

The Evaluation of the Instruction of EFL Pronunciation in the Algerian Secondary Schools

A Case Study within Baccalaureate Candidates

تقييم تعليم نطق اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمدارس الثانوية الجزائرية
دراسة حالة مرشحي البكالوريا

KERROUM Fathia* كروم فتحية fathiakerroum@yahoo.fr	Didactics	Department of English/ Faculty of Foreign Languages/ University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed/ Algeria
HAMANE Soraya حمان صورية hamaneso-2012@hotmail.fr	Sociolinguistics and Didactics	Department of English/ Faculty of Foreign Languages/ University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed/ Algeria
DOI: 10.46315/1714-010-002-051		

Received: 22/06/2020 Accepted: 05/09/2020 Published :16/03/2021

Abstract:

Pronunciation usually is the first noticeable skill while we speak. In Algeria, however, its teaching is granted the least attention despite the difficulty of its acquisition. This article seeks to elevate pronunciation teaching and assessment as it clarifies how teachers consider the use of the third year textbook of English in the secondary education. A survey questionnaire has been conducted among 70 teachers in the Wilaya of Bouira in middle Algeria. The results of the study have confirmed the researcher's hypothesis that pronunciation is not having a worthy attention both in the textbook and in the official BAC exam.

Keywords: Teaching of English; Pronunciation; Third year textbook; Baccalaureate in Algeria; Teacher Training.

ملخص

عادة ما يكون النطق أول مهارة ملاحظة أثناء التحدث. في الجزائر، مع ذلك، يحظى تعليمه بأقل قدر من الاهتمام على الرغم من صعوبة اكتسابه. يهدف هذا المقال إلى رفع مستوى تعليم وتقويم النطق لأنها توضح كيف رأي الأساتذة في استخدام كتاب السنة الثالثة للغة الإنجليزية في التعليم الثانوي. أجري استبيان استقصائي على 70 أستاذا بولاية البويرة وسط الجزائر. أكدت نتائج الدراسة فرضية الباحث بأن النطق لا يحظى باهتمام جدير سواء في الكتاب المدرسي أو في امتحان البكالوريا الرسمي.

كلمات مفتاحية: تعليم اللغة الانجليزية؛ النطق؛ الكتاب المدرسي للسنة الثالثة؛ البكالوريا في الجزائر؛ تكوين الأساتذة.

* - Submitting Author: fathiakerroum@yahoo.fr

1. Introduction

As far as the Algerian context is concerned, the instruction of the English language has been adopted for several decades. However, we keep noticing weaknesses in the learners' oral communicative skills. Clearly, pronunciation mastery impairs the EFL/ ESL speaking process as it is perceived according to Davis (1999) cited in Kanellou (2011) as a top priority for students after completing elementary English courses.

Despite its importance, it tends to be neglected by both teachers and material designers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to identify the causes leading to this situation so as to suggest corrections for students who require it in both their studies and future professions.

With the rise in the number of English users, the demand of professional language teaching has sparked a growing interest in curricula, materials and professional development and a spotlight has been focused on the four skills where is inevitably the first skill to be noticed when speakers communicate. In Algeria, several Algerian learners of English are fairly poor manipulators both orally and in the written form regardless those who may be described as well speakers.

In our case, the third or Baccalaureate year of the secondary education, has the 'Pronunciation and spelling' rubric taking less than half an hour per lesson; so if calculated, the whole textbook 'New Prospects' which includes six units , encompassing each, two short pronunciation lessons taught in isolation, most of them focus on stress marking in words with suffixes. Plus, it is worthwhile noting here that students only deal with four units, therefore; they become four small uninteresting lessons in the whole year.

Fig (1): A Pronunciation Lesson Sample in the Third Year Textbook

verb	nouns	adjectives
economize	economy economist	economic economical uneconomical

Source: New Prospects p: 57

Today, calls are being launched mostly by ESL instructors for pronunciation to be addressed by a growing chorus of scholars (Derwing, 2010; Fraser, 2000; Gilbert 2010, Hughes, 2006; Lord, 2010; Padro, 2004; Setter and Jenkins 2005). Barrera Pardo (2004) describes it best by saying that:

“Many teachers, nonetheless, remain skeptical about the teachability of pronunciation, and in consequence continue to consider explicit pronunciation instruction of relatively little importance in their practice.”(p.6)

In the light of the aforementioned, two questions are set forth for investigation in the framework of the study in hand:

- To what extent are the secondary school teachers satisfied in terms of the designed teaching materials proposed in the third year textbook ‘New Prospect’?
- Does the textbook fulfill the Baccalaureate candidates’ needs in terms of both the well preparation for the final exam and their future oral communication?

