

A CASE STUDY OF VOCABULARY ACQUISITION CHALLENGES FACED BY UZBEK LEARNERS: A MIXED RESEARCH APPROACH

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Abstract:

This research paper deals with investigations over major vocabulary acquisition challenges that Uzbek learners have faced, as well some alternative solutions to tackle the matter. More than 100 individuals were subjected to take part in self-made questionnaires and semi-structured interviews so as to find out key factors in difficulties of vocabulary acquisition. Both questionnaire and interviews were divided into three sub – groups, including background information of learners, exposure and practice, linguistic challenges they have met during their studies. The main reason of this division was to clarify underlying reasons of the issue deeper.

Questionnaires indicated that most of individuals learned new words by only repetition, but not in the context. In addition to that most candidates with difficulties in acquiring new words claimed a lack of target language usage in their daily lives which seems to be a main barrier to handle.

Furthermore, there were some specific differentiations for the culture making it difficult to acquire a language, such as phonology, syntax, word order, expressive means and stylistic devices. Having diagnosed all the data supported by questionnaires and interviews, this research paper covers some effective implementation to make learning language process easier for Uzbek students.

First of all, it is recommended to pay more attention to practical usage of vocabulary with a help of exposure to English atmosphere. This will give learners an opportunity to use what they have learnt in practice.

Secondly, it will be better for second language learners, as long as they focus not only on individual words, but on collocations and word chunks used together. In this case it will be quite straightforward for them to make up sentences. Last but not the least, teaching differences and similarities of phonology and word formation of Uzbek and English language may play a crucial role in learning a target language.

Keywords: Diagnostic analysis, language acquisition, mixed approach.

Introduction

Learning new languages has already turned out to be the major step towards a successful career and educational growth thanks to the advancements of technology, diplomacy and so on. Maybe that's why public interest in acquiring foreign languages has increased dramatically over the last decade. The globalized world requires strong communication skills, places a strong emphasis on successful vocabulary acquisition, especially for non-native learners.

As every nation has their own culture, perception, mother tongue and phonology, their experience of acquiring English varies significantly. Take Uzbek learners and Russian learners as an example. As Russian language and English language considered to be Indo-European languages, they may show some resemblance on their grammatical structure, or word order in a sentence. So it may be easier for Russian learners to learn English when compared to Uzbek learners.

Getting closer to the vocabulary acquisition challenges of Uzbek learners, we can easily detect major unique differences of two languages, namely Uzbek and English making life difficult for language learners. The main differences arise in terms of syntax, word order, pronunciation, which are the milestones to overcome during learning process. For Uzbek learners, English vocabulary acquisition arises unique challenges due to nation's linguistic and socio-cultural difference. Actually, there have been many studies conducted on vocabulary acquisition challenges faced by primarily Uzbek learners, it still remains to be one of the under – researched topic. This gap is particularly concerning given Uzbekistan's increasing focus on English language education and its integration into various sectors.

This study aims to investigate the specific vocabulary acquisition challenges encountered by Uzbek learners of English at the university level, focusing on the influence of L1 interference, learning strategies, and motivational factors. Specifically, this research will examine how the syntactical, grammatical and cultural differences between Uzbek and English, such as word order and parts of speech affect the learners' ability to acquire and retain new vocabulary.

Furthermore, the study will explore the effectiveness of various vocabulary learning strategies employed by Uzbek learners and how daily usage of acquired vocabulary impact their learning outcomes. By identifying these challenges and understanding their underlying causes, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers to enhance English vocabulary instruction for Uzbek learners, ultimately contributing to improved English proficiency and greater academic and professional opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been conducted by many specialists on this field to ensure successful acquisition of the target language. Researchers have divided the main factors for challenges into three groups: linguistic interference, socio – cultural factors, as well as learning strategies and pedagogical approaches.

Language learning challenges are often context-specific. What I mean by this is that what works for learners of one language background may not work for others. That's why many specialists of different nations and cultures have exerted themselves to this matter. Take Abuhabil S., Alramly S. , Alijoroshee F. and Ijouely A. as an example. They have conducted a study to pinpoint the specific problems Libyan secondary school learners in Misurata face when learning English vocabulary and methods that can be utilized for them. Furthermore, Scott Thornbury, who is highly respected figure in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) , especially in the field of vocabulary acquisition. Thornbury (2004) advocates for a “lexical approach “to language teaching and highlights the importance of equipping learners with strategies for independent vocabulary learning. He also claims that some factors give rise to acquisition challenges, such as pronunciation, spelling, grammar, meaning, connotation and others.

