

CHALLENGES IN UZBEK EFL CLASSROOMS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO PEDAGOGICAL AND LEARNER OBSTACLES

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Introduction

The importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has grown significantly in Uzbekistan due to the country's increasing integration into the global economy and its focus on improving international communication. English proficiency is now essential for academic success, career advancement, and international relations. However, teaching English in Uzbek classrooms presents numerous challenges that hinder effective language acquisition. These challenges range from low student motivation, cultural and linguistic differences, to inadequate resources and the diverse proficiency levels within classrooms. This article aims to explore the specific challenges faced by both teachers and students in Uzbek EFL classrooms and to provide insights into possible solutions.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the challenges in Uzbek EFL classrooms. The research was conducted in Tashkent and Samarkand, involving 30 EFL teachers and 200 students across different educational institutions. A qualitative survey was administered to teachers to gather insights into their experiences and the difficulties they face in their teaching practice. Additionally, a quantitative survey was given to students to understand their perceptions of language learning obstacles. Interviews with 10 teachers were also conducted to provide a more in-depth exploration of the issues. The data collected were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and challenges common to the Uzbek EFL context.

Results

The study revealed several recurring challenges in Uzbek EFL classrooms:

1. **Motivation and Attitudes Toward Learning English:** Both teachers and students pointed to student motivation as a primary challenge. Many students viewed English as a mandatory subject rather than a useful tool for personal or professional growth. The prevailing attitude toward English, often associated with academic obligation rather than intrinsic interest, led to low levels of engagement and a lack of sustained effort.
2. **Cultural and Linguistic Differences:** Students in Uzbek EFL classrooms often encounter difficulties due to the cultural gap between Uzbek and English-speaking cultures. The differences in communication styles, social norms, and idiomatic expressions can lead to misunderstandings. Additionally, the structure of the Uzbek language—its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary—presents challenges for students when learning English, which has different linguistic conventions.
3. **Varying Proficiency Levels:** A significant number of classrooms had students with varying levels of proficiency in English. While some students had strong foundations in the language, others were beginners or at intermediate levels. This created challenges for teachers in creating lessons that

catered to the needs of all students. As a result, some students felt either bored due to lack of challenge or frustrated due to insufficient support.

4. **Limited Resources and Infrastructure:** Many teachers reported a lack of proper teaching resources, such as modern textbooks, multimedia tools, and technology. In rural or less-funded schools, classrooms often lacked basic resources like projectors or computers, which hindered the use of interactive or multimedia-based lessons. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms were common, which further limited the individual attention teachers could provide to students.

5. **Teaching Methodologies:** The predominance of traditional teacher-centered methods, such as rote memorization and grammar-translation techniques, was another challenge identified by both teachers and students. This approach often resulted in limited speaking and listening practice, hindering students' ability to use English in real-world contexts.

Discussion

The challenges observed in Uzbek EFL classrooms are reflective of broader issues in language education in post-Soviet countries. Motivation is a pervasive issue in Uzbekistan, where many students view English as an academic requirement rather than a tool for personal growth (Kuzmina, 2021). Teachers need to adopt strategies that help students see the practical benefits of learning English, such as using authentic materials or focusing on skills that are applicable to real-world situations.

Cultural and linguistic differences also pose challenges. The significant gap between the structure of the Uzbek language and English means that students often struggle with English grammar and pronunciation. As Rakhimov and Mamatov (2022) noted, the differences between the two languages often lead to interference in language learning. Teachers can mitigate these challenges by focusing on cross-cultural communication, which not only helps students understand the language better but also promotes intercultural awareness.

The problem of varying proficiency levels is compounded by large class sizes and the lack of personalized instruction. While teachers try to use group work or differentiated tasks, it remains a struggle to meet the needs of both beginner and advanced learners in the same classroom. Adaptive learning technologies or more focused interventions for students with lower proficiency could be helpful in addressing this issue (Durrani & Aslam, 2020).

Limited resources and outdated infrastructure are prevalent across many Uzbek schools. Despite these limitations, teachers have adapted by utilizing available materials, such as students' smartphones or free online resources, to enhance their lessons. However, the integration of modern educational technologies remains limited, and significant investment in educational infrastructure is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in EFL classrooms.

The reliance on traditional methodologies also hampers the development of communicative competence in students. A shift toward communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and practical language use, could address this issue (Kuzmina, 2021). Teachers should be trained to implement more student-centered approaches, which encourage active learning, peer interaction, and practical usage of English in authentic situations.

Conclusion

The challenges faced in Uzbek EFL classrooms are multifaceted and rooted in both pedagogical and systemic factors. While issues such as motivation, cultural differences, proficiency disparities, and limited resources are common, they can be mitigated through strategic interventions and innovative teaching practices. The adoption of modern methodologies, investment in teaching resources, and a more individualized approach to instruction could significantly improve the language learning experience for Uzbek students. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies in overcoming these challenges, as well as exploring the role of technology in modernizing EFL instruction in Uzbekistan.

References

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