

Techniques in Teaching Pronunciation to Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In many English language classrooms, teaching pronunciation is given the least attention. ESL teachers hold the view that what is essential for being able to communicate in English is rich vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. There is certainly some truth in this. Nevertheless, being able to pronounce words properly can be critically important in certain situations. Factors leading to pronunciation problems are interference of mother tongue, learners' age, attitude and their insufficient knowledge of phonology and phonetics of English. This study was undertaken because language teachers play a decisive role in enhancing their students' pronunciation and this should be rightly emphasized during pre-service education so that the future teachers can work on it. Moreover, the study indicates that ESL learners need extensive training especially in the recognition of sounds and the differences in the production and articulation of these sounds.

Key Words: *Techniques in pronunciation teaching; Pronunciation drill; Intelligibility.*

Introduction

Learning a foreign language "is basically a mechanical process of habit formation" (George, 2002). Non-native English speakers often use the pronunciation and communication style of their native language when speaking in English, resulting in accented speech. There are some common problems, such as articulation of vowels and consonants, intonation, stress, sense groups and linking, that can interfere with intelligibility when speaking in English. General observation suggests that it is those who start to learn English after their school years who are most likely to have serious difficulties in acquiring intelligible

pronunciation, with the degree of difficulty increasing markedly with age. This difficulty has nothing to do with intelligence or level of education, or even with knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary.

There is no simple answer to why pronunciation is so difficult to learn. Indeed, there is a whole range of theoretical perspectives on the question (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2005). What is generally accepted among psycholinguists and phonologists is that the difficulty of learning to pronounce a foreign language is cognitive rather than physical, and that it has something to do with the way 'raw sound' is categorized or conceptualized in speech.

Many learners of English as a second language have major difficulties with English pronunciation even after years of learning the language. This often results in difficulties in finding employment. Most of the students from rural backgrounds, who were not taught pronunciation, have problems with distinguishing the English sounds while listening to them and that results in difficulties in understanding the spoken language. Some of them cannot produce the sounds properly; they have problems with intonation, and word and sentence stress, and so communicating in English is problematic. To rectify these issues the teaching of pronunciation should be introduced as early as possible.

Significance of the Study

Today it will be very difficult to neglect English language because of the rich scientific and technical literature in it. It provides opportunities to Indians to get employment throughout India. It is a powerful language of communication. Effective communication consists of many elements such as vocabulary, grammar, structure and pronunciation. Among these elements pronunciation receives very little attention among the learners and teachers. Intelligible pronunciation is essential for better communication. Those who are not good in their pronunciation experience social isolation, difficulties in employment and limited opportunities for further study. Many learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher (Jenkins, 2000). Therefore, some sort of

pronunciation instruction in class is necessary. Adopting new techniques in the teaching of pronunciation may work. The techniques used in this study are based on constructivist learning. They are based on the principle that students discover their own truths through activities. The teacher's job is to facilitate that discovery. How do we get students to discover concepts? The simple answer is, "Ask, don't tell." The investigator adopted some techniques in order to create a collaborative learning environment for learning pronunciation in an easy and enjoyable manner. This approach provides an enjoyable learning environment for students.

Objectives

The study aimed to:

1. Assess the standard of pronunciation among the B. Ed. English students;
2. Enhance correct pronunciation among those through some techniques;
3. Evaluate the effect of the techniques on the pronunciation of the B. Ed. English students; and
4. Examine differences between boys and girls in acquiring the correct pronunciation as a result of the techniques.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the B. Ed. English students' pronunciation as a result of the techniques.
2. There is no significant difference in the English pronunciation of urban and rural B. Ed. English students as a result of the techniques.

3. There is no significant difference in the English pronunciation of boys and girls among the B. Ed. English students as a result of the techniques.
4. There is no significant difference in the English pronunciation of B. Ed. English students studying in government and non-government colleges as a result of the techniques.

