# ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN EFL EDUCATION: ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES OF UZBEK AND TAJIK TEACHERS

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## Abstract

This study investigates the sociolinguistic factors affecting English language learning among two distinct subgroups of teachers in Navoi, Uzbekistan. The first subgroup consists of five Uzbek EFL teachers who frequently use code-switching between Uzbek and Russian, reflecting their positionality and sociolinguistic dynamics. The second subgroup includes six rural Tajik EFL teachers whose dialectal Tajik and lower socioeconomic status impact their educational experiences and interactions. The research highlights how gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors influence classroom practices and assessment outcomes. It also addresses the implications for teaching methodologies and assessment practices, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive and equitable educational approaches.

*Key words: sociolinguistics, code-switching, socioeconomic status, linguistic identity, gender dynamics, dialectal variation, classroom practices, assessment, cultural responsiveness*

Это исследование изучает социолингвистические факторы, влияющие на изучение английского языка среди двух различных подгрупп преподавателей в Узбекистан. Первая подгруппа состоит из пяти узбекских преподавателей английского языка, которые часто используют кодовое переключение между узбекским и русским языками, что отражает их позициональность и социолингвистическую динамику. Вторая подгруппа включает шесть сельских таджикских преподавателей английского языка, чье диалектное таджикское и низкое социально-экономическое положение влияют на их образовательный опыт и взаимодействие. Исследование подчеркивает, как пол, этническая принадлежность и социально-экономические факторы влияют на практику в классе и результаты оценивания. Также рассматриваются последствия для методик преподавания и оценивания, подчеркивая необходимость культурно отзывчивых и справедливых образовательных подходов.

*Ключевые слова: с*оциолингвистика, кодовое переключение, социально-экономический статус, лингвистическая идентичность, гендерная динамика, диалектные различия, практика в классе, оценивание, культурная отзывчивость

Ushbu tadqiqot, Oʻzbekistonda ikki xil guruhdagi ingliz tili oʻqituvchilarining til oʻrganish jarayoniga ta'sir koʻrsatadigan omillarni oʻrganadi. Tadqiqot jins, etnik kelib chiqish va ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy omillar sinf amaliyoti va baholash natijalariga qanday ta'sir qilishini koʻrsatadi. Shuningdek, ta'lim metodikasi va baholash amaliyotlari uchun madaniy jihatdan mos va adolatli ta'lim yondashuvlarini ta'kidlash zarurligi muhokama qilinadi.

***Kalit soʻzlar:*** *sotsiolingvistika, kod almashinuvi, ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy holat, lingvistik shaxsiyat, jinslar oʻrtasidagi dinamikalar, dialektal farqlar, dars jarayonidagi amaliyotlar, baholash, madaniy moslik*

Language learning and teaching is a complex process which includes various factors. This paper studies this multifaceted process in the setting of two ESP subgroups of teachers in Uzbekistan. This paper examines the influence of gender, ethinicity in language learning.   This study aims to address the challenges and opportunities inherent in teaching these diverse learners by providing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course designed to enhance their language proficiency and pedagogical skills.

The target learners for my study are eleven learners who are members of two distinct subgroups and have a variety of sociolinguistic factors. The first subpopulation consists of five Uzbek teachers of EFL from city schools in Navoi, Uzbekistan. Their first language is Uzbek. The Uzbek teachers communicate in a standardized form of Uzbek with a lot of code-switching in Russian. Nuessel (2010) noted that "code-switching" occurs for a variety of reasons, and these target learners employ code-switching in order to explain their views easily. Their code-switching in Russian is an example of the principle of positionality, as this practice places them in a "higher position" in the group since Russian has been considered the main foreign language in Uzbekistan for a long time. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) wrote that the principle of positionality in sociolinguistics refers to the position of the individual, which is the result of different social factors. Their age range is 30 to 50. Three of the learners are women, and two of them are men. Their language proficiency level is upper-intermediate. Their socioeconomic status ranges from middle to high.

