



## PRONUNCIATION IN ACTION: AN INVESTIGATION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS IN IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AT IPB CIREBON

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### Abstract:

The research delves into the dynamic landscapes of pronunciation teaching practices, aiming to investigate and critically analyze the methodologies employed in language education. Pronunciation, a vital component of language proficiency, significantly influences effective communicative. Recognizing the challenges faced by learners in acquiring accurate pronunciation skills, this study seeks to contribute empirical insights into the effectiveness of diverse teaching practice. To limit the scope of the study, the researcher focused the investigation only on pronunciation accuracy. This is a qualitative approach where the researcher examines real-life, synchronous bound systems or collective bund systems over time through detailed and in-depth data collection. Data were collected through document analysis, non-participatory observation, questionnaire, and in-depth interview after gaining consent from two senior high school's English teachers in Indonesia. The collected data were then analyzed using the interactive model of analysis. This study concerns that pronunciation practice received a small portion of attention. Most of the pronunciation accuracy training was carried out with a similar pattern of activities, i.e., read aloud, listen-and-repeat, and teachers' corrective feedback to respond to the student's errors. Pronunciation accuracy training experienced several problems. A poor internet connection can be disastrous for accuracy training as implementing synchronous learning or uploading and downloading audio/video requires a good and strong internet connection. The first problem is the lack of students' engagement to study due to the difference in sensation and excitement with face to face (F2F) learning. There are also challenges when assessing pronunciation, namely the unavailability of an appropriate pronunciation assessment rubric and a large number of students in one class. These imply that adequate preparation is needed in applying pronunciation accuracy instruction, apart from the material itself.

**Keywords:** investigating, pronunciation accuracy, pronunciation practice

## INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation is a critical aspect of language proficiency, influencing effective communication and language comprehension. As English continues to be a global lingua franca, the importance of clear and accurate pronunciation cannot be overstated. In language education, various methodologies and interventions have been employed to enhance learners' pronunciation skills.

Despite the widespread adoption of English as a foreign language (EFL), learners often face challenges in achieving native-like pronunciation. Common issues include segmental errors (vowel and consonant sounds), suprasegmental features (intonation, stress, and rhythm), and interference from the learner's native language. These pronunciation challenges can impact communication and lead to misunderstandings.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is not solely determined by vocabulary and grammar proficiency; pronunciation plays a pivotal role. Clear and accurate pronunciation contributes to successful interpersonal communication, academic achievement, and professional success. Understanding the factors that influence pronunciation improvement is essential for educators and learners alike.

As part of speaking skills, pronunciation should be taught by the instructors and mastered by the learners (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Pennington & Richards, 1986). Being able to pronounce English words well is essential for English learners, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL). The correct pronunciation will precisely deliver the message to the interlocutors and make it easy to understand the message to the teachers in learning activities and the others' language speakers (Kelly, 2002; Yoshida, 2016). Pronunciation instruction in teaching and learning improves students' pronunciation ability (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). Practicing and including pronunciation in the English materials will make the students' English, especially speaking, more understandable.

Regardless of its importance, pronunciation is often being neglected in the English teaching and learning process. Studies such as that conducted by Abdolmanafi-Rokni et al. (2013), Baker and Murphy (2011), and Kelly (2002) have shown that the reasons why English teachers are neglecting pronunciation are because they lack motivation in teaching pronunciation and its knowledge. Similarly, Gilbert (2010) argued the causes for pronunciation ignorance in EFL classrooms. The teachers lack enough time to teach pronunciation, and they are not sure of their pronunciation. Consequently, the teachers emphasize and give more attention to grammar and vocabulary than pronunciation in the language teaching process. A study done by Foote et al. (2016) found that pronunciation teaching is only taught in less than 10% of the total time in English teaching duration. Similarly, Brown (1991) reported that the English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher was often given small concentration if not entirely ignored. This sub-skill has been related to 'poor relation' in the ELT world.

Several studies have explored interventions and strategies to enhance English pronunciation. However, there remains a gap in our understanding of the most effective methods for improving pronunciation, especially considering diverse learner backgrounds and varying linguistic challenges. Existing research may lack consensus on the optimal approaches or may focus on specific aspects without providing a comprehensive view.

