

LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN LEARNING ENGLISH FOR YOUTH ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT: The emigration of Albanians to England has increased significantly in recent years, making the role of using and learning the English language decisive, especially for the Albanian youths who attend school. The purpose of studying the English language encompasses various aspects such as education, economics, social integration, and more. This study explores the language barriers young immigrant Albanians face in England when learning English, as well as the unique factors that influence their experiences in school. The study involved the observation of 75 Albanian youths, 30 males and 45 females. The problems caused by mastering the mother tongue are related to grammar, vocabulary, and articulation. Given the connections between culture, language, and individuality, cultural concerns emphasise how crucial it is to include different cultures in the classroom. The study suggests educational approaches, such as bilingual classes, to address language barriers and promote fluency in Albanian and English. Adding Albanian social aspects to culturally sensitive curriculum and teaching is recommended to improve student interaction and foster a sense of belonging. The study recommends teacher preparation courses that emphasise barriers to linguistic and cultural sensitivity, to improve the capacity of teachers to deal with particular issues. The research suggests a comprehensive, collaborative strategy that combines educators, communities, and legislators to create a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere for successful language learning in English through the skills and social inclusion of Albanian youth immigrants.

KEYWORDS: teacher, language, emigrants, training, challenges, education, culture.

1. Introduction

Albanian, a unique Indo-European language, presents special linguistic features that can affect English language acquisition. Albanian grammar, syntax, and phonetics present notable differences from English. To comprehend these distinctions effectively, it is important to implement a focused and culturally sensitive methodology. As global migration patterns continue to shape multicultural societies, the need for effective language education becomes primary. Albanian youths face constant challenges in taking advantage of specific opportunities to learn English and easily integrate into English life. The linguistic landscape of multicultural classrooms requires a nuanced approach that takes unique aspects of the students' mother tongue. The Albanian language is an Indo-European language with phonetic elements and specific grammatical systems that influence language learning among Albanian youths who want to learn English (Ragip Kçiku, 2012). English, on the other hand, is a West Germanic language that emerged in medieval England (Crystal, 2003). Like the Germanic languages, it is part of the broad Indo-European language family and has been defined as an Anglo-Saxon language (Hughes, 2004), with specific phonetic elements and grammatical systems that influence the Albanian youths' progress in English learning. Since language represents cultural influences and the understanding of conversation and languages is enhanced by cultural environments, cultural and linguistic influences are interrelated to Albanian youths. Cultural factors significantly impact the process of language acquisition, and the profound cultural background that Albanian immigrant youth possess profoundly affects their educational experience (Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, 2013). The progress of Albanian immigrant children toward fluently learning English is significantly impacted by their multicultural background (Sedmak & Dezan, 2023).

2. Literature Review

Language serves multiple purposes and plays a crucial role in fostering social integration at both individual and societal levels (Agha, 2007). Proficiency in language goes beyond basic skills. It serves as a gateway to crucial aspects of life, including career opportunities, academic pursuits, and

effective social interactions. Albanian language, being an Indo-European language, possesses unique phonetic elements and distinct grammatical systems that have an impact on language acquisition for young Albanians aspiring to learn English (Ragip Kçiku, 2012). English, on the other hand, is a West Germanic language that emerged in medieval England (Crystal, 2003). Like the Germanic languages, this language belongs to the wider Indo-European language family. It is often referred to as Anglo-Saxon, with distinct phonetic elements and grammatical systems that impact the process of learning. Culture impacts language, and cultural contexts help youths understand discourse and languages better. As a result, cultural and linguistic impacts are interconnected to youths. The cultural background of youths significantly influences their language interactions and comprehension throughout the process of learning English (Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, 2013). The progress of Albanian immigrant children toward learning the English language fluently is significantly impacted by their multicultural background (Sedmak & Dezan, 2023). Teachers should be specifically trained to understand the linguistic and cultural nuances associated with the Albanian language. Intercultural competence is a fundamental ability that language teaching professionals are required to possess. English teachers who exhibit the capacity to explore, comprehend, and value both their own and other cultures are more likely to adeptly manage the variances that may arise in their classrooms (Byram, Michael, 1997). Teachers must participate in essential training sessions such as workshops, seminars, and continuous support in order to effectively address the difficulties encountered by migrating youths. According to a study conducted by Chatzidaki and Xenikaki (2012), research indicates that teacher training programs that prioritize cultural sensitivity have a beneficial impact on student performance.

