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Barriers to Foreign Language Skill Development and Strategies for Effective Improvement

Abstract

In today's globalized world, foreign language proficiency is regarded as an essential competence from personal, social, academic, and professional perspectives. Despite long-term exposure to foreign language instruction, extending from primary education to undergraduate studies, many learners report that they are unable to achieve sufficient communicative competence. This persistent gap between years of instruction and actual language proficiency highlights the need to investigate the underlying obstacles that hinder effective language skill development.

The present study aims to identify the primary challenges faced by students enrolled in foreign language teacher training departments in developing their language skills and to propose practical strategies to overcome these challenges. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilizes semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to collect data from participants. The data were analyzed through coding-based content analysis in order to categorize recurring themes and patterns. The findings indicate that the most significant obstacles are concentrated in listening comprehension, speaking fluency and pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and academic writing skills. Psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and insufficient exposure to authentic language input were also identified as major barriers. Additionally, participants emphasized methodological limitations, inadequate practice opportunities, and limited integration of communicative and technology-supported learning environments as contributing factors.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that overcoming these obstacles requires the implementation of communicative and task-based approaches, increased exposure to authentic materials, systematic vocabulary instruction, constructive feedback mechanisms, and the effective integration of digital technologies into language instruction. Creating supportive and learner-centered classroom environments that reduce anxiety and encourage active participation is also essential. The results of this research contribute to a better understanding of the complex factors affecting language skill development and provide pedagogical implications for improving the quality of foreign language teacher education programs.

Keywords: *foreign language learning, communicative competence, speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, language anxiety, authentic materials, teacher training*

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Xarici dil bacarıqlarının inkişafına maneələr və effektiv təkmilləşdirmə strategiyaları

Xülasə

Müasir qloballaşmış dünyada xarici dil biliyi şəxsi, sosial, akademik və peşəkar baxımdan vacib kompetensiya kimi qiymətləndirilir. İbtidai təhsildən bakalavr səviyyəsinə qədər davam edən uzunmüddətli xarici dil tədrisinə baxmayaraq, bir çox öyrənən kifayət qədər kommunikativ səriştə əldə edə bilmədiyini bildirir. Tədris illəri ilə real dil bacarığı arasındakı bu davamlı uyğunsuzluq dil bacarıqlarının effektiv inkişafına mane olan əsas amillərin araşdırılmasını zəruri edir.

Tədqiqatın məqsədi xarici dil müəllimliyi ixtisası üzrə təhsil alan tələbələrin dil bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirərkən qarşılaşdıqları əsas çətinlikləri müəyyən etmək və bu çətinliklərin aradan qaldırılması üçün praktik strategiyalar təklif etməkdir. Keyfiyyət yönümlü tədqiqat dizaynına əsaslanan bu işdə məlumatların toplanması üçün yarı-strukturlaşdırılmış müsahibələr və açıq tipli

anketlərdən istifadə olunmuşdur. Toplanan məlumatlar təkrarlanan mövzuları və nümunələri müəyyənləşdirmək məqsədilə kodlaşdırmaya əsaslanan məzmun təhlili vasitəsilə analiz edilmişdir.

Nəticələr göstərir ki, əsas çətinliklər dinləyib-anlama, danışmaq səsliyi və tələffüz, söz ehtiyatının mənimsənilməsi, oxuyub-anlama və akademik yazı bacarıqları sahələrində cəmləşir. Eyni zamanda narahatlıq, səhv etmək qorxusu, özünə inamsızlıq və autentik dil mühitinə kifayət qədər məruz qalmama kimi psixoloji amillər də əsas maneələr kimi müəyyən edilmişdir. Bundan əlavə, iştirakçılar metodoloji məhdudiyyətləri, kifayət qədər praktika imkanlarının olmamasını və kommunikativ və texnologiya əsaslı təlim mühitlərinin məhdud tətbiqini də mühüm amillər kimi vurğulamışlar.

Əldə olunan nəticələrə əsasən, bu maneələrin aradan qaldırılması üçün kommunikativ və tapşırıq əsaslı yanaşmaların tətbiqi, autentik materiallara daha çox çıxışın təmin edilməsi, sistemli söz ehtiyatı tədrisi, konstruktiv geribildirim mexanizmləri və rəqəmsal texnologiyaların dil tədrisinə effektiv inteqrasiyası zəruridir. Həmçinin, narahatlığı azaldan və aktiv iştirakını təşviq edən dəstəkləyici və öyrənən mərkəzli sinif mühitinin yaradılması da mühüm əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Bu tədqiqatın nəticələri dil bacarıqlarının inkişafına təsir edən mürəkkəb amillərin daha yaxşı anlaşılmasına töhfə verir və xarici dil müəllimlərinin hazırlanması proqramlarının keyfiyyətinin artırılması üçün pedaqoji tövsiyələr təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *xarici dil öyrənilməsi, kommunikativ səriştə, danışmaq səsliyi, söz ehtiyatının artırılması, dil narahatlığı, autentik materiallar, müəllim hazırlığı*

Introduction

Knowing a foreign language is perceived as a social necessity, primarily a personal one. Parallel to the development of interpersonal relationships and mass media, learning a language different from one's native tongue has become a necessity of our time. As with all other forms of learning, language learning is known to have certain principles and rules. Indeed, foreign language learning is a holistic process with multiple stages. This process encompasses developable skills and behaviors. The development of these skills and behaviors is strengthened by the learner's experience. Undoubtedly, these elements alone are not effective or sufficient in foreign language learning. The individual's needs and interests are as important as their desire to learn.