While the above raised questions are waiting for insightful and deep reflections towards settling objective and quantitative answers, the following hypothesis has been introduced in the terrain of study:

- Secondary school teachers are not much satisfied with the materials proposed in the textbook in terms of pronunciation instruction due to their shortage of the previous training to deal with such a vital aspect for communication.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Research Instrument

In this study, we opted for a quantitative research which is based on a survey questionnaire (see the appendix). It is constructed and administered to seventy (70) Algerian teachers of English. It aims at exploring how teachers implement pronunciation in the Algerian terrain.

The survey questionnaire is composed of items numbered from 1 to 16, including few subentries in item 3 (3a and 3b), 5 (5a and 5b), 8 (8a and 8b), 12(12a and 12b), 13(13a and 13b), 15(15a and 15b) and item 16(16a and 16b).

Preceding every questionnaire administration, there ought to be a pilot study for the purpose of improving considerably the design of the questions as well as their ranking. This questionnaire is conducted with seven (07) teachers to get the feedback required.

2.2 Sample

The sample is a representative of the English teaching population of the Wilaya of Bouira in terms of number, gender and seniority. We opted to reach at least one fifth of its overall population. Hence, the sample of this research represents 28% of Bouira’s English teaching population -70 teachers out of 245- according to one of the current Inspectors of English Mr. Mosrane. A sample of this size hopefully shall present fair results to be generalized over the country. The sample is described by:

- Gender: the sample contains 18 males and 53 female teachers of English,

- Seniority: there are 28 senior teachers or experienced ones which have 10 or more years of working service, the other 42 teachers are junior ones or having less than 10 years of experience. – see item 1 on the questionnaire survey-
- Levels already dealt with: all of the teachers have already dealt with Bacculaureate candidates.

3. Discussion and analysis of results

For the purpose of simplifying data processing, it has been decided to group the responses under seven headings, bringing together related items and focusing on the sub topics from 3.1 to 3.7. As far as computation is concerned, percentages are calculated out of the total number of the informants (70). The study has helped in a qualitative manner also which killed two birds with one stone by the aid of the implementation of the questionnaire which has contributed in drawing a clear picture of teachers' behaviors towards the main elements of pronunciation and how they consider this sensitive almost mathematical aspect.

3.1 Importance of Pronunciation

This first sub section considers how both teachers and bacculaureate candidates perceive pronunciation as identified in both items2 and 3a. the results show that the lion's share of this question (15 respondents for the 'very important' and 48 for the 'important' suggestion) is taken by the perspective that pronunciation is a crucial aspect, this is justified by the argument that a given language cannot be learned without having knowledge of its spoken form. Furthermore, they added that the speaking skill and pronunciation are intertwined in improving the speaker's communicative competence. The left suggestion of being 'not important' (07 informants only) is justified by the teacher's claim that the students should focus on their oral communication because they are and will never be close to native speakers so their English should be approximate.

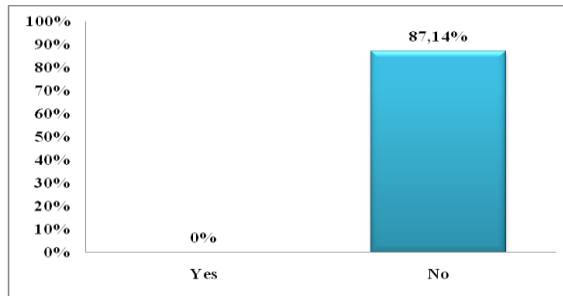
Table 1. The importance of teaching pronunciation

Importance	Response Count	Response Percentage
Very important	15	21.42%
Important	48	68.57%
Not important	07	10.00%
Total	70	100%

As for item 3b, 90% of the teachers believe that their students are uninterested in pronunciation lessons as much as other subjects like grammar, writing or reading for the causes that the students prefer those latter skills due to the fact that they have better appreciation in the written tests which is the reason why the students are in class in the first place. Besides, they do not understand how to

conclude keys for pronunciation whether in tests or in class when examples of intonation for instance are changed from the ones they have already studied in class. This fact is more emphasized by a large number of scholars such as Gilbert (2005) and Morley (1991) who acknowledge that suprasegmentals should be granted more importance than segments as far as pronunciation instruction is concerned.

