

An Investigation of the Influence of Strategies to Improve English Pronunciation among English as a Second Language Students

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of various strategies used by English teachers in Harbin, China, to improve ESL students' English pronunciation. It highlights the importance of effective pronunciation skills for ESL students' overall language proficiency, especially in listening, and seeks to identify how teachers address challenges in teaching oral language skills.

Approach/Methodology/Design: A qualitative research design was employed, using interviews with a sample of several teachers selected through purposive sampling. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis to explore both the challenges faced by students in pronunciation and the strategies teachers use to overcome these issues.

Findings: The study identified several challenges that students face, including phonetic difficulties, limited opportunities for speaking practice, and anxiety or shame associated with making mistakes. Teachers also encountered barriers, such as curriculum limitations, inadequate resources, and lack of institutional support. Key strategies identified as effective included role-playing, audio-visual aids, and adaptable teaching methods tailored to specific classroom needs.

Practical Implications: The study suggests that to improve pronunciation, teachers should foster a supportive language environment, focus on motivational techniques, incorporate multimedia resources, and employ learner-centered approaches. It calls for more resources and institutional backing to support these strategies, emphasizing that an engaged and flexible teaching approach is crucial for effective pronunciation instruction.

Originality/value: This research contributes to the field by underlining the need for a holistic approach to pronunciation teaching that adapts to the unique needs of ESL students in a non-English-speaking context. It highlights the importance of teacher training and diverse teaching methods to improve pronunciation outcomes, offering insights into how a supportive and resource-rich environment can enhance language learning effectiveness.

Introduction

1.1 Background information

The English language takes on a more central role in the process of international communication and economic interaction with further globalization development (Smith & Robertson, 2018). Even in case of making the grammatical mistake, the ones that own proficient

English pronunciation will most probably be understood, while the ones having poor pronunciation are at danger of stumbling on barriers of communication, despite them having perfect grammar (Gilakjani, 2012).

Chinese teachers tend to focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary, neglecting to help students improve their ability to communicate with native speakers. Therefore, teachers in China need to realize that English pronunciation is an important factor in the ability of non-native speakers to express themselves in English. When students do not have a good command of English pronunciation skills, their listening level will also receive limitations (Shah et al., 2017). As such, teaching pronunciation is essential not only for speakers to be understood but also for listeners to interpret messages accurately.

There are many different opinions on how to teach pronunciation. One of the most significant debates is reflected in how teachers use effective strategies for teaching pronunciation (Saito, 2012). Borg (2003) suggests that active teachers with decision-making skills select teaching strategies and methods through a combination of complex contexts, practicality of methods, ideas, and beliefs. This aligns to the recent study by Wise and Jung (2019) stressing the relevance of context-based factors and multi-faceted dimensions of belief and behavior.

1.2 Problem statement

According to the survey, just 17.39% of English teachers are proficient in using and mastering pronunciation rules and information, and only 12.5% have undergone professional training in pronunciation teaching (Jiang et al., 2019). In China's more developed educational regions, teachers continue to undervalue pronunciation instruction in the classroom (Chen & Goh, 2011). Whether pronunciation teaching should be organized as a classroom focus should be judged based on whether the strategies organized by the teacher will contribute to improving learners' pronunciation levels.

Theoretically, many studies have contributed to strategies for improving learners' pronunciation levels, but from a pedagogical perspective, there needs to be more measurements of the outcomes of teachers' strategies in Chinese classrooms to determine the effectiveness of teaching strategies for improving pronunciation levels. Therefore, this study can fill this gap in teaching strategies by exploring strategies for teaching pronunciation in China and finding effective teaching methods to reinforce them. Based on the results of this study, educators can reflect on the fact that strategies that have negative effects on teaching should be corrected or discarded to reach a targeted improvement in Chinese students' pronunciation.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Chinese English teachers' strategies for teaching pronunciation to students of English as a second language. The research objectives will be achieved for the study to be considered complete:

- A. To understand the problems faced by Chinese students of English as a Second Language (ESL) in learning to speak the language.
- B. To explore the specific challenges teachers face when teaching pronunciation to English as a Second Language (ESL) students.
- C. To critically discuss the influence of the teaching strategies used by teachers on Chinese students' pronunciation levels, providing insights into practical teaching experiences.
- D. To explore how teachers may be able to adapt their teaching methods to suit the specific needs of their students.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the above four research questions, the researcher will consider answering the following research questions:

- I. What are the influences of the strategies for enhancing ESL students' English pronunciation in Harbin?
- II. What challenges do the Harbin students face while using English as a Second Language while learning to speak the language?

