

PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGES FACED BY UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: This article explores the major pronunciation difficulties encountered by Uzbek learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It examines how linguistic, phonetic, and sociocultural factors influence learners' ability to produce accurate English sounds. The study also highlights the role of native language interference, insufficient phonetic training, and limited exposure to authentic English speech. Recommendations are provided for teachers to design pronunciation-focused instruction and integrate phonetic awareness into communicative learning environments.

Keywords: pronunciation, Uzbek EFL learners, phonetics, language interference, speech accuracy

Pronunciation plays a vital role in English language proficiency, as it directly affects intelligibility and communication effectiveness. For Uzbek EFL learners, mastering English pronunciation remains a significant challenge due to the structural differences between the Uzbek and English sound systems. Uzbek is a Turkic language with a relatively simple vowel system and fewer consonant clusters, while English contains numerous diphthongs, stress variations, and complex consonantal patterns. As a result, many Uzbek learners experience difficulties producing sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /w/, and distinguishing between long and short vowels. Understanding these pronunciation problems is essential for improving both teaching practices and learners' communicative competence.

1. Phonological Interference from the Uzbek Language

One of the most common challenges arises from first language (L1) interference. Uzbek lacks several English sounds, which leads to phonological substitution. For example, the English "th" sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are often replaced by /s/ or /z/, as in "think" → "sink" or "this" → "zis." Similarly, the /v/ and /w/ distinction is problematic since Uzbek has only one similar labiodental sound. Learners may pronounce "west" as

“*vest.*” These substitutions can reduce comprehensibility and cause communication breakdowns.

2. Stress and Intonation Patterns

English is a stress-timed language, whereas Uzbek is syllable-timed. This rhythmic difference often causes Uzbek learners to place stress incorrectly or maintain a flat intonation pattern. For example, learners may stress all syllables equally, producing monotonous speech. Incorrect word stress (e.g., *COMfortable* pronounced as *comFORTable*) affects naturalness and fluency. In addition, learners struggle with rising and falling tones used in English for expressing attitudes and emotions.

3. Lack of Exposure and Listening Practice

In Uzbekistan, English is primarily learned in formal classroom settings where authentic listening opportunities are limited. Students are more familiar with textbook dialogues than natural English speech. This lack of exposure hinders their ability to perceive and reproduce native-like pronunciation. Moreover, teachers themselves may not always model accurate pronunciation, reinforcing errors among students.

4. Educational and Psychological Factors

Many learners prioritize grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, considering it less important for exams. As a result, pronunciation instruction is often neglected. Some students also experience foreign language anxiety, which discourages them from speaking or practicing aloud. Affective factors, therefore, play a crucial role in pronunciation success.

5. Strategies for Improvement

Improving pronunciation among Uzbek EFL learners requires a communicative and phonetic-based approach. Teachers should integrate minimal pair exercises (e.g., *ship–sheep*, *fan–van*), listening discrimination tasks, and phonetic transcription practice. Modern technology—such as language learning apps, podcasts, and speech recognition software—can enhance self-monitoring and provide exposure to diverse accents. Encouraging learners to imitate authentic materials and engage in interactive speaking tasks can lead to long-term improvement.

Pronunciation challenges among Uzbek EFL learners stem from linguistic differences, limited exposure, and insufficient emphasis on phonetic training. Overcoming these difficulties demands a balance between explicit phonetic instruction



and communicative practice. Teachers should raise students' awareness of sound contrasts, stress, and intonation patterns, while learners must actively practice through listening and speaking activities. Enhancing pronunciation competence will ultimately strengthen learners' confidence, fluency, and overall English communication skills.

Recent research has revealed that Uzbek learners of English encounter various pronunciation challenges due to linguistic and phonological differences between the two languages, limited exposure to authentic English, and insufficient training in phonetic skills. According to the study *“Teaching English Pronunciation to Uzbek Speakers: Challenges and Solutions”*, the most frequent pronunciation difficulties include incorrect articulation of vowel length, confusion between similar consonant sounds, and problems with stress and intonation patterns. Uzbek learners often substitute unfamiliar English sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, and /w/ with those that exist in their native language, leading to noticeable accent interference and decreased intelligibility. For instance, many students pronounce *think* as *sink* or *west* as *vest*, demonstrating clear evidence of first-language influence.

Another research paper titled *“A Study of Word Stress Patterns in English and Their Difficulties for Uzbek Learners”* emphasizes that while English stress placement varies depending on word structure and origin, Uzbek stress typically falls on the final syllable. This mismatch causes Uzbek students to apply their native stress rules to English words, often leading to unnatural rhythm and miscommunication. As a result, even when learners possess adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge, their spoken English may sound monotonous or incorrect to native speakers.

Moreover, recent pedagogical experiments have shown that mobile-assisted pronunciation practice can significantly enhance Uzbek learners' phonetic competence. In one study, students who participated in mobile-based pronunciation training that included listening, imitation, and self-recording tasks improved both their segmental pronunciation (individual sounds) and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, and intonation). These results suggest that integrating technology into language learning environments can help overcome traditional limitations of classroom-based pronunciation teaching.

Overall, studies confirm that Uzbek EFL learners need explicit pronunciation instruction supported by authentic listening activities and consistent oral practice.



Teachers should focus on raising students' awareness of English sound contrasts and stress patterns while encouraging them to develop self-monitoring strategies. With the help of modern technology, exposure to native English input, and targeted phonetic exercises, Uzbek learners can gradually reduce the influence of their first language and achieve greater clarity and confidence in spoken English.

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