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INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PHONETIC SYMBOLS INSTRUCTIONS ON PRONUNCIATION OF ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Teaching pronunciation is considered as a difficult and challenging task in an ESL classroom. Students find it really difficult to pronounce words of English properly; this is because not much intention is paid to this aspect of language. Students try to pronounce the words as they read them. But pronunciation is not about the words, it is about the sounds. In this study students are taught pronunciation with the help of phonetic symbols. In phonetic transcription our whole focus is on sounds rather than words. The participants for this study were randomly selected from two Govt. Schools of Sialkot and their numbers was 40. The methodology used for the study was experimental technique. 20 students were included in control group (the group that didn't receive any treatment) and 20 students were in experimental group (the group that received a treatment). A pre and post test was conducted to assess the improvement in their performance in pronunciation in ESL classroom. SPSS software was used for the analysis of data. Results showed a clear difference in the performance of students in pre and posttests, which proved that Phonetic symbols are highly effective in teaching pronunciation to students in ESL classroom.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation plays a vital role when it comes to second language learning. According to(Tsojon and Aji 2014)"Pronunciation is a vital aspect of language learning as poor pronunciation distorts or mars the communication process. Every speaker of a language requires good pronunciation skills. In other words, good speaking requires good pronunciation especially when one is communicating with people outside one's immediate linguistic environment or speech community"(Tsojon and Aji 2014)

For a variety of reasons, teaching pronunciation is challenging. Teachers are frequently left in the dark about how to teach pronunciation and are confronted with conflicting methods. There is currently no agreed-upon method for choosing what to teach, when to teach it, as well as how to teach it. Another issue is the absence of quick observable benefits, or carry-over: students who practice a specific pronunciation aspect in class typically do well, but the practice impact fades the moment they focus on the message content. As a result of these challenges, teaching pronunciation is frequently secondary, and teachers are hesitant to do so.(Darcy, Ewert et al. 2012)

Pronunciation can be improved by teaching phonetic transcription. Phonetic transcription is the study of sounds which do not focus on the spelling of a word rather it focuses on sound of the word. According toAl- Zayed (2017) the science of phonetics is concerned with explaining the sounds of speech and the patterns they produce. Among its many practical uses, the one that most readers would think of first is teaching and mastering the pronunciation of a second language(Al-Zayed 2017)

1.1. Significance of the study

As non-native speakers of the language students do commit a lot of pronunciation mistakes while communicating in English language. This can lead to misunderstanding between speaker and listener because poor pronunciation leads to poor communication. This study is intended to find out the effects of phonetic symbols to improve the pronunciation of students.

1.2. Objectives of the study

The study aims to

- Find out the significance of phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching at the elementary level
- Find out whether phonetic symbols instructions create a significant difference in performance of students in post test

1.3. Statement of the problem

In ESL classrooms students do face a lot of problems one of which is pronunciation problem. Many techniques are used to teach pronunciation in ESL\EFL classroom. The most prominent technique among these is teaching pronunciation with the help of phonetic symbols. This research aims to know the impact of phonetic symbols on student's proficiency of pronunciation learning.

1.4. Research questions

- Is there any impact of using phonetic symbols on ESL students' performance in pronunciation ability at elementary level?

- Is there any observable difference in group's performance in the post test because of use of phonetic transcription?

2. Literature review

The phenomenon known as a foreign accent is a complicated element of language that impacts speakers and listeners in terms of perception and production, as well as social interaction. Although the influence of second language (L2) accented speech on communication has long been a matter of debate and conjecture, it has only been in the last several decades that a systematic attempt to examine the impact of L2 accented speech on communication has been made. . Even now, there has been far less study on L2 pronunciation than on other domains like grammar and vocabulary, and teaching techniques and materials are still largely affected by intuitive common sense. While no one can deny the usefulness of intuition related to practical experience, in language teaching, relying solely on anecdotal data and personal judgments has major limitations. These resources, in particular, are unable to answer many of the difficult problems that classroom instructors encounter, nor do they always result in genuine, useful classroom activities. As a result, there is a strong need for scientific, repeatable research to inform pronunciation training.(Derwing and Munro 2005).

