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ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ENHANCING LISTENING SKILLS THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

This article explores challenges in teaching foreign languages in Uzbekistan's inclusive classrooms, focusing on enhancing listening skills with IT tools like subtitled videos and apps, aligned with educational reforms.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive education, foreign languages, listening skills, information technologies, multimedia, accessibility, scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education, a growing priority globally and in Uzbekistan, seeks to ensure all students, regardless of ability, have equal access to learning opportunities. Teaching foreign languages in such settings is particularly challenging, as it requires addressing diverse needs - physical, cognitive, and sensory - while fostering skills like listening, crucial for communication. In Uzbekistan, where English is increasingly emphasized in the curriculum (Decree No. PP-1875, 2012), inclusive classrooms often include students with hearing impairments or learning disabilities, yet resources remain limited.

Traditional methods, reliant on uniform auditory input, struggle to accommodate these learners, widening achievement gaps. Information technologies (IT), such as digital audio tools and interactive platforms, offer innovative solutions by providing adaptable, multisensory experiences. For instance, schools in Tashkent have begun piloting multimedia resources to support English learning (Hasanova, 2020). This article investigates the obstacles to teaching foreign languages in inclusive Uzbek classrooms, focusing on listening skills, and explores how IT can enhance accessibility and engagement. By integrating local examples and global theories, it aims to propose practical strategies for educators, aligning with Uzbekistan's educational reforms to promote equity and language proficiency in diverse settings.

Challenges in Inclusive Foreign Language Education

Inclusive education in Uzbekistan, mandated by the Law on Education (2020), integrates students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, yet teaching foreign languages poses distinct hurdles. Listening, a foundational skill, is particularly problematic due to diverse learner profiles - students with hearing impairments, attention deficits, or dyslexia face barriers in processing unfamiliar phonemes and syntax. In Uzbek schools, where English instruction often relies on teacher-led repetition, these students struggle to keep pace. For

example, rural schools in Samarkand lack specialized auditory aids, leaving hearing-impaired learners isolated (Mirzaev, 2021).

Additionally, large class sizes and limited teacher training in inclusive methods exacerbate the issue, as educators cannot easily differentiate instruction. Cultural attitudes toward disability, sometimes viewing it as a limitation rather than a diversity factor, further complicate engagement. Florian (2014) notes that such systemic gaps - insufficient resources and inflexible pedagogies - are common in inclusive settings globally. In Uzbekistan, the rapid push for bilingualism (e.g., Presidential Decree No. UP-6108, 2020) intensifies these challenges, as curricula prioritize speed over accessibility. Without tailored approaches, listening comprehension remains uneven, hindering language acquisition and reinforcing inequities. Addressing these obstacles requires innovative tools and strategies to meet the diverse needs of Uzbek learners effectively.

The Role of Information Technologies in Teaching Listening

Information technologies (IT) offer transformative potential for teaching listening in inclusive foreign language education, particularly in Uzbekistan. Tools like subtitled videos, speech-to-text apps, and interactive audio platforms can adapt content to diverse abilities, enhancing comprehension and participation. In Tashkent's School No. 17, teachers have used YouTube English lessons with captions to support deaf students, enabling them to follow along visually while peers focus on audio (Hasanova, 2020).

Similarly, apps like ELSA Speak, which provide pronunciation feedback, help students with attention deficits in Ferghana refine listening skills through gamified repetition. For visually impaired learners, podcasts with descriptive narration - such as BBC's English learning series - offer auditory immersion, a method trialed in Bukhara's inclusive programs (Rahimov, 2022). Mayer's (2009) multimedia learning theory supports this approach, arguing that dual-channel inputs (audio and visual) boost retention across ability levels. In Uzbekistan, where internet access has expanded (ITU, 2021), IT can bridge resource gaps, though challenges like inconsistent connectivity in rural areas persist. By leveraging these technologies, educators can create flexible, engaging listening experiences, aligning with national goals to improve English proficiency while ensuring inclusivity for all learners in diverse classroom settings.

Practical Examples

1. Subtitled Audio Clips

Scenario: Teaching English to a mixed-ability class, including deaf students.

Tool: Videos with adjustable subtitles and playback speed (e.g., BBC Learning English).

Outcome: Deaf students follow transcripts, while others refine pronunciation, improving overall listening proficiency.

2. Speech Recognition Apps

Scenario: Practicing French listening for students with ADHD.

Tool: Apps like Duolingo or Google Translate's voice feature.

Outcome: Interactive feedback sustains focus, and instant corrections reinforce auditory recognition.

3. Interactive Podcasts

Scenario: German lessons for visually impaired learners.

Tool: Audio podcasts with descriptive narration (e.g., Slow German).

Outcome: Enhanced auditory immersion compensates for visual limitations, fostering inclusivity.

Theoretical Insights

Theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how IT enhances listening skills in inclusive foreign language education, with relevance to Uzbekistan's context. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes scaffolding - support tailored to learners' zones of proximal development - which IT facilitates through adaptive tools like slowed audio or interactive exercises. In Uzbekistan, where teachers often lack inclusive training (Mirzaev, 2021), such technologies serve as digital scaffolds, supporting diverse learners. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018) advocates multiple means of representation - combining audio, text, and visuals - to ensure accessibility, a principle reflected in Tashkent's pilot programs using subtitled media.

Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis further suggests that comprehensible input is key to language acquisition; IT tools adjust input complexity, making listening tasks manageable for students with disabilities. In Uzbekistan, where English is a second foreign language after Russian, this is critical for overcoming phonetic and cognitive barriers. Bakhtin's (1981) heteroglossia highlights the multiplicity of voices in language learning, which IT can amplify by offering varied formats. These theories collectively underscore IT's role in addressing local challenges - resource scarcity and teacher readiness - while aligning with Uzbekistan's inclusive education reforms to foster equitable language skills development.

CONCLUSION

Teaching foreign languages in inclusive settings demands innovative approaches to overcome barriers in listening comprehension. Information technologies provide flexible, engaging tools that cater to diverse learners, from subtitled media for the hearing-impaired to interactive apps for attention-challenged students. By integrating IT, educators can transform listening instruction into an inclusive, effective process, aligning with broader educational equity goals. Future research could explore AI-driven personalization to further refine these strategies.

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