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## TEACHING THE ACCURATE PRONUNCIATION AND DISTINCTION OF THE UZBEK SOUNDS “X” AND “H” TO ENGLISH LEARNERS

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore suitable methods for teaching English students who learn Uzbek to accurately and properly produce the Uzbek sounds “x” and “h”. Since these two sounds are not phonetically open and do not exist in English phonetics, students who learn Uzbek may find the pronunciation of these two sound really difficult at first. Actually, not only foreign learners, but also native speakers of Uzbek may be confused if they are not familiar with the proper rules and techniques to pronounce “x” and “h”. For reasons above, this paper explores effective methods for teaching and learning the two Uzbek phonemes.

**Keywords:** Phonology, pronunciation, experimental phonetic method, descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, glottal fricative, velar fricative.

### Introduction

According to Pennington and Richards, pronunciation is a central concern of language teaching. From the past and also modern language teaching states that pronunciation is a bridge to speaking in the targeted language. At present, I think there is no doubt that no one questions whether pronunciation is the center of the language curriculum. Although the amount of research on pronunciation teaching is steadily increasing, there is still much more to explore about the effects and effectiveness of different approaches at different learning stages and proficiency levels (Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). In Uzbek language, there is not enough research to establish teaching techniques to train students who learn



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Uzbek. When it comes to phonology and pronunciation of Uzbek, it is common that some phonemes in Uzbek are difficult to pronounce, like “x” and “h”.

The consonants “x” and “h” are “x” is voiceless velar fricatives and “h” is a voiceless glottal fricative. These two are separate phonemes. English speakers of Uzbek often confuse these two sounds because English does not have “x” sound. Replacement of “x” and “h” creates errors and misspelling of words like xona “room” instead of hona, which is a nonexistent word.

From the reasons above, the purpose of the research is to determine the definite pronunciation issue of speakers of English and to find out teaching techniques that allow them to learn the right pronunciation of these two consonants.

### **Participants**

The experiment was carried out among 15 students of English speaking country in the third year who were taking a first course of the Uzbek language at a university.

### **Methods**

In this study, the “Experimental Phonetic Method” was applied in order to analyze the articulatory and acoustic characteristics of the sounds [x] and [h]. A group of words (xona, yaxshi, xurmo, xalta, hazil, shuhrat, rahmat, hurmat) was recorded from English speakers and Uzbek speakers at the same time for comparison. Then the recordings were analyzed with the help of “Praat” and “Audacity” software to identify formant frequencies. The findings were presented to provide suggestions for teaching pronunciation. Also, this study applied Descriptive Analysis. This approach was used to describe the articulatory position, manner of production, and acoustic characteristics of the sounds [x] and [h] pronounced by native English speakers and Uzbek students. Another applied method to identify and describe similarities and differences between the sounds [h] and [x] in Uzbek and the sound [h] in English is Comparative Analysis. In this stage, students were given different words from Uzbek and English focusing on the sound [h]. For example, hurmat/house, hozir/hot, holat/home. Since the sound [x] is not exist in English phonology, they were given xurmo/Bach (French name). With the help of this approach, it became clear why the sound [x] is glottal and the sound [h] is



velar fricative. The results found similarities and differences were used as recommendation to teach the pronunciation of these words.

## Materials

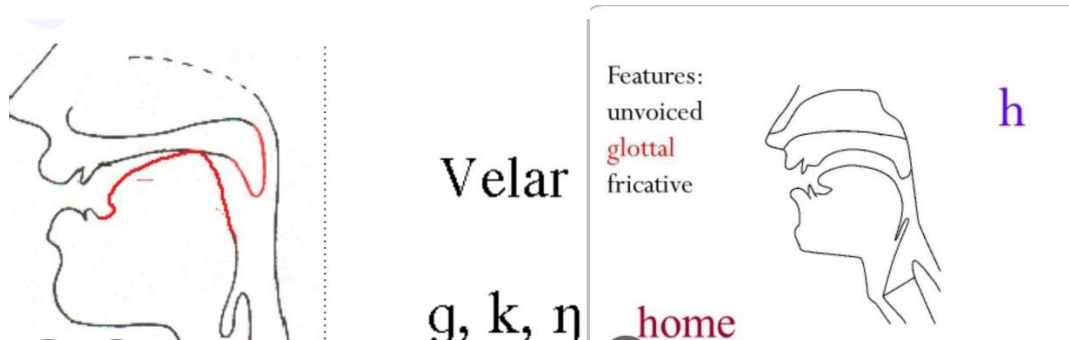
Materials used were minimal pair lists, native speaker recordings in Uzbek native language, and phonetic charts that illustrated points of articulation for "x" and "h". Additionally, "Praat" and "Audacity" software were used for experimental phonetic method.

Xona- hona (room)

Xalta- halta (sack)

Xurmo- hurmo (persimmon)

Xomush- homush (sad)



## Procedure

**The study took three stages:**

1. Diagnosis Stage: Audio recordings of the student's first-time pronunciations of "x" and "h" were made and analyzed using a phonetic checking app (Praat and Audacity).
2. Instruction Stage: A series of articulatory explanations, images, and imitation practice lessons was given. Students were shown how "x" is created at the back of the mouth with airflow restricted near the velum, and "h" is created at the glottis with an open voice movement without the use of the tongue.
3. Assessment Stage: Pre-instruction records of students were compared with post-instruction records to measure progress in the accuracy of pronunciation.



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## Results and Discussion

The outcomes showed dramatic improvement in the learners' accuracy of pronunciation. Pre-instruction tests showed that, 75% of the participants pronounced "x" as "h" in an incorrect way. After intense practice in pronunciation, the figure for students who pronounced incorrect declined to 20%. The spectrographic analysis showed more distinction in the place of articulation and greater consistency in the production of the two sounds.

Students also swore to greater consciousness and confidence regarding articulation in speaking Uzbek. Qualitative feedbacks showed that native-speaker audio models and visual models were most effective.

## Conclusion

From the results, it seems that conscious phonetic training by means of auditory, visual modeling and experimental phonetic method can be effective in reducing pronunciation errors in English learners of Uzbek. As the "x" sound is natively nonexistent for speakers of English, there needs to be a conscious articulatory explanation. The teachers must emphasize instruction:

Demonstrating articulation placement using diagrams, mirrors or software like "Praat" and "Audacity";

Drilling minimal pairs to enhance auditory discrimination;

Using record-and-compare routines for self-correction;

This drill can be applied to other Uzbek and similar languages' non-English sounds;

All in all, practice in proper pronunciation of Uzbek "x" and "h" requires awareness of their disparity in articulation and conscious practice. The study confirms that explicit instruction, auditory modeling, and visual support can accomplish progress in increasing the learners' ability to distinguish and produce the sounds appropriately.

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