

Problems and solutions in teaching English pronunciation to primary school learners

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Abstract

This article explores the key challenges and practical solutions in teaching English pronunciation to primary school learners. Pronunciation plays a vital role in the early stages of language acquisition, directly impacting learners' ability to understand and use the language effectively. Based on a study conducted with teachers and students at School No. 66 in Chust, Uzbekistan, the article identifies common pronunciation issues such as phonetic interference from the mother tongue, mispronunciation of unfamiliar English sounds, incorrect stress and intonation, and limited phonemic awareness. Specific difficulties include pronouncing sounds like [θ], [ð], and [w], as well as understanding non-phonetic English spellings. To address these challenges, the study suggests integrating methods such as phonics-based instruction, use of minimal pairs, mirror exercises, tongue twisters, and interactive digital tools like Lingokids and ELSA Speak. Additionally, poems, dialogues, and consistent teacher modeling are emphasized as effective strategies to reinforce correct pronunciation. The findings underscore the importance of early and continuous pronunciation instruction using auditory, visual, and kinesthetic techniques to help young learners build confidence and fluency in English.

Keywords: English pronunciation, primary learners, phonetic interference, teaching methods, pronunciation errors, phonics, digital tools

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматриваются основные проблемы и практические решения в обучении произношению английского языка у младших школьников. Произношение играет важную роль на ранних этапах овладения языком, напрямую влияя на способность учащихся понимать и эффективно использовать иностранную речь. На основе исследования, проведенного с участием учителей и учащихся школы №66 города Чуст, Узбекистан, в статье выделены типичные затруднения в произношении, включая фонетическую интерференцию родного языка, неправильное воспроизведение непривычных звуков английского языка, ошибки в постановке ударения и интонации, а также ограниченное фонематическое восприятие. Особую трудность вызывают такие звуки, как [θ], [ð], и [w], а также слова с непредсказуемым произношением. В качестве эффективных методов решения этих проблем предлагаются фонетический подход (phonics), работа с минимальными парами, упражнения перед зеркалом, скороговорки и использование интерактивных цифровых приложений, таких как Lingokids и ELSA Speak. Кроме того, особое внимание уделяется использованию стихов, диалогов и постоянному произносительному моделированию со стороны учителя. Результаты исследования подчеркивают необходимость раннего и систематического обучения произношению с применением аудиальных, визуальных и кинестетических методик, что способствует формированию уверенного и беглого устного общения на английском языке у младших школьников.

Ключевые слова: английское произношение, младшие школьники, фонетическая интерференция, методы обучения, ошибки произношения, фонетика, цифровые инструменты

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada boshlang'ich sinf o'quvchilariga ingliz tilidagi to'g'ri talaffuzni o'rgatishda uchraydigan asosiy muammolar va ularni bartaraf etish bo'yicha samarali yechimlar tahlil qilinadi. Talaffuz tilni o'zlashtirishning dastlabki bosqichlarida muhim o'rin tutadi va o'quvchilarning tilni to'g'ri va samarali o'rganishiga bevosita ta'sir ko'rsatadi. Maqola Namangan viloyati Chust shahridagi 66-maktabda ingliz tili

o'qituvchilari va 2–4-sinf o'quvchilari ishtirokida olib borilgan tadqiqot natijalariga tayangan holda yozilgan. Tadqiqot davomida o'quvchilarda eng ko'p uchraydigan talaffuz xatolari aniqlanib, ularga fonetik tafovutlar, ona tilining ta'siri, ingliz tiliga xos tovushlarning noto'g'ri aytilishi, urg'u va intonatsiyadagi xatoliklar hamda fonematik ongning yetarli darajada shakllanmaganligi sabab bo'lishi aniqlangan. Ayniqsa, [θ], [ð] va [w] kabi tovushlarni to'g'ri talaffuz qilish, shuningdek, ingliz tilining fonetik bo'lmagan yozuv tizimini tushinishda muammolar kuzatilgan. Muammolarni bartaraf etish uchun maqolada fonik (phonics) usuli, minimal juftliklar bilan ishlash, oynali mashqlar, tez aytish mashqlari, shuningdek Lingokids va ELSA Speak kabi interaktiv ilovalardan foydalanish taklif etiladi. Bundan tashqari, she'rlar, dialoglar va o'qituvchining to'g'ri talaffuz namunasi asosida dars tashkil etish usullari samarali deb topilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari, kichik yoshdagi o'quvchilar uchun eshitish, ko'rish va harakatga asoslangan yondashuvlar yordamida talaffuzni o'rgatish zarurligini, bu esa o'quvchilarda ishonch va ravon nutqni shakllantirishga xizmat qilishini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: ingliz tili talaffuzi, boshlang'ich sinf o'quvchilari, fonetik xatolar, fonematik ong, o'qitish metodlari, fonik yondashuv, raqamli vositalar

