

The Effect of Live Teacher Pronunciation vs. Playback Pronunciation Practice on Pre-Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners' Pronunciation Accuracy

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Abstract: *The present study investigated the effect of teacher live pronunciation on Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy. It tried to determine the extent to which awareness raising along with the efficient amount of practice of pronunciation affects pronunciation ability of Iranian intermediate learners. To answer this question, 60 Iranian intermediate language learners were selected via administration of a PET exam to 300 language learners. Then, they were randomly divided into two groups of 30 participants. Participants in the experimental group were instructed on a certain plan to learn and practice pronunciation with teacher live pronunciation. In this study, the focus was on standard patterns of pronunciation which was presented by teacher live in the class. In the control group no treatment has been done and learners received a normal routine of the semester as they always did. A validated standardized test of pronunciation was administered to both groups, and the results were assessed. The results indicated that the means of the two groups were significantly different. This means that teachers' live pronunciation is an effective way for improving the pronunciation accuracy of the learners, making the lesson enjoyable for and motivating them.*

Key Words: *live teacher's pronunciation, playback pronunciation, accuracy*

1. Introduction

According to Hashemian and Soureshjani (2013), being able to speak English includes a number of skills involving vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and so on. Besides, it can be argued that the most important of such skills is pronunciation. Despite having a good grasp of vocabulary and the grammatical rules of the English language, speakers would be unintelligible if they have a poor pronunciation. Though pronunciation is an aspect of language difficult to acquire, the reality is that in many English language classrooms, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention.

A major difficulty, however, facing almost L2 learners is the achievement of acceptable pronunciation that enables them to be understood by L1 English speakers. In fact, many of these learners master the elements of language such as syntax, morphology, or even semantics to the level of almost native-like competence but often fail to master phonology. Besides, pronunciation is difficult to teach for several reasons. Teachers are often left without clear guidelines. Indeed, there is no well-established systematic way of deciding what to teach, and when and how to do it (Derwing & Foote, 2011). Another challenge is that the guidelines for teacher training and classroom materials are not well-defined. A further problem is that most materials are written only for high-level learners. Researchers and teachers agree that pronunciation instruction is important and efficient in improving intelligibility (Derwing & Foote, 2011).

In the line with the above contentions, this paper examines some features of the live teacher pronunciation vs. playback pronunciation practice on pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy. It is one of the most difficult challenges that Iranian students face, and needs reappraisal of English teachers. In this regard, the present study intends to investigate the following question:

RQ: Is there any statistically significant difference between the effects of live teacher pronunciation practice and playback pronunciation practice on pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy?

2. Literature Review

Good pronunciation brings success to ESL students in society. On the contrary, insufficient proficiency of English pronunciation influences the development of communicative competence that is required for building up the communicative bridge between speakers and listeners. Precisely speaking, great pronunciation competence in English is able to make others understand easily; whereas, English pronunciation inferior to basic level increases the misunderstanding among conversations with others (Jahan, 2011). It is not necessary to speak English like a native speaker, but well enough to be understood (Jesry, 2005). Clearly, the positive effect of good pronunciation in the process of learning English is assured and reinforced.

Lee (2009) has examined the reasons for improving Asian students' low participation in class in Australia through combining both writing and speaking. Various evidences show that the best way to improve speaking skill is to combine both communication (task based teaching and learning) and Grammar Translation Method in teaching OCSs (Chang, 2011; Hall, 2011).

In the meantime, numerous studies have investigated the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching (Derwing & Munro, 2009). At present, it is not the lack of studies but the lack of conclusive results which constitutes a problem. Although the specific focus of previous studies

into the effect of pronunciation teaching varied, many studies suggest that pronunciation instruction can have a positive effect on the quality of pronunciation of adult L2 learners in general and on comprehensibility and intelligibility in particular (see for example Saito & Lyster, 2012; Dłaska & Krekeler, 2013). However, while there is agreement about the benefits of pronunciation instruction, these studies remain inconclusive about the contribution of specific teaching methods.