When it comes to Uzbek learners and their difficulties in learning this language, there haven't been done sufficient research. One of specialists who has conducted research in this field is Dilafruz Shamsiddinovna, teacher at World Languages

University. During her research, she found out that almost all students struggle with pronunciation, writing, spelling and using grammatical patterns properly. However, there is still a need for further clarification and understanding.

METHODOLOGY

The research used a quantitative approach to find main challenges and their root causes. More than 100 English language learners ranging from beginner learners to advanced learners were subjected to answer a self – made questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sub-groups, namely demographics and background, exposure and practice, linguistic challenges, and methods.

No	Main sub-groups	Specific Features	Expected results
1.	Demographics and background	Age, nationality, period of learning the language	Young adults, Uzbek , 4 to 5 years
2.	Exposure and practice	Daily usage of the language, passive reading and listening, language production	Insufficient exposure and usage
3.	Linguistic challenges	The differences of languages in pronunciation, spelling, connotation, lexicology and grammar.	Pronunciation and spelling
4.	Methods	Memorizations, flashcards	Memorization

RESULTS

In the following pages, you will get informed about the results of the questionnaire. I polled more than 100 young adults of different status and language level, using quantitative approach to get their perspective. The learners polled were the participants of two – month online lessons, mainly aimed at boosting general English. As their speaking mentor, I requested them to take part in my poll and define their vocabulary acquisition challenges. We will analyze results according to characteristics of the questions. This is the students' responses about their background and demographics:

Nº	Question	Option1	%	Option2	%	Option3	%
1	How old are you ?	10-20	53	21-30	36	31-50	11
2	Level in English	elementary	44	Intermediate	46	Advanced	10
3	Period of learning the language	1-3	68	4-6	21	7-10	11
4.	Mother tongue	Uzbek	91	Russian	5	Kazak	4

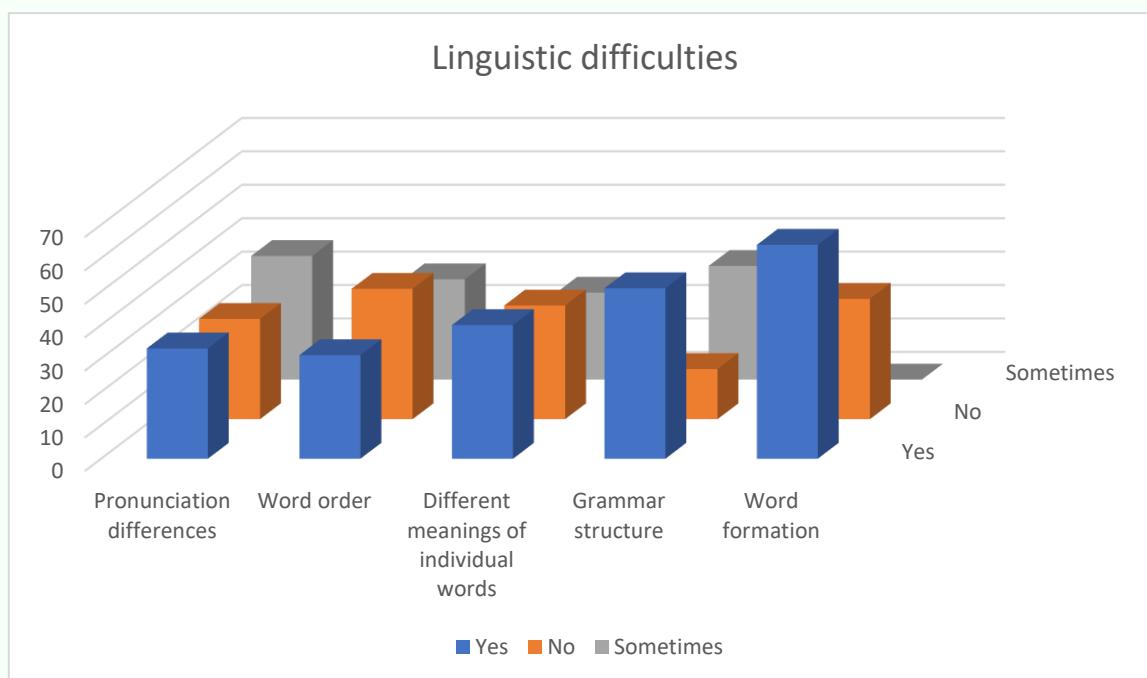
As we can infer from the table above, 53 percent of participants are young adults and middle-aged language learners account for 36 %. When we compare the level of learners, intermediate level learners dominate the trend. Additionally, it was noted that 68% of the participants who took part in the survey have been learning English for 1 to 3 years, and the majority of the participants, specifically 91%, were found to be Uzbek learners.