What challenges do the teachers face when teaching pronunciation to students of English as a Second Language?

- III. How may teachers be able to adapt their teaching methods to meet the specific needs of their students?

Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of the Key Terms

2.1.1 English as a Second Language (ESL)

According to Elyas and Alghofaili (2019) and Orakbayevna (2021), ESL is a program that teaches English language skills to non-native speakers. The ESL programs may include lessons for study skills, content vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, cultural orientation, and speaking (Islam & Park, 2015). This program can be held for students at all stages and proficiency levels and mostly helps those who migrate to English-speaking countries.

2.1.2 English pronunciation

Most individuals usually speak the dialect of Standard English that belongs to the art of one country they come from. Regardless of these differences, Chaira (2015) and Rogers (2014) state that the English language commonly has 44 phonemes or word sounds, which are divided into 25 vowels and 19 consonants. With the pronunciation of the English language, individuals can make sentences and paragraphs and speak publicly comfortably (Edo-Marzá, 2014).

2.2 Teaching English Pronunciation in China

Concerning teaching language, second language acquisition involve learners moving from mastering single syllables to harmonizing individual sounds into communicative sentences (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). When learning a second language, current pronunciation instruction focuses on scrutinizing, comparing, and practicing phonological differences between the mother and second languages. However, Reed and Levis (2019) argued that learners facing complex pronunciation problems in a second language cannot be solved through listening practice and imitation when there are significant differences between the two language systems. Moreover, for the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching, when teaching between different language systems, mastery of a second language is significantly less effective than teaching pronunciation in only one language. Therefore, linguists have concluded that when learning a foreign language in a cross-linguistic system, the differences between the two languages should be fully grasped, and a targeted approach to foreign language teaching should be established.

Liu et al. (2019) opine that the structuralist view places the purpose of language learning above the acquisition of knowledge and the use of skills in language. In China, structured teaching not only limits the methods of teaching English pronunciation but also hinders the effectiveness of pronunciation exercises in practice (Deterding, 2010).

2.3 Pronunciation Teaching Strategies used by English Teachers

In the 21st century, pronunciation learning has shifted from being considered a 'completed' aspect of language learning to a crucial goal of achieving native-like fluency (Pennington, 2015). The nativeness and intelligibility principles are the two primary tenets that shape pronunciation education strategies (Levis, 2005). Therefore, teachers should choose teaching strategies according to different pronunciation objectives.

Although teachers organize pronunciation instruction in the classroom, less than half of the teachers interviewed by Foote et al. (2012) provided supplementary materials for pronunciation activities outside of the textbook. This suggests that the strategy of selecting only textbooks for pronunciation instruction is inadequate. Yousef Bani Ahmad (2019) conducted a study on the learning of English by students whose mother tongue is Bahasa and found out that the difference in the language system is the main cause of pronunciation problems.

However, Jafari et al. (2022) found that the effects of repetition and imitation in English language learning were very limited. According to Adem and Berkessa (2022), the communicative method is the appropriate strategy for ESL/EFL specialists. In the context of teaching English, "Communicative Language Teaching" (CLT) refers to a method that places a strong emphasis on students using language in authentic contexts. It was created in the 1980s and is centered on communicative competency, which promotes genuine language usage in authentic contexts as opposed to filler teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). When it comes to acquiring English pronunciation, many instructors and students choose to oppose and ignore CLT, despite the fact that it is well recognized.

