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A Survey Study of Factors Influencing Iranian EFL Learners' English Pronunciation Learning

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Abstract

English pronunciation is one of the most important and complicated parts of foreign language teaching and learning. Due to its complexity, pronunciation has been overlooked in English language teaching. Understandable pronunciation is an important part of communicative competence. Individuals who have acceptable pronunciation can easily improve their language skills better than those who have weak pronunciation. Thus, English pronunciation is very significant for successful communication. This study investigated the factors influenced Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning. To this end, fifty Iranian EFL learners participated voluntarily in this study. A quantitative method was used as the design of this study. The researchers used a survey questionnaire as the instrument of this study. The collected data were analyzed via using frequency and percentage. The findings of this research indicated that factors such as pronunciation instruction, attitude, motivation, and error correction respectively were the most important factors that had the greatest effects on Iranian learners' pronunciation improvement. It was also concluded that when teaching pronunciation into their classes, EFL teachers and learners should be equipped with these factors that can considerably increase their success in the correct teaching and learning of English pronunciation.

Keywords: pronunciation, pronunciation learning, factors, EFL

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1. Introduction

As opportunities for oral communication have grown, ELT teachers have become increasingly more preoccupied with finding the most effective ways of aiding EFL/ESL learners learn the oral skills as a significant aspect of foreign language learning (Namaziandost, Abedi, & Nasri, 2019). Pronunciation is one of the most neglected dimensions of English language teaching. Teaching pronunciation is very important to enable the learners outstretch the skills that are indispensable to convey in the target language (Namaziandost, Rahimi Esfahani, & Hashemifardnia, 2018). Pronunciation is a significant component of oral proficiency in a second language. It is one of the most noticeable linguistic signs revealing whether someone is a native speaker of a language or not (Diah & Zita, 2006). Pronunciation has a close connection to the concept of identity. It is a domain within which one's identity is expressed (Zuengler, 1988).

Phonology is the description of the distinctive sound units of a language (phonemes) by means of distinctive features. Language teachers should devote proper weight to teaching pronunciation in their classes because teaching pronunciation in as important element of foreign language learning (Namaziandost, 2017). Phonology is an under emphasized area of instruction in the field of English language learning in comparison with other aspects of language like grammar. Being able to produce the sounds of a language accurately plays a key role in communication. According to Lord (2005), even if a speaker has adequate grammar and vocabulary knowledge, he/she may not be understood if he/she has a strong foreign accent. Major et al. (2002) indicated that both native and nonnative listeners scored significantly lower on listening comprehension tests when they listened to nonnative speakers of English reading a text.

Acceptable pronunciation is an important part for good communication in a foreign language and is responsible for one's first impression of a learner's proficiency" (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck, & Smit, 1997; Tanner, 2012). Haghighi and Rahimy (2017) states that pronunciation is a concept in English language teaching and learning which is very important for communication and it needs the comprehension and production of the sound systems. EFL learners should have pronunciation competence in order to communicate the message easily. English pronunciation hasn't been paid enough attention and no serious attempt has been done to perceive the great value of this important skill (Farhat & Dzakiria, 2017; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2018). Pronunciation instruction has been overlooked by some teachers due to lack of time, lack of confidence, and uncertainty about how to teach pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

According to Shankar (2008), the fault which ruins the communication process is pronunciation not vocabulary or grammar. Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) considers pronunciation as one of the key parts of communication that should be given equal importance like vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking. Kelly (2000) stated that correct pronunciation is related to speaking proficiency and learners with unacceptable pronunciation would be perceived as incompetent. Fraser (2000) expressed that comprehensible pronunciation assists clarity in conveying the message in oral communication even if the speaker does not have enough grammar or vocabulary knowledge; while incomprehensible pronunciation may stop the comprehension of the message and may lead to complete misunderstandings even if the speaker may have good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Different factors contribute to the significance of pronunciation learning. Many language research have looked at factors affecting how a second language is learned. These factors involve motivation, pronunciation instruction, learners' social identity, error correction, native language, age, exposure, and attitude. The purpose of this research was to examine the factors influencing Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning.

1.1 Research Question

The research question of this study was to:

What are the factors influencing Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 The Aim of Teaching English Pronunciation

According to Wrembel (2002), the aims of teaching pronunciation 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

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abilities and speech-modification strategies-that will permit learners to develop intelligibility, communicability, and confidence outside the class. Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) express that the objectives of teaching pronunciation are: 1) to develop English that is easy to understand and not confusing to the listener; 2) develop English that meets learners' needs that lead to communicative competence; 3) assist learners feel more comfortable in using English; 4) develop a positive self-awareness as non-native speakers in oral communication; and 5) develop speech consciousness, personal speech monitoring skills, and speech adjustment strategies that aid learners develop in and out of the classroom.

According to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2011) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016), the aims of teaching pronunciation is not to ask learners to pronounce like native speakers. Understandable pronunciation should be the real goal of oral communication. If learners want to change the way of producing words, they should change the way they think about the sounds of those words. This is correct both for individual sounds and the bigger parts of speech like syllables, stress patterns, and rhythm. The aim of pronunciation should be more realistically focus on clear and comprehensible pronunciation. At the beginning levels, the teachers want the learners to beat the problem which pronunciation reduces their ability to communicate. At the advanced levels, pronunciation aims can focus on components that increase communication; intonation features that go beyond basic pattern, voice quality, and phonetic distinctions between registers (Brown, 2000). In speaking English, the communication between the speaker and the listener has reciprocal relationship. It impacts each other. It means that in order that the listener can understand the meaning of what is said, the speaker must speak comprehensibly. Speaking clearly includes clear pronunciation. For this reason, pronunciation is one of the important features of language to be learned. If the learners speak with inaccurate pronunciation it makes misunderstanding in meaning (Brown, 2000).