Fig (3): The students' interest in pronunciation lessons



3.2 Teachers' Comfortability / Confidence

59 or 84.28% of the respondents have expressed their concern about pronunciation. Not for the purpose of underestimating our teachers but in comparison to other subjects dealt with in class. This is proved by the upcoming item (5) which is the urgent change of lesson if the inspector pays a visit in class. An overwhelming majority of 63 informants or 90% of the teachers were truthful about their intention to change the lesson into reading, writing or listening for their critical reasons which were grouped in the following notes:

- There is no theme/ topic to work with in pronunciation lessons
- Other lessons are more interesting and have much more involvement of the students.
- Grammar/ listening/ reading / writing have more activities and more stages to follow better than pronunciation which is just one or two tasks and that's it.
- Pronunciation lessons in the textbook can be finished in half an hour in a boring frame and the session has one hour so, what can be done in the last half an hour?
- Pronunciation lessons are preferably integrated in the programme with vocabulary explorer so there is no consistency to work within isolation.
- I don't even teach it or waste my time on it because the students need focus on more tangible skills required in the BAC exam.

The teachers' opinion is more clarified in item 6 which targets whether or not the teachers' have received any formal training or workshops about the teaching of pronunciation and how to assess their students. Surprisingly, all of the seventy teachers (100%) have confirmed that they haven't received any training of pronunciation instruction at the university, they claim that they have

encountered courses of phonetics and phonology only emphasizing the fact that acquiring the speech sounds of a language and being formally trained about its teaching and learning in institutional settings are two distinct and opposite areas of concern. When working as teachers, their workshops with their inspectors are about other topics focusing mostly on how to implement the Competency Based Approach.

Table.2 Teachers' pre-training of pronunciation instruction

Training of Pronunciation Instruction	Response Count		Response Percentage
Yes	as a student	00	00%
	As a teacher	00	
No	As a student	70	100%
	As a teacher	70	
Total	70		100%

3.3 Techniques of Pronunciation Instruction

The items 7 and 8 are grouped to serve the techniques of teaching pronunciation. The teachers here were given the chance to tick more than one suggestion in order to reinforce our results.

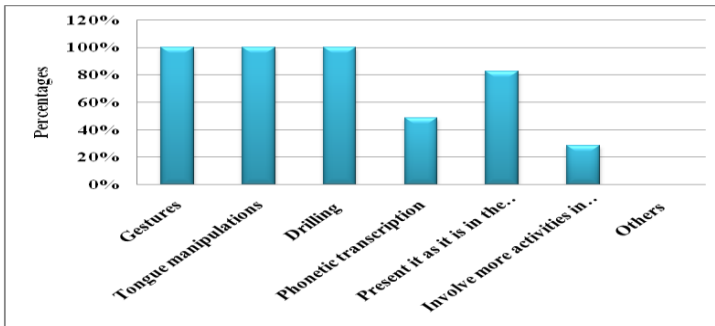
Table 3. Techniques of pronunciation instruction

Techniques of Pronunciation Instruction	Response Count	Response Percentage
Gestures	70	100%
Tongue manipulations	70	100%
Drilling	70	100%
Phonetic transcription	34	48.57%
Present it as it is in the coursebook.	58	82.85%
Involve more activities in order to clarify the item	20	28.57%
Others	00	00%

Here, teachers have more focus on their personal performance in class as they highly adapt gestures, tongue manipulations and drilling for the students to engrave the correct pronunciation of words or to attain correct marking of intonation or stress. Almost half of the informants (34 or

48.57%) use phonetic transcription to clarify stress marking, whereas no one (00%) has suggested other techniques probably due to their lack of training and interest to teach pronunciation.

Fig (4): Techniques of pronunciation instruction



3.4 Use of Personal Materials

As far as the use of the teaching equipment or the hardware, the respondents of item 8a suggest a number of the scoring 49 or 70%. They declare that they do not use any material other than the textbook to teach pronunciation. However, all of them have emphasized on the use of such materials for the introduction of the unit which necessitates videos, listening scripts or PowerPoint presentations. When reaching the lesson of 'pronunciation and spelling', it will be as quick as possible because there are more important lessons.

The causes which discourage the informants from making use of those materials appear in the responses to item 8b. From the results obtained, we can form this list:

- The long syllabus (28 or 40%)
- Lack of time (23 or 23.85%)
- Shortage of the hardware (speakers and data show projectors) (12 or 17.14%)
- Lack of teacher training in the field of technology and computing (07 or 10%)

Similarly, item 9 also have pinpointed their objective when asked about the use of authentic recordings in class. 6 out of 70 respondents (8.53%) have declared that they do use them but they encounter certain comprehension difficulties unless the recording is repeated several times. On the contrary, when they use the ones produced through the 'Received Pronunciation' model or the recording of their own voices on phones, the students can have better understanding.

