

Challenges of Teaching English: In the Case of Samarkand Schools, Language Centres, and Institutions

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Abstract: This article attempts to find out the challenges faced by English teachers at different educational institutions, and analyzes the causes of issues which affect the language learning process. Observation method was applied to get the data. Data was collected from different educational institutions over a lengthy period of time through observing different age groups. Some common language teaching problems were found at all three different types of educational institutions which are compulsory schools, language centres, and technicums. The core reasons of all problems were discussed in the article.

Keywords: Educational reforms, appropriately selected materials, mother tongue interference, proper techniques and methods

1. Introduction

Improvement in learning and teaching English is one of the most substantially crucial demands in this age all over the world. This global phenomenon brings unprecedented amount of opportunities with it in any field from economy to medicine. Teaching English is globally one of the most challenging and demanding works can be done. In Uzbekistan, the demand for learning English is growing at an unprecedented age. To meet these demands, the vast number of educational centres, language applications, and handbooks has been created. The government of Uzbekistan has been taking major reforms to improve the process of teaching and learning English taking the benefits of this into consideration. In the Decree of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev «On Uzbekistan's development Strategy " is mentioned about achieving major improvement of in quality of general secondary education, facilitating in-depth study of foreign languages, computer science, and other important and popular disciplines. (Decree, 2012) Educational institutions namely kindergartens, schools, and institutes and universities have been supplied with cutting-edge technologies. The experts also have been prepared by highly qualified experts. The Webster University located at Tashkent takes the leading role in this sphere. Teachers and students are taking the advantages of online MOOC courses to enhance their teaching skills such as, [coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org), [futurelearn.com](https://www.futurelearn.com) and so on. Basically, these courses provide free audit without any certificate free of charge. PRESETT has certainly been one of the most effective, important and inspirational programmes the British Council has carried out in its 20 year history in Uzbekistan. PRESETT is an abbreviation stands for Pre-Service Education and Training. (Fairlex, 2021) Paying the necessary amount of money provides the access to get the certificate of completion. The improvement in the technologies and the availability of internet are making the teaching English more available and higher quality. Schools are also being provided with necessary handbooks, books and audio materials to teach pupils. Therefore, vast amount of language centres, highly qualified specialists, widely available textbooks, and facilities created to teach the English language conveniently. Using these amenities and conveniences, English language teachers and researchers in the field are finding more convenient ways of teaching this language.

Nevertheless, teachers keep struggling to teach English language in some cases not to mention the challenges for students. Learning English language is complicated process owing to its complex grammar rules, pronunciation features, and its rich lexical recourse. Some students struggle to learn English because of some phonetical features of English language do not exist in Uzbek language. In the meantime, its grammar structure also remarkably differs from Uzbek language grammar and causes particular amount of hurdles to the students.

Teaching English in the context of Samarkand, Uzbekistan

In Samarkand, there are 1225 number of secondary schools where more than 683519 students are getting educated (J, Ulashev, 2019), about 50 private schools, and approximately 200 educational centres. English teacher training centres and educational institutions also exist here, and serve to prepare high qualified teachers in the field. As the national curriculum of Uzbekistan includes the teaching English for all ages and grades, learning English language starts from kindergarten and proceeds literally during the whole educational process. Students are supposed to learn English at an A 1 level, according CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) to in their early schools years from 1 to 4, they are supposed to be at an A2 level till 5 or 6th grades. The school lasts till the grade of 11, and there students should complete learning B1 level and be somewhere around B2. Tertiary education requires the students to have a minimum B2 level certificate since there are no entrance exams or tests for the students who have held the B2 level certificate of CEFR. However, only minority of students can achieve to that level of English proficiency during school years. As it is mentioned earlier, the authority provides with high quality recourses to teach English, such as electronic devices, television, blackboard, course books, and other gadgets and materials. It is obvious that all