Introduction

Nowadays, the English language is rapidly entering every sphere of our lives. In the near future, learning this language will become a necessity for everyone, as English has already become the global language of communication in the modern world. This research work covers teaching the language with correct pronunciation to primary school pupils, the challenges encountered in this process, and ways to overcome them. Correct pronunciation is one of the most basic and essential requirements in teaching any foreign language. This is because correct pronunciation is not only crucial for proper understanding of words but also for speaking beautifully and effectively. Teaching English pronunciation to primary school learners undoubtedly brings about certain challenges. The importance of pronunciation in primary school is very high, as it directly affects pupils' ability to learn the language correctly and efficiently, as well as the development of their communication skills. I will explain this further with examples below.

When learning a foreign language, teaching correct pronunciation makes the learning process much easier. The more accurately and clearly a foreign word is pronounced, the more confident the learner feels. Teaching correct pronunciation helps students hear and understand words properly. On the other hand, learning incorrect pronunciation can lead to misunderstanding or misinterpreting the speech of other speakers. As a result, it negatively affects students' ability to comprehend the language. Learning pronunciation in English is an effective method for learning new words. Knowing the correct pronunciation of words not only helps students understand how the word sounds, but also improves their understanding of its meaning. For example, in English, if the words "read" (to read) and "red" (the color red) are pronounced incorrectly, even a small difference in pronunciation can completely change the meaning. These slight differences in pronunciation are essential for understanding the correct meaning of words.

Methods

This research was conducted in March 2025 at School No. 66 in Chust city, Namangan region. Five English language teachers and 60 students from grades 2 to 4 participated in the study. To explore the teachers' experiences, interviews were conducted in the form of open-ended questions. Additionally, students' pronunciation errors during lessons were observed.

During the study, in order to identify and analyze students' pronunciation mistakes, four common types of pronunciation errors were examined: phonetic differences, sound substitutions, incorrect pronunciation, and difficulties in auditory perception.

Based on my observations, I have outlined below the key challenges I encountered.

The most significant difficulties in teaching pronunciation were found in phonetic differences. Every language has its own sound system, and for primary school students in particular, it can be difficult to grasp the differences between the sound systems of their native language and English. For example, the English "th" sound does not exist in Uzbek, which makes it hard for students to pronounce it correctly. Words like the

book, this, that, thanks, etc., pose a challenge. Similarly, the English "w" sound, which is absent in Uzbek, is often replaced with the "v" sound, as in pronouncing water as vater.

Since English, unlike Uzbek, does not follow a phonetic spelling system—where words are pronounced exactly as they are written—learners faced certain difficulties in pronunciation. For example, words such as know, knife, think, through, dangerous, comfortable, famous, and others often posed challenges for students. Another common issue was the correct use of accent and intonation in English. Incorrect stress or intonation can completely change the meaning of a word or sentence. Stress in a word is not only a matter of pronunciation but also of meaning. For instance, in the word content, a change in stress alters the entire meaning of the sentence. Therefore, teaching proper stress and intonation is essential for effective communication in English.

Word Stress and Meaning Differences in English

Word Pronunciation	Meaning	Part of Speech	Example Sentence
RE cord /'rek.ɔ:d/	A written or audio account of something	Noun	She broke the world record in swimming.
re CORD /rɪ'kɔ:d/	To capture or save information/sounds	Verb	Don't forget to record the meeting.
PRE sent /'prez.ənt/	A gift	Noun	He gave her a birthday present.
pre SENT /prɪ'zɛnt/	To give, show, or introduce something	Verb	She will present her project tomorrow.
PRO duce /'prɒ.dju:s/	Fruits and vegetables; agricultural items	Noun	The market sells fresh local produce.
pro DUCE /prə'dju:s/	To create or manufacture something	Verb	They produce high-quality electronics.
CON tract /'kɒn.trækt/	A written agreement	Noun	He signed a contract with the company.
con TRACT /kən'trækt/	To shrink or reduce in size	Verb	Metals contract when they cool down.