2.2 Significance of Teaching English Pronunciation

English pronunciation is a necessary part of language learning (Rossiter, Derwing, Manimtim, & Thomson, 2010); therefore, both teachers and learners should pay particular attention to the process of teaching and learning pronunciation (Ha, 2013). Pourhosein Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) emphasize that pronunciation instruction is granted the least attention in the EFL classes. Varasarin (2007) asserts that a lot of learners rank pronunciation as one of the most difficult areas in learning English and the process of learning English is interconnected, which means that the learning of one language aspect might be a support for learning other aspects of language. For example, in Gilbert's (1984) view, the improvement in English pronunciation is of great importance to improve learners' listening and speaking abilities.

Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) state that many learners have strong desire to learn and speak English with proper pronunciation since learners with a limited pronunciation performance may lose their self-confidence in social interactions, which negatively impacts estimations of a speaker's credibility and capabilities. That is, learners with acceptable pronunciation tend to be understood despite their grammatical mistakes in the speech. Namaziandost, Esfahani, and Hashemifarnia (2018) claim that pronunciation is important not only in encouraging native-like accents, but also for communication. Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016) assert that learners' English capability is judged based on their own English pronunciation. If their pronunciation is poor it has a negative impact on their language skill. Poor pronunciation results in misunderstanding and spoils communication. Acceptable pronunciation makes listeners to judge learners' language ability easily even if they have a lot of grammatical mistakes.

2.3 Factors Affecting English Pronunciation

Different factors have been studied in conjunction with pronunciation in an attempt to describe what impacts a learner's learning of English pronunciation.

2.3.1 Motivation

Learners' motivation can impact their L2 phonological attainment (Borges, 2014). Dörnyei (2001) and Khamkhien (2010) demonstrate that motivation is the strongest factor leading to the success or failure of learning a second or foreign language. It is a major stimulant persuading a learner to follow a course of action, beginning the learning, and supporting the learning process. If the learners' motivation is high, they will be willing to improve their skills by themselves. Moley Bandré, and George (2011) and Namaziandost, Nasri, and Ziafar (2019) assert that motivation happens when learners develop an interest in and form a bond with a topic that lasts beyond the short term. Celce-Murcia and Goodwin (1991) states that motivation helps learners to attain comprehensible pronunciation.

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Pennington and Richards (1986) assert that earners who are integratively motivated try to gain a native accent in English and those who are not integratively motivated try to maintain a distinctive accent since speakers use phonological features to create a sense of identity. Pourhosein Gilakjani, Leong, and Sabouri (2012) remark that motivation identifies whether the learner develops native-like pronunciation. According to Moyer (2007) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012), positive attitude towards the language can develop native-like pronunciation. Purcell and Suter (1980) found that strength of concern for pronunciation accuracy was the most significant predictor of pronunciation after first language, aptitude for oral mimicry, and length of residence. Elliott (1995a) measured the impacts of twelve variables believed to be related to pronunciation accuracy on 66 Spanish learners. These variables involved field independence, degree of right hemispheric specialization, GPA in Spanish, and attitude towards pronunciation. Out of all the factors, attitude or towards pronunciation was the most significant factor.

Smit (2002) investigated the interaction between the learners' motivational attitudes and their attainment in learning pronunciation. The results of this research represented that those learners with positive attitudes towards pronunciation are more likely to conduct successfully on a pronunciation test. The findings also showed that learners with adequate proficiency in English and self-confidence can gain pronunciation standards on the ground that they are intrinsically motivated to work more independently on their L2 pronunciation. The study carried out by Bongaerts et al. (1997) represented that instrumental motivation is highly negatively correlated with foreign accent in an L2. The findings of Moyer's (1999) study indicated that instrumental motivation was the most significant factor predicting foreign accent. The study performed by Elliott (1995) found that strength of concern for native-like pronunciation was the most significant factor predicting pronunciation accuracy and labeled this factor as motivation.

2.3.2 Pronunciation Instruction

Numerous studies have looked at how instruction affects language pronunciation (Colantoni & Steele, 2006; Face, 2006; Lord, 2005; Reeder, 1998; Rose, 2010; Shively, 2008; Zampini, 1994). These studies have found that as level of instruction increases pronunciation improves. Liu (2008) expresses that the important matter of teaching pronunciation is how to increase the positive consequences of instruction for learners. One aspect of this subject is what should be taught in class. Early teaching methods emphasized on the segmental features of pronunciation, while more recent approaches have stressed suprasegmental features such as sentence rhythm and intonation. The increasing tendency in today's pronunciation syllabus design is to combine both segmentals and suprasegmentals in one course. Liu (2008) continues that another part of this matter is how to teach pronunciation. Traditional teaching methods have been supported or challenged during different times while new methods have been created. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) supported a more balanced view. They say that traditional pronunciation techniques can be used as a starting point for class and later learners can use communicative activities.

Derwing and Rossiter (2003) demonstrated that the teaching of segments to L2 English learners was not effective in reducing the degree of foreign accent in their speech. Lord (2005) investigated the impact of teaching nine Spanish sounds to native English learners on the accuracy of their production of these sounds. The findings of this study revealed improvement accuracy for most sounds. Saito (2007) represented improvement in the production of English /æ/ by Japanese EFL learners after receiving phonetic instruction. Saito (2011) provided explicit phonetic training on eight English sounds to L2 Japanese learners of English. No impact of instruction was found on the degree of foreign accent in the speech of the L2 learners. Lord (2010) carried out a study and concluded that English learners of Spanish who had taken a Spanish phonetics course were found to be more accurate than those who did not in producing three Spanish allophones. It was also concluded that this advantage was not related to pronunciation instruction.

Saito and Lyster (2012) indicated that pronunciation instruction combined with corrective feedback had a positive effect on the accuracy of English /r/ by non-native Japanese learners. Kissling (2013) investigated the impact of phonetic and pronunciation instruction on the production of eight Spanish phones by non-native English learners. The results showed that both the phonetic and pronunciation instruction was effective in improving the accuracy of the learners' production of the target phones. Sturm (2013) found that a course in French phonetics given to non-native French learners was effective in improving their overall accuracy of French pronunciation. Derwing et al. (2014) investigated the impact of a short-term pronunciation instruction on the degree of foreign accent in the speech of seven L2 English speakers who had lived in an English speaking country for 19-23 years. The findings revealed no impact of instruction on the degree of foreign accent.

