

Exploring the Difficulties of English Pronunciation Among Students in Riphah International University Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the problems encountered by students in English Pronunciation at Riphah International University Islamabad. Pakistan is a multilingual country in which English is mostly learned in schools, colleges and universities as a second or third language. Correct pronunciation of English words is a big obstacle for university students. The main objective of this study is to find the frequent pronunciation problems and analyze how Urdu as a native language influence English pronunciation. For data collection the study utilizes a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire. The participants include 31 female students of Bs English program from different semesters. The results show that a substantial number of students face difficulties in areas such as word stress, intonation and the pronunciation of long multisyllabic words. Around 80% of participants recognize that their native language influences their English pronunciation. More than 84% stated frequent difficulties. Many students use pronunciation apps and YouTube videos like listening to native speakers, watch English movies for better pronunciation. A large number of students do not receive proper instruction in classroom and support from teachers. Additionally, around 77% of students feel embarrassment while speaking English due to their pronunciation mistakes. The findings show a strong need for phonetic instruction and practice pronunciation in classroom. Teachers should use different materials and methods, helping students to pronounce words correctly. The limitations of this research are that the sample size is small. The participants are from Bs English program Riphah international university Islamabad. This paper offers valuable insight into the phonological challenges encountered by EFL learners in higher education. Future research can be done between different departments and universities expanding into large and more diverse population. They can also consider including teachers input for a more comprehensive understanding.

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1. Introduction

English has become the global language. In Pakistan, the importance of English language is highly increased for effective communication in educational context. Among the four key language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) pronunciation remains one of the most difficult and challenging for students. Educational institutions also recognize the importance of correct pronunciation and they are working on it. Many university students still face difficulties in this area. Research by Sara (2015) points out that the students often do not have enough time to focus on pronunciation. Shak, Lee and Stephen (2016) highlight the importance of clear pronunciation in both professional and academic context. At Riphah International University students came from diverse linguistic background which affects their ability to pronounce English words correctly. As Antaris and Omolu (2019) explores that pronunciation is a crucial part of learning a language. It helps people understand you clearly and communicate effectively. Liang (2015) finds out that negative transfer from native language creates difficulties in pronunciation. Lasabuda (2017) explores the pronunciation difficulties. The study focuses on pronunciation, intonation and liaison in communication. This study explores the pronunciation difficulties of students and identifies the key factors contributing to these challenges.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How does students' native language influence their English pronunciation?
2. What are the prevailing pronunciation difficulties faced by students at Riphah International University?

2. Literature Review

Sara (2015) found that school teachers in Sylhet's suburban areas do not give importance to pronunciation skills. Teachers have limited knowledge of pronunciation teaching methods and do not have enough time to address student's pronunciation problems. The study also revealed that the use of local accents by both teachers and students significantly contributes to student's pronunciation difficulties. Liang (2015) investigated pronunciation and listening difficulties among Chinese EFL learners specifically in the context of connected speech. The findings revealed that negative transfer from Mandarin phonological rules caused

issues in both pronunciation and comprehension in connected English speech.

Hago and Khan (2015) investigated pronunciation difficulties among Saudi EFL learners at the secondary school level. The study shows that learners mispronounced eleven English consonants and often add vowels to separate consonant groups. These issues were closely related to the impact of Arabic phonology on English pronunciation. Shak, Lee and Stephen (2016) investigate English pronunciation errors among below-average Malaysian university students. The study shows that students frequently mispronounced vowels (short, long and diphthong), consonants (plosives, fricatives and affricates) silent letters and the ‘-ed’ suffixes. The negative error affects the performance of students in professional and academic settings such as interviews and presentations. Lasabuda (2015) examine the pronunciation difficulties faced by English students of fourth semester at IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontat. The study highlighted the importance of punctuation, intonation and liaison in communication. Qualitative method is used in this research. It found that students struggle with stress placement, intonation pattern and articulation of unfamiliar sounds. It affects their fluency and comprehensibility.