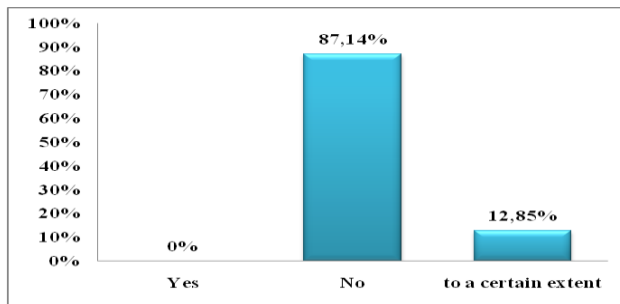
3.5 Use of 'New Prospects'

Items 10, 11 and 12 are grouped together to measure the informants' degree of satisfaction with the treatment of pronunciation in the third year textbook 'New Prospects'. To begin with, item 10 questions the availability of time dedicated to treat pronunciation. Almost all of the teachers (68) or 97.14% declare that the students needs require more time than the one devoted for each session (half an hour or less as proposed in the programme). In addition, item 11 reaches the total percentage

of 100% which declares that 'New Prospects' does not give proper activities to evaluate the students. They add that it is on the back of the teachers to form explicit rules and reminders in addition to adding explanations and tasks to assimilate the BAC exam and prepare their students for the graduation exam.

Thereby, to touch the heart of the topic, we went directly to ask the teachers about their degree of satisfaction with the materials proposed in the textbook in item 12a, an overwhelming majority of 61 out of 70 or 87.14% of the respondents have asserted their dissatisfaction of the textbook to approach pronunciation. Nevertheless, only 9 respondents or 12.85% have declared that they are satisfied 'to a certain extent'

Fig (5): Satisfaction with 'New Prospects'



Item 12b diagnosed the causes of this dissatisfaction where the textbook proposes vague isolated lessons of pronunciation which are most times modified or replaced to follow only those activities proposed in the Baccalaureate exam. Moreover, those lessons are inadequate with the learners' levels' of proficiency as they are presented in a decontextualised language frame that doesn't contains neither the rules nor enough practice.

4.6 Pronunciation and Feedback

Item 13a shows a total agreement (100%) that teachers correct their students mistakes as they consider themselves the first source of knowledge the student counts on for feedback as proposed by 37 teachers in item 13b. 17 informants have marked that the correction should be accurate to attach it in the students' memory once the mistake is committed. 07 informants have declared that they give classmates the opportunity to correct the mistake for pair/ group feedback. 9 informants haven't responded to this item.

Table 4. Pronunciation and feedback

Reasons for Feedback	Response Count	Response Percentage
Responsibility of Knowledge	37	52.85%
Accuracy and fast correction	17	24.28%

Priority for Peer/ Group Feedback	07	10%
No Answer	09	12.85
Total	70	100%

4.7 Communication in Pronunciation

The last three items 14, 15 and 16 were categorized to serve communication. The first item (14) examines the progress marked at the level of the students' pronunciation and communicative skills. 28 of the informants or 40% have argued that their students' pronunciation has developed thanks to the drilling and frequent use of new vocabularies in relation with the third year programme. However, as teachers, they have to be the corrector of their repeated mistakes. However, the rest 40 or 57.14% have announced that their students haven't progressed perhaps due to their lack of efforts by focusing on written communication (essay production). Two (02) informants haven't responded.

Table 5. The Students' pronunciation progress

Student's Pronunciation Progress	Response Count	Response Percentage
Yes	28	40%
No	40	57.14%
No response	02	2.85%
Total	70	100%

It can be deduced here that the majority of the informants and teachers of English in general have doubts about the textbook's aid as a tool capable of improving the learners' pronunciation both receptively and productively.

As for item 15a, 54 of the respondents or 77.14% consider this transitional exam of no enough fulfillment when targeting communication performance for the reasons provided in item 15b that the BAC exam highlights only writing an essay starting from a guided topic. However, as far as oral communication is concerned, a series of yearly repeated activities are offered to the students where they usually mark, in a written form, the pronunciation of final 'ed', final 's', marking syllable division, silent letters or just pinpoint the stress according to added suffixes.

