

The Impact of Phonetics Instruction on Pronunciation Growth and Attitude Shifts Among EFL Undergraduates: Insights From Testing and Interviews

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Abstract—The present mixed-methods study investigated the effect of targeted phonetics instruction on the changing pronunciation and attitudes of 72 first-year female English majors at Majmaah University, KSA, in 2025. An experimental group of 36 participants received a 14-week intensive phonetics course, while a control group that also numbered 36 participants did not. Quantitative analysis of pre- and post-test pronunciation scores revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group with a mean increase of 4.37 points and no change in the control group. Furthermore, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher motivation and engagement. Qualitative virtual interviews revealed that individuals believe learning pronunciation opens up work options and improves communication, despite difficulties with certain sounds. Effective teaching tactics can help learners overcome these challenges and gain confidence. To summarize, the study's findings emphasized the need to incorporate basic phonetics training into the EFL curriculum, particularly at the primary school level, through qualified teachers who can use systematic ways to foster pronunciation abilities. This study, with its considerable findings, provides important insights for improving EFL training.

Index Terms—English pronunciation, learning strategies, motivation, pronunciation proficiency, pronunciation growth

I. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is an essential component of English language proficiency. It is how we produce the language's sounds and plays a vital role in communication (Gilakjani, 2012). To make sure that this area of the language curriculum provides good value concerning students' real-life needs, Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019) stated that it is helpful to review the role and processes of pronunciation teaching in a historical and contemporary context. This is because of the natural evolution of spoken English, changing patterns in English usage, and, more specifically, the increasingly dominant function of English as a language for international and intercultural communication.

Still, for many EFL learners, pronunciation remains a challenge. The goal of this study, therefore, is to investigate pronunciation proficiency growth and perceptions of pronunciation factors and challenges among EFL undergraduates majoring in English. Foote and Trofimovich (2017) stated that social issues, along with identity, psychological, sociocultural, linguistic, interactional, and sociocognitive factors, play a role in pronunciation development when learning a language. Marzá (2014) concurs, stating that learners are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good pronunciation.

Using a mixed-methods approach, including pronunciation pre- and post-tests that assess the participants' ability to produce English sounds accurately and fluently, the present study aims to investigate a focus group of first-year EFL undergraduate students' pronunciation performance. The results of these tests, part of a comprehensive diagnostic pronunciation assessment, will be used to facilitate the teaching of a phonetics course. The study's thorough approach aims to improve undergraduates' pronunciation proficiency and address the challenges that can be effectively managed (Hameed, 2024). It also explores the complex interplay between first-year EFL students' pronunciation development, motivational factors, and preferred learning strategies, uncovering valuable insights that will be instrumental in informing and optimizing pronunciation instruction in these crucial early stages, as advised by Meisarah (2023). Moreover, the study also uses tests and interviews to collect participants' reflections on the factors that improved or hindered their EFL pronunciation skills.

A. Problem Statement

First-year undergraduates majoring in English sometimes struggle to master the language's segmental and suprasegmental elements, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstanding. This could be due to interference with mother tongue habit formation, a lack of correct instructions, insufficient follow-up or feedback, a lack of self-motivation, little or no practice, or a failure to implement appropriate language learning practices.

B. Significance

Despite the importance of strong pronunciation skills for successful English communication, there is a pressing need for more research to explore how first-year EFL students' perceptions of their pronunciation growth, motivations for improvement, and preferred learning strategies change throughout their initial academic year. The findings could be extremely useful to educators, researchers, and stakeholders in English language teaching and learning because they have the potential to significantly improve understanding of first-year EFL students' pronunciation development, evolving motivations, and perceived effectiveness of various learning strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. English Pronunciation

Reed and Levis (2019) consider well-pronounced English as a gateway to spoken intelligibility for L2 learners, a concept deeply tied to the social meaning of the English language. O'Connor (1980) notes the aspirations of millions of international students to speak English with pronunciation that is easily understood by other students and native speakers (p. 1) This can be achieved through written language comprehension and extensive listening, not just for semantic understanding but also for phonetic nuances. Hancock (2012) and Plailek (2021) stress the importance of pronunciation in effective communication, highlighting that poor pronunciation can significantly impede listeners' comprehension and hinder success.

B. Learning English Pronunciation Proficiency

Hancock (2012) suggests that, for better pronunciation, students record themselves producing four to five words, then sentences, and then listen to them for a week or two. Finally, they should ask themselves which words they said. The learner should know which of the /h/ sounds he can differentiate between, such as distinguishing "heat" /hi:t/ from "eat" /i:t/. The second phase should demonstrate how the employment of multiple sounds conveys a specific phoneme and how a single phoneme can be represented by a distinct sound in each spot where it appears.