Researchers have given less heed to foreign language students' views of their requirements or what they feel are the best strategies to overcome communication issues that they ascribe to their own outputs when it comes to pronunciation.(Derwing and Rossiter 2002)

Because of a lack of needed phonetic and phonological expertise, pronunciation is often overlooked by educators when teaching English as a second language. Pronunciation for English as an International Language provides a link between phonetics, phonology, and pronunciation, offering the reader a research-based method to teaching the English language(Low 2014)

In general, ESL/EFL learners' original languages affect their English pronunciations in some way, and these sorts of unusual pronunciations result in unique forms of English, such as Chinese English, Thai English, Filipino English, Indian English, Burmese English, Lao English, and so on. It doesn't matter what kind of English we speak as long as we can communicate clearly. If you reside in a place where English is not traditionally used and no one speaks it for general communication, the English pronunciation you employ may reflect the differences between your first language and English. The English accent that you are used within your own country may not be the same in another region. As language training has shifted to communicative competency, more and more instructors are emphasizing the importance of pronunciation instruction, stating that "pronunciation should be taught in all second language classrooms using a range of exercises."(Wei and Zhou 2002)

In everyday life, language is a medium of communication. The everyday user does not value speaking skills as highly as linguists do. They just take things for granted, believing that speaking and comprehending are as natural as breathing. Many English students prefer learning better "DUMB ENGLISH" rather than studying English pronunciation, which leads to learners being surprised when they encounter problems in oral communication. The most significant element, among many others, is phonetics, which, to a considerable part, undermines the learner's confidence in both listening and speaking. The ability to converse English embodies accurate pronunciation and intonation and has a direct impact on acceptable conversational communication.(Zhang and Yin 2009).

Derwing and Rossiter(2002) investigate the perspectives of 100 adult (ESL) learners from various first non - English speaking backgrounds on their pronunciation difficulties and the techniques they use when communication breaks down. Although the great majority of students' pronunciation issues were segmental, paraphrasing, self-repetition, writing/spelling, and loudness modification were the most often employed techniques when they were not understood. Their replies were broken down into first language groups and experience levels. Students were also questioned if their accents were influenced by their surroundings and if they thought they had any control on their pronunciation. Those who said they could manage their accents also described how they achieved it. The findings are presented in relation to pronunciation training and commercially accessible materials that are most commonly utilized in ESL programs throughout Canada. Respondents were asked which of all the methods they utilized when faced with a communication breakdown they used the most. Multiple responses were recorded in certain situations. More than 50 % of respondents (56%) chose paraphrase as their preferred technique, followed by self-repetition (28%), writing/spelling (7%), volume adjustment (5%), speaking clearly (3%), and lowering speech pace (3%)(Derwing and Rossiter 2002)

3. Methodology

This research was based on experimental technique. Two groups of participants were included in this study. One was the no treatment or traditional group that was receiving no treatment and was been given instructions in a traditional way and the other group was the experimental group that was given phonemic instructions. For this purpose participants were given phonetic symbols instructions for a certain period of time to make them aware of phonemic symbols and their role in pronunciation.

3.1. Population and sampling

This study was conducted in government elementary schools of tehsil Sialkot. Forty female students(20 in each group) were selected randomly as sample for this research study from two schools of Sialkot. According to the information that we obtained from school data all the participants spoke local or national language Urdu at their home and they had no interaction with native speakers of English language nor had any of participant travelled in any English-speaking country. Their ages ranged from 9 to 13 years.

3.2. Instrumentation

A pre and posttest was used as research tools for collecting data from participants. The purpose of the pretest was to judge the pronunciation ability of students based on their previous knowledge and to find out that in which areas of pronunciation they lagged behind. On the other hand,posttest aimed to find out that how well and effective was the treatment given to the participants of controlled group and how this treatment affected and improved their pronunciation ability. The test used for the study was adapted from research of (Saarelainen 2016)and it included MCQs type questions, a list of phonemic symbols and participants had to choose the right word from the given list of words, and a read aloud paragraph.

3.3. Data collection and analysis procedure

The participants were instructed to fill the written part of the test and read aloud the given paragraph while their audio was being recorded. Their performance in written part was judged by awarding them marks and in read aloud test their performance was judged using a checklist having different components of pronunciation as word stress, intonation, sounds,

vocal features, chunking and pausing. After counting their obtained scores in pre and post tests, the data was analyzed using SPSS software.

3.4. Ethical consideration

The participants of the study were told about the test and they were guaranteed that their names and identities would be kept secret. All the participants participated voluntarily for the study by their own consent. They were assured that the data collected from them is only for research purpose and they could drop anytime during research if they feel uncomfortable or insecure.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

PRE-TEST OF BOTH GROUPS(CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL)