Teachers generally agree that practice in a communicative setting can have a negative impact if uncorrected. Sometimes, however, explicitly pointing out students' mistakes may hurt their self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2013). Therefore, while teachers are aware of the importance of correction will increase the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching, they should choose the right time to correct errors. Albiladi (2019) suggested that teacher feedback is one of the key factors that can help students overcome common problems in pronunciation. However, it should be used in conjunction with different teaching and learning activities, such as the minimal comparison method, visual aids, and contextualized pronunciation activities, to identify students' multifaceted pronunciation problems and make timely corrections. Studies have found that when organizing pronunciation activities, teachers focus only on teaching segments (Couper, 2017; Foote et al., 2012; Wahid & Sulong, 2013). However, neglecting in training students' pronunciation accuracy and sentence coherence (Yakut, 2020). Sun (2023) indicates that technologies such as Bridge not only augment traditional instructional methods asserted that the Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technological tools could help one to improve their pronunciation more effectively than traditional ways in some contexts.

2.4 English as a Second Language Teaching Challenges

2.4.1 Challenges faced by students

Students learning English as a second language (EFL) always face many challenges on how to master English pronunciation. Leung and Street (2014) mentioned that EFL students have limited occasions and opportunities to use English. Akbari (2015) argues that English always fails to occupy an important position in the society, which leads to greater challenges for EFL students to learn pronunciation. Consequently, the limitation of usage scenarios and lack of importance in the society cause them to have more difficulties in practicing pronunciation in their daily life than other students who use English. Meanwhile, learner engagement has been recognized as a key

precursor to meaningful task experience in the language classroom (Dörnyei, 2019). Simple oral exercises can be a useful tool for improving students' speaking abilities in the classroom. King (2020) conducted an observational study in an English classroom in Japan and found that generally students were unable to get practice in speaking in the English classroom. Fear of pronunciation leads to their inability to participate in classroom English activities and is the main reason for inadequate development of pronunciation skills.

Considering that phonological transfer is a prevalent phenomenon in second language acquisition (Ringbom, 2007). Phonological transfer is defined as how the sound system of one language affects the user's perception and production of speech in another language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). A common distinction regarding second language learning is between positive transfer (facilitation) and negative transfer (interference). Positive transfer is facilitated by the similarity between L1 and L2, which suggests that the degree of L1 to L2 transfer may be significant when languages are categorized as belonging to the same or different language families with a common ancestor (Sabourin & Manning, 2023). Chinese and English are categorized with different language families with many significant differences in phonology and phonetics (Bogush, 2020). Since English is word-to-word correlated and Chinese pronunciation is determined by different tones, it is difficult to form a positive Chinese-to-English phonological transfer (Liu, 2001).

2.4.2 Challenges faced by teachers

Pronunciation problems are not only a challenge for students, but also for teachers (Sayer, 2015; Salim, Terasne, & Narasima, 2020). The majority of English teachers in China are similarly learners of English as a second language, which means that their accents are not as standard as native speakers (Menon, 2006). As a result, teachers may also avoid organizing pronunciation instruction in the classroom because of their own pronunciation problems.

Research has shown that English teachers often lack adequate training in teaching pronunciation leading to their lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation (Couper, 2017; Bai & Yuan, 2019). Derwing and Munro (2005) state that the lack of specialized training leads to the development of teaching strategies that have no value or even produce negative effects of teaching strategies (Derwing and Munro, 2015; Murphy, 2014).. Therefore, the limitations of teachers' own pronunciation level and the lack of outside expertise cause them to face obstacles in organizing pronunciation teaching correctly and have a little difficulty in helping students to develop and correct their pronunciation.

At the same time, even teachers with adequate training continue to face the problem of how to combine and integrate pronunciation practice with other skills into each lesson because they are constrained by time (Darcy & Hancock, 2021). Few teachers currently make pronunciation lessons a priority in their classrooms (Derwing, 2010; Baker, 2014; Henderson et al., 2012). Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) conducted a survey of 100 English language teachers, and 62% of them reported that they lacked enough time in the classroom for pronunciation training.