Summarizing the results of the initial research, the majority of participants have an intermediate level of English proficiency and have been learning English for 1 to 3 years.

The chart below shows the trend of student's exposure to the target language and their practice:



This table illustrates how frequently students use the language in their daily lives and the practical application of the learned language in real-world contexts. Students' responses were categorized as "yes," "no," or "sometimes". We divided English language skills into two categories: receptive and productive skills. Regarding receptive skills, less than 10% of students highlighted that they read texts in English, while slightly over half (54%) stated that they listen to audio in English in their daily lives. In conclusion, while the majority of participants listen to audio, songs, and podcasts in English, they read relatively few texts in this language. When discussing productive skills, 51% of students noted that they do not regularly write texts in the language they are learning.



Through the following diagram above, we can identify the potential linguistic difficulties that Uzbek learners might encounter while learning English. We have categorized these linguistic difficulties into five types, and we will analyze them one by one.

Pronunciation differences. Most of the candidate, precisely, 70% of the participants indicated that the pronunciation of English words makes it difficult to memorize new vocabulary. It is important to note that since English and Uzbek belong to different language families, their pronunciations are fundamentally

different, and this results in one of the main challenges in the process of learning English.

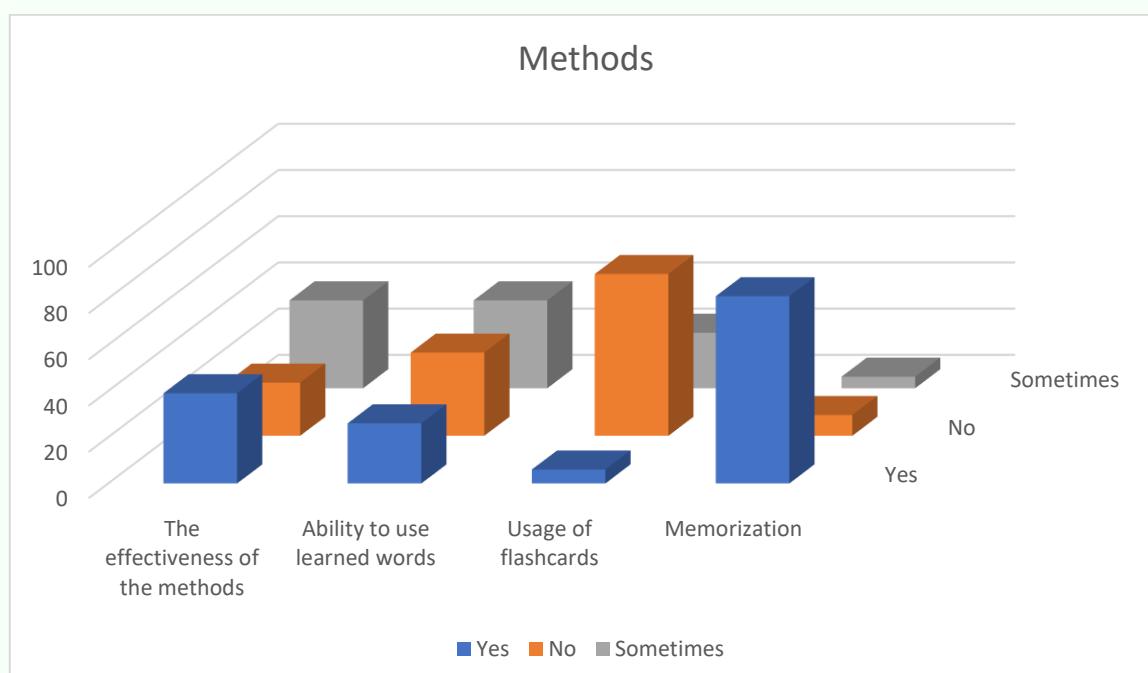
Word order. More than half of the participants (61%) emphasized that the word order in English sentences poses a difficulty for them

Different meanings of individual words. When asked about the various meanings of a word in English, 47% of the participants stated that this consistently causes difficulties for them, while 33% mentioned that it is sometimes problematic. In conclusion, a total of 80% of the participants struggle with learning words that have multiple meanings.

Grammar structure. In total, 85% of the students struggle with acquiring words due to the grammatical structure of the English language.

Word formation. More than 50 % of participants find it difficult to cope with word formation.

