

**CHALLENGES OF UZBEK EFL LEARNERS IN PRONUNCIATION****Akhmedova Zarina Dilshod kizi**English teacher at comprehensive school No. 27,  
Chinaz district, Tashkent region.<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19753390>

**Abstract.** *This article examines the major pronunciation difficulties experienced by Uzbek learners of English as a foreign language. The analysis proceeds from the assumption that pronunciation problems are not random classroom errors but systematic outcomes of phonological distance between Uzbek and English, combined with instructional, sociolinguistic, and psychological factors. Recent Uzbek-focused studies indicate that learners encounter persistent obstacles at both segmental and suprasegmental levels: they struggle with English sounds absent from Uzbek, confuse vowel length and quality, simplify consonant clusters, and transfer Uzbek stress and rhythm patterns into English speech.*

**Keywords:** *Uzbek EFL learners, English pronunciation, phonological interference, intelligibility, consonant clusters.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Pronunciation occupies a central place in spoken language competence because it directly influences intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interactional success. Contemporary pronunciation research has moved away from the older ideal of complete native-like imitation and instead emphasizes intelligible speech as the most realistic and pedagogically sound goal for second- and foreign-language learners. In this perspective, pronunciation teaching is not a cosmetic addition to grammar and vocabulary instruction; it is a core component of oral communication. For Uzbek learners of English, this point is especially significant, because many students with reasonably strong lexical and grammatical knowledge still experience hesitation, misunderstanding, or reduced confidence in real conversation due to pronunciation problems.

The issue is therefore not merely phonetic in a narrow sense. It concerns the learner's ability to be understood, to understand others, and to participate effectively in academic, professional, and intercultural communication. [1], [5]

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

At the segmental level, one of the most noticeable difficulties concerns consonants that are absent or only partially comparable in Uzbek. Uzbek learners frequently have problems with the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, substituting them with sounds that are articulatorily closer to their first language. In the University study, words such as *think* and *this* were reported as being pronounced in ways that approximate *sink* and *zis*, while /w/ and /v/ were also commonly confused, as in *west* being pronounced as *vest*. These substitutions are not trivial matters of accent colouring; they can influence lexical distinction and listener understanding. Other Uzbek-oriented analyses also note that the absence of some English consonants in Uzbek encourages replacement with nearest native equivalents rather than acquisition of new articulatory habits.

This pattern is entirely consistent with broader second-language phonetic theory, which predicts that learners classify unfamiliar target sounds through the filter of existing native categories. [2], [4]

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

English vowels pose an equally serious challenge. The Uzbek-focused sources available online repeatedly indicate that learners struggle with distinctions that English treats as phonemic

but Uzbek does not maintain in the same way. Difficulties with pairs such as /ɪ/ and /i:/, or /æ/ and /e/, are especially common. The 2026 University article reports that Uzbek-speaking learners often neutralize both vowel quality and length, while another recent article on English pronunciation challenges in Uzbek settings notes the frequent confusion of words like *ship* and *sheep*. The underlying problem is structural: English depends on a dense vowel system, including tense-lax contrasts, central vowels, and diphthongal movement, whereas Uzbek learners approach English with a relatively simpler native vowel framework. When these English distinctions are reduced, speech may remain partly understandable in context, but lexical precision decreases and misunderstandings become more likely. [2]

A further source of difficulty is phonotactics, especially consonant clusters. English allows many initial, medial, and final clusters that are more complex than those typically favoured in Uzbek. Several Uzbek-oriented discussions report that learners often simplify these clusters, omit one of the consonants, or insert extra vowels in order to make the word conform more closely to native-language syllable structure. A recent pedagogical article comparing English and Uzbek pronunciation notes that Uzbek learners often simplify clusters such as /str/ and other multi-consonant combinations, producing speech that sounds segmented or broken into syllables more typical of Uzbek. The same comparative literature also underlines that English phonotactics is more permissive, while Uzbek tends to prefer simpler syllable shapes. This difference explains why learners may pronounce English words more slowly, with extra vowels or reduced cluster accuracy, especially in spontaneous speech rather than in careful repetition. [4]

However, the most persistent and pedagogically underestimated problems are often suprasegmental. Pronunciation is not only a matter of producing individual sounds correctly; it also involves stress placement, rhythm, prominence, weak forms, and intonation. Several sources on English and Uzbek prosody point to a basic difference between the two systems: English is strongly stress-based and relies on alternations between prominent and reduced syllables, whereas Uzbek is described in these sources as more regular, more predictable in stress, and closer to syllable-timed organization. A recent contrastive analysis reports that Uzbek learners of English struggle with unpredictable stress placement, vowel reduction, weak forms, and English rhythm precisely because these features do not operate in the same way in Uzbek. The 2026 study similarly notes that Uzbek learners may produce monotone speech, unnatural stress placement, and limited connected speech because they transfer native rhythmic and intonational habits into English. In practical classroom terms, this means that even if a learner approximates most consonants and vowels acceptably, speech may still sound non-target-like and may be harder to process if prosodic organization remains Uzbek-based. [2]

For Uzbek learners, explicit articulatory explanation is particularly useful because many difficulties involve sounds or timing patterns that are not available in the native system. The article recommends focused listening, guided articulation practice, interactive speaking tasks, and digital tools that provide immediate feedback. This combination is methodologically sound [2].

Another important implication concerns orthography. Although not all Uzbek-focused studies discuss this point in equal detail, the wider pronunciation-teaching literature consistently shows that learners in EFL settings often over-rely on spelling when pronunciation instruction is weak. For Uzbek learners, this can be especially problematic because English spelling does not transparently encode pronunciation, while classroom exposure to authentic spoken models may

be limited. As a result, students may build stable but inaccurate sound-image associations early in learning. Once fossilized, these patterns become harder to correct. This is why early and sustained pronunciation work matters. It should begin not at advanced levels or exam-preparation stages only, but from the point where learners first acquire lexical items and speaking routines. [1], [3], [5]

### CONCLUSION

The pronunciation challenges of Uzbek EFL learners are best understood as a structured interaction between phonological distance and pedagogical conditions. At the segmental level, learners commonly struggle with English consonants and vowels that do not map neatly onto Uzbek categories, especially dental fricatives, /w/-/v/ contrasts, and distinctions of vowel quality and length. At the suprasegmental level, they face difficulties with variable stress, vowel reduction, weak forms, English rhythm, and intonation, because these features diverge substantially from Uzbek prosodic habits. These linguistic problems are amplified when exposure to spoken English is uneven, teacher modelling is inconsistent, or pronunciation remains marginal in classroom practice. Yet the evidence does not support a pessimistic conclusion. The same research base suggests that progress is possible when pronunciation is taught explicitly, contrastively, and communicatively, with intelligibility as the central goal rather than imitation of an idealized native accent. For Uzbek learners, the most effective route is a pedagogically selective one: teach the contrasts and prosodic features that matter most for being understood, integrate them into meaningful speech, and build regular habits of listening, production, and feedback.

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