

CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges faced by rural students in learning English, with a particular focus on the educational context of Uzbekistan. Despite the growing importance of English as a global language and its role in securing scholarships, employment, and international mobility, rural learners continue to face significant barriers to effective learning. Using a combination of classroom observations, personal teaching experience, and informal interviews with rural students, the research identifies key obstacles such as limited access to qualified teachers, outdated learning materials, inadequate exposure to real-life English use, and socio-economic constraints. In addition, cultural perceptions and traditional mindsets often discourage students, particularly girls, from fully investing in English education. The findings call for targeted policy measures, improved teacher training, digital access, and community support programs to bridge the rural-urban gap.

Аннотация: В данном исследовании рассматриваются трудности, с которыми сталкиваются сельские учащиеся при изучении английского языка, с особым акцентом на образовательный контекст Узбекистана. Несмотря на растущую важность английского языка как глобального языка и его роль в получении стипендий, трудоустройстве и международной мобильности, сельские учащиеся продолжают сталкиваться со значительными препятствиями на пути к эффективному обучению. Используя сочетание наблюдений в классах, личного опыта преподавания и неформальных интервью с сельскими учащимися, исследование выявляет ключевые препятствия, такие как ограниченный доступ к квалифицированным преподавателям, устаревшие учебные материалы, недостаточное знакомство с реальным использованием английского языка и социально-экономические ограничения. Кроме того, культурные представления и традиционный менталитет часто препятствуют учащимся, особенно девочкам, в полной мере инвестировать в изучение английского языка. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о необходимости принятия целенаправленных мер политики, улучшения подготовки учителей, расширения доступа к цифровым технологиям и программ поддержки сообществ для преодоления разрыва между сельскими и городскими районами.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot qishloq o'quvchilari ingliz tilini o'rganishda duch keladigan qiyinchiliklarni o'rganib, O'zbekistondagi ta'lim sharoitiga alohida e'tibor qaratadi. Ingliz tilining global til sifatidagi ahamiyati ortib borayotganiga va uning stipendiyalar, bandlik va xalqaro mobillikni ta'minlashdagi roliga qaramay, qishloq o'quvchilari samarali o'rganish uchun jiddiy to'siqlarga duch kelishda davom etmoqda. Sinfdagi kuzatuvlar, shaxsiy o'qitish tajribasi va qishloq o'quvchilari bilan norasmiy suhbatlar kombinatsiyasidan foydalangan holda tadqiqot malakali o'qituvchilardan foydalanish cheklanganligi, eskirgan o'quv materiallari, real hayotda ingliz tilidan yetarli darajada foydalanmaslik va ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy cheklovlar kabi asosiy to'siqlarni aniqlaydi. Bundan tashqari, madaniy tushunchalar ko'pincha o'quvchilarni, xususan, qizlarni ingliz tili ta'limiga to'liq sarmoya kiritishdan to'xtatadi. Topilmalar maqsadli siyosat choralari ko'rishni, o'qituvchilar malakasini oshirish, raqamli foydalanishni ta'minlashni va qishloq va shahar orasidagi tafovutni bartaraf etish uchun jamoatchilikni qo'llab-quvvatlash dasturlarini talab qiladi.

Keywords: English language learning, rural students, education challenges, access to resources, language policy, Uzbekistan, language acquisition barriers

Ключевые слова: изучение английского языка, сельские учащиеся, проблемы образования, доступ к ресурсам, языковая политика, Узбекистан, барьеры в освоении языка.

Kalit so'zlar: ingliz tilini o'rganish, qishloq o'quvchilari, ta'lim muammolari, resurslardan foydalanish, til siyosati, O'zbekiston, tilni o'zlashtirish to'siqlar

Introduction: In the twenty-first century, English functions as a global lingua franca for science, higher education, international business, and digital communication. For students everywhere, competence in English is increasingly associated with access: access to up-to-date knowledge and research, access to scholarships and exchange programs, and access to competitive employment markets. In countries undergoing rapid reform and international integration, such as Uzbekistan, English is therefore more than a school subject, it is really a strategic skill that shapes academic and career pathways. Despite this broad importance, the reality of learning English in rural areas is markedly different from that in cities. Across many districts and regions, village schools face persistent structural and social barriers that limit learners' progress. The current study springs from first-hand experience teaching in a village and from classroom observations at the university level, these perspectives reveal a gap between national ambitions for English competence and the everyday conditions rural students encounter. Several interrelated problems reduce the effectiveness of English education in rural contexts. First, infrastructure and resource shortages are widespread. Many village schools lack modern textbooks, listening and speaking materials, or modern curricula that promote communicative competence rather than rote memorization.

Where audio-visual equipment, language labs, or simple internet access are absent, students have little opportunity for autonomous practice or exposure to authentic English input. Secondly, digital use limits rural learners' ability to benefit from online and AI-enhanced tools. Globally, artificial intelligence (AI) and web platforms (online courses, language apps, video lessons) offer low-cost ways to practice and access high-quality instruction. However, impaired connectivity, lack of personal devices, and low digital literacy mean that these opportunities remain largely poor for many village students. Even when the internet is available, weak bandwidth and limited teacher training on how to integrate digital resources combat effective use. Third, challenges arise from the education system and instructional practices themselves. In many rural schools teaching remains exam-oriented and teacher-centered: emphasis on grammar rules, translation, and written tests overshadows speaking, listening, and communicative use. Professional development for teachers is uneven, while some educators are well trained and motivated, many rural teachers have limited access to continuous training, little exposure to modern methodologies, and few incentives to update their pedagogical skills. This affects not only lesson quality but also students' motivation and confidence. Fourth, socio-economic and cultural factors play a major role. Poverty, household responsibilities, and long distances to school reduce time for study and extracurricular practice. In some communities, traditional attitudes about the purpose of education or about girls' roles can lower expectations for language study, so students perceive English as irrelevant or reserved for the few who will leave the village. Consequently, many rural learners hold outdated or instrumental views of English ("it's only for exams" or "it's for city people"), which undermines sustained engagement. Finally, although national policies increasingly recognize the value of English (for example, incentives connected to international certificates or university admission advantages), implementation gaps remain. Policy measures that work in urban institutions do not automatically translate to rural settings without targeted funding, teacher support, and infrastructure investment.