From the Oxford Dictionary, pronunciation is how a particular language or statement, or sound is vocalized. People use a language to communicate with others, as pronunciation is how they say by pronouncing them. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) noted that pronunciation is the output of powerful sounds used by a particular language as part of its code to achieve meaning in context. At the same time, (Cook, 2016) defined pronunciation as the product of English sounds. Moreover, Richards and Schmidt (2013) stated that pronunciation is the way

of producing particular sounds. The indicators of pronunciation are intelligibility, fluency, accuracy, and native-like (Djiwandono, 2011). To be specific, it means that pronunciation is the production of speech that creates meanings.

Blatchford et al. (1977) expressed that pronunciation is a sound system production that does not interrupt communication from the speakers' or the listeners' viewpoints. In another study, Yates (2002) mentioned pronunciation as the production of sounds used to make meaning. Phonemes arrange the sound system of English to create words, sentences, or phrases for making meaning. Phonemes may be vowels, diphthongs, trip thongs, or consonants. How one or groups speak a word in distinct ways is affected by social and physical factors, such as the region where they grew up and lived, ethnic group, social class, education, and speech or voice disorder.

In this study, pronunciation is the ability to produce word sounds used to make meaning in oral communication with an intelligibility aim. The emphasis is accuracy which refers to the correctness of sound production to convey a message so that the listener will get the purpose and the point of view right away from the speaker.

Darcy et al. (2012), Tharpe (2016), and Ur (1999) pointed out that there are some principles in teaching pronunciation. There is appropriate curriculum, pronunciation elements selection, student as the center, students become independent, teaching vowel and consonants, opportunity to practice vocalization and suitable activities.

The strategies in pronunciation stated by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) and Kelly (2002) are drilling, chaining, listen and imitate, tongue twister, minimal pairs, spelling, spelling and reading. Fraenkel (1984) noted that in learning how to pronounce a language, there are two main stages such as receptive (list stage) and productive (speaking stage). No matter what methods used, the materials delivered well to the learners are crucial.

Pronunciation is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of speaking skills to learn in English due to requiring a lot of time and effort to improve understanding of how to pronounce correctly. Teachers rarely teach it in EFL classrooms. Besides, it is one of the most formidable challenges facing language teachers and learners. The teachers supposedly understand the natures that influence the pronunciation of their learners. In that case, the teachers can improve their teaching to improve their learners' pronunciation accurateness. Harmer (2007) highlighted there are some difficulties that the students face when learning spoken English, especially pronunciation, namely what students can hear, the intonation problems.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The data used is qualitative, which is data collected in words and sentences. Qualitative data play an essential role in impact evaluation by providing valuable information for understanding processes before the results are observed and assessing changes in people's perceptions (Kabir, 2016). This qualitative data include; lecturer practice and the classroom's actual learning activities. The researcher held the sample using convenience sampling, one of the non-probability sampling methods where the sample is taken from a group of populations easy to contact or reach. Thus, the population members fulfil the specific criteria: ease of accessibility, reachability, availability, and willingness to participate (Dörnyei & Griffee, 2010). This sampling method was applied to select the target from the campus populations. The data collection techniques used are document observation, classroom observation, questionnaire, and interview. Qualitative research has four criteria for judging trustworthiness as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The four criteria of qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. The participants who participated are those who can give answers to questions being explored. The

data were triangulated by applying methodological triangulation. This triangulation technique refers to using multiple data sources; documents and classroom observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The purpose of triangulating the data was to increase the credibility and validity of the data findings. The data collected from observations of the teacher's syllabi and lesson plans were rechecked in classroom observation whether the teacher applied what has been mentioned in their documents or not. Afterward, data from documents and classroom observation were verified through questionnaires and interviews to get more in-depth data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Research Results

There are two main issues related in treating pronunciation. Those are a) the duration of pronunciation teaching; b) the strategy used in teaching pronunciation.

