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London International Monthly Conference on Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation

DEVELOPING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS IN FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WITH UZBEK AS THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the specific features of developing pronunciation skills among first-year university students whose language of instruction is Uzbek. Particular attention is paid to the difficulties associated with acquiring Russian phonetic norms arising from differences between the sound systems of Russian and Uzbek. The paper substantiates the need for systematic pronunciation instruction that integrates auditory perception, articulatory training, and communicative practice. A sequence of methodological techniques is proposed to develop phonemic awareness, improve articulatory skills, and increase students' confidence in oral communication.

Keywords: Russian language, Uzbek-medium instruction, first-year students, pronunciation skills, phonetic interference, phonemic awareness, articulation, communicative competence.

Introduction

In the context of expanding educational and professional interactions, proficiency in Russian remains an important component of language education for students at higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. However, successful language acquisition requires not only knowledge of grammatical rules and an adequate vocabulary but also the ability to perceive and reproduce spoken language accurately. Pronunciation frequently becomes one of the first obstacles to effective and fluent communication.

This issue is particularly significant during the first year of university studies, when students adapt to new learning environments and gradually move from completing isolated language exercises to engaging in independent verbal interaction. Their initial levels of language proficiency may vary considerably. Therefore, teachers need to consider not only curriculum requirements but also students' actual communicative abilities.

One of the main causes of pronunciation difficulties is phonetic interference, which refers to the influence of previously acquired native-language pronunciation habits on the acquisition of the target language's sound system. Differences between Russian and Uzbek are particularly evident in the distinction between hard and soft consonants, the realization of unstressed vowels, word stress placement, and the intonational organization of utterances.

For example, when learning Russian, particular attention should be paid to distinguishing hard and soft consonants in word pairs such as *угол — уголь* (corner — coal) and *мел — мель* (chalk — shallow water). Equally important is practicing the pronunciation of unstressed vowels in words such as *вода* (water), *молоко* (milk), and *хорошо* (well), as well as mastering variable word stress in forms such as *ру́ки — руки́* (hands — of the hand) and *го́род — города́* (city — cities). Such exercises help students understand that Russian pronunciation is determined not only by individual sounds but also by the overall phonetic structure of spoken words.

As a practical solution, a three-stage instructional cycle, **"Listen — Pronounce — Use,"** is proposed. Unlike isolated phonetic drills, this approach enables students to work with the same linguistic material through successive stages, progressing from auditory discrimination to independent speech

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production. The cycle can be incorporated into regular classroom activities without requiring a separate, extended phonetics lesson.

At the **"Listen"** stage, the teacher presents two pronunciation variants and asks students to identify the word they hear, for example, *мел — мель* or *угол — уголь*. Students then identify which consonant feature changes the meaning of the word. The objective is not to guess the answer based on spelling but to recognize phonetic differences through listening.

At the **"Pronounce"** stage, students compare tongue positions when producing hard and soft consonants, repeat syllables and words, and subsequently record a short phrase using their mobile phones. When practicing word stress, it is useful to compare forms such as *ру́ки — руки́* and *го́род — города́*. The teacher draws attention to changes in the pronunciation of unstressed vowels, ensuring that students do not substitute letter-by-letter reading for natural pronunciation.

At the **"Use"** stage, the phonetic feature being studied is integrated into communicative activities. For instance, in a pair-work task entitled **"Clarify the Information,"** one student provides an address or a name, while the other asks for clarification and repeats the information received. The teacher primarily assesses the intelligibility of the message and subsequently evaluates the accuracy of individual sounds. This sequence prevents error correction from becoming an obstacle to communication.

The use of digital educational tools also deserves particular attention. Audio recordings, electronic dictionaries with pronunciation features, and speech-recording applications allow students to listen repeatedly to model pronunciation and compare it with their own speech. Nevertheless, digital tools should primarily be regarded as supplementary resources supporting the teacher's work, since automated pronunciation assessment systems cannot always reliably explain the nature of pronunciation errors.

Another important methodological requirement is the creation of a supportive speaking environment. Fear of making mistakes often reduces students' willingness to participate, particularly when speaking in front of a group. Therefore, pronunciation correction should be systematic, constructive, and focused on achieving intelligible speech rather than formally eliminating every characteristic of a learner's accent.

For ongoing diagnostic assessment, the same short set of tasks can be administered before and after the instructional cycle: (1) auditory discrimination of five word pairs; (2) reading ten words containing the target phonetic features; and (3) delivering a 30–40-second oral statement. Errors are recorded separately according to the following categories: consonant palatalization, word stress, vowel reduction, and intonational completeness. Comparing recordings helps identify individual pronunciation difficulties. This assessment framework is presented as a methodological proposal; quantitative results from its practical implementation are not provided in the present paper.

Thus, pronunciation skills should be viewed not as an isolated technique involving the repetition of sounds but as an integral component of intelligible oral communication. The proposed **"Listen — Pronounce — Use"** cycle connects phonetic observation, articulatory training, and communicative tasks. Its effectiveness within a particular student group should be evaluated through comparable diagnostic activities.

The practical significance of the proposed approach lies in its applicability to Russian language classes in both language-related and non-language-related academic programs. The presented instructional sequence can be used to develop classroom exercises, methodological guidelines, and diagnostic materials for students at the initial stage of university education.

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