Given these realities, this paper aims to document and analyze the principal obstacles rural students face when learning English and to give voice to their perspectives as seen through classroom observation, document analysis, and interviews. Specifically, the study asks: What are the primary structural, pedagogical, and socio-cultural barriers to English learning in rural Uzbekistan? How do rural students and local professionals perceive the value and purpose of English? Where do policy and local practice diverge, and what implications does this have for equitable language education?

Methods: This study was carried out by the researcher, who served as a volunteer English teacher for approximately three months in a rural village located in

the Navoi region of Uzbekistan. The main purpose was to identify the challenges faced by rural students in learning English and to explore practical ways to overcome them. To achieve this, several methods were employed.

Firstly, the researcher designed and administered a survey among schoolchildren to investigate their perspectives and attitudes toward learning English. The results showed that most students demonstrated limited motivation, perceiving English as a difficult and unnecessary subject. This step was essential in understanding the outlook and mindset of rural learners.

Secondly, the researcher conducted a diagnostic test to measure the students' existing knowledge of English. The results revealed that proficiency levels were very poor, with many learners struggling even with basic grammar and vocabulary. This provided a realistic baseline for developing further strategies in the classroom.

Thirdly, the researcher personally carried out classroom teaching for small groups of village children. The lessons focused on practical aspects of English such as vocabulary building, conversational skills, and essential grammar. While attempts were made to incorporate modern resources such as mobile applications and AI-supported tools, the effectiveness of these was limited due to poor internet connectivity and lack of digital devices in the area. In addition, the researcher conducted observations in the local school to assess the professional level of English teachers. The findings indicated that many teachers lacked advanced pedagogical training and had limited access to updated teaching resources. As a result, outdated methodologies were often used, which hindered students' progress.

By combining these methods: survey, diagnostic testing, classroom teaching, and observation, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the barriers rural students face in English learning, while also testing and reflecting on practical teaching strategies that could contribute to long-term improvement.

Results: The findings of this study strongly confirm the critical importance of English for rural students' educational and professional futures, while also highlighting the barriers they face.

The survey results demonstrated that although students generally recognized the global significance of English, particularly for securing international opportunities, accessing scholarships, and expanding career choices, their own attitudes were shaped by a lack of confidence and limited exposure. Many learners considered English too difficult or irrelevant to their daily lives, reflecting the need for stronger motivation and contextualized teaching approaches.

The diagnostic test further confirmed the seriousness of the problem. A large portion of students struggled with even the most basic aspects of the language, such as greetings, numbers, and common vocabulary. This suggested that without systematic

support, they would be unable to compete with their urban peers, who often have access to better schools and private tutoring.

The teaching sessions provided by the researcher showed promising outcomes, even if modest at first. During the initial lessons, students demonstrated hesitation and very limited knowledge. However, after three months of regular instruction, their performance improved significantly. Many students began using simple conversational phrases, actively participating in class discussions, and displaying greater motivation to continue learning English. This rapid improvement highlighted the transformative effect of consistent exposure and interactive teaching methods, even in a resource-limited environment. The school observations also confirmed the importance of improving teacher quality in rural areas. Since many teachers had outdated knowledge and lacked modern teaching resources, students were not receiving instruction that met international standards. This underlines the crucial role of teacher training and professional development in improving outcomes for rural learners. Overall, the results highlight that while the current situation of English learning in rural areas is challenging, the importance of mastering English remains undeniable. Students, teachers, and communities recognize that English opens doors to higher education, better employment, and global cultural exchange. The study makes clear that bridging the gap between rural and urban students is both urgent and achievable with targeted interventions.

Discussion: Our study shows that lack of access to digital resources, quality teaching, digital knowledge and opportunities hinder English learning in villages, which is consistent with previous research conducted in similar contexts. Limited financial resources prevent schools from providing modern learning materials, and many students lack parental support in practicing English at home.

These barriers not only reduce students' opportunities to improve their language skills but also affect their self-confidence and future academic prospects. Implementing online learning platforms and teacher training programs could help mitigate these challenges, making English learning more accessible in rural communities.

Conclusion: This study has provided me with a deep understanding of the barriers that rural students face in learning English and has allowed me to directly witness the limitations of the current education system in remote areas of Uzbekistan. Through surveys, diagnostic testing, classroom teaching, and observation, I was able to see not only the challenges, such as outdated teaching methods, limited resources, and poor access to technology, but also the determination and hidden potential of rural students. Personally, this experience has been transformative. It has shown me that improving education, especially English learning, in rural communities requires both dedication and long-term vision. I realized that true change will not come easily, and it demands hard work, strong leadership, and systemic reform. From this study, I have

promised myself to commit to this mission. In the future, I aim to become a leader and manager in the field of education, where I can develop innovative policies and projects that directly address these inequalities. My dream is to continue my studies at world-class institutions such as Harvard University, where I can gain the knowledge and skills needed to bring sustainable change to Uzbekistan's education system. This research was not only an academic exercise but also a personal journey. It taught me that while rural students face immense barriers, they also have a strong passion for learning. With proper support, training, and opportunities, they are capable of reaching their fullest potential. This realization strengthens my commitment to ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has the chance to access quality education and the transformative power of English.

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