C. Pronunciation Proficiency Growth

Scholars and researchers have polished their pens and spent time figuring out how to increase language pronunciation proficiency, which has typically involved using a variety of segmental, syllabic, prosodic, and temporal metrics. Even for early bilinguals, achieving native-like L2 pronunciation is more difficult than learning vocabulary and grammar (Granena & Long, 2013).

D. Instructional Efficacy in Pronunciation

Research on L2 pronunciation, as cited by Alghazo et al. (2023), has gained momentum since the 2010s, yet challenges remain regarding the standards of pronunciation instruction (PI). Despite evidence supporting its effectiveness in improving both accuracy and fluency, findings are mixed, with Thomson and Derwing (2015) noting that many questions about instructional efficacy remain unanswered. Early studies, such as Derwing et al. (1998), demonstrated positive impacts of instruction, with participants showing improved intelligibility. Reviews by Barrera-Pardo (2004) and Thomson and Derwing (2015) further confirmed these findings, noting significant improvements in comprehension. Interestingly, research indicates that perception-based instruction may hold the key to more effective L2 pronunciation instruction, as shown by Lee et al. (2020). Some researchers advocate for perception training as a precursor to production practice, which could revolutionize how instructors teach pronunciation.

Derwing (2017) found that while many studies show increases in learners' pronunciation, the real advantages to students are sometimes unclear. This highlights the critical need for additional research that assesses learners' long-term outcomes and communication efficacy. Effective education should improve learners' perception of phonology and speech intelligibility to others; however, many studies prioritize accent reduction over comprehensibility. This chapter examines the current condition of pronunciation instruction, addressing issues faced by teachers and highlighting the importance of prompt action.

Similarly, some scholars have investigated the long-held belief that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are inherently superior in teaching pronunciation compared to non-native speakers (NNESTs) and regard NESTs as ideal models; research indicates that effective pronunciation instruction is based on teachers' expertise and professional practices rather than their native pronunciation (Alghazo & Zidan, 2019).

E. Phonetics Curriculum and Teaching Materials

Alghazo (2015) highlights the critical importance of curriculum design and teaching materials in developing pronunciation skills among EFL learners. He identified the "often-unchanging" curricula as a significant barrier to effective learning and notes that the "blind" selection of materials does not address students' needs. This emphasizes the urgent need for reform that incorporates student perspectives to better align with their learning expectations. Therefore, the curricula of ESL teachers must reflect the needs and expectations of their students.

F. The Impact of Motivation on Pronunciation Proficiency

Alavinia and Gholizadeh (2017) conducted a study investigating motivation's impact on the pronunciation proficiency of 58 elementary EFL students. Despite assessing intrinsic or extrinsic motivation types, the results indicate no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation improvement of the two groups. This finding suggests that neither motivation nor corrective feedback influenced learners' pronunciation performance. It underscores the importance of considering students' motivational and attitudinal factors, leading teachers to consider how they provide feedback and to be more empathetic and understanding of their students' individual needs.

According to Hago and Khan (2015), incorporating English pronunciation challenges and independent strategies can improve Saudi EFL learners' English pronunciation skills and overall learning experience. These projects seek to prevent and treat pronunciation difficulties in secondary schools. Gagliardi (2016) investigated middle school English as a Second Language (ESL) students' assessments of their speaking and pronunciation confidence concerning their overall and speaking English proficiency levels using a survey and many open-ended questions. The findings revealed that certain groups held high levels of confidence. Furthermore, the open-ended responses revealed students' desire for the classroom community's support in speaking up.

Al-Jarf (2022) studied the impact of technology on developing second language (SL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pronunciations using Natural Reader. The results showed no significant differences in decoding abilities or pronunciation. Students practiced the program, listened to lectures, and took oral reading and vocabulary examinations. A link was found between practice time and post-test decoding and pronunciation competency scores.

Over one academic year, Saito et al. (2019) investigated the impact of aptitude on second language pronunciation development among 40 first-year Japanese university students. They evaluated spontaneous speech elements, and the results indicated that experience in the classroom improved significantly, especially in global comprehensibility, providing reassurance and confidence in the effectiveness of traditional learning methods. Explicit learning aptitude was found to enhance fluency and prosody, and incidental learning ability was developed in the second semester.

Granena and Long's (2013) pioneering investigation into maturational restrictions in three linguistic domains among 65 Chinese Spanish learners and a second-language native speaker control group is a significant contribution to the field. Results showed that icons of opportunity close first for L2 phonology, then for lexis and collocation, and morphosyntax. The rate of decrease with increasing age of onset was associated with sensitive periods. The research also revealed significant relationships between linguistic aptitude and pronunciation scores and between language aptitude and lexis and collocation scores in the AO 16-29 group. This adds an intriguing dimension to learners' understanding of second language acquisition, sparking further interest and engagement in this field of study.

