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Strategy for Teaching Pronunciation

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all our families, teachers, and anyone who is interested in learning.

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SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

As English gains more global usage, many prioritize being understood over proper syntax and vocabulary, but non-native speakers still struggle to improve their pronunciation for effective international communication. The fault lies with English courses, which often neglect to teach pronunciation or include exercises in course books. This raises questions about whether English teachers fail to provide instruction in English pronunciation or if there simply aren't enough pronunciation practice exercises available.?

The issue is that English courses tend to prioritize vocabulary and grammar progress, leaving little or no time for teaching pronunciation. As a result, pronunciation is often neglected by teachers when planning their lessons, even though developing spoken English skills is just as important as written language skills. Unlike grammar rules, pronunciation cannot be simply memorized and needs to be assimilated by learners, who should perceive new sounds like babies hearing a language for the first time. Similar to how children need support in developing writing skills, learners also need guidance in acquiring appropriate English pronunciation. Some learners may have no difficulty pronouncing English sounds, while others may require special help and encouragement. English teachers should be accountable for supervising basic problems of English pronunciation, and it is recommended that learners engage in fun pronunciation activities to acquire the necessary skills instead of just phonetic drills.

The fact that teaching English pronunciation is usually neglected may not always be the result of teachers' indifference but it can rather express teachers' doubts of not being able to teach English pronunciation in the right way. (Kelly 2007, 13) As stated by Kenworthy (1990, 69), English teachers should firstly realize that they do not necessarily need to be expert phoneticians. What really matters is a basic knowledge of phonetics and a kind of sensitivity in giving students guidance and hints when necessary. As Tennant (2007, 2) claims, the important thing in teaching English as a second language is to help students make their speech to sound intelligible for the others.

This study is divided into four sections. The first section is an introduction which gives information about the topic. The second section which is literature review explains the previous studies and explanation about the topic which includes a deep understanding of the topic and

placing the study into context. The third section demonstrates researchers experience and reflection on lesson plan. The fourth section includes the conclusion of the study and demonstrates the importance of the current study in addition to the list of references.

SECTION TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

1.English pronunciation:

Pronunciation is the way we pronounce a word, especially in a way that is accepted or generally understood. The way we speak also conveys something about ourselves to the people around us. Learners with good English pronunciation are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas. Celce-Murcia (1987) defined pronunciation as the production of the sounds used to make meaning. It also includes attention to the particular sounds of language, and aspects of speech beyond the level of individual sounds, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm, voice production, and in its broadest definition, the gestures and expressions related to the way we speak.

The older pronunciation textbooks usually focused on sound discrimination. This is one of the myths held by many teachers and students. A pronunciation class should include much more than the contrast of word sounds, and the pronunciation of consonants and vowels. There are six basic components of pronunciation which include intonation, stress and rhythm, vowels and consonants, initial sounds and final sounds, and voiced and voiceless sounds.

- **Intonation:** Intonation refers to the way the voice goes up and down in pitch when we are speaking and the rise and fall of our voice as we speak. In the Random House Unabridged English Dictionary, intonation is defined as “the pattern or melody of pitch changes in connected speech, especially the pitch pattern of a sentence”. According to Scarcella and Oxford (1994) and Wong (1993), it conveys and performs grammatical functions in sentences. Brazil, Coulthard and Johns (1980) pointed out that intonation in English also conveys involvement in a conversation, as well as the desire to take part or not take part in conversation. Firth (1992) suggested that teachers should check the following questions: Are the students using a suitable intonation pattern? Are yes or no questions signaled through the use of a rising intonation? Is a falling intonation used with-questions? Are the students changing pitch to indicate the major stress in a sentence?