During my three – year's experience I have witnessed students having problems to use what they have learned in practice, especially in terms of grammar rules and vocabulary they have been introduced. Now, let's take a look at the diagram below presenting mostly-utilized methods and their effectiveness.



The figures above illustrates that only 36 % of participants can not use the words they have learned in practice which was contrary to my own experience. As for

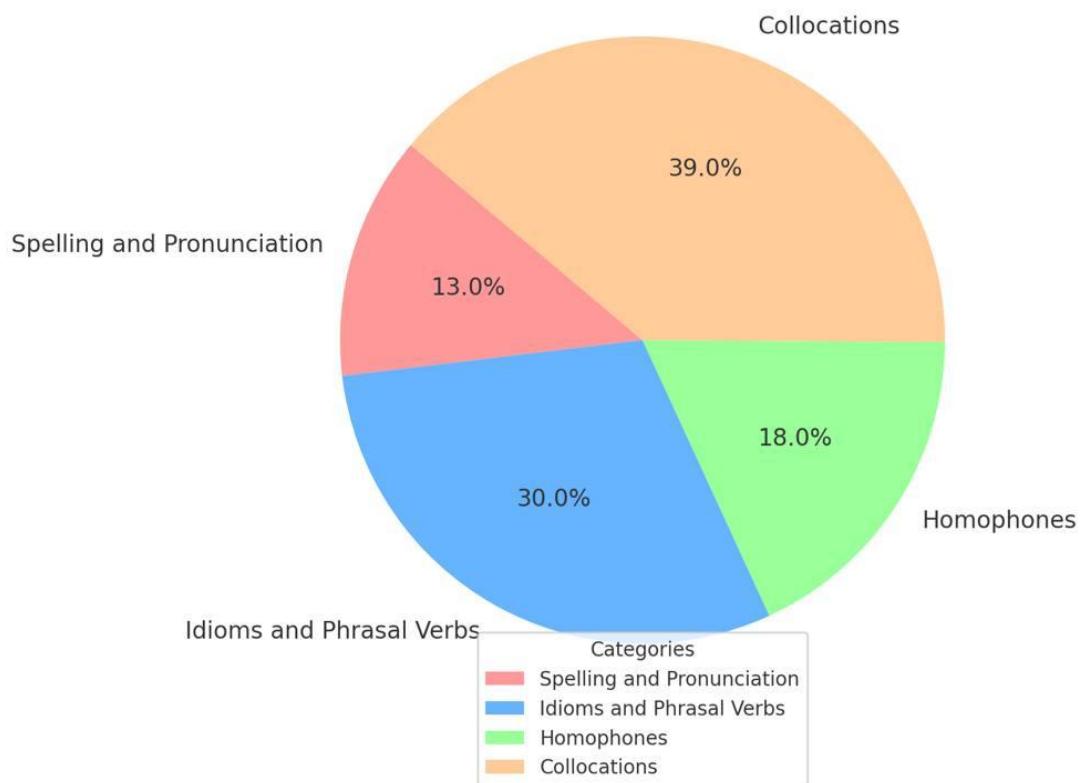
the methods in vocabulary learning process, 81 percent of candidates memorize words in order to learn them.

DISCUSSIONS

Comparing the data above these figures alone indicate that Uzbek learners use English very minimally in their daily lives and lack sufficient exposure to the language. We can conclude that one of the most significant barriers to learning English for Uzbek learners is not only vocabulary acquisition but also the insufficient practical use of the target language.

Furthermore, it can be mentioned that in English, the word order is primarily ‘subject + predicate,’ which differs from the grammar of the Uzbek language, where the subject is placed at the beginning of the sentence and the predicate is at the end. The significant difference in grammar is also a main challenge faced by Uzbek learners. During my research, I compared my results with those of the article written by Dilafruz Shamsiddinova. Here, I want to include the data collected by Dilafruz Shamsiddinova, showing the distribution of language learning aspects.

Distribution of Language Learning Aspects



If we compare the data collected by myself and the data above, we can notice some minor differences. The former shows that pronunciation and word formation dominate the trend, while in the latter we can see that most participants have found dealing with collocations and phrasal verbs more challenging when compared with spelling and pronunciation.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, not only working on vocabulary but also mastering the language is a time-consuming and challenging process for Uzbek learners of English. The lack of sufficient opportunities to use the language makes this process even more difficult for many language learners.

The differences between the two languages that create difficulties for language learners are primarily grammatical, syntactic, and morphological. Since English and Uzbek belong to different language families, new methods and techniques are needed to further improve the language learning process.

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