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.*

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.

Although many studies in the field of English language teaching have recognized the importance of pronunciation instruction, teachers and material developers have found it challenging to incorporate the teaching of pronunciation into their framework. The challenges stem from a complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical factors. One significant obstacle is the influence of learners' native languages (L1), which often results in pronunciation interference. Learners tend to transfer the phonological patterns of their L1 onto English, leading to errors in sound production, intonation, and rhythm. For example, distinctions between certain English sounds that do not exist in their L1 can be particularly difficult. Furthermore, limited exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom can hinder pronunciation development. In many EFL settings, learners have minimal opportunities to interact with native English speakers, relying heavily on classroom instruction. This lack of real-world exposure can make it challenging to internalize the nuances of English pronunciation. Another challenge lies in the variability of English pronunciation itself. Regional accents and dialects can create confusion for learners, who may struggle to distinguish between different pronunciations.

Another issue is that many EFL teachers are non-native English speakers, and they may lack specialized training in pronunciation instruction. Therefore, they may feel less confident in their pronunciation abilities, which can affect their teaching effectiveness. Many teachers confess that although they are interested in the subject, they are not confident in teaching it. They feel that they need more knowledge and skills relating to the teaching of pronunciation (Yates, 2001; Macdonald, 2002). Large class sizes and limited resources can also make it difficult to provide individualized pronunciation feedback, which is crucial for learners' progress.

In contrast to the reluctance shown by teachers, many studies (Vitanova & Miller, 2002) show that learners placed a high value on instruction in pronunciation. In a study in 1997, Madden & Moore found that the students considered pronunciation to be valuable and needed to be taught. Vitanova & Miller (2002) also found that students believed the mastery of pronunciation would improve communicative abilities and increase confidence in communication.

Concerning the issue of teaching pronunciation in the classroom, Morley (1991) outlines five essential needs for effective pronunciation instruction. Firstly, L2 teachers should have a background in applied English phonetics and phonology. Secondly, efforts should be made to develop pronunciation/speech activities, tasks, material, methodologies, and techniques. Thirdly, we need more assessment methods to measure learners' intelligibility and communicability improvement. Fourthly, researchers have to investigate the role of instruction on the acquisition of L2 pronunciation. Finally, there should be more controlled studies that investigate varied aspects of L2 phonology, as well as different theories that try to explain how the acquisition of a L2 phonological system takes place.

Recent advances in technology have also enhanced the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction. Computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT) tools now offer immediate feedback, visualization of speech patterns, and personalized learning paths that were previously unavailable in traditional classroom settings. Technology has transformed pronunciation instruction by offering ample opportunities for exposure to diverse English varieties. Streaming media, podcasts, and speech analysis software allow learners to develop flexibility in both production and perception—a critical skill in navigating the phonological diversity of global English. These technological innovations, combined with communicative classroom activities, provide learners with opportunities for autonomous practice and self-assessment that complement formal instruction.

2.3. Goals of pronunciation teaching and learning

In the context of English as a global language, the primary goal of pronunciation teaching and learning transcends traditional native-speaker mimicry, focusing instead on achieving effective and intelligible communication across diverse linguistic contexts. The emphasis has shifted from pursuing a perfect replica of British or American pronunciation to developing a clear, comprehensible speaking style that facilitates successful international interactions. Learners aim to develop pronunciation skills that allow them to be understood by a wide range of English speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, including native and non-native speakers. This approach recognizes the reality of English as a lingua franca, where communication success depends more on mutual intelligibility than on adherence to any single accent or pronunciation model. Morley (1991) states that the goal of pronunciation should be changed from the attainment of perfect pronunciation to the more realistic goals of developing functional intelligibility, communicability, increased self-confidence, the development of speech monitoring abilities, and speech modification strategies for use beyond the classroom. Sharing this view, Yates (2002, p.1), points out that "most people agree that intelligibility is the most appropriate goal for learners". Gilbert (2008, p.1) sees the goal of pronunciation instruction "not as helping students to sound like native speakers but as helping them to learn the core elements of spoken English so that they can be easily understood by others".

Pennington and Richards (1986) suggest that pronunciation should not be treated as an isolated component but rather as an essential thread woven through listening, speaking, and even reading activities. This integrated approach allows learners to develop phonological awareness alongside other language skills, creating stronger neural connections and facilitating more natural acquisition. Pronunciation instruction needs to prioritize core elements that enhance communicative clarity: accurate production of crucial phonemes, understanding of word stress and sentence intonation, and developing listening skills that help speakers adapt to various English accents. The goal is to equip language learners with pronunciation strategies that enable them to communicate confidently and effectively in global professional, academic, and social environments, where English serves as a bridge between diverse linguistic communities.