- **Stress and rhythm:** Stress means that speakers of English make certain syllables and words. Stress is the amount of energy or effort that we use to pronounce words that are more important in a sentence. In English, you need to use word and sentence stress correctly if you want your listeners to accurately understand the meaning of your words. The rhythm of a language is created by the strong stresses or syllables in a sentence.
- **Vowels:** A vowel is a sound in spoken language that is characterized by an open configuration of the vocal tract so that there is no build-up of air pressure above the glottis. Vowel sounds are produced by air from the lungs which vibrate when the air in the mouth is not blocked. There are five vowels in English (a, e, i, o, u) which compose the different vowel sounds and are made by lowering the jaw and by changing the position of the tongue. One definition of a diphthong would be a combination of vowel sounds. The first sound in each phoneme is longer and louder.
- **Consonants:** A consonant is a part of speech and a sound that is articulated with complete or partial closure of the upper vocal tract. The upper vocal tract is the section of the vocal tract located above the larynx. There are 25 consonant sounds in English language which consist of 21 letters b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z and the 4 consonant clusters, ch, sh, th, and ng. Scarcella and Oxford (1994) defined consonants as noises produced with some sort of blockage in the air passage. A consonant may appear in both the initial sound and final sound. Some consonant sounds are voiced, while others are voiceless.
- **Initial and final sounds:** There are several kinds of final sounds. For example, when the final /s/ is used in the third person, there are three distinct sounds, which are the
- /s/ in sings, the /z/ in tells and the /is/ in watches. There are rules for using the final /s/ sound, such as the voiceless ending /s/ is used when the last sound in a word ends in a voiceless sound, and the voiced ending /z/ is used when the last sound in the base word ends in voiced sound.
- **Voiced and voiceless:** All the sounds produced in the English language are either voiced or unvoiced. All vowels in English are voiced, whereas only some of the consonant sounds are voiced. One problem faced by many students with pronunciation is whether or not a consonant is voiced or voiceless. When they

pronounce consonant sounds, they will feel no vibration in their throats, just a short explosion of air. Students could pronounce each of these consonant sounds and feel no vibration in their throats. Some of these sounds, such as final sounds and voiced sounds, do not exist in the Thai language. As a result, many Thai students find English pronunciation difficult

2. THE NECESSITY OF TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION ON THE INTERNATIONAL GROUND.

As the significance of the English language grows and its status of a global language is strengthened every day, a lot of people start realizing that the only knowledge of English grammar and vocabularies is becoming not to be sufficient. In today's increasingly international world, it is not only necessary to understand what other English speakers say but it is also essential to make your own speech intelligible for the others. But even though the global character of English language makes many English learners and teachers realize the necessity of improving the pronunciation skills, many English students still cope with mispronouncing sounds, misplacing stress in sentences and misusing intonation patterns.

Why is it so? O'Connor (1980, 1-3) explains this problem as a matter of habits that our native tongue strongly incorporated into our language patterns. He adds that the ability to imitate the language perfectly weakens with the age as children of ten years or less are able to gain excellent knowledge of any language they are exposed to but children who are older than ten are more likely to struggle with a difficulty in mastering the pronunciation. Tennant (2007, 3) goes even further and explains that students whose first language belongs to the group of syllable-timed languages – e.g. Italian, Hungarian, where equal stress is placed to all syllables – find it difficult to adopt the English stress-time patterns. That is why so many adults grapple with pronouncing English sounds properly and fail to eliminate their native pronunciation habits.

2.1 What Kind of English to Teach?

A great number of discussions have been led in order to decide which variety of English language is the best to be taught for foreigners. According to Farrell and Martin (2009, 2), the problem is not unequivocal as it might be thought. So far it might be believed that it is

the standard variety of English that should be taught, it is important to note that there is no general agreement what the term Standard English actually refers to.

2.1.1. Standard English and Received Pronunciation

The conception of Standard English is usually perceived as a phenomenon of British Standard English or American Standard English. But what about Standard English in such places like Africa, Canada or West Indies? Does it mean that the official English in these places cannot be perceived as a Standard English? Even though the term Standard English is well known, its definition is not an easy one. (Farrell and Martin 2009, 2)

