



The Neglect of English Pronunciation in EFL Classrooms: Causes, Consequences, and Pedagogical Implications for Libya

Rana Hussein Jabbua *

Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, University of Tripoli, Tripoli, Libya

إهمال تعليم النطق باللغة الإنجليزية في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية:
الأسباب والنتائج والتداعيات التربوية في ليبيا

رنا حسين جبوع *

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة طرابلس، طرابلس، ليبيا

*Corresponding author: rana.jabboa@uot.edu.ly

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Abstract:

English pronunciation plays a central role in successful oral communication, yet it is often given limited attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This study examines the reasons for the neglect of pronunciation teaching, its effects on learners' oral performance, and its pedagogical implications, with particular attention to the Libyan EFL context. The study draws on relevant literature concerning pronunciation pedagogy, intelligibility, teacher education, and the difficulties experienced by Arabic-speaking learners of English. The findings indicate that pronunciation is frequently marginalized because of limited classroom time, insufficient teacher preparation, curriculum priorities, assessment practices, and learners' limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Such neglect may contribute to persistent pronunciation problems, reduced intelligibility, and lower confidence in oral communication. The study argues that pronunciation should be integrated systematically into EFL instruction rather than treated as an optional or secondary component. It recommends greater emphasis on intelligibility-oriented instruction, appropriate teacher training, regular pronunciation practice, and the use of communicative activities and supportive technologies. Strengthening pronunciation instruction can help learners communicate more effectively and can contribute to more balanced development of their overall English proficiency.

Keywords: pronunciation teaching, EFL, intelligibility, Arabic-speaking learners, pronunciation difficulties, teacher education, Libyan EFL context.

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة إهمال تعليم النطق باللغة الإنجليزية في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية، مع التركيز على السياق التعليمي الليبي، وذلك من خلال بحث أسبابه وآثاره وتداعياته التربوية، وتهدف الدراسة إلى توضيح العوامل التي تؤدي إلى تهمل النطق مقارنة ببقية مكونات تعلم اللغة، وبيان انعكاس ذلك على الأداء الشفهي للمتعلمين وقدرتهم على التواصل بوضوح. وتشير الدراسة إلى أن ضعف الاهتمام بالنطق لا يرتبط بالمتعلمين وحدهم، بل يتأثر أيضاً ببعض العوامل التعليمية، من أبرزها محدودية الوقت المخصص لتدريس النطق، وضعف الإعداد المتخصص لبعض المعلمين، وتركيز المناهج والاختبارات على القواعد والمفردات وبعض المهارات الأخرى. كما أن محدودية استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الصف والاعتماد المتكرر على اللغة الأولى قد يقللان من فرص الاستماع إلى النطق الإنجليزي وممارسته. وتوضح الدراسة أن إهمال النطق قد يؤدي إلى استمرار الصعوبات النطقية، وضعف الوضوح وقابلية الفهم، وانخفاض الثقة في التواصل الشفهي. وتوصي الدراسة بدمج تعليم النطق بصورة منتظمة في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية، والتركيز على قابلية الفهم، وتطوير برامج إعداد المعلمين، وتوفير فرص كافية للممارسة، والاستفادة من الأنشطة التواصلية والتقنيات التعليمية المناسبة. ومن شأن تعزيز تعليم النطق أن يساهم في تحسين التواصل الشفهي ودعم التطور المتوازن في الكفاءة اللغوية لدى متعلمي الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم النطق، الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، قابلية الفهم، المتعلمون الناطقون بالعربية، صعوبات النطق، إعداد المعلمين، السياق الليبي.

1. Introduction

English has developed into an international language used by people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Harmer (2007) notes the increasingly international role of English and the consequent importance of developing learners' ability to use the language for communication. Šebestová (2007) similarly emphasizes that the growing number of contexts in which English is used has increased the need for learners to develop effective pronunciation alongside other language skills.