Method and Sample

Since the major objectives of the present study were to enhance correct pronunciation through some techniques and to find out their effectiveness, the investigator adopted the experimental research design involving a pre-test and a post-test on a single group. Based on the non-probability purposive sampling technique, the study sample was selected. The size of the sample was 80 spread over four colleges, both government and non-government ones, amounting to 20 from each college.

Study Tool

A test named "Check your Pronunciation" was constructed by the investigator consisting of thirty-five multiple choice items to test pronunciation, stress and intonation of the B. Ed. English major students of Coimbatore city. The tool was administered to the same level of students to calculate reliability, which was found to have the value of 0.67 using Spearman Brown's formula. Finally, the number of items was reduced from thirty-five to thirty. Each item in this tool carried a score of one for the correct response. Since this study

was conducted to measure the average gain in the achievement level of the whole group, the same tool was used for both the Pre-test and Post-test. The *pre-test* was meant to test the average achievement level of the whole group *before* using the techniques; the *post-test* was used to measure the average gain in the achievement level of the whole group *after* using the techniques.

Tool Administration and Experimentation

The pre-test was administered to the samples chosen using the tool constructed and the students' performance was evaluated immediately. After one week, the investigator started enhancing the pronunciation of the Experimental Group using the techniques. Four Pronunciation techniques were adopted, namely Pronunciation Drill, Dictionary Usage, Use of Audio-Visual Aids and Phonetic Transcription. These techniques were employed for six hours per week for a month. The techniques encouraged active participation of the learners and provided for students' interest, comfort, collaborative learning and exploration. After completing the experiment, the instructor advised the group to practise the same for four weeks. Then, the same tool was used to evaluate the students' pronunciation in the post-test. Both pre-test and post-test data were analyzed.

Techniques - An Overview

Pronunciation Drill

The investigator selected an activity named 'Introducing features of pronunciation' from a book by Hewings (2004). This activity

introduces some key terms – vowel, consonant, consonant clusters, word stress and intonation – and gets students thinking about differences between pronunciation in English and in their first language. The level of the activity is elementary. A copy of the handout (See **Appendix**) was given to all the subjects to perform the activity. Examples in 1 were presented by the investigator, the subjects were then asked to complete the exercises in 2, and their answers were checked. Time was given to think about the questions in 3. Similarities and differences between English and the subjects' first languages were highlighted and it was checked whether students had understood the key terms correctly. The same procedure was carried out for all the key terms except 'intonation'. Demonstration was given by the investigator for the tones – fall, rise, rise-fall, and fall-rise - and sufficient practice was given individually.

Dictionary Usage

The investigator recommended *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (OALD) (8th Edition)* (Hornby, et al., 2010) to the subjects for learning the pronunciation of the list of words given. Initially, the subjects were instructed to use dictionary for learning the pronunciation. They had already been trained in English vowel and consonant sounds, and their symbols. A list of words was given to the subjects for practice and they were tested for their accuracy.

Using AV Aids

PowerPoint, audio and video clips of native

speakers conversing about various topics, such as interview tips, conversation with neighbors, visiting a library, participating in a competition and environmental issues, were used. The subjects of the study were given adequate exposure to these materials for two weeks.

Phonetic Transcription

Phonetic transcription is the visual representation of speech sounds. The most common type of phonetic transcription uses a phonetic alphabet. Four simple exercises were carefully selected – *Write the words you read, Match the phonemic script with the corresponding English word, Choose the suitable transcription and Transcribe the sentences*. Suitable guidance was given to the subjects, who practised the exercises for two weeks.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected were coded and processed for obtaining values. The t-test was employed to find out whether there was any significant difference between the sample groups. From the results, the association between the independent and dependent variables was identified. The data were analyzed in relation to the objectives and the hypotheses were tested for significance.

Hypothesis 1:

There was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test in acquiring correct pronunciation among the B. Ed. English students.

