

**EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' SKILLS IN PRONUNCIATION AND SPEECH PATTERNS: EVIDENCE FROM FEDERAL EXAMINATION BOARD IN KARACHI**

**Dr. Nuzhat Naz**

Department of Early Childhood care and Education  
New Vision School

**Mahnaz Aslam**

Assistant Professor

Department of Education University of Turbat

**Kiran Ehsan Ellahi**

Lecturer in Education

Department of Teacher Education

Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology.

\*Email of the corresponding author: [nnuzhat46@gmail.com](mailto:nnuzhat46@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This study aimed to find out the similarities and difference of pronunciation practices between two educational and examining boards under the same institute availing the opportunities in terms of communication classes. This study was conducted to get first-hand information about students' self-analysis regarding their pronunciation skills. This study was designed to probe the impact of teacher's training skills for developing pronunciation of students. The respondents observed in their formal classrooms got freedom to express their personal learning and practicing experiences with regards to pronunciation of English language. The study provided the researchers insight of unseen and unshared view about professional practices of language teachers in school systems. It led towards the timely implementation of practices and improvement in the language strategies keeping in view the unshared thought and opportunity to bring sound change. The checklist carrying 50 words from the respective books of students were used in the study. Students' pronunciations were recorded. All those listed words meant to cover up all the necessary elements in spoken English. The word list had covered the range from regular to irregular words. The Cambridge system students were found 90% successful in pronouncing the words whereas the performance of Federal Board system students was around 60%. This presented great difference of pronunciation skills of O 'Level students although their pronunciation showed dominance of British accent. The Federal Board students were less able to pronounce the words accurately. This difference is due to improper follow up of communication classes and teaching methodologies which resulted in lack of confidence level and speech issues..*

**Keywords:** Pronunciation pattern, communication classes, British accent, language teaching

**INTRODUCTION**

English as an International language has very dominant role in Pakistani education system. The cultural trend of using English as a medium of instruction has now become very popular. Ever since the world has turned into global village, the

importance of need of speaking in English has also increased. English as Second Language (ESL) or English as an International Language is a core element of conversation required by the learner in his daily life as it is the demand of our today's world. There is great increase in the learning of English as Second Language, ESL (Pail, 2004). There are four significant skills of English: listening, speaking, reading and writing. There is a need to balance these four skills among learners in order to become good at English. Language teachers can play a good role in education as a role model. If they perform these four skills in a proper manner, students will surely get chance to speak well. Unfortunately, teacher and learner find fewer opportunities in terms of having practice of these four skills in their institution which results in lack of speaking ability (Coleman, 2010).

Teachers are considered a key factor in building the structure of students' knowledge if hired as an English teacher. The learning of language suffers due to lacking in professional trainings as an English language teacher. English language curriculum itself does not come up to the requirement of teaching English as a Second Language. It mainly focuses over crossing the certain syllabi in order to meet the current requirement of the level (Teenvo, 2011). Competency level of the learners is not according to the level required as they are not provided with right direction/guidance of learning the language with its due requirement. Traditional or passive learning is skills in practice which creates hindrances in learning the language across many language centers and educational institutions in Pakistan.

English pronunciation matters a lot when it comes to speaking, but unfortunately most of the current pedagogic practices do not focus over the main objectives in terms of teaching pronunciation. Students in their academic and domestic life pronounce these words incorrectly due to ill usage of language in formal and informal settings. There are different pronunciations found of a similar word too. For example, the word divorce is pronounced (dee vorce). It is also pronounced (dye vorced). The word bowel/bool is pronounced (Ba owl) which are incorrect but are very common in practice as teaching English as Second Language. This happens as the teachers or trainers lack the phonetic knowledge in real classrooms settings. Pronunciation is the backbone of a language in daily communication or as a second language. The aim of communication depends upon the delivery of the right words in classes at schools, colleges and universities.

In Pakistan, the rise of a language centers, communication classes in school activities and in syllabus are meant to improve the pronunciation skills. Schools themselves try to hire and pay the teachers well that are good at spoken skills, but these practices are limited to private sectors. In most cases in schools, learners of English as Second Language possess ability over verbal usage, but lack pronunciation. Teachers that do not have sound background of phonetic system impart pronunciation which can easily be observed in English learners' communication.