Countless studies have delved into the factors that underpin pronunciation challenges among EFL undergraduates. Take Fadillah's (2020) investigation into the pronunciation hurdles faced by Indonesian EFL undergraduates, for instance. The research outcomes highlighted three key factors leading to the shift in English vowels and consonants, factors influencing pronunciation, and the tools and media used to monitor pronunciation. The results highlight the critical importance of these factors in addressing pronunciation difficulties in EFL undergraduates.

Pennington (2021) offers an overview of the factors influencing pronunciation teaching in recent decades. The author highlights the mutability of pronunciation, a term referring to its changeability over time, the role of social and psychological factors, and a shift toward multilingual approaches. Key trends include a focus on intelligibility, communicative and task-based methodologies, context-specific teaching, and advancements in electronic resources. Furthermore, the research emphasizes advanced learners and those with job-related needs, noting that accent serves as a unique background identifier. Community influence is crucial for developing native-like pronunciation, often more significant than age. Factors like stress, intonation, and rhythm impact intelligibility, while motivation and attitude play vital roles in learners' success. The study also called for increasing emphasis on pronunciation development in language instruction.

Khamkhien (2010) found that most Thai students had limited English pronunciation and that gender was the most important factor in test scores. College or years of English study were not important factors. To improve pronunciation, he suggested following explicit instruction, home recording, teacher knowledge, context and expertise, and word stress assignments. Moreover, educational administrators should improve teacher preparation programs. Teachers should also be provided with opportunities to acquire practical skills and knowledge to function effectively as resource persons.

Tabula et al. (2020) identified language interference, phonetic ability, English study experience, and motivation as the most significant factors causing English mispronunciation among Thai students. Pointing to the role of feedback, Saito (2021) stated that corrective feedback (CF) has gained attention for second language pronunciation development, enhancing communication and segmental and suprasegmental accuracy (p. 13). Effectiveness depends on individual variability, and L2 learners need phonetic knowledge, conversational experience, perceptual awareness, and model pronunciation forms.

Agustine et al. (2022) examined young Indonesian learners' segmental changes in mispronounced English words, revealing interference of L1 sounds and pronunciation rules. Results showed native sound substitution for absent phonemes, insertion of native sounds, and negative transfer of L1 spelling pronunciation. Young learners mispronounced words with absent phonemic segments, silent letters, spelling patterns, and multiple borrowings.

Abd Elwahab (2020) studied the pronunciation factors that affect Arab learners' ability to pronounce English letters and phonemes because of the influence of their native language. The linguistic variations between English and Arabic

significantly affect pronunciation, creating challenges in adding or substituting new phonemes. While native accents are less important than syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, they can sometimes obstruct speech flow. Improvement in pronunciation competency can be achieved through awareness, desire, exposure, and practice.

Saito (2015) investigated the role of age of acquiring (AOA) in foreign language speaking proficiency, which yielded significant outcomes. The investigation showed a negative relationship between AOA and segmental and prosodic accomplishment, highlighting the significance of early language acquisition. Notably, no significant age effects were observed in fluency or lexico-grammar achievement, suggesting that these aspects of language learning may be less influenced by age of acquiring (AOA) (p. 4).

Ahmed's (2017) study in Sudan uncovered the challenges EFL Sudanese students face in pronunciation, primarily due to ineffective teaching strategies. He proposed using an appropriate instruction approach to teach pronunciation and suggested creating language labs at secondary schools for practical phonetics tasks.

Alzainaidi and Latif's (2019) study on the difficulties Saudi EFL students face with English pronunciation significantly contributes to the field. The research, which focused on 40 female university students, found that lower-intermediate students made more mistakes in pronouncing problematic consonant sounds and clusters, with higher variance in word-initial and word-medial positions. These findings suggest that consonants in these positions create more pronunciation defaults. The findings underscore a need for further research to understand and address these pronunciation challenges.

Shahzada (2012) posited that correct pronunciation is crucial for language learning and international communication. A study involving 100 government schoolteachers of English in Bannu found that they lacked knowledge of phonetics and phonology, had limited English teaching institutions to teach at, and did not use audiovisual aids. The study recommended proper pronunciation training, the role of institutions like NUML, and motivation to use different language equipment in English classes. Psycholinguistics studies have shown that human communication begins with face-to-face social-emotional connections, which encompass various aspects of people's existence. These factors contribute to communicative behavior and language, leading to individual variation or individual differences (IDs) in language learner and speaker profiles, highlighting the diverse needs of each learner. This linguistic system is influenced by various factors, including emotional, intellectual, and physiological factors (Reiterer, 2018).

G. Critical Analysis and Interpretation of Previous Studies

The above studies collectively highlight various factors affecting pronunciation, including age of acquisition, language interference, motivation, and community support. For instance, Khamkhien (2010) emphasizes gender as a significant factor, while Tabula et al. (2020) identify language interference and motivation as key contributors to mispronunciation among Thai students. This diversity points to the complex interplay of individual learner characteristics and environmental influences.