2.5 Adaptation of Pronunciation Strategies for ESL Students

Szyszka (2017) states that the effectiveness of the existing pronunciation teaching strategies still has a gap for many students, which needs adaptation. This shows that regardless of Szyszka (2017) showing a positive relationship between using the PLS and learners' pronunciation improvement, some learners might find it difficult to engage in class to avoid making mistakes using certain strategies. These discrepancies, among others highlighted by researchers such as Pawlak and Szyszka (2018) in using pronunciation learning strategies, create the need for

teachers to understand how specifically they might use strategies. Chen (2016) and Sardegna (2018) highlighted that at the beginning of the teaching pronunciation method, teachers must assess students' needs to determine the specific strategies that the students might need. Lappin - Fortin and Rye (2014) highlighted various methods that might be used to evaluate the students' pronunciation, including rubrics, recordings, self-assessment and diagnostic tests.

2.6 Summary and Research Gap

This chapter has explored on various topics that have been discussed by researchers concerning this study. Even though many researchers use pronunciation methods for ESL students, there still needs to be a gap. For example, most researchers engaged in this topic have emphasized the effectiveness of pronunciation studies using quantitative methods, therefore needing more in-depth insights. Also, most studies have made their information more general by failing to focus on specific regions. Therefore, to bridge this gap, this study will focus on qualitative studies to help collect in-depth insights and target only Harbin High Schools in China. In the chapter the researcher will explore on methods that were used in collecting data for this study (Sonsaat Hegelheimer, 2021). There is a wealth of research exploring how English pronunciation should be taught, emphasizing features to prioritize for improving learners' intelligibility.

Methodology and Procedures

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and process used to examine the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching strategies. The methodology will be based on Saunders et al.'s (2012) research onion, which is a method that helps students create an organized methodology. According to Saunders, the outermost layer of the research methodology is research philosophy, which includes the truth, assumptions, and beliefs. The last layer is the producers of analysis data and ethical considerations. Therefore, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the research philosophy, design, and methodology, followed by an analysis of the data.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study will be based on the communication language teaching theory, which is a teaching method that focuses on helping students develop their communication skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Komol & Suwanphathama, 2020; Richards, 2005). Littlewood (2011) and Savignon (2005) states that communication language teaching is based on the philosophy that, for the students to learn the language, they need to practice using the language and also communicate meaning to others. This theory will be used in this study to help emphasize that for ESL students to learn effectively, there is a need for integration of practicality in learning and reading.

3.3 Research Philosophy

Considering the nature of this research, positivism might not apply in this case since the main aim here is to understand the various strategies teachers may use to improve the pronunciation level of ESL students; therefore, interpretivism is chosen (Potrac et al., 2014).

3.4 Research Approach

This study will be based on an inductive approach since it is a method of reasoning that involves drawing broad generalizations or principles from the use of observations. This method starts with the set of observations and then moves to the particular experiences to a moral general

set of propositions (Jebreen, 2012). Therefore, in this study, the inductive approach will help collect primary data and then analyze them to draw general information concerning the various strategies teachers may use to improve the pronunciation level of ESL students.

3.5 Research Method

The nature of the study, considering that it is based on interpretivism philosophy, makes the qualitative method the most suitable. Cleland (2017) argues that qualitative research addresses research questions about the 'how' and 'why' and enables researchers to understand contexts, phenomena and experiences.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

This study will consider primary qualitative data and secondary data. Qualitative data can be used for data collection through various means, such as observation, focus groups, and interviews (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Gill et al., 2008). The researcher used semi-structured interviews in this study (Saunders et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2004). The advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that teachers are free to express their views. However, due to the openness of the questions, the participants could have used their biases on certain ends of the pronunciation methods while answering the questions, making the results more biased. The secondary data will be for triangulating the primary data and will be obtained from online databases. This can be controlled by consistent coding and analysis between the researchers, so that the reliability can be considered a bit higher. Further, secondary data covered peer reviews, hence providing stability to the sources in terms of triangulation with primary data for enhanced source validity, and in so doing, replicability of the findings.

