

**INTEGRATING COMMUNICATIVE PRONUNCIATION ACTIVITIES INTO  
AUDIO-LINGUAL PRACTICE FOR UZBEK EFL CLASSROOMS**

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**Annotation**

This exploratory action research examines the integration of communicative pronunciation activities into audio-lingual practice for Uzbek secondary school learners of English. The study was carried out with 28 students at the A2–B1 CEFR level over a six-week intervention period. Lessons combined traditional audio-lingual drills (minimal pairs, substitution, transformation) with short communicative activities such as role-plays, information-gap tasks, and storytelling designed to recycle target sounds in meaningful contexts. Data collection included pre- and post-tests of pronunciation accuracy, classroom recordings of communicative tasks, and learner self-reports on confidence and motivation. Results demonstrated significant improvement in the production of problematic English sounds (/θ, ð/, /w–v/, and tense–lax vowels /i:–ɪ/), as well as increased intelligibility during spontaneous speech. Students also reported higher motivation and enjoyment compared to drill-only lessons. Findings suggest that an integrated model combining audio-lingual structure with communicative practice can address the persistent pronunciation challenges of Uzbek EFL learners.

**Keywords:** pronunciation teaching, audio-lingual method, communicative approach, Uzbek EFL, pronunciation accuracy, intelligibility

**Introduction**

Pronunciation has long been recognized as one of the most persistent challenges for Uzbek learners of English due to both phonological distance and sociolinguistic factors. Uzbek, as a Turkic language, lacks interdental fricatives (/θ, ð/) and has limited consonant cluster patterns, leading to consistent substitution and epenthesis errors (Babajanova & Babadjanova, 2023). In addition, the /w–v/ contrast poses difficulty due to the absence of a distinct labiovelar approximant in Uzbek, resulting in learners often pronouncing *west* as *vest*. Studies of Uzbek IELTS candidates confirm that mispronunciation of these contrasts reduces intelligibility in academic and professional contexts (Arshad & Rifky, 2023).

While the audio-lingual method (ALM) historically emphasized repetition, mimicry, and habit formation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), many researchers in Uzbekistan and CIS contexts argue that drill-based training alone may not guarantee transfer into spontaneous communicative performance (Uzakova, 2022; Khamgokova, 2019). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), on the other hand, prioritizes meaningful use and interaction but often lacks sufficient controlled practice for accurate sound production (Foote et al., 2016). Recent scholarship in Uzbekistan suggests that combining structural drills with communicative activities may provide an optimal balance, especially for young and adolescent learners whose motivation increases when practice is contextualized (Abduqodirova, 2024).

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the integration of communicative pronunciation activities into audio-lingual practice. Specifically, it addresses the research question: To what extent does combining audio-lingual drills with communicative tasks improve Uzbek learners' pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility compared to drill-only instruction?

## Method

The study was conducted at a public secondary school in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, with a sample of 28 ninth-grade students (14 boys and 14 girls) whose proficiency ranged between A2 and B1. English lessons were held three times per week, and pronunciation was typically addressed indirectly within reading and speaking tasks. For the purposes of this action research, a six-week intervention was implemented by the classroom teacher.

The instructional design integrated audio-lingual drills with communicative activities in each lesson. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher modeled the target sounds and engaged the learners in choral and individual repetition of minimal pairs (e.g., *thin-sin*, *west-vest*, *ship-sheep*). This was followed by substitution and transformation drills that encouraged learners to manipulate sentences while maintaining correct sound production. Immediately after these structured drills, students participated in short communicative activities lasting ten to fifteen minutes. These included role-plays such as ordering food, storytelling exercises where learners described picture sequences, and information-gap tasks that required exchanging details containing the target sounds. By embedding the same phonological contrasts in communicative contexts, the teacher aimed to reinforce accuracy while fostering fluency.

Data were collected through three instruments. First, learners completed a pre- and post-test consisting of a 25-item pronunciation task, which included both isolated words and sentences containing the targeted sounds. Second, classroom recordings of communicative activities were analyzed to assess learners' intelligibility and spontaneous sound production. Third, students completed a short self-report questionnaire measuring their confidence and attitudes toward pronunciation practice on a five-point Likert scale. Two trained raters independently evaluated the recordings for accuracy and intelligibility, with inter-rater reliability reaching  $\kappa = .84$ . Descriptive statistics and paired-sample comparisons were used to analyze the data, while qualitative observations from field notes were included to illustrate learner engagement and error patterns.

## Results

The integration of communicative activities with audio-lingual drills produced measurable improvements in learners' pronunciation. On the pre-test, average accuracy rates for interdental fricatives were 39%, for /w-v/ contrasts 55%, and for tense-lax vowels 61%. After six weeks, post-test results showed increases to 71%, 83%, and 80% respectively. Analysis of classroom recordings indicated that learners produced target sounds with greater consistency during spontaneous tasks; for instance, epenthesis in final clusters decreased significantly, and stress placement in bisyllabic words became more target-like.

Table 1 summarizes pre- and post-intervention performance.

Table 1. Learners' Pronunciation Accuracy (%) Before and After Intervention (N=28)

Target Feature	Pre (%)	Post (%)	$\Delta$ (pp)
/θ/ and /ð/	39	71	+32
/w-v/ contrast	55	83	+28
/i:-ɪ/ vowel distinction	61	80	+19
Final consonant clusters	41	68	+27
Intelligibility in dialogues (0-4 scale)	2.4	3.3	+0.9

Learners' self-reports also showed increased confidence, with average ratings rising from 2.7 to 3.9 on the five-point scale. Qualitative feedback indicated that students enjoyed the

communicative activities more than isolated drills, noting that dialogues and role-plays “made pronunciation practice fun” and “useful for real life.”

### **Discussion**

The findings suggest that integrating communicative pronunciation activities into audio-lingual practice can substantially improve both accuracy and intelligibility for Uzbek EFL learners. Segmental gains in /θ/, /ð/, and /w-v/ confirm previous research identifying these sounds as problematic for Uzbek learners (Babajanova & Babadjanova, 2023; Arshad & Rifky, 2023). Importantly, the transfer of improved pronunciation into spontaneous speech supports the argument that controlled drills alone are insufficient unless followed by meaningful practice (Foote et al., 2016).

From a pedagogical perspective, the integration strategy aligns with recommendations from Uzbek and CIS scholars who stress the importance of blending structural methods with communicative approaches to sustain learner motivation (Uzakova, 2022; Khamgokova, 2019). Students’ increased confidence and positive attitudes also reflect broader trends in language pedagogy, where motivation is recognized as a key factor in long-term improvement. The success of role-plays and information-gap activities suggests that pronunciation instruction can be both systematic and engaging when drills are linked to real-life contexts.

Limitations of this study include its relatively small sample size, short duration, and reliance on teacher-designed materials. Further research should examine long-term retention, expand to include suprasegmental features such as intonation and rhythm, and compare integrated methods with purely communicative or purely audio-lingual approaches. Nevertheless, this action research provides evidence that a hybrid method is both feasible and effective in Uzbek secondary classrooms.

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