Ahangari, Rahbar, and Entezari Maleki (2015) found that pronunciation instruction would make learners more aware of their pronunciation in EFL situations where English is contextually reduced and learners do not have access to real

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communication with English native speakers. Wrembel (2004) carried out a study to examine the relationship between L2 pronunciation achievement and phonological training. The findings indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in areas like reading lists of words and reading a dialogue. In another study, Stasiak and Szpyra-Kozłowska (2003) investigated the impact of two approaches on pronunciation instruction: pronunciation taught through imitation/drilling and pronunciation taught through phonetic instruction. The results showed improvements in the participants' pronunciation of some segmental features like word-final velar nasal, dental fricatives, and the pronunciation of individual words, compared with the control group that had not received any pronunciation treatment. In a similar way, Saito's (2011) study findings approved the effectiveness of teaching pronunciation. In his study, just the participants assigned to the group taught through explicit phonetic instruction and repetitive practice improved their pronunciation in the sentence reading tasks.

2.3.3 Learners' Social Identity

There is an interdependency between language and society. According to Levis (2005) and Nushi, Jafari, and Golesorkhi, (2019), learners' pronunciation act as a marker of social belonging since the speakers try to speak in a way that make them conform to the ethics of the social groups they fit into. Setter and Jenkins (2005) also expressed that pronunciation is connected with learners' identity, since the degree to which we try to foreignize our accent indicates how we want to be seen by others, of the social communities with which we identify membership. Jiang, Green, Henley, and Masten (2009) asserted that the degree of foreign accentedness is affected by the social and cultural identity. Pishghadam and Kamyabi (2009) found a positive relationship between accentedness and deculturation. The results of this study revealed that practicing native-like accent estranges the learners from their own culture.

Gatbonton, Trofimovich, and Magid (2005) investigated the relationship between ethnic group affiliation and L2 pronunciation accuracy with 24 Francophone learners of English. The results revealed a significant relationship between learners' L2 accent and perceived affiliation to their home ethnic group, implying that learners treat their peers' L2 accent as a mark of these peers' degree of ethnic affiliation. Identity refers to how one perceives oneself as fitting into or being distinct from a group. Pronunciation has a special connection to identity. According to Zuengler (1988), pronunciation is an area within which one's identity is expressed. This shows the particular sensitivity listeners have for pronunciation differences. Not only can untrained listeners identify accented speech in segments of speech (Flege, 1984), they can also identify accented speech when the clarity of speech is masked and played backwards (Munro, Derwing, & Burgess, 2010). Even when listeners are unfamiliar with the language they are listening to, they can distinguish native from nonnative speakers (Major, 2007). Such sensitivity becomes a way to separate those who are in the group from those who are not.

2.3.4 Error Correction

Error correction or corrective feedback generated by the teacher towards pronunciation errors can cause certain attitudes towards pronunciation learning on the part of the learners (Nushi, Jafari, & Golesorkhi, 2019). Research has demonstrated that the learners' pronunciation can be facilitated by corrective feedback (Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015). Kang (2010) examined the attitudes of 238 ESL learners towards pronunciation instruction in New Zealand. The results of this research indicated that the majority of the participants wanted to sound like native speakers, and they favored the kind of corrective feedback that facilitates the achievement of such proficiency in L2 pronunciation. Peerdadeh and Entezamara (2016) examined the attitudes of 82 Iranian EFL learners towards oral error corrections on their pronunciation errors. The findings displayed that the participants had positive attitudes towards oral corrective feedback, because they did not want to repeat a mistake, and wanted to have enough phonology knowledge to improve their pronunciation. Syamsiah (2012) stated EFL teachers should give correction on learners' pronunciation errors and they should be good models for their learners. Lee et al. (2015) demonstrated corrective feedback (CF) on errors facilitates pronunciation improvement of language learners.

2.3.5 Native Language

According to Kenworthy (1987) and Khamkhien (2010), the native language is the most important factor in explaining learners' pronunciation particularly foreign accents. If the learners are familiar with the sound system of their native language, they will be able to identify their own problems. Learners' native language plays an important role in the correct learning of pronunciation in a new language. Learner's first language is an important factor to account for foreign accents and affects the pronunciation of the target language. It relates to interference from the mother tongue, and to cause errors in aspiration, stress, and intonation in the target language. Most teachers' experiences indicate that

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the learners' first language plays a significant impact on learning the sound system of another language (Nation & Newton, 2009). That is, every language in the world has various varieties and different accents. Learners of a language speak the target language differently: sometimes slightly different and sometimes highly different than the native speakers' do, which we call foreign accent, the nature of which is identified by the learner's native language (Avery & Ehrlich, 1987). Seddighi (2010) investigated phonological differences between Persian and English, comparing segmental and suprasegmental features of English and several problematic areas which Iranian Iranians face. The findings showed that EFL learners at three levels confront serious difficulties in the areas which don't exist in their mother tongue.

2.3.6 Age

Age has a key role in learning pronunciation. If learners pronounce a second language with a native-like accent, they should have started to learn it during their childhood since these learners begin their second language learning in target language speaking people environment (Khamkhien, 2010; Senel, 2006). Kenworthy (1990) says that children who learn a second language and have enough exposure to the target language can attain near native-like pronunciation. This means that teachers should begin teaching pronunciation in the beginning of learning a second language because it would be very easy for children to attain near native-like pronunciation. Mayberry and Lock (2003) and Larsen-Freeman (2008) declares that younger children learn L2 pronunciation more easily and quickly than older children.