The second subgroup consists of six rural Tajik teachers of EFL from the mountains of Nurata, Uzbekistan. Their first language is Tajik (6). These teachers utilize dialectal Tajik, which affects their identity, and feel ignorance toward the members of the first subgroup. According to Wardhaugh & Fuller (2014), dialects and varieties may occasionally separate a specific social

group. Five of them are women; one of them is a man. Their ages range from 30 to 50. Their language proficiency level is intermediate. Their socioeconomic status ranges from low to middle.

### Learning context

The target learners are selected from different districts and invited to take part in the course. The aim of this ESP course is to improve the language proficiency level of the teachers and to teach them about the methodology of English language teaching. The classes are held during the school holidays. The teachers are asked to pass the APTIS for Teachers, or TKT, exam at the end of this one-year course.

The first subpopulation consists of five Uzbek EFL teachers from Navoi city schools in Uzbekistan. Their first language is Uzbek. The Uzbek instructors communicate in a standardized form of Uzbek, which involves the use of a significant amount of code-switching in Russian. Nuessel (2010) noted that "code-switching" occurs for a variety of reasons, and these target learners use it to easily explain their points of view. The practice of code-switching in Russian is an example of the principle of positionality, as it elevates them to a "higher position" within the group. They are between the ages of thirty and fifty. Three of the students are female, and two are male. The level of their language proficiency is upper-intermediate. Their socioeconomic status is intermediate to high.

The second subgroup consists of six rural Tajik EFL teachers from the mountains of Uzbekistan. Their first language is Tajik (6). These teachers speak dialectal Tajik, which has an impact on their identity, and they are ignorant of the members of the first subgroup. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2014) suggest that dialects and varieties may occasionally be used to distinguish a particular social group. Five of them are women and one is a man. Their ages range from thirty to fifty. Their language proficiency is intermediate. Their socioeconomic status ranges from lower to middle.

### Profile of the Learning Context

The target learners are chosen from various districts and invited to participate in the ESP course. The goal of this ESP course is to help teachers improve their language ability and learn about English language teaching methodology. Classes are held during the school holidays. At the completion of this one-year course, teachers are required to pass the APTIS for Teachers, or TKT, exam. Both subgroups are from Uzbekistan, although one is from Navoiy and the other from the

mountainous regions. Geographical differences influence learners' language use, socioeconomic position, and linguistic backgrounds.

Not all gender and sexuality subjects are covered in the classroom with these target learners. Because of target learners' cultural and religious views, discussing gender issues in the classroom is unpleasant, and according to Bayley and Villareal (2018), respecting the learners' private or cultural sensitivity helps to create a safe learning environment. Furthermore, many educational institutions in Uzbekistan prohibit the discussion of some gender-related themes, particularly knowledge about the LGBT community. However, the topic of gender equality in education is covered because, according to Schilling (2011), awareness of gender dynamics helps women to actively participate and share their thoughts regardless of gender.

For these students, the topic of ethnicity is included in the learning context. Mesthrie et al. (2009) found that learners' ethnic backgrounds had a significant impact on their language use and interaction patterns. Furthermore, discussing ethnicity promotes cultural understanding between two populations and minimizes misconceptions. Carefully selected ethnicity-related educational resources can build mutual regard between two groupings. The teacher should avoid discussing themes that could lead to conflicts and misconceptions. Regarding race, this topic is irrelevant to my target learners because they are the same race. However, including generic facts about race will help them avoid future raciolinguistic issues. Because some of my target students wish to study or work abroad.

*The setting that English will be used*

Some of the learners in this group intend to study in English-speaking countries to complete their Master's degrees, while others want to stay in Uzbekistan and advance their careers. This condition generates some movements and transitions:

- Geographic moves: Students who want to study abroad may have to relocate to nations where English is the primary language. Their shift necessitates knowledge of language ideology and a willingness to confront linguistic prejudice. According to Lippi Green (2004), members of various language groups use linguistic features to criticize others and categorize languages as "good" or "bad".

