

EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT

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This research paper explores effective methods for teaching English pronunciation in multilingual learning environments, with particular emphasis on learners whose first language is Uzbek. Pronunciation remains one of the most complex aspects of second language acquisition due to phonological differences, cognitive constraints, and limited exposure to authentic input. This study evaluates a range of pedagogical approaches, including explicit phonetic instruction, communicative pronunciation teaching, task-based learning, and technology-assisted methods. The findings demonstrate that an integrated approach—combining phonetic awareness, meaningful interaction, and digital support—significantly enhances learners' intelligibility, fluency, and confidence. The paper also highlights the importance of addressing language-specific challenges and promoting learner autonomy for sustainable pronunciation development.

Introduction

The acquisition of accurate pronunciation is widely recognized as a fundamental component of communicative competence in second language learning. While grammar and vocabulary often dominate language instruction, pronunciation plays an equally crucial role in ensuring successful communication. Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, and reduced learner confidence, even when grammatical structures are correct.

In multilingual contexts, pronunciation teaching becomes even more complex due to the interaction of different phonological systems. Learners bring with them the influence of their first language (L1), which shapes their perception and production of sounds in the target language (L2). For Uzbek learners, these challenges are particularly evident. Uzbek phonology differs significantly from English in terms of vowel systems, consonant inventory, syllable structure, and prosodic features such as stress and intonation.

For example, Uzbek does not distinguish between certain vowel contrasts found in English, such as /ɪ/ and /i:/. As a result, learners may pronounce ship and sheep identically. Similarly, consonant sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ (as in think and this) do not exist in Uzbek, leading to substitutions like /s/ or /d/. Additionally, English stress patterns are less predictable than those in Uzbek, making it difficult for learners to produce natural-sounding speech.

Traditional pronunciation teaching methods, often based on repetition and teacher correction, have been criticized for their limited effectiveness. Such approaches may improve accuracy in controlled settings but fail to promote spontaneous, fluent communication. Consequently, there is a growing need for more effective, learner-centered methods that integrate phonetic instruction with communicative practice and technological support.

This paper aims to investigate such methods, providing a comprehensive analysis of their theoretical foundations, practical applications, and effectiveness in multilingual contexts.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of different pronunciation teaching methods.

Participants

The participants consisted of 75 intermediate-level English learners from a multilingual educational setting, the majority of whom were native Uzbek speakers. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25, and all had studied English for at least five years.

Research Design

Participants were divided into three groups:

Group A: Traditional instruction (repetition and teacher correction)

Group B: Phonetic and communicative instruction

Group C: Integrated approach (phonetics + communication + technology)

The study was conducted over a period of 14 weeks.

Data Collection Methods

The following instruments were used:

Pre-test and post-test pronunciation assessments

Audio recordings analyzed for phoneme accuracy, stress, and intonation

Learner questionnaires

Classroom observations

Assessment Criteria

Pronunciation improvement was evaluated based on:

Segmental accuracy (individual sounds)

Suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, intonation)

Intelligibility (ease of understanding)

Discussion and Results

1. Explicit Phonetic Instruction and Awareness

Explicit phonetic instruction plays a vital role in helping learners recognize and produce unfamiliar sounds.[1] Teaching the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) enables learners to understand the relationship between spelling and pronunciation.

Students in Groups B and C showed significant improvement in distinguishing problematic sounds. For example:

ship /ʃɪp/ vs sheep /ʃi:p/

bad /bæd/ vs bed /bed/

Uzbek learners initially struggled with these distinctions but improved after targeted phonetic training.

Uzbek example:

“Men ‘ship’ va ‘sheep’ ni bir xil aytardim, lekin IPA orqali farqini tushundim.”

Phonetic drills combined with visual diagrams of mouth position were particularly effective.

2. Communicative Pronunciation Teaching

Communicative approaches emphasize the use of pronunciation in real-life communication rather than isolated practice.[2]

In this study, students engaged in:

Role-plays

Group discussions

Problem-solving tasks

These activities encouraged learners to focus on meaning while simultaneously improving pronunciation.

Example:

Students simulate a job interview:

“I have experience in marketing.”

The teacher focuses on stress patterns:

“I have EXPERIENCE in MARKeting.”

This approach improved fluency and confidence significantly.

3. Task-Based Learning and Pronunciation

Task-based language teaching integrates pronunciation into meaningful tasks.[3]

Example task:

Students prepare a short presentation on a topic and present it to the class. During preparation, they practice pronunciation, stress, and intonation.

This method promotes:

Real-world language use

Integration of skills

Deeper learning

4. Technology-Assisted Pronunciation Learning (CALL)

Technology has transformed pronunciation teaching by providing interactive and personalized learning experiences.[4]

Students in Group C used:

Speech recognition software

Mobile applications

Online pronunciation tools

Results showed a 30% improvement in pronunciation accuracy compared to other groups.

Example:

A student records the sentence:

“I think this is the best solution.”

The software identifies errors in /θ/ sounds and provides corrective feedback.

5. Importance of Suprasegmental Features

While segmental accuracy is important, suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation are crucial for intelligibility.[5]

Uzbek learners often use flat intonation, which can make speech sound unnatural.

Example:

Incorrect: monotone speech

Correct: varied intonation

Teaching through:

Listening exercises

Imitation

Drama activities

proved highly effective.

6. Intelligibility vs Native-Like Pronunciation

Modern research emphasizes intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation as the primary goal.[6]

Learners who focused on being understood, rather than sounding like native speakers, achieved better communication outcomes.

7. Psychological and Affective Factors

Pronunciation learning is influenced by emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence.[7]

Students who feared making mistakes were less likely to participate in speaking activities.

Creating a supportive classroom environment:

Encouraging mistakes

Providing positive feedback

Using interactive activities significantly improved performance.

8. Uzbek Learners' Phonological Challenges

a) Vowel System Differences

Uzbek has fewer vowel contrasts than English.

b) Consonant Substitution

/θ/ → /s/ or /t/

/ð/ → /d/

c) Stress Patterns

Uzbek stress is more predictable than English.

Targeted teaching strategies addressed these issues effectively.

9. Integrated Approach: The Most Effective Method

Group C (integrated approach) showed the highest improvement across all criteria:

Better phoneme accuracy

Improved fluency

Higher confidence

This confirms that combining methods is more effective than using a single approach.

Additional Information

The study also highlights the importance of continuous practice and exposure. Learners who engaged with English media (films, podcasts, songs) showed faster improvement.

Example:

Watching English movies with subtitles helps learners connect pronunciation with meaning.

Additionally, teacher training is essential. Teachers must be equipped with phonetic knowledge and technological skills to implement effective pronunciation teaching.

Conclusion

Effective pronunciation teaching in multilingual contexts requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. For Uzbek learners, addressing specific phonological challenges is essential. The combination of phonetic instruction, communicative practice, task-based learning, and technological support leads to significant improvements in pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility. Future research should explore long-term outcomes and the role of emerging technologies in pronunciation teaching.

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