

## Teaching English Intonation to EFL Students

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## Abstract

Intonation is an important melodic aspect that characterizes spoken language as well as a feature that enables successful communication. Therefore, teaching intonation to learners of English as a specialty is one of the main tasks for language practice. This research paper seeks to find out why intonation has been neglected in the process of teaching pronunciation to EFL learners and determine that teaching intonation patterns, with a focus on its significant functions of transmitting meanings to learners, has positive influence on their English language proficiency and fluency. Adopting a mixed approach research, qualitative and quantitative research methods; the corpus of data was collected from teachers' and students' questionnaires. The research also suggests some useful in-class activities to teach intonation patterns to EFL learners, mainly because it is, to some extent, the first responsible for the students' level of success in communication.

Keywords: Teaching intonation; Speaking skill; English; Attitude; Foreign Language.

المخلص

التنغيم هو جانب لحنى مهم يميز اللغة المنطوقة بالإضافة إلى ميزة تمكن من التواصل الناجح. لذلك، يعد تدريس التجويد لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كتخصص أحد المهام الرئيسية لممارسة اللغة. تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى معرفة سبب إهمال التجويد في عملية تدريس النطق لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وتحديد أن أنماط التنغيم التدريسية، مع التركيز على وظائفها الهامة المتمثلة في نقل المعاني إلى المتعلمين، لها تأثير إيجابي على إتقانهم للغة الإنجليزية والطلاقة. اعتماد نهج بحثي مختلط وأساليب بحثية نوعية وكمية؛ تم جمع مجموعة البيانات من استبيانات الأساتذة والطلبة. يقترح البحث أيضاً بعض الأنشطة المفيدة في الفصل

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لتعليم أنماط التجويد لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ويرجع ذلك أساسًا إلى أنها، إلى حد ما، المسؤول الأول عن مستوى نجاح الطلبة في التواصل.

كلمات مفتاحية: تدريس التجويد؛ مهارة التحدث؛ اللغة الإنجليزية؛ السلوك، اللغة الأجنبية.

## 1. Introduction

Through the present research, we aim at investigating how significant is intonation when learning and teaching a foreign language's pronunciation and comprehending meanings, it is often perceived as a difficult, if not impossible task, because of the complexities of the intonation system. Nevertheless, increasing attention is now being paid to the connection between intonation alternatives and the speaker's communicative intention, thus "intonation is not only a matter of making oneself understood or having a good pronunciation, but is a way of expressing different meanings" (Halliday, 1970, p. 21).

Intonation proves to be crucial for understanding the spoken language and being understood correctly when speaking it yourself, in this respect Pike states its communicative importance vividly in the following words: "Actually, we often react more violently to the "intonational" meanings than to the lexical ones; if a man's tone of voice belies his words, we immediately assume that the intonation more faithfully reflects his true linguistic intentions" (Pike, 1945, p. 56). Intonation has been neglected for the past years in language teaching. However, it is now slowly gaining recognition as an integral part of language fluency, competence and proficiency.

A great deal of research has been done, and is still being done, on intonation, and perhaps more so far English than for any other language, Intonation, stress and general "melody" of speech are said to be among the first aspects of speech that human infants attend to, react to, and produce themselves (Lieberman, 1986, p. 239). It has also been shown that child learners of a second language have little difficulty in acquiring native-like pronunciation and intonation in the L2. Intonation is thus an important aspect of language that seems to be easily, if not automatically, acquired by children in both L1 and L2. Moreover, as observation and experience amply demonstrate, it is easy for adults to maintain and retain in the L1, yet difficult, if not impossible, for adults to learn in an L2. Due to its inherent complexity and to the corresponding difficulty in learning and mastering it, intonation was ignored for many years in language teaching. However, it is now slowly gaining recognition as an integral part of language fluency, competence, and proficiency (Chun, 2002, p. xiii).

Research questions:

- How to teach students intonation rules to be memorized and motivate them to use it in practice?
- How to reach the native speaker's "intonational" competence?
- How to think in English, speak in English, pronounce in an English tone?
- Why students are more likely to pronounce the L2 with the L1 intonations?
- Why do teachers neglect teaching intonation?
- What prevents learners from using intonation when speaking a foreign language?

Hypothesis:

Learning English as a foreign language is not the easiest task, especially when we teach the spoken form and how we practice pronunciation and intonation patterns in a formal or informal environment. Some teachers tend to neglect intonation rules because they consider it time consuming due to language acquisition problems such as mother tongue interference. This leads us to hypothesize that:

If foreign language learners are given the chance to express their ideas through processing the English language as a native speaker, this shall improve their fluency and language proficiency.