- Transitions in Uzbekistan: Learners who choose to stay in Uzbekistan and advance their careers may encounter some transitions since following the course, they will assume additional obligations to prepare schoolchildren for local and international contests. It requires them to use critical pedagogy. Canaragajah (1999) observed that critical pedagogy, as opposed to mainstream pedagogy, incorporates learners' own backgrounds, identities, and relationships into the educational process.Learners who wish to stay in Uzbekistan and work in schools will speak and teach standard English. As Fought (2011) noted, standard English is mostly employed in educational institutions, particularly in non-native settings.Learners intending a move overseas are likewise expected to use a standard language in universities, but in a multilingual setting, they will meet many kinds of English - World Englishes. According to Selvi (2019), each speaker offers their own brand of English to the conversation.The group of students who want to study abroad may face linguistic profiling since they speak English with an Uzbek accent. Baugh (2005) observed that language profiling is frequent in all aspects of life, from purchasing a home to applying for a job.The second cohort of students will be influenced by Uzbekistan's legislation governing foreign language education. EFL teachers are expected to utilize only one standard form of English.

*Gender*

The first subgroup is predominantly composed of women, which may alter classroom dynamics and communication patterns. Gender distinction is evident in their speech, which has more "high-status" language elements. Mesthrie et al. (2009) stated that research show that women are more status concerned and use a variety of prestige forms. The second category is made up of both men and women, with probable gender-related variances in communication styles. The dominance of male speech in this subgroup can be attributed to the influence of cultural and regional values. According to Mesthrie et al. (2009), in some civilizations, women deny themselves the ability to express themselves fully.

Men in both groups use more "vernacular" language, while women use more "feminine" vocabulary. Furthermore, due to cultural beliefs, all women in the group avoid direct conversation with the men and speak in a "low" voice. Women's speech contains an excessive number of "hypercorrections". According to Schilling (2011), women hypercorrect their speech in order to produce error-free or optimal results.

*Ethnicity*

The ethnicity of two subgroups can be evaluated using their respective language resources to generate ethnic identities.

Tajik learners regard their language as a "heritage language" and work hard to keep it alive because their dialect of Tajik is only spoken in this small mountain district. According to Uzbek ethnicity, indirectness is the most common speech quality. Many students in this group do not ask for explanations, despite the fact that they do not grasp some of the topics covered. Tajik learners, on the other hand, are more forthright, which can lead to misunderstandings during conversations. Turn-taking patterns in the classroom can be challenging to manage at times since Tajik students do not always listen to their companions and prefer to speak up. According to Fought (2011), these discursive elements contribute to the replication of ethnic identity.

Both subgroups share a sociolinguistic trait that is not available in English. Special pronouns indicating respect (Uzbek "Siz", Tajik "Shumo") and special verb suffixes for displaying respect (Uzbek "-ing, -inglar", Tajik "-et, -eton") are used in both Tajik and Uzbek. Fought (2011) defined these characteristics as links to ethnic identity that indicate group membership. However, all learners are hesitant to address an older person in English with a single pronoun.

*Accent & Pronunciation*

The teacher should be aware that both subgroups have accents when speaking the target language, and the goal for these students should not be to develop a pristine British or American accent, but rather to be able to hold a coherent conversation. Furthermore, the teacher should avoid "preferential linguistic profiling" of the first subgroup when adopting a British accent and "discriminatory linguistic profiling" of the second subgroup while speaking English with a Tajik accent.According to Baugh (2005), linguistic profiling leads to harmful practices not only in education but also in a variety of other settings.