Al-Jarf (2022) and other studies explore the use of technology in pronunciation training. Some studies show no significant improvement through technological tools, while others demonstrate a moderate enhancement in pronunciation skills. However, all these studies underscore the importance of practice time and engagement with the material, regardless of the use of technology. They suggest that while technology can be beneficial, its effectiveness may depend on how it is integrated into the learning process.

Gagliardi (2016) found that students' confidence in speaking correlates with their perceptions of community support. This finding is not only significant but also crucial, pointing to the emotional and social dimensions of language learning. A supportive classroom environment is not just beneficial, but it is also necessary, as it enhances motivation, leading to better pronunciation outcomes. This underscores the vital role of community support in language learning, making it a key factor for educators and practitioners to consider.

Studies by Augustine et al. (2022) and Abd Elwahab (2020) illustrate the challenges learners face due to the influence of their native languages. The findings suggest that understanding the specific phonetic challenges posed by L1, such as the differences in vowel sounds or intonation patterns, can inform more effective instructional strategies tailored to address these issues.

Several studies support structured pronunciation instruction, emphasizing the necessity of explicit teaching methods. For instance, Khamkhien (2010) and Ahmed (2017) highlight the shortcomings of current teaching strategies, suggesting that improved teacher preparation and practical phonetics tasks could lead to better outcomes.

A recurring theme is the general lack of focus on pronunciation in language curricula and the urgent need for a shift in pedagogical approaches to prioritize pronunciation development. Pennington (2021) and others don't just argue for this shift; they stress its critical importance, especially given pronunciation's role in effective communication. This emphasizes the importance of adapting to new methods and approaches in language education, making the audience feel the need for change.

The above review provides a comprehensive overview of various studies on pronunciation challenges and instructional strategies for learners of English. The findings suggest that improving EFL learners' pronunciation skills requires a multifaceted approach that considers individual learner differences and the influence of community dynamics. Understanding and incorporating these dynamics and effective instructional strategies is crucial. However, the need for further research to explore the nuanced interactions between these factors, particularly in diverse educational contexts, is not just clear but urgent. Addressing teacher training and resource availability gaps is crucial for enhancing pronunciation instruction and fostering excellent language proficiency among learners.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study uses mixed-method approaches consisting of pre- and post-test assessments that are analyzed using SPSS version 26. The qualitative data collection is a virtual interview analyzed through content analysis.

A. Study Questions

The questions that guided this study are of significant importance to the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education and research, with practical implications for educators and researchers:

To what extent does first-year EFL students' pronunciation accuracy across specific sound categories (e.g., vowels, consonants, intonation) change over their first year of study? For instance, do they show more improvement in producing vowel sounds, which are often more challenging for EFL learners, or intonation, which is crucial for conveying meaning in English? Furthermore, how do first-year EFL students perceive their pronunciation strengths and weaknesses, and how do these perceptions align with the objective changes indicated by the pronunciation tests?

B. Hypotheses

H1: First-year EFL students who report higher intrinsic motivation at the beginning of their studies will demonstrate more remarkable pronunciation improvement on post-tests than those with lower intrinsic motivation.

H2: EFL freshmen who perceive specific learning strategies, such as phonetic drills or pronunciation exercises, as more enjoyable and effective will report more remarkable pronunciation improvement than those who find them less beneficial.

C. Participants

Data from two groups of 72 participants (female) aged 18-19 were collected in this study. All were born in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and this was their first year (2025) at the college where they were majoring in English language. Moreover, they were divided into two groups:

1. Experimental Group: This consisted of Saudi EFL learners who received targeted phonetics instruction. They participated in specific lessons designed to improve pronunciation skills, followed by assessments and interviews measuring the growth in their pronunciation and attitudes.
2. Control Group: This group included Saudi EFL learners who did not receive the targeted phonetics instruction during the study period. They engaged in regular language learning activities without focusing on phonetics. This group also underwent pre- and post-testing and interviews to compare their progress and attitude shifts against those of the experimental group.

D. The Data

(a). Quantitative Data

The study used pronunciation pre- and post-tests to measure the 72 participants' pronunciation performance and proficiency level. The study used the same pretest components and procedures in the post-test to ensure a consistent evaluation.

The third tool was semi-structured interviews. The researcher administered pretests at the beginning of the study. The instructor used words from the students' book and maintained this list by adding new terms. A collection of words was compiled when preparing for the pretest, followed by the post-tests, which were administered at the end of the semester. The two tests consisted of the following:

1. Tool 1

A list of pre- and post-test components with their phonetic transcriptions in both British (Br) and American (Am) English. with the following instructions: "The following words are to be read aloud, allowing a pause between words. Pay attention to the pronunciation of the vowels and consonants".