Many researches have been conducted in the thirst of evaluating the pronunciation skills, pronunciation teaching methodologies and gap between communications. In the light of researches on pronunciation, the researchers found that the main reasons the traditional practices are not very language-oriented in classrooms is that they do not fulfill the requirement of teaching English as Second Language. Lack of knowledge

about phonetic system, lack of teachers' training and lack of awareness regarding proper pronunciation are very common.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to compare similarities and differences of pronunciation between Federal Board and O' Level students. The other objectives were to study the role of communication classes and evaluate self-awareness of English language learners about their pronunciation skills.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the difference between pronunciation of Federal Board and O' Level English students?
- What is the importance of communication classes in developing the pronunciation skills?

### **Study Justification**

Pronunciation has always been the most significant feature in communication. Delivery of any information on (ESL) English as Second Language receives a lot of attention and priority all over the world, but unfortunately Pakistani schooling systems have not done a lot to improve the language skills of learners. The study will assist the learners, teachers of English language, parents and school management to develop uniform policy and practices in terms of teaching pronunciation in formal English classes.

### **Scope & Limitation**

This study probes to provide us with the knowledge of differences of language teaching methodologies. The current practices would provide grounds to improve the teaching pedagogies. It would offer to adopt the culture of promoting right pronunciation and awareness. It would depict the prominent accent in context with (GA) General American or British accent as used by the institution to give description of dominant accent.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Pronunciation has very significant role in speaking and communication. In Pakistan, curriculum has received modification in terms of addition of oral communication practices, but unfortunately this very helpful strategy is neglected by language as it is mostly utilized for covering up the syllabus in formal settings. The other very critical situation is teachers are not trained to teach English as second language. The researches and surveys, which have been conducted, revealed that there is great difference of learning English between public and private schools. In public institutions, the traditional teaching aims towards the passive learning hence lacks in communication skills in terms of pronunciation. Moreover, parents have greater concern with English in terms of earning or getting better jobs. The syllabus follows passive learning strategies. Teachers lack knowledge of phonology and incorrect pronunciation is taught both at secondary and higher secondary schools.

There is a need to shift from passive learning to active and sound learning. Language teachers' training is another factor which plays an important role in the learning of English as second language.

Another research reveals that improper infrastructure and curriculum is the main cause which creates obstacle in the learning of English. All four skills of learning English; listening, speaking, reading and writing can only be improved if the trainer and learner both have sound knowledge of pronunciation. (Levis, 2005; Howlader, 2010; Howlader, 2011). The research by experts states that mother tongue plays very dominant role in the learning of pronunciation. Research questionnaire and survey tests have been used by most of the researchers in order to evaluate the pronunciation skills as strategies and current practices regarding the improvement of pronunciation skills. There are different pronunciation models followed by native and non-native speakers (RP) Received Pronunciation, GA (General American) model, but there are other pronunciation models too which are considered for pronunciation by a small population of the specific region; Canadian English, Australian English and New Zealand English Model.

This research analyzes similarities and differences of pronunciation between O 'level and Federal Board students. The research included the pre-test which contained twenty (20) questions related to self-analysis of learners in terms of pronunciation skills. The environment, background, parental support, reading comprehension and listening comprehension practices, teachers' role and oral communication exercises all are the significant features for learning pronunciation skills. This research includes the checking of pronunciation of students of both the systems.

### **Review of Literature**

There has been a lot of developments in linguistic discipline. The ways of teaching English have improved (Knight, 2001). Research studies in applied linguistics are not as abundant as required by research scholars in the field. Fewer of them are about pronunciation patterns and practices. Research studies in linguistics in Pakistan are scarce too. Hence, there is a need to understand the review in this direction. It was the common practice during nineteenth century where there used to be traditional rule to memorize grammatical rules and Lexical terms of the language by the learners (Knight, 2001). Teaching of language is likely to be easy if it is taught in a learner's native language. Mother tongue became reference to the teaching of target language through comparison and contrast of item between the two languages.

