



“MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE AT SAMARKAND STATE INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES”

Bio: Andrew Alexander Mobbs is originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, United States. He obtained his Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, and he has been teaching and conducting teacher-training workshops at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages in Samarkand. His specialty relates to language teaching methodologies as well as some theories in applied linguistics. However, aside from teaching, he is an avid poet and has published several poems and one poetry collection. His hobbies are reading, writing, listening to music, and going on long walks.

— What are your impressions about the Education system in Uzbekistan?

— This is always an interesting topic to discuss. There are several similarities between Uzbek and American education systems. For example, in both countries, most bachelor degree programs are four years, and most master degree programs are two years. In addition, similar subjects are taught among schools in both countries. However, there are many differences, so I have been trying to get used to some of them. One major difference is the grading system. In the US, all of our grades are percentage-based; we do not give daily marks that range from 5 to 0.

— What kind of teaching methods do you find useful?

Which one would you prefer most: a teacher-centered or student-centered lesson? And why?

— I believe that student-centered lessons are generally more effective than teacher-centered lessons. The teaching methods you use in the classroom should depend on several factors. Namely, you should consider your students' needs and

learning styles. Generally, though, I prefer communicative and interactive methods that encourage student participation. I do not think the lesson will be as effective if only the teacher talks.

— **We know that you are giving extra lessons. I mean the free speaking club and film clubs. What are the advantages of these classes?**

— First of all, let me say that I truly enjoy my weekly conversation and film clubs; the students are wonderful! The main reason I started these extra activities is because I simply cannot teach every single student in their regular assigned classes, as there are thousands of students at our institute. So, an advantage is that more students can come each week to practice their listening and speaking skills in a relaxed atmosphere.

— **According to your experience, what would you advice for learners to developing speaking skills to the level of a native speaker?**

— If you want to speak like a native speaker of your target language, you must expose yourself to authentic speech as much as possible. If you cannot speak with a native speaker, then I recommend watching a lot of films and listening to a lot of songs in your target language.

— **From your every day experience at the Institute of Foreign Languages, what can you tell about the students' levels of learning English language?**

— Overall, I am quite impressed with my students! In general, their English language proficiencies are either intermediate or advanced, and even if they do not always have perfect grammar, they can fluently and successfully communicate most of the time. Besides their language skills, I am pleased to say that the students at our institute are so kind and respectful.

— **While exchanging information with Uzbek teachers, what do you feel? What have you learnt during your experience at SamSIFL?**

— I believe exchanging both technical and cultural information with teachers and other colleagues is mutually beneficial. Not only have the teachers found much of what I have taught them helpful, but they have in turn helped me by explaining the educational policies and cultural aspects of Uzbekistan. I am happy to collaborate with anyone who wants to collaborate with me.

— **As you know, the IELTS Center has been being ruled for almost a year successfully. Can you share your opinions about this Center?**

— I am honored to work at the IELTS Center, and I think everyone appreciates the services it offers. The director, Mr. Anvar Nizamov, is extremely knowledgeable and has ample experience both domestically and abroad. The rest of the staff is so wonderful and hardworking, too. It is my hope that the IELTS Center will continue to expand in the years to come.

— **What are the differences of TOEFL and IELTS? While training what do the skilled students have to focus on?**

— The overall purpose of IELTS and TOEFL are the same - to ensure that students who are not native speakers of English are linguistically capable of studying or working in a country where English is the most common native language. Also, both tests include the four main skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The main differences are the length and the format. The IELTS, for example, is 2 hours and 44 minutes long, yet the TOEFL is approximately 4 hours long. As for the format, there are several differences, but the main thing is that the IELTS addresses the skills in a segregated fashion while the TOEFL addresses the skills in an integrated fashion. This is no surprise because the TOEFL is mostly associated with the US, and the US education system often focuses on the integration of skills and subjects. Overall, learners studying for these two tests can prepare in similar ways, but they should be familiar with the format and design of whichever test they take, and they should also keep in mind some general test-taking strategies. For example, I always tell my students to eat a nice, healthy breakfast before an important exam!