Therefore, it is important to teach primary school students not only how words are written, but also how they are pronounced and where the correct stress should be placed.

Another challenge is the issue of accent. Now let's talk about regional or native accents. An accent refers to stylistic differences in pronunciation—that is, how words are spoken. Accents can vary depending on regions or countries that speak the same language. It includes specific intonation, stress patterns, and articulation unique to a person or a group.

For primary school learners, it is essential to focus not on accents, but on clear and understandable pronunciation. At an early learning stage, exposure to different accents can be confusing for students. Uzbek-speaking students, for instance, often try to pronounce English sounds using familiar sounds from their native language, which leads to the development of an accent.

For example, when pronouncing thank you, learners may pronounce the [θ] sound as t or s, resulting in "tank you" or "sank you." Similarly, in the word hour /aʊər/, the silent "h" is often mistakenly pronounced as the Uzbek "x" sound, due to interference from the mother tongue.

Analysis (Discussion)

The results of the research showed that the main difficulties faced when teaching English pronunciation to primary school students are phonetic differences and unclear pronunciation. Since the sound system of the Uzbek language differs significantly from that of English, many instances of incorrect pronunciation were observed among the students.

Examples and Practical Tools

To improve pronunciation, it is essential for children to repeatedly listen to correct pronunciation through **audio or video resources**. Frequent repetition helps them internalize the correct sound patterns.

Words that sound similar or differ by only one or two sounds should be learned in **minimal pairs**, such as sheep–ship, bear–beer, dear–deer, cat–cut, read–red, and so on. Practicing these pairs helps students recognize subtle sound differences and pronounce words more accurately.

One of the most effective techniques for achieving accurate pronunciation is the **mirror exercise**. This method is especially helpful for practicing sounds that do not exist in the Uzbek language, such as [θ], [ð], and [w]. By looking in the mirror, learners can observe the position and movement of their mouth, lips, and tongue, helping them produce these sounds correctly.

Tongue twisters also play a significant role in improving pronunciation. These often involve repeating similar sounds, words, or syllables quickly and in succession, which can be difficult to articulate. Through practicing tongue twisters, students are encouraged to repeat difficult sounds multiple times, gradually improving their fluency and pronunciation skills.

Tongue twisters are an effective way to enhance pronunciation through repetition and rhythm. They challenge students to pronounce similar sounds quickly and accurately, which sharpens their articulation. Some useful examples include:

- Six slippery snails slid slowly seaward.
- She sells seashells by the seashore.
- Red lorry, yellow lorry.
- Larry rarely rakes really red leaves.

Apps and digital tools actively engage learners in pronunciation practice. They go beyond passive listening by encouraging students to speak, write, choose sounds, complete tests, and play educational games. This type of active learning enhances memory retention, as students remember what they hear and repeat.

Some effective apps for teaching English pronunciation to primary school students include:

- Lingokids – Playlearning
- BBC Learning English – Kids
- Fun English by Studycat
- Duolingo Kids
- ELSA Speak – English Accent Coach
- Kiboomu Kids Learning Songs

These applications have proven helpful in teaching correct pronunciation to young learners in an engaging and interactive way.

Poems and dialogues also play an important role in developing fluent speech. Repetitive lines in poems help simplify pronunciation and reinforce language patterns. For example: Here is your jacket, Your favorite red jacket. Put on your jacket, Let's go out and play.

Such materials make learning enjoyable and aid in building rhythm, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking.

4. Conclusion

Pronunciation is one of the most important skills in language learning. Correctly pronouncing words not only makes the speaker's speech understandable but also demonstrates respect for the language being learned. Good pronunciation helps students express their thoughts clearly, avoid misunderstandings, and build their confidence. Therefore, paying attention to pronunciation from the very beginning is crucial for every language learner.

In conclusion, poems, dialogues, and dictation exercises play a significant role in pronunciation learning. Through these activities, students practice listening, speaking, and understanding words correctly. However,

the role of the teacher in this process is also extremely important. The teacher must not only impart knowledge but also serve as a model of correct pronunciation, consistently organizing listening and speaking exercises. Otherwise, incorrect pronunciation will become ingrained, negatively impacting the learner's future language acquisition.

For effective pronunciation learning, both the teacher and the student must work together.

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