The Reform Movement started which resulted in foundation of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabets). Speech and oral practices received priority in language teaching through this association (Howatt, 1984, as cited in Knight, 2001). Direct Method came in use with the establishment of this association and along with this grammar teaching method got weaker. The direct method involves focus over active learning of the target language in the class as compared to previous method (Knight, 2001). The Foundation of Reform Movement led towards the establishment of phonetic system. There came the existence of accurate representation of the sound systems language which later on gave rise to learning of pronunciation. Moreover, phoneticians, the members of IPA

(International Phonetic Alphabets) promoted the phonetic system in language teaching which was expected to have good impact on modern language teaching.

With the passage of time, Reform Movement promoted the phonetic system and set such principles which provided the foundation for oral approach in the United Kingdom which emphasized over the contextualization of the language and its teaching and promoting the importance of pronunciation and its accurate practices (Knight, 2001). Audio lingualism came into existence with the development of Reform Movement. Audio Lingual Method was introduced in USA, during World War II where there came the need of good foreign language speakers (Stern, 2001). This method involves the learning of a language through listening to dialogue or grammatical structures then mimicking these dialogues or grammatical structure in order to gain perfect communication skills through repetition. It is a fact that communication plays vital role in Audio Lingual Method. It supported the teaching of pronunciation in comparison with Direct Method where teachers and instructors repeat a sound of a word or phrase which is repeated by the students through imitation. The Lingual Method offers phonetic knowledge as well in order to acquire sound accurately through transcriptions or demonstration. Pronunciation teaching method was found more effective through minimal pair drills. This technique involves teachers presenting and reading out pairs of words which have difference of only one sound. Students utilize their listening comprehension skills and learn to discriminate the sound. The sound repetition enables them to modernize their pronunciation.

Chomsky, (1957) demonstrated that language was created by a speaker due to some innate skills so it can not only be learnt by habit (Chomsky, 1957, as cited in Knight, 2001) which raised questions on both the models of language and the learning methods. Language was considered a product of rule formation and hypothesis testing not the mimicking or habit. Cognitive theory and cognitive code learning received promotion due to the development of the generative grammar. It came into existence as a reaction against structuralism and behaviorism on the basis of the audio-lingual method. Numerous methods got importance due to rise of Cognitive Theory and Cognitive Code Learning. On the other hand, silent way method is defined as method which is based upon a theory that states that memory can be increased if stimulated through motor activities of language. In this method, there is coordination between speech and physical act. Stress and rhythmic pattern can be better understood in pronunciation teaching through these physical actions.

It helps learners of English to understand meanings rather than grasping defined grammatical structures or comprehending the rules of the target language. The practical approach is required through communication practices. Being a part of a class, a learner takes the help of communication to show his understanding of objects present in very surrounding. Furthermore, a situation does also need to be explained through communication. An instructor is considered a leader, guide and helper of learners in terms of language facilitator.

There are basically two versions of CLT, Communicative Language Teaching strategies: One is associated with the teaching of grammar through activities hence it

is called weak version. The other one is associated purely with the communication. Therefore, it is called the strong version (Howatt, 1984). If on one hand communication is a key to explain the situation ideas or context well, on the other hand the right pronunciation is also very important component too.

Task-based teaching was invented by to fill in the gaps of communication though; it is thought a branch of CLT. In comparison with that, it offers a task as a problem-solving activity which enhance natural language learning through an environment (Foster, 1999). Accomplishment of the task depends upon language. Task-based language teaching is considered a helping tool for enhancing capability of learner through activities. In terms of sound learning, a facilitator is a source who can decide what tasks should be chosen in order to provide a wide range of precise activities to ensure the maximum learning of the language. Later on, students themselves become able to get themselves involved in the activities.

