

ENHANCING PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AMONG INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract. This study explores the effects of focused instruction on phonetics, phonology, and morphology for intermediate-level Uzbek EFL learners in a private language center. The targeted teaching of concepts such as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), word stress patterns, morphemes, affixes, and selected grammar structures aimed to enhance learners' pronunciation, vocabulary formation, and overall language awareness. Through practical, task-based, and visually supported techniques, the research demonstrates that raising students' phonological and morphological awareness can improve both comprehension and production in English.

Keywords: Phonological Awareness, Morphological Awareness, Intermediate EFL Learners, Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Word Stress Patterns, Morphemes (Free and Bound), Affixes (Prefixes and Suffixes), Vocabulary Expansion, EFL Instruction, Language Acquisition, Grammar Structures.

ПОВЫШЕНИЕ ФОНОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ И МОРФОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТИ СРЕДИ УЗБЕКСКИХ УЧАЩИХСЯ СРЕДНЕГО УРОВНЯ EFL

Аннотация. Данное исследование изучает влияние целенаправленного обучения фонетике, фонологии и морфологии на учащихся среднего уровня изучения английского языка как иностранного (EFL) в частном языковом центре в Узбекистане. Целенаправленное преподавание таких понятий, как Международный фонетический алфавит (IPA), модели ударения, морфемы, аффиксы и выбранные грамматические структуры направлено на улучшение произношения, формирования словарного запаса и общего языкового понимания. Через практические, основанные на заданиях и визуальной поддержке методы, исследование демонстрирует, что повышение фонологической и морфологической осведомленности студентов способствует улучшению как понимания, так и говорения на английском языке.

Ключевые слова: Фонологическая осведомленность, морфологическая осведомленность, учащиеся среднего уровня EFL, фонетический алфавит (IPA), модели ударения, морфемы (свободные и связанные), аффиксы (приставки и суффиксы), расширение словарного запаса, обучение EFL, освоение языка, грамматические структуры.

O'RTA DARAJADAGI O'ZBEK TILIDA INGLIZ TILI O'RGANUVCHILARINING FONOLOGIK VA MORFOLOGIK XABARDORLIGINI OSHIRISH

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot o'rta darajadagi o'zbek tilida ingliz tilini ikkinchi til sifatida o'rganayotgan talabalarga fonetika, fonologiya va morfologiya bo'yicha maqsadli ta'limning ta'sirini o'rganadi. Xalqaro fonetik alifbo (IPA), so'z urg'u naqshlari, morfemalar, qo'shimchalar va tanlangan grammatik tuzilmalar kabi tushunchalarni o'rgatish orqali talabalar talaffuzini, lug'at shakllanishini va til bo'yicha umumiy xabardorlikni oshirish maqsad qilingan.

Amaliy, vazifalarga asoslangan va vizual yordam bilan olib borilgan darslar orqali tadqiqot fonologik va morfologik xabardorlikni oshirish o'quvchilarning tushunish va nutq qobiliyatlarini yaxshilashini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Fonologik xabardorlik, morfologik xabardorlik, o'rta darajadagi EFL o'quvchilari, fonetik alifbo (IPA), so'z urg'u naqshlari, morfemalar (erkin va bog'langan), qo'shimchalar (prefikslar va suffikslar), lug'atni kengaytirish, EFL ta'limi, til o'rganish, grammatika tuzilmalari.*

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, phonological accuracy and morphological understanding are crucial yet often overlooked elements of language instruction.

Learners frequently struggle with pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds, spelling of complex words, and correct usage of morphological structures. These difficulties can impede both comprehension and communication, especially at the intermediate level where fluency and confidence begin to develop.

This study was conducted at the "Bilim-Ziyo" education center in Angren, Uzbekistan, with 12 ninth-grade students, all aged 16. These learners had recently transitioned from pre-intermediate to intermediate level (B1 CEFR), scoring between 4.5 and 5.0 on IELTS practice exams. Despite prior exposure to grammar and vocabulary, learners exhibited challenges in academic spelling, sentence construction, and intonation. As noted by Ebbers (2017), increasing morphological awareness can directly contribute to student motivation and successful engagement with new material.

This research therefore aims to examine how explicit instruction in phonological and morphological concepts can support Uzbek EFL learners in developing stronger linguistic competence.

Methods

Participants: Twelve Uzbek-speaking learners participated in the study. All were intermediate (B1) students, having previously completed a foundational course that focused on the four language skills (Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing) and basic grammar.

Instructional Approach: The instructional module was divided into five key areas:

1. International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
2. Word Stress Patterns (Primary and Secondary)
3. Morphemes (Free and Bound)
4. Affixes (Prefixes and Suffixes)
5. Grammar Integration (Genitive vs. Plural, Voiced vs. Voiceless Consonants, Derivational Affixes, and Compound Words)

A communicative and task-based learning approach was adopted, integrating songs, dialogues, flashcards, group activities, and kinesthetic learning to promote student engagement.

Lessons were scaffolded and contextualized within real-life scenarios (e.g., ordering food, song lyrics, classroom games) to make abstract concepts accessible.

Results

The instruction yielded several key outcomes:

- IPA and Pronunciation: Learners showed increased ability to distinguish minimal pairs such as ship/sheep, think/sink.

When learners transcribed English song lyrics using IPA, they began recognizing common sound-symbol correspondences, which boosted their listening accuracy.

- Word Stress and Intonation: After exposure to stress placement rules, learners correctly identified stress patterns in both nouns and verbs (e.g., re'cord vs. reco'rd). They also practiced multisyllabic words like civilization and phenomenon, improving their spoken fluency.

- Morpheme Recognition: Students successfully analyzed complex words by breaking them down into free and bound morphemes. For example, in happiness, learners recognized happy as a free morpheme and -ness as bound. Visual activities (e.g., mimicking "happy" with a smile) helped learners internalize meaning-based word parts.

- Affix Usage and Vocabulary Expansion: Students practiced creating new words through affixation (e.g., friend → friendly, friendship). Their writing and speaking became more diverse and accurate with increased use of derived forms.

- Grammar Application: Instruction on voiced/voiceless sounds and compound structures led to more precise sentence formation. Learners improved in distinguishing between similar-sounding words and applying plural/genitive rules more consistently in writing.

Discussion

The study reinforces the significance of teaching phonology and morphology explicitly within EFL contexts. As McMahon (2020) emphasizes, mastery of IPA supports accurate pronunciation and listening, while morphological awareness contributes to vocabulary growth and spelling. Students initially struggled with technical concepts like bound morphemes or IPA symbols, but contextualized and interactive teaching strategies mitigated these difficulties.

Flashcards, song transcription, and physical response activities served not only as motivational tools but also as cognitive supports. The results align with Goodwin and Ahn's (2010) findings that morphological instruction can significantly improve literacy skills, especially among learners with limited vocabulary or decoding strategies.

An integrated approach, as suggested by Payne (2011), allowed learners to see connections between phonology, morphology, and grammar—facilitating deeper understanding and stronger language production. Overall, the improvement in students' performance and confidence validated the effectiveness of this instructional model.

Conclusion

This classroom-based study demonstrates that integrating phonological and morphological instruction enhances intermediate-level learners' overall linguistic competence.

By using practical, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences, students gain essential tools to decode, pronounce, and construct language more effectively. These findings suggest the importance of including such components in EFL syllabi, particularly for adolescent learners preparing for higher-level language exams or academic English use.

Future research may explore the long-term impact of such instruction, and how it may be adapted for younger learners or for learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

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