#### 1. The duration and portion in pronunciation

On this issue, the researcher observed teachers' documents (lesson plans and syllabi) and the teaching activities in the classes to know about the pronunciation teaching practice. Then, the teachers were asked to talk about their pronunciation practice as language teachers to get deeper information. The participants' response as follows:

*"...Ketika mempelajari bahasa Inggris, pengucapan yang salah mengakibatkan makna yang dimaksud menjadi salah. Komunikator yang baik memiliki pengucapan yang baik pula.*

Pronunciation accuracy (intonations, stresses, and sounds) belong to the language features and usually presented orally. The table below shows the duration and portion accuracy practice.

**Table 1:** The Duration and Portion of Pronunciation Accuracy Practice

Observation	Duration (minutes)	Portion (n/90 minutes)	Duration (minutes)	Portion (n/120 minutes)
Meeting 1	63	70%	-	0%
Meeting 2	60	67%	-	0%
Meeting 3	-	0%	29	24%
Meeting 4	-	0%	18	15%
Meeting 5	-	0%	-	0%
Meeting 6	-	0%	-	0%
Meeting 7	6	7%	13	11%
Meeting 8	12	13%	-	0%
Meeting 9	-	0%	-	0%
Meeting 10	-	0%	-	0%

**Average**

**16%**

**5%**

Table 1 shows pronunciation accuracy practice duration and portion in 10 observation meetings. The focus of the pronunciation here was on intonation and words' sounds.

Meanwhile, stress received less attention than the other two pronunciation features shown in seventh meeting.

Pronunciation accuracy practice was taught at first, second, seventh, and eighth meetings, with 63, 60, 6, and 12 minutes in class. Thus, the total duration per meeting in class was three hours or 90 minutes.

The materials of pronunciation accuracy training in the participants' classes were observed from classroom observation. The result shows all trained of pronunciation accuracy features, rising and falling intonation, word and sentence stress, and vowel and consonant sounds. Intonation and individual sounds were taught explicitly, whereas stress was implicitly taught. It is also taught all pronunciation accuracy features besides stress; word and sentence stress. He reported focusing more on the other two features, incredibly individual sounds (Interview, M4). It was since his students still need more practice in pronouncing English word sounds.

**Table 2: Pronunciation Accuracy Practice**

<b>Pronunciation Accuracy</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
Rising intonation	Observed
Falling intonation	Observed
Word stress	Observed
Sentence stress	Observed
Vowel sound	Observed
Consonant sound	Observed

Based on the data, it can be concluded that it must be planned well to train students' pronunciation. However, words and sentence stress materials were rarely discussed or delivered from three pronunciation accuracy features in practice. Most of the time, intonation and sounds were the features of teaching pronunciation accuracy. The practice of pronunciation accuracy in the participants' classes was no more than 11% of the total duration of learning for ten observation meetings. In addition, even though planned pronunciation practice, the students did not allocate exact time or duration to conduct pronunciation accuracy training.

## **2. The strategy used in teaching pronunciation**

The second issue is related to the strategy how to teach pronunciation. The data are gathered to answer this issue by observing syllabi and lesson plans of the related topic materials, giving questionnaires to be filled, and asking questions in an interview.

Based on the observation data, it is planned to implement reading aloud, to deliver pronunciation accuracy practice. In addition, the students would be asked to read proverbs and riddles, which they found from various sources. In practice, there were other strategies she used. The first strategy that chosen by Joy was listen-and-repeat by using provided audios from the book she used as the reference. Listen-and-repeat was implemented in the first and second observation meetings. The students were asked to listen to the audios and record their pronunciation, imitating the speaker in the audios. The audios were about related vocabularies that will be used in the chapter of proverbs and riddles, which were pronounced word by word, phrase by phrase, and sentence by sentence.

Other than that, it is also implemented minimal pairs and corrective feedback to respond to the students' mistakes. When the students submitted their recording of imitating the audios, it is checked their pronunciation and made corrections if they made mistakes. Minimal pairs were used to show the students how to differentiate words that have a similar sound. Corrective feedback was implemented in speaking evaluation in the seventh and eighth observation meetings when they read dialogues text in the group via video call.

