



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

REPORT ON HORNBY-FUNDED TEACHER ASSOCIATION PROJECT

Title: Network of English teacher researchers in Uzbekistan (NETRUZ)

Country: Uzbekistan

Dates: September 2020–2021

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Uzbekistan is currently carrying out lots of educational reforms and initiatives to promote teachers' professional development. This project aimed to contribute to these reforms and help solve current issues existing in the system. For example, there has always been a gap between university and school EFL teachers even though they might have very similar teacher interests and needs: preparing students for international proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL, etc.), dealing with discipline issues, doing research for their professional development and salary rise, lack of training in contextually relevant methodologies, lack of student interest in the curriculum topics, research publications, etc. English teachers encounter various teaching challenges and look for possible solutions in the existing literature; however, they may not be able to find solutions to these various teaching challenges, and may need to develop more context-appropriate methodologies. The main aim of this project was to help teachers facing the same issues build a network with others experiencing similar teaching issues, who have been able to find appropriate solutions.

This network has also served as a very useful platform for novice English teachers and experienced teachers who lack the necessary knowledge of appropriate methodology to deal with context-related difficulties: lack of resources, classroom facilities, textbooks, electricity, ICT, heavy workload, etc. Within this project, teachers were trained and mentored to systematically investigate their teaching practices and students' learning, and share their practices and recommendations with other teachers. A portfolio of teacher-research mentors was also set up to offer training and mentoring to less experienced teachers who want to inquire into their classroom practices.

There were also some contextual factors to consider while implementing this project in Uzbekistan, i.e. Covid-related restrictions. During the project cycle, we faced a lot of challenges that forced us to rethink training approaches to suit trainees' time and needs.

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Our main objectives were:

- to develop a network for English language teacher researchers and teacher-research mentors;
- to organise teacher training courses and workshops in which English language teacher researchers and teacher-research mentors are trained and share their teaching experience;
- to organise the 1st Conference of English Teacher Researchers.

In addition, we sought to achieve the following:



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

- bridge the gap between university and school EFL teachers;
- develop a collaborative network between university and school EFL teachers;
- develop EFL teachers' teacher-research competencies;
- organise a portfolio of teacher-research mentors;
- acknowledge English language teachers' context-appropriate methodology.

Recommendations will be developed for EFL teachers to adapt their methodology to their contextual needs.

3. PROJECT MEMBERS AND THEIR ROLES

Team leader

Name: Menglieva Elyanora

Institution: British Management University in Tashkent, Avloniy In-service Training Institute

Main responsibilities: project lead, teacher trainer, mentor supervisor

Team members, selected from the most experienced teacher trainers who have been actively contributing to English teacher education

Name: Nilufar Begibaeva

Institution: Republican research centre for the development of innovative methods in teaching foreign languages, currently British Council in Uzbekistan

Main responsibilities: mentor trainer, mentor, mentor supervisor

Name: Alimova Mamura

Institution: Namangan State University

Main responsibilities: mentor trainer, mentor supervisor, conference organiser

Name: Khikmatullo Urazbaev

Institution: Westminster University in Tashkent

Main responsibilities: invited researcher (with lots of experience in data analysis), mentor trainer

Name: Inomiddin Imomov

Institution: Avloniy In-service Teacher Training Institute

Main responsibilities: mentor trainer (delivery of one workshop)

Mentors of the NETRUZ project:

Dilafuz Sarimsakova, Namangan State University

Ella Maksakova, Webster University in Tashkent, British Management University in Tashkent

Feruza Erkulova, Namangan State University (a former school teacher)

Malika Mirvokhidova (Kudratova), TEAM University

Nilufar Tillayeva, UzSWLU and Webster University in Tashkent (a former school teacher).

Note: Two of the NETRUZ mentors used to be school teachers. They are also currently involved in several projects related to school projects (materials development, teacher training, etc.)