Following Trudgill (2000, 6), the historical perspective of English language standardization explains that the standard variety of the English language stems from the unification of the various English dialects that were used by scholars, writers and clerks in London area. In connection with this, Fisher (1996, 9) notes that these were predominantly graphemic copies of clerks which created standard. Because of the fact that all writings were dictated, clerks got used to write in almost the same style, syntax and orthography. As these clerk's graphemic copies were later distributed and preserved, they contributed to English language standardization. Following Trudgill (2000, 5), the variety of English used by the upper-class Londoners was lately established as a fashionable model also among the other social classes. This variety of English became lately popular also by Caxton and it was used in all the books published. Even it underwent a great number of changes; this variety of English has survived as the highest form of the English language. Fisher (1996, 9) summarizes the process of English language standardization as a process which occurred through a way of writing essays and copies for business or governmental purposes rather than a process which happened through a way of oral usage.

Nowadays, a concept of Standard English is perceived as a variety of English which is used by educated people in newspapers and television. However, there are many regional differences within Standard Englishes, especially in terms of vocabulary stock and grammatical aspects. From the regional point of view, a number of varieties exist, for example, between Standard English (lift) and Standard Scottish English (elevator). (Trudgill 2000, 6) As Farrell and Martin (2009, 2 -3) add to this topic, Standard English is a term which refers to the most widely accepted form of English in an English speaking country. These are the speakers of this country who decide which aspects should be included in their Standard English and which not. Therefore, Canadian speakers may

present their Standard English in different way than African speakers. In connection with this Trudgill (2000, 8) states that it is important to realize that the peculiarities between these varieties do not make one variety more important than the other, as all the languages and all the dialects are equally complex systems.

2.1.2 Teaching Production and Teaching Comprehension

Crystal (2010) envisages the matter from another point of view. He claims that the most important thing in teaching EFL is to bring global English into the classroom. It does not mean that teachers necessarily need to stop teaching according to the materials that include e.g. RP. That is right the opposite. If teachers set up a teaching model on an English course book including RP, they can carry on. The point is that these study materials need to be complemented with such substances which include as many various English varieties as possible. In other words, teachers need to expose their students to as many varieties as possible in order to make them realize that the English variety included in their books is not the only variety which exists in the world. The sooner students get exposed to these varieties; the better. Crystal (2010) adds that it does not mean that students have to be exposed to all the varieties existing; the aim is just to make the students familiar with the language which they can really encounter in the streets.

Here, Crystal (2010) highlights the idea, that it is not only the factor of pronouncing the sounds accurately which contributes to conversation effectiveness, but this is most importantly the ability to distinguish what the others are saying. In accordance with this, he mentions two possible ways how teachers can bring global English into the classroom, namely teaching production and teaching comprehension. In terms of teaching production, teachers need to realize that introducing only one variety, e.g. RP, is not a good way of making students be exposed to the existing varieties. However, Crystal (2010) claims that it is not as for production where global English has such a great impact, but it is rather in terms of comprehension where a misunderstanding can change everything. Regarding this, it is more than advisable that teachers expose their students to as many comprehension activities as possible. This applies to reading comprehension (introducing written materials into the classroom, e.g. a variety of international newspapers, journals and internet sites) as well as to listening comprehension (incorporating a variety of listening activities).

2.1.3An Overview of Teaching Models

To sum it up, according to Ur (2009, 2-5), teachers of ESL have the following ways to choose from in order to introduce a teaching model in their classroom:

1) Teachers can base their English lessons on the Standard English model which includes comprehensible and acceptable features recognizable worldwide. It is usually based on one or two predominant native varieties (British English, American English). Introducing only the Standard form, however, eliminates the possibility to encounter the great number of idioms, vocabulary, grammar and spellings that are included in many English varieties.

2) Teachers can also decide for a native model which is favoured by many students and teachers as it is well defined and codified. The question is which variety of native model to choose from as there are many native model varieties around the world.

3) Another option to elect from is the diverse model, which enables to teach also some of the local variations. This model is probably the most ideologically embraceable, even though it requires some kind of codification. As this way presents a very flexible way of teaching, it is difficult to design a syllabus for it.