ST.ID	T.M	PRE-TEST	Mean	Std. Deviation	ST. ID	T.M	PRE-TEST	Mean	Std. Deviation
A1	20	2	0.66	12.72	B1	20	1	0.33	13.43
A2	20	1	0.33	13.43	B2	20	1	0.33	13.43
A3	20	1	0.33	13.43	B3	20	0	0	14.14
A4	20	1	0.33	13.43	B4	20	2	0.66	12.72
A5	20	2	0.66	12.72	B5	20	2	0.66	12.72
A6	20	1	0.33	13.43	B6	20	0	0	14.14
A7	20	0	0	14.14	B7	20	1	0.33	13.43
A8	20	1	0.33	13.43	B8	20	2	0.66	12.72
A9	20	0	0	14.14	B9	20	0	0	14.14
A10	20	0	0	14.14	B10	20	1	0.33	13.43
A11	20	2	0.66	12.72	B11	20	1	0.33	13.43
A12	20	1	0.33	13.43	B12	20	1	0.33	13.43
A13	20	1	0.33	13.43	B13	20	2	0.66	12.72
A14	20	0	0	14.14	B14	20	1	0.33	13.43
A15	20	2	0.66	12.72	B15	20	0	0	14.14
A16	20	0	0	14.14	B16	20	0	0	14.14
A17	20	1	0.33	13.43	B17	20	2	0.66	12.72
A18	20	1	0.33	13.43	B18	20	1	0.33	13.43
A19	20	2	0.66	12.72	B19	20	1	0.33	13.43
A20	20	0	0	14.14	B20	20	1	0.33	13.43

Table-1Independent Sample TTest of Pre Tests (Control & Experimental Group)

Test	N	M	SD	d	t	Effect Size
CG Pre-Test	20	.9500	.7591	19	-.213	0.001
EG Pre Test	20	1.0000	.72548			

An independent pre test for control and experimental group is given in table 1. We can see that total number of students who participated in the study are 20 from both groups. The

mean value for the pre test of control group is .9500 and for the pre test of experimental group is 1.0000. The standard deviation value for pre test of control group is .7591 and for pre test of experimental group is .7254 and difference is 19. Effect Size is 0.001 which is less than 0.005, which indicates that there is the clear difference in Mean score of both groups that's why students improvement is good.

ST.ID	TM	Obtained	Mean	Std. Deviation	ST.ID	TM	Obtained	Mean	Std. Deviation
A1	20	1	0.33	13.43	B1	20	8	2.66	8.48
A2	20	2	0.66	12.72	B2	20	9	3	7.77
A3	20	0	0	14.14	B3	20	8	2.66	8.48
A4	20	1	0.33	13.43	B4	20	8	2.66	8.48
A5	20	1	0.33	13.43	B5	20	7	2.33	7.44
A6	20	2	0.66	13.43	B6	20	9	3	8.48
A7	20	0	0	12.72	B7	20	8	2.66	8.48
A8	20	1	0.33	14.14	B8	20	10	3.33	9.19
A9	20	2	0.66	13.43	B9	20	9	3	7.77
A10	20	1	0.33	12.72	B10	20	8	2.66	8.48
A11	20	1	0.33	13.43	B11	20	7	2.33	9.19
A12	20	1	0.33	13.43	B12	20	8	2.66	8.48
A13	20	2	0.66	13.43	B13	20	8	2.66	8.48
A14	20	1	0.33	12.72	B14	20	10	3.33	7.07
A15	20	2	0.66	13.43	B15	20	8	2.66	8.48
A16	20	1	0.33	12.72	B16	20	9	3	7.77
A17	20	2	0.66	13.43	B17	20	8	2.66	8.48
A18	20	1	0.33	12.72	B18	20	8	2.66	8.48
A19	20	2	0.66	13.43	B19	20	7	2.33	9.19
A20	20	1	0.33	12.72	B20	20	8	2.66	8.48

Table-2:-Independent Sample T.Test of Post Tests (Control & Experimental Group)

Test	N	M	SD	d	t	Effect Size
CG Post Test	20	1.2500	.6386	19	-26.085	0.94
EG Post Test	20	8.400	1.0463			

An independent post test for control and experimental group is given in table 2. We can see that total number of students who participated in the study is 20 from both groups. The mean value for the post test of control group is 1.2500 and for the post test of experimental group is 8.400. The standard deviation value for post test of control group is .6386 and for post test of experimental group is 1.0463 and difference is 19. Effect Size is 0.94, which indicates that there is the clear difference in Mean score of both groups that's why students improvement is very good.

PRE & POST TEST OF CONTROL GROUP

ST.ID	TM	PRE-TEST	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	ST.ID	TM	POST TEST	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION

