form that outlines objectives of the research and confidentiality matters and contact details of the researcher.

Table 7. Modification of Complex Questions After Expert Review

Stage 2	Original Questions	Expert Reviewer Comment	Revised version
Expert Review	<i>What courses, teaching methods, approaches, and techniques do you consider the most useful that should be integrated into the ELT curricula?</i>	There are many elements in one question	<i>What courses or teaching methods do you consider most useful for preparing future teachers?  Could you explain why?</i>

Expert Review	<i>How would you describe the balance between theoretical and practical experience (teaching skills) that should be taught in the ELT curriculum?</i>	This question is too long	<i>How well does the curriculum balance theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills?</i>
Expert Review	<i>What types of assessment are implemented? Could you provide specific examples?</i>	Some questions contain multiple questions inside one, which reduces clarity.	a) <i>What types of assessment are used in the curriculum?</i>  b) <i>Could you share a few examples?</i>
Expert Review	<i>What assessment methods should be included in the ELT curriculum to fully equip pre-service teachers with the most essential teaching skills?</i>	To maintain clarity and prevent leading the respondent, break this into two separate questions. Divide the prompt into two clear and sequential questions. The first discusses <i>how</i> (assessment methods), while the second addresses <i>what</i> (essential skills)	<i>What types of assessment are used in the curriculum?</i>  <i>Can you share a few examples?</i>

### 3.2. Refinements After Internal Review

The most significant modifications occurred after the internal review stage with the lecturers who work at private universities. The opening questions 2 and 3 (e.g., *What do you like the most about this program? What would you like to change in this program? If you have a chance to redesign the current curriculum, what would you change?*), which asked about strength of the program and possible modifications that might be suggested by the participants were criticized for not being appropriate warm-up questions, as they were a bit challenging and required to use problem solving skills right from the beginning. The review also revealed that most questions in the section B (core questions) subsections ii and iii need clarification prompts and examples (e.g., *How should an effective ELT curriculum address specific needs of pre-service teachers in terms of language and professional preparation?*). Some words like “feature”, “elements”, “components”, “structure”, “effective” were suggested to be specified as they were considered ambiguous.

Table 8. Modification of Questions After Internal Review

Stage 3	Original Questions	Expert Reviewer Comment	Revised version
Internal Review	<i>What do you like the most about this program? What would you like to change in this program?/ If you have a chance to redesign the current curriculum, what would you change?</i>	To me, the question does not sound very light. I mean is it generic? Is it a light and warm-up question?	<i>How would you describe the unique characteristics of ELT education in private universities?</i>
Internal Review	<i>How do these key elements contribute to the effectiveness of the ELT curriculum?</i>	What does 'effective' mean here? I suggest making it more precise.	<i>What does “effective curriculum” mean to you?</i>

Internal Review	<i>To make the curriculum more effective, what courses do you consider the most useful for preparing future English language teachers?</i>	I wonder what your expected answer here would be. I think obviously the respondent will say they are essential etc. Do you think you could also clarify which ones are more impactful to the success of a program?	<i>Which ones are more impactful to the success of a program, or arrange them in order of importance?</i>
Internal Review	<i>What are the most important features of an ELT curriculum that prepare pre-service ELT teachers effectively?</i>	For me the term 'feature' is somewhat ambiguous. Would you clarify what kind of features? Or in relation to what?	<i>What essential components should be included in an effective ELT teacher preparation curriculum?</i>

### 3.3. Refinements After Pilot Study

The piloting The piloting stage of the study simulated the interview stage of the actual research. The time frame of the interviews ranged between 50-70 minutes. The appropriateness and clarity of the questions were tested and improved. However, it was noticed that some questions required cuing (hinting) for certain participants who experienced cognitive load and memory delays (Foddy & Foddy, 1993). Another important finding was that some questions or prompts elicited bounded responses while some required unbounded. In other words, some questions generated limited and narrow responses (bounded) while some had unbounded extensive responses (Weller et al., 2018). This identification helped modify some questions to maintain the balance to avoid discussions that are either too narrow or too broad.

Pilot study also indicated that some questions should be revised to be more personalized and informal to foster a closer, and better relationship with participants and reduce stress. For example, the question “What courses are essential or should be a part of the curriculum?” was changed to “If you were an ELT curriculum developer, what courses would you add or remove from the curriculum?”. During the interviews, it was found that some participants were not familiar with the content and structure of the curriculum as they were not involved in the development process. Therefore, curriculum related questions were replaced with other follow-up questions focusing on the courses they teach. Some phrases such as “working with curriculum” were changed to “working in the ELT program” or “working with pre-service teachers”, as some participants highlighted that they are not directly involved in curriculum development. Finally, considering that lecturers typically work with syllabi, some follow-up questions about the syllabi were added before moving the discussion on curriculum.