Project-based learning is altogether part of formulated designed, well-developed activities to ensure the smooth learning of a language. PBL is considered an analogous to TBL (Nunan, 2004). Like CLT, it also has two versions: weak and strong. A traditional way of teaching which moves parallel (weak version PBL) along with teaching of foreign language class (the strong version PBL). TBL and PBL both have main concern with pronunciation; hence it is the chief ingredient of communication. A communicative approach requires having sound teaching and learning of pronunciation in order to avoid communication hurdles, hence pronunciation is one of the main objectives of CLT, PBL and TBL. On the other hand, CALL system was developed in early 1980s known as Computer Assisted Language Learning. This system can be explained as the use of computer by the learner in order to improve language proficiency and skills.

CALL can be explained as a collection of methodological theories, techniques or sum of resources. It is not a sort of methodological, but a gadget or the tool through which various pedagogies can be taught. CALL offers a broad aspect of learning through electronic media: video, sound pictures, print, social media, newspaper, talk shows and documentaries. Phonetic practices can be best done through CALL, if adapted to audio-lingual technique. It provides quick response to learners which saves their time as well as improves their phonetic sound. (Erben, et al., 2009). E-tools for language teaching method have rapid and fast growth as they do not only facilitate the learners, but also bring confidence and creativity in them. (Dudeney, et al., 2008). It empowers self-assessment promoting student-centered class which in terms of more effective learning has constant evaluation and assessment through regular feedback. Studies also assert that there are fewer practices of communication done in the class. In other words, teachers neglect communication practices in English so students are not found in habit of conversation in English (Rahman, 1991). Teaching of pronunciation revolves around four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Teachers' speaking proficiency can be easily seen by their students as they reflect them (Coleman, 2010). National Education Policy [NEP] (2009) of Pakistan has brought uniformity and unanimity in the use of medium of instruction which makes English to be spoken and used for instruction and class discussion or other verbal activities. English medium or Urdu medium both can provide quality education in terms of

learning the language. If they possess effective class room learning environment, which fulfills the true demands of communication skills, it will definitely bring positive outcome along with the teachers training and inclination towards developing conducive speaking environment.

Teachers' trainings are not conducted in connection with language Learning (Sarwar, et al., 2017). Learning of L2 is found less effective as the curriculum fails to fulfill the requirements of the language learning. Furthermore, there is lack of basic facilities in terms of teaching the subject (Teevno, 2011). Language teachers are supposed to be the pillars over which lay a ceiling of learning, their best services will make the learning strong, but if they are weak in their base training, it will cause a collapse of the learning ceiling (Emery, 2004).

Received Pronunciation is related to accent spoken by the people who are in power beside a dialect. It is considered a social prestige. It is thought that RP speakers are those who live in past culture. These days RP accent is rarely spoken by the BBC presenters, which shows that British themselves are not using RP accent anymore. It is not easy to find out the model of pronunciation which is required to be accepted by everyone. Less than three 3% of the total population speak in pure accent in UK (Crystal, 1995). There is concern about the falling standard of pronunciation by the ESL, English as second Language teachers. World's main concern in terms of language is Lingua Franca Core. Native Speaker Model finds Lingua Franca Core as a threat to itself. It is worth concerning to adopt utterance model of pronunciation. There has been improper teaching of pronunciation by ESL teachers due to their lack of knowledge in terms of phonetic system. There has been lack of knowledge about pronunciation teaching. The native speaker does not possess positive attitude towards teaching of pronunciation. Pronunciation is taken as source of communication not paying attention towards the correct pronunciation or accent. The concept of EFL or ESL is now combining into EIL, English as International Language. These days English is served in a form of Lingua Franca due to a large number of non-native speakers (Widdowson, 1994).

### **Research Methodology**

This study involves qualitative approach and the method used is called phenomenology. The study deals with the data about the participants' perception, observation and self-analysis regarding their pronunciation skills. According to Cohen, et al., (2007), the qualitative research can be defined as the explanation of participants' views, data and providing shape to data in terms of pattern, theme categories and structure. Phenomenology as branch of scientific research inquiry is based upon the personal observation and experience. This study contains interview in order to gain the personal observation and experiences which have been further cross-checked through pronunciation words, checklist developed separately from both systems' course books for understanding the gap and similarities and differences between their pronunciations.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this research was students from O' Level and Federal Board System. The sample of the study were n=120 private system students who appeared in local schools as regular students. As both the systems have facility of communication classes, the comparative analysis was done 60 students represented O' Level education system and the other 60 represented Federal Board.