A1	20	2	0.66	12.72	B1	20	8	2.66	8.48
A2	20	1	0.33	13.43	B2	20	9	3	7.77
A3	20	1	0.33	13.43	B3	20	8	2.66	8.48
A4	20	1	0.33	13.43	B4	20	8	2.66	8.48
A5	20	2	0.66	12.72	B5	20	7	2.33	7.44
A6	20	1	0.33	13.43	B6	20	9	3	8.48
A7	20	0	0	14.14	B7	20	8	2.66	8.48
A8	20	1	0.33	13.43	B8	20	10	3.33	9.19
A9	20	0	0	14.14	B9	20	9	3	7.77
A10	20	0	0	14.14	B10	20	8	2.66	8.48
A11	20	2	0.66	12.72	B11	20	7	2.33	9.19
A12	20	1	0.33	13.43	B12	20	8	2.66	8.48
A13	20	1	0.33	13.43	B13	20	8	2.66	8.48
A14	20	0	0	14.14	B14	20	10	3.33	7.07
A15	20	2	0.66	12.72	B15	20	8	2.66	8.48
A16	20	0	0	14.14	B16	20	9	3	7.77
A17	20	1	0.33	13.43	B17	20	8	2.66	8.48
A18	20	1	0.33	13.43	B18	20	8	2.66	8.48
A19	20	2	0.66	12.72	B19	20	7	2.33	9.19
A20	20	0	0	14.14	B20	20	8	2.66	8.48

Table-3Paired Sample TTest of Pre & Post Tests (Control Group)

Test	N	M	SD	d	t	Effect Size
Pre Test	20	.9500	.75195	19	-1.552	0.11
Post Test	20	1.2500	.63817			

A paired pre test for control group is given in table 3. We can see that total number of students who participated in the study is 20 in this group. The mean value for the pre test of pre test is ..9500 and for the post test is 1.2500. The standard deviation value for pre test of control group is .7519 and for post test of experimental group is .6381 and difference is 19. Effect Size is 0.11, which indicates that there is the clear difference in Mean score of both groups that's why students improvement is good.

PRE & POST TEST OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

ST.ID	TM	PRE TEST	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	ST.ID	TM	POST TEST	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
B1	20	1	0.33	13.43	B1	20	8	2.66	8.48
B2	20	1	0.33	13.43	B2	20	9	3	7.77
B3	20	0	0	14.14	B3	20	8	2.66	8.48
B4	20	2	0.66	12.72	B4	20	8	2.66	8.48
B5	20	2	0.66	12.72	B5	20	7	2.33	7.44
B6	20	0	0	14.14	B6	20	9	3	8.48
B7	20	1	0.33	13.43	B7	20	8	2.66	8.48
B8	20	2	0.66	12.72	B8	20	10	3.33	9.19

B9	20	0	0	14.14	B9	20	9	3	7.77
B10	20	1	0.33	13.43	B10	20	8	2.66	8.48
B11	20	1	0.33	13.43	B11	20	7	2.33	9.19
B12	20	1	0.33	13.43	B12	20	8	2.66	8.48
B13	20	2	0.66	12.72	B13	20	8	2.66	8.48
B14	20	1	0.33	13.43	B14	20	10	3.33	7.07
B15	20	0	0	14.14	B15	20	8	2.66	8.48
B16	20	0	0	14.14	B16	20	9	3	7.77
B17	20	2	0.66	12.72	B17	20	8	2.66	8.48
B18	20	1	0.33	13.43	B18	20	8	2.66	8.48
B19	20	1	0.33	13.43	B19	20	7	2.33	9.19
B20	20	1	0.33	13.43	B20	20	8	2.66	8.48

Table-4Paired Sample TTest of Pre & Post Tests (Experimental Group)

Test	N	M	SD	d	t	Effect Size
Pre Test	20	1.050	.6863	19	-27.80	0.97
Post Test	20	8.400	1.046			

A pairedpre test for experimental group is given in table 4. We can see that total number of students who participated in the study is 20 in this group. The mean value for the pre test is 1.050 and for the post test is 8.400. The standard deviation value for pre testis .6863 and for post test is 1.046 and difference is 19. Effect Size is 0.97, which indicates that there is the clear difference in Mean score of both groups that's why students improvement is good.

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted to find out that how pronunciation of students can be improved by providing those instructions of phonetic symbols, to what extent phonetic transcription can help in making their pronunciation better in ESL at elementary level. The researcher collected data to check the effectiveness of phonetic transcription on students' pronunciation.

- The findings of the study show that students' pronunciation can be improved by the used technique.
- It has been observed that teaching pronunciation with the help of phonetic symbols proved to be very effective and has a remarkable influence on students' learning.
- Phonetic transcription helps students in pronunciation learning as there is much focus on the sounds rather than words.
- There is a clear difference in the pre test and post test result of students of experimental group which shows that students learn better when they are exposed to sounds rather than words.
- Results of pre and post tests of experimental groups show that there was not a significant difference in their performance that is because they were not given any kind of treatment/phonetic instructions like experimental group.

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5.1. Recommendations

By conducting the present research and after having the final results the researcher recommends that

- Teachers should use phonetic transcription in ESL classrooms to teach pronunciation to students.
- A lot of work should be done inside the EFL classroom.
- Teachers should focus on teaching pronunciation in the same way as they do on the other aspects of language.

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