Ismayilli emphasizing the importance of knowing and learning a foreign language in adapting to social and cultural changes, states that with the increasing opportunities for cultural exchange and cooperation in various fields between countries, foreign language learning activities have become an even more essential necessity. However, "despite being included in the curriculum at every level from primary to higher education, the number of people who cannot speak, understand what they read, or express themselves in simple terms on paper is considerable" (Ismayilli, 2025). Therefore, foreign language learning, speaking, and the ability to use it effectively have emerged as a significant problem in today's societies. In this context, it is seen that personal, social, and/or attitudinal factors are influential in foreign language learning. Factors falling under the personal domain include variables such as gender, age, educational experience, foreign language proficiency level, and motivation to learn. It is useful to briefly explain these factors that positively and/or negatively affect foreign language learning.

Gender is one of the important factors in the process of learning and acquiring a foreign language. This concept, which signifies the difference between women and men, cannot be evaluated solely in relation to biological reasons. The concept of gender, first used in 1972, indicates that the difference between women and men is not only based on biological grounds but also evaluated within a social and cultural context. The roles of girls and boys are shaped according to societies and their cultural structures. Therefore, it can be said that the perception of gender is primarily formed at the social level. The participation of women and men in social life, the form and rate of participation, can also be entirely explained by gender. In any society, the determination of roles for women and men, their position, and the formation of gender-specific roles largely occur through the perception of gender. Undoubtedly, gender roles are related to the socio-economic and cultural structure of that society. As the name suggests, gender roles are shaped according to the roles that women and men assume. This

situation has also been conceptualized from a perspective that views the differences and relationships between women and men as a product of socialization, not their biology.

Another personal factor in foreign language learning is age. Many studies have highlighted the benefits of learning a foreign language at an early age. The primary reason for this is that a child's cognitive development is more conducive to learning a foreign language compared to an adult. The ease and permanence of learning at an early age increases foreign language proficiency. This learning process, which requires effort for adults, follows a more natural course in children. This is due to the flexibility of the child's cognitive structure, the enrichment of the learning process with games and various activities according to the principle of child-centeredness, and their openness to communication. In a study conducted by Lightbown, it was found that 90% of students, 95.7% of teachers, and all parents believed in the benefits and necessity of learning a foreign language at an early age. Based on the fact that children's perceptions are more open than adults', it is clear that learning a foreign language at an early age will increase success. (Lightbown, 2013).

As of 2007, the age for starting compulsory foreign language education in some European countries was given as 6 in Italy, Austria, and Norway; 7 in France and Finland; 8 in Germany, Spain, and Romania; 9 in Hungary; and 10 in the Netherlands and Turkey. Evim, and Uzun found in their research that the cognitive readiness level of second-grade students was suitable for starting foreign language learning at an early age. It is necessary to emphasize the content and quality aspects of this teaching method rather than the age at which foreign language learning begins (Evim, 2014).

In foreign language learning, motivation and encouragement play an important role among personal factors. Motivation, based on the desire to do things and possessing inherent biological, emotional, social, and/or cognitive forces, is a phenomenon that initiates, sustains, and participates in goal-oriented behaviors. Composed of three fundamental components action, persistence, and intensity motivation is a crucial driving force in foreign language learning. The desire to learn a foreign language and the decision to initiate this process that is, to start a behavior are related to the action aspect of motivation. Action necessitates perseverance in the face of obstacles and effort to achieve the goal, which aligns with the principle of persistence and/or insistence in motivation. Unfortunately, when these two elements do not meet with concentration, the necessary motivation and desire in the learner do not develop.

