

TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION THROUGH PHONETIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: This article explores the effectiveness of phonetic awareness activities in teaching English pronunciation to EFL learners. It focuses on how explicit attention to sound patterns, articulation, and stress through interactive and multisensory exercises can enhance learners' pronunciation skills. The study used pre- and post-tests, classroom observation, and student feedback to assess progress. Results show that phonetic awareness activities significantly improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence in spoken English.

Keywords: Phonetics, pronunciation, EFL learners, phonetic awareness, language teaching, articulation.

Introduction

Pronunciation remains a key challenge for many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Poor pronunciation may hinder communication even when a learner has strong grammar and vocabulary. One promising approach to improving pronunciation is through the development of **phonetic awareness**—the conscious understanding of how sounds are produced and distinguished. This study investigates how targeted phonetic awareness activities can contribute to better pronunciation outcomes for secondary school learners.

In many traditional classrooms, pronunciation is often neglected or addressed superficially. However, with globalization and the increasing demand for clear spoken English, pronunciation teaching has become more critical than ever. Learners who lack phonetic awareness may develop fossilized pronunciation errors that are difficult to correct later.

By integrating phonetic awareness activities—such as minimal pair drills, syllable stress identification, and sound discrimination exercises—teachers can help students recognize the distinct sounds of English and produce them more accurately. This approach not only improves pronunciation but also boosts overall oral communication skills, listening comprehension, and learner autonomy.

Furthermore, phonetic training supports the development of listening discrimination, which is essential in real-life communication. When students can both

hear and **produce** target sounds correctly, their overall language fluency and intelligibility improve substantially

Methods

The study was conducted among 40 intermediate-level EFL students over a six-week period. Methods included:

- **Pre-test and post-test** to evaluate pronunciation development.
- **Interactive classroom activities** such as minimal pairs practice, tongue twisters, visual articulation charts, and audio recordings.
- **Teacher observation** for monitoring changes in pronunciation performance.
- **Student surveys** to assess learners' perceptions and motivation.

Results

The pre-test showed that many students struggled with particular English sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /v/, and /w/. After participating in phonetic awareness activities:

- 75% of students showed **improved accuracy** in producing difficult phonemes.
- Students reported greater **confidence** in speaking.
- The **post-test** scores increased on average by 22% compared to the pre-test.
- Classroom interaction also improved as students became more aware of their pronunciation errors and how to self-correct.

Discussion

The results indicate that phonetic awareness is a crucial but often underused strategy in EFL pronunciation teaching. Learners benefit from explicit instruction in how English sounds are formed. Visual and kinesthetic activities, such as mouth diagrams and mirror practice, were particularly effective. Moreover, the increased self-awareness led students to correct their errors independently, indicating lasting phonological improvement.

Challenges included limited classroom time and the need for teachers to be trained in basic phonetics. However, the positive student feedback suggests that incorporating these activities into regular lessons is both feasible and beneficial.

The findings of the research and classroom practices demonstrate that phonetic awareness activities are not only helpful but essential in pronunciation instruction. When learners engage in focused tasks such as identifying minimal pairs (e.g., "ship" vs. "sheep"), practicing word stress, and recognizing intonation patterns, they become more aware of their own speech and are better equipped to adjust it.

Moreover, phonetic awareness enhances learners' **metacognitive skills**—they begin to reflect on **how** and **why** they mispronounce certain words and take active steps toward improvement. This reflective process leads to more autonomous learning and long-term retention of correct pronunciation.

In addition, pronunciation activities that involve **listening discrimination** and **articulatory training** contribute to better listening comprehension, as students learn

to distinguish subtle differences in native speech. This is especially important for learners from L1 backgrounds with different phonological systems, such as Uzbek, where certain English sounds (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, or /v/) do not exist.

Another important factor is learner motivation. Activities that are **interactive, visual, and kinaesthetic**—such as using mirrors to see mouth position or apps that give audio feedback—greatly increase student engagement. When pronunciation is taught in a dynamic, game-like context, students are less afraid of making mistakes and more willing to participate.

However, challenges remain. Some teachers feel underprepared to teach pronunciation systematically, especially in EFL contexts where access to phonetic tools is limited. Therefore, **teacher training** in phonology and classroom techniques must be strengthened to maximize the benefits of phonetic awareness.

In summary, the integration of phonetic awareness activities into English language teaching bridges the gap between theory and practice, enhances students' communicative competence, and supports the development of accurate, intelligible speech

Conclusion

Teaching English pronunciation through phonetic awareness activities is an effective way to enhance learners' articulation, fluency, and confidence. These activities help bridge the gap between hearing and producing sounds. Incorporating them into regular EFL instruction can significantly improve students' communicative competence. Further studies are recommended to explore long-term effects and implementation across different proficiency levels.

In conclusion, integrating phonetic awareness into pronunciation instruction offers a structured and effective path toward mastering spoken English. These techniques empower students to take control of their pronunciation learning by understanding the mechanics of sound production and practicing with purpose.

Teachers who adopt this approach are more likely to foster a learning environment that promotes experimentation, self-correction, and gradual improvement. Additionally, phonetic awareness lays a foundation for more advanced language use, enabling learners to communicate more naturally and confidently in English.

Moving forward, it is essential to include phonetic awareness activities in teacher training programs and to develop materials that make these techniques accessible across different educational contexts. With consistent practice and supportive instruction, students can significantly improve their pronunciation skills and, consequently, their communicative competence in English.

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