TABLE: 1

Test	N	Mean	Difference of mean	SD	t-value	Result
Pre-	80	8.88	6.33	2.757	16.68**	Significant
Post-		15.21		3.623		

**significant at 0.01 level

From **Table 1** it is evident that the mean scores of Pre- and Post-tests differ significantly. The calculated t-value was found to be significant at 0.01 level. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2:

There was no significant difference between Government and Non-Government College B. Ed. English students in the acquisition of correct pronunciation.

TABLE: 2

School type	N	Mean	Difference of mean	SD	t-value	Result
Government	20	16.05	1.12	3.912	0.266**	Not Significant
Non-Government	60	14.93		3.515		

**significant at 0.01 level

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in acquiring pronunciation among the high school students with respect to the type of institution – Government and Non-Government. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3:

There was no significant difference in the post-test of urban and rural students in the acquisition of correct pronunciation.

TABLE: 3

Locality	N	Mean	Difference of mean	SD	t-value	Result
Urban	40	15.65	0.87	3.584	0.283**	Not Significant
Rural	40	14.78		3.654		

**significant at 0.01 level

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value is less than the table value at 0.01 level, which means that there is no significant difference in the post-test of urban and rural students in the acquisition of correct pronunciation and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 4:

There was no significant difference in the post-test of boys and girls in the acquisition of correct pronunciation.

TABLE: 4

Gender	N	Mean	Difference of mean	SD	t-value	Result
Boys	20	14.1	1.48	3.796	0.134**	Non -Significant
Girls	60	15.58		3.519		

**significant at 0.01 level

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value is less than the table value at 0.01 level, which means that there is no significant difference in the post-test of boys and girls in the acquisition of correct pronunciation and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Findings of the Study

- There was significant difference between the pre-test and post-test in acquiring correct pronunciation among the future teachers. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the techniques adopted helped the students in acquiring the proper pronunciation.
- There was no significant difference between Government and Non-Government College students in the acquisition of correct pronunciation. The result highlights that the techniques produced a similar impact on both

government and non-government college students.

- There was no significant difference in the post-test of urban and rural students in the acquisition of correct pronunciation. The approach created a positive impact on students' achievement irrespective of their locational background.
- There was no significant difference in the post-test of boys and girls in the acquisition of correct pronunciation. This shows that both boys and girls benefited equally from the techniques.

Conclusion

Since the pre-service teachers are the torch-bearers for the future generation, they need to be trained in various skills. At present very little importance is being given to pronunciation by both teacher trainees and

teacher educators. So, pronunciation activities are often neglected. This negligence ultimately puts the future teachers at a disadvantage in the job market even though they have completed their B. Ed. programme and have mastery of other skills required. The present study has shown that, with the help of some techniques, the pronunciation skill of future teachers can be developed and they, in turn, can hope to develop their students' pronunciation as well.

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ELTAI ESP SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (SIG)

Those who are interested in joining this Special Interest Group of ours are requested to contact

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APPENDIX – STUDENT HANDOUT

Vowels

1 Examples: job give good car

2 Underline the vowel sounds in these words:

Fall learn way road

3 Does your language have the same vowel sounds?

Give example words:.....

Consonants

1 Examples: my top work this

2 Underline the consonant sounds in these words:

Shoe rob good leave

3 Does your language have the same consonant sounds?

Give example words:.....

Consonant clusters

1 Examples: black drop trip queen

2 Underline the consonant sounds in these words:

Space play climb strong

3 Does your language have the same consonant clusters?

Give example words:.....

Syllables

1 Examples: bad (1 syllable) arrive(2) computer(3) supermarket(4)

2 How many syllables do these words have?

Helicopter some trousers president

3 Does your language have words with the same number of syllables?

Give example words:.....

Word stress

1 Examples: traffic about terrible tomorrow conversation

2 Underline the stressed syllable in these words:

Banana teacher engineer alone chemistry

3 Does your language have words with same stress pattern?

Give example words:.....

Intonation

1 Examples: ~~Yes~~ Yes Yes Yes

2 Listen and mark the same tones in the word *No*.

No No No No

3 What are the words for *yes* and *no* in your language?

Is it usual to say them with the same four tones?