Table 8. Modification of the Drafts

Stage	Draft	Number of items revised
External Review	Draft 2	7
Internal Review	Draft 3	10
Pilot study	Draft 4	18

During the interview some participants produced overly diverse answers, which led to not being able to have adequate discussion to other questions within the given time. This stage also helped reduce the interviewer’s stress and provided an opportunity for training before the actual interview. Furthermore,

this stage confirmed the benefits of piloting regarding the evaluation of practicality of research procedures.

## 4. Conclusion

Qualitative research should be a cyclical, interactive process which prioritizes decisions influenced by the research aims and “the voice of participants” (Demirci, 2024). Ensuring rigor in qualitative inquiry demands trust and rapport, in-depth discussions, being unbiased “to make the participants the stars of the show” (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This qualitative study puts lecturers at the center of the ELT program, recognizing their role as key contributors to the enhancement of curriculum development and evaluation from the bottom-up. The preliminary phase of the research described in this paper demonstrates how lecturers could be involved in the entire research procedure not only as participants, but also as reviewers who could improve the instrument of the study. Moreover, ELT program lecturers could provide some insights on the current state of ELT curriculum and how it might be improved. They are insiders who could reveal valuable information on curriculum evaluation based on their pedagogical expertise and needs of their students. They also possess “theoretical sensitivity” (Maxwell, 2013) of curriculum development and evaluation approaches, expertise on theoretical principles and practical constraints. Considering the data gained from the participants who are the core stakeholder of ELT curriculum, curriculum experts and developers are expected to contribute to the development of curriculum evaluation framework and guidelines which are adjusted to the context of ELT program of private universities.

This multi-step interview protocol refinement process enabled the systematic development of the robust qualitative research instruments. Each step was thoroughly documented, maintaining transferability and transparency of the study. The protocol underwent four rounds of review and refined after completing each stage, which facilitated in-depth exploration of the research topic. The comments of the external and internal reviewers provided an opportunity “to fine-tune the interview protocol” (Castillo-Montoya, 2016), while pilot study helped the researcher to witness how the interview protocol functions in reality prior to conducting actual interview.

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## Appendix A

### Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives on Effective Curriculum Evaluation Methods for ELT Pre-Service Teacher Education at Private Universities in Uzbekistan

#### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions for ELT Curriculum Evaluation Research in Uzbekistan**

##### **Introduction**

I want to express my gratitude for agreeing to participate in this research. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a Lecturer at the English Language Teaching and Educational Management (ELTEM) Department at \_\_\_\_\_ University in Tashkent and a PhD student at the faculty of \_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ University.

The main purpose of this study is to explore and understand perceptions, experiences, and recommendations regarding the evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in pre-service education in private higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. This research comprises two distinct stages. First, the study aims to identify the essential needs of ELT teachers by establishing criteria for an effective ELT curriculum based on perspectives from key stakeholders: university lecturers who closely work with the target population (pre-service teachers, their parents, and in-service teachers) and curriculum experts who have experience in developing ELT curricula. Based on the perceptions of ELT program lecturers and curriculum experts, essential components and approaches of the ELT curriculum will be identified. Second, the research focuses on developing guidelines and a framework (or modifying an existing framework) for evaluating ELT curricula, informed by the expertise and experiences of ELT lecturers and curriculum specialists.

You are going to participate in the interview. The interview is planned to take 60 to 90 minutes. I would like to ask your permission to audio (video) record the interview process to assure the accuracy of your thoughts and experiences. This will also help us engage in a more fluid conversation focusing on the interview in-depth, asking follow up questions instead of pausing to take notes.

Any information you share will be held confidential, secure and anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to the information and will aggregate the results from the all interviews, assuring you that the findings will not be attributed to any individual or any location.

Please know that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to stop or pause the interview at any time without any consequences. Your comfort and consent are very important throughout this process.

While responding to the interview questions, you are expected to provide detailed, honest answers based on your experience and expertise. Please feel free to share specific examples or situations that illustrate your points. Your reflections on both successes and challenges are valuable to deepen our understanding.

