International Journal of Research in English Education

# English Pronunciation Instruction: A Literature Review

Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani

Lahijan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lahijan, Iran

Tel: 98-13-4263-2762. E-mail: abbas.pourhossein@yahoo.com

Received: October 15, 2016 Accepted: November 14, 2016 Online Published: November 18, 2016

**Abstract**

English Pronunciation instruction is difficult for some reasons. Teachers are left without clear guidelines and are faced with contradictory practices for pronunciation instruction. There is no well-established systematic method of deciding what to teach, when, and how to do it. As a result of these problems, pronunciation instruction is less important and teachers are not very comfortable in teaching pronunciation in their classes. This paper reviews some of the important issues of English pronunciation instruction. The aims of this paper are to define the term pronunciation, discuss the goal of pronunciation instruction, explain the importance of pronunciation instruction, elaborate the role of teachers in teaching pronunciation, and finally mention some suggestions in helping teachers to improve learners' pronunciation. The review of literature shows that if teachers want to teach pronunciation accurately they should be trained in pronunciation instruction.

**Keywords:** pronunciation, goal, importance, role, suggestions

## 1. Introduction

English pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills to acquire and learners should spend lots of time to improve their pronunciation (Aliaga García, 2007; Martínez-Flor et al. 2006; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016). Understandable pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' competence and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction. Good pronunciation leads to learning while bad pronunciation promotes to great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2012).

According to Fraser (2000), teachers should be provided with courses and materials that help them improve their pronunciation instruction. She continued that second language education research should not be concerned with the significance of English pronunciation instruction but with the methodology of pronunciation instruction. Morley (1991) stated that understandable pronunciation is a main objective of pronunciation instruction. In is a necessary component of communicative competence.

Morley (1991) emphasized that learners should develop functional intelligibility, functional communicability, increased self-confidence, the speech monitoring abilities, and speech modification strategies. In this paper, the researcher defines the term pronunciation, reviews the goal of English pronunciation instruction, and explains the significance of English pronunciation instruction.

The goal of pronunciation instruction is not to ask learners to pronounce like native speakers. Instead intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of oral communication. If learners want to change the way of pronouncing English words, they have to change the way they think about the sounds of those words. This is true both for individual sounds and the bigger parts of speech such as syllables, stress patterns, and rhythm. Unfortunately, pronunciation instruction is sometimes ignored in English language teaching (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2011; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016). In this paper, the researcher defines the term pronunciation, explains the goal of English pronunciation, elaborates the importance of pronunciation, states the role of teachers in teaching pronunciation, and mentions some suggestions for teaching English pronunciation.

[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]

## 2. What Is Pronunciation?

Cook (1996 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016) defined pronunciation as the production of English sounds. Pronunciation is learnt by repeating sounds and correcting them when produced inaccurately. When learners start learning pronunciation they make new habits and overcome the difficulties resulting from the first language. According to Yates (2002 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016), pronunciation is the production of sounds that is used for making meaning.

Pronunciation is the production of a sound system which doesn't interfere with communication either from the speakers' or the listeners' viewpoint (Paulston & Burder, 1976). Pronunciation is the way of uttering a word in an accepted manner (Otlowski, 1998). Furthermore, Richard and Schmidt (2002) defined pronunciation as the method of producing certain sounds.

## 3. The Goal of English Pronunciation Instruction

According to James (2010), acceptable pronunciation can be understood based on the following basic levels. In level 1, what the speaker is saying is not understandable to people. The speaker uses the wrong sounds when producing English words or uses the wrong prosodic features when producing English sentences. According to Hinofotis and Bailey (1980, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Goodwin, 1991), there is a beginning level for pronunciation. If the pronunciation of a speaker falls below this level, he/she will be not be able to communicate without paying attention to his/her knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. In level 2, what the speaker is saying can be understandable to people but the speaker's pronunciation is not acceptable to listen to because he/she has a strange and heavy accent. Morley (1994) said that when a speaker's pronunciation is heavily accented it can affect the speaker's understanding. In level 3, people understand the speaker and the speaker's English is acceptable to listen to. Scovel (1988) called it comfortable intelligibility and it should be the aim of English pronunciation.

Therefore, the important question is this: what shapes acceptable pronunciation? A speaker has acceptable pronunciation when other people can understand him/her and the speaker's English is of great value to listen to. According to James (2010), the aim of learning pronunciation for some learners is the native-like accent. This can probably be a primary objective but it cannot be the ideal goal of teachers who intend to improve their learners' pronunciation.