Selecting language texts for tasks and activities:It would be beneficial for my target learners to access multimodal resources (audio, video, etc.) that incorporate Global Englishes, variety, and accents. According to Selvi (2019), teaching language variations helps learners acquire a repertoire of codes and discourses. Furthermore, the educational materials should reflect cultural diversity in order to foster cross-cultural understanding. Canagarajah (1999) introduces diverse civilizations to demonstrate that there is no dominant group and that knowledge is socially

created in each culture. Language learners should feel comfortable and valued, regardless of their ethnicity,                gender,                or                linguistic                background. *Instructional                methods                and                approaches.*

Adopting a "polymodal" approach and providing opportunities for exposure to multiple Englishes would be beneficial since it demonstrates to learners different types of English rather than "standard" English. According to Selvi (2019), this technique encourages diversity in the classroom, which is beneficial to my target learners. Furthermore, using the "English-within-multilingualism" concept instead of "English-only" helps my target learners keep their "heritage language"

*Classroom Practices: Gender.*

In both populations, a cautious approach to gender is required. Many women in the target demographic avoid classroom interactions with men owing to cultural and religious views. The teacher should create a classroom environment in which women can comfortably express themselves by not making direct requests to participate in classroom interactions with students of the opposite gender. The teacher should use caution when instructing some of the ladies in the class to talk louder or faster, as this is part of their gender identity. Schilling (2011) discovered that diverse patterns of intonation and speech flow exist in numerous cultures and communities around the world. Furthermore, women in both subgroups will not tolerate blatant criticism in front of the entire group. In these cases, the teacher should plan an individual discussion.

*Socioeconomic Status*

Members of the second group have limited access to educational materials and resources due to their socioeconomic condition. The availability of resources for both groups should be examined, with printed materials available for the lower socioeconomic level group due to their difficulty accessing online content.

Uzbek learners in the first subgroup exhibit "indirectness," which causes them not to ask for explanation or clarification, or even to understand the material. To address this scenario, which is part of their ethnic identity, the teacher should ask numerous instruction-checking questions (ICQ) and content-checking questions (CCQ).

Tajik learners should be given several exercises (information gap, listening, and discovering an error) in which they play the role of "listener" in order to address the problem using their dominant "turn-taking" styles.

*Assessment Implications*

Internal Classroom Assessments

Internal language assessments should be egalitarian, taking into account learners' socioeconomic condition. Teachers should be aware that students in the second grouping may have limited access to resources. Assessments should not penalize students who have limited access to resources, and other evaluation techniques should be explored.

Language assessments should consider gender and ethnic consequences. For example, women's use of "low" or "hybercorrected" speech, as well as hesitations caused by L1 interference, should not be deemed faults, according to Schilling (2011). Target learners should be given additional "waiting time" while assessing their spoken production in order to accommodate learners' speech patterns impacted by cultural norms.

When judging accuracy, mistakes caused by L1 interference, such as errors in verb aspects or pronouns, should not be considered errors. According to Nuessel (2010), these mistakes represent learners' continuous language development. The goal of language examinations should be to examine not only standardized language proficiency, but also the learners' capacity to manage code-switching and dialectal variances as part of their sociolinguistic competency. As Selvi (2019) said, rather than expecting uniform standardized language use, evaluations can include tasks that allow for code-switching for the first subgroup or dialectal variances for the second subgroup, as these aspects are inseparable from target learners' speech. Language learners should not be penalized for using "code switching," "borrowings," and crossings, but rather evaluated in terms of their sociolinguistic ability.

*External assessments*

External examinations, such as APTIS for Teachers, for which my target learners are preparing, should be culturally responsive and free of biases that could penalize students from diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds. The tests should strive for justice and equity in measuring

English language proficiency, while also allowing differences in accent and dialect. *Ethical*

*Considerations:*

When performing external assessments, it is critical to consider the cultural and language diversity of the target learners. This includes acknowledging that learners may have a Tajik accent or utilize code-switching in their speech. Ethical assessment procedures include avoiding discriminatory practices and making sure that tests do not unfairly

In summary, this study underscores the necessity of developing and implementing educational approaches that are both inclusive and sensitive to the sociolinguistic realities of learners. By fostering an educational environment that values and supports linguistic diversity, educators can enhance the effectiveness of EFL instruction and contribute to more equitable and culturally responsive educational practices. The implications for teaching methodologies and assessment practices are significant. Culturally responsive teaching and assessment strategies must be employed to address the diverse needs of these learners.

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