Similarly, item 16a has targeted the same area of interest but this time, after succeeding their Baccalaureate degree. Overwhelmingly speaking, all of the informants (70 or 100%) have agreed that oral communication will be adhered by certain difficulties, whether in the near or far future, mostly because the graduated students will find new required tasks, topics and research in

university, unless they do more efforts to acquire specific English where they read and extract knowledge from foreign documents.

In this context, several causes can be deduced as suggested by the informants in item 16b:

- The negative influence of the French language which hinders the students' pronunciation,
- Shortage in pedagogical materials and the inexistence of language laboratories to improve their oral communication,
- The large number of students in class which prevents equal opportunities for oral communication and proper feedback,
- The overloaded programme which gives no chance to additional practice,
- Lack of teacher training in pronunciation instruction.

5. Interpretation of the Findings and Recommendations

The research has resulted in fulfilling statistics that proved the researcher's hypothesis about the neglect of pronunciation. Therefore, it should be noted here that there are important points of remedy which must be forwarded by both teachers and syllabus designers:

- They have to develop awareness among EFL students about the importance of learning pronunciation in developing their speaking skill as emphasized by Madden and Moore (1997), "pronunciation is the most obvious and unavoidable marker of a language learner's proficiency" (p.3), and MacDonald (2002), "pronunciation is a key element of the learning of oral skills in a second language" (p.3).

- For syllabus designers, pronunciation lessons in 'New Prospects' should be granted more attention in terms of design and activities away from the negative cloud of isolation and decontextualisation surrounding them where most teachers are discouraged to handle them due to the lack of training and preparation unless they implement personal efforts to meet their students' needs for the uncertain result of improving their students' oral communication.

- As for the Baccalaureate exam, it should be poled out of the traditional layout to comply with modern testing of language capacities both receptively in terms of listening and reading and productively in terms of writing and speaking in order to cope up with both university and occupational requirements and upgrade the students' level of written and oral communicative competences.

The current research work also recommends that EFL learners in general, not only Baccalaureate candidates, shouldn't depend on the teachers' materials or the syllabus to mend and sculpt their pronunciation. They have to ameliorate their pronunciation through the adaptation of habits such as listening to recordings, music, news and films in English. Concurrently, they have to practise what they have learned through oral communication to achieve better progress.

6. Conclusion

The main fact which we all should agree on is that before focusing on the teachers' role in class and the learners' duties towards searching for correct treatment of pronunciation instruction in class and out, the main roots which govern EFL teaching should be addressed. They are the syllabus designers who are the vital vein behind creating a competent model to be prescribed and yielded by all of the teachers. Indeed, pronunciation instruction has been described by a 'Cinderella' in 1969 by Kelly, an 'Orphan' in 2010 by Gilbert and the 'most likely to fall between the cracks' by Padro in 2004. However, research in this field should be given a rebirth and advanced into a new area of interest in the Algerian educational system to prepare the new generations on a durable base that would undoubtedly push the them forward.

7. References

- Barrera-Pardo, D. B. (2004). Can Pronunciation Be Taught?. A Review of Research and Implications for Teaching. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. 17, 6-38
- Belkheir F., (2016). Teaching EFL Pronunciation to High-School Freshmen in Algeria A case Study. *Revue du Progress*. 4, 82-102.
- Burgess, J. Spencer, S. (2000). Phonology and Pronunciation Integrated Language Teaching and Teacher Education. *System*. 28 (2), 191.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D., & Goodwin, J. (1996). *Teaching Pronunciation: A reference for teachers of English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fraser, H. (2000). *Coordinating Improvements in Pronunciation Teaching for Adult Learners of English as a Second Language*. Canberra, Australia: University of New England.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kanellou V., (2011). The Place and Practice of Pronunciation Teaching in the Context of the EFL Classroom in Thessaloniki, Greece.
- Keys, K. and Walker, R. (2002). Ten Questions on the Phonology of English as an International Language. *ELT Journal*. 56 (3): 298-302
- Kuo, I-Chun., (2006). Addressing the Issue of Teaching English as a Lingua Franca. *ELT Journal*. 60 (3): 213-227
- Leather, J. (1983). Second Language Pronunciation: Learning and Teaching. *Language Teaching*. 16 (3), 198-219
- Levis, J. (2005). Changing Contexts and Shifting Paradigms in Pronunciation Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*. 39 (3): 369-376

Macdonald, D., Yule, G. and Powers, M. 1994. Attempts to Improve English L2 Pronunciation: the Variable Effects of Different Types of Instruction. *Language Learning* 44 (1), 75-100.