The reconceptualization of pronunciation teaching also acknowledges the sociolinguistic reality that accents are intrinsically linked to identity. As Walker (2010) notes, maintaining elements of one's L1 accent while speaking English can be a legitimate expression of cultural identity rather than a deficiency to be eliminated. This perspective respects learner autonomy while still addressing pronunciation features that may impede communication. It represents a more culturally sensitive approach that values diversity in English pronunciation while maintaining a focus on functional effectiveness.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this shift has necessitated new approaches to assessment and instructional design. Levis (2005) distinguishes between the "nativeness principle" (achieving native-like pronunciation) and the "intelligibility principle" (focusing on features that facilitate understanding), advocating strongly for the latter in modern pronunciation teaching. Under this framework, assessment criteria prioritize communicative success over accent conformity, evaluating whether a speaker can be understood rather than how closely they approximate a particular native model.

The evolution in pronunciation teaching reflects broader shifts in language pedagogy toward communicative competence and intercultural understanding. As Derwing and Munro (2015) assert, the ultimate goal is to develop learners who can navigate the complex

phonological landscape of global English with confidence and adaptability. This means not only producing intelligible speech but also developing perceptual flexibility to understand diverse accents—a two-way process that acknowledges the shared responsibility for successful communication. This progressive view of pronunciation teaching recognizes that in our interconnected world, speakers of English need not sound identical but must be mutually comprehensible. This balanced approach—emphasizing intelligibility while respecting linguistic diversity—represents the most practical and ethical direction for pronunciation pedagogy in the global English context.

2.4. Pronunciation elements to be prioritized

Pedagogical approaches now recognize the importance of teaching pronunciation in communicative contexts, moving away from isolated sound drills to more interactive, meaningful communication practices. This includes helping learners develop strategies for self-monitoring and self-correction, building confidence in their pronunciation skills. Equally important is raising awareness of global English varieties, helping students understand that there is no single "correct" pronunciation, but rather a spectrum of intelligible communication styles. Practical teaching should also integrate technology and multimedia resources that provide immediate feedback, allow for comparative listening, and expose students to diverse pronunciation models from various English-speaking contexts. Avery & Ehrlich (1992) argue that the teachers must focus on two areas. Firstly, they should make learners aware of aspects of their pronunciation that make people misunderstand them. Secondly, teachers should create opportunities for their students to practice aspects of the English sound system, which are crucial for their improvement.

In contemporary language classrooms, pronunciation teaching should prioritize several key aspects that enhance communicative effectiveness and linguistic flexibility. First and foremost, intelligibility takes precedence over native-like perfection. According to Morley (1991), learners should be trained both in segmental (sounds) and suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, rhythm, and linking). Moreover, because suprasegmental elements extend across segmental elements and provide context and support for segmental production, they should be given a more prominent place in pronunciation instruction.

As Jenkins (2000) points out, pedagogic phonological tasks should be scaled down to specific items which are essential in terms of 'intelligible pronunciation'. This means focusing on clear articulation of sounds that are most critical for mutual understanding, particularly those phonemes that can significantly alter meaning or cause comprehension challenges. Jenkins (2000) identifies specific pronunciation features that most significantly impact intelligibility in international communication, for example: most consonant sounds, appropriate consonant cluster simplification, and vowel length distinctions. However, while other features, like the exact quality of vowels or the production of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, may be less essential for mutual understanding. This research-based approach allows instructors to prioritize pronunciation elements that yield the greatest communicative benefit, optimizing limited classroom time.

Prioritizing suprasegmental elements in pronunciation teaching is crucial because they significantly impact comprehensibility and naturalness in spoken English. While segmental features (individual sounds) are important, suprasegmentals (features that extend beyond individual sounds) like stress, intonation, rhythm, and juncture play a more holistic role in conveying meaning and engaging listeners. First, suprasegmental elements are essential for comprehensibility. Incorrect stress patterns can drastically alter the meaning of words and phrases. For example, "INSult" (noun) vs. "inSULT" (verb). Intonation conveys crucial

information about the speaker's attitude, emotions, and intentions. A rising intonation at the end of a sentence signals a question, while a falling intonation indicates a statement. Rhythm, particularly stress-timing in English, helps listeners anticipate and process information. Deviations from this rhythm can make speech sound unnatural and difficult to follow. Second, suprasegmental elements significantly contribute to communication effectiveness. Effective communication involves not just transmitting information but also conveying nuances and building rapport. Suprasegmentals play a vital role in achieving this. Moreover, using appropriate intonation and rhythm can make learners sound more confident and persuasive. Besides, teachers should emphasize the rhythm of connected speech, helping students understand how words link together and how stress can change within different grammatical contexts.