Listening skills are closely related not only to speaking but also to reading skills. "Listening skills, which begin before birth, develop in the family, continue in school, and are used in many areas of life, are in a way reading and interpreting sounds" (Kargı, 2015). The relationship between listening and reading is not only on the phonetic level but also in a semantic context. Because the development of comprehension skills conditions the development of behavior. In other words, it supports responding to speech with appropriate behaviors and words. According to Mehdiyev, (2016) it is known that acquiring knowledge, developing appropriate behaviors and attitudes in new situations by utilizing previously acquired experiences, is closely related to a good listening skill and habit acquired in a timely manner. According to many experts and researchers, speaking is the most challenging skill in foreign language learning. The teaching method used in language instruction directly affects speaking skills. There are many ways to effectively develop this skill. For example, the question-and-answer method and pronunciation exercises can be used to improve speaking skills. Majadley (2026: 96) states that language learning "begins with producing the sounds and saying the words in that language." In pronunciation exercises, the suitability of the physical environment is important for the correct perception of sound in language teaching. A noise-free environment is as important as correct pronunciation. The essence of pronunciation practice depends on the teacher producing words or word phrases with emphasis and correct modeling. Students who imitate this pronunciation follow the examples.

Words, the fundamental building blocks of language, are of primary importance in the effective use of a foreign language. Fluent language use depends on vocabulary. In vocabulary teaching, a path can be followed from simple to complex, taking into account the learner's linguistic needs. However, the principle of not resorting to the native language should be carefully avoided in vocabulary

teaching. Instead, gestures and facial expressions, movements, or drawings can be used to illustrate. The use of dictionaries is also extremely important in vocabulary teaching. Another point in vocabulary teaching is that by giving one noun, verb, or adjective from the same root, other words related to that word can be taught.

Another act of language is reading. "Reading is a process of communication, perception, and learning" (Yıldırım, 2006). Another definition similar to this can be given as follows: "We can define reading as the process of converting symbols (letters) used in response to a specific meaning into sounds and assigning meaning to them" (Komala, 2025). As is known, the act of reading is primarily "an effort to make sense of, comprehend, and interpret printed and written symbols" (Li, 2025). Comprehension and understanding begin primarily with reading. "Many of a person's learning inputs occur through reading" (Richards, 2001). "In the past, reading was considered a means of obtaining the meaning of a sentence.

Today, however, it is defined as a tool for developing brain technology. Since reading is primarily a process of constructing meaning, there are many factors that influence it. The reader's previous knowledge, experiences, and past events are quite decisive in understanding. Cognitive abilities, knowledge, and past experiences are fundamental elements in reading. If reading is considered a cognitive activity, it can be said that the knowledge and expectations acquired by the reader throughout their life as a result of various endeavors also have a significant share in understanding. Because in order to understand a text that has been analyzed, the reader needs to be able to establish a connection between the text and their own knowledge and experiences.

Writing skills, contrary to popular belief, do not simply refer to writing on specific topics. The ability to express oneself, which begins with speaking, is strengthened by writing skills. Foreign language teaching/learning encompasses four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These skills are further divided into two parts: comprehension-oriented (receptive skills) – 'listening' and 'reading' – and production-oriented (productive skills) – 'speaking' and 'writing' (Babayev, 2025). Writing activities directly develop students' expressive skills through written texts, while being supported by exercises and activities used according to specific strategies and language levels. In these activities, grammar instruction, a secondary skill, also aims to use language creatively and effectively within the framework of new approaches.

Communication essentially stems from an individual's desire to express themselves within their society, to understand others, and to organize and interpret events and human relationships. With changing world conditions, the boundaries of an individual's communication needs have also expanded and changed. Exchanging information, becoming well-media literate, and establishing economic, social, and cultural relationships have made communication with other nations essential. Knowing something is a dualistic process, encompassing both a need and a necessity. The desire to access information has elevated communication from an individual level to an inter-societal level. Foreign language teaching/learning fundamentally includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. These four basic skills are further divided into two main categories based on their comprehension and production orientations. Listening and reading are comprehension-oriented skills, while speaking and writing are production-based. Knowing a foreign language means being able to internalize that language with all its skills by utilizing the learned vocabulary and grammatical structures. Therefore, knowing a foreign language is not only about learning the rules and theoretical knowledge of the language, but also about being able to use this knowledge effectively and appropriately in communication. For this reason, knowing a foreign language now requires acquiring knowledge of culture, lexicology, grammar, and phonology in addition to the four basic language skills.

The most frequently cited problem in language learning is the inability to learn and/or use a foreign language to a sufficient level from primary school to university education. Many studies on this subject reveal the various obstacles to achieving this. In this context, the most criticized aspects are the education system and curricula (Krashen, 1982). Reasons for criticism include teaching materials, course content not designed for foreign language instruction, high student numbers,

inadequate physical conditions, the content of foreign language courses, class hours, the inability to create an environment for practicing the language due to the lack of native-speaking teachers, and the failure to start foreign language instruction at an early age.

Another significant obstacle encountered in foreign language teaching is unhealthy teaching environments and conditions. "Since a suitable and healthy learning/teaching environment cannot be established, the internalization of what is learned becomes quite difficult" (Kargı, 2014, p. 357). This research aims to identify the causes of the most fundamental linguistic problems faced by students studying in language departments in achieving sufficient language learning and use, and to offer solutions. In this context, the research attempts to determine what the major problems in language learning are, what kinds of problems stand out in which linguistic skills in language teaching, and what students' views are on solving these problems. In this regard, the fact that studies in Turkey addressing the obstacles to developing language skills and ways to overcome them, according to the opinions of students studying foreign language teaching, are quite limited in the literature, prompted researchers to conduct this study. In this sense, the study is considered extremely important in terms of revealing the obstacles to developing language skills and ways to overcome them.

