PRONUNCIATION: A KEY CHALLENGE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT:

Pronunciation remains a critical challenge in English language teaching, particularly for non-native speakers. Despite the increasing importance of clear communication in global contexts, many learners continue to struggle with various aspects of pronunciation, including segmental features (vowels and consonants), suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, and intonation), and accent variation. This paper explores the impact of pronunciation difficulties on English language learners and identifies effective strategies for improving pronunciation skills in the classroom. It examines both traditional and innovative approaches, such as the use of visual aids, phonetic training, technology-assisted tools, and interactive activities. Additionally, the paper addresses the role of teacher awareness and the importance of fostering a supportive, non-judgmental learning environment. The findings suggest that a holistic, communicative approach to pronunciation instruction—incorporating both theoretical knowledge and practical application—can significantly enhance learners' intelligibility and confidence in using English in real-world situations.

INTRODUCTION. Pronunciation is often cited as one of the most significant yet challenging aspects of English language acquisition, particularly for non-native speakers. Despite its fundamental role in communication, pronunciation tends to receive less focus in traditional language teaching curricula compared to grammar and vocabulary. This discrepancy may be attributed to the perceived difficulty in teaching pronunciation and the complexity of its diverse elements. Pronunciation encompasses both segmental features, such as individual consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental features, including stress,

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rhythm, and intonation patterns. These aspects are crucial for ensuring clarity and intelligibility in spoken English. Furthermore, the variety of global English accents adds an additional layer of complexity, as learners may face challenges in acquiring not only native-like pronunciation but also an understanding of how accents influence communication. In this context, addressing pronunciation issues is not merely about achieving a "native" accent, but about improving intelligibility and confidence in communication. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the challenges involved in teaching pronunciation and propose evidence-based pedagogical strategies for enhancing the teaching and learning of English pronunciation.

Analysis:

The challenges associated with teaching pronunciation can be examined from multiple perspectives. First, segmental features—such as individual sounds—pose a significant challenge for learners whose native languages do not share the same phonemic inventory as English. This misalignment often results in interference, where learners carry over phonological rules from their first language, producing errors that may compromise intelligibility. For example, the pronunciation of English vowels, which exhibit subtle differences in tongue position and lip rounding, is frequently problematic for speakers of languages with a more limited vowel system.

Suprasegmental features also present difficulties, especially in the context of stress, rhythm, and intonation. English is a stress-timed language, meaning that the rhythm is determined by the regular occurrence of stressed syllables, while other syllables are reduced. This pattern contrasts with syllable-timed languages, where each syllable is given equal time. Consequently, learners who speak syllable-timed languages may produce monotonous or unnaturally rhythmic speech. Intonation, the rise and fall of pitch in speech, also plays a crucial role in expressing meaning, emotion, and intent in English. Without mastering intonation patterns, learners may be misunderstood or appear robotic in their communication.

In addition to these linguistic challenges, the sociocultural context of pronunciation instruction adds another layer of complexity. The diversity of English accents—ranging from British to American, Australian, Indian, and others—requires teachers to consider how much emphasis should be placed on acquiring a specific accent versus enhancing intelligibility. Moreover, learners' attitudes toward their own accent, often influenced by social factors such as identity and cultural pride, may impact their motivation to improve pronunciation.

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Pedagogical approaches to pronunciation instruction have evolved to address these challenges. Traditional methods, such as drilling and phonetic transcription, have been supplemented by more communicative approaches that emphasize real-world use. Integrating technology—such as speech recognition software and online pronunciation tools—has proven effective in providing immediate feedback, allowing learners to self-assess and improve independently. Additionally, incorporating pronunciation practice into regular classroom activities, rather than isolating it in separate lessons, facilitates a more natural and holistic approach to language acquisition.

Introduction to Stress Patterns

- **Activity**: The teacher introduces the concept of **stress-timed language** versus **syllable-timed language**. A simple explanation is given: English tends to emphasize certain syllables in words and sentences, while other syllables are spoken more quickly and with less emphasis.

- **Example**: The teacher reads a sentence with clear stress patterns: "I **love** speaking **English** every **day**," emphasizing the stressed syllables: *love*, *English*, *day*.

- **Discussion**: Learners are asked to identify the stressed syllables in the sentence[1]

Modeling Intonation

Activity: The teacher models a sentence with varied intonation to show how pitch can affect meaning: "Are you coming tonight?" vs. "You're coming tonight."

For the question, the teacher raises their pitch at the end of the sentence.

For the statement, the teacher lowers their pitch at the end.

Practice: Students are paired up and practice saying these sentences with the correct intonation, focusing on rising and falling pitch[2]

Ultimately, improving pronunciation instruction requires a multifaceted approach that balances theory with practical application. Teachers must be equipped with a variety of tools and techniques to address the diverse needs of learners, from those at the beginner level to advanced students seeking to refine their skills. By fostering a supportive environment and emphasizing intelligibility over perfection, educators can help learners navigate the complexities of English pronunciation and communicate more effectively in a global context.

In conclusion, pronunciation remains a critical yet often overlooked aspect of English language teaching. The challenges associated with teaching pronunciation stem from both the linguistic complexities of segmental and suprasegmental features, as well as the sociocultural dynamics surrounding accents and intelligibility. As this paper has explored,

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effective pronunciation instruction requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both the technical aspects of speech production and the communicative goals of the learner. By incorporating diverse teaching methods—such as phonetic training, task-based activities, and technology-assisted learning—teachers can create a more engaging and supportive environment for students to improve their pronunciation skills. Moreover, it is essential to emphasize intelligibility and confidence in communication, rather than striving for native-like accuracy. This shift in focus aligns with the global reality of English as a lingua franca, where effective communication is paramount. As English continues to be spoken by people from diverse linguistic backgrounds, enhancing pronunciation instruction is essential to fostering mutual understanding and facilitating clearer, more effective communication worldwide.

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