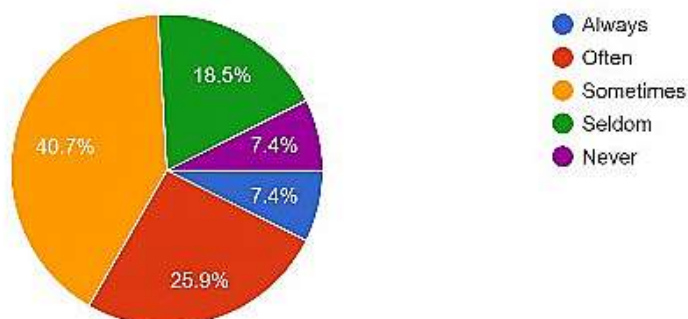
4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

The first stage of the project was to conduct a survey to analyse and understand the needs and interests of Uzbekistani teachers (university and school) in research, classroom inquiry

and professional development. According to the Presidential Decree No.4963 (January 25, 2021), school teachers are expected to develop or apply new methodologies, teaching tools and techniques through classroom experiments or classroom research. The Decree highlights the importance of integrating research into the classroom for teachers' professional development. Survey findings revealed that the majority of teachers conducted research for their professional development and that they were interested in being trained in classroom-based research.

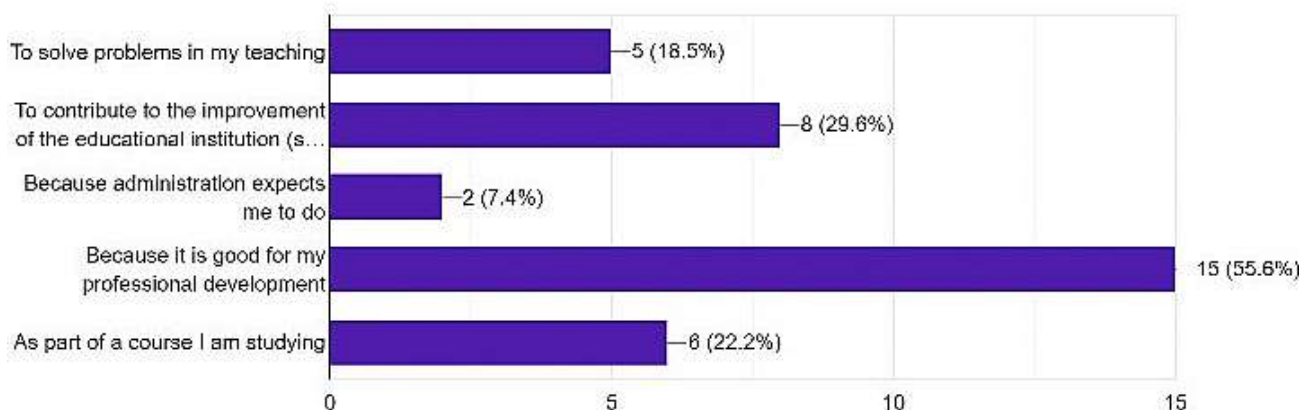
18. How often do you conduct research?

27 responses



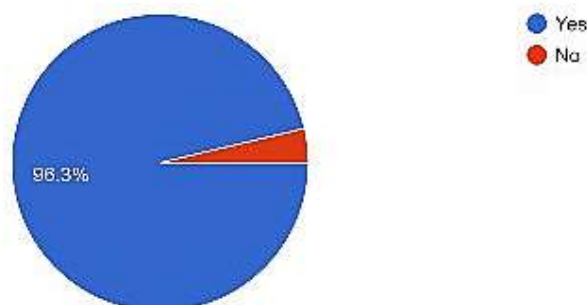
19. What are the main reasons for conducting research?

27 responses



24. Will you be interested in learning or being trained on how to do research into your current teaching practices?

27 responses



Based on this data, we decided to set up the new Network of English Teacher Researchers in Uzbekistan (NETRUZ). We created a new logo and a new blog where we could share all the project activities and announcements: <https://netruz-project.blogspot.com>. The blog became of great importance to the project because it served as a platform to disseminate project results, and announce calls for project participants and papers. Moreover, it regularly features success stories, reflective notes of project participants, audios, videos and case studies.



