

**CHALLENGES FACED BY UZBEK STUDENTS IN
LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION**

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Abstract This article explores the primary challenges faced by Uzbek students in acquiring accurate English pronunciation. Drawing from recent academic studies and practical classroom observations, it examines the phonological interference between Uzbek and English and proposes potential strategies to overcome pronunciation difficulties.

Keywords English pronunciation, education, Uzbek learners, phonetic interference, language learning challenges, EFL

Introduction

In our country, several fields of science are selected each year for focused development. This year foreign languages have been identified as such priority areas. Uzbekistan's policy of openness, its active integration into the global market, and the expansion of international cooperation in all spheres are increasing the demand for foreign language proficiency.

"The time has come to introduce a new system for teaching foreign languages in our country—one that will serve as a solid foundation for the future. If we are determined to build a competitive nation, then from now on, graduates of schools, lyceums, colleges, and higher education institutions must have a strong command of at least two foreign languages. This strict requirement should become a key criterion in evaluating the performance of every educational institution leader," said Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Today, instruction is conducted in foreign languages at 25 higher education institutions in our country. In 2016, there were only 7. The number of graduating

students who have obtained international language certificates has increased tenfold over the past three years.

Aim of the Article

The aim of this article is to explore the common pronunciation mistakes and difficulties faced by Uzbek learners of English, and to provide effective strategies and tools for overcoming these challenges. By analyzing frequent errors and understanding their causes, this article seeks to help learners improve their pronunciation and become more confident in speaking English clearly and accurately.

Pronunciation plays a vital role in achieving communicative competence in any foreign language. For Uzbek learners of English, it presents considerable difficulties because of the phonetic and phonological differences between Uzbek and English. Although access to English through education and media has grown, many Uzbek students continue to face challenges in accurately producing and identifying specific English sounds. This often results in communication difficulties and a lack of confidence when speaking. This challenge is made even more difficult by the influence of the native language, limited exposure to native English speakers, and the lack of emphasis on pronunciation in the Uzbek education system. Consequently, pronunciation tends to be an overlooked component of English language learning in Uzbekistan.

Uzbek and English differ substantially in terms of phoneme inventory and syllable structure. According to Roach (2009), English has a wide range of vowel and consonant sounds, some of which do not exist in Uzbek. For instance, the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (as in "think" and "this") are absent in Uzbek phonology. As a result, students often substitute these with /s/ or /z/, leading to miscommunication.

Additionally, Uzbek is a syllable-timed language, whereas English follows a stress-timed rhythm. This difference causes Uzbek learners to produce speech with unnatural rhythm and intonation, which negatively impacts their overall fluency.

A common challenge for Uzbek learners of English is the presence of vowel length, which is phonemically contrastive in English but not in Uzbek. This difference can lead to confusion between minimal pairs that differ only in vowel length, such as "ship" and "sheep" or "bit" and "beat." In Uzbek, vowel length does not change the meaning of a word, so learners may not recognize the distinction between these English words that rely on vowel length for their phonemic differences.

In addition, the phenomenon of epenthesis (the insertion of extra vowels) often occurs in speech when learners try to pronounce English words that are unfamiliar or difficult. This can lead to the insertion of a vowel sound, usually a schwa /ə/, between consonants. For example, the word "next" might be pronounced as "neksət."

Several studies have documented the typical errors made by Uzbek learners of English, highlighting several common patterns in their speech:

Consonant Confusion

/w/ vs /v/: The sound /w/ in words like "wet" or "wonder" is often substituted with the sound /v/ as in "vet" or "village," because Uzbek has a different phoneme system and lacks the /w/ sound, **/ʃ/ vs /ʒ/:** The "sh" sound as in "ship" [ʃ] may be confused with the "zh" sound as in "measure" [ʒ], since the distinction between these two sounds may not be present in the learner's native language, **/θ/ vs /s/ or /t/:** The English "th" sound, represented phonetically as /θ/ (as in "think" or "thanks"), often becomes a /s/ or /t/ sound, as this dental fricative does not exist in Uzbek. As a result, learners might pronounce "think" as "sink" or "thanks" as "tanks."

Difficulty with English Stress and Intonation

Uzbek learners may also face challenges in English due to differences in stress patterns and intonation. In English, stress is phonemic and can alter the meaning of words. In Uzbek, stress is more fixed and does not play as important a role in meaning differentiation. The phonological differences between Uzbek and English, including vowel length, consonant confusion, and stress patterns, can significantly affect the accuracy of Uzbek learners' English pronunciation. Teachers and learners alike need to focus on these areas to reduce errors and improve clarity in spoken English.

Vowel mispronunciations

Inability to distinguish between short and long vowels, especially in minimal pairs.

Stress and intonation problems

Incorrect placement of word stress and lack of sentence-level stress variation. Intrusion of Uzbek phonological patterns/clusters, as in pronouncing "school" as "iskul".

Such errors not only hinder intelligibility but also affect learners' listening skills, as mispronunciation often correlates with difficulties in sound recognition.

Teachers in Uzbekistan often lack formal training in phonetics, which limits their ability to effectively teach pronunciation. Many rely heavily on written exercises, neglecting the auditory and articulatory aspects of language learning.

In my view, the national curriculum does not prioritize pronunciation, and assessments rarely include speaking components. This lack of focus leads students to perceive pronunciation as unimportant, resulting in minimal motivation to improve in this area.

There is also a shortage of technological resources and authentic audio materials, particularly in rural schools and university. Many students rely on teachers with Uzbek-accented English, limiting their exposure to native-like pronunciation models.

Several methods have been proposed to improve pronunciation among Uzbek EFL learners: Nowadays Increased use of audio-visual materials, including several native speaker recordings, movies, cartoons, musics, podcasts, and essential pronunciation apps.

Focused articulation exercises, especially on problematic sounds using phonemic charts and IPA symbols.

Explicit teaching of stress and intonation using visual aids and pitch contour graphs.

Contrastive analysis to help learners identify differences between Uzbek and English phonological systems.

Integrating pronunciation into daily classroom activities, including warm-up drills, tongue twisters, and shadowing exercises, use of peer and self-assessment, allowing students to reflect on their own pronunciation and track progress.

Motivation plays a significant role in pronunciation acquisition. Learners who are more exposed to English media, such as YouTube or telegram channels, additionally online courses, and music, tend to show better pronunciation patterns. Encouraging students to engage in such input-rich environments can complement classroom instruction.

Besides, creating more opportunities for real-time communication with native or fluent speakers through language exchange programs or virtual pen-pal systems can provide practical, meaningful practice

Uzbek students face persistent challenges in mastering English pronunciation, mainly due to phonological differences, limited instructional support. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, involving teacher training, curriculum reform, and learner-centered pronunciation practice.

Conclusion

By emphasizing pronunciation as a core skill, integrating effective teaching strategies, and leveraging technology and exposure, English instruction in

Uzbekistan can be significantly improved. Correct pronunciation in English is essential, especially for the younger generation. As English has become the most important global language in today's world, every learner should prioritize learning to pronounce words accurately. Good pronunciation not only helps in clear communication but also builds confidence and leaves a strong impression on listeners. In a world where English opens doors to education, careers, and international relationships, mastering pronunciation is a key step to success.

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