**Table 3:** The Planned and Implemented Strategies

Observation	Planned	Implemented
Meeting 1	-	Listen and repeat, Corrective feedback
Meeting 2	-	Listen and repeat, Corrective feedback
Meeting 3	-	Minimal pair
Meeting 4	Reading	Corrective feedback, minimal pair
Meeting 5	-	-
Meeting 6	-	-
Meeting 7	Reading	Reading, corrective feedback
Meeting 8	Reading	Reading, corrective feedback
Meeting 9	-	-
Meeting 10	-	-

**Table 4:** The Effective Strategy to train Pronunciation features

Pronunciation Features	Activities
Intonation	Listen, repeat and reading
Stress	Listen and repeat
Sounds	Minimal pairs

As shown in two tables above, which the data gathered from the questionnaire, the participants chose some strategies as the most suitable and effective strategy to train pronunciation features from the questionnaire and interview. Listen and repeat were chosen by as the effective method in training intonation and stress. Reading is the most suitable strategy to train the rising and falling intonation. The most practical method in teaching vowel and consonant sounds: minimal pairs.

### 3. The challenges of pronunciation teaching

The second part of this research finding explored the challenges faced by the English teachers in teaching pronunciation accuracy. Based on the data analysis, the following challenge was identified; the obstacles in teaching pronunciation. The participants faced the following main challenges in teaching pronunciation namely students' motivation and engagement and pronunciation assessment.

## B. Discussion

Based on the research findings, it is evident that background of knowledge and understand pronunciation is important. From the observation, pronunciation is also trained to the students in the EFL classroom. Pronunciation is taught in every synchronous meeting; at least the teachers corrected mistakes the students made. Furthermore, the teachers applied strategies that they thought were the easiest to implement during the study to minimize the obstacles they would face. Thus, the teachers' challenges in teaching pronunciation accuracy

were related to the unreadiness teacher's creativity, and time management, while challenges in evaluating pronunciation were also faced by the teachers when they were in the F2F classroom.

Pronunciation is a subskill of speaking skill, and it received the least attention in the learning and teaching practice. Researchers found that English teachers preferred teaching other English language aspects, such as vocabulary and grammar, more than pronunciation (Baştürkmen et al., 2004; Foote et al., 2016). Pronunciation teaching surveys show that not all English teachers see pronunciation as an essential aspect to be taught (Burns, 2006; Foote et al., 2012), and the others claimed the reason why they commit to user library.uns.ac.id digilib.uns.ac.id 41 do not teach pronunciation is that they were lack pronunciation training when they were student teachers (Foote et al., 2012). In this study, the researcher found that the English teacher has motivation and belief about the importance of pronunciation ability. They also admitted they got enough pronunciation knowledge and training in their university before being an English teacher.

After observing the learning activities for ten meetings for each participant, the researcher found that pronunciation was taught for 11% of the total duration of the lesson. This teaching portion was only for pronunciation accuracy features, which are intonation, stress, and sounds. The mentioned finding is congruent with Foote et al.'s finding in 2016. They found that the duration of pronunciation teaching (accuracy and fluency) was not more than 10% of the total duration in the F2F setting after four observations. Furthermore, in her study, Huensch (2018) found that 82% of the participants were taught pronunciation for 15 minutes or less every week, and only 5% of that duration was pre-planned teaching. So, it can be said that the teachers tend to teach pronunciation incidentally. Nevertheless, in contrast, this finding the contrary to the results of published teacher surveys which suggest a considerable emphasis on pronunciation, for example, with 75% of instructors reporting that they teach pronunciation more than once per week (Murphy, 2011).