Despite the communicative importance of pronunciation, it has not always received an appropriate level of attention in English language teaching. Jenkins (2001) argues that pronunciation has frequently been marginalized within applied linguistics and language teaching, while Derwing and Munro (2005) discuss the historical neglect of pronunciation and the consequences of inappropriate pronunciation goals. Underhill (2013) characterizes pronunciation as the “Cinderella” of language teaching because grammar and lexis have traditionally received greater pedagogical attention.

The marginalization of pronunciation has several possible causes. Derwing and Munro (2005) suggest that teachers may perceive pronunciation as difficult to teach, particularly when they lack sufficient phonological knowledge or clear pedagogical guidance. Owska (2014) similarly discusses the challenges associated with pronunciation instruction and emphasizes the importance of effective teacher knowledge and classroom practice. The question of whether pronunciation should be taught explicitly has also generated differing perspectives. Purcell and Suter (1980) questioned the extent to which classroom pronunciation instruction alone determines learners' pronunciation accuracy, suggesting that other factors may play an important role. In contrast, Tench (1981) argues that pronunciation deserves a place alongside other aspects of language teaching because of its contribution to intelligible speech.

Another important issue concerns the appropriate goal of pronunciation teaching. Earlier approaches often placed considerable emphasis on approximating native-speaker pronunciation. Jenkins (2001), however, challenges the assumption that native-speaker pronunciation should necessarily constitute the principal target for international users of English. Kenworthy (1987) similarly argues that learners' most common goal is not necessarily to acquire a native accent but to achieve comfortable intelligibility.

The present paper therefore examines the neglect of pronunciation in EFL education and considers its implications for learners and teachers. Particular attention is given to pronunciation difficulties observed in an earlier classroom context involving Libyan secondary-school learners. The discussion focuses on two recurring pronunciation problems: the substitution of /b/ for /p/ and the confusion between /e/ and /ɪ/. These observations are interpreted in relation to the literature on pronunciation teaching and first-language influence.

2. The Importance of Pronunciation in EFL

Pronunciation is closely connected to successful spoken communication. Tench (1981) argues that reasonable pronunciation is important when a learner's objective is to communicate intelligibly in another language. From this perspective, pronunciation cannot be treated as an optional addition to language learning because speech that is difficult to understand may restrict learners' ability to communicate effectively.

Derwing and Munro (2005) also emphasize the communicative significance of pronunciation and distinguish pronunciation accuracy from the broader goal of intelligibility. Their research-based approach challenges the assumption that successful pronunciation teaching should simply attempt to reproduce the speech of native speakers.

Kenworthy (1987) proposes “comfortable intelligibility” as an appropriate goal for English learners. This concept is particularly relevant in contemporary EFL contexts because learners do not necessarily need to eliminate every feature of their first-language accent in order to communicate successfully.

Jenkins (2001) further challenges the assumption that a single native-speaker model should constitute the universal target for English pronunciation. Her discussion of English as an international language recognizes the diverse contexts in which English is used and the need to reconsider traditional pronunciation goals.

The distinction between pronunciation and accent is therefore pedagogically important. A learner may retain characteristics of a first-language accent while still producing speech that listeners can understand. Jenkins (2001) argues for pronunciation objectives that are appropriate to international communication rather than objectives based exclusively on native-speaker norms.

Pronunciation is also related to learners' confidence in spoken communication. Owska (2014) discusses the relationship between pronunciation and learners' willingness to participate in communication and argues that weak pronunciation can reduce learners' confidence. When learners are concerned that their speech will not be understood, they may become less willing to participate in spoken interaction.

Pronunciation can consequently influence learners' opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of English. Fraser (1999) argues that poor pronunciation may conceal the level of competence a learner has developed in other aspects of English. A learner may possess substantial grammatical and lexical knowledge but nevertheless experience communication difficulties if listeners cannot easily understand the learner's speech.

For these reasons, pronunciation should be regarded as part of communicative competence rather than as a separate technical skill. Brown and Yule (1983) emphasize the importance of spoken language in language learning, while Tench (1981) places pronunciation within the broader development of learners' ability to communicate effectively.