4) In order to improve student's intelligibility, teachers can introduce so called common core model into the classroom. This method should be universally comprehensible and easily achievable. However, it is not proved whether this model includes all the most common language features used worldwide or not. (Ur 2009, 2-5)

2.2 Why to Teach Pronunciation?

As the character of ELF is strengthened every day, the necessity of clear communication between NNS is inherent. However, a great number of EFL teachers neglect teaching pronunciation and they rather focus on grammar and vocabulary. (Harmer 2005, 183) But how can mastering grammar rules and vocabulary perfectly help students make their speech intelligible? It is proved that speakers whose pronunciation is listener friendly are able to lead a successful conversation even with their grammatical mistakes better than speakers whose grammar obeys all the rules. (Gilakjani 2012, 1) Pronunciation teaching so proves to

be an essential part in every English lesson. Pronunciation activities do not only help students to be confident of different sounds and sound features, but it most importantly helps students to improve their spoken skills. Focusing on where the sounds are in the mouth and which syllables are stressed in the words fortifies students' comprehension and intelligibility. (Harmer 2005, 183) In connection with this, Gilakjani (2012, 8) claims that teaching pronunciation should be more than just training individual sounds or isolated words. Pronunciation needs to be viewed as an essential part of communication. Therefore, in order to consolidate pronunciation skills (both comprehension and production), it is crucial to incorporate pronunciation activities into classroom through various materials and tests. Good pronunciation skills do not only bring speakers confidence to communicate but it also improves their listening comprehension, the basis of an accomplished conversation.

Here are some of the main reasons why incorporating pronunciation activities into every English class should take a key role:

- Using wrong sounds in words or wrong prosodic features in sentences may lead to misunderstanding as it is very difficult to work out what the speaker is saying.
- Even though it is clear what the speaker is saying, his/her pronunciation makes listeners feel unpleasant as speaker's accent is distracting or too heavy. It can undermine speaker's confidence as well as it can make the listener think that the speaker lacks proper knowledge of English language. (Gilakjani 2012, 3)

3. FACTORS INFLUENCING PRONUNCIATION

The fact that some students are able to acquire a reasonable knowledge of English in few months and the others are not able to reach the same level within some few years leads this paper to the topic of factors which influence attaining English pronunciation. As noted by Shoebottom (2012), some of these factors can affect acquiring pronunciation skills prosperously (e.g. determination and hard work in training pronunciation skills), some of these factors are far beyond human control. Generally, we can distinguish two main groups of the factors, internal and external.

Internal Factors

These are the factors which are incorporated into student's individual language.

- **Age:** It is proved that children are the most talented ones in terms of acquiring EFL. However, adults can achieve a reasonable progress in obtaining pronunciation skills successfully if they are well motivated and determined.
- **Personality:** Students who are of introvert character are usually afraid of expressing themselves orally; they do not rather look for any opportunities to speak. On the other hand, students who are of extrovert character are usually seeking for taking part in every conversation possible, ignoring their mistakes.
- **Motivation:** It is important to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who are intrinsically motivated exhibit greater interest and enjoyment in their English language development. Students who need to study English in order to take a better job or to communicate with relatives who live in an English speaking country (so they are extrinsically motivated) are also likely to achieve better results.
- **Experiences:** Students who have already been exposed to some foreign language have greater chances to acquire a new language easier than students who have never encountered one.

External Factors

These factors characterize the particular language learning situation.

- **Curriculum:** It is important to expose students of ESL to such a workload which is appropriate for their studying needs.
- **Instruction:** It depends also on teacher's teaching skills and abilities how successful students are in terms of their language development. In addition to this, students who are exposed to some ELT also in other subjects reach greater progress.
- **Culture and Status:** It has been noticed that students whose culture possesses a lower status than the culture whose language they are exposed to achieve the language skills slower.
- **Motivation:** It is proved that students who are continually supported to better their language skills by their families or teachers reach a greater success.
- **Access to native speakers:** Students who have the possibility to meet with native speakers lose the fears to communicate. Native speakers provide a linguistic model and an appropriate feedback for students. (Shoebottom 2012)

4.INCLUDING PRONUNCIATION INTO THE CLASSROOM.

