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RESEARCH PAPER

English Pronunciation Errors Committed by the IELTS Students of Gujranwala

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to search out the pronunciation errors committed by IELTS students of the New England Academy, Gujranwala, the reasons behind the incorrect pronunciation and to find out the remedial measures to improve the pronunciation of IELTS students. The sample of twenty students and two teachers was selected randomly. The students were taken an oral punctuation test and the different questionnaires were given to the teachers and the students as well. To carry out this particular study the descriptive method was used. Oral punctuation tests and close-ended questionnaires were used as data collection tools. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software was used to analyze the data. It was concluded that phonemes that are in a mismatch with consonant cluster and word orthography were mispronounced by the IELTS students. The pronunciation errors of vowel sounds were also noted. Mother tongue interference of the IELTS students and limited use of the English language was found the causes behind the incorrect pronunciation. The study recommends that the teachers should focus on pronunciation by using suitable material and the use of the English language in the class can also help to improve the pronunciation of IELTS students.

Introduction

It is a big challenge for IELS students to learn the correct pronunciation of the English language. Speaking is a necessary skill to interact with the natives of the English language so it is a big task to learn this skill as it is a crucial skill to learn. To learn a language in the speaking aspect, it is necessary to know the sound system of that particular knowledge. It is necessary to know, how that particular language is organized. How do the units of meaning work? How the sentence is organized? It is also necessary to know the grammar of that particular language that which words can be put together and which cannot (Jorda, 2002). After getting this kind of knowledge, one can try to speak that language but even there will be a problem during the pronunciation of the different words. Speaking is a spontaneous process in which we have a very short time to think and correct. According to Jorda, speaking has much importance to learning a language. When we speak that particular language then we learn.

English has become a lingua franca. It is the single language that can be understood in the whole world. It is the need of everyone to learn and think in this language, especially those who want to go abroad for higher studies or business perspectives. He/she has to speak the English language to communicate with the natives of the foreign country. There is

a deep relationship between speaking and pronouncing a language. No one can speak without pronouncing words (Al Yaqoobi, Ali & Sulan, 2016). Pronunciation is an essential skill to learn a language. With the help of pronunciation, we communicate each other. According to Derwing and Rossiter (2002), most of the learners of English as a second language feel difficulty in learning pronunciation. If there is a problem in communication, definitely that will be due to the lack of pronunciation (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002).

To achieve success in the oral discourse pronunciation has a vital role. One should pay complete attention to pronunciation as it is the only way to convey our message in any oral discourse. If the pronunciation is incorrect or something hidden that leads to misunderstanding. Pronunciation is critically important as usually it is noticed when someone speaks, everyone notices his/her language proficiency. There is no doubt that it is the sub-skill of any language but its teaching is always neglected in all the language teachings. It is a need to teach English pronunciation to be proficient in English speaking skills.

There is a need to emphasize that the learners should be proficient in English pronunciation and errorless. According to Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005), it is not important that someone has a good command of general knowledge of a foreign language if he/she can't pronounce it properly. Even we can't convey our knowledge in a language in which we are poor in the pronunciation of that particular language. Its influence can be negative as well if we are talking about a language and we even can't speak that language properly. To achieve reasonable intelligibility, it is necessary to be appropriate in the speech and to be fluent in that language. To be proficient in a language makes us confident in speech. One's self-esteem can also be affected as it helps to show a side of recognition. So, teaching pronunciation to IELTS students has much importance for effective teaching.

There is a difference between the sound system of Urdu and the English language in many aspects. As consonant sounds of English are different in numbers from the other languages' consonant sounds. Pronunciation stands an obstacle in interaction so it is very important to investigate the pronunciation errors of IELTS students. The meaning of a word or expression can be changed because of incorrect pronunciation. Observing the IELTS students at New England Academy, Gujranwala committing different errors of pronunciation during the learning session, it is to be noticed that those errors affect their communication and fluency at a time. Based on that observation, it was decided to explore their pronunciation errors. To discover the factors behind such types of errors was very necessary to be able the pronunciation of the students better. The English language has become a lingua franca and to interact at an international level it is a need to learn English language speaking skills. In Pakistan, Urdu / Punjabi language is the mother tongue and our organs of speech are used for Urdu / Punjabi language but they are not used to the English language. So, there are some sounds of English, which are difficult to pronounce by the Pakistani IELTS students. In this regard, the researcher wants to know those sounds which are difficult to pronounce by IELTS students and to conduct this research to know the tips and tricks by which they can improve their English pronunciation. It is very necessary to be fluent in English speaking as all the IELTS students go abroad for study purposes. If they know how to pronounce, they can easily understand the language of their instructors.