students have access to learn English from the early age to 19 years for free of charge at schools. However, some hidden factors halt students from learning the language. To support this view, school amenities for teaching English are not enough for learning English properly, in rural areas. Another issue can be faced in teaching English is that professional teachers are reluctant to go to the rural areas on teaching purposes. It results in poor teaching performance at schools. Some students prefer going to the private schools or special language centres to learn English rather than learning at their own schools. Even if the government made a particular amount of effort to make this process better, learning English costs vast amount of money for students. The most painful aspect of this particular situation is that students come from poor background family cannot afford to attend to private or special language centres. Firstly, students who do not have access to private schools or language centres, fail to meet the requirements of entrance exams. Secondly, discrimination stems from this situation in society as wealthier students have got higher level of proficiency of English language and keep getting higher opportunities than the students who have got lower levelled income. Another challenge school students and all other English language learners undergo is lack of language exposure. Some Uzbek language learners never meet or met a real native or native like speaker in their life. It is highly unlikely to hear a word in English language in a typical day as there live no English speakers in Uzbekistan. Earlier, prior to Covid-19 outbreak, students would meet a certain amount of English speaking tourists on the historical sites. However, in its own place, it was a rare condition to have a conversation with them. As the number of English learners at least three folds the number of tourists to Uzbekistan. Learning all concerns in this field, and addressing these issues are utmost important to improve English acquisition and teaching process. This article outlines all the possible problems faced by English teacher and language learners to do further researches to address them.

2. Literature review

2.1. Challenges of teaching English at Primary Education.

The research states that one of the most painful problems can be faced by English teachers and learners at Uzbek schools are “unreasonably created textbooks” (Ташбаева Фазилат Бахрамовна, 2020). The reason why they are mentioned as unreasonable because those books are filled with complicated grammar rules, old-fashioned English words which are less likely to be used by the modern English native speakers, or by far difficult reading and writing tasks to the school pupils’ English proficiency levels. Another problem is students have got minimal level of motivation to learn English language. Since pupils can get what they want using their native language, seemingly there is no need for making strenuous effort to learn the English language. In addition to that, psychological barriers to learn English are also a good reason why students are reluctant to learn the English language. Among Uzbek pupils, shyness, low self-esteem and confidence, and fear of being mocked can stop some learners using the English language. The last difficulty stated by the author is that no real English communication with native speakers of English language, or lack English exposure. Students learn the language and they just put it into dusty shelf. There are no people to communicate or either not enough situations to use the language in written and oral communication except for English classes. Early English learning has been found as the solution to these problems. Besides organizing the English classes on a daily basis to prevent the deprivation of English communication found also as the way to cure those challenges.

2.2. Challenges in the teaching English at higher education.

Students’ background knowledge in English, the amount of time allocated to teach them at universities and the competency of English teachers are the most crucial aspects to improve. The methods teachers are using at higher education should be appropriate to the topic or the level of students’ English language. When setting goals, the existing conditions must be taken into account, so that the achievement of goals is real. These two fundamental elements of the methodological system determine the choice of the method of teaching a foreign language. (Rixsibayevna, 2019)

3. Research methodology

Research was undertaken through observation. The researcher visited and taught in different workplaces at Samarkand. Observation took place at school#81, located at Al Bukhara district, Samarkand, Samarkand branch of IT Park, Samarkand Tourism Technicum and two different language centres called Bilim Orzu, Fast and Excellent. The observation lasted more than 6 months. During the observation, English teaching classrooms were analyzed, and challenges and their causes were learnt. Mostly, pupils were in their teens, or in freshmen, and sophomore years of their institutions.

4. Research findings

Observations showed that there are some common challenges faced by English teachers and language learners across the region. They were inappropriate selection of materials, using poor organized handbooks, lack of effective methods and techniques, lack of English exposure, too complex tasks to students’ level of comprehension, and mother tongue interference.

4.1. Mother tongue interference

Mother tongue is by the definition, the language person uses from the birth for significant and impacting times in their life. Additionally, this is the language a person most commonly speaks. (Tomblin, 2019) It is obvious that lack of proficiency skills in the mother tongue is the great source of struggles to learn the English language. Low level of literacy in the mother tongue leads to poor results in acquiring the other new language. As long as the students are familiar with the basic grammar structures in L1, it is likely that they encounter fewer problems in learning the English compared to their counterparts who have little knowledge of grammar. For example, students know the function of parts of speech, and comparing the target language with their own language is easier for them. Noun plays the role of subject and object in English language as well. Or else, verb comes in the role of predicate. These are the cases with Uzbek language grammar. Consequently, they learn the language faster. One of the most primary challenges in learning English pronunciation is that some English sounds do not exist in Uzbek language. Since the phonology of English language and Uzbek language quite differs from each other. Some English phonological sounds do not exist in Uzbek language. Gulnigor presents that phonics which do not exist in her paper called "Common pronunciation mistakes of Uzbek learners in speaking English" (Gulnigor, 2018) dividing into two groups: vowels [u, ou, ai, ue] and consonants [ð, θ, r, w, f, and v]. Those omitting sounds make Uzbek students to struggle to pronounce English sounds.