Are there any questions about the interview process?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

## TOPICS

- The sequence of courses throughout the English Language Teaching curriculum
- The importance of practical and theoretical balance
- The importance and need of core language components (grammar, vocabulary, receptive and productive skills)
- Pedagogical theory and teaching methodologies
- Integration of technology in language teaching
- Material design and adaptation
- Practical teaching skills and practicum experiences
- Language assessment and evaluation
- Curriculum development and evaluation

## Interview Questions for University Lecturers

### SECTION A

#### Opening questions: Building Rapport

1. Could you please introduce yourself?
2. What is your overall experience in working with the ELT curriculum/working as a lecturer in the ELT program?
3. What courses do you teach?
4. What do you like the most about working with pre-service ELT teachers?
5. How would you describe the unique characteristics of ELT education in private universities?/ What are some unique characteristics of ELT education in the context of a private university?

### SECTION B

#### Core questions

- i. Curriculum experience

Main questions	Prompts/Follow-up questions
1. a. What do you know about the current ELT curriculum you work with? b. Tell me how the ELT curriculum is organized in your university.	a. <i>What courses are currently part of the curriculum? Could you mention a few examples?</i> b. <i>How well does the curriculum balance theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills?</i>

	<p>c. <i>How is the practicum (teaching practice) organized?</i></p> <p><i>(When does it start and how long does it last?)</i></p> <p>d. <i>What types of assessment are used in the curriculum? Can you share a few examples?</i></p> <p>e. <i>How does the curriculum incorporate teaching technologies (e.g., digital tools, online platforms)?</i></p> <p>f. <i>Can you give examples of how these are used in practice? (Are there any courses on instructional technology)</i></p> <p>g. <i>Tell me more about the courses you teach.</i></p> <p>h. <i>Tell me about the components of the syllabus. What are some essential criteria to design a syllabus?</i></p> <p>i. <i>How often and why do you change the syllabus?</i></p>
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ii. Perceptions of effective curriculum

Main questions	Prompts/Follow-up questions
<p>2. a. How do you define “effective curriculum?”/What does the word “effective” mean to you?</p> <p>b. What <b>key elements</b> do you think should be part of an effective ELT curriculum?</p>	<p>a. <i>Which elements are more impactful to the success of a program, or <b>arrange them in order of importance?</b></i></p> <p>b. <i>To make the curriculum more effective, <b>what courses</b> do you consider the most useful for preparing pre-service ELT teachers?/anything you would like to add to make the curriculum more effective?</i></p> <p>c. <i>If you were a curriculum developer, what courses would you add or remove?/If you were a curriculum developer, what changes would you make?</i></p> <p>d. <i>What assessment methods do you use?</i></p> <p>e. <i>What <b>assessment methods</b> do you find most effective for evaluating pre-service teachers’ readiness? Why?</i></p> <p>f. <i>Based on your experience, what are the <b>three to five most essential skills/knowledge</b> that the ELT curriculum</i></p>

	<i>must ensure all pre-service teachers graduate with?</i>
3. How do you think the current ELT curriculum prepares pre-service teachers for their future careers?	<i>a. Could you describe a situation where graduate students were well-prepared or underprepared for actual teaching context?</i>
4. How do you think (your personal opinion) the ELT curricula differ between public and private universities (in terms of their practical focus, resource allocation, and responsiveness to market demands)?	<i>a. Can you provide specific examples of how these differences might impact student learning outcomes and career preparation?</i>

iii. Criteria and approaches for curriculum evaluation

<b>Main questions</b>	<b>Prompts/Follow-up questions</b>
5. How would you define “curriculum evaluation” in simple terms?	<p><i>a. What do you know about the evaluation stage of the current ELT curriculum?</i></p> <p><i>b. Have you personally participated and/or observed a curriculum evaluation process?</i></p> <p><i>c. If yes, can you share your experience of how it was conducted (stages)?</i></p> <p><i>d. Who was involved in the curriculum evaluation process?</i></p>
6. a. <b>What</b> should be evaluated in the ELT curriculum in your opinion? b. If we think about the list of criteria for curriculum evaluation, what would you include?./If you were asked to evaluate the ELT curriculum and make a list of criteria, what would you include?	<p><i>a. Could you suggest <b>criteria/qualities</b> that are essential for evaluating ELT curriculum in a private university context?</i></p> <p><i>b. <b>Who</b> should be involved in the curriculum evaluation process?</i></p> <p><i>c. What about your course evaluation? tell me more about the process</i></p> <p><i>d. How do you know the course you have taught was successful?</i></p> <p><i>e. What formal or informal methods do you use to evaluate the courses you teach?</i></p>