NETRUZ logo



NETRUZ blog

In order to identify mentors of teacher research – practitioners who wanted to be trained in teacher research and mentoring – there was a call announced on the <https://netruz-project.blogspot.com> and NETRUZ telegram group: t.me/netruzproject. Specific criteria for selecting teacher-research mentors were developed in terms of experience, teaching context, residential area (urban/rural) and teachers’ needs. The teacher-research mentors were required to have 2+ years of teaching or research experience and a willingness to expand their knowledge and research skills. We asked applicants to send a motivational letter highlighting their interest in doing classroom research and improving classroom practices. 12 English language teachers working in educational institutions (schools and universities) in Uzbekistan were selected to take part in the course and of these 6 became teacher-research mentors for this project. The remaining 6 teachers who were trained did not continue their training and mentoring due to several reasons (e.g. lack of time, couldn’t complete their exploratory action research projects, etc.).



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

The training for teacher-research mentors was organised from April to June 2021, and mainly online due to Covid restrictions. It was delivered by Elyanora Menglieva, Nilufar Begibaeva, Inomiddin Imomov and Alimova Mamura. Khikmatullo Urazbaev was also invited to deliver several workshops on data analysis and teachers and researchers from various countries were invited to share their research findings, research tips and exploratory action research tips with our mentors. These wonderful guest speakers were: Addy Ahmad, Malaysia; Suzie Ryu, South Korea; Vinayadhar Raju, India; Darío Luis Banegas, University of Strathclyde, Scotland; and Sagun Shrestha, a PhD candidate at Dublin City University.



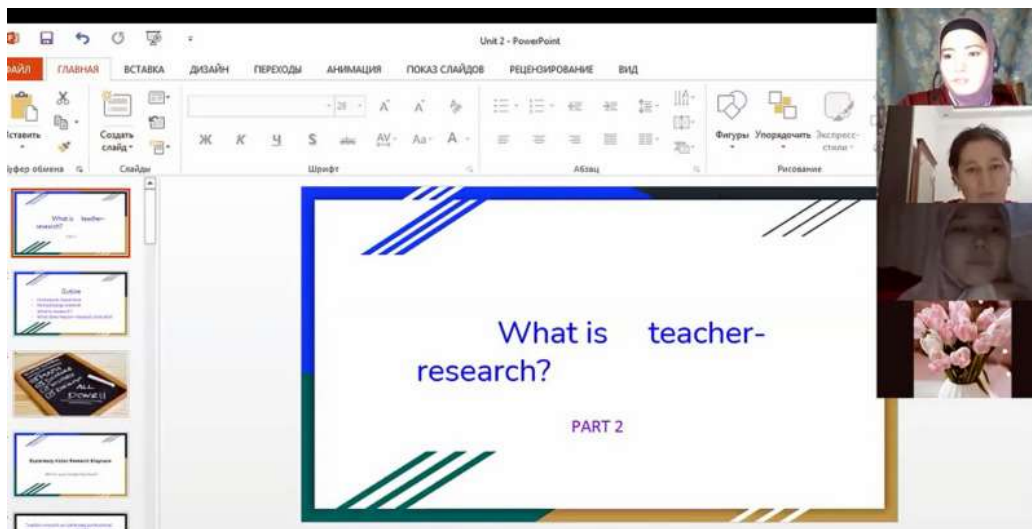
After training, mentors conducted their exploratory action research and presented their projects at the IATEFL ReSIG: Teachers Research! Online 2021 International Conference (11 December, 2021). Their presentations (videos) were also shared on the NETRUZ project blog to promote exploratory action research in Uzbekistan: <https://netruz-project.blogspot.com/2021/12/netruz-teacher-researchers-projects.html>.



In June 2021, there was a new call for teacher researchers who would be trained by mentors of teacher research. This time we specifically looked for teachers not only from universities but schools and lyceums. 20 teachers (11 university teachers, 1 lyceum teacher and 8 school teachers) applied between October 2021 and January 2022 and all successfully completed the training (online due to Covid restrictions). During this period, participants were trained and supported by mentors in exploring classroom practices, identifying challenges and taking necessary actions to bring changes to their classrooms. Over the course, some trainees could not continue their projects due to various circumstances (lack of support from the school/university authority, lack of time, huge workload, career change, etc.). However, 11 teachers successfully completed their projects and shared their research findings at the 1st NETRUZ Conference of English Teacher Researchers.