3. Cultural and linguistic influences

3.1 Linguistic intervention

One of the biggest challenges Albanian youths face in learning English is the influence of the Albanian language in the language-learning process. Youth immigrants face many challenges, such as syntax, pronunciation, and vocabulary, due to language interference (Sarri, 2016). A noticeable challenge arises when students focus on the phonetic aspect of vowel sounds in English, particularly the differentiation between the short vowel sound /ɪ/ (as in "sit") and the long vowel sound /i:/ (as in "seat"). The challenge arises because the short vowel /ɪ/ sound in "sit" differs from the long vowel /i:/ in "seat." In English, this distinction is essential to conveying the intended meaning. Unlike English, which distinguishes between short and long vowels, Albanian vowels are generally of equal length. This simplifies the vowel system and contributes to the overall phonetic clarity of the Albanian language. However, the phonetic representation here is an approximation, and the actual pronunciation may vary between different dialects and speakers. Albanian youths may face specific challenges in phonetics and pronunciation due to the differences between the two languages. One common challenge that Albanian youths often face is pronouncing the sound "th" correctly. The "th" sound is two sounds: the voiced dental fricative /ð/ (as in "this") and the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ (as in "think"). In Albanian grammar, the sound "th" is pronounced as /θ/ and does not change. Mispronunciation of these sounds can lead to misunderstandings, as replacing one "th" with another can change the meaning of a word (Ladefoged and Johnson, 2014). Example: "take a bath" (/θ/) vs. "bathe" (/ð/): *"I take a bath every evening and sometimes I like to bathe in warm water"*; "breath" (/θ/) vs. "breathe" (/ð/): *"I was gasping for breath while my sister was breathing deeply"*.

It is important for teachers to use suitable activities when dealing with language intervention. They must implement activities related to phonetic training, vocabulary-building exercises, and targeted grammar exercises to reduce language interference and encourage a smooth transition to English language competence (Mattheoudakis, 2017). Comprehending the barriers to linguistic uniqueness that Albanian youths face allows teachers to personalize their teaching approaches, ensuring harmony between valuing the richness of the Albanian language and promoting English fluency.

3.2 Cultural Considerations

Byram and Grundy (2003) draw attention to the language learning process and cultural influences as they impact the way youths engage, comprehend, and employ language. Efficient communication goes beyond the use of words and grammar; it encompasses the comprehension of cultural subtleties. Albanian youths are challenged to understand idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references that may not have direct translations in their native language. Understanding the cultural

context is crucial for learners to avoid misinterpretations when acquiring a new language. Establishing a connection between the teaching strategies and students' cultural identities can improve the learning process. This can be further reinforced by utilising teaching resources, models, and exercises that are culturally relevant and appropriate. Language is far more than just a set of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary rules. It serves as a powerful representation of culture. The cultural perspectives of these youths shape their language usage and comprehension when they engage with it in English. A well-rounded understanding of different cultures and proficiency in various languages are essential for effective communication. According to Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, (2013), Albanian youths may display distinctive communication styles, mannerisms, and nonverbal cues because of their cultural background. Teachers must grasp these subtleties to foster an atmosphere that promotes diverse communication styles. In addition to fostering a greater sense of ease among young individuals in educational settings, it encourages a more profound understanding of communication as a cultural phenomenon. Teachers can cultivate a sense of mutual respect and appreciation by fostering an environment where Albanian youths and the English language can engage in discussions and explore the similarities and differences between English and Albanian culture. An inclusive education is fostered by a multicultural strategy that recognises and appreciates the richness of diversity (Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, 2013). Adjusting the teaching method to accommodate the diverse cultural backgrounds of Albanian youths allows educators to ensure that each student has a meaningful and prosperous language-learning journey.

3.3 Pedagogical Approach

Based on the way they interact with language, Albanian youths in England acquire language in quite different ways. Most academics and observers agree that immigration from Albania has had a transformative impact on language patterns as well as on the dynamics of society. This observation reveals two main approaches to comprehending this phenomenon.

3.4 Bilingual Education

As a potential educational approach to handle the complex issues that Albanian youths encounter on both a language and societal level, bilingualism is gaining momentum. Sarri (2016) supported this technique as it uses a dual-language methodology by making learners participate in lessons provided in their mother language and their desired language, English. This dual language experience aims to help students become more familiar with their mother language and provide a deeper comprehension of English (Sarri, 2016). The significance of bilingual education comes from its maintaining and acknowledging the close relationship between native language development ability and academic success in English. This technique determines that students do not need to be proficient in their native language skills to develop the skills required for learning the English language. Instead, its purpose is to provide progress in language by encouraging cognitive and intellectual growth in both languages. Through the implementation of bilingual education, the students who emigrated from Albania to England are allowed to use the linguistic terrain of the classroom, using their abilities to collaborate effectively in an English-medium education environment while retaining a strong connection with their linguistic and cultural background. This strategy helps the predominant objective of aiding the Albanian youths to blend thoroughly into the academic system of England. Collaboration between educators, administrators, and the community is necessary to implement bilingual education initiatives. A solid foundation in the mother tongue can act as a support system for learning English (Sedmak & Dezan, 2023). By highlighting the importance of the youths' language and cultural background, this method affirms their self-identity position while fostering a greater comprehension of the academic material. According to research, bilingual language learning is essential as it improves English language competency and favours academic success in several areas (Vathi & King, 2013). Native language proficiency can be used by the youths to enhance their English comprehension and other academic material in the encouraging learning environments of these programs (Vathi & King, 2013).