	<p>f. <i>How does this relate to evaluating the curriculum as a whole?</i></p> <p>g. <i>Can you share a specific case where student outcomes clearly showed the <b>strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum?</b></i></p>
<p>7. a. <b>How</b> should the ELT curriculum evaluation process be conducted <b>in the context of a private university?</b></p> <p>b. If we put curriculum evaluation into specific stages, how can it be effectively organized?</p>	<p>a. <i>How can curriculum evaluation be effectively integrated to ensure continuous improvement?</i></p> <p>b. <i>How can curriculum evaluation demonstrate alignment with educational goals/objectives?</i></p> <p>c. <i>How do you determine whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of pre-service teachers (any approaches?)</i></p> <p>d. <i>In your opinion, what are the most <b>effective ways (approaches)</b> to conduct the ELT curriculum evaluation?</i></p> <p>e. <i>What are the steps? Why are these approaches effective?</i></p> <p>f. <i>How feedback from evaluation should be used to improve curriculum?</i></p> <p>g. <i>How frequently should the ELT curriculum be evaluated and updated? Why?</i></p>

## SECTION C

### Closing questions

1. What barriers exist to implementing effective curriculum evaluation in a private university? How would you tackle them?
2. Based on our discussion today, what do you believe is the single most important factor that should be considered when evaluating an ELT curriculum for pre-service teachers?
3. What final advice would you give to someone developing an evaluation framework for ELT pre-service teacher education programs in Uzbekistan?
4. Do you have anything else to share about ELT curriculum content and development in the context of private university?

### Generic probing questions

1. Could you provide a specific example? / Can you give an example on what you have just mentioned?
2. Could you elaborate on this/that point?

3. Why do you believe this approach/method/course was/wasn't effective?
4. How could that be improved?
5. What do you mean by.....?
6. How is that different/similar from your expectations?

## Appendix B

### Final Alignment Matrix

Research Questions	Core Questions	Prompts & follow-ups	Rationale
RQ1 How do university lecturers and curriculum experts perceive an effective ELT curriculum at private universities in Uzbekistan?	1. What key elements (e.g., courses, practicum, assessment) do you believe should be part of an effective ELT curriculum? (to meet the needs of pre-service teachers)	<p>a. <i>What courses are currently part of the curriculum? Could you mention a few examples?</i></p> <p>b. <i>How well does the curriculum balance theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills?</i></p> <p>c. <i>How is the practicum (teaching practice) organized?</i></p> <p><i>(When does it start and how long does it last?)</i></p> <p>d. <i>What types of assessment are used in the curriculum? Can you share a few examples?</i></p> <p>e. <i>How does the curriculum incorporate teaching technologies (e.g., digital tools, online platforms)?</i></p> <p>f. <i>Can you give examples of how these are used in practice? (Are there any courses on instructional technology)</i></p> <p>g. <i>Tell me more about the courses you teach.</i></p> <p>h. <i>Tell me about the components of the syllabus. What are some essential criteria to design a syllabus?</i></p>	The questions progress from general to specific, highlighting what elements should be inside the curriculum. The first follow-up question encourages obtaining broad and diverse perspectives of participants. Next questions are more specific, asking about the necessary courses, assessment, and skills that should be integrated inside the ELT curriculum that prepares pre-service teachers for real teaching context

		<i>i. How often and why do you change the syllabus?</i>	
<p><b>RQ2</b> What criteria do university lecturers and curriculum experts perceive as essential for effective ELT curriculum evaluation in private universities in Uzbekistan?</p>	<p>2. a. How do you define “effective curriculum?”/What does the word “effective” mean to you?  b. What <b>key elements</b> do you think should be part of an effective ELT curriculum?</p> <p>3. How do you think the current ELT curriculum prepares pre-service teachers for their future careers?</p> <p>4. How do you think (your personal opinion) the ELT curricula differ between public and private universities (in terms of their practical focus, resource allocation, and responsiveness to market demands)?</p>	<p><i>a. Which elements are more impactful to the success of a program, or <b>arrange them in order of importance?</b></i>  <i>b. To make the curriculum more effective, <b>what courses</b> do you consider the most useful for preparing pre-service ELT teachers?/anything you would like to add to make the curriculum more effective?</i>  <i>c. If you were a curriculum developer, what courses would you add or remove?/If you were a curriculum developer, what changes would you make?</i>  <i>d. What assessment methods do you use?</i>  <i>e. What <b>assessment methods</b> do you find most effective for evaluating pre-service teachers’ readiness? Why?</i>  <i>f. Based on your experience, what are the <b>three to five most essential skills/knowledge</b> that the ELT curriculum must ensure all pre-service teachers graduate with?</i></p>	<p>The purpose of these questions is to identify the perceptions of ELT lecturers in terms of curriculum effectiveness, the courses, assessment methods, the balance between theory and practice that they consider important. The questions help explore general criteria of effective ELT curriculum</p>
<p><b>RQ3</b> What approaches do university lecturers and curriculum experts recommend for effective</p>	<p>5. How would you define “curriculum evaluation” in simple terms?</p>	<p><i>a. What do you know about the evaluation stage of the current ELT curriculum?</i>  <i>b. Have you personally participated and/or observed a</i></p>	<p>The main focus of these questions is to identify how the ELT curriculum should be organized, what</p>