One of the important figures in the history of research concerning the age factor and pronunciation is Lenneberg with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Based on this hypothesis, there is a neurobiologically-based period ending around the age of 12, after which it is impossible to gain complete mastery of a second language. The CPH stated that the critical period does not apply to any aspect of language acquisition except pronunciation. The reason is that phonological production is the only aspect of language performance that has a neuromuscular basis (Bongaerts, Planken, & Schils, 1995; Pullen, 2011). A study done by Collier (1987) investigated the impact of age on English pronunciation. The findings showed that the older students were faster and more efficient that younger ones in the early stages of language learning. Older students developed their second language skills ceaselessly, but adults would reduce after the first year. Kassaian (2011) found that learning of pronunciation can be obtained better at the earlier ages. Granena and Long (2012) found that age is an important factor that has n great impact on the correct pronunciation and it is considered as a predictor of learning pronunciation.

2.3.7 Exposure to the Target Language

According to Brown (2007) and Zhang (2009), exposure relates to the length of time that the learners live in a target language environment. It does not matter the country the learners stay, but depends on how much they use English in their daily life. The more they spend their time for listening and speaking English, the better their English pronunciation will be. Zhang (2009) expresses that we cannot just say that learners who live in the target language country will have acceptable native-like pronunciation. There are two points. The first point is whether the learners take every opportunity using the target language and take full advantage of the environment. If the learners have been living in an English-speaking country, then the learners will have many opportunities to listen to and to apply English since they will be surrounded by the English speaking environment. Moreover, it is important that they have the desire to connect with native speakers and get to know the new culture and customs. The second point is that there are a lot of people who live in an English speaking country, but spend much time within a non-English speaking environment even though they are in English speaking country. Therefore, just exposure is not of great importance, but how the learners react to the opportunities. The above points have been supported by Senel (2006) who asserted that exposure is a helpful factor, but it is not the necessary factor for the development of L2 pronunciation. If the learners know the necessity of being exposed to the target language, they will try to use its opportunities. If they do that, they will be more successful in improving their English pronunciation.

2.3.8 Attitude

Another factor affecting on improving pronunciation of the target language is one's attitude towards speakers of the target language and the extent to which the language ego identified with those speakers. Brown (1992) and Khamkhien (2010) expressed that learners with a positive attitude towards the people who spoke the target language were likely to learn pronunciation more successfully. They were not afraid of the second identity that may have been emerging within them. Celce-Murcia et al. (2000) remarked that attitude towards the target language, culture, personal identity issues, and motivation for learning could support or stop pronunciation skills development. According to Šebestová

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(2007), attitude has a key role in pronunciation learning. Attitude is a personality factor and it is difficult for us to predict whether individuals who enter an environment with different accents change their own accents. Different accents represent various attitudes towards people. When people mimic the accents of the speakers of a foreign country, they show their positive relation to their language and culture and respect them. Therefore, people like to integrate themselves to the new environment. The attitude factor is related to the motivation factor in pronunciation learning. Vitanova and Miller (2002) found that learners related pronunciation learning to communicative abilities and pronunciation helps learners to attain confidence in communication. Nowacka (2012) carried out a research about the learners' attitudes towards pronunciation. Learners said that it is very significant for them to have an acceptable pronunciation especially native-like accent. Learners also mentioned that their pronunciation improved due to listening to authentic materials, practical pronunciation instruction, and contacts with native speakers.

3. Methodology

In this section, the design of the study, participants, sampling, instrument, data collection, and data analysis were discussed in detail.

3.1 Design of the Study

The researchers used a quantitative method as the design of this research. An instrument was used for collecting the data. The quantitative instrument involved a survey questionnaire entitled "Factors influencing EFL learners' English pronunciation learning."

3.2 Participants

Fifty Iranian EFL learners were voluntarily selected for doing the objectives of this research. They are studying English Language Translation in one of the Islamic Azad Universities of Guilan, Iran. Convenience sampling was used for this research. In this sampling, participants voluntarily participate in conducting the purposes of the research (Creswell, 2003). The researchers chose 50 learners from one of the Islamic Azad Universities based on the following criteria:

1) EFL learners' willingness to take part in the research; (2) being concerned with the learning of English pronunciation; and (3) familiarity with the problems of English pronunciation learning.

3.3 Instrument

A survey of 50 Iranian EFL learners was carried out in one of the Azad Universities, Guilan, Iran. A survey questionnaire involved 8 statements was developed with the assistance of two English language teaching specialists. Two Iranian Associate Professors were asked to assess the validity of the survey questionnaire. They were asked to judge the suitability of the items of questionnaire. The researchers emailed the softcopies of the items to the Iranian Associate Professors after getting their consent to judge the items. After receiving their feedback some changes were made concerning the items. These changes helped the researchers to provide the comprehensibility of the items. The researchers developed the questionnaire in English and did not translate it into Persian language because the learners had sufficient comprehension of questionnaire. The researchers asked the learners to choose the appropriate answer in each item.

3.3.1 Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was verified using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. As Table 1 indicates, the eight items of the survey questionnaire were entered into SPSS and the reliability analysis revealed an extremely high degree of internal item consistency with a reliability coefficient of .857.

Table 1. Reliability of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.857	8

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3.4 Data Collection

The researchers used a survey questionnaire for collecting the data. It was about the factors influencing Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning in various issues. They designed 8 questions for this goal. The researchers distributed the items of the questionnaire to Iranian EFL learners of English in one of the Islamic Azad Universities of Guilan, Iran. The learners were asked to answer the items of the questionnaire within 15 minutes. Finally the researchers collected the learners' answer sheets for analyzing the data.

3.5 Data Analysis

After finishing the data collection, the researchers arranged and tabulated the collected data. All the data obtained from the survey questionnaire filled in by the participants were analyzed via using statistical procedures like frequency and percentage.

4. Findings

Tables 2 to 9 indicate the factors influenced Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning. The survey questionnaire involved 8 items and learners answered all of them. The researchers measured the items on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). Eight tables were designed for 8 questions. In addition, 8 figures were designed to understand clearly Iranian learners' views about the factors influencing pronunciation learning.