Problem Statement

According to students studying foreign language teaching, what are the obstacles to improving their language skills, and what are the ways to overcome these obstacles?

Sub-Problems

1- What are the obstacles to improving listening and comprehension skills, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles?

2- What are the obstacles to improving speaking and articulation skills, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles?

3- What are the obstacles to improving vocabulary learning skills, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles?

4- What are the obstacles to improving reading skills, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles?

5- What are the obstacles to improving writing skills, and what should be done to overcome these obstacles?

Research Model

This study utilized a qualitative research technique. Qualitative research is a type of research that employs data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and document analysis, following a process aimed at presenting perceptions and events realistically and holistically in their natural environment. Qualitative research designs provide researchers with a flexible approach and contribute to the consistency of various stages within a specific focus.

Study Group

The study group consists of 52 students studying in the 3rd and 4th years of the English Language Teaching program Nakchivan State University's Department of Foreign Languages during the 2024-2025 academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select these classes and students. Purposive sampling allows for in-depth study of situations considered to possess rich information. In this research, maximum diversity sampling was used to create a relatively small research group and to reflect the diversity of individuals who could be involved in the problem being studied (Ismayilli, 2025). Maximum diversity is important for the detailed definition of the unique dimensions of each situation included in the study group and for revealing common themes and their value that may emerge among situations exhibiting largely different characteristics.

Data Collection Tool

The interview form used in the study, consisting of 5 questions, was prepared by the researchers. The prepared interview form was reviewed by 5 faculty members who are experts in the field, and necessary corrections were made based on their opinions. Then, this form was given to 10 students to determine if there were any questions they did not understand or that caused conceptual confusion. After the necessary corrections, the form was ready for application. In qualitative research, validity

means that the researcher observes the phenomenon being investigated as it is and as impartially as possible (Babasoy, 2025). From this perspective, the validity of the form has been ensured.

Research data was collected by taking notes during the interviews and transcribing the data. These transcripts were then checked after the individual interviews were completed. Interviews with participants lasted between 10 and 25 minutes. The interview method allowed participants to respond from their own perspectives; unlike surveys, there were no pre-prepared questions, so participants freely expressed their thoughts on a topic. During data collection via interviews, participants were given the opportunity to present diverse and rich ideas, and their opinions were not restricted in any way.

Analysis of Data

The data obtained in the research were examined using qualitative research methods and evaluated with the help of content analysis. In the analysis of qualitative data, coding-based content analysis was performed. The basic process in content analysis is to bring together similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes, and to interpret them by organizing them in a way that the reader can understand.

In the analysis of the data, the recordings were first taken and transcribed. The transcribed data was kept completely faithful to the original. Interview data were coded and then organized according to the emerging theme. The opinions expressed by each participant were reviewed two or three times, and the accuracy of the statements was confirmed by two researchers. Then, the resulting codes were re-analyzed internally and linked to sub- and main themes.

In this study, participants' opinions were presented using a realist approach. Thus, researchers remained neutral on issues such as whether participants were right or wrong, and allowed them to freely share their views on the subject. The researchers presented the participants' opinions without abbreviation to ensure the integrity of the participants' thinking and to allow the reader to make their own interpretations.

3. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Table 1.
 Student Views on Obstacles to Improving Listening and Comprehension Skills and What Needs to Be Done to Overcome Them.

What are the obstacles to improving listening and comprehension skills?	N
Lack of attention	1
Lack of quality and understandable resources (S14).	7
Lack of understanding while listening	2
Lack of attention and motivation (S14), (S4), (S7), (S8), (S17), (S37), (S22).	4
Dinleme ve algılama ile ilgili etkinliklerin çok yetersiz olması (S20). (S21). (S34). (S30). (S1). (S10). (S33). (S51). (S52).	9
Lack of lessons focused on listening and comprehension (S38). (S44). (S46).	3
	2
Insufficient sensory aids or materials (S6). (S12).	1
Lack of self-confidence in students (S41).	10
What should be done to overcome these obstacles? 1	1
Intensive listening lessons should be given to students (S21). (S24). (S29). 3	1
More movies and videos should be watched. (S48). (S28). (S32).	3
Listening activities should be done in the native language. (S48). (S1). (S5). (S46).	4
Materials should be used (such as video, sound system and visuals) (S30).	1
Lack of motivation must be addressed. (S25). (S4). (S41). (S45).	4