3.5 Cultural Sensitivity in Teaching

It is important to consider cultural distinctions when creating instructional plans for Albanian youth. It is essential for teachers to have a deep understanding of cultural nuances that can impact language acquisition among students. Youth engagement can be enhanced by incorporating culturally

appropriate material into the curriculum and fostering an environment where they feel empowered to learn. Research has revealed that the motivation and involvement of learners can be increased by using culturally sensitive teaching strategies. Teachers should create a more inclusive and productive atmosphere for learning by connecting the cultural background of students to the teaching material. Concerted and interactive learning strategies such as group activities, storytelling, and project-based learning are used to create an effective learning environment that rewards students' engagement (Rexhepi, 2020). There are varying communication styles across cultures, and Albanian immigrant youths may also have their own unique ways of connecting and expressing themselves. Teachers should have an in-depth knowledge of these differences and be able to interpret non-verbal cues, body language, and direct eye contact (Rexhepi, 2020). Supporting an inclusive learning environment and accommodating different learning styles can greatly enhance learners' sense of support and encouragement, contributing to a more comfortable classroom atmosphere.

3.6 Community Engagement

Albanian youths can overcome language barriers by participating in community-based programs. The support network formed between community groups, families, and schools might help them foster a sense of belonging in the classroom and meet community needs (Sofia, 2022). Research shows a significant correlation between the community's practical movement and youths' academic success, especially for students from immigrant families (Vathi & King, 2013). Albanian youths are encouraged to participate actively in their school programs. Also, parents are motivated. To participate in such programs to ensure the academic success of Albanian youths (Vathi, 2011).

4. Similarities and Differences Between English and Albanian Languages

Grammar is the foundation of any language and greatly affects human communication, expressing thoughts, and conveying meaning. When examining the grammar of two languages, such as English and Albanian, there are clear differences that represent each language's unique structures and characteristics. Despite Albanian and English being Indo-European languages, they differ in linguistic characteristics that indicate their cultural, geographical, and historical backgrounds. Some of the most significant distinctions between the grammatical structures of English compared to Albanian grammar include that English does not possess the grammatical gender, which is a characteristic of the Albanian language. In Albanian grammar, the gender system that differentiates between masculine, feminine, and neuter genders may be related to its Indo-European origins. There is a notable difference in how grammatical gender and definite articles are handled. In English, there are no grammatical gender differences. In contrast, Albanian classifies nouns into masculine, feminine, or neuter genders, with each gender necessitating a definite article. English, which has no grammatical gender differences, English uses definite (the) and indefinite (a, an) articles before a noun to specify whether a noun is particular or general. In contrast, Albanian classifies nouns in masculine, feminine or neuter gender, where each gender requires an ending based on the gender. For example, the noun in the masculine gender ends with "i" and "u" in the feminine gender with "a" and "ja", and in the neuter gender with 'ë' or 'it'. Example: In English: "*The table*" - "*a table*"; in Albanian: "*tavolina*" - "*një tavolinë*". Moreover, there were discrepancies in the methodologies used by the two languages for noun determination and verb conjugation. The two languages use distinct strategies to convey verb tenses. Albanian has a distinctive system of conjugation and verb endings, while English relies on auxiliary verbs and word forms (Sarri, 2016). The conjugation of verbs in English is simpler than in Albanian. Verbs in English may be categorised as regular, or irregular based on their formation of the simple past tense. In English, auxiliary verbs (such as "has," "have," and "had") and word forms are often used to denote various tenses. Regular verbs adhere to a consistent pattern when forming the perfect tense and the simple perfect tense. Typically, regular verbs are modified by appending the suffix "-ed" to their original form. For example - base form: *I walk*; past form: *I walk-ed*; and past participle: *work-ed*.