Al-Zayed (2017) explores pronunciation difficulties among Arabic speaking learners from Jordan. The differences in phonetic, phonological and prosodic structures between Arabic and English cause the major difficulties for students. They also face challenges with stress pattern, consonants, vowels and intonation. Ababneh (2018) found that Arab EFL learners often made pronunciation errors. These errors include vowel insertion stress misplacement and consonant substitution (for example replacing /p/ with /b/ and /v/ with/f/). These errors are caused due to negative transfer of first language, very limited pronunciation practice and zero interaction with native English pronunciation. Antaris and Omolu (2019) examines the pronunciation problems between 8th grade students at MTsN Palu Barat. It found that students face challenges with unfamiliar English sounds. They often apply Indonesian pronunciation rules to English words. The result of this study shows that pronunciation directly affects intelligibility and communication efficiency. Toci (2020) investigates the pronunciation difficulties faced by Albanian Macedonian and Turkish EFL learners. Students face problems with unfamiliar sounds, consonant clusters and intonation. It is often caused by phonological differences between native language and English. Mohammad and Idris

(2020) found that pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills for Arabic speaking EFL learners. They face difficulties with stress, rhythm and articulation leading to unclear speech and lack of confidence. These challenges were mainly caused by the interference of first language and lack of experience with native English pronunciation.

Tarbunsarib and Simatupang (2021) explore the English pronunciation difficulties faced by Indonesian college students. The study found that students face difficulties with English vowel and consonant sounds. They are also not provided with proper materials and methods for pronunciation learning. Plailek and Essien (2021) explores pronunciation problems faced by EFL students. The study identifies that limited exposure to native speech, first language interference and insufficient phonetic instruction influence pronunciation. It is found that pronunciation plays an important role in communication.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study involves 31 female students of BS English department at Riphah International University. The students are from different semesters 4, 5, 6 and 8. The age of participants was between 20 to 25 years. The participants were familiar with English language. They use it as their second or third language.

Age	Frequency	Percent
20	4	10.8
21	8	26.7
22	7	23.3
23	9	30
24	2	6.7
25	1	3.3
Total	31	100.0

3.2 Tool

A self-constructed questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data for the study. It consists of two portions. The first portion consists of personal information, age, gender, semester and department. The second part consists of 15 closed-ended items. Each item offers four

multiple choice options. The items are designed to learn about the problems students face in English pronunciation.

3.3 Data Collection

A questionnaire was designed through google form for data collection. It includes multiple choice questions according to the research topic. Participants were given complete instructions. An example question was given for better understanding. It helps them to understand the process of solving it. 31 participants completed the form. It took them 15 to 20 minutes. The online method allows participants to respond at their convenience. It makes the process contact free.

4. Data Analysis

The identity of participants was confidential. They were fully informed and their consent was taken. Quantitative method was used to analyze the collected data. All the responses were compiled and examined to identify patterns, trends and common difficulties. The results were evaluated using descriptive statistics specifically frequencies and percentage. It provides a clear understanding of the participants' experiences and challenges. The table below displays the results of the percentage and frequency of the student's facing difficulties in English pronunciation.

Table 4.1: How often do you practice English pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Daily	10	32.3
b) Weekly	3	9.7
c) Occasionally	16	51.6
d) Never	2	6.5
Total	31	100.0

Table 4.1 shows that 51.6% of the students occasionally practice English pronunciation. This suggests that while students are somewhat engaged in improving their pronunciation but their efforts lack regularity. Encouraging regular practice routines may help enhance their speaking skills over time.

Table 4.2: How confident are you in your English pronunciation skills?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Very confident	7	22.6
b) Somewhat confident	18	58.1
c) Not confident	6	19.4
d) Not sure	0	0
Total	31	100.0

According to the table, 58.1% of the students are confident in their English Pronunciation skills. This suggests that a majority of the students feel confident about their English pronunciation abilities. It shows positive learning experiences of the students.

Table 4.3: Do you find it difficult to pronounce English words correctly?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Always	4	12.9
b) Often	13	41.9
c) Sometimes	13	41.9
d) Never	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

Table 4.3 exhibits that 41.9% of the students often face difficulty and 41.9% of the students sometimes face difficulty in English Pronunciation. This suggest that large number of students struggles with pronunciation.