2. Pre- and Post-Test Words List

Table 1 shows the pre- and post-test components used to assess the learners' pronunciation.

TABLE 1
PRE- AND POST-TEST COMPONENTS

English .Br	English .Am	Words in Context
/gɔː.dʒəs/	/gɔr.dʒəs/	The bride looked gorgeous on her wedding day.
/θɔr.ə.li/	/θɜr.oo.li/	I thoroughly enjoyed this week’s English class.
/dɔː.tə/	/dɔː.tər/	My daughter asked if she could have a friend for a playdate.
/'tʃæl.ɪndʒ/	/'tʃæl.ɪndʒ/	I invite all English learners to take my monthly writing challenge.
/vəˈraɪ.ə.ti/	/vəˈraɪ.ə.ti/	It is important to use sentence variety in your TOEFL essays.
/'m.flu.əns/	/'m.flu.əns/	Celebrities influence how young people act and dress.
/wɪs.əl/	/wɪs.əl/	My grandfather taught me how to whistle when I was a child.
/aɪ.lənd/	/aɪ.lənd/	Victoria is located on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada.
/əˈplaɪ.əns/	/əˈplaɪ.əns/	The washing machine is one appliance that many people could not live without.
/'rɪ frɪdʒ.ə.reɪ.tər/	/'rɪ frɪdʒ.ə.reɪ.tər/	Another appliance that is considered a necessity is the refrigerator.
/sɪz.əz/	/sɪz.ərz/	Left-handed people require a special type of scissors.
/kɒf/	/kɒf/	During the flu season, the students are taught to cough in their sleeves.
/preɪz/	/preɪz/	Offering generic praise like “good job” is not enough to motivate a child.
/'saɪ kɒl.ə.dʒɪst/	/'saɪ kɑː.lə.dʒɪst/	A psychologist told me that I needed to learn how to relax.
/dʒen.ju.ɪn/	/dʒen.ju.ɪn/	The collector said our piece was a genuine antique.

3. Testing Segmental and Suprasegmental Features

The two test items are designed to measure both segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. The study tests segmental features, aiming at assessing the pronunciation of individual vowel sounds in words like “gorgeous”, “thoroughly”, and “variety”, and examines the articulation of consonant sounds in words such as “whistle”, “scissors”, and “cough”. For suprasegmental features, the context sentences encourage learners to practice appropriate intonation patterns while reading aloud. Moreover, allowing pauses between words promotes awareness of natural speech rhythm. Overall, the test aims to enhance learners' proficiency in both the precise articulation of sounds and the fluidity of spoken language. Furthermore, it follows the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It is important to teach and test both segmental features as essential components for achieving intelligible and effective oral communication in English (Wang, 2022).

This preparation helps them understand and accurately produce the sounds represented in the IPA transcriptions during assessments. However, if the program does not include explicit instruction on the IPA, students may struggle to interpret the transcriptions effectively during testing. This will be revealed by this study.

(b). Qualitative Data: Virtual Interview Questions

TABLE 2
VIRTUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Themes	Interview Questions
Motivation	1. What are your motives for developing your English pronunciation?
	2. Is it important for you to improve your English pronunciation?
Learning experiences	3. What were the types of pronunciation instruction you got previously?
	4. What were the learning difficulties you faced while learning pronunciation?
Learning Strategies	5. What are the strategies you used to learn English pronunciation?
	6. Have you encountered any difficulties in learning English pronunciation?
	7. How do you use the strategies to solve your difficulties in learning English pronunciation?
Attitudes	8. To what extent are you confident now about your pronunciation?
	9. Do you feel you face challenges in improving your English pronunciation?
	10. Are you ready to make some efforts to improve your English pronunciation?

Table 2 shows the online interview questions that were administered to 36 female EFL undergraduates in their first year to get their reflections about learning standard English pronunciation by responding to the interview's four dimensions.

(c). Study Design and Procedures

1. Procedures for Teaching the Phonetics Course

The researcher followed the instructions provided by Kelly (2005, p. 4), who advises teaching learners about the physiology of sound production, including how speech organs like the tongue, lips, and vocal cords work together to create sounds. Learners may have varying backgrounds in language acquisition that can affect their pronunciation. Moreover, teachers must encourage learners to explore sounds in their native language and English to understand differences, besides emphasizing the crucial role of stress and intonation in English pronunciation, as it can significantly affect comprehension.