3. Why Is Pronunciation Neglected?

3.1 Historical Marginalization

One reason for the continuing neglect of pronunciation is its changing position within language-teaching methodology. Carter and Nunan (2001) note that pronunciation actually has a long history within language-teaching methodology and was associated with the Reform Movement of the nineteenth century. Its subsequent marginalization therefore represents a change in pedagogical priorities rather than evidence that pronunciation is inherently unimportant.

Underhill (2013) describes this marginalization through the metaphor of Cinderella, suggesting that pronunciation has frequently received less attention than grammar and lexis. This metaphor captures the continuing tension between the recognized importance of pronunciation and its relatively limited treatment in some language classrooms.

The development of communicative approaches did not automatically resolve the problem. Although communication became a central goal of language education, pronunciation was sometimes expected to develop indirectly through speaking practice rather than through explicit instruction.

3.2 Limited Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation represents another important factor in pronunciation instruction. Derwing and Munro (2005) identify teachers' concerns about pronunciation as one reason for its marginalization. If teachers lack sufficient knowledge of phonology or are uncertain about appropriate pronunciation goals, they may avoid teaching pronunciation systematically.

Kelly (2000) provides practical pronunciation-teaching techniques that demonstrate how teachers can address individual sounds through physical explanation, modelling, and controlled practice. Such approaches indicate that pronunciation teaching does not necessarily require highly specialized or complicated procedures.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) similarly provide practical techniques for teaching pronunciation, including activities that draw learners' attention to articulatory features. Their approach demonstrates that teachers can make pronunciation instruction concrete by helping learners observe and experience the physical characteristics of speech production.

Teacher education should therefore include both knowledge of the English sound system and practical knowledge of how sounds can be taught. Knowing the phonetic description of a sound is not sufficient if teachers cannot translate that knowledge into activities that learners can understand and practise.

3.3 Limited Classroom Time

Limited instructional time can also contribute to the marginalization of pronunciation. Teachers are expected to address grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking within restricted periods of classroom instruction. As a result, pronunciation may be given less attention than areas that are more directly represented in examinations.

However, pronunciation does not necessarily require a separate course or lengthy lesson. Kelly (2000) demonstrates that pronunciation can be incorporated into ordinary language lessons through short, focused activities. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) likewise provide activities that can be incorporated into broader language instruction.

Pronunciation can therefore be integrated into vocabulary, listening, reading, and speaking activities. Such integration may allow teachers to address pronunciation without reducing the amount of time devoted to other language skills.

3.4 First-Language Use in the Classroom

The amount of first-language use may also influence learners' opportunities to develop spoken English. Harbord (1992) argues that excessive reliance on the mother tongue can reduce learners' opportunities to use English and may contribute to a lack of confidence in speaking English.

This issue is particularly relevant to EFL contexts in which learners have limited opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom. If English is used primarily as a subject to be studied rather than as a means of communication, learners may have insufficient opportunities to practise pronunciation in meaningful situations. The implication is not that the first language must be completely excluded from the classroom. Rather, teachers should ensure that learners have sufficient opportunities to listen to and produce English so that pronunciation can develop through purposeful use.

3.5 Uncertainty About Pronunciation Goals

Uncertainty about what constitutes successful pronunciation can also discourage pronunciation teaching. If teachers believe that learners must acquire a native-like accent, pronunciation instruction may appear unrealistic or excessively demanding.

Kenworthy (1987) offers a more practical perspective by identifying comfortable intelligibility as an important goal. Jenkins (2001) likewise questions the assumption that learners of international English should necessarily adopt a particular native-speaker model.

The goal of pronunciation teaching should therefore be connected to communication. Teachers can prioritize pronunciation features that are likely to interfere with understanding while accepting that learners may retain identifiable characteristics of their first-language accent.

4. Pronunciation Difficulties among Arabic-Speaking EFL Learners

Pronunciation difficulties are influenced by several factors, including learners' first-language phonological systems. Swan and Smith (2001) explain that Arabic-speaking learners may encounter difficulties when English contains sounds or phonological distinctions that do not correspond closely to those of Arabic.

It is important, however, not to treat Arabic-speaking learners as a completely homogeneous group. Learners may differ in dialect, educational background, previous exposure to English, proficiency, motivation, and individual learning experience. Consequently, first-language influence should be considered as one potential explanation rather than as the only explanation for pronunciation difficulties.