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the related literature about phonetics, phonology, the errors committed by IELTS students/EFL learners, the problems while pronouncing different consonants of English and the solutions as well. It also discusses the effects of the mother tongue on second language learning. It also reviews the sound system of the English language.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is considered very important for any language learner as it influences the performance and the competence of an individual. According to Longman dictionary, "pronunciation is a way to pronounce a particular word or a language". So, pronunciation is an integral part of communication and has importance in any language learning for an individual. One can't compete just with the help of good grammar and vocabulary if one can't understand the correct pronunciation. On the other hand, one who has a good command of pronunciation can be understood even he commits errors in other areas. If one has a good command of grammar and vocabulary and commits errors in pronunciation fails to communicate. Elder (2004) and Khalifa (2020) say that the students should know their errors of pronunciations and there is a need to pay attention to eradicate them especially when they are going to compare with the natives.

Phonology

Phonology is the study of patterns of sounds. Different writers define phonology differently but the concept of all the definitions is the same. According to Kenstowicz (2014), phonology is the study of sound patterns and the selection of patterns of a language. Yule defines it as it is the system and pattern of speech sounds in a language. Instead of actual physical articulation of speech the relation between abstract and mental aspects of sounds in a language (Yule, 2016).

Crystal (2008) and Visonil and Marlina (2020) say that phonology is the set of rules which show the types of phonetic relationship when it is written. It discusses the occurrences of the sounds in a phonological environment. Like as occurrence of interdental sound /ɵ/ after dentalized sound /l/ *stealth, wealth, health*. It is also observed that a dark /l/ when it is followed by a vowel sound and it is final or initial sound like the sound in the *bill, till, mill,* etc. Therefore, in phonology, a learner learns how to put together different sounds or sound patterns.

Phonetics

Phonetics is the study of sounds. Mahon (2002, p. 27) says that it tells the way to describe and analyze the range of human sound in their languages. It is the branch of linguistics and studies the production of speech sounds. There are three main types of phonetics a). articulatory phonetics studies the production of sound b). auditory phonetics discusses the perception and receiving of sounds and c). acoustic phonetics deals with the waves of sounds. According to articulatory phonetics, sounds are classified into three main categories as consonants, vowels and semi-consonants semi vowels.

Difficulty with the Sounds

There are problems in the pronunciation of the English language because of the complexity of the vowel sound system. IELTS students seem confused due to the inconsistency of pronunciation. An English letter has a different sound if there is a different consonant that follows that. Like in *attend* and *particular*, there are different sounds of "a". Students commit errors while pronouncing phonemes "v" and "w". The students can't differ in these sounds. Every sound has a value during communication as we pronounce every phoneme correctly then our communication can be done properly. Phonemic pronunciation plays important role in oral proficiency.

Mother Tongue Effect

The interference of the mother tongue impacts foreign language learning. Every foreign or second language learner commits an error while learning a second or foreign language because of the difference between L1 and L2 but the cause of all errors is not this difference. According to Ellis (1997) and Hojati (2012), mistakes can be committed because of the gaps in the language learner's knowledge. Linguistics enlists two different types of transfer of the first language to the second language. One is that in which everything is shared smoothly from L1 to L2. In this kind, L1 plays a positive role in second language acquisition it is called positive transfer. The second is negative transfer, in which the difference between the first and the second language causes difficulties in the second or foreign language learning process. $/^p/$, $/^b/$ are two different phonemes and can be distinguished by a native (Michael Swan, 2001).

In Pakistan, most of the people live in the province of Punjab and their mother language is Punjabi. It is spoken out of Pakistan as well. As it is spoken in the east Punjab of India, there it is a language of the state. It is spoken in Diaspora, Britain, North America, East Africa and Australia as well. There are no exact figures found in the number of Punjabi speakers, either as a second or first language. The dialect is different for different Punjabi speakers who live at a distance. Same as the Urdu language, it is also spoken out of Pakistan and its dialect also differed if two speakers live in a distance.

Much research has been conducted on the errors of production of speech sounds of English and is being conducted in the whole world, but in our area particularly here in Gujranwala, no one worked on it. Teachers just teach the students four skills and they don't pay attention to the pronunciation so the errors could not be found before this. The researcher tries to explore the reasons behind the wrong pronunciation and also gives remedial measures to eradicate the errors of English pronunciation. The researcher tries to set a trend in our area of Gujranwala to teach the students of IELTS the English pronunciation in a correct way and to make them fluent in English proficiency.