Table 4.4: Which aspect of English pronunciation do you find most challenging?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Stress and intonation	17	54.8
b) Vowel sounds	6	19.4
c) Consonant sounds	3	9.7
d) Linking words	5	16.1
Total	31	100.0

According to the table, 54.8% of the students find Stress and Intonation challenging. This suggests that students should practice listening and spoken exercises.

Table 4.5: How much does your accent affect your English pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) A great deal	2	6.5
b) Somewhat	14	45.2
c) Very little	11	35.5
d) Not at all	4	12.9
Total	31	100.0

According to the table, 45.2% of the students' accent affects their English Pronunciation and also 35.5% of the students face very little effect on accent. This highlights that students believe that their accent has a noticeable impact on English Pronunciation.

Table 4.6: How much does your first language (Urdu) influence your English pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) A great deal	5	16.1
b) Somewhat	13	41.9
c) Very little	12	38.7
d) Not at all	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

According to the table, 41.9% of the students' first language influences their English pronunciation and another 38.7% of the students face the same issue.

Table 4.7: How often do you listen to native English speakers (e.g., movies, podcasts, etc.) for pronunciation practice?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Very often	5	16.1
b) Often	16	51.6
c) Occasionally	9	29
d) Never	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

The table shows 51% of the students listen to native English speakers. This helps them learn pronunciation and also native like accent.

Table 4.8: How much do classroom activities help you improve your pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) A lot	8	25.8
b) Somewhat	12	38.7
c) Very little	10	32.3
d) Not at all	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

The data in table 4.8 shows that 25.8% of the student's fond classroom activities very helpful, 38.7% says it is helpful but did not cover everything and 32.3% of the students found it a little helpful.

Table 4.9: Do you find it difficult to pronounce English words with more than two syllables?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Always	4	12.9
b) Often	10	32.3
c) Sometimes	13	41.9
d) Never	4	12.9
Total	31	100.0

The table shows 32.3% of the students face difficulty in speaking two syllable word and 41.9% of the students face the same problem but not all the time.

Table 4.10: Do you feel embarrassed when speaking English because of your pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Always	6	19.4
b) Often	6	19.4
c) Sometimes	12	38.7
d) Never	7	22.6
Total	31	100.0

According to the table, 38.7% of the students sometimes feel embarrassment due to pronunciation but 19.4 % (always) and 19.4% (often) face embarrassment.

Table 4.11: Have you ever participated in any English pronunciation workshops or training sessions?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Often	3	9.7
b) Occasionally	4	12.9
c) Rarely	11	35.5
d) Never	13	41.9
Total	31	100.0

The data in table 4.11 shows that 41.9% of the students never participated in any workshop. This happens due to lack of interest or they have better options for their English Pronunciation. 9.7% of the students often participated in workshops or training sessions.

Table 4.12: How often do you receive feedback on your pronunciation from teachers?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Frequently	2	6.5
b) Occasionally	12	38.7
c) Rarely	11	35.5
d) Never	6	19.4
Total	31	100.0

The table 4.12 exhibits that 6.5% students get feedback from their teachers many times. 38.7% and 35.5% get occasionally and rarely get feedback on their pronunciation.

Table 4.13: How helpful do you think technology (apps, online videos, etc.) is in improving your pronunciation?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Very helpful	13	41.9
b) Somewhat helpful	16	51.6
c) Not very helpful	1	3.2
d) Not helpful at all	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

The data in table 4.13 shows that 41.5% of the students take advantage of online videos and apps. 51.6% of students also find it helpful in improving their pronunciation.

Table 4.14: Do you use any specific methods to improve your pronunciation (e.g., repeating words, listening, etc.)?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Always	6	19.4
b) Often	12	38.7
c) Sometimes	10	32.3
d) Never	3	9.7
Total	31	100.0

The figures in table 4.14 show that only 19.4% of the students use different methods in order to improve their pronunciation. 9.7% never use any methods.

Table 4.15: How comfortable are you speaking English in front of others?

	Frequency	Percent
a) Very comfortable	11	35.5
b) Somewhat comfortable	17	54.8
c) Uncomfortable	3	9.7
d) Very uncomfortable	0	0
Total	31	100.0

The data in table 4.15 exhibits that 54.8% of the students feel comfortable in speaking English in front of others while 9.7% feel uncomfortable while speaking English in front of others.