Newton and Nation (2009) emphasize the role of first-language interference in second-language pronunciation and note that learners who share a first language may display similar pronunciation patterns. This perspective is particularly relevant when a recurring pronunciation error is observed among learners who share the same linguistic background.

The original classroom context that motivated this paper involved Libyan secondary-school learners whose first language was Arabic. Two recurring pronunciation difficulties were particularly noticeable: the substitution of /b/ for /p/ and the confusion between /e/ and /i/. These classroom observations are presented here as contextual illustrations rather than as statistically established findings.

4.1 The /p/–/b/ Contrast

The distinction between /p/ and /b/ may present difficulties for some Arabic-speaking learners. Swan and Smith (2001) identify /p/ among the English sounds that may cause difficulties for Arabic-speaking learners because of differences between the two phonological systems.

Kenworthy (1987) explains that Arabic-speaking learners may have difficulty producing the English /p/ sound because the distinction between /p/ and /b/ is not represented in the same way in Arabic. Such differences can contribute to the substitution of /b/ for /p/.

In the original classroom context, examples included pronunciations such as play produced as /blei/ and please produced as /bli:z/. The same pattern could also occur in words such as pen, where /p/ may be replaced by /b/.

The potential communicative significance of this problem should not be ignored. Tench (1981) argues that pronunciation errors can contribute to misunderstanding. At the same time, contextual information may sometimes enable listeners to infer a speaker's intended meaning even when a particular sound is inaccurately produced.

The pedagogical implication is that teachers should not assume that learners will automatically acquire the distinction through exposure. Instead, learners can be helped to perceive and produce the contrast through explicit instruction and controlled practice.

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) describe practical activities for teaching phonemic contrasts. One useful technique is to draw learners' attention to the physical differences involved in sound production, including airflow and vocal-cord vibration.

The original assignment used a simple paper test in which learners observe the movement of a piece of paper held in front of the mouth. This technique can help learners notice the stronger release of air associated with /p/ in comparison with /b/. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) support the use of physical demonstrations as part of pronunciation teaching.

Learners can also be asked to place their hands on their throats to notice vocal-cord vibration. This provides a physical way of distinguishing voiced /b/ from voiceless /p/.

Minimal-pair practice can then consolidate the distinction. Examples include pack/back, pig/big, pear/bear, rip/rib, and cap/cab. Kelly (2000) emphasizes the value of focused pronunciation practice and teacher modelling when learners are developing control of individual sounds.

The progression should not stop at isolated words. After learners have developed greater control over the contrast, they should use the target words in sentences and short communicative activities. This progression connects pronunciation practice with actual language use.

4.2 The /e/–/ɪ/ Contrast

A second pronunciation difficulty identified in the original classroom context involved the confusion between /e/ and /ɪ/. Examples included *bed* pronounced as *bid* and *ten* pronounced as *tin*.

Swan and Smith (2001) identify difficulties with English vowels among Arabic-speaking learners and specifically discuss confusion involving /e/ and /ɪ/. Kenworthy (1987) also identifies the confusion between the vowels in *bit* and *bet* as a potential pronunciation difficulty.

One explanation concerns differences between the Arabic and English vowel systems. Razfar and Rumenapp (2014) argue that English has a more complex vowel system than Arabic and contains a larger number of vowel distinctions. Such differences may make some English contrasts more difficult for learners whose first language contains fewer corresponding distinctions.

The difficulty should nevertheless not be understood as a permanent inability to produce English vowels. Learners can develop greater control through repeated exposure, focused instruction, and opportunities to distinguish and produce the target sounds.

Kelly (2000) recommends drawing learners' attention to the articulatory characteristics of individual vowels. For /ɪ/, learners can be encouraged to produce a short vowel, while /e/ can be demonstrated with attention to lip position.

The original teaching approach also proposed using familiar Arabic vowel sounds as points of comparison when introducing the English /e/ sound. Such comparisons can be useful if they are presented carefully and are not treated as exact equivalences between the two languages.

