

TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract: English pronunciation is one of the significant parts of language teaching and learning because it affects learners communicative competence and performance. If learners do not have acceptable pronunciation this may decreases their self-confidence and restrict their social interactions. In this paper, the researcher defines the term pronunciation, explains the importance of pronunciation, declares the goals of English pronunciation, expresses techniques for teaching English pronunciation, elaborates the learner's involvement in the pronunciation learning, represents the teacher's involvement in the pronunciation instruction

Key words: pronunciation, phonemes, articulation, improve, spelling, language learning

Teaching English pronunciation is a challenging task with different objectives at each level. When teaching pronunciation, ensure you make pronunciation a physical class activity instead of a mental activity and make sure your students practice and pronounce the words correctly.

A teacher's first goal for their students is to achieve basic communication. However, that can fail if their accent is so bad that no one can understand them. In addition, teaching pronunciation is necessary since it is embarrassing to ask someone to repeat themselves three times and still not understand them. When teachers decide to focus on pronunciation practice, many of them make the mistake of teaching pronunciation along with new vocabulary. This combination can work with students who have a 'good ear' or speak a related language. However, it can be hit and miss with students whose mother tongue is not related to the target language. This problem brings us back to whether pronunciation can be taught effectively at all. The answer is yes, of course, it can; it is just that the way many textbooks teach it is one of the least effective. Many books will have you drill pronunciation with repetition of the vocabulary. Some of the better ones will have you work on spelling; Spelling is an important skill, especially in English with its many irregularities and exceptions.



However, unfortunately, very few will start you and your students where you need to, at the phoneme level. The dictionary defines 'phoneme' as 'any perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another. Examples are p, b, d, and t in the English words pad, pat, bad, and bat. This definition highlights one reason language teachers start teaching pronunciation with phonemes. If a phoneme is a 'perceptually distinct unit of sound,' students first need to hear and recognize it. Thus in the first pronunciation exercises, students should listen and identify rather than speak. Introduce your phonemes in contrasting pairs like /t/ and /d/. Repeat the phonemes in words and isolation and ask the students to identify them. In addition, you may want to draw pronunciation diagrams for each sound showing the placement of the tongue and lips. Diagrams can help students visualize the differences they are attempting to recognize. You might also consider teaching your students symbols from the phonetic alphabet. Learning some of these symbols can clear confusion where the same letters have different sounds. For example, the 'th' in 'there' and the 'th' in 'thanks' look the same, but they are not. Of course, knowing phonetic symbols is not essential and would be overkill with children. That said, it would be worth it for visual or analytical learners.

You can play all sorts of matching games with this material to make the drills more fun and less stressful. For example, you can have students play with nonsense sounds and focus on the tiny differences between contrasted phonemic pairs, the key being to get them to hear the phoneme. While this may sound time-consuming and unnatural, you have to realize that you are in the process of reprogramming your students' brains, and it is going to take a while. Our brains must create neural pathways to learn new facial movements and link them with meaning.

We are recreating an accelerated version of the infant's language learning experience in the classroom. We are also breaking down language to babbling noises so that our students can play with the sounds, as infants do. Therefore, students learn to distinguish meaningful sounds while using more mature analytical skills that an infant does not have. Your students' articulation and perception of phonemes will improve if you practice phonemes regularly. Then, after several weeks, you will get them all to the point where you can practice pronunciation on a word or even a sentential level. Younger students may progress faster, but even adults will begin to give up fossilized pronunciation errors with practice. So now, it is time to take the next leap and correct pronunciation in the context of natural conversation. Now that we have looked at physical challenges making sounds, we can address three further potential barriers.



When teaching phonemes, students explore physical parameters and develop neurological pathways. To be explicit, students make meaningless noises and use their mouths, tongues, and lips in new ways. However, when we work on pronunciation at a lexical or sentential level, students may have complex emotional, psychological, and cultural motivations that require re-education.

Three barriers to students adopting a second language are anxiety, learned helplessness, and cultural identity. Of course, not every student will have all these problems. However, for sure, all of them will have at least one to a greater or lesser extent. As English teachers, we have to bring these problems to our students' attention in non-threatening ways and suggest tools and strategies for dealing with them. Learned helplessness is harder to solve and recognize. Learned helplessness means that, after trying something several times and consistently failing to get a positive result, a person shuts down. Therefore, if students get negative feedback on their pronunciation skills, and if they try to improve but feel they have not, they stop trying. You might think they are lazy, but they do not believe they can improve. They have already given up.

Luckily, the fix is straightforward: stay positive and praise frequently. To encourage students, periodically record them to hear the improvement after a few months. If a student progresses, tell them what they did right. For example, 'the difference between your short /a/ and short /e/was apparent that time! So let's do it again!' Record students reading or reciting a text at the beginning of the year and again every couple of months. Play the recordings and let students hear how much they have improved. They will probably impress themselves, and you!

Finally, the best way to help students improve their pronunciation skills is to encourage them to speak English as much as they possibly can. Introduce the idea that even when doing homework students should be reading aloud. Learning to pronounce English well takes muscle coordination, and that means practice - not just mental activity.

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