Material and Methods

Type of Research

The research was quantitative descriptive. The pure research design was used to conduct the research. The researcher tried to get different results from the students and the teachers of the IELTS class at New England Academy, Gujranwala. Data collection is a vital part of the research, for which different means were used. The given below methods were used to collect the data.

Data Collection Instruments

The given below instruments were utilized to get the data:

Close-Ended Questionnaires

Two close-ended questionnaires having 10 items were made by the researcher. A questionnaire was given to the teachers to collect data to construct the reasons and the possible solutions for the errors committed by IELTS students. The 2nd questionnaire was given to the students to detect the types of errors committed by the students. The data collected through the close-ended questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation).

Oral Pronunciation Test

An oral pronunciation test was also made by the researcher to test the pronunciation errors committed by IELTS students. It was designed to check the production of certain words that reflect oral competencies. The criteria of the test were the errors made by the IELTS students during their class which was observed by the researcher himself. The oral pronunciation test was taken by the students only. The following areas of the oral pronunciation test were targeted:

Sound Recognition (5 words)

Production of inflectional morphemes past e-d and plural s. (5 words)

Initial and final clusters (5 words)

The participants were asked to pronounce the given words and their voice was recorded by the researcher. The scoring of the utterance was according to the correct pronunciation. The correct utterance was given 1 point and the wrong pronunciation was given 0 points.

Population and Sampling

All the students of IELTS classes at Gujranwala were the population of this study. But the sample was selected from the New England Academy by using the random sampling method for the proposed research. Ten students and two teachers from the IELTS class were selected as a sample and as the participants of this research. Mixed ability students were selected through random selection.

Students of the IELTS class were selected as:

Gender: Both Male and Female students

Age: 18 to 30 years

Level: IELTS (English language learning course)

The teachers of the IELTS class were selected as:

Gender: Both Male and Female

Age: 27 to 40 years

Delimitations of the Study

The students were selected from a private institute of Gujranwala

All the students were aged between 18-30 years

All the teachers were aged between 27-40 years

No gender restriction was applied.

Research Plan

The following research process was followed to conduct this research:

The researcher observed the IELTS students first and found the pronunciation errors then the researcher talked to their teachers to explore more errors. The teachers told the researcher that those errors are due to different mother tongues and due to our articulatory organs as they have trained for Urdu or Punjabi language, not for all the English phonemes. Then the researcher collected different words based on the observation and put them into the sentences. By using those sentences, the researcher conducted an oral punctuation test of the students. The students were asked to speak the given sentences and the researcher recorded those speeches of 10 students one by one. The recorded pronunciation of IELTS students was compared with the actual pronunciation of those particular words by using British Council Pronunciation through Google. The correct pronunciation was given 1 point and the incorrect pronunciation was given 0 points. The mean of the data was taken with the help of SPSS software.

Based on the data collected by oral pronunciation test, the researcher made two close-ended questionnaires to collect the data to know the reasons behind the incorrect pronunciation of the IELTS students. One questionnaire was given to the teachers and the other one was given to the students. The questionnaire given to the students was about to collect the data regarding the problems behind incorrect pronunciation. The questionnaire given to the teachers was to know the remedial measures to eradicate the pronunciation errors of IELTS students. This data was also analyzed with the help of SPSS software.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The first question of this research was "*what are the English pronunciation errors committed by the IELTS students of Gujranwala?*". To find out the answer to this question an oral pronunciation was conducted to check the pronunciation errors committed by the IELTS students of the New England Academy, Gujranwala. Fifteen sentences were given to the students to pronounce and their voices were recorded by the researcher. After recording their pronunciation of particular words was compared with the actual pronunciation. The correct pronunciation was given 01 point and the wrong pronunciation was given 0 points. The results of oral pronunciation tests are given below.

Results and Discussion

Results of Oral Pronunciation Tests

Given below table-i shows the results of the sound recognition test. 30% of students pronounced sounds correctly and 70% of students pronounced sounds incorrectly. According to the given below table, the students were given five words to pronounce and more than 50% of participants pronounced the words incorrect.

Table 1
Results of Oral Pronunciation Test (Part-I) Sound Recognition

Oral Test (Part-I)	Measure		Pizza		Pronunciation		Thought		Wednesday	
	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
Frequency	3	7	2	8	0	10	6	4	4	6
Percentage	30%	70%	20%	80%	0%	100%	60%	40%	40%	60%
Mean of True	30%									
Mean of False	70%									

Given below table-ii shows the results of the oral pronunciation test in which they were given five words having the addition of s/es and d/ed. More than 50% of students pronounced the words correctly. As given in table-ii 58% of students pronounced correct and 42% pronounced incorrect. The word "Goes" was pronounced correct by 90% of participants and just 10% of participants pronounce that word wrong. Same as the word "Pleasures" was pronounced correct by 40% and 60% pronounced that word incorrect. The word "Inquired" was mispronounced by 70% of participants. So, the IELTS students have trouble in the correct pronunciation of the word ending on d/ed. More than 50% of participants pronounce these words correctly.