Concerning the segmental features, there are some issues that EFL teachers need to take into account. First, it is necessary to consider L1 interference. Learners' native language phonology significantly influences their English pronunciation. Teachers must be aware of the specific sound differences between English and their students' L1. Teachers should also analyze common segmental errors arising from L1 transfer and address them systematically. Therefore, rather than applying a general teaching pattern of segmental elements, more attention should be paid to the problematic areas that arise from a specific L1 background. For example, it is especially difficult for Vietnamese learners to hear and produce final consonants in English because these features are not prominent in the Vietnamese language. Another example is word and sentence stress, as well as rhythm in the English language. These features need to be emphasized in a pronunciation teaching program for Vietnamese learners.

When deciding what to teach, teachers have to analyze the needs and the current pronunciation abilities of students carefully. Besides, they need to make students aware of the necessity to set appropriate pronunciation goals and to employ strategies for self-monitoring. Additionally, teaching should incorporate strategies for listening discrimination, enabling students to recognize and reproduce subtle sound differences that impact communication.

3. CONCLUSION

Pronunciation is far more than a peripheral linguistic skill; it represents a fundamental cornerstone of effective language learning and communication. The traditional paradigm of pursuing accent perfection has long overshadowed the more critical objective of developing communicative competence and linguistic confidence. By shifting towards a holistic approach that prioritizes intelligibility and meaningful communication, language educators can fundamentally transform the way learners engage with and master a new language.

This transformative approach demands a comprehensive reimagining of pronunciation instruction. It requires moving beyond rigid, prescriptive methodologies to embrace dynamic, learner-centered strategies that recognize the unique linguistic backgrounds, psychological needs, and communication goals of individual learners.

The future of pronunciation education lies in creating flexible, adaptive learning environments that view pronunciation not as a mechanical skill to be mastered, but as a nuanced, contextual competency that evolves through targeted practice, cultural understanding, and authentic communication experiences.

Ultimately, effective pronunciation instruction is about empowering learners to become confident, articulate communicators who can navigate linguistic diversity with ease and grace. By prioritizing communicative effectiveness, emotional resilience, and individual

learning paths, educators can help students go beyond linguistic barriers and develop the profound human capacity to connect, understand, and be understood across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

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MỘT SỐ VẤN ĐỀ VỀ DẠY HỌC PHÁT ÂM
VÀ ĐỀ XUẤT CHO GIÁO VIÊN

Tóm tắt: *Phát âm là một khía cạnh quan trọng có ảnh hưởng đáng kể đến hiệu quả giao tiếp và sự tự tin của người học. Tuy nhiên, phát âm lại thường chưa được thực sự chú trọng trong việc học ngoại ngữ, nhất là trong bối cảnh dạy và học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL). Trong bài viết này, các tác giả mong muốn tìm hiểu mối quan hệ giữa khả năng phát âm và kỹ năng nói, đồng thời xem xét những thách thức cũng như những chiến lược tiềm năng trong việc giảng dạy phát âm. Thông qua việc tổng hợp các quan điểm từ các nhà nghiên cứu ngôn ngữ hàng đầu, các tác giả đề xuất thay thế các phương pháp truyền thống chú trọng vào việc phát âm hoàn hảo bằng cách tiếp cận dựa trên một cách hiểu sâu sắc hơn về tính hiệu quả trong giao tiếp. Nghiên cứu cho rằng việc giảng dạy phát âm hiệu quả cần được mở rộng vượt ra ngoài việc phát âm đơn thuần để bao quát các năng lực giao tiếp rộng hơn. Bài viết đề cập đến khoảng cách đáng kể giữa sự chuẩn bị của giáo viên, thiết kế chương trình giảng dạy và kỳ vọng của người học trong việc giảng dạy phát âm. Thông qua việc phân tích các phương pháp hiện tại, các quan điểm lý thuyết và nghiên cứu thực nghiệm, bài viết hy vọng cung cấp cho các giáo viên tiếng Anh những hiểu biết thực tế và những đề xuất chiến lược để áp dụng phương pháp giảng dạy phát âm hiệu quả hơn, giúp người học giao tiếp một cách tự tin và rõ ràng hơn.*

Từ khóa: *Giao tiếp, kỹ năng nói, giảng dạy phát âm, ngoại ngữ tiếng Anh, mức độ dễ hiểu.*