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**TEACHING ENGLISH TO BEGINNERS: A PHILOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES**

ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) to beginners requires pedagogically sound strategies that account for linguistic diversity and cultural context, particularly in regions like Baku, Azerbaijan, where English education is increasingly vital. This article synthesizes evidence-based practices for novice ESL teachers, emphasizing comprehensible input, scaffolded instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. Drawing on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and communicative language teaching principles, it proposes practical techniques such as simplified instructions, repetitive drilling, and maximized student interaction, tailored to address Azerbaijani learners' challenges, including Turkic language interference. Through a qualitative synthesis of theoretical literature, classroom observations, and reflective practice at Western Caspian University, the study offers examples like role-plays and flashcard games to foster beginner proficiency. The findings underscore the importance of integrating philological insights—language structure and cultural context—into ESL pedagogy, with implications for teacher training and curriculum design in Turkic-speaking regions. This work contributes to applied linguistics and philology by bridging theory and practice in language education.

Keywords: English as a second language, beginner learners, language acquisition, applied linguistics, classroom pedagogy, Azerbaijani context

**Преподавание английского языка начинающим: филологический
взгляд на усвоение языка и педагогические стратегии**

Аннотация

Преподавание английского языка как второго (ESL) для начинающих учащихся требует педагогически обоснованных стратегий, учитывающих как лингвистическое разнообразие, так и культурный контекст. Особенно это актуально для таких регионов, как Баку (Азербайджан), где значимость английского языка неуклонно возрастает. В статье представлен синтез доказательных подходов для молодых преподавателей ESL, с акцентом на понятный языковой ввод, поэтапное обучение и культурно ориентированную

педагогическую практику. Методологическая база включает гипотезу понятного ввода Стивена Крашена, Зону ближайшего развития Льва Выготского и принципы коммуникативного подхода. Описываются практические техники, такие как упрощённые инструкции, структурированное повторение и активизация речевого взаимодействия, адаптированные с учётом интерференции тюркских языков, свойственной азербайджанским обучающимся. На основе качественного анализа теоретических источников, наблюдений за учебным процессом и педагогической рефлексии, проведённых в Западно-Каспийском университете, приводятся примеры таких заданий, как ролевые игры и карточные упражнения. Результаты подчёркивают необходимость интеграции филологических знаний — языковой структуры и культурного контекста — в методику преподавания ESL. Работа вносит вклад в прикладную лингвистику и филологию, соединяя теоретические основания с практическими решениями в области преподавания языка в тюркоязычных регионах.

Ключевые слова: английский как второй язык, начальный уровень, усвоение языка, прикладная лингвистика, педагогика, азербайджанский контекст

İngilis dilinin başlanğıc səviyyədə tədrisi: Filoloji əsaslı dil öyrənmə və pedaqoji strategiyalar

Xülasə

İngilis dilinin ikinci dil kimi (ESL) yeni başlayanlara tədrisi, linqvistik müxtəliflik və mədəni kontekst nəzərə alınmaqla, elmi əsaslara söykənən pedaqoji strategiyalar tələb edir. Bu, xüsusilə də ingilis dilinə artan ehtiyacın müşahidə olunduğu Bakı (Azərbaycan) kimi regionlarda aktualdır. Məqalədə tədrisə yeni başlayan ESL müəllimləri üçün sübutlara əsaslanan yanaşmalar təqdim olunur. Bu yanaşmalar anlaşılan dil materialı, mərhələli təlim və mədəni cəhətdən həssas pedaqoji üsullara əsaslanır. Tədqiqat Krashen-in "Anlaşılan Giriş Nəzəriyyəsi", Vıqotskinin "Yaxın İnkişaf Zonası" və kommunikativ dil öyrənmə prinsiplərinə söykənir. Təlimatların sadələşdirilməsi, təkrar drill məşqləri və tələbələrin qarşılıqlı ünsiyyətə təşviqi kimi praktik metodlar təklif olunur. Bu metodlar, türk dilləri təsiri də daxil olmaqla, azərbaycanlı öyrənənlərin üzləşdiyi çətinlikləri nəzərə alır. Qərbi Xəzər Universitetində aparılan nəzəri ədəbiyyatın təhlili, dərs müşahidələri və müəllim refleksiyası əsasında keyfiyyət yönümlü təhlil aparılmış və rol oyunları, kart oyunları kimi fəaliyyət nümunələri təqdim edilmişdir. Tədqiqat nəticələri göstərir ki, ESL tədrisində filoloji biliklərin — dil strukturu və mədəni kontekstin — integrasiyası mühüm əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Bu tədqiqat tətbiqi dilçilik və filologiya sahəsinə praktik və nəzəri istiqamətlərin sintezi baxımından töhfə verir.