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust



Namangan State University and NETRUZ organised the International Conference on New Trends in English Language Teaching and Teacher Education on May 27–28 2022 in Namangan. The conference aimed to bring together English language school teachers, teacher educators, teacher trainers, researchers, teacher researchers and mentors to discuss current issues and trends in teacher education and ELT in Uzbekistan. At the conference, the NETRUZ mentors reflected on their mentoring experience on doing exploratory action research, while other teacher researchers shared their EAR findings and materials with teachers who face similar challenges. Several teacher educators also talked about the importance of teachers being reflective and having an inquiry mindset. The conference videos and materials (classroom materials, e-book) will be shared on the NETRUZ blog so that every teacher has access to them.





A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

Conference participants also learned about the NETRUZ project and received a copy of the NETRUZ champion teachers book: *The teacher research journey: voices from champion teacher-researchers of Uzbekistan*. The book consists of two parts: part 1 tells the reflective stories of the mentors; and part 2 contains the exploratory action research stories of the NETRUZ teacher researchers. The book was edited by two members of the project team – E. Menglieva and M. Alimova – and 3 mentors – M. Mirvokhidova, E. Maksakova and N. Tillaeva. The reason the NETRUZ team decided to produce a book was to allow mentors to share their mentoring experience and their journey of being teacher-researchers, to provide recommendations to future mentors of teacher-research and teacher-research programmes. The book was also a great opportunity for teacher-researchers (including mentors) to share their exploratory action research projects with other teacher-researchers and particularly the authorities of their institutions (schools and universities). These institutions are now encouraging other teachers to be involved in classroom research projects and NETRUZ.



THE TEACHER RESEARCH JOURNEY

Voices from champion teacher-researchers of
Uzbekistan



5. EVALUATION

This project greatly impacted the teachers who took part in the training, and their practices. According to them, they learned about their current practices, their confidence increased, etc. (See feedback below and further reflections on the blog: <https://netruz-project.blogspot.com/>). Moreover, these teacher researchers are now promoting the NETRUZ as a platform where teachers learn how to carry out exploratory action research, and as a result, lots of teachers around Uzbekistan are asking NETRUZ members to organise more training.

NETRUZ:
Network of English Teacher Researchers in Uzbekistan
RESEARCHING AND DEVELOPING TOGETHER

Exploratory Action Research: Teacher-Researchers' Experience

I learnt how to observe my learners and their needs. Trainers helped me how to make objectives of my lessons and how to achieve them.

I learned how to consider students previous knowledge of the language and how to build on that knowledge to help my students achieve their best potentials.

I became more confident in teaching.

My students were glad to collaborate with me in my exploratory research which says they are eager to develop their skills and they were interested and inspired listening about it. My lessons became more engaging and fun both for me and my students which made us even closer to each other.

I learnt that every student needs attention, just by letting them know that you are not different to their progress might make big changes in their behavior and attitudes towards you and your subject.

Discussing, suggesting, analyzing and having feedback from a critical friend plays a great role in professional development of any teacher's career.

It taught me to reflect on my teaching and to think about how to find ways to solve some difficulties we face during teaching process.

It taught me to reflect on my teaching and to think about how to find ways to solve some difficulties we face during teaching process.

It helped me to improve my teaching skills and through reflection to change my teaching methods

The project also attracted much attention from various public educational institutions such as the Namangan branch of LPA – Agency for Promoting Foreign Languages, and they will also promote classroom-based research training by the end of the year when the NETRUZ recommendations and expertise will be shared. In addition, the teachers' professional development framework in Uzbekistan is currently being reviewed as part of an initiative by the British Council in Uzbekistan and other institutions, and professional development projects such as ours could be considered an alternative for teachers' professional development activities on the credit-based CPD* used in the public education system.

*The Avloniy Institute responsible for school teacher training and retraining programmes in Uzbekistan currently offers a new credit-based CPD system. According to Institute requirements, school teachers who present at international conferences earn 4 credits, at national conferences, 2 credits. Teachers who publish their research papers in international indexed journals (Scopus, Web of Science) earn 9 credits.

