COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AMONG UZBEK STUDENTS

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Abstract: English proficiency has become increasingly important for Uzbek students seeking access to higher education, international communication, and employment. Nevertheless, learning English as a foreign language can involve linguistic, psychological, and educational difficulties. This paper reviews commonly reported challenges affecting Uzbek learners, with particular attention to differences between Uzbek and English, vocabulary development, pronunciation, listening comprehension, speaking anxiety, and opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. The study uses a qualitative, literature-based approach: relevant scholarship on second-language acquisition and published work concerning English education in Uzbekistan is examined thematically. The review suggests that learners' difficulties are interconnected rather than isolated. For example, limited vocabulary may reduce speaking confidence, while fear of making mistakes can reduce the amount of practice needed to improve fluency. Differences in grammar and sound systems may also encourage direct translation and persistent errors. These challenges should not be interpreted as evidence of low ability; they often reflect the interaction of language distance, learning conditions, assessment practices, and unequal access to English input. The paper argues for regular communicative practice, explicit but contextualized language instruction, supportive feedback, and greater access to authentic listening and reading materials. Because this is a literature review rather than a primary field study, its conclusions identify recurring themes and pedagogical implications rather than measuring their prevalence among all Uzbek students.

Keywords: Uzbek students; English as a foreign language; language learning difficulties; speaking anxiety; vocabulary; pronunciation; language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

English is widely used in international education, research, business, tourism, and digital communication. For students in Uzbekistan, it can provide access to academic resources and broader professional opportunities. English is taught in schools and universities, yet classroom attendance does not automatically lead to confident communication. Some learners can complete grammar exercises successfully but struggle to understand natural speech or express an idea spontaneously. This gap between knowledge about English and the ability to use it is a central concern in foreign-language education.

The expression English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is appropriate where English is mainly learned through formal instruction rather than used routinely in the surrounding community. In this context, learners may have limited opportunities to practise with proficient speakers outside lessons. The amount and quality of exposure therefore matter: students need repeated contact with meaningful language, not only explanations of rules. Richards

emphasizes that listening and speaking develop through purposeful practice and interaction, while communicative approaches treat language as a resource for accomplishing real tasks rather than only as a set of grammatical forms (Richards 2008).

Uzbek learners are not a uniform group. Their experiences differ according to region, school resources, teachers' methods, prior exposure, motivation, and whether they also use Russian or another language. It would therefore be inaccurate to claim that every Uzbek student has the same problems. Still, research on English learning in Uzbekistan has discussed recurring concerns such as limited exposure, vocabulary acquisition, grammatical differences, and the development of oral fluency (Kutlimuratova and Urazboev 2023; Shamsiddinova 2024).

This paper examines the following question: What linguistic, psychological, and educational difficulties commonly affect Uzbek students learning English, and what teaching practices may help address them? Its purpose is to synthesize relevant literature and connect general second-language learning concepts with the Uzbek educational context. The paper does not claim to represent every learner or to offer new survey data. Instead, it organizes recurring challenges and draws practical implications for classroom teaching.

METHODS

The paper adopts a qualitative narrative-review design. It brings together foundational work on second-language acquisition, foreign-language anxiety, and communicative language teaching with published discussions of English learning in Uzbekistan. The material was considered thematically rather than statistically. The main themes were: (1) language-system differences; (2) vocabulary and pronunciation; (3) listening and speaking; (4) affective factors such as anxiety and confidence; and (5) classroom and environmental conditions.

The review prioritizes sources that explain established concepts or directly discuss Uzbek learners. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's account of foreign-language classroom anxiety provides a framework for considering fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986). Richards's work informs the discussion of listening and speaking instruction (Richards 2008), while published Uzbekistan-focused studies provide local context (Kutlimuratova and Urazboev 2023; Shamsiddinova 2024). The sources are used as qualitative evidence and illustrative scholarship, not as a systematic review of every publication in the field.