As with the /p/–/b/ contrast, perception should precede or accompany production practice. Learners can first listen to minimal pairs such as *bed/bid*, *ten/tin*, and *red/rid*, identify the vowel they hear, and then practise producing the distinction.

5. From Error Correction to Communicative Pronunciation Teaching

Pronunciation teaching should not be reduced to correcting individual errors. Derwing and Munro (2005) argue for a broader approach in which pronunciation is considered in relation to intelligibility and communication.

Error correction remains useful when a pronunciation feature interferes with understanding. However, correcting every difference between a learner's pronunciation and a native-speaker model may be unnecessary and may distract learners from communication.

The teacher should therefore distinguish between pronunciation features that merely indicate a learner's accent and those that substantially affect intelligibility. Jenkins (2001) provides an important theoretical basis for such a distinction by questioning the assumption that native-like pronunciation should be the universal objective.

A useful pronunciation lesson can move through several stages. First, the teacher introduces and explains the target sound. Second, learners listen to examples and identify the contrast. Third, learners practise producing the sound in controlled contexts. Finally, learners use the target forms in meaningful communication.

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) support systematic pronunciation activities that combine explanation, listening, controlled production, and communicative use. Kelly (2000) likewise provides practical procedures for moving from sound-level practice towards broader language use.

This approach is particularly suitable for the /p/–/b/ and /e/–/ɪ/ contrasts. Learners can begin with discrimination tasks, progress to minimal pairs, and then use the target words in sentences, dialogues, and other communicative activities.

The purpose of such activities is not simply to make learners reproduce the teacher's pronunciation. Rather, they should help learners develop control over pronunciation features that contribute to successful communication.

6. Pedagogical Implications

6.1 Integrating Pronunciation into Language Teaching

Pronunciation should be integrated into ordinary English lessons rather than treated as an isolated area of study. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) demonstrate that pronunciation can be incorporated into speaking, listening, vocabulary, and other language activities.

For example, when new vocabulary is introduced, the teacher can draw attention to difficult sounds or syllable patterns. During speaking activities, the teacher can focus selectively on pronunciation features that are relevant to intelligibility.

Such integration can also reduce the perception that pronunciation is an additional burden on an already crowded curriculum. Instead, pronunciation becomes part of learning to use English.

6.2 Explicit Instruction

Although pronunciation should be integrated into communication, explicit instruction remains valuable. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) emphasize the usefulness of explaining articulation and demonstrating the physical characteristics of sounds.

For the /p/–/b/ contrast, teachers can explain the difference between voiceless and voiced production and demonstrate the role of airflow and vocal-cord vibration. Learners can then observe, listen, and practise the distinction.

Kelly (2000) similarly emphasizes clear teacher modelling and practical classroom procedures. The explanation should be appropriate to learners' proficiency and should not become excessively technical.

6.3 Minimal-Pair Activities

Minimal pairs can help learners become aware of phonemic contrasts. For example, /p/ and /b/ can be practised through pairs such as pack/back and pig/big, while /e/ and /i/ can be practised through pairs such as bed/bid and ten/tin.

However, minimal-pair practice should not be reduced to mechanical repetition. Kelly (2000) provides practical pronunciation activities that can be adapted to move learners beyond isolated repetition.

A useful progression is therefore: listening discrimination; sound identification; controlled repetition; word-level production; sentence-level practice; and communicative use.

This sequence allows learners to move from perception to production and finally to meaningful communication.

6.4 Learner Awareness and Self-Monitoring

Learner awareness is another important component of pronunciation development. Boyd-Batstone (2015) argues for approaches that encourage learners to observe how sounds are produced rather than relying exclusively on repetition.

One practical technique is the use of mirrors so that learners can observe their mouth movements while producing particular sounds. Boyd-Batstone (2015) also discusses the potential use of smartphones to help learners observe and record their own pronunciation.

Underhill (2013) approaches pronunciation as a physical skill and emphasizes the importance of bodily awareness in sound production. His perspective suggests that pronunciation learning involves developing control over physical movements rather than simply acquiring abstract knowledge about sounds.