The researcher uses examples to show how changing stress can alter meaning and comprehension. This incorporates diverse teaching techniques, such as imitation, repetition, and visual aids, catering to different learning styles. Furthermore, the researcher adapted methods based on the learners' backgrounds and existing language skills and provided exercises that allow learners to practice specific English sounds and sound combinations, especially those not present in their native

languages. They also promoted active listening to native speakers through audio resources and encouraged learners to imitate these models. Next, the teachers highlighted the importance of recognizing and reproducing unfamiliar sounds and fostered an atmosphere where learners feel comfortable experimenting with sounds and making mistakes. They provided constructive feedback to help guide improvement, integrated pronunciation practice into real-life speaking situations to reinforce learning, and finally, encouraged learners to use new sounds in context, enhancing retention and confidence.

2. Testing Procedures

The experimental group began after teaching a phonetics course over 14 weeks, followed by in-class tests using a pre- and post-test sample adapted from highly regarded and reliable sources, the British Council's websites, and online interviews. The pretest, which began in the first week of the 2024/2025 semester, involved recording the pronunciations of 36 first-year EFL students from a vocabulary list. The researcher divided students into six groups, who took six hours to use the phone to record each student's pronunciation. The following steps were used:

- Step 1: To make the participants feel more secure, a list of word repetition exercises was created so they may practice pronouncing the words before the test.
- Step 2: The students were informed that they would be pronouncing a list of words aloud for pronunciation evaluation. This step ensured that the aim was to evaluate students' pronunciation abilities, not to grade them. This technique was adopted to lessen any anxiety they might feel and to make them more receptive to the process.
- Step 3: The students were located in a quiet place for maximum focus. The pretest was conducted individually with each student. This approach was chosen to ensure that each student felt respected and valued, fostering a sense of comfort and ease.

3. The Recording Process Steps

The stage started by distributing the vocabulary list and allowing students time to familiarize themselves with the words. Each student was then asked to pronounce the words aloud while the researcher recorded. After each recording, observations were transferred to a checklist with space for comments. The researcher noted pronunciation issues, including mispronunciations, accent difficulties, or speech impediments.

The researcher's phone was used for recording, allowing each student to pronounce words aloud individually. The recording was paused between words to help students concentrate on their pronunciation. This method ensured a secure testing environment, crucial for maintaining research integrity. After all the words that the students had pronounced were recorded, the process was meticulously replicated with each student, culminating in a post-test after 12 weeks of instruction. Hewings (2004) emphasizes that testing productive skills should be done individually, ideally through recordings for later evaluation.

4. Scoring and Analysis Procedures

The scoring and analysis process began by recording all the students and carefully listening to each recording. The researchers then noted any common pronunciation errors made by the students. Based on these standard errors, the researchers then created a list of words to be the focus of future pronunciation classes throughout the semester. After this comprehensive analysis of all the recordings, we provided individualized feedback to each student. This feedback, which highlighted their strengths and weaknesses and offered specific suggestions for improvement, was a key part of a student-centered and supportive approach.

Finally, the study tabulated the students' scores and analyzed the results with SPSS version 26, a tool renowned for robust data analysis capabilities. This software was instrumental in analyzing the data for the current study, ensuring a high level of scientific rigor. The study calculated the mean and standard deviation of the pre- and post-test scores and used the paired-sample t-test procedure to compare the mean of the two tests. The data from the online interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the emerging themes related to the participants' motivation, experiences, attitudes, and strategies for acquiring English pronunciation.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Quantitative Findings and Discussion

TABLE 3
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S PRE-TEST SCORES OUT OF 20

Ss No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Pretest Scores	0	9	12	11	8	10	8	17	18	18	13	14	17	16	18	15	13	18
Ss. No.	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
Pretest Scores	15	13	18	13	17	10	15	18	18	12	12	15	18	14	18	16	5	14

Table 3 shows Student 1's score of 0 is a notable outlier. This student had no prior knowledge or ability related to the test content. This is important to track throughout the study to see how they responded to the intervention.

TABLE 4
CONTROL GROUP'S PRE-TEST SCORES

Ss. No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Pretest Scores	5	7	10	6	9	8	12	11	7	13	9	10	8	11	6	12	7	9
Ss. No.	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
Pretest Scores	10	8	5	11	7	12	9	6	8	10	11	7	9	12	8	6	10	5

Table 4 shows the control group's pretest scores ranging from 5 to 13, indicating a moderate spread in initial abilities, suggesting a generally similar baseline understanding among participants.

In comparing the experimental and control pretest scores shown in Tables 3 and 4, the experimental group demonstrated greater variability in their pretest scores than the control group. The range of scores is much wider (0-18 vs. 5-13), indicating a more diverse initial level of understanding or ability within the experimental group. The control group's pretest scores are lower than the experimental group's scores.