This project also benefited me – the project lead and initiator of this project. I was awarded the UK Ambassador's Choice Award 2022 by the UK's Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Tim Thorlot:

'The dynamism, determination and ambition that Eleanora has demonstrated means that her time in the UK has been truly transformational for her, not only personally, but also professionally. And I admire the fact that she uses her education not only to develop her own career, but also to benefit other people in the field of education, which is very important for the UK and Uzbekistan.'





A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

6. EXPENDITURE

Dates	Description of activities	Initial budget	Actual cost	Comments (about changes)
January 2021	A needs analysis for organising the network of teacher researchers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a survey • distribute the survey • analyse the survey 	n/a	n/a	Completed: 27 teachers took the survey
February 2021	Setting up a website/blog for the network and a feedback forum to evaluate the processes of the network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a blog to enable readers to evaluate the processes via the 'Comments' section 	£50	£50	Completed: Elyanora Menglieva was paid £50 to set up and regularly update the blog
March 2021	Call for 5 teacher-research mentors (schools, universities) and recruit them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrote a call for teacher-research mentors • interviewed them • selected the most motivated mentors 	n/a	n/a	Completed
April 2021	A kick-off meeting of English language teacher-research mentors and project leaders; the election of responsible persons for the particular activities within the network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organised an online meeting • invited mentors and project members to meet each other 	Coffee break £25	£0	Completed: Due to Covid restrictions, the kick-off meeting was organised online before the mentor training sessions
May–June 2021	Conducting 6-day online workshops for teacher-research mentors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • created a syllabus for the workshops to train mentors • scheduled Zoom sessions • conducted workshops • asked mentors to keep reflective diaries 	Salary to mentor supervisors 3 x £70 = £210 (for 6 days of training)	£270	Completed: 3 supervisors were paid (Elyanora Menglieva, Nilufar Begibaeva, Alimova Mamura) to deliver workshops and support mentors (£210). Post-training, 6 mentors were selected as NETRUZ mentors. (£60 was reallocated from coffee break and the second training to hire another mentor.)
July 2021	Call for 20 teachers to become teacher researchers (schools, universities): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrote a call for teacher 	n/a	n/a	Completed: 20 teachers were selected and trained.



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

	<p>researchers (8 university + 10 school + 2 lyceum teachers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> created a survey form and interviewed if necessary, along with teacher-research mentors selected the most motivated teacher researchers 			
October 2021– January 2022	<p>Conducting 3-day offline/face-to-face and 3-day online workshops for teacher researchers by trained mentors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organised 6-day (36 hour) online teacher research training course due to pandemic restrictions created a syllabus along with mentors supported mentors in their workshops purchased Zoom annual subscription 	<p>30 people – coffee break: £210 and lunch: £300</p> <p>Salary to mentors 5 x £60 = £300 (for 6 days of training)</p>	<p>£360</p> <p>£120</p>	<p>Completed: Training was done online due to Covid restrictions. 11 teachers completed the training and their projects.</p> <p>Salary was paid to 6 mentors (£360).</p> <p>To organise online sessions, Zoom annual subscription (£120) was purchased.</p>
March 2022	<p>Call for papers (success stories of English language teachers):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wrote a call for abstracts – presentations and plenary speakers (success stories of English language teachers involved in this project) abstracts were reviewed by mentors and mentor supervisors selected the most interesting papers to be presented at the conference 	n/a	n/a	Completed
May 2022	<p>The 1st Conference of Teacher Researchers and Teacher Research Mentors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organised 2-day conference at Namangan state university invited teacher researchers, mentors and project leaders to share their exploratory action research findings 	<p>Coffee break 60 x £5 = £300 Lunch 60 x £10 = £600 Total = £900</p>	£1000	Completed: Due to the rise in cost of food products, £100 was added to organise lunch and a coffee break for the conference participants.
May 2022	<p>Publishing selected success stories of English language teachers, along with reflective papers of trained mentors and trained teacher researchers; publication of the Teacher Research Mentoring Scheme:</p>	n/a	£195	Completed: Initially we wanted to publish the NETRUZ teacher researcher stories in an e-book, but when we organised the conference in Namangan



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> selected authors submitted their research papers reviewed the papers and selected success stories of English language teachers to be published reviewed reflective papers of trained mentors and trained teacher researchers 			for school and university teachers, we wanted to provide hard copies of the book. So, we spent £195 on publishing and printing books for the participants and Namangan university libraries.
May 2022	Promoting a feedback forum to evaluate the processes of the network, and sharing teaching experiences and reflective stories	n/a	n/a	Completed: All project participants wrote feedback and promoted the results of the project via conferences and the virtual environment (Facebook, Telegram).