<p>curriculum evaluation at private universities in Uzbekistan?</p>		<p><i>curriculum evaluation process?</i>  <i>c. If yes, can you share your experience of how it was conducted (stages)?</i>  <i>d. Who was involved in the curriculum evaluation process?</i></p>	<p>could be the stages and approaches for evaluations from the perspective of lecturers. The questions also focus on the other stakeholders that should participate in the evaluation process and the frequency of evaluation. The questions also cover how lecturers evaluate their own courses</p>
	<p>6. a. <b>What</b> should be evaluated in the ELT curriculum in your opinion?          b. If we think about the list of criteria for curriculum evaluation, what would you include?./If you were asked to evaluate the ELT curriculum and make a list of criteria, what would you include?</p>	<p>a. <i>Could you suggest <b>criteria/qualities</b> that are essential for evaluating ELT curriculum in a private university context?</i>          b. <i><b>Who</b> should be involved in the curriculum evaluation process?</i>          c. <i>What about your course evaluation? tell me more about the process</i>          d. <i>How do you know the course you have taught was successful?</i>          e. <i>What formal or informal methods do you use to evaluate the courses you teach?</i>          f. <i>How does this relate to evaluating the curriculum as a whole?</i>          g. <i>Can you share a specific case where student outcomes clearly showed the <b>strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum?</b></i></p>	

	<p>7. a. <b>How</b> should the ELT curriculum evaluation process be conducted <b>in the context of a private university</b>?</p> <p>b. If we put curriculum evaluation into specific stages, how can it be effectively organized?</p>	<p>a. <i>How can curriculum evaluation be effectively integrated to ensure continuous improvement?</i></p> <p>b. <i>How can curriculum evaluation demonstrate alignment with educational goals/objectives?</i></p> <p>c. <i>How do you determine whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of pre-service teachers (any approaches?)</i></p> <p>d. <i>In your opinion, what are the most <b>effective ways (approaches)</b> to conduct the ELT curriculum evaluation?</i></p> <p>e. <i>What are the steps? Why are these approaches effective?</i></p> <p>f. <i>How feedback from evaluation should be used to improve curriculum?</i></p> <p>g. <i>How frequently should the ELT curriculum be evaluated and updated? Why?</i></p>	
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## Appendix C

### Feedback Summary

Criteria	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 3
Clarity of wording	Some questions are quite long or contain multiple sub-	Key to a curriculum are syllabus, methodology, and assessment. Then,	Some main questions and probes are overly lengthy or seek to cover numerous subjects simultaneously.

	<p>questions within a single item, which may overwhelm participants or reduce the clarity of what is being asked. A few terms, such as “effective curriculum,” “components,” “innovative technologies,” or “curriculum evaluation,” are somewhat broad and may benefit from brief clarification or examples to ensure consistent interpretation across participants.</p>	<p>objectives, teacher role, student role, materials, and resources. Some of these are included in the first question but not all. I think this should be added. This question should be revised for lecturers: What do you think, what should be considered in the ELT curriculum evaluation?</p>	<p>Divide the prompt into two clear and sequential questions. The first discusses <i>how</i> (assessment methods), while the second addresses <i>what</i> (essential skills).</p> <p>Simplify the question by utilizing the core, umbrella term ("methods"), and then use the given Generic Probing Questions for gathering details about "approaches and techniques."</p> <p>You should then use the existing generic probes</p>
<p>Relevance</p>		<p>quite inclusive</p>	<p>e questions are clearly and directly relevant to the three main research questions (RQs). The protocols successfully provide the necessary path to obtain perceptions of effectiveness (RQ1), evaluation criteria (RQ2), and effective approaches/recommendations (RQ3). The interview is structured into three sections: descriptive context (Section B.i), perceptions (B.ii), and evaluation (B.iii), ensuring that all RQs are covered systematically. The material is ideal for gathering data to</p>