TABLE 5
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S PRONUNCIATION POST-TEST FINDINGS

Ss No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Post-Test Scores	8	15	20	15	20	14	9	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	19	19
Ss No.	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
Post-Test Scores	20	19	20	16	20	20	20	20	20	19	20	19	20	17	20	19	10	20

Table 5 shows the scores range from 8 to 20, showing a significant overall improvement compared to the pretest scores. It shows the majority of students scored above 15, indicating a strong improvement in pronunciation skills. Many students achieved the maximum score of 20, further highlighting the effectiveness of the intervention. Student 1 scored eight, which, while an improvement, indicates that this student still requires additional support. Student 35 scored 10, suggesting they also need focused intervention. Numerous students scored high, demonstrating excellent pronunciation skills post-intervention.

The post-test scores indicate a significant improvement in student performance compared to the pretest. Most students showed marked progress, with many achieving high scores. The instructional strategies employed between the pretest and post-test were effective, but there are still a couple of students who may require additional support to reach their full potential.

TABLE 6
CONTROL GROUP'S POST-TEST SCORES

Ss No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Post-Test Scores	7	9	10	6	8	9	13	10	8	12	10	9	9	12	7	13	8	11
Ss No.	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
Post-Test Scores	12	9	8	12	9	15	11	5	9	9	12	7	9	14	9	5	11	6

In comparing Table 5 to Table 6, the experimental and control groups' T-scores, the results indicated an observable difference between the two groups' post-test scores. The experimental group showed significant growth and executed higher scores, with an average increase of 4.37 points post-intervention. In contrast, the control group's performance remained stable, indicating minimal progress. This indicated that the phonetics instruction effectively enhanced the pronunciation skills of the experimental group, while the control group did not experience the same level of improvement.

TABLE 7
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST SCORES

Variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Scores	13.94	36	4.06	0.68
T-Scores	18.31	36	3.25	0.54

Table 7 shows the pretest's scores, which indicate a wide range of changes in abilities among first-year EFL students, varying from 0 to 18. This variability underscores the need for targeted pronunciation instruction. Whereas, the post-test results show significant improvement, with many students scoring above 15 and several achieving perfect scores, suggesting the phonetics intervention positively impacted pronunciation skills.

TABLE 8
STATISTICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S PRE AND POS-TEST SCORES

Variable	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sign. (2-tailed)
Pre- and Post-Test Points	4.36	2.44	0.41	10.726	35	0.000*

Table 8 shows significant differences between pretest and post-test scores, with a t-value of 10.726 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a notable improvement in the participants' pronunciation. The quantitative data analysis reveals that first-year EFL students' post-test scores improved their pronunciation skills by an average of 4.37 points after the intervention, with lower standard deviation in post-test scores suggesting more consistent performance.

Moreover, the post-test scores show that many students reached the maximum score of 20, while the pretest scores displayed considerable variability, such as exemplified by Student 35. This points to significant growth, underlining effective pronunciation techniques.

To summarize, the results of comparing the pretest and post-test scores for the experimental group showed that targeted teaching improved their pronunciation skills. There is a significant improvement and reduction in score variability, demonstrating how beneficial the intervention was. The results also indicated great progress. These positive results highlight the possibility for applying and implementing appropriate principles, procedures, and approaches to improve students' pronunciation development, providing reassurance about the efficacy of these measures.

B. Qualitative Findings

(a). Experimental Group's Interview Findings and Discussion

What follows are the results of the interviews that were conducted to obtain the experimental group's insights and perspectives. The discussion highlighted key themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews compared to the control group's interviews to draw a meaningful conclusion and get an idea about the implications, which could guide future actions and decisions.

1. Motivation

The participants stated that correct pronunciation is crucial for securing better job opportunities, studying abroad, and communicating effectively with native speakers. They believe their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drove their efforts to improve.

2. Previous Pronunciation Experiences

Many students acknowledged their challenges with mispronunciation and expressed a strong desire for explicit, systematic instruction on English sounds and suprasegmental features like pitch and intonation. Their unwavering commitment to improving pronunciation, despite the challenges, is truly inspiring.

3. Learning Strategies

The participants cited native language interference and a lack of practice outside of the classroom as barriers to competence. They stated that they urgently needed more knowledge about efficient methods for improving their pronunciation, like self-recording and using materials from native speakers.

4. Attitudes Toward Pronunciation Deficiencies

Students voiced significant concerns about making mistakes and facing negative judgments, which greatly affected their confidence in speaking. This emotional aspect is crucial in their learning journey and should be a key focus in instructional approaches, evoking a sense of empathy in the audience.

To conclude, addressing these factors is vital for fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages continued growth in pronunciation skills. The need for further support is urgent and should be a priority for all stakeholders in language education.

(b). Control Group's Interview Findings and Discussion

The following are the control group's results to compare to the experimental group's results.

1. Motivation

Most of the participants answered Question 1, which asks about the control group's motives for developing their English pronunciation. They want to improve their English pronunciation because they know it plays a big role in clear and effective communication, particularly in academic and professional growth. Moreover, they believe that good pronunciation helps them feel more confident when speaking and reduces the chances of misunderstandings.