Table 2. Item 1: I do not have enough motivation in learning English pronunciation.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	3	6%
Agree (A)	10	20%
Neutral (N)	0	0%
Disagree (D)	17	34%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	20	40%
Total	50	100%

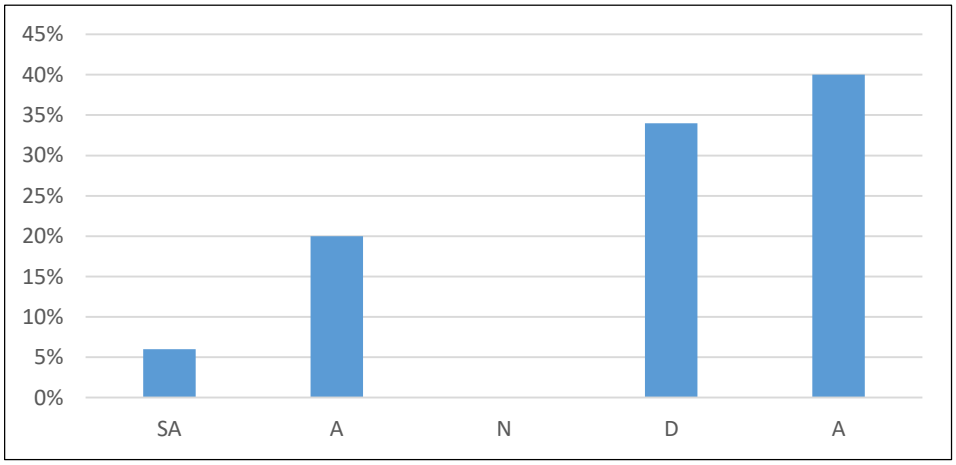


Figure 1. Learners' response to item 1

Figure 1 shows that 6% learners are strongly agree, 20% learners are agree, 0% learners are neutral, 34% learners are disagree, and 40% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "I do not have enough motivation to learn English pronunciation." Based on the findings obtained from the Figure 1, many Iranian EFL learners strongly

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disagreed that they do not have sufficient motivation to learn English pronunciation. It means that they had extreme motivation to learn L2 pronunciation.

Table 3. Item 2: Pronunciation instruction is generally effective in improving EFL learners' pronunciation.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	33	66%
Agree (A)	12	24%
Neutral (N)	0	0%
Disagree (D)	3	6%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	2	4%
Total	50	100%

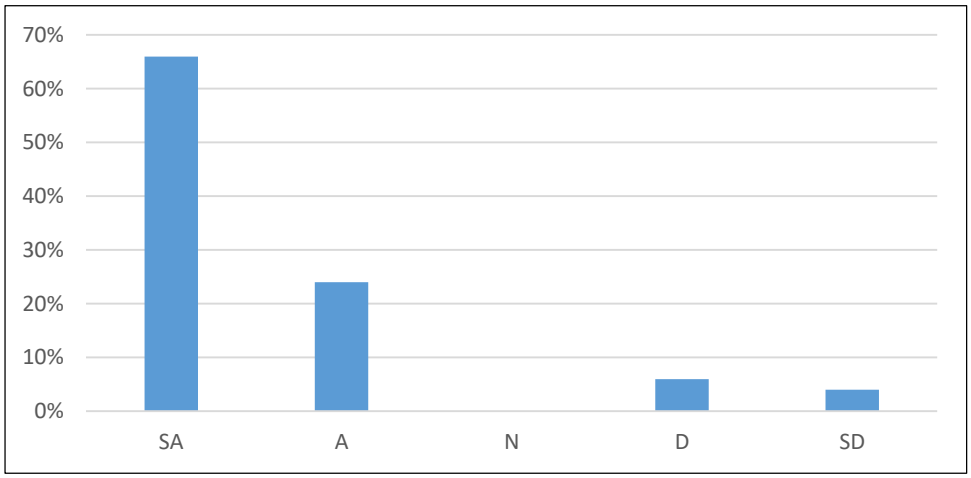


Figure 2. Learners' response to item 2

The findings obtained from the Figure 2 reveal that 66% learners are strongly agree, 24% learners are agree, 0% learners are neutral, 6% learners are disagree, and 4% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "Pronunciation instruction is generally effective in improving EFL learners' pronunciation." As the Figure 2 represents, many learners strongly agreed that pronunciation instruction has a key role in developing learners' pronunciation.

Table 4. Item 3: I think that social identity does not have any effect on the learners' foreign accentedness.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	17	34%
Agree (A)	6	12%
Neutral (N)	3	6%
Disagree (D)	22	44%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	2	4%
Total	50	100%

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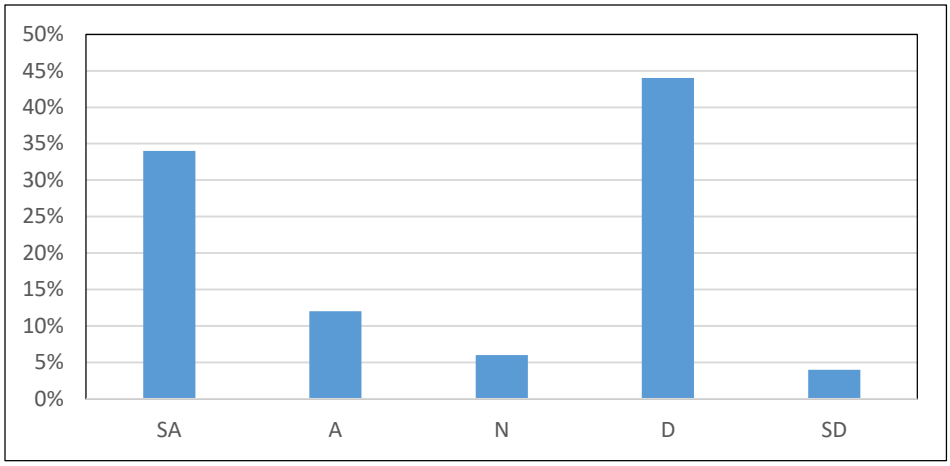


Figure 3. Learners' response to item 3

As the Figure 3 shows, 34% learners are strongly agree, 12% learners are agree, 6% learners are neutral, 44% learners are disagree, and 4% learners are strongly disagree to the statement "I think that social identity does not have any effect on the learners' foreign accentedness." According to the findings, the majority of learners expressed that social identity affected their foreign accent. That is, success in L2 pronunciation learning is impacted by social influences on learning.