Açar sözlər: İkinci dil kimi ingilis dili, başlanğıc səviyyəli öyrənənlər, dil öyrənmə, tətbiqi dilçilik, sinif pedaqogikası, Azərbaycan konteksti

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) to beginners is a complex yet rewarding endeavor, particularly in Azerbaijan, where English proficiency is increasingly essential for educational and economic opportunities. Beginners, often with minimal or no prior knowledge of English, face challenges such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and anxiety about errors, compounded by the linguistic influence of Azerbaijani, a Turkic language with distinct phonological and syntactic features like vowel harmony and agglutinative morphology (Agadzadə, 1965). Philology, the study of language in its historical and cultural contexts, provides a valuable framework for addressing these challenges by examining language structure and pedagogical practice. This article explores how novice ESL teachers in Baku can effectively teach beginners, integrating philological insights with practical strategies grounded in language acquisition theory. It addresses the question: How can novice ESL teachers apply philologically informed strategies to teach English to beginners in Azerbaijan's multilingual context? By synthesizing theoretical frameworks, classroom observations, and reflective practice, the article offers actionable guidance for creating supportive and engaging learning environments, contributing to applied linguistics and philology with implications for teacher training and curriculum design in Turkic-speaking regions.

Philological research emphasizes the interplay of language structure, cultural context, and pedagogy. Krashen's Input Hypothesis posits that learners acquire language through exposure to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level, necessitating clear and contextualized instruction for beginners (Krashen, 1985). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the role of scaffolded support, where teachers guide learners toward independence through structured tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). These theories align with communicative language teaching (CLT), which prioritizes meaningful interaction over rote memorization (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Behaviorist approaches, such as Skinner's verbal behavior theory, underscore the value of repetition for building linguistic habits, particularly for pronunciation and vocabulary (Skinner, 1957). However, CLT advocates balancing drilling with authentic communication to enhance fluency and motivation (Farrell, 2015). Research shows that maximizing Student Talking Time (STT) over Teacher Talking Time (TTT) fosters proficiency, especially for beginners (Harmer, 2007). In Azerbaijan, learners' native language influences English acquisition, with Turkic features posing challenges, such as the absence of articles or distinct consonant sounds like /θ/ in "think" (Nurmonov et al., 1992). Culturally responsive teaching, which acknowledges students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, can mitigate these issues (Gay, 2018). Technology, such as

digital flashcards or language apps, supports multimodal learning, though access disparities must be addressed (Chapelle, 2016). Despite these insights, practical guidance for novice teachers in Turkic-speaking contexts remains limited, and this article bridges this gap by integrating philological perspectives with evidence-based strategies.

The methodology employs a qualitative synthesis approach, combining a review of applied linguistics and philological literature with reflective practice from the author's experience teaching beginner ESL students (A1 level, CEFR) at Western Caspian University, Baku. The synthesis draws on key texts (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007; Agadzada, 1965), informal classroom observations of 15 students (aged 16–20) over one semester, and analysis of lesson plans and student feedback. While not empirical, this approach aligns with practitioner-oriented research in philology, which values the integration of theory and practice (Farrell, 2015). The strategies are designed for adaptability across monolingual Azerbaijani and multilingual classrooms, with examples contextualized for Baku's learners.

A supportive classroom environment is essential for beginners, who often experience anxiety. Teachers should build rapport using a warm tone, inclusive language, and acknowledgment of students' Azerbaijani fluency (e.g., "You're great at Azerbaijani—let's learn English together!"). Arranging desks in small groups facilitates interaction, reflecting CLT's emphasis on collaboration. Cultural sensitivity is critical, as Azerbaijani students may prefer greater physical distance or avoid prolonged eye contact, aligning with cultural norms (Harmer, 2007). For example, starting classes with a "Word of the Day" (e.g., "hello") in both Azerbaijani and English bridges linguistic contexts and reduces anxiety.