Table 2
Results of Oral Pronunciation Test (Part-II) Adding s/es, d/ed

Oral Test (Part-II)	Goes		Pleasures		Weeps		Adopted		Inquired	
	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
Frequency	9	1	4	6	9	1	4	6	3	7
Percentage	90%	10%	40%	60%	90%	10%	40%	60%	30%	70%
Mean of True	58%									
Mean of False	42%									

Given below table-iii shows the result of the oral pronunciation test in which the students' pronunciation of consonantal clusters was observed. The result shows that 50% of IELTS students pronounced the consonantal cluster correctly and 50% of pronounced them wrong. So, there is a problem in pronouncing consonant clusters to some extent. Like 50% of students feel trouble with consonant cluster sounds.

Table 3
Results of Oral Pronunciation Test (Part-II) Consonantal Cluster

Oral Test (Part-III)	Blue		Clarify		Gratitude		Sculpture		Sweater	
	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
Frequency	8	2	5	5	3	7	3	7	6	4
Percentage	80%	20%	50%	50%	30%	70%	30%	70%	60%	40%
Mean of True	50%									
Mean of False	50%									

Table 4
Oral Test Percentage

	TRUE	FALSE
Part-I	30%	70%
Part-II	58%	42%
Part-III	50%	50%
Mean	46.00%	54.00%

Tables 1 to 3 show the results of oral pronunciation tests which were tested in three different ways. The overall difference is shown in the given below table 4. In Part-I the sound recognition was tested and the difference is given that 30% of students pronounce correct and 70% of students mispronounced the words. Same as in part-II the pronunciation of

additional phones s/es and d/ed were tested and the difference is given as 58% of students feel no trouble pronouncing the additional phonemes and 42% of participants felt trouble. In part-III, the pronunciation of consonantal clusters was checked and the results are given as 50% of students pronounce them in a correct way and 50% pronounced wrong. This comparison shows that the IELTS students have trouble at the sound level. The students were unable to identify the correct pronunciation of phonemes. Moreover, it is difficult for IELTS students to identify the difference between the spelling of the word and its corresponding pronunciation. The students feel problems with the word inflections as well. The pronunciation rules are not followed by the students. Furthermore, half of the participants pronounced consonant clusters wrong. It proves that there is a problem of epenthesis for IELTS students.

Results of the Students' Questionnaire

A questionnaire was given to the students to identify the IELTS students' perceptions towards the pronunciation problems and errors. Given below table 5 shows the results of the close-ended questionnaires test taken by the students. The students were given 10 statements and the mean of every statement is given below

Table 5
Results of Close-Ended Questionnaires Test Taken by Students

Sr. No.	Descriptive Statements	Total	Mean	Sta. Dev.
1	I feel difficulty pronouncing certain English sounds.	10	4.7	4.20
2	I feel difficulty with the division of syllables.	10	4.5	4.00
3	I have problems with phonetic transcription.	10	5	4.47
4	I mispronounce the words ending on d/ed and s/es.	10	3.4	3.19
5	I mix the vowel sounds.	10	3.4	3.00
6	Silent sounds confuse me.	10	3.5	3.26
7	I feel difficulty while pronouncing consonantal cluster.	10	3.5	3.19
8	I know pronunciation rules, but I don't practice them.	10	4.4	3.97
9	There is a lack of practice of English language.	10	4.7	4.20
10	Most of my pronunciation errors are made due to the mother tongue interference.	10	4.1	3.69

According to the table-v, almost more than half of the IELTS participants agreed that they feel difficulty in the pronunciation of the English sounds. They are also agreed that this reason for the difficulty is the lack of practice of the English language. Most of the IELTS participants agreed that they are unaware of pronunciation rules as they were not taught pronunciation. The standard deviation shows that most of the participants agreed that silent sounds, the mix of the vowel sound and ending phones are the cause of mispronunciation. They are the main cause of errors. Most of the IELTS participants agreed that mother tongue interference is also a major cause of mispronunciation. Based on the overview of the test shows that most IELTS participants have difficulties in pronouncing phonemes, especially with the words of mismatch between spelling and pronunciation. The consonant clusters also create problems in the pronunciation of the phonemes.