A limitation of this method is that the reviewed sources vary in scope and research design. Some focus on vocabulary or speaking, while others discuss teaching conditions more broadly. Consequently, the findings below describe patterns that appear in the literature; they do not establish a national ranking of difficulties or prove that one factor causes another. A future empirical study could test these themes through interviews, classroom observations, and learner assessments across different regions and educational levels.

RESULTS

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

One recurring challenge is the need to learn patterns that differ from those of a learner's first language. Uzbek and English do not organize every grammatical meaning in the same way. English requires articles in many noun phrases, distinguishes tense and aspect through combinations of verb forms, and often depends on a relatively fixed subject–verb–object order.

Uzbek uses different grammatical resources and permits word-order patterns that may not transfer naturally into English. Learners may therefore omit articles, select an unsuitable tense, or construct sentences that reflect Uzbek word order. These patterns are better understood as developmental errors than as carelessness.

Direct translation can be useful at early stages, but it becomes restrictive when learners assume that a phrase in one language has a single equivalent in another. Teachers can help by contrasting examples in context, asking students to notice patterns, and providing short tasks that require the target structure for a meaningful purpose. Rather than presenting grammar as a list of exceptions, instruction can show how form, meaning, and situation work together.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AND PRONUNCIATION

Vocabulary learning involves more than memorizing a translation. Students need to recognize a word in listening and reading, recall it during speaking or writing, understand its grammatical behavior, and know which words commonly occur together. Idioms, phrasal verbs, collocations, and words with several meanings can be especially difficult because their meaning is not always predictable from individual parts. Shamsiddinova's Uzbekistan-focused study identifies vocabulary-related concerns including spelling, pronunciation, collocation, and idiomatic expressions (Shamsiddinova 2024).

Pronunciation creates a related challenge. English spelling does not consistently indicate pronunciation, and some English vowel or consonant contrasts may be unfamiliar to a learner. Word stress and connected speech can also make known vocabulary hard to recognize when listening. The goal should not be to erase a learner's accent; it should be intelligibility. Short, regular activities—such as listening and repeating meaningful phrases, noticing word stress, recording speech, and comparing it with a model—can make pronunciation work manageable. Vocabulary is more likely to become usable when it is revisited in different contexts rather than studied once as an isolated list.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND SPOKEN FLUENCY

Listening can be difficult because natural speech is fast, sounds are linked, and speakers reduce or omit sounds in casual conversation. Learners may understand a sentence when they read it but fail to recognize it when it is spoken. Unknown words, unfamiliar accents, and limited background knowledge can further overload comprehension. Listening lessons are therefore more effective when students have a clear purpose, listen more than once, and move from general meaning to selected details.

Speaking requires learners to retrieve vocabulary, form sentences, pronounce them, and respond to another person in real time. A student who knows a grammatical rule may still pause frequently because the rule has not become automatic. If classroom activities focus mainly on written exercises or teacher explanations, students may have too few opportunities to practise spontaneous speech. Published work on Uzbek EFL learners has similarly highlighted limited authentic exposure, translation, slow word retrieval, and insufficient oral practice as potential barriers to fluency (Kutlimuratova and Urazboev 2023).

ANXIETY, CONFIDENCE, AND MOTIVATION

Psychological factors influence whether students are willing to use the language they know. Some fear that classmates will laugh at their pronunciation or that a teacher will correct

every mistake. Others become anxious when asked to speak without preparation. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) describe foreign-language classroom anxiety as a distinct phenomenon associated with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This framework helps explain why a learner's performance may be weaker in public speaking than in individual written work.

Motivation also changes over time. Students may begin with strong goals but lose interest if lessons feel disconnected from their needs or if progress is difficult to notice. Conversely, confidence can increase when tasks are achievable, progress is visible, and errors are treated as part of learning. Teachers need not remove correction; they can make it selective and constructive. Pair rehearsal before whole-class speaking, clear success criteria, and feedback that identifies one or two actionable improvements can lower the perceived risk of participation.