Morley (1994) expressed that an accent that is too different from a known standard can become confusing; therefore, it is suggested that learners' accents become close to a standard variety. If a speaker has a heavy English accent, this may cause negative judgments about his/her personality and competence. If learners need not to pronounce like native speakers of English and at the same time they need to have an accent that is near to a known standard, then what English models can a teacher use with his/her students?

James (2010) answered the above question and stated that there are different kinds of models that can be found for teaching and learning English pronunciation. One can turn on his/her TV and find channels such as CNN International, BBC, or Sky News. These channels help one hear many different people from Germany, France, and the other non-English-speaking countries. All of these channels have acceptable pronunciation and this will facilitate the process of persons' understanding.

According to Yates and Zielinski (2009), much attention to English pronunciation indicates that pronunciation has a key role in learning English. If teachers don't present the general rules and principles toward comprehensible pronunciation to their EFL learners, nobody will certainly do it. This is the responsibility of EFL teachers to do this by teaching the new sounds, words, sentences, and phrases and arranging appropriate materials for understandable pronunciation in their EFL classes. EFL teachers should explore new ways of indicating, practicing, and giving feedback on English pronunciation that are actually appropriate for learners to learn English pronunciation easily and effectively.

According to Hismanoglu (2006), pronunciation instruction is very important for oral communication. It is also a significant part of communicative competence. Although the role of English pronunciation is important in English language, many teachers do not pay enough attention to this important skill. The problems of pronunciation instruction have been demonstrated by some researchers. Morley (1991) said that it is necessary for teachers to teach English pronunciation in ESL and EFL classes although many teachers do not pay attention to it in their instruction.

[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]

Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) expressed that English pronunciation is one of the least favorite areas for teachers to teach in their classes. Morley (1991) also said that intelligible pronunciation is a necessary part of communicative competence and without having perfect pronunciation skills learners would not be able to communicate effectively. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) declared that many teachers try to teach grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills for their learners without incorporating English pronunciation into their curriculum.

**4. The Importance of English Pronunciation Instruction**

According to Harmer (2001), a lot of teachers do not pay enough attention to English pronunciation. There are different reasons for this negligence. Many learners state that they do not need to learn pronunciation and learning pronunciation is a waste of time. They state that just communication in English is enough and when they are understood, nothing else is important.

Harmer (2001) emphasized that the main aim of teaching and learning in any language is to enable students to communicate in the target language and if this is the case, communication is an important term to explain. Communication means to understand and be understood. Many learners think that because they can talk to their teachers and other students so they can easily communicate in English. But they make a big mistake.

There are a lot of reasons for their mistakes. Firstly, teachers can understand their students much more easily than an average person because their ears are used to 'bad English.' Secondly, other students are the speakers of the same language have the same pronunciation patterns and make the same mistakes so it is easy for them to understand each other. Thirdly, the classroom is not a real situation and it just takes place at school and students do not have an opportunity to talk to native speakers (Harmer, 2001).

Many teachers are not aware of the importance of pronunciation. Teachers pay enough attention to grammar and vocabulary in learning a foreign language and they help learners become skillful in listening and reading. Secondly, the majority of teachers think that pronunciation study is too difficult and monotonous for learners (Harmer, 2001).

According to Harmer (2001), the lack of high quality, suitable teaching and learning materials, and the lack of time to practice pronunciation are the major reasons that cause teachers not to pay enough attention to English pronunciation. Teachers think that they have too much to do and pronunciation instruction just wastes their time. Some teachers believe that their students can learn correct pronunciation without particular pronunciation instruction.

Kenworthy (1987) said that there are some factors for the learning of acceptable pronunciation by some students without depending on their teachers. They are learners' phonetic abilities, integrative motivation, and achievement motivation. There are just some students who know the value of good pronunciation. This is the responsibility of teachers to persuade their learners to study pronunciation severely and help them learn to pronounce English sounds correctly. Teachers should tell their students that their very first English lesson is pronunciation. If students do not practice good pronunciation at the beginning of their learning process, they may learn wrongly. Therefore, words should be learnt regarding to their pronunciation. Otherwise, this may damage learners' overall success.

Harmer (2001) expressed that the first thing that native speakers notice during a conversation is pronunciation. Grammar and vocabulary are important elements of language and they can be useless if the speakers cannot pronounce those elements or words accurately. Native speakers can understand people, despite their grammatical errors, if they use accurate pronunciation. Communicative efficiency can be guaranteed by correct pronunciation. Pronunciation is an essential part of communication and without correct pronunciation nobody can say that he/she knows the English language perfectly.