3.7 Sampling Method

The location chosen for data collection was a high school in Harbin. This high school has English as a compulsory course. The number of participants is one of the important components of conducting a research (Bryman, 2016). Due to time and environmental constraints, I finally chose 4 teachers as the sample for the study. These teachers were selected using the convenience method over the purposive method. However, this method introduces potential biases. To mitigate these biases, strategies like triangulation and acknowledging limitations are recommended. By combining interview data with observations and secondary data, and transparently addressing the sample's representational limits. However, considering the scope of the study is an institution which have many English speakers due to the language been taught there, there was a need to filter the participants. The convenience method was used (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Therefore, I approached 4 ESL teachers using the criteria: be teachers in Harbin high schools, having taught 4 years and above, be fluent in English, be a Chinese and also available during the period of interview.

Table 1. General information of the interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Profession	Length of teaching
1	Female	25	English teacher	4 years
2	Female	30	English teacher	10 years
3	Female	36	English teacher	15 years

3.8 Reliability and Validity

3.8.1 Transferability

Bryman (2016) claimed that the reliability of study is tested by the degree of transferability which based on the high credibility of an experiment. Therefore, in this study, researcher will develop specific and detailed interview questions to dig deeper into teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding pronunciation instruction.

3.8.2 Confirmability

Confirmability is assessed against the objectivity of the research (Bryman, 2016). To ensure confirmability, some of the findings produced by the researcher should be supported by appropriate theories and evidence. At the same time, the researcher should avoid the interference of personal expectations.

3.8.3 Theoretical Saturation Test

In qualitative research, the theoretical saturation test is a crucial step to ensure the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the study's conclusions. In this study, I conducted a theoretical saturation test to verify whether any new themes or perspectives emerged from the data. Through in-depth interviews with four English teachers in Harbin, I found that over time, new interview data no longer generated new themes or significant extensions of existing views, indicating that theoretical saturation had been achieved. This finding aligns with the perspectives of Bryman (2016) and Silverman & Marvasti (2008), who argue that when new data fail to provide novel information or insights, the study can be considered to have reached theoretical saturation. Therefore, it can be affirmed that this study, having passed the theoretical saturation test, provides a sufficient and reliable basis for exploring strategies to improve ESL students' English pronunciation.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is very important in research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The ethical considerations for this study began as per E3 form (See appendix 1). The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained by using pseudocodes as personal identifying numbers.

Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis

In this study I used thematic analysis to process the data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis method entails searching through the data for the purpose of identifying analyses and bringing together repeating modules. This method was suitable for studies since non-textual data were used and therefore need to be coded in order to obtain theme which were used to write the report. The thematic analysis was rigorously performed with multiple rounds of coding to ensure themes were derived directly from the data, minimizing researcher bias and enhancing the confirmability of the study findings.

4.2 Theme 1: Challenges faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) students in oral learning

4.2.1 Phonetic Challenges

The participants were requested to provide some of the challenges they thought students could be experiencing while speaking or learning the pronunciations, what emerged common among the participants was the phonetic challenges. The phonetic challenge can be in the form of repeating pronunciation errors, spelling difficulties, difficulty in saying complex words, and allophonic difficulties. Participant 1 quoted:

Many students need help distinguishing between Chinese and English pronunciations and still use Chinese pronunciation to read English words and sentences.

In this case, the participants wish to show that when the ESL students speak, they are unable to differentiate the English language from their native language, and, therefore, they will find a mix-up. All the participants agree that the phonetic languages are brought by the children having a strong influence on pronunciation by the native language. This phonetic challenge is also explained by a previous study by Ringbom (2007), who explained that phonological transfer is a challenge to students brought about by the influence of the children's native language. Also, Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) also explained phonological transfer as a challenge to students.