## 2. Meaning and function of intonation in English language:

It is not easy to define Intonation. There has been an attempt to define the term 'intonation' in two diverse ways, among which equating intonation with 'speech melody', restricting it to the "ensemble of pitch variations in the course of an utterance" (Hart, 1990, p. 10). The two main tasks of pitch modulation are (1) highlighting, marking prominence relations, and (2) phrasing, the division of speech into chunks. However, it is not pitch alone which is responsible for these tasks. A broader definition of intonation includes loudness, and segmental length and quality, although languages differ in the extent to which they modulate these to achieve highlighting and phrasing. Like pitch, loudness, length and quality are auditory percepts (Baumann, 2006). Their articulatory and acoustic correlates are given in table below:

**Table 1 Aspects of speech contributing to intonation in its broad sense**

Perception	Articulation	Acoustics
pitch perceived scale: high – low	quasi-periodic vibrations of vocal folds	fundamental frequency (F0) measure: Hertz (Hz)

loudness perceived scale: loud – soft	articulatory effort, subglottal air pressure	intensity measure: decibel (dB)
length perceived scale: long – short	duration and phasing of speech gestures	duration of segments measure: millisecond (ms)
vowel quality perceived scale: full – reduced	vocal tract configuration, articulatory precision	spectral quality measure: formant values in Hz

**Source:** (Trouvain, 2007, p. 27)

Tone refers to the pitch overall behaviour. Tones can be either static, flat tones or changing, rising or decreasing tones. In order to analyse intonation, a unit known as the tone-unit is typically used. At least one tonic phrase makes up a tone-unit (a tonic syllable being a syllable with tone and prominence). The section of the tone-unit that extends from the first stressed syllable up to (but not including) the tonic syllable is known as the "head." A pre-head, which includes all the unstressed syllables in a tone unit preceding the initial stressed syllables, may come before the head. There may even be a "tail," or some syllables trailing the tonic syllable all the way to the end of the tone-unit. So, a tone-structure unit's is (pre-head) (head) tonic syllable (tail). Intonation is critical for communication since it aids the recipient's interpretation of the message. Various explanations for how intonation can aid communication have been proposed, including:

1. The attitudinal function of intonation allows us to express our feelings and attitudes as we speak.
2. The accentual function of intonation aids in the production of the effect of prominence on stressed syllables.
3. The grammatical role of intonation is to aid in the recognition of the grammar and syntactic structure of the utterance.
4. The discourse purpose of intonation is to convey given-new information or to supply information for turn-taking.

In spoken language, from the marking of sentence modality to the expression of emotional and attitudinal nuances, intonation serves a variety of linguistic and paralinguistic tasks. It is critical to figure out how they are articulated in the learner's native language in order to spot disparities between the native and target languages. Many characteristics of information organization and indirect speech acts are expressed differently across languages, which is particularly important to note. Making learners aware of these functions will not only assist them in learning to articulate them, but will

also assist them in more analytically interpreting what they hear, decreasing the risk of attributing unusual intonation patterns to the speaker's attitude or emotional state (Baumann, 2006).

It has been shown how intonation analysis entails making categorical judgements about whether there is stress or accent, and if there is an accent, what type of pitch accent it is. It also entails deciding whether or not a boundary exists, and if so, whatever pitch movement or level should be utilized to designate it. There are various gradient components to intonation, such as pitch height variation or the precise form of the contour, comparable to allophonic variation in the segmental domain (Trouvain, 2007, p. 32).

### 3. Data analysis:

#### 3.1. Data analysis of teachers' questionnaire:

This section introduces summaries of the results obtained from the statistics of the teachers' and students' questionnaire. The section also shows the results related to each of the study questions and highlights the main outcome of these results.

#### Q1- How long have you been working as a teacher?

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for each teacher's career. The results showed that (15%) of teachers ticked the (more than 20 years) scale, others of (35%) ticked the scale (16 – 20 years), (30%) of teachers ticked the (11-15 years), (10%) answered (6-10 years), (10%) answered (3-5 years) and (5%) ticked (1-2 years) scale, while there were no new teachers.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
This is my first year	0	0%
1-2 years	1	5%
3-5 years	2	10%
6-10 years	2	10%
11-15 years	6	30%
16-20 years	7	35%
More than 20 years	3	15%

**Table 1: Years of teachers working career.**

#### Q2- Was the teaching of English intonation part of your academic training?

The second question that we sought to answer asked the participants if they had been taught about intonation during their academic training. The results showed that (40%) of students answered "Yes", while (60%) answered "No".