— **How can you compare the E-learning system in Uzbekistan and in the USA?**

— It is no surprise that e-learning systems have increased in every country. Our institute uses Moodle for e-education purposes, and US universities use similar systems; in fact, I believe some might even use Moodle. One of the main e-learning systems in the US is called Blackboard Learn, and although the design of this interface differs from Moodle, its purpose and functions are basically the same.

— **What are the benefits of using modern technologies during the lesson?**

— As time goes on, technology will continue to expand, including in language classrooms. Technology such as audio, video, etc. can offer many benefits in this way. For example, it makes information more easily accessible to a lot of students. Also, in many cases, it increases their motivation to participate in the lessons, as many are accustomed to this digital age. One other benefit is that it can provide authentic examples of language and culture from anywhere in the world.

— **If you compare American students and Uzbek students, what kind of differences or similarities can you notice?**

— There are universal qualities and truths about students of all countries and cultures. Some students will be hardworking, and some will be lazy. Some will be respectful, and some will cause disturbances. Some will pursue higher education,

and some will want to end their education early. These things can be said about students in the US, Uzbekistan, and other countries. However, in general, I believe that Uzbek students have more respect for their teachers than many other countries, which is one reason I am thankful that I work here.

— **Besides English what languages do you know?**

— I always make a joke that I know two and a half languages. Besides English, which is my native tongue, I have studied German, Mongolian, and limited Uzbek. Nowadays, my German skills are intermediate at best, and my Uzbek skills are only conversational. I was fluent in Mongolian because I lived there for two years, but ever since I left, I have forgotten parts of the language. However, I love studying languages because it allows me to also study their respective cultures. In one way or another, all languages are beautiful.

— **We know that you are also interested in analyzing ghazels. And you are keen on creating ghazels in English. What caused you to take interest?**

— Besides teaching, reading and writing poetry is my main passion in life. The ghazal is an example of a fascinating poetic form. I respect it because of its ancient traditions and its mysticism. I first learned about the ghazal a year ago when I took a graduate-level forms of poetry class. Many people in the US are not so familiar with eastern writing styles, so it was so interesting for me to learn and attempt because it was such a new concept. Then, one year later, I came to Uzbekistan and discovered Alisher Navoi and some of his ghazals with the help of Dinara Sultanova. It is amazing how life works out sometimes!

— **As you know, Alisher Navoi was the greatest poet to write ghazels in the Turkic language. And 30 of his ghazels were translated into English in order make the foreign readers understand the deep philosophic meanings. So, as an English expert, how can you mark the re-creation of Navoi's ghazels by Dinara Sultanova?**

— As I mentioned, I met Dinara Sultanova, a retired literary translation professor from our institute, a few months after I arrived in Uzbekistan. She was kind enough to discuss her translation work with me, particularly her translations of Navoi's ghazals into English. I cannot emphasize enough how much respect I have for this woman because of her scholarship and her passion for literature and language. Translating any text from one language to another has several challenges, but translating entire ghazals — which are very complicated forms — from Uzbek into English — which are very dissimilar languages — goes well beyond your normal challenge. However, she translates with the utmost care and knowledge, and because of her, people in the west will be able to read and learn more about Navoi's works.

— **What do you think the Uzbek language is difficult or easy to learn?**

— Uzbek is a fascinating language, and one reason I find it so fascinating is because it is fundamentally different from English. Uzbek comes from the Turkic language family, whereas English comes from the Indo-European language family (in this way, Tajik is closer to English than Uzbek!), so there are several differences in terms of morphology, syntax, and phonology. I have taken a few lessons in Uzbek, and I have been able to learn some from the streets. If I had more time and discipline, I should increase my vocabulary first and foremost. From what I have studied, I do not think Uzbek is an extremely difficult language; it just takes time to learn. The most difficult part for me is the morphology because English does not have so many suffixes and infixes. However, becoming more familiar with Uzbek (and even a little Tajik) has been my pleasure.