			directly inform the final recommended evaluation framework.
Coverage	<p>Overlap with lecturers' questions</p> <p>Many questions are identical; consider designing distinct roles:</p> <p>Lecturers: focus on implementation and student outcomes</p> <p>Curriculum experts: focus on design, alignment, evaluation frameworks, policy</p>	<p>Key to a curriculum are syllabus, methodology, and assessment. Then, objectives, teacher role, student role, materials, and resources. Some of these are included in the first question but not all.</p>	<p>The protocols are comprehensive in terms of core RQs, however there is a significant stakeholder gap. While the thesis title and introduction reference a wide range of stakeholders (pre-service teachers, parents, and in-service teachers) whose needs should be considered while developing the curriculum, the current questions mainly address the perspectives of lecturers and experts. This omission puts the final evaluation framework at risk of being disconnected from the perspectives of the end users. A critical question must be included to both protocols in Section B(iii).</p> <p>In the Lecturer Protocol, Q2 and its subsequent prompts (a-e) are slightly redundant. To ensure a maximum 60-minute period, combine these into a single main question and then probe generically.</p>
Sequencing and flow	<p><b>Some questions are too leading or prescriptive</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> What teaching methods... should be included?</p> <p>What assessment</p>	<p>Yes, quite fine.</p>	<p>The general flow of the interview is great and logical. The protocol develops seamlessly from simple interpersonal inquiries (Section A) to descriptive questions about the current program (Section B.i), followed by more complicated and opinion-based questions about effectiveness (B.ii) and</p>

	<p>methods should be included?</p> <p>These imply that methods must be included.</p> <p>Paraphrase</p>		<p>evaluation recommendations (B.iii). This framework is good for qualitative research because it allows participants to build comfort and context before delving into the most abstract and prescriptive issues, resulting in the collection of rich data.</p>
<p>Language appropriateness</p>	<p><b>Too many prompts</b></p> <p>Some questions have 5–7 prompts, which will overwhelm participants.</p> <p>Consider grouping prompts into one combined question with optional follow-ups.</p> <p><b>Some questions require contextual clarification</b></p>	<p>Yes, readable and comprehensible</p>	<p>The language chosen is completely appropriate for the targeted participants' academic and professional backgrounds (university lecturers and curriculum experts). The distinction between the two protocols is also nicely performed, with the Expert guide correctly using more abstract, system-level vocabulary, whereas the Lecturer guide concentrates on practical program realities. However, you should be prepared to verbally clarify complex academic terms (such as "systematic approaches") to guarantee mutual understanding during the interview.</p>
<p>Ethical considerations</p>	<p>Your introduction is already strong. Minor improvements:</p> <p>Add a sentence about right to withdraw:</p> <p><i>You may withdraw at any time</i></p>		<p>The ethical forms given (Recruitment, Consent, Data Handling) should meet normal research ethics board requirements (e.g., use of pseudonyms, password security, data destruction), as it was previously mentioned.</p> <p>Questions needing criticism, such as Lecturer Protocol, Section A, Q4 (<i>"What would you like to change in this</i></p>

	<p><i>without consequences.</i></p> <p>Add confidentiality clarification:</p> <p><i>Data will be anonymized and stored securely following UPM ethical guidelines.</i></p>		<p><i>program?"),</i> have a low level of sensitivity, especially in a private HEI where job security might be a concern. Prior to asking this type of questions, you should orally reinforce the confidentiality guarantee.</p> <p>A debriefing form is required. This form should briefly clarify the study's goal, reaffirm confidentiality, provide contact information, and express the researcher's willingness to disclose aggregate findings. This grants the participants the right to be debriefed.</p>
Overall suitability	<p>Some questions are repetitive or overlap in meaning, particularly those related to curriculum components, course value, and theoretical–practical balance.</p> <p><b>Missing technical curriculum evaluation terminology</b></p> <p><b>Missing question on challenges</b></p>	<p>I think it covers what is needed for curriculum evaluation should the interviewer engage well with the participants. This engagement definitely requires wrestling with culture as well, which is essential for curriculum design but I don't know to what extent culture is the focus of the study. If it is, I think it can be added to the prompts I mentioned above.</p>	<p>The protocols are comprehensive, relevant, and well-designed for a qualitative study. They aim to obtain the depth of experience and detailed recommendations required to create the final evaluation framework, thereby meeting the study objectives.</p>
Additional suggestions	<p><b>Missing question on challenges</b></p>		<p>Given the current length and complexity of the interview, the candidate must prepare for conducting it to ensure it fits within the maximum 60-</p>