4.2.2 Opportunities for Speaking

In addition to phonetic challenges, the participants also noted that the students face the challenges of limited language usage opportunities, the environment they live in only encourages them to speak Chinese more than English. Participant 2 said, “They can only get pronunciation training in English classes and have no chance to speak English at other times.” Participant 3 also stated “regardless of the country making more attempts towards teaching English pronunciations, the students still do not have enough pronunciation activities and the environment to develop oral proficiency”. Therefore, the challenge ESL students experience while learning and speaking the language is opportunities for speaking. Also, Akari (2015) found that the English language often fails to occupy an important position in Chinese society, contributing to greater challenges for EFL students in learning pronunciation skills.

4.2.3 Fear of Making a Mistake and Feeling Ashamed

While speaking, the students also experience other challenges. Participant 4, while explaining the barriers students experience while learning the language, stated that they fear making mistakes while speaking. This was also emphasized by Participant 3, the major barrier to student oral learning is a lack of confidence, which eventually makes them fear making mistakes. Previous studies rarely explained such ideas, and therefore, this study derived new insights that ESL students also feel ashamed of speaking, lack confidence and fear making mistakes, in addition to phonetics and opportunities for speaking challenges. This theme confirms the research question “What are the influences of the strategies for enhancing ESL students' English pronunciation in Harbin?” aligning with Pennington (2019) emphasizing the use of technology and resources as an adaptation towards effective pronunciation strategies.

4.3 Theme 2: Challenges Experienced By Teachers While Teaching ESL Students

4.3.1 Curriculum Constraints

The participants also explained that other than the challenges the students experience, there are

challenges for the teachers as they teach the language. Interviewee 2 stated that there is seldom enough time to organize pronunciation teaching, English language teaching is still at the "exam-oriented" stage. This suggests that even though the importance of pronunciation teaching has been made clear, the Chinese education system does not facilitate the implementation of pronunciation teaching. Participant 3 is very straightforward on this point when she quotes:

At the junior high school and primary school levels, there is no proficiency test for listening and speaking. At the high school level, only a small part of the scores in the college entrance examination are related to listening.

In this case, the participants show that the current education curriculum is quite constrained to listening more than speaking. Therefore, teachers feel challenged to transfer the skills to their real lives. These insights resonate with Dersing and Munro's (2015) and Murphy's (2014) previous studies, which found that the curriculum requirements and the broader social environment usually constrain teachers. According to these researchers, these curriculum constraints priorities listening more than speaking.

4.3.2 Resources Constraints

Participant Three noted that finding resources for different learning styles without formal guidance is a signifying handle for them during the teaching process. This is made clear by Participant 1, who noted that at present, due to the insufficient time for oral practice, it is challenging to achieve an effective oral practice. Due to the time constraints, the teacher may find themselves constrained to cover information in a test in a shorter time, which affects their teaching practices and performances of the students. This insight from the study is also emphasized by previous researchers such as Darcy & Hancock (2021), who emphasized that many English teachers usually face the challenges of integrating the pronunciation process with other language skills within a limited time.

This theme confirms the research question "What challenges do the Harbin students face while using English as a Second Language while learning to speak the language?" aligning with Akari (2015) that English language often fails to occupy an important position in Chinese society, contributing to greater challenges for EFL students in learning pronunciation skills.

4.4 Theme 3: Pronunciation Strategies used for Improving Speaking Proficiency to ESL Students

4.4.1 Role Playing

In the pronunciation learning process by the ESL students, various strategies can be applied, as highlighted by the participants. Participant 1 emphasizes that she improves the students' speaking proficiency by introducing training, listening exercises, and many other things. According to this practice, the speaking proficiency skills strategy is done through role-playing, which usually allows the students to practice pronunciation in an engaging narrative. Participant 4 also emphasized that she usually conducts sole playing activities with authentic material to expose the students to the natural spoken English environment to which they can relate.

4.4.2 Audio-Visual Strategy

Participants emphasized that using audio-visuals as supplementary materials to put students in the language environment of native English speakers and imitate them is also a great strategy for improving their pronunciation skills. Participant 2 quoted

I often use English videos to help students learn spoken English. They will imitate the lines of their favorite characters. I organize role-playing activities after watching the videos.

