

TEACHING ENGLISH IDIOMS AND PHRASAL VERBS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN UZBEK CLASSROOMS

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Teaching English idioms and phrasal verbs presents a significant challenge in Uzbek classrooms due to linguistic and cultural differences. This paper examines the most common difficulties faced by both teachers and learners when dealing with idiomatic expressions and multi-word verbs. Based on classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student feedback, the study identifies major problems such as lack of contextual understanding, limited exposure, and ineffective teaching strategies. It also explores practical solutions, including the use of visual aids, storytelling, contextual learning, and digital resources. The findings highlight the importance of culturally aware and communicative approaches in helping Uzbek learners grasp and use idioms and phrasal verbs effectively.

Idioms and phrasal verbs are essential components of natural and fluent English communication. However, for non-native learners, especially those in Uzbekistan, mastering these expressions poses a significant challenge. Idioms are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and often cannot be understood by simply analyzing individual words. Similarly, phrasal verbs often have meanings that are not predictable from the meanings of their parts. As a result, many Uzbek learners struggle to understand and use them correctly in speech and writing. Traditional methods of teaching tend to focus on rote memorization and translation, which are often ineffective for such complex expressions. This paper explores the major problems associated with teaching and learning idioms and phrasal verbs in Uzbek classrooms and proposes practical, context-based solutions to make the process more engaging and effective.

Teaching idioms and phrasal verbs to Uzbek learners of English is a particularly difficult task, primarily because these linguistic features are heavily tied to cultural context, figurative meaning, and non-literal usage. Many of these expressions defy direct translation and require deep contextual understanding, which is often underdeveloped in traditional Uzbek English classrooms. This section analyzes the main problems encountered in teaching these expressions and proposes potential solutions.

One major challenge is the lack of exposure to authentic English input. Uzbek students are often taught English in formal, grammar-focused environments where idioms and phrasal verbs are not frequently encountered. As a result, learners rarely see these expressions used in natural contexts. For example, idioms like “hit the sack” or “spill the beans” are unlikely to appear in standard textbooks or classroom dialogues. Similarly, phrasal verbs such as “give up,” “look after,” or “run into” may be introduced without sufficient examples or context, making them harder to internalize.

Another difficulty lies in the unpredictable meanings of phrasal verbs and idioms. For instance, the phrasal verb “pick up” can mean to lift something, to learn something, or to acquire someone in a vehicle—depending on context. This ambiguity confuses learners, especially when one verb-particle combination has multiple meanings. Idioms pose a similar issue. When a student hears “it’s raining cats and dogs,” a literal translation creates confusion and sometimes amusement, but not understanding.

A further issue is over-reliance on literal translation techniques. In many Uzbek classrooms, vocabulary is taught by giving students direct Uzbek equivalents of English words or phrases. However, this method fails when teaching idioms and phrasal verbs, because literal translations often do not make sense or even exist in Uzbek. For example, the idiom “break the ice” (to start a conversation in a social situation) might be misunderstood unless explained in context. As a result, students memorize phrases without understanding, leading to passive knowledge that is rarely applied in speaking or writing.

Teacher preparedness is another contributing factor. Many English teachers in Uzbekistan, especially in rural areas, have limited training or resources for teaching idioms and phrasal verbs effectively. Teachers may avoid these topics altogether or teach them in isolation, without providing sufficient practice or contextual use. In some cases, teachers themselves lack confidence or familiarity with such expressions, particularly when their own English education was grammar-translation oriented.

To address these challenges, several practical solutions can be implemented in Uzbek classrooms.

First, contextual teaching is essential. Instead of presenting idioms and phrasal verbs as vocabulary lists, teachers should embed them in dialogues, short stories, or video clips. When students encounter these expressions in meaningful contexts, they are more likely to grasp their figurative meanings. For example, showing a short scene from a movie or series where a character says “I’m going to hit the sack” can help students infer the meaning more naturally than a definition on a worksheet.

Second, visual aids and storytelling are powerful tools for teaching idioms. Associating idioms with colorful, humorous images helps learners remember them. For example, an illustration of cats and dogs falling from the sky can serve as a memorable cue for “raining cats and dogs.” Similarly, teachers can use personal or fictional stories to introduce idioms and phrasal verbs in an engaging and relatable way.

Third, group activities and role-plays provide opportunities for active use. Students can practice using idioms in dialogues, create their own stories using a set of phrasal verbs, or even play games like idiom bingo or matching activities. These exercises make the learning process interactive and encourage students to use new expressions in communication rather than just memorizing them.

Fourth, technology and mobile applications can play a supporting role. Language learning apps such as Quizlet, Memrise, and FluentU offer idiom and phrasal verb practice through games, flashcards, and videos. YouTube channels and educational podcasts also provide authentic exposure and pronunciation models. Teachers can integrate these resources into homework or blended learning strategies.

Fifth, raising cultural awareness is key. Many idioms reflect cultural references that may be unfamiliar to Uzbek learners. For example, “to bite the bullet” originates from wartime medical practices. Explaining the background or origin of such expressions not only helps comprehension but also enriches learners’ intercultural competence.

Additionally, gradual introduction and recycling are crucial. Students should not be overwhelmed with too many idioms or phrasal verbs at once. Instead, teachers can introduce a few expressions each week, reinforce them through repetition, and recycle them in future lessons. Spaced exposure improves long-term retention and helps integrate these expressions into active vocabulary.

Finally, assessment methods should reflect communicative competence rather than passive knowledge. Instead of asking students to translate idioms, teachers might use cloze tests, sentence creation, or oral interviews to assess understanding and application. This

shift encourages students to focus on using idioms and phrasal verbs meaningfully, not just memorizing definitions.

In summary, while teaching idioms and phrasal verbs in Uzbek classrooms is undoubtedly challenging, it is also essential for developing communicative fluency. Through contextualization, creativity, interactive methods, and cultural sensitivity, teachers can help students move beyond literal translation and engage with the expressive richness of the English language.

Teaching English idioms and phrasal verbs in Uzbek classrooms presents notable challenges due to differences in culture, linguistic structure, and traditional teaching methods. Students often struggle with understanding figurative meanings, contextual usage, and the non-literal nature of these expressions. Contributing factors include limited exposure to authentic English, an overemphasis on translation, and insufficient teacher training. However, these difficulties can be addressed through context-based teaching, visual support, storytelling, communicative activities, and the integration of digital tools. Enhancing teachers' cultural competence and encouraging the gradual, meaningful introduction of idioms and phrasal verbs can significantly improve students' understanding and usage. With a communicative, student-centered approach, Uzbek learners can not only comprehend these expressions more effectively but also begin to use them confidently in both spoken and written English.

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