	<p>Add:          “What challenges or barriers do you see in evaluating ELT curricula in private universities?”</p> <p>This will enrich your findings.          Add: <i>What evaluation models or frameworks do you consider most appropriate for ELT curriculum evaluation in Uzbekistan?</i></p> <p><b>Missing international benchmarking</b></p> <p>You have one question at the end, which is good. Add follow-up:</p> <p>Which countries’ ELT curriculum evaluation practices could serve as a model for Uzbekistan?</p>		<p>minute timeframe.          All recruitment and consent documents must be completed in a professional academic tone, with all bracketed placeholders (e.g., [duration], [Your Name]) filled with final, specific information.</p>
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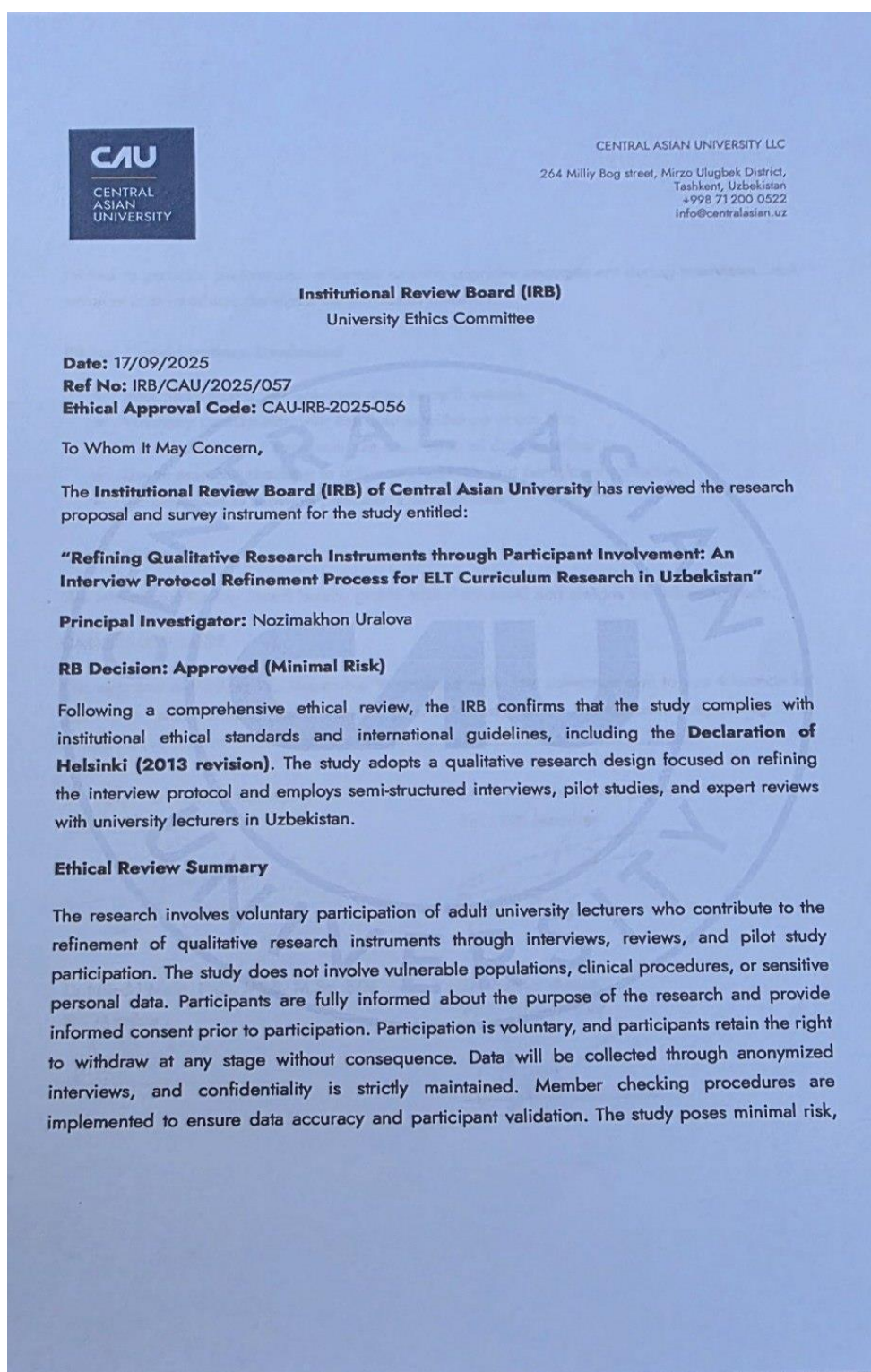
Appendix D