Harmer (2001) also emphasized that through pronunciation instruction, students not only learn different sounds and sound features but also improve their speaking skill. Concentrating on sounds causes learners aware of where words should be stressed and they give them more information about spoken English and help them get the goal of comprehension and intelligibility.

According to Kenworthy (1987), some teachers state that pronunciation instruction cannot be useful because only a few learners will be able to get native-like pronunciation. We should know that native-like pronunciation may be an ideal goal only for some learners and not for all learners. Intelligibility is a logical aim for the majority of learners. Harmer (2001) stated that learners can rarely achieve 'perfect' pronunciation. Some of them do not like to pronounce



[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]

like native speakers and they like to retain their foreign accent because it is a part of their identity. Native-like pronunciation may be an inappropriate goal for most learners. Understandable pronunciation should be one of the basic aims of language learners. Pronunciation instruction has some realistic aims that need to be emphasized in order to develop communicative competence.

According to Wrembel (2002), these aims are 1) functional intelligibility-developing spoken English that is easy to understand for listeners; 2) functional communicability-developing spoken language that meets communicative needs; 3) increased self-confidence-developing a positive self-image; and 4) speech-monitoring abilities and speech-modification strategies-that will allow students to develop intelligibility, communicability and confidence outside the classroom.

According to Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003), the goals of teaching pronunciation are to develop English that is easy to understand and not confusing to the listener, develop English that meets persons' needs and that results in communicative competence, help learners feel more comfortable in using English, develop a positive self-awareness as non-native speakers in oral communication, develop speech consciousness, personal speech monitoring skills and speech adjustment strategies that help learners develop in and out of the class.

**5. The Teachers' Role in English Pronunciation Instruction**

Morley (1991) expressed that teachers do not teach but facilitate learners' learning pronunciation. The role of teachers is like a coach, a speech coach, and a pronunciation coach. The pronunciation coach has the critical role of checking and guiding modifications of spoken English at two levels (a) speech production, and (b) speech performance. According to Morley (1991), teachers perform pronunciation diagnostic analyses and select those aspects that can have a great effect on changing the speech of learners toward increased comprehensibility, assist learners in setting both long-range and short-term objectives, develop a lot of instructional modes and modules (e.g., whole-class instruction, small-group work, individual one-on-one tutorial sessions; prerecorded audio and/or video materials; work with new computer program speech analysis systems), structure in-class speaking and listening activities with invited native speakers and non-native speakers of English., provide models, cues, and suggestions for modifications of elements in the speech patterning for all learners, monitor learners' speech production and speech performance and evaluate pattern changes as a continuous part of the program, and persuade learners' speech awareness and realistic self-monitoring.

**6. Suggestions for Improving English Pronunciation Instruction**

There are a lot of useful suggestions for EFL teachers to help learners improve their English pronunciation. EFL teachers should be accurately trained in pronunciation to improve their learners' English pronunciation (Shahzada, 2012). EFL teachers should speak clearly and slowly in their pronunciation classes and they should convince their learners that their language is understandable. This can help their learners improve their pronunciation by listening to them carefully (Bradley-Bennett, 2007).

Teachers should teach their learners that slow speech with correct pronunciation is much better than fast speech with wrong pronunciation. Learners should understand that understandability is more important than fast speech (Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, 2010). EFL teachers should be aware of their learners' needs and problems in pronunciation. Based on their needs, teachers should present some appropriate materials to their learners to reduce their learners' pronunciation problems (Shahzada, 2012). Teachers should use computer technologies such as different kinds of computer software in their classes to help their learners improve their pronunciation by exposing them to authentic materials (Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, 2010).

Teachers should familiarize their learners to both American and British English and learners should be able to understand both varieties of pronunciation (Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, 2010). Teachers should incorporate pronunciation in other language activities because it will help learners to adapt themselves to the sound systems of a new language and overcome their affective problems related to the learning of English language (Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, 2010). Teachers should set obtainable goals that are appropriate for the communication needs of the learners. Teachers should act as the speech coach of pronunciation, give feedback to their learners, and encourage them to improve their pronunciation (Thanasoulas, 2002).

[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]

## 7. Conclusion

Pronunciation should be viewed as more than correct production of individual sounds or words. It should be viewed as an important part of communication that is incorporated into classroom activities. Teachers can urge their learners to monitor their own pronunciation and practice their speaking skills as much as possible in and outside the classroom. Understandable pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence. With this in mind, teachers should set obtainable goas that are applicable and suitable for the communication needs of learners. Pronunciation instruction has to aim at intelligible pronunciation and teachers can actively encourage their learners' actual production, build pronunciation awareness and practice. Pronunciation instruction is very important because it is the main source of understanding. If learners cannot utter the correct version of a word then they are not able to communicate correctly. Pronunciation instruction helps learners to have a better understanding of native speakers and improves their ability to communicate easily and effectively.