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Yes	8	40%
No	12	60%

**Table 2: Teaching intonation in the academic training of teachers**

**Q3- What percentage of “class” time is typically spent on each of the following activities?**

The third question that we sought to answer asked the participants about the percentages of “class” time spent on activities done by the teacher. The results showed that (100%) of teachers who spend “less than 20%” of class time in the administrative tasks, (90%) of teachers spend “less than 20%” of class time in maintaining discipline and (85%) of teachers who spend “more than 20%” of class time in the actual teaching and learning activity.

	Teachers%	Less than 20%	More than 20%
Administrative tasks%	100%	5%	
Maintaining discipline%	90%	10%	
Actual teaching and learning%	85%		85%

**Table 3: Dividing teachers’ activities in the class time.**

**\*90min→ 100% (1h: 30min)**

**\*18min→20%**

**Q4- How much time does teaching intonation usually take from the actual teaching and learning activity of the class time?**

In the fourth question, the teachers were asked to make an assumption of the time that the English intonation consumes from the (teaching-learning) activity of the class time. The results showed that (15%) of teachers answered “3minutes”, (60%) answered “5 minutes” and others (25%) answered “10 minutes max”.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
3 minutes	3	15%
5 minutes	12	60%
10 minutes max	5	25%

**Table 4: Teaching intonation’s timing from the class time**

**Q5- English laboratories in the university can encourage both students and teachers to teach and learn intonation patterns; to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their opinions towards the role of English laboratories to motivate students to learn about intonation patterns. The results showed positive attitudes where the majority of teachers almost (70%) answered “totally agree”, (15%) answered “partially agree”, while others of (10%) showed negative attitudes and ticked “totally disagree”, (5%) ticked “partially disagree” scale.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Totally agree	14	70%
Totally disagree	2	10%
Partially agree	3	15%
Partially disagree	1	5%

**Table 5: Teachers’ attitude towards the role of English laboratories in teaching intonation**

**Q6-Do you teach intonation patterns to your students signifying its role in communication?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their opinions towards the role of intonation in communication. The results showed that (85%) of teachers answered “Yes”, while (15%) answered “No”.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Yes	17	85%
No	3	15%

**Table 6: Teachers’ attitude towards the role of intonation**

**Q7-Do you think that teaching intonation should be one of the main modules in teaching English as a foreign language?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their attitudes towards the importance of teaching intonation in English as a foreign language. The results showed that (80%) answered “totally agree”, (10%) answered “partially agree”, (5%) answered “totally disagree” and (5%) answered “partially disagree”.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Totally agree	16	80%

Partially agree	2	10%
Totally disagree	1	5%
Partially disagree	1	5%

**Table 7: Teachers' attitudes towards teaching intonation as a main module in TEFL.**

**If 'Yes', which of the following reasons best explain what prevented you from teaching intonation as a main module in pronunciation? Tick the right answer.**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their attitudes towards the limitations against focusing on teaching intonation as a main module in pronunciation. The results showed that (10%) answered "The lack of pre-requisites", (10%) answered "The programmed", (15%) answered "Complicated and not interesting", (5%) answered "not important", (25%) answered "Time consuming", (20%) answered "The lack of equipments", (15%) answered other reasons".

	teachers	Percentages %
The lack of pre-requisites	2	10%
The programme of the ministry of education	2	10%
Complicated and not interesting	3	15%
Not important, can't be taught in isolation	1	5%
Time consuming	5	25%
The lack of equipments and laboratories	4	20%
Other reasons	3	15%

**Table 8: Reasons prevents teaching intonation as a main module**

**Q8- Would you help to improve the pronunciation and intonation of your students in order to help them reach the native speaker's competence in their career?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their attitudes towards helping the students to improve their pronunciation to reach the native speaker's performance in the future. Interestingly, the results showed positive attitudes where (85%) of teachers ticked the "Yes" scale, while others of (15%) showed negative attitudes and ticked the "No" scale.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Yes	17	85%
No	3	15%

**Table 9: Attitudes towards enhancing the improvement of intonation and pronunciation**

**Q9- How do you usually teach intonation in the classroom?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their attitudes towards the techniques and activities used by the teacher to teach intonation to his students. The results showed that (15%) answered “language forms”, (60%) answered “meaning, function in context”, (25%) answered “Different way”.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Language forms	3	15%
Meaning, function in context	12	60%
Different way	5	25%

**Table10: Techniques for teaching intonation in the classroom**

**Q10- What is the best activity to motivate students to practise intonation patterns?**

To answer this question, we asked the teachers to give their attitudes towards the activities that motivate students to learn about intonation patterns. The results showed that (30%) answered “Listen and repeat”, (30%) answered “Practice in pairs communication games”, (15%) answered “Listen to the tape and complete”, (25%) answered “Use gestures referring to the right pronunciation”.