### **Procedures**

The samples were made to pronounce the words using the selected criteria. They were given two checklists that had the words written on them. The proforma and the checklists served as the data collection device from the selected samples. Each sample of the study was given a proforma which contained twenty 20 items related to participants' personal observation, views and expertise related to their pronunciation skills for instance reading habit, phonetic knowledge, teachers' listening comprehension activities, knowledge of vowel sound, knowledge of consonant sound, participation in speech completion, personal judgment of pronunciation. Such interviews provided the researchers with in-depth knowledge of participants 'privacy and access to information related to subject (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The next stage was the checking of pronunciation of students with the help of wordlist developed separately for both groups of samples. As they both had the communication classes facility so the textual words were selected which were recorded on audio tape along with the manual entry of checklist.

### **Data Collection**

This research included the data collection through collection of personal views and analysis related to pronunciation skills which was further analyzed through recording the words pronounced by the participant. The data was collected from 120 students who participated in the study. Primary data collection and words pronunciation were taken from the same participants as advocated by Cohen, et al., (2007). Primary data was very significant and provided the researchers with an insight of multiple interpretations. All approved protocols were observed in the collection of data.

### **Descriptive Data Analysis**

The data was collected in two phases. First one dealt with the questionnaire for getting self-analysis of participants regarding their pronunciation skills while the other one included the recording of pronunciation of 50 words of the participants and marking them on checklist. The words were collected from their respective books. The data was analyzed thematically. Questionnaire comprised Thematic Approach (TA). Thematic Research contains two processes: deductive and inductive.

This analysis is found more flexible in qualitative type of research. Such data analysis favors the researcher where there is a requirement of deducing data and then analyzing it thematically in the light of evidences. Cambridge system students pronounced 85% correct words which stated that their familiarization with these words was more professional in nature and complexity. The impact of communication classes in this group was visible as they pronounced the words correctly in relation with their personal observation. Teaching and learning of pronunciation were of a better level. It showed that they were given maximum opportunity to learn and pronounce the words.



Teaching methodology stated effective manner as it showed students' confidence. They were found fluent at spoken English. Phonetic knowledge was clear too. These words received pronunciation of a good standard. They showed their familiarization with the words. Stresses were correctly applied in most cases. The knowledge of consonant sound, vowel sound and phonetic system was appropriate. As these words were taken from their text book, they revealed their regular practice of pronunciation through classroom practice.

The words *reckon* and *gregarious* were pronounced 90% correctly. They were rightly stressed as well. Their pronunciation depicted the familiarization with words. The intonation was almost correct. Their pronunciation had influence of British accent to a fair extent. Three or more syllable words were justified in terms of pronunciation, their knowledge of vowel, consonant sound and phonetic system was to a maximum level appropriateness. Classroom reading, verbal practices seemed adequate as they showed fluency in pronunciation. Most of the students showed their interest in pronouncing the words quickly which represented the effect of their listening comprehension activities and reading practices. Thus, words like were pronounced accurately in terms of stress, intonation and voice clarity.

The group of students in the Federal Board showed average result in pronunciation of these words which revealed lack of their verbal practices. The words such as *alleviated*, *bounty*, *delicate*, *furiously* and *flamboyant* were not stressed appropriately. Students' knowledge of phonology seemed ineffective which negated their personal analysis in the assessment form. They were hesitating while pronouncing these words. It seemed that the classes were not able to receive enough exposure of reading and writing culture. The students also said that they were asked to read silently in most cases. The words such as *companion*, *aptitude*, *colleague* and *curative* were pronounced satisfactorily to some extent. They lacked knowledge of vowel and consonant sound. Furthermore, the classroom practices did not seem to be good enough. They seemed reluctant to pronounce these words in first attempt.