5. Discussion

More than half of the students (51.6%) said they practice pronunciation only sometimes and 32.3% practice daily. This means that students are not practicing regularly. Sara (2015) also found that students do not spend enough time on pronunciation because schools and teachers do not focus on it much. Most students (58.1%) feel somewhat confident in how they pronounce English words. This shows a positive attitude. Mohamed and Idris (2020) found that many students feel less confident when their pronunciation is not clear. In comparison this is a better result.

A large number of students (around 84%) said they often or sometimes find it hard to pronounce English words. This matches the study by Shak, Lee and Stephen (2016), who found students made many pronunciation mistakes with vowels and consonants. More than (54.8%) said that stress and intonation are the most difficult parts. They struggle with how voice rises and falls in speech. Lasabuda and Al-Zayed (2017) also found in their studies that students face difficulties with stress and intonation because of their native language. About 45% of students said their native language accent affects their pronunciation. Ababneh (2018) also said in his study that students pronounce words based on their native language accent. The accent interference cause pronunciation mistakes. Many students (over 80%) said that L1 Urdu affects their English pronunciation. Liang (2015) and Simatupang (2021) found the same language transfer in their studies. They said native language rules cause English pronunciation mistakes.

More than half of the students often listen to native speakers. English movies and podcasts are very helpful in learning correct pronunciation. Plailek and Essien (2021) also suggest that native speech helps in improving pronunciation skills. Only a few students (25%) said classroom activities helps a lot, while many students said they are not very helpful. This shows that students do not get enough time to focus on pronunciation in classroom. Sara (2015) also found that teachers do not spend enough time on teaching correct pronunciation. Many students struggle with long English words (more than two syllables). Lasabuda (2017) and Toci (2020) also found in their studies that students face problems with syllables, stress and word parts. Many students (77.5%) said they feel embarrassed while speaking English because of pronunciation. Mohammad and Idris (2020) also said poor pronunciation can lower confidence and make students shy about speaking.

Students like (41.9%) never joined any pronunciation workshop. This happens because of lack opportunities and interest. Antaris and Omolu (2019) said proper training helps a lot. It should be given more value for better pronunciation. Only 6.5% of students said they get regular feedback from teachers. Plailek and Essien (2021) also said students need more feedback from teachers to improve themselves. Most students use apps and videos for correct pronunciation. Some students (38.7%) use their own methods for example repeating words or listening. 9.7% of

students never try anything to improve themselves. Teachers play a big part in student's life. They should encourage them to use different strategies. They should also provide proper material and methods for improvement. Most students feel somewhat or very comfortable speaking English language in front of others. This shows good confidence but more practice could help those who still feel nervous. The study found that many students at Riphah International University face difficulties with English pronunciation especially with stress, intonation and long words. Most students do not practice regularly and their native language accent affect their pronunciation. While some students show confidence and benefit from using technology like videos and apps. Technology and listening to native speakers are helpful tools. Many students still feel embarrassed when speaking. They receive limited classroom support or teacher feedback. These results align with previous studies on second language learners. However, the study has limitations. It only surveyed students from one university and limits how widely the findings can be applied. The data is also based on self-reported responses which may be biased or inaccurate. Additionally, the study did not include teacher's perspectives or direct observation of pronunciation. It could have provided deeper insights for the study.

6. Conclusion:

The purpose of this research is to find the English pronunciation difficulties faced by students at Riphah International University. The findings show that 70% of students who participated in this research are aware with the importance of leaning proper pronunciation for better communication. This suggests that students need improvement in pronunciation. The research was conducted with a sample of 31 female participants of Riphah international university. Future research could expand into a large sample size. It could be conducted between multiple universities and departments. This could help in understanding the pronunciation problems students face in different educational institution. The study could also reveal whether the students from different universities face similar or different pronunciation problems. It will help in understanding the students and make different strategies for better pronunciation. The findings highlight the importance of addressing pronunciation difficulties to improve students speaking skills. Overcoming these challenges is necessary for effective communication and also for boosting student's confidence. Institutions should consider including pronunciation exercises into their teaching. This will help students in

overcoming these challenges. This will not only enhance their communication skills but also boost their overall language proficiency.

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