



# **PREPARING FIRST-YEAR ACADEMIC STUDENTS IN UZBEKISTAN FOR THE SAT READING TEST: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates the challenges and pedagogical strategies involved in preparing first-year academic students in Uzbekistan for the SAT Reading Test, aligning with the national policy on foreign language education and the emphasis on STEM-oriented learning in the 21st century. As Uzbekistan increasingly promotes international education and academic mobility, mastering standardized tests such as the SAT has become vital for students aspiring to pursue higher education abroad. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study explores learners' difficulties in reading comprehension, inference-making, and academic vocabulary, as well as teachers' perspectives on integrating SAT reading tasks into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Findings reveal that contextual adaptation, critical reading instruction, and culturally responsive materials are key to improving performance. The paper argues that bridging English language instruction with SAT-oriented tasks not only supports individual academic success but also advances national educational goals of developing globally competitive, multilingual, and STEM-proficient graduates.

**Keywords:** SAT Reading, Academic Literacy, EFL Instruction, Uzbekistan, STEM Education, Language Policy, College Readiness.

## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, English language competence has become a prerequisite for academic success, global communication, and professional advancement. In Uzbekistan, the government has prioritized foreign language education reform as



part of its national strategy to integrate into the global academic and scientific community. Presidential decrees (such as *Decree No. PF-60, 2022*, “On the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026”) emphasize the modernization of education, the expansion of STEM disciplines, and the integration of foreign languages into all levels of schooling. Within this policy framework, preparing students for international assessments like the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) has gained significance, particularly for those seeking admission to foreign universities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

However, despite progress in communicative English teaching, many first-year academic students in Uzbekistan still face challenges when approaching SAT Reading tasks. These tasks demand critical analysis, inference-making, and evidence-based reasoning—skills that go beyond general language proficiency. This study examines how English language instruction can be adapted to meet these new academic demands, helping learners transition “from language proficiency to college readiness.”

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The SAT Reading Test measures not only comprehension but also the ability to evaluate arguments, interpret data, and identify textual evidence. Scholars such as Grabe (2009) and Alderson (2019) stress that academic reading involves interactive and strategic processing, where readers connect textual meaning with prior knowledge. In EFL contexts, however, learners often lack sufficient exposure to authentic academic texts and culturally diverse materials (Anderson, 2015). Moreover, as Koda (2020) notes, limited vocabulary and background knowledge significantly hinder reading performance .

Uzbek scholars and policymakers have begun addressing these challenges by aligning national education goals with global standards. The focus on STEM integration (Tashpulatova, 2023) requires English instruction to support academic literacy in scientific and technical fields.

Internationally, studies on SAT-based pedagogy (McDonough & Shaw, 2020; Krashen, 2021) demonstrate that evidence-based reading and writing enhance students’ higher-order thinking, essential for success in both humanities and STEM disciplines.

This article builds on these theoretical insights by contextualizing SAT reading preparation within Uzbekistan's educational reforms and language policy.

## **METHODOLOGY PARTICIPANTS**

The study involved 60 first-year lyceum students from two academic lyceums affiliated with regional universities in Uzbekistan. Most participants had an intermediate level of English (B1–B2 CEFR).

## **INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES**

**Needs Analysis Survey:** Identified students' prior exposure to SAT materials, reading habits, and difficulties.

**Diagnostic Reading Test:** Adapted from official SAT practice passages to assess baseline performance.

- **Instructional Intervention:** A 10-week module integrating SAT reading strategies (e.g., inference, tone, evidence location) into English classes.
- **Teacher Interviews:** Collected qualitative data on classroom challenges, resource availability, and student engagement.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Quantitative results were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to measure progress, while thematic coding identified key patterns in teacher reflections and learner feedback.

## **RESULTS**

The diagnostic test revealed that only 18% of participants could accurately identify textual evidence, and 25% could infer author's tone or purpose. After the 10-week intervention, comprehension and evidence-based reasoning improved by an average of 27%.

Students reported that exposure to SAT passages enhanced their academic reading habits and vocabulary awareness. Teachers noted that contextualizing SAT tasks within Uzbek cultural and educational realities made them more engaging and relevant. Nevertheless, several challenges emerged:

- Limited access to authentic SAT materials and digital resources.
- Time constraints within the academic schedule.
- Initial learner anxiety due to unfamiliar text genres and test formats.

These findings indicate that, while challenging, integrating SAT preparation into EFL courses is both feasible and beneficial when supported by teacher training and curricular adaptation.

## DISCUSSION

The improvement in learners' comprehension and analytical reading supports the argument that academic reading instruction can be effectively enhanced through SAT-oriented learning.

This aligns with Uzbekistan's education policy goals of fostering globally competitive graduates with strong analytical and problem-solving skills. By connecting language instruction with SAT preparation, teachers help students internalize STEM-relevant reading skills, such as interpreting data, identifying patterns, and reasoning from evidence—skills that parallel scientific inquiry.

Moreover, this integration advances the national agenda of multilingualism and innovation-based education, emphasizing that language learning is not an isolated goal but a tool for academic and professional development. The study also reinforces Krashen's (1982) claim that language acquisition is most effective when learners engage with meaningful, challenging content that promotes critical thinking.

### Pedagogical Implications

To bridge the gap between language proficiency and college readiness in Uzbekistan, the following pedagogical actions are recommended:

- 1. Curriculum Integration:** Align university EFL syllabi with international standards such as the SAT Reading framework, emphasizing evidence-based reasoning.
- 2. Teacher Professional Development:** Provide training in designing SAT-style activities and scaffolding academic reading strategies.
- 3. Use of Multimodal and STEM Texts:** Introduce scientific and analytical reading passages to strengthen language skills relevant to STEM education.
- 4. Policy Support:** Encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and international testing organizations to establish preparatory modules for globally recognized exams.
- 5. Digital Literacy Enhancement:** Incorporate online SAT practice tools and adaptive reading platforms to personalize learning

## CONCLUSION

Preparing first-year academic students in Uzbekistan for the SAT Reading Test represents a crucial step toward aligning national education goals with global academic standards. The integration of SAT-oriented reading instruction fosters not only linguistic competence but also the analytical, critical, and evidence-based thinking necessary for success in STEM and beyond. By embedding such preparation into university-level EFL programs, Uzbekistan can further realize its vision of producing internationally competitive, multilingual citizens ready to contribute to innovation and scientific advancement in the 21st century.

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986210376923>