4.2. Selecting and using proper materials to teach English.

At the schools, teachers use the hand books which are set by the authority. The teachers do not take into consideration the students' comprehension level or their interests. Sometimes, those core handbooks cause a lot of problems to teach English. Their formats do not match the students' level. They are way too much filled with unnecessary words, or tasks. Even teaching English process begins at kindergarten and lasts during the whole educational process; students cannot learn the language at required level because of these mistakenly selected materials. **At the technicum**, teachers use handbooks what the authority has ordered to use even students cannot understand a word from those textbooks. Technicum entrance exams demand the students to have got at least B1 or B2 level of English language. Nevertheless, poor English educational background at schools influences on their language acquisitions and students perform badly. Almost 50% of all students do not understand the language at all. Teachers just ignore their comprehension level and proceeds teaching in their own way. Some books are full of information to learn the language, yet, that information is impractical. The results are not satisfactorily. Students can learn nothing as the handbooks are too tough to understand. This phenomenon leads most of the students to private educational or language centres where students can learn at their own pace and level. **At language centres**, hand books selection has its own issues. Some inexperienced teachers just rely on the hand books themselves, and cannot use a right amount of hand outs from external sources. Even if they use, they tend to choose the handouts which are either way too easy or too difficult. In both cases, students can just be distracted and it does not help to improve students' English language skills. Among language centres, Cambridge University press, Oxford University press, Longman, and Macmillan handbooks and course books are the most popular. Therefore, although attending to language centres cost much money, students prefer learning the language there as they offer effective classes with high quality of textbooks. However, most strikingly, educational centres tend to hide the name of the book, and present them to the students as their own work. The primary reason of this is that as soon as some students find out the source of handbooks, they are likely to study independently and it cuts the language centres' income.

4.3. Inadequate language exposure.

Uzbek and English language are quite different from each other. Students are less likely to have some basic knowledge of English language in their background knowledge. Because, Uzbek language is belong to Turkic languages family and English language is belong Indo European languages family. Word choice, sentence structure and any other linguistic formations are different. On top of that students are less likely to have an English friend or acquaintances from English speaking countries. Because, Uzbekistan is surrounded with Asian countries and it means listening to real native speaker is a kind of miracle. Therefore, building the basic skills in English language requires the particular amount of time, and energy from both teachers and students. In educational institutions, teachers try to create English atmosphere and give making presentations at home. However, students fail to deliver a successful presentation. Because, after rote learning the speech contains academic words and advanced phrasal verbs taken from internet web pages, other students cannot understand that speech. As a result, communication will be lost. Students understand that they need to learn English language. However, while they learn the English, they feel they are learning something which is much unrelated to the life they are living. It seems English language is meaningless. These feelings stem from lack of genuine communication in English language. They just learn the English language words and just forget as they do not see those words in context, such as in movies, books, newspapers etc. Teachers urge students to use them. Yet, some students do not feel as it helps them to improve their language skills.

4.4. Use of improper methods and techniques.

Language educators are responsible to inspire students to learn more, and work on themselves. There are several ways to do this including rewards, using diversity of methods, or techniques which boost student engagement in English classroom. Some teachers use the methods which they experienced through their own English language teachers. However, these days some English instructors are not specialists in the field of teaching languages or not qualified to teach English language. Most of the English instructors teach at educational institutions are students who just knows English language really well, study finance or other subjects. not any one who knows English language can be an English teacher. Even they know the language well, they have less capability of teaching English. Those so called English teachers just be selected by language centres' owners because they are a cheaper labour force. They are not aware of teaching techniques, approaches, and methods. They try to teach the language the way they learnt when they were learners. This leads to poor language acquisition. Some of the teachers use old-fashioned punishment techniques, such as punishing the students by making the students write down the words multiple pages, or physical punishment. Most common one is verbal abuse, just talking some words which make the students feel awkward in a team. Sometimes, these techniques prove themselves as a successful, but it can lead to vice result. So, English teaching should be conducted by someone who have qualified, or expert in teaching languages.

5. Conclusion

There are some common problems being faced by teacher and English language learners during the teaching and learning process of English language although government has taken a considerable amount of reformations to improve this process. Those challenges include improperly selected materials to teach English to students' age and English comprehension level. Another problem is English language is being taught by not qualified English teachers who just know the English language itself without having any knowledge in teaching which lead students get confused with tons of unnecessary information in English language. The prime issue faced by English language learners is lack of English language exposure as there are not English speakers or native like speakers in Uzbekistan.

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