Irregular verbs, unlike their regular counterparts, deviate from the conventional "-ed" pattern in their past tense and simple perfect tense forms. Each irregular verb possesses distinct forms that are exclusive, and there is no rule for them. This complexity underscores the importance of understanding these verbs thoroughly. Examples: base form: *I go*; past form: *I went*; past participle: *gone*.

In contrast, verbs in Albanian language are selected according to the tense. Example: *Koha e tashme: une eci; E kryera e thjeshtë: une eca; Koha e kryer: une kam ecur; Koha e tashme: une shkoj; E kryera e thjeshtë: une shkova; Koha e kryer: une kam shkuar.*

Despite sharing numerous grammatical categories, Albanian distinguishes itself from English in gender, plural, and grammatical categories (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2015). In contrast, English adjectives remain unaltered irrespective of gender, and there is a grammatical rule for the formation of plurals (Fusco, Larsen-Freeman, and Howard Alan Williams, 1999). In English, there are two forms of plural: regular and irregular. The regular plural form of most singular nouns is created by adding "-s" to the end. Nouns ending in sibilant sounds (-s, -z, -sh, -ch, -x) form the plural by adding "-es." If a singular noun ends in a consonant followed by "y," the "y" has to change to "i" and "-es" has to be added. Some nouns have irregular plural forms that do not follow these rules. Example: Singular- *child*, plural-*children*, singular-*man*, plural-*men*. Adjectives in Albanian indicate compatibility with the noun in terms of gender and plural form. In the Albanian language, the plural form of masculine nouns is formed by adding -*ë/a/nj/enj/inj/ra/ër*. Examples: In English we have "*a good friend*", "*good friend-s*" (plural); in Albanian - *nje shok i mire, shok-ëtë mirë*. In English: "*a famous river*", "*famous river-s*" (plural); in Albanian - *lumëi famshëm, lumenjtë famshëm* (plural). In English - "*a red bus*"; "*red bus-es*" (plural); in Albanian - *një autobus i kuq, autobusa të kuq*. In English: "*a short man*", "*short men*" (plural). In Albanian: *një burrëishkurtër, burratë shkurtër* (plural). English: "*hungry slave*", "*hungry slave-s*" (plural); in Albanian: *skllavi uritur, skllëvërtë uritur* (plural). In Albanian grammar, the plural form of feminine nouns is formed by adding -*ë/a/*. Example: *një nënë, nëna* (plural); in English - "*a mother*", "*mother-s*" (plural). In Albanian: *një lugë e madhe, lugë të mëdha*.

Certain feminine nouns form their plural by altering the sounds of the subject. These nouns do not adhere to any specific set of rules. Example: singular-*dorë*; *duar* (plural), singular-*derë*, *dyer* (plural), singular - *grua, gra* (plural). The usage of adjectives varies between English and Albanian despite their shared function as noun modifiers. Teachers need to have a deep understanding of the similarities and differences between English and Albanian languages to effectively assist young Albanian immigrants residing in England with their language development (Sarri, 2016).

4.1 Policy Implications

To improve the school performance of Albania youths living in England, extensive classroom technique improvements are needed, as well as more extensive acceptable changes. It is the responsibility of the government to put these policies into place to enhance the learning environment and provide these kids with the best possible circumstances for learning a new language.

4.2 Multicultural Education Policies

Multicultural educational programs must be established to guarantee that Albanian immigrant youths receive an adequate language education. Policymakers must determine the complex cultural and linguistic heterogeneity present in the Albanian population and make policies accordingly. Studies show that multicultural educational policies impact the language learning and academic performance of immigrant youths. Linguists, community leaders, legislators, and teachers must work together to implement policies that particularly cater to the needs of Albanian children in England (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2015). Further studies may help enhance these policies so that they prove to be beneficial in educational settings. Policymakers should also consider the need for opportunities for instructors to pursue professional development. Training programs that improve language teaching abilities and cultural competency impact the general efficacy of language education skills (Vathi & King, 2013). Implementing multicultural education policies helps Albanian immigrant youths successfully blend into the English-speaking population and also adapt to the learning environment that celebrates variety.