This research is going to investigate the direct retention of live teacher pronunciation vs. playback pronunciation with EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy. Most of the early pronunciation studies show the significant effect of this factor on pronunciation accuracy. This study examines the effects of live teacher's pronunciation and playback pronunciation on pre-intermediate Iranian EFL Learners' Pronunciation Accuracy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The current study was a quasi-experimental study in which the participants of the study were homogeneously selected and then randomly assigned into two groups of control and experimental in order to investigate the research question of the study. Only the experimental group received treatment, whereas the control group received placebo. In the following, the participants of the study, the materials and the data collection and analysis procedure will be explained.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted with 60 Iranian students who have enrolled an EFL course at Iranian Institute in Rasht, Iran. They were female learners aged 18 to 40. In order to make sure of homogeneity, the participants were selected out of a pool of 200, based on their results in a PET exam, which is a standard exam of Cambridge University. Having calculated the mean and the SD, those with the score of 1 SD above and below the mean were selected to conduct the study. All participants had already passed 10 courses in the institute and none of them had any other experience of studying English. After selection of the participants, they were randomly divided into two classes of equal number.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Proficiency test: in order to make sure of the homogeneity of the participants, they were selected based on their results in a PET exam. As PET is a standardized test, standardization process was not necessary to be done.

3.3.2 Pre-test: an intermediate level pronunciation test was arranged and administered at the beginning of the study to both groups as the pre-test in order to compare their pronunciation scores. The scores were processed through a t-test calculation.

3.3.3 Post-test: in order to make sure of the equivalence of this test with pre-test, the pre-test was re-designed so that the level of difficulty was the same, but the vocabulary items which were used have been changed with other words and was administered to both groups as the post-test.

4. Data Collection Procedure

AS THIS COURSE WAS A GENERAL ENGLISH COURSE, COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING WAS USED IN BOTH CLASSES AND ALL METHODS USED WERE THE SAME EXCEPT FOR FOCUS ON PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE. IN THE CONTROL GROUP THE LEARNERS RECEIVED A NORMAL ROUTINE INSTRUCTION AS THEY ALWAYS DID, WHEREAS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP IN EACH SESSION FOR 20 MINUTES THEY WERE TREATED WITH FOCUSED PRACTICE ON LIVE TEACHER PRONUNCIATION. IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE OF THE APPROPRIACY OF THE MATERIAL BEING USED, THE VOCABULARY ITEMS WERE SELECTED FROM THEIR TEXTBOOK AND SIMILAR TEXTBOOKS AT THE SAME LEVEL SO THAT THE LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY OF THE MATERIAL USED WOULD BE KEPT THE SAME. BY THE END OF THE STUDY, THE STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION ABILITY WAS TESTED AGAIN THROUGH ADMINISTRATION OF A POST-TEST.

THE RESULTS OF THE POST-TEST WERE ANALYZED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION VIA ANOTHER INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST BETWEEN THE SCORES OBTAINED FROM THE EXPERIMENTAL AND THE CONTROL GROUP TO SEE WHETHER THERE EXISTED A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PERFORMANCES OF THE GROUPS.

5. Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed via an independent samples t-test between the scores of the control and experimental groups. The results are discussed below.

6. Results and Discussion

The summary of the descriptive analysis for the data related to the post-test of the experimental and the control groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 1:
Group statistics of the posttest scores of experimental and control group

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Error
Scores	Experimental	30	14.1667	1.59921	.29197	
	Control	30	13.1333	1.56983	.28661	

As it can be seen, the mean score obtained from the experimental group which received an efficient amount of treatment is highly more than the mean of the control group with placebo, the mean score of the experimental group is almost “14” whereas the mean score of the control group is “13”.

Table 2:
The independent sample t-test between the scores of control and experimental group in pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Prescore	Equal variances assumed	.001	.979	-.166	58	.869	-.06667	.40239	-.87213	.73
	Equal variances not assumed			-.166	57.999	.869	-.06667	.40239	-.87213	.73

In Table 2, the two-tailed sig of the test is “0.86” which is much higher than the assumed p value which is “0.05”, so it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference

between the groups. From another point of view one can refer to mean difference which is obtained “0”.