	Number of teachers	Percentages %
Listen and repeat	6	30%
Practice in pairs	6	30%
Listen to the tape and complete	3	15%
Use gestures	5	25%

**Table11: Activities motivate intonation practice**

**3.2. Data analysis of students' questionnaire:**

**Q1-A learner of English must improve his/her speaking skill, to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards the improvement of the speaking skill. The results show positive attitude for the item, where (80%) of students answered "totally agree" that, while the responses were negative, to a certain extent, where (20%) of students "partially disagree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Totally agree	24	80%
Totally disagree	0	0%
Partially agree	0	0%
Partially disagree	6	20%

**Table 12: Attitudes towards improving the speaking skill**

**Q2- It is not necessary to speak as fluent as a native speaker, to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards the necessity being as fluent as native speakers of a language. The results show that (16,67%) of students "totally disagreed", where (33,34%) of students were "totally agree", (20%) answered "partially disagree" and (30%) "partially agree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Totally disagree	5	16,67%
Totally agree	10	33,34%
Partially disagree	6	20%
Partially agree	9	30%

**Table 13: Attitudes towards reaching the native speaker's fluency**

**Q3-Intonation is one of the main features of speaking skill; to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards considering intonation as one of the main features of the speaking skill. The results show that (33,34%) of students "totally agree", (30%) answered "partially agree", while the negative results were (10%) of students who "totally disagree" and (26,67%) of students answered "partially disagree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
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Totally agree	10	33,34%
Totally disagree	3	10%
Partially agree	9	30%
Partially disagree	8	26,67%

**Table 14: Attitudes towards the significance of intonation in the speaking skill**

**Q4- Practicing intonation is more important than studying them theoretically; to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards the importance of practicing intonation against its theoretical study. Interestingly, the results show that (90%) of students "totally agree", (0%) answered "partially agree, while (10%) of students "totally disagreed" and (0%) of students answered "partially disagree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Totally agree	27	90%
Totally disagree	3	10%
Partially agree	0	0%
Partially disagree	0	0%

**Table 15: Intonation practice versus theoretical study**

**Q5- How often do you try to apply intonation when you speak English in the class?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards the attempts to apply intonation when speaking English in classrooms. The results show that (30%) of students answered "always", and (20%) students answered "often", (40%) students answered "sometimes", (10%) students answered "rarely" and (0%) of students who answered "never".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Always	9	30%
Often	6	20%
Sometimes	12	40%
Rarely	3	10%
Never	0	0%

**Table 16: The practice of intonation in the classroom****Q6- How often do you try to apply intonation when you communicate in English outside the class?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards attempting to apply intonation outside the classroom with surroundings. The results show that (0%) of students answered "always", (6,67%) of students answered "Often", (16,67%) of students answered "sometimes", (26,67%) students who answered "rarely" and (50%) of students answered "never".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Always	0	0%
Often	2	6,67%
Sometimes	5	16,67%
Rarely	8	26,67%
Never	15	50%

**Table 17: The practice of intonation outside the classroom****Q7- Teachers and classmates can encourage you to practise intonation, to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes about the influence of teachers and classmates on students practicing intonation. The results show that (60%) answered "totally disagree", (30%) answered "partially disagree", (7%) answered "partially agree", (3%) answered "totally agree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Totally disagree	18	60%
Totally agree	1	3.34%
Partially disagree	9	30%
Partially agree	2	6.67%

**Table 18: The role of teachers and classmates in intonation practice****Q8- Friends and society can encourage you to practise intonation, to what extent do you agree?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes about the role of friends and society in intonation practice. The results show that (13,34%) of students answered "totally agree", (6,67%) answered "partially agree", while (46,67%) answered "totally disagree" and (33,33%) answered "partially disagree".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Totally agree	4	13,34%
Totally disagree	14	46,67%
Partially agree	2	6,67%
Partially disagree	10	33,33%