In this quote, the participants emphasize that converting the learning process to audiovisual is one of the effective strategies that help stimulate the learners to learn and seek English. Participant 3 also explained that the resources in the textbook are too monotonous she also opted to expose the students to native speakers through music, podcasts and media. The teacher uses the audiovisual media to expose the students to native speakers' pronunciations and intonations whom they can relate to and this facilitates intuitive imitation.

This theme confirms the research question “What challenges do the teachers face when teaching pronunciation to students of English as a Second Language?” aligning with Deterding (2010) that the concept of structured teaching not only limits the methods of teaching English pronunciation but also hinders the effectiveness of pronunciation exercises in practice.

4.5 Theme 4: Adaptation of Teachers' Strategies in the Face of Challenges

The participants were asked to explain whether they feel the available strategies have been influential while others are less influential in influencing the students towards achieving high pronunciation levels. According to Participant 1, the effectiveness of the pronunciation strategies is usually evaluated through regulated assessments, tracking progress and student feedback towards their specific goals. From the past assessment, this participant has found that the effectiveness results are two-sided depending on the difficulty of the test. However, overreliance on traditional pronunciation exercises and repetitive training does not provide the students with practical application scenarios.

Pronunciation can be improved through group work and role-playing strategies. Participant 1 said that group work allows students to learn from and supervise each other. She said, “I quickly realized that this approach did not meet the individual needs of my students.” This insight resonates with what Sardegna (2018) explained in previous literature, that the pronunciation learning strategies must be adapted to suit the students' needs and be effective for them. Participant 3 also adopts a group work strategy to correct students' mispronunciations during pronunciation practice. Therefore, these participants agree that one of the adaptive processes for ensuring that pronunciation strategies are influential is through groups.

In addition, teachers can also ensure that the pronunciation strategies used are effective by providing timely feedback. According to the participant, students with pronunciation challenges always prefer to use personalized feedback to ensure it guides them at the individual level rather than the group level. This participant noted that she would organize the regular oral exams to test the student's oral proficiency and then analyses the weaknesses based on the exam results. Therefore, to better achieve this participant's teaching goals, she ensures that she has incorporated phonic games. However, Colnerud (2015) explained that teachers might need to be very cautious when providing feedback to students since they might be negative in reducing their morale and feeling incapable. This theme confirms the research question “How can teachers adapt their teaching methods to meet the specific needs of their students?” aligning with Sayer (2015) that teachers also feel pressure when organizing pronunciation instruction.

4.6 Summary

The data collected was analyzed through a thematic process, and four themes were obtained. Some of the findings that were obtained include the challenges the ESL students usually experience. Teachers also experience the challenges of curriculum and resources while teaching

the language. The strategies that can help in enhancing phonetic teaching practices are role-playing and audio-visual aids.

Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Effectiveness of the Multifaceted Teaching Approaches

The study showed that the multifaceted teaching methods that Chinese EFL teachers have adopted were somehow effective in improving ESL pronunciation. It is recommended for schools to continue investing in a variety of teaching tools and methods to be able to provide the different learning styles and needs by students.

5.1.2 Challenges Due to Environmental and Systemic Factors

Environmental and systemic factors, such as the language environment not being facilitating or differences in the structural nature of the two languages - being that the target language and the first language of the learners differ - definitely impact the effectiveness in pronunciation teaching. Schools should provide a more interactive and experiential environment with greater opportunities for the use of the English language. Some of these might include language labs, conversation clubs.

5.1.3 Need for Standardization in Teaching Pronunciation

There are differing levels of teaching pronunciation because of diverse teaching ways and teacher capabilities. This will set standards for approaches in the teaching of pronunciation within the education system in China. It should include developing and implementing mandatory comprehensive phonics courses for its Chinese ESL learners at universities, colleges, and high schools.

5.1.4 Importance of Teacher Training and Resource Availability

Teacher proficiency and the availability of appropriate teaching and learning resources greatly influence the success of pronunciation teaching strategies. This is possible through workshop organization, training programs, and sharing of resources to help enhance teacher capacities and thereby ensure that teaching quality is uniform.