Table 5. Item 4: My English pronunciation has been improved by the teachers' corrective feedback.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	29	58%
Agree (A)	10	20%
Neutral (N)	2	4%
Disagree (D)	4	8%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	5	10%
Total	50	100%

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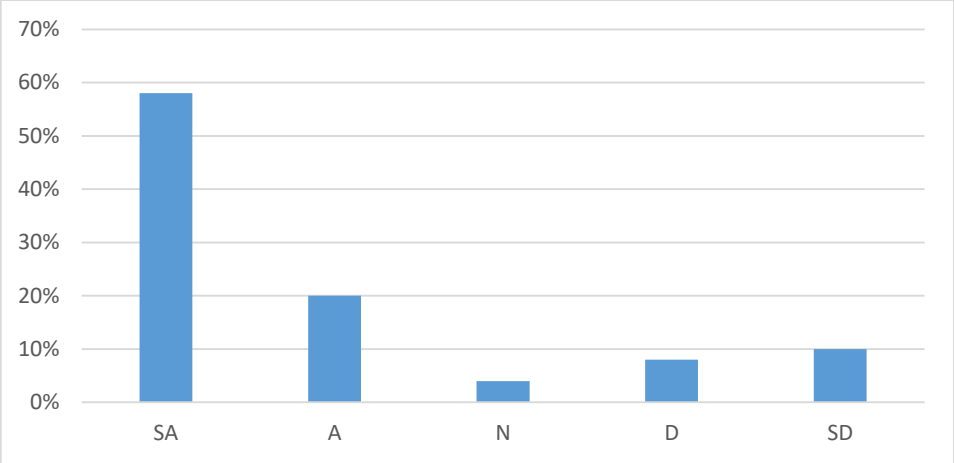


Figure 4. Learners' response to item 4

According to the findings in Figure 4, 58% learners are strongly agree, 20% learners are agree, 4% learners are neutral, 8% learners are disagree, and 10% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "My English pronunciation has been improved by the teachers' corrective feedback." The majority of learners stated that teachers' corrective feedback really helps them to improve their English pronunciation.

Table 6. Item 5: To improve their English pronunciation, learners should think about the differences between their native language and the target language.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	14	28%
Agree (A)	24	48%
Neutral (N)	0	0%
Disagree (D)	8	16%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	4	8%
Total	50	100%

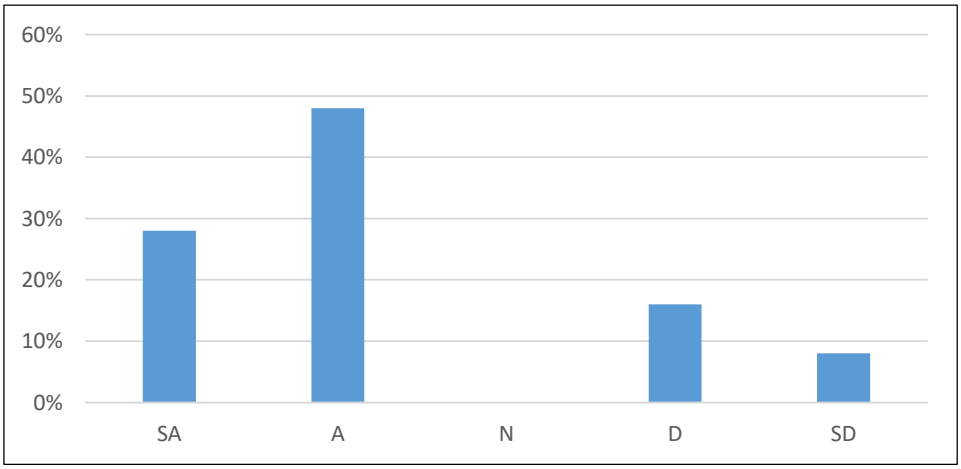


Figure 5. Learners' response to item 5

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Figure 5 demonstrates that 28% learners are strongly agree, 48% learners are agree, 0% learners are neutral, 16% learners are disagree, and 8% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "To improve their English pronunciation, learners should think about the differences between their native language and the target language." The majority of learners expressed that knowing the differences between their native language and the target language can assist them in improving their pronunciation.

Table 7. Item 6: In my opinion, younger learners learn L2 pronunciation more quickly than older learners.

Likert-type scale	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly Agree (SA)	5	10%
Agree (A)	17	34%
Neutral (N)	0	0%
Disagree (D)	26	52%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	2	4%
Total	50	100%