**Table 19: The role of friends and society in intonation practice**

**Q9- Have you been taught about English intonation before?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes about their previous knowledge about intonation. Surprisingly, the results show that (90%) of students answered "Yes", while the other (10%) of them answered "No".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Yes	27	90%
No	3	10%

**Table 20: Previous background about the English intonation**

**Q10-Do you think that intonation is important for transmitting meanings?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes towards the significance of intonation in meanings. The results showed that the majority, that is, (86,67%) of students answered "Yes", while (13,34%) answered "No".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Yes	26	86,67%
No	4	13,34%

**Table 21: The importance of intonation in transmitting meanings**

**Q11- Do you think that using intonation in English is a difficult task?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes about the difficulty of using intonation in English. The results showed that (70%) of students answered "Yes", where the other of (30%) answered "No".

	Number of students	Percentages %
Yes	21	70%
No	9	30%

**Table 22: Attitudes towards the difficulty of intonation use**

**Q12- Do you think that intonation problems and speech misunderstandings happen due to one of following?**

To answer this question, the researcher used the means and percentages for the students' attitudes about what are the main reasons for speech misunderstandings and intonation problems. The results showed that (16,67%) ticked (L1, L2 interference), (10%) ticked (language transfer), (36,67%) ticked (The lack of using the spoken), (6,67%) ticked (social factors), (30%) ticked (Other personal reasons) scale.

	N of students	Percentages %
L1 interference in the L2	5	16,67%
Language transfer	3	10%
The lack of using the spoken language	11	36,67%
Social factors (history, attitude, traditions)	2	6,67%
Other personal reasons	9	30%

**Table 23: Reasons behind speech misunderstandings and intonation problems**

#### 4. Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the main reasons behind the negligence of intonation in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. It highlights its attitudinal functions of transmitting meaningful utterances and exchanging ideas and expressions in a smooth and natural way, precisely for an effective communication, modulating intonation in teaching pronunciation to be one of the most essential factors of the speaking skill. Thus, its significant role can neither be denied nor avoided when raising the awareness of the language proficiency and fluency needs for better intonation knowledge, grasp and practice.

Students of Tahri Mohammed's University have little consideration to intonation patterns; most of them not only avoid intonation practice but the whole use of spoken

form of the foreign language. The lack of the spoken form use is due to speech problems such as accentuation and mother tongue interference in the foreign language performance this inhibits meeting the native-speaker fluency and automaticity. Moreover, the findings revealed the teachers' attitudes towards intonation patterns functions in effective communications and interactions.

Therefore, the study aims at providing both learners and teachers with the appropriate remedies that engage students in the process of learning more about intonation and pronunciation, activate their knowledge and interest to practice the foreign language productively and flawlessly.

## **5. Recommendations and remedies**

Despite its acknowledged importance, Intonation is required to be thickest link that best explains the speakers' real-world situations and speech expressions which focus mainly on what we want to produce and how we are going to produce it. For a safe interaction and exchange of ideas and attitudes between the teacher and the learner; we have the following suggestions:

1. Provide pronunciation training-courses to the teachers. Raising teachers' awareness of intonation functions for a better production of foreign language ,hence, approaches to teach intonation and to engage students for the right grasp of knowledge must be included in the academic training of teachers that is the best solutions and preparation to guide teachers to deal with different intonation circumstances, especially with the case of foreign language students , because students tend to imitate their teachers pronunciation as superior models of language performance to check whether their pronunciation of intonation is correct or not.
2. Teachers should teach the language taking into account its formal and informal use far from the language transfer. Major exposure to the foreign language may enhance both teachers' and students' pronunciation, and opening up a discussion with students may arouse their interest towards the lesson, meanwhile this gives the teacher chance to assess their intonation providing students' with explanation illustrating with examples, correct their mistakes and ask them to guess meanings from the way he pronounce the words or sentence expressions, this procedures will certainly strengthen their English language proficiency and fluency.
3. Getting used to the alternation of weaker and stronger beats: Click your fingers to emphasise the stress beats, you can get students used to thinking about the 'music' of English by over-emphasising the beats in sentences, by clicking your fingers or clapping your hands to show them the right rhythm of words loudness or length, and asking them to do the same, also moving arms up or down referring to rising or falling intonation

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,the use of gestures can engage students in the lesson and activate their practice is most of times interesting and enjoyable to learn .

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