Original question	Revised Question	Interview Excerpt
<p><b>What</b> should be evaluated in the ELT curriculum?</p> <p><i>(This question is too broad and sounds like interviewer checks interviewees knowledge which makes an interview process a bit stressful )</i></p>	<p>If you were asked to evaluate the ELT curriculum and make a list of criteria, what would you include?</p> <p><i>(This question is more structural and guided. It encourages interviewees to put themselves in the role of an evaluator and think practically what criteria they would use. The tone of question is more personal and task-oriented.)</i></p>	<p>Okay, um, maybe it would be the alignment again, what is the framework that it is adopting or adapting, using yes and where it is reflected, how it is reflected. Another important criteria would be learning objectives, or outcomes, as we call them, right? And these learning outcomes, are they aligned with, with the content, with the assessment, also definitely it would be if it was the case with my current workplace, alignment with graduate attributes, because we have the attributes and throughout their studies, within any course, in any year, every learning outcome should reflect The graduate attributes. So that alignment would definitely be there. And of course, we would take a look at the assessment. Does it does it follow assessment principles? Is it reliable? Is it valid? I don't know. Is practicality in place? And also nowadays we're looking into SDGs. It's become very common, especially since our university has started adopting them and joined this initiative, right? So we are trying to make sure that we adhere to SDG four, at least, if not SDG seven. So what else? Yes, we also take a look at the types of the sources that were used, references that were used. So are the authors of the curriculum inspired by existing courses? So in</p>

		what way is it different from that course? If it is Western context,
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## Appendix E

### Approval letter from Institutional Review Board





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limited to potential professional reflection or mild cognitive engagement during interviews, and adheres to strict ethical standards for qualitative research.

#### Ethical Considerations Confirmed

- Informed consent was obtained prior to participation
- Voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any time
- Confidentiality and anonymity are ensured in all data handling
- Use of member checking to enhance credibility and participant validation
- No collection of sensitive personal or clinical data

#### IRB Decision

The Institutional Review Board hereby grants ethical approval and assigns the following code:

**CAU-IRB-2025-057**

This approval authorizes the researcher to proceed with data collection and to use this code for **academic publication, conference presentation, and institutional reporting**. For verification or further information, please contact: [research.ethics@centralasian.uz](mailto:research.ethics@centralasian.uz).

Dr. Sedigheh Shakib Kotamjani  
IRB Chairperson

Dr. Sherzodbek Dadaboyev  
PhD, IRB Member

Dr. Niladri Maiti, PhD, MDS, M.Sc, BDS  
IRB Member

Dr. Sardor Azam,  
PhD, IRB Member

## Appendix F Cover Letter

Nozima Uralova

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Dear Editorial Team,

I am pleased to submit the manuscript entitled REFINING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS THROUGH PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: AN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL REFINEMENT PROCESS FOR ELT CURRICULUM RESEARCH IN UZBEKISTAN for consideration for publication in the JIRSEA. This manuscript reports the preparatory phase of a main qualitative research. It mainly focuses on systematic refinement of the interview protocol that is used to explore English Language Teaching curriculum evaluation at higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan. The manuscript is not presenting substantive findings about the ELT curriculum itself, but offers a detailed methodological contribution by describing the multi-stage Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) process:

1. Matrix development
2. Internal Review Process
3. External Review Process
4. Pilot Study

We believe that this detailed description of the instrument refinement process aligns with JIRSEA's scope, as the journal values rigorous research methods that could serve as a contribution to enhance the field of qualitative research in education. By describing the stages of IPR, we aim to provide practical guidance for researchers who conduct qualitative research in similar contexts as well as novice researchers in the field of education.

We revised the manuscript and removed the primary study's research questions to avoid confusion.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Sincerely,

Nozima Uralova