## **Discussion**

The students' responses revealed that the teaching of pronunciation and speaking exercises were helpful. Speaking skills was a part of regular classes. The students were found enthusiastic in learning correct pronunciations to a greater extent. They showed their consent and concern in the forms too. The forms also revealed 80% responses associated with their parental support, environment, classroom activities, self-studies, knowledge of phonology, vowel and consonant sound. In their pronunciation recording session, the students seemed eager, confident and more geared up. They showed very little nervousness. Their accent was clear, rightly stress and pronounced.

As the words were selected from their text books, they seemed to have exercised the word before. They were prompt in pronouncing them. Nearly 80% suggested promoting the speech competition culture as it could lead them to know the importance of pronouncing the words correctly. To some extent, they showed variation of accent, but British accent was found more prominent due to their inclination towards English dictionary. Many of them suggested raising the awareness through electronic

dictionary as they had already used it. One of the positive aspects of O' Level students was that they were frequent users of dictionary.

On the other hand, the experience of the Federal Board was fine too. 50-60% of them were well-prepared for recording. They showed great interest in the test of pronunciation. Many of them seemed nervous, but got settled down soon. They wanted the teachers to allocate a day for preparation for such drills in future. They seemed very conscious about recording as they considered it part of their assessment. Later on, the investigator informed them that it was meant for analysis of the difference between the pronunciations. They suggested to be given more two-syllabic words instead of three or four. They complained about fewer opportunities of reading practices in the classroom. The first phase showed 90% self-analysis of their personal observation and experience which showed variation in their answers. In their 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the test, actual recording of the pronunciation was the done. They complained regarding more handwriting practices.

### **Findings**

This study aimed to find out the similarities and difference of pronunciation between two educational systems under the management of the same institute availing the opportunities in terms of communication classes. This study was conducted to get firsthand information about students' self-analysis regarding their pronunciation skills. This was quite helpful as they got freedom to express their personal observation. The questionnaire provided the knowledge of unseen and unshared view and led to the timely implementation of practices and improvement in the strategies. The use of checklist carrying 50 words from the respective books and recording of students' voices was beneficial to the students. The study found that 90% O' Level students remained successful in pronouncing the words whereas the performance of the Federal Board system was of 50-60 % which presented great difference of pronunciation skills. This difference is due to improper follow up of communication classes and teaching methodologies which resulted in lack of confidence and speech issues.

### **Conclusion**

Pronunciation is the key to any language when it comes to the understanding and usage of a language. English is certainly one of the effective and required tools of communication in Pakistani educational institutions offering UK Board Examinations. It is regarded and promoted in the schooling system of Pakistan. Unfortunately, these institutions lack effective language teachers and promoters towards correct pronunciations of words in English. Privately-run educational institutions have been trying to maintain the standards of English as a foreign language, but the system requires more training and development of the teachers and the management. The current study presented the difference of pronunciation where same facility of promoting the pronunciation is available, but the systems have communication class following three types. Federal Board system had weak pronunciation in comparison with Cambridge System. Self-analysis forms revealed the same difference to a fair extent as many of the Federal Board students marked and suggested to be given maximum support in learning the pronunciation correctly. They suggested that oral practice of pronunciation must be introduced in classes. Speech competition could lead

to better pronunciation among the students. Most of the students were unaware of the phonetic system. The Cambridge system was found better as it had shown better result in pronouncing the words. The gaps in pronunciation are mainly ignorance of teaching methodologies and less focus over verbal skills in comparison with speaking.

### **Recommendations**

The teaching methodology may be modified in ESL and EFL classrooms in educational institutions offering English as a compulsory subject. In these classes, practice of pronunciation activities must be made compulsory. This is expected to let the students feel encouraged to speak with correct pronunciations. The other recommendation includes introduction of electronic dictionary wherever possible. The prompt knowledge of phonetic will add confidence and active learning among the students as well. The teachers of ESL and EFL may also provide assignment on reading for effective communication in and out of the school situations. The policy makers of ESL and EFL may introduce a monitoring system to check the oral and verbal practice in text books too. Local authorities should provide a website free of cost to students where an individual can launch a problem and can be addressed according. This study also recommends introducing low cost or free model classes too.

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