When the table was examined, 9 students stated that very few listening and comprehension activities were performed, 7 students indicated a lack of attention and motivation, 4 students said that understanding was difficult because the speaker's language was not their native language, 3 students stated that lessons on listening and comprehension were very inadequate, 2 students said their vocabulary was insufficient, and another 2 students stated that there were insufficient materials, thus viewing these situations as obstacles to developing listening and comprehension skills. Some student opinions on this matter are: "I think that not enough work is done on listening and comprehension (S21)". "This is because not enough listening is done and many activities are not done to improve listening and comprehension skills (S34)", "The biggest factor in listening and comprehension is the lack of lessons on these skills (S38)". "Lack of quality and understandable resources and motivation (S14)". We may have difficulty in comprehension because we cannot adapt to the subject we are listening to. A lack of self-concentration can also be an obstacle. Distraction can also affect listening. To be a good listener, we need to focus our attention (S7)". Lack of concentration is an obstacle in this regard. After providing an environment where the student can listen attentively, their perception ability will also improve (S17)." It was in the form of "Lack of concentration is an obstacle in this regard (S18)."

To overcome these obstacles, 10 students suggested that more listening activities should be conducted in various ways, 4 students suggested that listening activities should be done in their native language, 3 students suggested that listening lessons should be given, and 3 students suggested that more films and videos should be shown. Some student opinions on this matter were: "Intensive listening lessons should be given to students starting from the preparatory class. Daily developments such as radio, news, and audio articles should be followed (S21)", "We could watch more films and videos, or if we had a French-speaking teacher and had conversation lessons with them, our listening and speaking skills would improve (S48)".

Table 2.
 Student Opinions Regarding Obstacles to Developing Speech and Pronunciation Skills and What Needs to Be Done to Overcome These Obstacles.

What are the obstacles to improving speech and articulation skills?	N
Have a practice (S4). (S15). (S22). (S34). (S28). (S7). (S33). (S41). (S44), (S51).	10
Insufficient application of the learned language (S14).	1
Lack of repetition (S16).	1
Most of the lessons are taught in the native language. (S42). (S28).	2
Lack of foreign teachers(S28). (S10). (S13). (S39).	4
Lack of motivation (S25). (S42). (S8). (S12). (S13). (S17). (S32).	7
Lack of vocabulary (S8). (S33). (S47).	3
Lack of speaking lessons (S13). (S13). (S42). (S29). (S36). (S44).	6
Grammar hesitation (S39).	1
What should be done to overcome these obstacles?	
To organize conversation clubs (S14).	1
Increasing vocabulary (S16). (S9).	2
To organize speaking activities (S16). (S19). (S34). (S5). (S27). (S27). (S29).	7
To have lesson with foreign teachers (S21). (S33). (S50).	3
To have practice (S22). (S7). (S9).	3
To memorize (S4). (S9).	2
English should be reinforced through theatre or drama-style games. (S6).	1

To go abroad (S10).	1
To motivate students (S12).	1
To have speaking lessons each semester (S46).	1

When the table was examined, 10 students stated that they did not have enough practice related to speaking, 7 students stated that they lacked self-confidence in speaking, 6 students stated that the speaking lessons were insufficient, 4 students stated that there was a lack of a foreign teacher, 3 students stated that they did not have sufficient vocabulary knowledge, and 2 students stated that most of the lessons were taught in Azerbaijani all of which they considered as obstacles to improving their speaking skills. Student opinions on this matter are: “The obstacles to improving speaking and pronunciation skills are lack of practice (S22)”. “The biggest factor in the obstacle of listening and speaking skills is the lack of basic practice (S15)”. “Because speaking is not practiced enough (S34)”. “The biggest factor in speaking and pronunciation is self-confidence. The teacher should instill that self-confidence in the student in every way (S38)”. “Speaking lessons are insufficient (S13)”. “Also, a foreign teacher is necessary because we don't speak unless we have to (S13)”. “In the 2nd and 3rd grades, there are no lessons focused on speaking (S13)”. “Also, we are in the 3rd grade and some lessons are still taught in Azerbaijani. Maybe it's done for our understanding, but it's to our detriment (S42)” To overcome these obstacles, 7 students suggested that more emphasis should be placed on speaking activities, 3 students suggested that foreign teachers should be assigned, 3 students suggested that speaking practice should be provided, 2 students suggested that vocabulary should be enriched, and 2 students suggested that what has been learned should be reviewed. Student opinions on this matter were: “To overcome this obstacle, a lot of practice is necessary (S22)”. “The teacher should instill all kinds of self-confidence in the student (S38)”. “Motivation and self-confidence should be provided as much as possible in speaking, and the student should participate more actively in speaking (S17)”. “Speaking lessons should be in every class and every semester. Like the preparatory class, speaking lessons should be more intensive in the 4th year to further develop their skills (S29)”.

Table 3.
 Student Views on the Obstacles to Improving Vocabulary Learning Skills and What Needs to Be Done to Overcome Them.