In Table 3, the amount of sig two-tailed is “0.014” which is significantly less than the predetermined amount of p value. Therefore, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference between the groups. From another point of view, the amount of T is “2.5” which is higher than the critical value so the null hypothesis of the study was rejected. It can be concluded that treatment has been effective. The group which received treatment has achieved higher score than the one which has not received the treatment

Table 3:
The independent sample t-test between the scores of control and experimental group in posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper	
scores	Equal variances assumed	.014	.907	2.526	58	.014	1.03333	.40914	.21435	1.85231
	Equal variances not assumed			2.526	57.980	.014	1.03333	.40914	.21435	1.85232

The findings in this study are in line with that of other researchers like Osburne (2003) who examined the effects of pronunciation practice strategies on pronunciation ability and their results showed that the learners who received a considerable amount of practice achieved higher scores on the post-test. Osburne (2003) stated that pronunciation practice increases the accuracy of the learners in uttering words. As a result, the findings of the present study indicated that teacher live pronunciation practice is an effective method in pronunciation ability development. It also enhanced the performance of the EFL learners in general.

Another study conducted by Timmis (2002) indicated that teachers amount of practice on the pronunciation of words has a direct relationship with enhancement of learners' pronunciation. He recommended live teacher pronunciation practice. The use of strategies such as introducing new words with the correct and precise pronunciation can activate the learners' prior knowledge. According to Hahn (2004), in the pronunciation recognition phase, the learners become familiar with some of the sounds in the text and review their experience in relation to those.

The results of the present study are also consistent with the study conducted by Macdonald (2002) who examined the effect of pronunciation practice with Australian learners. He claimed that activities of this kind increase learners' motivation in pronunciation accuracy. The findings of his study indicated that after those activities the learners were highly motivated and enthusiastic to speak. Therefore, they scored significantly higher.

The participants in the experimental group who received enough instruction and practice with live teacher pronunciation were able to produce the words more easily compared to the control group who did not receive treatment. Therefore, this study has shown that the use of this method with pictures can reduce the learners' problems in pronunciation of texts with too many unfamiliar vocabularies which interrupt the learners.

7. Conclusion and pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study revealed that live teacher pronunciation practice can improve EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy significantly. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, teachers can bring about new insight into teaching pronunciation more effectively and move some steps forward to just handing some material to the learners and asking them to do some exercises on their own, leaving them alone with the material, in which learners even do not have a clear idea of what they have to do. On the other hand, in normal classes, learners do not get enough practice on pronunciation of new words and they do not master the pronunciation. By using this method they will be obliged to practice pronunciation a great deal and become more accurate.

The results of this study showed that using this technique in the classroom can help learners to be better learners. Instead of finding a remedy for the so-called pronunciation problems, which is a very common one among Iranian EFL learners, they can prevent the problems to happen by giving learners more awareness of the material and help them to have a better producer of the language.

From another point of view the findings of this research can lead syllabus designers to include more parts dealing with more detailed information on pronunciation of words. There are some course books which this point has been considered in them, but the amount is not sufficient and also teachers are not given clear awareness on the importance of these sections in their guidebooks. This issue can be elaborated in the course books and teachers' training program in order to get better results in the class.

Another important issue is for teachers' trainers while preparing prospective teachers for their career. In training future teachers, they should make them aware how to succeed in leading

their learners to deal with pronunciation problems. In the training of teachers they can be taught to put more time and energy on live teacher pronunciation practice to their students while teaching all other skills and sub skills for instance grammar, to avoid the future problems of inaccurate pronunciation.

This study attempted to investigate the effect teacher live pronunciation on pronunciation accuracy of intermediate EFL learners. The findings of the study revealed that teacher live pronunciation is significantly effective in better pronunciation of learners and their considerably better performance in post-test. The findings also indicated that the trained learners in the experimental group could produce the vocabularies in the post-test better than the control group. This meant that the treatment was effective. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

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