PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AND LEARNING: SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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Abstract: *Pronunciation represents an important aspect that fundamentally shapes communication effectiveness and learner confidence. However, this aspect is often not paid adequate attention to in language learning, especially in an EFL context. This article aims to look into the complex interplay between pronunciation and speaking skills and examine the challenges and potential strategies in pronunciation instruction. By synthesizing insights from leading linguistic researchers, the study challenges traditional approaches prioritizing accent perfection, instead advocating for a more nuanced understanding of communicative intelligibility. The research suggests that effective pronunciation training be extended beyond mere sound production to encompass broader communicative competencies. The investigation reveals significant gaps between teacher preparation, curriculum design, and learner expectations in pronunciation instruction. Through a comprehensive analysis of current methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and empirical research, the article provides language educators with practical insights and strategic recommendations for integrating more effective, learner-centered pronunciation training that empowers students to communicate with greater confidence and clarity.*

Key words: *Communication, speaking skills, pronunciation teaching, EFL context, intelligibility.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is fundamentally a tool of communication, and at the heart of effective communication lies pronunciation—a complex, multifaceted skill that transcends mere sound production. Despite its critical importance, pronunciation often remains the most neglected aspect of language learning, relegated to the margins of linguistic instruction and frequently overlooked by educators and learners alike.

The journey of mastering pronunciation is far more than an academic exercise; it is a profound pathway to human connection. When language learners struggle to articulate sounds clearly, they encounter technical challenges and significant psychological barriers that can undermine their confidence and willingness to engage in meaningful communication. Every mispronounced word carries the potential to create misunderstanding, generate social anxiety, and potentially limit personal and professional opportunities.

Contemporary language learning demands a sophisticated approach that recognizes pronunciation not as a peripheral skill, but as a core competency integral to linguistic proficiency. This approach must move beyond traditional models, which focused on

achieving a "perfect" native-like accent, and instead prioritize intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, and learner empowerment. By reframing pronunciation as a dynamic, context-sensitive skill, educators can transform language learning from a mechanical process of sound reproduction to a rich, interactive journey of cultural and linguistic discovery.

2. CONTENT

2.1. The link between pronunciation and communication

In language learning, all skills acquired are interconnected. Pronunciation is often considered an important factor for speaking and listening skills. Accurate pronunciation enables clear and effective communication, allowing speakers to convey their intended meaning with precision and listeners to comprehend messages without unnecessary cognitive strain. It is an essential component of communication competence that directly influences a learner's ability to express themselves effectively. When pronunciation is precise, speakers can express themselves more confidently, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings that can arise from subtle phonetic variations. According to Gilbert (1994), when the students' pronunciation skills improve, their speaking skills become more refined. Sharing this view, Jones (2002) states that there is a stronger link between pronunciation and communication, and that good pronunciation will make learners' speaking not only easier to understand but also more effective.

Moreover, pronunciation skills play a crucial role in improving listening comprehension. According to Gilbert (2008), listeners rely heavily on pronunciation cues to decode meaning, interpret emotional context, and engage more deeply with the speaker's message: "… changes in pitch help listeners follow the speaker's meaning because these melodic signals provide cohesion and contrast, … tell listeners what is new information, … how ideas relate to each other" (Gilbert 2008, p.3). Mispronunciations can lead to communication breakdowns, where listeners might struggle to understand the speaker or, worse, misinterpret the intended message entirely. Pronunciation serves as a powerful indicator of language proficiency and can significantly impact social interactions, professional opportunities, and cultural integration.

However, pronunciation is far more than a mere technical skill of producing sounds correctly. The nuanced art of pronunciation goes beyond simply articulating individual sounds; it encompasses rhythm, intonation, stress patterns, and the subtle musicality of language that gives speech its natural flow and authenticity. Advanced pronunciation skills allow individuals to sound more natural, build stronger connections with conversation partners, and navigate complex linguistic landscapes with greater ease and confidence. Lu (2002), for example, insists that incomprehensible non-standard pronunciation and intonation will produce psychological nervousness in speakers, which is likely to also block their efforts to seek clarification or to paraphrase using alternative expressions with phonetically different pronunciation and intonation. As pointed out by Fraser (1999, 2000), poor pronunciation can also condemn EFL users to less social, academic, and work advancement than they deserve.

With more emphasis now given to meaningful communication, the overall aim of pronunciation instruction is for the learner to develop spoken English that is easy to understand. Morley (1991, p.488) asserts that "intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence." In the context of teaching English as a global language, many authors agree that the purpose of teaching and learning pronunciation is not to sound perfectly like native speakers, but the ability to communicate effectively in the international context (Jenkins, 2000; Patsko, 2013; Hancock, 2018). Therefore,

pronunciation teaching and learning in the classroom should focus more on the factors that help to meet the demand for intelligibility, but not native-like pronunciation.

Recent research by Zhang and Yin (2009) further emphasizes that pronunciation difficulties can significantly impair learners' self-esteem and potentially limit social interactions. Their findings suggest that targeted pronunciation instruction that focuses on problematic areas can dramatically improve not only linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic confidence. This perspective aligns with Derwing and Munro's (2015) comprehensive work demonstrating that even modest improvements in pronunciation can yield significant benefits in communicative success and listener comprehension. Learners who receive structured pronunciation guidance typically report greater confidence in speaking contexts and increased motivation to engage in communicative situations.

In essence, pronunciation is now recognized not merely as a technical aspect of language but as a dynamic, interconnected skill that bridges cognitive processing, cultural communication, and personal expression. The contemporary approach to pronunciation teaching acknowledges its multifaceted nature and its critical role in facilitating meaningful human connection across linguistic boundaries. As globalization continues to bring diverse speakers into contact, the importance of intelligible pronunciation as a cornerstone of effective communication only continues to grow in significance.

2.2. Pronunciation teaching in the classroom

The usefulness of teaching pronunciation is a widely debated subject in the language teaching context. While some argue that teaching pronunciation is useless, many others believe that teaching can play an important role in helping learners develop ways of improving their pronunciation and shaping their attitudes toward the importance of pronunciation (Richards & Renandya, 2002). With the emergence of more holistic, communicative methods and approaches to EFL instruction, pronunciation is addressed within the context of real communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996). Fraser (1999) says it is effective pronunciation teaching that offers learners a genuine choice about how they express themselves. According to Carter and Nunan (2001), students need to start pronunciation lessons early and continue through to higher levels.

The evidence supporting systematic pronunciation instruction continues to grow as researchers document its positive impact on learner outcomes. Derwing and Rossiter (2003) investigated how different types of pronunciation teaching affected accuracy, fluency, and complexity in learners' speech production. Their research provided empirical evidence for the benefits of targeted pronunciation instruction, particularly when focused on both segmental features (individual sounds) and suprasegmental elements (stress, rhythm, intonation). It can be seen that explicit pronunciation teaching leads to measurable improvements in both segmental accuracy and prosodic features, particularly when instruction is sustained over time. These findings counter the misconception that pronunciation acquisition happens naturally through mere exposure to the target language. According to Gilbert (2008), “students who are taught about English prosodic patterns often report improved understanding of speech on TV, in movies, and in face-to-face conversation” (p.6). In reality, many adult learners develop fossilized pronunciation errors that persist without targeted intervention, potentially hindering their communicative effectiveness permanently. Given these considerations, the systematic inclusion of pronunciation instruction from beginning through advanced levels represents not merely an optional enhancement but rather a fundamental necessity for comprehensive language teaching programs aiming to develop truly competent communicators.