What are the obstacles to improving vocabulary learning skills?	N
Not memorizing the learned vocabulary (S2). (S37).	2
Not using dictionary (S14). (S8). (S10).	3
Not doing enough textual research and not reading books. (S22). (S34).	2
Memorizing the word (S38). (S12). (S45). (S50). (S26). (S1). (S4). (S7). (S24). (S40). (S 51).	11
Not reading books, newspapers, or magazines. (S7). (S39).	2
Speaking only with certain words. (S8).	1
Trying to learn words individually rather than within sentences. (S47).	1
What should be done to overcome these obstacles?	
Words should be learned by reading newspapers, magazines, and books. (S15). (S22). (S35). (S10). (S17). (S4).	6
It is necessary to learn the word, not just memorize it. (S16). (S38). (S1). (S10). (S17). (S24).	6
Words should be learned along with their synonyms and antonyms. (S19). (S24).	2
In terms of vocabulary learning, a learning portfolio model should be implemented for students. (S21).	1
Sufficient textual analysis should be done. (S22). (S44).	2

The learned words should be reviewed. (S35). (S27). (S36). (S46).	4
All lessons should be taught in a foreign language. (S28).	1
You should use the words you've learned and put them into practice. (S25). (S47). (S50).	3
Words should be presented more through visual materials. (S18). (S24). (S31).	3

Upon examining the table, 11 students stated that they memorized the words, 3 students did not use a dictionary, 2 students did not review the learned words, and another 2 students did not read enough books or magazines, thus viewing these situations as obstacles to improving their vocabulary learning skills. Student opinions on this matter included: “To learn or improve vocabulary, it is necessary to review and memorize words daily or to reinforce them by forming sentences with the words (S27)”, “Lack of or insufficient habit of using a dictionary (S14)”, “Words cannot be learned through memorization; if they are, this is a major obstacle (S1)”, and “Not reading books and not using the learned words in daily life are obstacles to vocabulary learning (S34)”.

(The table shows that 11 students memorized the words, 3 students did not use a dictionary, 2 students did not review the learned words, and 2 students did not read enough books or magazines, thus viewing these situations as obstacles to improving their vocabulary learning skills.) To overcome these obstacles, 6 students suggested learning words by reading newspapers, magazines, and books; another 6 students suggested learning words instead of memorizing them; 4 students suggested reviewing the learned words; 3 students suggested putting the learned words into practice; 3 students suggested using visuals for words; and 2 students suggested learning words along with their synonyms and antonyms. Student opinions on this were: “For vocabulary skills, words related to the topic should be given along with their synonyms and antonyms in each lesson, and a certain number of words should be learned (S19)”. “To overcome obstacles, it is necessary to learn words without memorizing them. If each word is constantly repeated and connected to daily life, it is learned very quickly (S1)”. “Understanding a word by learning it is more important than memorizing it (S7)”

Table 4.
 Student Views on Obstacles to Improving Reading Skills and What Needs to Be Done to Overcome Them.

What are the obstacles to improving reading skills?	N
Lack of or insufficient reading habits (S14). (S26). (S8). (S9). (S12). (S17). (S1). (S10). (S47).	9
Not reading books, newspapers, and magazines (S22).	1
Lack of motivation (S4). (S50).	2
Lack of materials (S6).	3
What should be done to overcome these obstacles?	
Stories, novels, books, and newspapers should be read. (S16). (S19). (S20). (S39). (S50). (S21). (S38). (S27). (S2). (S11). (S29).	11
A large number of texts should be read in class. (S30).	1
Reading skills should be improved by reading a lot. (S5). (S7). (S12).	3
Reading should be done daily (S41).	1
Reading should be done for 1-2 hours a week. (S44).	1

When the table was examined, 9 students stated that they had no or insufficient reading habits, 3 students stated that they had inadequate reading materials, and 2 students stated that they lacked sufficient motivation to read, viewing these situations as obstacles to improving their reading skills. Some student opinions related to this were: “Lack of or insufficient reading habits (S14)”. “The biggest obstacle to improving reading skills is the lack of a reading habit (S17)”. “We don't read

because we often had difficulties with materials, books, magazines, and texts (S6)". "More texts, newspapers, magazines, and similar materials should be used in classes (S30)". "The obstacle to improving reading skills is the person's unwillingness or embarrassment when speaking with an accent. To overcome this obstacle, the student should read extensively to adopt the language and correct their accent (S4)".

To overcome these obstacles, 11 students stated that reading enough books, newspapers, novels, and stories is necessary, 3 students said that extensive reading is needed, and 1 student said that daily reading is necessary. Student opinions on this matter were as follows: "I believe that the most important thing in reading is pronunciation. For this, students should be made to read many books, magazines, articles, stories, news, and newspapers (Student 21)". "In terms of reading, we should read many books and stories (Student 16)". "The obstacles to developing reading skills are not reading books, newspapers, and magazines. We can overcome this obstacle by reading (Student 22)". "To improve reading skills, it is necessary to read many books in the language being learned. To overcome this, a reading habit should be instilled in the student (Student 38)". "Daily reading practice is necessary for reading skills (Student 41)".