7. DISSEMINATION TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

All activities and outcomes arising from the project were shared on the NETRUZ blog throughout the duration of the project. Additionally, I, the project leader, shared the project results at the following international conferences:

10 June 2021 – International scientific-practical hybrid conference on ‘Intercultural Communication: Current Issues of Linguistics, Literature, Folklore and Translation Aspects’, Urgench State University, Uzbekistan

Title of presentation: Expanding your professional development opportunities through teacher research

1–2 April 2022 – Webster University International ‘Conference on Creativity and ELT’, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Title of presentation: How to improve classroom practices: teachers as researchers

The project results were also published by Iroda Abduazimova in a local newspaper (2 September, 2021), which highlights the importance of the project to educational priorities outlined by the Ministries of Education, and aligns with tasks mentioned in the President of Uzbekistan’s decree ‘On the approval of the concept for the development of the higher education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030’: introducing mentorship (ustoz-shogird – mentor-mentee) programmes into the education system, implementing up-to-date methodologies, integrating research findings into teaching practices, etc.

Some of the training participants who completed their projects have also shared their exploratory action research experience and information about NETRUZ during other teacher association meetings.



News article about NETRUZ



Dildora Ashurova shared her NETRUZ experience on 25 March 2022

8. OVERALL REFLECTIONS

From this project, I gained much experience and developed my skills in leading people and managing a project. I also learned how to adapt to sudden changes that may occur while carrying out such a project. Having a precise plan to follow and enthusiastic members and teachers (participants) helped to ensure the successful completion of the project. Additionally, there has been a lot of support from other teacher associations, such as English Language Teachers Association (ELTA), Telangana, India. The project offered teachers a practical value as teachers improved their teaching and began to listen to students more closely and engage them in their classrooms.

Lessons learned

We learned that teachers needed more time to complete their exploratory action research projects, something I did not realise at the beginning of the project, and as a result the timeline of the project was longer than initially expected. Also, it is important to find ways of encouraging teachers and maintaining their interest throughout the exploratory action research. We noted that collaborative learning helped most teachers to continue with their research and that teachers learned a lot from one another.

For anyone interested in running a similar project, I would recommend thinking very carefully about the timeline. Completing exploratory action research may take more time than expected. Also, collaborating with other teacher associations on mentoring and teacher-research training would be helpful as teachers and mentors from other countries and contexts would be able to share their experiences.



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

9. GOING FORWARD/LOOKING AHEAD

Our teacher association is planning to organise two training courses this year (2022): one for mentors in August; and one for teacher researchers October 2022–January 2023. This training has been requested by many school and university teachers who are interested in conducting teacher research.

In addition, Namangan State University and a department at Uzbek State World Languages University plan to integrate exploratory action research ideas into the existing module called Classroom research of their PRESETT curriculum starting from September 2022. How to integrate it in pre-service teacher training is currently under discussion.

Along with the Namangan State University and agencies, we are planning to organise the 2nd Conference of Teacher Researchers and Mentors in May 2023 to further spread the impact of NETRUZ and introduce more teachers, particularly school teachers, to exploratory action research.

I and other NETRUZ mentors are also planning to carry out face-to-face practical workshops for teachers so that they too are able to undertake exploratory action research projects.

This project has also attracted much attention from local private universities that would like to introduce their teachers to exploratory action research and we are now at the discussion stage of collaboration.

Several international organisations, such as RTI which has been doing considerable work in the public education system, have also shown interest in NETRUZ and our work (published book). We, the NETRUZ team, hope to promote exploratory action research more and encourage all teachers working in educational institutions in Uzbekistan to apply classroom-based research in their teaching.

Menglieva Elyanora (Team leader)