2. Learning Experiences

Regarding Question 2 about the types of previous pronunciation instruction they have experienced, many said that they have had very little focused instruction on pronunciation. Most of their learning was centered around vocabulary and grammar, with occasional attention to speaking. Concerning the learning difficulties they faced while learning

pronunciation, most of them were convinced that their journey into pronunciation had been surrounded by struggles with specific sounds and intonation patterns in some sounds when listening to native speakers.

3. *Learning Strategies*

Concerning the strategies they used to learn English pronunciation, they state that they try to mimic native speakers by listening to audio and repeating phrases and also by practicing speaking with classmates. Additionally, they also use language learning apps, focusing on pronunciation; still, most of the time they find it challenging to remember the correct pronunciation of words, especially those with similar sounds. For the question about how they solve their difficulty in learning English pronunciation, they said they listen to recordings and repeat them multiple times, focusing on the sounds that they find difficult, and ask friends with good pronunciation for feedback when they practice speaking.

4. *Attitudes*

When it comes to attitudes and to what extent they are confident in their pronunciation, they stated that they are not confident enough. They want to be comfortable speaking in familiar situations but worry about mispronouncing words. They also feel challenged due to the absence of dedicated phonetics instruction, which hinders significant progress, often leaving them feeling insecure. They revealed that they need to put more effort into improving their pronunciation but need more structured guidance and practice. Only then will they make significant changes in their weak pronunciation.

C. *Comparison of Interview Responses From Both the Experimental and the Control Groups*

Comparing the two groups' interview responses, it appears that a more systematic approach to language learning is needed. The experimental group's significant motivation and affective engagement differ from the control group. The control group are aware of their pronunciation difficulties and are looking forward to improving them, but they lacked the systematic approach and strategies that characterized the experimental group. However, this also presents an opportunity for improvement. Addressing these differences is crucial for creating a more supportive learning environment and improving pronunciation skills across both groups.

D. *Limitations*

Similar backgrounds and learning experiences of the participants may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader range of EFL learners. While pretests, post-tests, and interviews provide valuable insights into pronunciation development, there are good opportunities for enhancement. Combining additional evaluation methods could offer a more comprehensive view. Additionally, interviews may be biased due to participants' desire to present themselves positively, necessitating caution in interpreting the results.

The study effectively tracked the pronunciation growth of first-year EFL students over one semester, laying a solid foundation for future investigations. However, extending this research over a longer duration and population would provide deeper insights into sustained pronunciation improvement. Additionally, the inclusion of a control group alongside the experimental group is crucial for methodological rigor, facilitating comparisons between different pronunciation teaching methods.

E. *Theoretical and Practical Implication*

Based on the study results, the following are the theoretical contributions and practical implications:

1. *Theoretical Contributions*

The study shows that targeted phonetics instruction significantly enhances pronunciation skills in EFL learners, supporting theories of focused training in language acquisition. There is a strong link between motivation and pronunciation progress, highlighting the importance of affective factors in language learning. Qualitative data indicates that mastering pronunciation can lead to better job opportunities and improved communication skills and can enrich understanding of learner attitudes.

2. *Practical Implications*

The study emphasizes the need to incorporate targeted phonetics instruction into EFL curricula to improve pronunciation and fluency. The identified practical strategies can help instructors address common learner challenges and foster a supportive environment. Findings support initiatives that build student confidence through phonetics training, enhancing communication skills and professional prospects. The study highlights the necessity of training and resources for educators to effectively implement phonetics instruction, improving the quality of language education.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the improvement from the mean pretest score of 13.94 to the post-test score of 18.31, which represents an average gain of 4.36 points, indicates that the phonetics course had a significant effect on the experimental group's pronouncing abilities when compared to the control group. The smaller standard deviation in post-test scores demonstrates consistent performance and demonstrates the efficacy of focused pronunciation teaching. Participants' success was evidently largely attributed to their motives for improving their pronunciation, which highlights the necessity of using

curricula that relate language proficiency to practical uses. This encourages teachers to develop more captivating courses. A clear route ahead for EFL programs to close gaps in learners' experiences is shown by the acknowledged demand for systematic training in segmental and suprasegmental elements. Teachers can further improve students' confidence and pronunciation skills by addressing issues like practice chances and creating a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom. The study highlights the necessity of additional phonetic methods and procedures as a crucial element of successful language instruction, as well as the significance of students' objectives and desires in their educational process. Additionally, the researcher suggests looking at particular sound categories to find difficulties and achievements, bolstering a focused intervention that might advance the EFL area. To evaluate generalizability and affecting factors, it suggests conducting the study again in a different EFL setting. Using a variety of techniques, including student feedback, classroom observations, and pronunciation recordings, can improve audience engagement and offer more comprehensive knowledge.

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