5.1.5 Positive Language Environments

The language environments that are positive and encouraging develop confidence. It is recommended to encourage and create environments where students can practice their language skills in both formal and informal settings. Moreover, technology integration in language learning tools would be able to simulate the natural setting of language usage.

5.1.6 Learner-Centered Approaches

Teachers have effectively handled the enhancement of learners' pronunciation skills through the development of learner-centered approaches that tailor teaching strategies to individual linguistic backgrounds, learning styles, and specific needs of the learners. Use the curriculum design in teaching practices that are characterized by learners' personalized learning pathways and oral communications.

5.2 Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, here are five paragraphs on how to implement teaching strategies in actual classrooms and adjust them according to the levels and needs of students.

5.2.1 Creating a Positive Language Environment

In actual English classrooms, teachers should strive to create a positive and supportive language environment. This involves encouraging students to actively speak up and showing tolerance for their mistakes. Through activities such as group discussions and role-plays, students can practice their English pronunciation in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. For beginners, teachers should use more positive reinforcement, such as praise and rewards, to boost their confidence. For intermediate and advanced students, teachers can introduce more challenging tasks to stimulate their learning motivation.

5.2.2 Leveraging Multimedia Resources

Multimedia resources play a crucial role in teaching English pronunciation. Teachers should utilize audio and video materials to expose students to authentic English pronunciation and intonation. This can include playing English movies, news clips, music, and videos. When selecting multimedia materials, teachers should consider students' interests and proficiency levels to ensure that the materials are both engaging and appropriate for their learning needs. By leveraging multimedia resources, students can gain a more intuitive understanding of English pronunciation features, thereby improving their pronunciation accuracy.

5.2.3 Employing Role-Playing and Situational Simulations

Role-playing and situational simulations are effective methods for improving students' oral communication skills and language proficiency. Teachers can design specific scenarios, such as shopping, traveling, or business negotiations, and let students practice dialogues in different roles. This approach not only helps students master correct pronunciation and intonation but also enhances their language adaptability and self-confidence. When implementing these activities, teachers should tailor the difficulty of situational simulations based on students' actual proficiency levels, ensuring that each student can practice within their comfort zone.

5.2.4 Providing Personalized Feedback and Guidance

Personalized feedback and guidance are essential for enhancing students' English pronunciation. Teachers should closely monitor students' pronunciation performance, record and analyze their practice sessions, and then provide targeted feedback and advice. This can be achieved through audio and video recordings. During feedback sessions, teachers should focus on pointing out specific issues, such as mispronunciations or flat intonation, and offer improvement suggestions. At the same time, teachers should encourage students to actively participate in the feedback process, helping them understand their pronunciation status and proactively seek improvement methods.

5.2.5 Implementing Differentiated and Personalized Instruction

To meet the varying levels and needs of students, teachers should implement differentiated and personalized instruction. Differentiated instruction involves grouping students based on their English proficiency and teaching them at appropriate difficulty levels. Personalized instruction, on the other hand, focuses on each student's learning style and needs, employing teaching strategies and tools that suit them. For instance, teachers can use more visual aids for visual learners and play more audio materials for auditory learners. By implementing differentiated and

personalized instruction, teachers can better cater to students' individual learning requirements and enhance their English pronunciation skills.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

5.3.1 Increase Size and Diversity of the Sample

The sample size and its diversity should be increased for future studies. This includes teachers from varied geographical regions, the types of schools they teach at, and their teaching background so that a more representative and nuanced view of what they felt the problems were could be established regarding effective strategies for pronunciation teaching.

5.3.2 Incorporate Quantitative Methods

Future studies of this nature should therefore incorporate quantitative research methodologies as a means of counterbalancing and complementing the subjectivity inherently contained in qualitative research.

5.3.3 Longitudinal Studies and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

If the longitudinal research method is used, for example, the changes in development, especially in pronunciation proficiency over time, could be measured, thereby allowing one to study the long-term effect of any possible teaching method or strategy. Future research should also be extended toward cross-cultural studies comparing pronunciation teaching strategies between cultures and appraising the impact of such strategies on learners within dissimilar cultural settings.

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