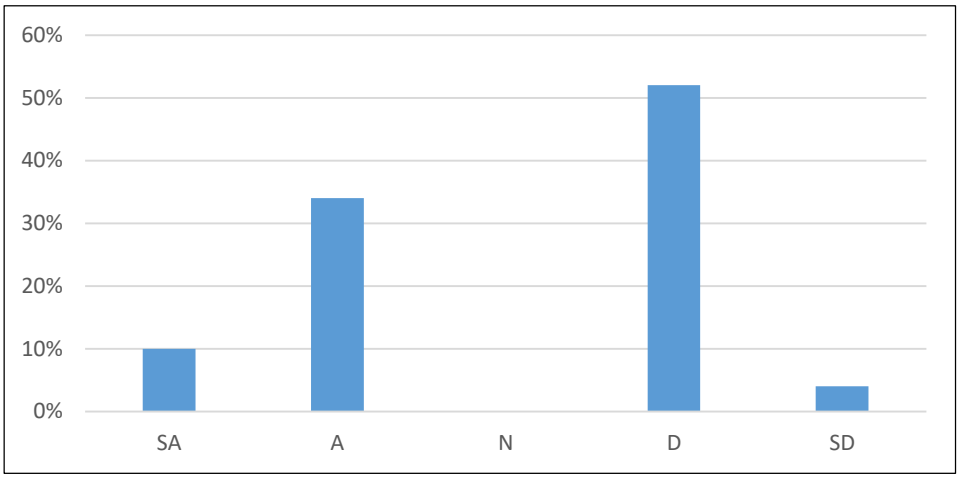


Figure 6. Learners' response to item 6

Based on the findings in Figure 6, 10% learners are strongly disagree, 34% learners are agree, 0% learners are neutral, 52% learners are disagree, and 4% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "In my opinion, younger learners learn L2 pronunciation more quickly than older learners." The majority of learners unanimously disagreed that younger learners learn pronunciation faster than older learners. That is to say, younger learners may learn faster than older ones in one study and older learners may learn it faster than younger ones in another research.

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Table 8. Item 7: Greater exposure to the target language makes it easier to acquire good pronunciation.

Likert-type scale	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly Agree (SA)	15	30%
Agree (A)	24	48%
Neutral (N)	4	8%
Disagree (D)	3	6%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	4	8%
Total	50	100%

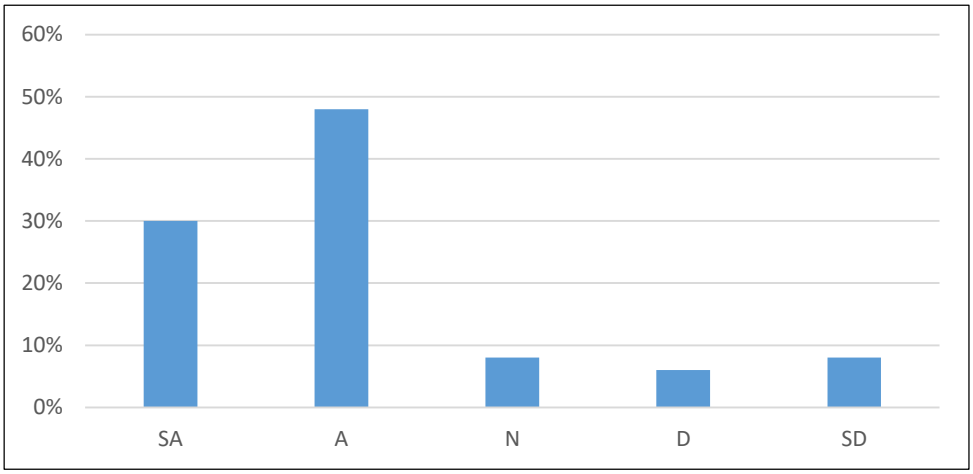


Figure 7. Learners' response to item 7

The findings of Figure 7 indicated that, 30% learners are strongly disagree, 48% learners are agree, 8% learners are neutral, 6% learners are disagree, and 8% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "Greater exposure to the target language makes it easier to acquire good pronunciation." The results revealed that many learners liked to have more language exposure to the target language but due to some factors such as financial problems, they couldn't go abroad and have native-like pronunciation.

Table 9. Item 8: If I am more concerned about the pronunciation of the target language, I can effectively improve my L2 pronunciation.

Likert-type scale	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree (SA)	31	62%
Agree (A)	13	26%
Neutral (N)	0	0%
Disagree (D)	3	6%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	3	6%
Total	50	100%

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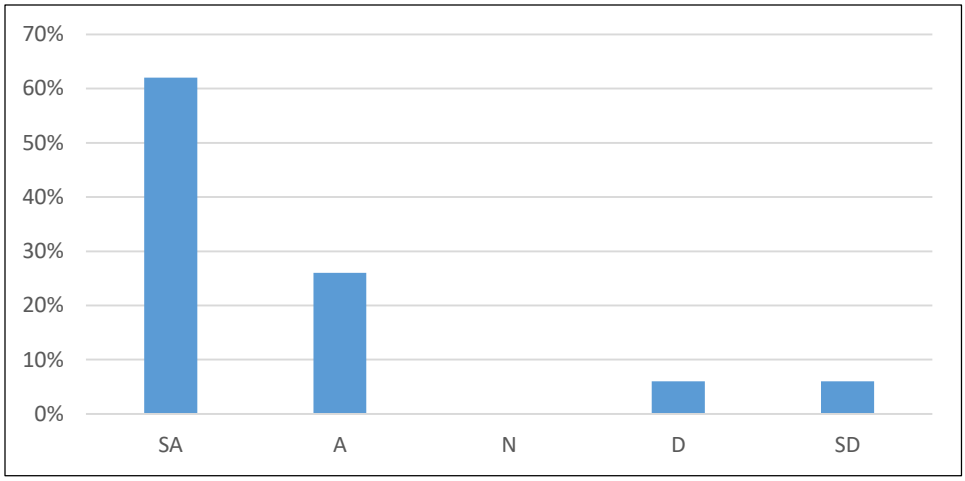


Figure 8. Learners' response to item 8

As the Figure 8 shows, 62% learners are strongly agree, 26% learners are agree, 0% learners are neutral, 6% learners are disagree, and 6% learners are strongly disagree to the statement that "If I am more concerned about the pronunciation of the target language, I can effectively improve my L2 pronunciation." According to the findings, the majority of learners strongly agreed that being concerned on the target language pronunciation will help them to improve their pronunciation.

