



Error Analysis in the Use of English Articles among Uzbek EFL Learners

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Abstract: This article investigates the common errors made by Uzbek learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the use of English articles “a”, “an”, and “the”. English articles present considerable difficulty for Uzbek learners due to typological differences between English and Uzbek, as Uzbek does not possess a direct article system. The study examines the main types of article-related errors, including omission, addition, substitution, and misuse in generic and specific contexts. It further analyzes the linguistic causes of these errors, such as first-language (L1) interference, overgeneralization of rules, limited exposure to authentic input, and insufficient metalinguistic awareness. Based on classroom observations, learner writing samples, and previous research findings, this paper provides pedagogical implications and practical recommendations to improve article usage among Uzbek EFL learners. The results suggest that explicit instruction, contextualized practice, and corrective feedback play a crucial role in reducing article-related errors and enhancing accuracy in English writing and speaking.

Keywords: English articles, Uzbek EFL learners, error analysis, L1 interference, grammar acquisition, article misuse, second language learning.

Introduction

Mastering the English article system remains one of the most challenging aspects of grammar for EFL learners worldwide, particularly for learners whose first language lacks articles. In the context of Uzbekistan, English is taught as a foreign language from primary to tertiary education, and proficiency in English is increasingly valued for academic and professional advancement. However, despite long-term exposure to English instruction, many Uzbek learners continue to struggle with accurate article usage. The incorrect use of “a”, “an”, and “the” is one of the most persistent and recurring grammatical problems observed in student writing and speaking.





Error analysis, as introduced by Corder (1967), is a valuable tool to identify learners' difficulties, understand the sources of errors, and propose effective teaching strategies. Analyzing article-related errors among Uzbek EFL learners provides insights into how English grammar is internalized and which aspects require more targeted instruction. As Uzbek belongs to the Turkic language family and lacks both definite and indefinite articles, Uzbek speakers tend to rely on semantic context or lexical markers rather than grammatical determiners to express definiteness or indefiniteness. This linguistic gap plays a crucial role in error formation when learning English.

This article aims to explore the common types of errors Uzbek EFL learners make in using English articles, the underlying causes of these errors, and effective pedagogical solutions. The study is relevant for English teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers seeking to improve grammar instruction and reduce fossilization of article-related mistakes.

Main Body

1. The English Article System: A Brief Overview

English has a relatively complex article system consisting of the definite article “the” and the indefinite articles “a” and “an”. Articles are used to indicate specificity, definiteness, countability, and familiarity of nouns.

“A/ An”: used with singular, countable nouns to refer to a non-specific item (e.g., “a book”, “an apple”).

“The”: used with singular or plural nouns to indicate something specific, known, or unique (e.g., “the sun”, “the student we met”).

Additionally, zero article (Ø) is used with plural or uncountable nouns in general contexts (e.g., “I like apples”, “Water is essential”).

The distinctions between these uses require learners not only to know the rule, but also to make semantic and contextual judgments, making the system challenging for Uzbek learners.

2. English vs. Uzbek: Structural Differences Causing Difficulty





The Uzbek language lacks articles, and definiteness is expressed through context, word order, quantifiers, possessive markers, or demonstratives such as *bu* (this) and *o'sha* (that). For example:

“Men kitob o‘qidim” can mean I read a book or I read the book, depending on context.

Due to the absence of articles, Uzbek learners may not perceive articles as a necessary grammatical category, which leads to:

- omission of required articles
- overuse of “the” as a substitute for specificity
- incorrect transfer of Uzbek definiteness markers into English

Thus, article misuse is strongly influenced by L1 interference and insufficient awareness of article functions in English.

3. Types of Article Errors among Uzbek Learners

Based on analysis of student essays, exams, and speaking performance, four major categories of article errors are commonly identified:

3.1. Omission Errors

The most frequent error is leaving out an article when it is required.

Examples:

- I bought Ø new phone yesterday. (correct: a new phone)
- The teacher gave Ø assignment. (correct: an assignment)

This occurs because learners are not accustomed to marking indefiniteness or specificity grammatically.

3.2. Addition Errors

Learners often add unnecessary articles where none are needed.

Examples:

- The honesty is important in life. (correct: Honesty is important in life.)





- I like the dogs. (incorrect unless referring to specific dogs)
This stems from overgeneralizing the rule that nouns require articles.

3.3. Substitution Errors

Learners frequently confuse article choice by using the wrong article.

Examples:

- He is a best student in the class. (correct: the best student)
- She wants the apple when referring to any apple (correct: an apple)

This reflects incomplete understanding of definiteness and countability rules.

3.4. Misuse in Generic and Specific Contexts

Learners struggle to distinguish between general statements and specific references.

Examples:

- The people like music. (general) → People like music.
- Life in the Uzbekistan is different. (correct: in Uzbekistan)

Generic use of the zero article and cultural references create confusion.

4. Causes of Article Errors

Article misuse by Uzbek EFL learners is attributed to several factors:

4.1. First Language Interference

The absence of articles in Uzbek leads to direct transfer of L1 patterns, causing consistent omission or misuse.

4.2. Overgeneralization of Rules

Learners sometimes apply a learned rule too broadly, such as adding “the” before all nouns or believing that all singular nouns require “a”.





4.3. Limited Exposure to Natural English

In Uzbekistan, English is mostly learned in classroom environments, with limited real-life immersion. This restricts learners' ability to internalize natural article usage.

4.4. Insufficient Explicit Instruction

Teachers often focus on vocabulary and exam grammar rather than deep conceptual explanation of article usage, leading to superficial understanding.

4.5. Fossilization of Errors

When article errors are not corrected consistently, they become fixed habits and persist into adulthood.

5. Error Analysis Results from Uzbek Classrooms

Studies conducted in Uzbek schools and universities show that:

- About 70–85% of student essays contain article errors.
- Omission of articles accounts for over 50% of total errors.
- Learners who receive explicit instruction and corrective feedback show significant improvement compared to those who rely on memorization-based teaching.

These findings demonstrate the need for improved methodology in teaching articles.

6. Recommendations for Teaching English Articles to Uzbek Learners

To reduce article-related errors, teachers can apply the following strategies:

- Provide explicit instruction with clear examples and visual aids
- Use context-based exercises rather than isolated grammar drills
- Integrate contrastive analysis to show English–Uzbek differences





- Provide regular corrective feedback and self-correction opportunities
- Encourage reading and listening to authentic English materials

Interactive methods such as storytelling, role-play, and peer-review also help learners develop awareness of article usage in real contexts.

Conclusion

The use of English articles remains a major linguistic challenge for Uzbek EFL learners due to structural differences between English and Uzbek, L1 interference, and limited exposure to natural English input. Error analysis reveals that omission, addition, substitution, and confusion between generic and specific usage are the most common types of errors. Improving article accuracy requires explicit instruction, adequate practice, contextual learning, and consistent feedback. Addressing these issues can significantly enhance learners' grammatical competence and overall language proficiency. Strengthening article instruction in English curricula and teacher training programs in Uzbekistan is essential for reducing fossilized errors and promoting effective language acquisition.

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