The goal of pronunciation instruction was shifted from the traditional one that is speaking like a native English speaker to the rational one that is to be more intelligible or 'the extent to which the message from the speaker can exactly be understood by the listener' (Munro & Derwing, 1995) and comprehensible or ease or difficulty in understanding an utterance. Both of the participants in this study targeted their pronunciation training to make their students have a pronunciation that the listeners or interlocutors could understand without much effort. The finding is in line with previous researches' results (e.g., Breitzkreutz et al., 2001; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Foote et al., 2016; Huensch, 2018; Matsuura, 2007) that the majority of the English teachers agreed that the goal of pronunciation is not to eliminate foreign accent or commit to user library.uns.ac.id digilib.uns.ac.id 42 native-like, but intelligibility and comprehensibility. In contrast, Bai and Yuan (2018) discovered that the English teachers in Hong Kong still believed that native-like speaking was an important goal in English learning. The English teachers and students judged nativeness accent and preferred native-like as the standard pronunciation. Whereas, Hamidova and Ganiyeva (2020), in their article, mentioned that the goal of pronunciation teaching is neither to assist language learners to achieve native-like accents nor to encourage convenient intelligibility to native speakers, but to assure mutual intelligibility between nonnative English speakers.

In teaching pronunciation accuracy, there are seven strategies or methods that can be used by language teachers, as offered by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) and Kelly (2002); drilling, chaining, listen-and-repeat, tongue twister, minimal pairs, spelling, and reading. The teachers in this study applied three of those strategies; listen-and-repeat, minimal pairs, and reading. Previous research indicated that reading aloud and minimal pairs use are classified explicitly as preferred activities or reported as frequently used (Burgessa & Spencer, 2000; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010).

The teachers were forced to be more creative and collaborative in choosing the resources and strategies, especially in teaching pronunciation. They had to think more about what kind of medium would gain students' engagement, what method of teaching would not burden the students. It is also confirmed the same finding who was researching South Korea. The study presented how English teachers reshaped their teaching practices and experiences in during the lesson. They considered a purposeful and effective use of their second language, developed lesson plans with more frequent linguistic and cultural negotiations, and took on more roles to design lessons, such as a video creator. In Arab countries, the language teachers revealed that they faced problems in the virtual context when preparing learning materials and implementing the learning strategies they used in traditional teaching and learning (F2F learning), which becomes insufficient during learning process.

It is also suggested that English language educators should be creative and innovative in conducting activities for students in an ERT environment. In other words, teachers are not simply moving F2F classes to classes. Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to teach remotely. Moreover, they must master the materials, technology, and foreign language pedagogy. Finally, the challenges faced must inspire teachers to be reflective, open, creative, and adaptive commit to user library.uns.ac.id digilib.uns.ac.id 45 to dynamic changes. It is a reminder for teachers to continue exploring technology to improve foreign language teaching.

Another challenge in conducting pronunciation instruction, as mentioned in the result findings, is that the teachers struggle to manage their time, teaching, and daily time since they still have to plan and design the next teaching medium or materials in their outside teaching time. They also realized that they were not ready to teach online. It is revealed that teachers experienced time management problems teaching in distance teaching in a similar vein. In addition, some of them encountered online interaction problems while the others faced strategies issues in online interactive, monitoring students learning, and engaging students in learning.

In assessing students' pronunciation, the language teachers relied more on estimates for indicators that would be assessed from the aspect of pronunciation. This condition is due to the unavailability of an appropriate pronunciation assessment rubric. Speaking rubrics are the only resource that educators and learners have for measuring pronunciation effects for most speaking tests, which may or may not even mention pronunciation features in them. Even the rubrics of well-known tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) do not include detailed pronunciation descriptors.

## CONCLUSION

The teachers should show that they gave pronunciation practice to their students as a part of speaking skills with their preferred pronunciation teaching strategies; listen and repeat, minimal pairs, reading, and corrective feedback. However, the portion of pronunciation teaching was still the same as the other language teachers in previous studies, which was only 11%. Furthermore, pronunciation received little attention since it was not taught separately but combined with other language skills. The teachers implemented synchronous mode only once or twice for each chapter, considering that synchronous mode requires a lot of internet data quota. Among pronunciation accuracy features, stress (word and sentence) was the feature that got the least attention in pronunciation practice during learning process. At the same time, the features that received the most attention were sounds (consonant and vowel). 2. The challenges



faced by English teachers in teaching pronunciation during the learning process were mostly poor internet connection which was the main core.

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