Table 5.
 Student Views on Obstacles to Developing Writing Skills and What Needs to Be Done to Overcome Them.

What are the obstacles to improving writing skills?	N
Lack of vocabulary (S20). (S34). (S6). (S7). (S8). (S9). (S13). (S17). (S18). (S24). (S27). (S37). (S44). (S46). (S47). (S52). (S14).	17
Having enough practice (S22). (S10). (S47).	3
To think in mother tongue (S38). (S12).	2
Lack of grammar (S27). (S37). (S44). (S45). (S46). (S47). (S49). (S51). (S52). (S14).	10
Not Having writing skill (S40).	1
What should be done to overcome these obstacles?	
Writing exercises should be reviewed. (S16). (S33).	2
Writing exercises should be conducted in the lessons. (S19).	1
Letters and articles should be written. (S22).	1
Writing activities should be done. (S34). (S28). (S5). (S6). (S10). (S11). (S12). (S15).	8
When writing, one should not think in Azerbaijani logic. (S38).	1
Daily writing assignments should be done. (S38). (S17). (S50). (S51).	4
Enriching vocabulary (S8). (S13). (S17). (S46). (S47). (S49). (S51). (S52).	8
Grammar deficiencies should be considered. (S27). (S37). (S44). (S45). (S17). (S46).	6

When the table was examined, 17 students stated that they lacked vocabulary, 10 students lacked grammar, 3 students did not do enough written work, and 2 students thought in Azerbaijani while writing, thus seeing this as an obstacle to improving their writing skills. Student opinions on this were: "Writing skills are directly proportional to vocabulary (S20)". "A person with insufficient vocabulary will also be insufficient in writing. Sometimes forgetting a word and not being able to find another word in its place stems from a lack of vocabulary (S7)". "This skill is word-focused and related to not having enough vocabulary. Besides this, the student cannot write a proper text due to insufficient grammar knowledge (S8)". "Not knowing grammar rules is a problem in writing, but it can be corrected through practice (S23)". "I think writing skills are lacking because of a lack of grammar. I believe that good writing comes from a well-learned grammar and a large vocabulary (S37)". "To improve writing skills, one should not think in Azerbaijani and should write about

everyday topics that come to mind (S38).” “One of the biggest obstacles to writing skills is not doing enough writing exercises. Not doing sentence exercises. To overcome this obstacle, writing exercises should be done. For example, one can keep a diary (S10).”

To overcome these obstacles, 8 students suggested more writing activities, another 8 suggested enriching their vocabulary, 6 suggested addressing grammar deficiencies, 4 suggested daily writing practice, and 2 suggested reviewing writing exercises. Student opinions on this include: “To improve writing, for example, we should gather every evening and write down our daily activities in a journal (S50).” “To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to first learn grammar rules and increase vocabulary (S8).” “For writing, if a student summarizes the book they read each month, both their writing and their comprehension and reading will improve. They can write and describe a movie or event they watched on television (S29).” “This skill can be developed by doing dictation and writing exercises along with vocabulary-building activities (S17).” “For writing skills, students improve their writing skills by constantly writing. They should not avoid writing (S11).” “Dictation exercises could be done in class, and homework such as compositions or essays using usable vocabulary could be assigned. This would make everyone even more obligated and stressful (O6).”

Conclusion

Students have identified several obstacles to developing their listening and comprehension skills, including insufficient quality and understandable resources, lack of attention and motivation, inadequate vocabulary, the speaker not being a native speaker (foreign teacher), insufficient listening and comprehension activities, lack of lessons focused on listening and comprehension, insufficient auditory aids or materials, and lack of self-confidence. Considering that comprehension and expression skills are of primary importance in foreign language teaching, the importance of listening and reading activities that strengthen comprehension, and speaking and writing activities that strengthen expression skills, becomes evident. Furthermore, research shows that "a person spends 42% of their time with others listening, and students listen to their teachers and classmates for 2.5-4 hours a day at school" (Ismayilli). Listening exercises are extremely important in learning and developing speaking skills in a foreign language. The development and use of speaking skills depend on good listening skills. Therefore, listening and speaking skills directly influence each other.

Mammadova, K (2024) research indicates that the teacher plays a significant role in motivating students through classroom activities. Furthermore, the variety of classroom activities, their suitability to the student's wishes, the materials used, and the attractiveness of the learning environment are considered effective factors in motivating students. Emphasis is also placed on the fear of failure and the lack of necessary environmental conditions for success. Additionally, high expectations for success in foreign languages and the inability to fully meet these expectations are seen as fundamental motivational problems. There should be technological infrastructure in the classroom to conduct listening and viewing activities in a foreign language. In other words, as classrooms become more crowded, the speaking time in the classroom, which is almost the only place where students can speak, decreases. Many classrooms lack the physical facilities necessary for conducting listening and viewing activities.