The reasons why it is important to incorporate pronunciation teaching into the classroom have been already presented. This part is going to show some of the ways that can help teachers to draw some of the pronunciation activities into the class.

4.1 When to Teach Pronunciation

According to Harmer (2005, 186), the first thing teachers need to do is to decide when to include pronunciation teaching into an English lesson. There are some possibilities to choose from:

- **Whole lessons:** if teachers decide to devote the whole lesson to teaching pronunciation, it does not necessarily mean that the entire lesson needs to be based just only on training pronunciation. Students may be asked to deal with listening skills or vocabulary stock before aiming on pronunciation tasks. In addition to this, it is no sensible to focus on pronunciation of sounds only, it is rather advisable to practice connected speech, sentence stress and intonation.
- **Discrete slots:** Inserting short, separate pronunciation parts into English lessons can prove extremely beneficial as it can refresh every English lesson. These short pronunciation sections, where one week phonemes and another week intonation can be practiced, are very popular among students as they welcome being not bothered with pronunciation tasks too long. However, pronunciation is not a separate skill; it is an essential part of our communication. That is the reason why longer sequences or even the entire lessons should be devoted to its teaching.
- **Integrated phases:** Making pronunciation tasks an integral part of lesson activities seems to be a successful way of dealing with pronunciation. Pronunciation tasks may be drawn e.g. in almost every listening activity as students may pay attention to pronunciation features they listen to or they can just imitate intonation.
- **Opportunistic teaching:** Pointing out a pronunciation problem when it has just arisen in the course is a good way of introducing pronunciation into the class. It is enough to devote a minute or two to some pronunciation issue so that fluency of the lesson is not interrupted a lot. (Harmer 2005, 186 - 187)

It is worth noting here that the suggested ways of introducing teaching pronunciation into a classroom do not necessarily need to be engaged separately. A lot of teachers mix the possible ways altogether according to the syllabus and timetable flexibility. (Harmer 2005, 187)

SECTION THREE EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION

1.1 Overview

This section demonstrates the researchers' experience and their reflection on the experience in the light of what has been explained in the sections above.

1.2 Experience of the Researchers

We, as the two researchers of this study, completed our primary and high school in the Kurdistan Region, and now we are at final stage of college. Based on our experience of attending lessons since primary school. This study deals with the importance of teaching pronunciation of the English language at secondary schools. As the global character of English language is strengthened every day, the only knowledge of English grammar and vocabularies is not sufficient as the importance of being able to lead an intelligible and effective communication plays a great role as well.

1.3 Reflection of the Researchers

As the global character of the English language is strengthened every day, a great number of its speakers start realizing that the importance of English grammar and vocabularies is getting overshadowed by the desire to sound intelligible. But even though the necessity of making the international conversation effective in terms of its intelligibility is significant from every corner of the world, non-native speakers of the English language do not manage to find a way of mastering their pronunciation skills. Whose fault is it? Do the English teachers simply ignore incorporating teaching English pronunciation into English lessons? Or do the English course books lack activities for practising pronunciation skills?

The aim of this paper is to find out the answers for these questions. In addition to this, it is going to spot some of the ways which can make teaching pronunciation more effective. In the theoretical part, the theme of the international character of the English language is going to be mentioned in order to highlight the importance of including teaching pronunciation into English lessons

SECTION FOUR

CONCLUSION

There are four sections in this study. An introduction provides background information on the subject in the first section. The second section, a literature review, provides background information on the subject, provides an in-depth analysis of it, and contextualizes the study. In the third section, the researchers' experiences are presented along with their reflections on the lesson plan. The study's conclusion is presented in the fourth section, along with a list of references and an explanation of the significance of the current study.

The study explained the importance of including teaching pronunciation into English lessons; as the necessity of being able to communicate intelligibly and effectively is strengthened by the global role of English language every day. In addition to this, factors which influence acquiring pronunciation skills of a second language were presented altogether with the aspects which accompany insertion of teaching pronunciation into English lessons. It was cleared up when teaching pronunciation can be included into English lessons and what pronunciation aspects to teach

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