5. Discussion

The researchers investigated the question "What are the factors influencing Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation learning? Learners should have much interest and sufficient motivation in pronunciation learning. Learners' high motivation arises from their keen interest to learn pronunciation. The findings of this research revealed that the majority of Iranian EFL learners had enough motivation to learn pronunciation. This finding is supported by the study of Pourhosein Gilakjani, Leong, and Sabouri (2012) who said that there is a relationship between motivation and pronunciation. That is, motivation identifies the development of learners' native-like pronunciation. This finding has also been supported by Moyer (2007) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012), indicating that high motivation towards the language develops native-like pronunciation.

The findings of the current study indicated that pronunciation instruction is of great importance to learners and should be taught by EFL teachers. This finding is in line with the study of Lord (2005), Liu (2008), Saito (2007), Kissling (2013), and Ahangari, Rahbar, and Entezari Maleki (2015), indicating that pronunciation instruction is effective in improving learners' English pronunciation. The above finding is not compatible with findings of Derwing and Rossiter (2003), Lord (2010), Saito (2011), and Derwing et al. (2014), revealing no impact of pronunciation instruction on improving learners' accent.

It is believed learners' social identity is connected to their English pronunciation and learners may wish to express their social identity through their L2 pronunciation. Learners who are able to form connections within the native society are most likely to have positive attitudes toward their culture, and are more likely to gain a native-like pronunciation. The findings of this research show that attitudes toward the target culture have a significant effect on learners' foreign accent. This finding has been supported by Levis (2005), Jiang, Green, Henley, and Masten (2009), Pishghadam and Kamyabi (2009), and Nushi, Jafari, and Golesorkhi, (2019) who express that the learners' foreign accent is influenced by their social and cultural identity.

Learners can benefit from their teachers' feedback on errors they commit when they are not able to produce the correct form of a word. Both teachers and learners should consider the provision of corrective feedback to be an important part of L2 pronunciation development, particularly when the errors stop effective communication. The findings of this study demonstrated that teachers' corrective feedback can assist learners to improve their pronunciation. This finding is in tune with the findings of Lee, Jang, and Plonsky (2015), Peerdadeh and Entezamara (2016), and Nushi, Jafari,

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and Golesorkhi (2019) who asserted that corrective feedback provided by teachers really facilitates learners' pronunciation.

The learner's first language can impact the pronunciation of the target language and is an important factor in accounting for foreign accents. Negative transfer from the first language causes errors in the pronunciation of the target language. The learners would like to talk like native-speakers of English. Therefore, they should try to produce the words like native speakers. It has been demonstrated that if the leaner's pronunciation is similar to that of a native speaker, his/her speech will be more understandable to the listeners. The results obtained from this research represented that knowing the differences between learners' native language and the target language help them to overcome their problems and improve their pronunciation. This finding is in agreement with the studies of Kenworthy (1987), Nation and Newton (2009), and Khamkhien (2010), revealing that learners' native language has a key role in the correct learning of L2 pronunciation.

It is said that adults attain a native-like accent, while the research findings indicate that children can acquire a native-like proficiency in L2 pronunciation. Most researchers agree that adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation. The obtained results of the current research showed that younger learners learn pronunciation faster than older learners. The above finding is in agreement with the studies of Kenworthy (1990), Mayberry and Lock (2003), Senel (2006), Larsen-Freeman (2008), and Khamkhien (2010) who suggested that younger children learn English pronunciation more easily than older children.

Learners' pronunciation learning is influenced by how much English they have an opportunity to hear in their daily lives. Learners who live in an English-speaking country where they are continuously surrounded by the language will be more familiar with the sounds and melodies they're attempting to imitate than those who have few opportunities to hear spoken English. The findings of this research indicated that a lot of EFL learners liked to have more English language experience in their so that they can gain native-like pronunciation. This finding has been supported by Senel (2006), Brown (2007) and Zhang (2009) who stated that when learners communicate with the native speakers of English and be exposed to the target language, they will successfully improve their L2 pronunciation.

The learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation is the main factor in gaining native or near-native pronunciation. The more concerned they are, the better their performance would be. The findings revealed that being concerned about L2 pronunciation can motivate learners to improve their pronunciation. This finding is in tune with Brown (1992), Šebestová (2007), Khamkhien (2010), and Nowacka (2012), demonstrating that learners who had positive attitudes towards the people who spoke the target language learnt pronunciation more effectively.

6. Conclusion

In this research, the researchers investigated some of the important factors influenced Iranian EFL learners' English pronunciation improvement. The findings of this research indicated that motivation, pronunciation instruction, learners' social identity, error correction, native language, age, exposure, and attitude were some factors that had considerable effects on learners' pronunciation learning. EFL learners should enhance their motivation via listening to the different accents of English native speakers. Accurate pronunciation instruction helps learners to improve their pronunciation knowledge. The findings showed that social identity impacts learners' pronunciation improvement. If learners are ready to learn a foreign language it certainly influences their pronunciation learning. Concerning the findings of this research, corrective feedback has a key role in pronunciation learning. Corrective feedback on learners' errors facilitates their pronunciation improvement. The results indicated that native language has a central role in the accurate learning of pronunciation. The learners will easily learn pronunciation if their native language has the similar sounds with the target language. According to the obtained findings, the younger the learners begin to learn L2 pronunciation, the better they can learn it. Based on the findings, it was revealed that exposure is a significant factor that involves the attitudes that the learners respond to opportunities using the target language. The better we pronounce the better people understand us. Regarding the results of this study, having positive attitudes improves learners' pronunciation learning and help them to gain a native-like pronunciation. If the learners have positive attitudes towards L2 pronunciation and set up appropriate aims for pronunciation, they will be able to easily learn it. To sum up, pronunciation is one of the important areas of language teaching. EFL teachers are regarded as the good models for their learners. They should have acceptable pronunciation; otherwise, they can mislead their learners. Therefore teachers should spend much time on teaching English pronunciation. Teachers should assist learners to set up appropriate objectives for their English pronunciation so that they can continually and regularly improve it in the long term.

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