CLASSROOM AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Learning outcomes are shaped by conditions as well as individual effort. Students may have unequal access to reliable internet, graded reading materials, language clubs, or opportunities to speak with people outside their class. Large classes and limited lesson time can make individualized feedback difficult. Where assessment rewards memorized rules more visibly than communication, teachers and learners may understandably prioritize accuracy on written tests over fluency. These conditions can create a cycle: students receive little communicative practice, feel unprepared to speak, and then avoid speaking when an opportunity arises.

The review indicates that linguistic, psychological, and institutional difficulties overlap. Limited vocabulary can make a conversation stressful; anxiety can reduce practice; and a classroom with few interactive tasks may leave learners without a safe setting in which to build confidence. No single technique is likely to solve every problem. Progress requires a combination of language-focused instruction, frequent use, and supportive learning conditions.

DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature suggests that difficulties in English learning among Uzbek students should be approached as a connected set of challenges rather than separate weaknesses. Language transfer helps explain some grammatical and lexical patterns, but it does not fully explain why a learner who performs well on written exercises may avoid speaking. Oral performance also depends on automatic retrieval, listening experience, confidence, and the classroom opportunities available to practise. This interpretation is consistent with communicative teaching, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and the practical use of language (Richards 2008).

Several pedagogical implications follow. First, grammar instruction should be explicit but contextualized. Teachers can compare English and Uzbek patterns when useful, then move quickly to examples in dialogue, short writing, and problem-solving tasks. Second, vocabulary teaching should include collocations, pronunciation, word families, and repeated retrieval. Students can keep a vocabulary notebook with example sentences rather than translations alone. Third, listening should be taught as a skill: learners can predict content, listen for the main idea, check details, and discuss what helped or hindered understanding.

Fourth, speaking practice should be frequent and low-stakes. Pair work, information-gap activities, short presentations, role-play, and one-minute talks can distribute participation more evenly than relying on a few volunteers. Students may first rehearse in pairs before speaking to

the whole class. Feedback should distinguish errors that prevent understanding from minor errors that can be addressed later. Such an approach maintains standards while reducing the fear that every utterance will be judged.

Fifth, teachers and institutions can expand exposure beyond the classroom through podcasts at an appropriate level, subtitled videos, online exchanges, reading circles, and English-language clubs. Digital resources are most useful when selected for a learning goal and accompanied by reflection; access to technology alone does not guarantee improvement. Finally, assessment should include evidence of real communication, such as listening tasks, interviews, collaborative projects, and prepared or spontaneous speaking, alongside grammar and vocabulary knowledge.

The present review has limitations. It does not provide new data from a representative sample of Uzbek students, and the literature available for the discussion covers different learner groups and skills. Further research should investigate how challenges vary between urban and rural settings, school and university contexts, and learners with different levels of prior exposure. A mixed-methods study combining proficiency tasks with interviews could establish which barriers students themselves consider most significant and whether reported barriers correspond to observed performance.

CONCLUSION

Common difficulties in learning English as a foreign language among Uzbek students include grammatical differences between Uzbek and English, vocabulary retention, pronunciation, listening to natural speech, spoken fluency, and anxiety about making mistakes. These challenges are influenced by classroom practice and access to meaningful English beyond lessons. They should not be treated as fixed limitations of Uzbek learners. Instead, they point to areas where teaching can be more responsive and practice more consistent.

A balanced approach combines clear language instruction with regular communication, repeated vocabulary learning, purposeful listening, constructive feedback, and opportunities to speak without excessive fear of error. Schools and universities can support this approach by aligning assessment with communicative goals and widening access to appropriate materials. Since this paper is a narrative review, its conclusions are interpretive rather than statistical. Empirical research across diverse Uzbek learning contexts is needed to test these implications and identify which interventions produce the strongest outcomes.

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