Results of the Teachers' Questionnaire

A questionnaire was given to the teachers to find out the problems behind the incorrect pronunciation and their solution. The teachers were also given ten statements in

the questionnaire. The results of close-ended questionnaires test taken by the teachers are given below in the table 6

Table 6
Results of Close-Ended Questionnaires Test Taken by Teachers

Sr. No.	Descriptive Statements	Total	Mean	Sta. Dev.
1	Students feel difficulty pronouncing certain English sounds.	2	5	4.47
2	Students feel difficulty with the division of syllables.	2	3.5	3.00
3	Students have problems with phonetic transcription.	2	4.5	4.00
4	Students mispronounce the words ending on d/ed and s/es.	2	3	2.65
5	Students mix the vowel sounds.	2	4.5	4.00
6	Students feel difficulty while pronouncing consonantal cluster.	2	5	4.47
7	Students make pronunciation errors because of lack practice of rules.	2	5	4.47
8	Most of pronunciation errors are made due to the mother tongue interference.	2	4.5	4.00
9	There are not clear and specified curricular objectives with regard to pronunciation.	2	5	4.47
10	Teachers should teach pronunciation using affective material.	2	5	4.47

Based on the above-given table, most of the participants agree that students feel difficulty in pronouncing English sounds. They also agree that there are no certain curricular objectives regarding pronunciation. They also find that mother tongue interference is the cause of poor pronunciation of the IELTS students. Students make pronunciation errors because of a lack practice of English language. Teachers also agree that students feel difficulty with the division of syllables and phonetics transcription. Students also mix the vowel sounds and feel difficulty pronouncing consonantal clusters. Based on the overview of the questionnaire taken by the teachers, the participant teachers agree that the students feel difficulty in the pronunciation of phonemes. The students mismatch the spelling and pronunciation of words. The consonant clusters are also caused by mispronunciation. They also agree that the cause of mispronunciation is the unavailability of affective material, curricular objectives, mother tongue interference and lack of practice of the English language.

Summary

This research was done to find out the result of three different questions. The questions were i). *What are the English pronunciation errors committed by the IELTS students of Gujranwala?* ii). *What are the reasons behind the English pronunciation errors committed by the IELTS students of Gujranwala?* iii). *How to improve the English pronunciation of IELTS students?*

Two data collection tools *oral pronunciation test* and *the close-ended questionnaire* were used to collect data from IELTS students and teachers. First, the students' oral pronunciation test was recorded by the researcher. On the basis of the result of the oral pronunciation test, the researcher made two close-ended questionnaires. One questionnaire was given to the students and the other was given to the teachers to find out the reasons behind poor pronunciation and the solution. Ten students of the IELTS class and two

teachers of the IELTS class from the New England Academy, Gujranwala were selected randomly as the sample of this study. The data taken by the participants were analyzed by using descriptive statements. The mean and standard deviation was calculated and shown in the tables.

Conclusions

The results of the obtained data show that the students of the IELTS class of the New England Academy commit pronunciation errors. According to the results of the questionnaires, the students feel difficulty in the pronunciation of consonant and vowel sounds. They also commit mistakes by pronouncing additional phonemes s/es and d/ed. They have problems with the pronunciation of consonant clusters. The students are aware of their errors. The students and teachers agree that there is a need to emphasize teaching pronunciation with the relevant curriculum for better progress. All the participants agree that the students should make the practice pronunciation in light of pronunciation rules. The participants also agree that mother-tongue interference is also the major cause of mispronunciation.

The students of the IELTS class can get help from this particular study in the area of pronunciation of English language words. This study tried to verify problems and difficulties of the English pronunciation of IELTS students of Gujranwala. The pronunciation errors and their causes are highlighted in the findings of this study as there is a need to pay more attention to pronunciation teaching to the students of IELTS class.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, this study recommends that teachers should be well aware of the incorporation of pronunciation practice in their syllabus. The IELTS students should be made aware of the importance of pronunciation of English language sounds. The students should be asked to listen to the correct pronunciation and then practice that. The students have less time in the class but they can practice after the class as well. The students should pay more attention to the listening of accurate pronunciation. After listening they can try to pronounce accordingly. This will help the IELTS students to learn pronunciation more accurately.

Further Research

This particular study was conducted to find out the pronunciation errors committed by the IELTS students of Gujranwala. In the future, the researcher may conduct the research to find out the errors of writing skills of IELTS students or on the other students of matriculation, intermediate or undergraduate classes. This research is conducted in Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan. It should be conducted in the other areas as the results may vary. Other researchers may research to improve the reading skills of the IELTS class as well.

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