## References


Aliaga García, C. (2007). The Role of Phonetic Training in L2 Speech Learning. *Proceedings of the Phonetics Teaching and Learning Conference (PTLC2007), University College, London.* Available at http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/ptlc/ptlc2007_web_procindex.html

Bradley-Bennett, K. (2007). *Teaching Pronunciation: an Independent Course Study for Adult English as a Second Language learners.* Retrieved from: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeadult/download/NCPDRC/TeachingPronunciation.pdf

Butler-Pascoe, M. E., & Wiburg, K. M. (2003). *Technology and Teaching English Language Learners.* MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Celce-Murcia, M., & Goodwin, J. M. (1991). Teaching Pronunciation. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language,* 136-153. New York: Newbury House.

Fraser, H. (2000). *Coordinating Improvements in Pronunciation Teaching for Adult Learners of English as a Second Language*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.

Hismanoglu, M. (2006).Current Perspectives on Pronunciation Learning and Teaching. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 2*(1), 101-110.

Hismanoglu, M., & Hismanoglu, S. (2011). Internet-based Pronunciation Teaching: An Innovative Route toward Rehabilitating Turkish EFL Learners' Articulation Problem. *European Journal of Educational Studies*, *3*(1), 23-36.

James, R. B. (2010). *Teaching Pronunciation Gets a Bad R.A.P: A Framework for Teaching Pronunciation.* Hankuk: University of Foreign Studies.

Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation.* Longman, Harlow.

Martínez-Flor, A., Usó-Juan, E., & Alcón Soler, E. (2006). Towards Acquiring Communicative Competence through Speaking. In Usó-Juan, E., & Martínez-Flor, A. (eds) *Current Trends in the Development and Teaching of the Four Language Skills.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 139-157.

Morley, J. (1991). The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. *TESOL Quarterly*, *25*(1), 51-74.

Morley, J. (1994). A Multidimensional Curriculum Design for Speech-pronunciation Instruction. In J. Morley (Ed.), *Pronunciation Theory and Pedagogy: New Views, New Directions* (64-91). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Otlowski, M. (1998). Pronunciation: What Are the Expectations? *The Internet TESL Journal*. *5*(1). Retrieved From June 26, 2016, from: http://www.iteslj.org./ Article / Otlowski poronunciation.html.

Paulston, C. B., & Burder, M. N. (1976). *Teaching English as a Second Language. Techniques and Procedures*. Cambridge: Winthrop Puplishers, Inc.


[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]

Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2011). A Study on the Situation of Pronunciation Instruction in ESL/EFL Classrooms. *Journal of Studies in Education*, *1*(1), 1-15.

Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2012). A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Pronunciation Learning and the Strategies for Instruction. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *2*(3), 119-128.

Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2016). What Factors Influence the English Pronunciation of EFL Learners? *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)*, *6*(2), 314-326.

Rasekhi Kolokdaragh, V. (2010). *ESL/EFL Learners' Perception of Their Pronunciation Needs and Strategies.* 41st Annual State CATESOL Conference in Santa Clara, CA, April 23, 2010.

Richards, J. C., & Richard, S. (2002). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. 3rded.UK: Pearson Education Limited.

Scovel, T. (1988). *A Time to Speak: A Psycholinguistic Inquiry into the Critical Period for Human Speech*. New York: Newbury House.

Shahzada, G. (2012). Views of the Teachers Regarding the Students' Poor Pronunciation in English Language. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *2*(1), 309-316. doi: 10.5901/jesr.2012.02.01.309

Shimamune, S., & Smith, S. (1995). The Relationship between Pronunciation and Listening Discrimination When Japanese Natives Are Learning English. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, *28*, 577-578.

Thanasoulas, D. (2002). Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, *8*(11), retrieved from October 2016, http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Motivation.html.

Wrembel, M. (2002). New Perspectives on Pronunciation Teaching. In W. Sobkowiak and E. Waniek-Klimczak. Dydaktyka Fonetyki Języka Obcego na Poziomie Licencjackim, Neofilologia II: Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ w Płocku, 173-183.

Yates, L., & Zielinski, B. (2009). *Give It a Go: Teaching Pronunciation to Adults.* Sydney, Australia: AMEPRC. Available: http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/classroom_resources/give_it_a_go

[ Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19 ]