Students indicated that obstacles to improving listening and comprehension skills could be overcome through various means, including increased listening activities, listening to short videos, short stories, and films, improving vocabulary, providing intensive listening lessons, monitoring daily developments such as radio, news, and audio articles, watching more films and videos, conducting listening activities in their native language, using materials, and addressing lack of motivation.

Students perceive the obstacles to developing speaking and pronunciation skills as lack of practice, insufficient application of the learned language, lack of repetition, lessons mostly being taught in Azerbaijani, absence of foreign teachers, lack of self-confidence, insufficient vocabulary, inadequate speaking lessons, and anxiety about adhering strictly to grammar. According to many experts and researchers, speaking is the skill that students struggle with most in foreign language learning. The teaching method used in language instruction directly affects speaking skills. There are

many ways to effectively develop this skill. For example, the question-and-answer method and pronunciation exercises can be used to improve speaking skills. Practice exercises in speaking skills should primarily be reinforced with grammatical rules. Speaking skills are directly related to correctly using the phonological structure of the learned foreign language. In pronunciation exercises, the suitability of the physical environment in language teaching is important for the correct perception of sound. The basis of pronunciation exercises relies on the teacher producing words or word phrases with emphasis and a correct model. Students who imitate this pronunciation follow the examples.

Participants suggested that obstacles to improving speaking and pronunciation skills could be overcome by organizing speaking clubs, enriching vocabulary, incorporating more speaking activities, employing foreign instructors, providing practice, reviewing what has been learned, reinforcing language through theatrical or dramatic plays, going abroad, encouraging students, and including speaking-related courses every year. Students indicated that they perceived the following as obstacles to improving vocabulary acquisition skills: not reviewing learned words, not using dictionaries, not doing enough text work, not reading books, memorizing words, not reading newspapers and magazines, speaking only with certain words, and trying to learn them individually rather than in context. Words, the fundamental building blocks of language, are of primary importance in the effective use of a foreign language. Fluent language use depends on vocabulary. In vocabulary teaching, a path can be followed from simple to complex, taking into account the learner's linguistic needs. However, the principle of not referring to the native language should be carefully avoided in vocabulary teaching. Instead, gestures and facial expressions, movements can be used, or the words can be explained through drawings. Using a dictionary is also extremely important in vocabulary teaching. Another point in vocabulary teaching is that by giving one noun, verb, or adjective from the same root, other words related to that word can be taught.

Students stated that the obstacles to improving vocabulary learning skills could be overcome by: learning vocabulary through reading newspapers, magazines, and books; learning vocabulary rather than memorizing it; learning vocabulary with synonyms and antonyms; applying the LP (learning portfolio) model to students for vocabulary learning; conducting sufficient text studies; reviewing learned vocabulary; teaching all lessons in a foreign language; using learned vocabulary; and presenting vocabulary more with visual materials. Students perceive the obstacles to improving reading skills as: lack of or insufficient reading habits; not reading books, newspapers, and magazines; lack of motivation; and lack of materials. In Asadova's (2025) study, which aimed to determine the perceptions of prospective primary school teachers regarding reading, it was found that the majority of prospective teachers (s 34) had negative perceptions regarding reading skills. In the study conducted with 56 prospective teachers, one of the participants' negative perceptions regarding reading books was that they considered themselves unsuccessful (s 23). The most important reasons for the inability to read were identified as boredom (s 15) and lack of a suitable environment (s 18). English teachers working in schools with adequate technological infrastructure stated that the efficiency of their lessons was high. Contrary to the common view in foreign language teaching, reading skills, not speaking, are the starting point of communication. Reading implies three interrelated processes: visual, comprehension, and cognitive. What is meant by visual is that the connection with reading is primarily made through written text. Therefore, "at the heart of reading is written communication" (Komala, 2025). Thus, the starting point of the act of reading begins with written symbols. In the traditional definition, reading is the activity of communicating with printed and written symbols.

Students suggested that obstacles to improving reading skills could be overcome by reading stories, novels, books, and newspapers; reading numerous texts in class; doing more reading; doing daily reading exercises; and reading for 1-2 hours a week. Participants identified vocabulary deficiencies, insufficient written work, a lack of Azerbaijani thinking and grammar skills, and a lack of writing habits as obstacles to improving writing skills. Therefore, it is possible to develop writing skills as an effective skill in the use of grammar. This would move away from normative grammar instruction and allow for the development of effective writing skills. Students indicated that obstacles to improving writing skills could be overcome by repeating writing exercises, practicing writing in

class, writing letters and articles, participating in writing activities, avoiding logical thinking in Azerbaijani while writing, doing daily writing exercises, enriching vocabulary, and addressing grammar deficiencies.

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