Teacher Training

Teacher training is needed to ensure the effectiveness of language learning programs for immigrant children in Albania (Chatzidaki & Xenikakt, 2012). Teachers can play a crucial role in noticing and addressing language challenges that Albanian youths encounter. There are various challenges that youths are likely to encounter during their educational process. One of these challenges is limited exposure to the English language. In his book, Krashen (1982) explains that insufficient English immersion in the classroom might impede the progress of language acquisition. Limited English proficiency among Albanian youths limits their ability to communicate effectively in English, hence impeding the development of their language abilities. To enhance the efficacy of language instruction, teachers must effectively convey ideas and tailor their approaches to accommodate the diverse requirements of individual learners. Training provides the teacher with the necessary skills to effectively communicate English language topics to Albanian youths in a manner that is easily comprehensible and accessible. According to Krashen (1985), the most effective way to acquire language is by providing

"comprehensible input" that is slightly beyond their current language proficiency level. Furthermore, Arnold (2019) states that emotional factors are crucial in effective English communication. Such emotions are presented as follows:

Embarrassment: Mispronouncing words or misusing language may cause youths to feel uncomfortable, particularly in front of their classmates. Apprehension about making errors could potentially impede their interest in engaging in class or participating in English conversations.

Frustration: The inability to articulate oneself in English might result in emotional discomfort. When students encounter language barriers that hinder their ability to express their thoughts effectively, they may feel frustrated and sad.

Fear of judgment: Concerns about potential judgment regarding language skills can be significant. Albanian youths may have concerns about how their peers and teachers perceive them, which can impact their confidence in the classroom.

The stress of cultural adjustment: Adapting to a different culture and language simultaneously can be quite challenging. Albanian students may experience cultural disorientation, which can impact their confidence in English.

The training focuses on helping teachers develop a deep understanding of linguistic nuances and cultural factors that impact the Albanian language and the emotional well-being of immigrant youths. Teachers should receive the essential training through seminars and ongoing support to effectively address the unique challenges posed by immigrant youths (Thornbury, 2017). Studies have indicated that teacher training programs that prioritize cultural sensitivity have been found to benefit immigrant learners' performance (Chatzidaki & Xenikaki, 2012). The trainings equip teachers to address the unique challenges faced by Albanian youths and create a nurturing educational atmosphere that fosters language development and cultural appreciation.

5. Results

Common Errors in Differentiating Long and Short Vowels: The study identified common errors made by Albanian youths distinguishing between long and short vowels. The analysis revealed a correlation between these errors and specific phonetic characteristics present in the participants' mother tongues, highlighting the influence of native language phonetics on the perception of English vowel sounds.

Impact of English Phonetic Model on Albanian Youths: The research findings indicate that the phonetic model of the English language has a discernible impact on how Albanian youths perceive and produce English vowel sounds. The study highlights the nuances and challenges in adapting to the English phonetic system for this specific linguistic group.

Grammatical Disparities and Language Barriers: The study elucidated how grammatical disparities between Albanian and English contribute to language barriers for Albanian youths. It provided insights into specific grammatical features that pose challenges, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the linguistic hurdles learners face.

Impact of Grammatical Gender on Language Acquisition: Findings revealed that the absence of grammatical gender in English, in contrast to its presence in Albanian, significantly affects language acquisition challenges. The study underscored how the presence or absence of grammatical gender shapes the learning process for Albanian youths.

Effects of Verb Conjugation Differences: The research explored how differences in verb conjugation systems between Albanian and English impact the learning process for new immigrants. The results shed light on specific challenges related to verb conjugation and provided insights into effective teaching strategies to address these challenges.

Influence of Cultural Linguistic Knowledge on Learning: The study demonstrated that cultural linguistic knowledge, including social norms and values, plays a crucial role in young Albanian-

speaking immigrants' learning. Understanding the cultural context proved essential for designing effective language learning programs.

Addressing Cultural Differences in Education: The research findings underscored the importance of teachers addressing cultural differences to create a more inclusive learning environment supportive of immigrant youths. The study identified specific strategies and approaches that teachers can implement to foster inclusivity and support the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of their students.

6. Conclusions

The effects of cultural background on the language learning of Albanian youths are a complex matter that requires a supportive and thorough approach. Cultural sensitivity and linguistic interference present various difficulties. The exploration of English and Albanian grammar reveals the structural disparities between the two languages and the unique cultural and historical influences that shape their linguistic characteristics. Structural disparities in the English and Albanian languages are evident, with Albanian having a three-gender system and English relying on conjugation and gender-specific endings. These differences highlight the Indo-European family's divergent origins. Despite these differences, both languages share certain grammatical categories, emphasizing the need for nuanced understanding when assisting Albanian immigrant youths in English language development. Acknowledging these distinctions as language is deeply intertwined with culture fosters a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to language teaching and learning — policy repercussions such as multicultural education and teacher training initiatives impact Albanian youths. Teachers, community workers, and parents should cooperate to create an encouraging learning environment. In addition, teacher training emerges as a pivotal component in ensuring the success of language learning programs for Albanian immigrant youths. Recognizing the challenges faced by them underscores the importance of teachers being well-equipped to address both linguistic and emotional needs.

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