PHONETIC CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO UZBEK- SPEAKING LEARNERS

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Abstract. English is widely used as a communication tool in the world today. Due to this, the requirements for effective teaching of English in Uzbekistan are increasing. The phonetic systems of English and Uzbek languages have their own significant differences, which makes their use difficult for Uzbek speakers. Three articles analyze the most common pronunciation problems of Uzbek students, the phonetic foundations of the document, and practical methods for overcoming them. The main problems are related to the wider vowel system of the English language, consonant clusters, stress and intonation features, and situations with unfamiliar sounds. The article proposes a systematic approach to overcome these processes, combining the development of phonetics, listening comprehension, articulatory training, and communicative practices.

Key words: Vowel system, diphthong, consonant clusters, stress and intonation, voicing contrast, monotone intonation, phonetic awareness, transcription, minimal pair drills, articulatory training, technology-enhanced learning.

English is the world's leading language of science, technology, business, and education. In Uzbekistan, great attention is paid to learning English at the state level. Although more emphasis is placed on grammar and vocabulary development, pronunciation is often considered a secondary skill. In fact, clear and correct pronunciation is one of the most important factors in understandable speech and confident communication for Uzbek students. The phonetic systems of English and Uzbek differ significantly in terms of the number of vowels, the structure of consonants, and prosodic features. While Uzbek has a relatively stable and simple sound system, English is characterized by a wider vowel inventory, complex syllable structure, and variable stress. These differences cause persistent pronunciation problems for Uzbek students. This article aims to identify these problems and offer methodological recommendations that will help overcome them. Uzbek generally has six main vowels, which are stable in quality and length. English has twelve pure vowels and several diphthongs. For example, it is difficult for Uzbek learners to distinguish between the short /ɪ/ (bit) and the long /iː/ (beat) sounds, since in Uzbek there is almost no contrast based on vowel length. Also, diphthongs such as /aɪ/ (time), /eɪ/ (say) require complex language movements that do not exist in Uzbek.

Consonant clusters. In Uzbek, it is rare for several consonants to appear in succession at the beginning or end of a syllable. In English, clusters such as /str-/ (street), /spl-/ (splash) are widespread. Learners often simplify them: for example, saying esport instead of sport or dropping the sounds.

Stress and intonation. In Uzbek, stress is almost constant and the tone of speech is more even. In English, stress is variable, and intonation is actively used to express meaning, contrast, or emotion. Because of this difference, Uzbek learners of English may speak in a monotonous manner or misplace stress.

Unfamiliar consonants. English contains sounds that are not found in Uzbek, such as the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (think, this). Learners often replace them with /t/, /s/, or /z/ (think instead of tink). The labiodental sound /v/ can also be confused with /w/.

Common Pronunciation Problems.The above phonetic differences create the following problems in the speech of Uzbek students:

Substitution of unfamiliar sounds – using /t/ or /s/ instead of /θ/.

Failure to distinguish minimal pairs – such as ship/sheep, bit/beat.

Reduction of consonant clusters – pronouncing col instead of cold.

Improper stress – the habit of stressing the last syllable.

Monotonous intonation – speech sounds dull or incomprehensible due to a flat tone.

Teaching strategies. To overcome these problems, targeted and systematic pronunciation training is necessary. The following approaches are effective:

Phonetic awareness and transcription. Working with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) makes it easier for students to see and feel the differences between sounds.

Minimal pair exercises. The ability to distinguish sounds is developed by listening to and saying sounds such as ship/sheep, pen/pan.

Articulation training. Using a diagram, video, or mirror to show mouth, tongue, and lip positions, such as placing the tongue between the teeth for the sound /θ/.

Step-by-step practice of consonant clusters. First, learn simple, then complex clusters.

Stress and intonation exercises. Master the rhythm and tone of English through dialogues, songs, and short speeches.

Technological tools. Pronunciation checking apps, the ability to write and listen to enhance self-control.

Integrating these techniques into the communicative part of the lesson, rather than as stand-alone exercises, will sustainably develop students' pronunciation.

The phonetic difficulties for Uzbek speakers in learning English are rooted in several key differences: the limited number of vowel sounds, the complexity of consonant clusters, the variability of stress and intonation, and the presence of unfamiliar sounds. However, these challenges can be effectively overcome through a combination of systematic phonetic preparation, listening comprehension exercises, articulation training, and technological tools. Putting pronunciation at the center of the teaching process will help Uzbek learners speak English clearly, fluently, and confidently, and will enhance their academic and professional opportunities.

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