Philologically informed instruction addresses Azerbaijani-specific challenges, such as vowel harmony affecting English pronunciation. Teachers should use simplified instructions with short sentences and gestures (e.g., "Say. Repeat." while pointing to the mouth), paired with visuals like word cards to enhance comprehension. Drilling is effective for sounds absent in Azerbaijani, like /θ/ in "think." For instance, teachers can conduct choral drills of "This is a book," followed by individual practice to refine pronunciation. Maximizing STT through role-plays and open-ended questions (e.g., "What's your favorite fruit?") encourages extended responses and aligns with CLT principles. An example activity for teaching shopping involves modeling "Can I have apples?" with a picture, drilling pronunciation to address Azerbaijani interference (e.g., /æ/ in "apples"), and having students role-play a market scene, reporting back (e.g., "She wants bananas"). This fosters functional language use and confidence.

Accessible resources enhance engagement in Baku's resource-constrained classrooms. Flashcards with Azerbaijani translations (e.g., "ev/house") support vocabulary retention through games like "Find the Pair," where students match

English words to Azerbaijani equivalents (e.g., “cat/pişik”). Notebooks encourage writing practice, while an emergency resource box with games, worksheets, and markers ensures flexibility. Where technology is available, free apps like Duolingo or YouTube videos with subtitles provide listening practice. In low-tech settings, printed dialogues serve as alternatives. For example, a flashcard-based “Memory Match” game reinforces vocabulary by pairing words and pictures, leveraging bilingual connections to support acquisition.

Lesson planning balances structure and adaptability, incorporating Krashen’s comprehensible input and Vygotsky’s scaffolding. A typical lesson includes a warm-up (e.g., reviewing vocabulary with a game), presentation (e.g., introducing verbs like “run” with visuals), practice (e.g., pair work to apply skills), and review (e.g., a quiz to consolidate learning). A sample lesson on introductions involves singing a “Hello” song, teaching “My name is...” with name tags, having students introduce themselves in pairs, and concluding with a group circle where each student says, “My name is...” Teachers must adjust activities based on student needs, such as extending drilling for pronunciation challenges or providing extra games for early finishers.

Feedback is critical for beginner progress and should be specific, timely, and encouraging (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Teachers should correct errors tactfully by modeling correct forms (e.g., Student: “I am student”; Teacher: “Great! Say ‘I am a student’”) and praise effort (e.g., “You pronounced ‘the’ well!”). Peer feedback, where pairs correct each other’s sentences, fosters collaboration. For example, after a speaking task, teachers can note one strength (e.g., “Good vocabulary”) and one improvement (e.g., “Use ‘a’ before ‘book’”), ensuring feedback is constructive and motivating.

From a philological perspective, these strategies address the structural and cultural dimensions of language acquisition. Simplified instructions and visuals provide Krashen’s comprehensible input, while drilling targets Azerbaijani-specific challenges, such as mastering English articles absent in Turkic languages. STT aligns with CLT’s focus on communication, reflecting philology’s interest in language as a dynamic system. Culturally responsive practices, like using Azerbaijani translations, leverage learners’ linguistic heritage, aligning with Gay’s framework (2018). The strategies contribute to philology by integrating behaviorist and communicative approaches, demonstrating their relevance to beginner ESL teaching. They also address Turkic language interference, offering insights for Azerbaijani philologists studying bilingualism. Practically, the strategies inform teacher training by emphasizing skills like lesson planning and feedback, and they advocate for beginner curricula prioritizing oral practice and vocabulary over complex grammar. Schools should invest in low-cost resources like flashcards, adaptable to Baku’s resource-constrained settings.

Limitations include the reliance on reflective practice rather than quantitative data, which could be addressed in future research by conducting experimental studies comparing drilling versus communicative tasks in Azerbaijani classrooms. While tailored to Baku, the strategies are adaptable to other multilingual contexts, enhancing their global relevance. Teaching English to beginners in Azerbaijan requires balancing theoretical rigor with practical application. By creating supportive classrooms, using clear and repetitive instruction, leveraging accessible resources, and providing constructive feedback, teachers can address linguistic and cultural challenges. Grounded in Krashen's, Vygotsky's, and communicative theories, these strategies offer a framework for novice educators. For philology, this study highlights the interplay of language structure, pedagogy, and cultural context, contributing to the discourse on ESL education in Turkic-speaking regions. Educators are encouraged to adapt these practices, reflect on their effectiveness, and engage with philological scholarship to advance language teaching.

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