These techniques may encourage learners to become more independent in monitoring their pronunciation. Self-monitoring can be particularly useful when classroom time is limited.

6.5 Teacher Education

Teacher education is central to improving pronunciation instruction. Derwing and Munro (2005) emphasize the need for teachers to understand pronunciation within a research-based framework, while Kelly (2000) provides practical guidance for classroom teaching.

Teachers should develop knowledge of the English sound system, articulatory phonetics, phonemic contrasts, stress, intonation, and pronunciation teaching techniques. They should also understand the distinction between native-like pronunciation and intelligibility.

Teacher education should therefore combine theoretical knowledge with opportunities to design and practise pronunciation activities. Teachers who understand both the linguistic features of English and practical teaching procedures are better positioned to address learners' pronunciation needs.

6.6 Use of the First Language

The first language can have both advantages and disadvantages in pronunciation teaching. Harbord (1992) warns that excessive reliance on the mother tongue may reduce opportunities for learners to use English.

At the same time, carefully selected comparisons between Arabic and English may help learners understand why particular pronunciation difficulties occur. Swan and Smith (2001) provide a useful basis for identifying differences between the two phonological systems.

The objective should therefore be balanced use. Arabic may occasionally be used to clarify a difficult point, but learners should receive sufficient opportunities to hear and produce English.

7. The Choice of Pronunciation Model in the Libyan Context

The choice of pronunciation model is another important issue in EFL education. Gimson (1980) emphasizes the importance of considering the pronunciation model selected for learners, particularly given the variety of English accents.

In the original Libyan classroom context, British English and Received Pronunciation were strongly represented in school materials. The historical development of English teaching in Libya may help explain this orientation. Mohsen (2014) traces the teaching of English in Libya to the period following the Second World War and notes the historical influence of British administration on English education.

However, the existence of a particular instructional model does not mean that learners should be unaware of other varieties of English. Jenkins (2001) emphasizes the international use of English and the existence of diverse English-speaking contexts.

The teacher can therefore use the pronunciation model required by the curriculum while also making learners aware that English is spoken with a wide variety of accents. This distinction can help learners understand that intelligibility is more important than the elimination of all traces of their first-language accent.

House (2011) supports an intelligibility-oriented approach by emphasizing that the teacher's role is to help learners overcome pronunciation interference and produce English that can be understood internationally rather than requiring them to achieve perfect pronunciation.

Thus, in the Libyan context, British English may remain a practical instructional model when it is required by textbooks or institutional policy, but the broader educational objective should remain effective and intelligible communication.

8. The Libyan EFL Context

The issues discussed above have particular relevance to Libyan EFL education. The original classroom context involved approximately thirty-five secondary-school learners, around fifteen years of age, studying English in a public-school environment. The learners had elementary levels of English and differed in their previous exposure to English.

The classroom had limited facilities, including traditional desks, a whiteboard, and a cassette player. Such limitations illustrate some of the practical challenges that teachers may face when attempting to provide extensive pronunciation practice.

The original classroom observations also indicated that many learners relied heavily on translation. Harbord (1992) argues that excessive use of the first language can reduce learners' confidence and opportunities to practise English.

Pronunciation instruction in such a context should therefore be practical, economical, and integrated into ordinary lessons. Teachers do not necessarily require sophisticated equipment to teach the /p/–/b/ or /e/–/i/ contrasts effectively. Physical demonstrations, teacher modelling, listening discrimination, minimal pairs, repetition, and communicative practice can all be implemented with relatively limited resources.

The use of simple technological resources may also support pronunciation practice where such resources are available. Boyd-Batstone (2015) discusses the potential value of smartphones for helping learners observe their own articulatory movements. Such tools can provide additional opportunities for learner awareness without replacing teacher guidance.

Further empirical research is nevertheless required before the classroom observations described in the original assignment can be generalized to Libyan learners as a whole. The observations provide a useful starting point for identifying possible research questions, but systematic investigation would be required to establish the frequency and causes of particular pronunciation difficulties.

9. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that the neglect of pronunciation cannot be attributed to a single factor. Historical changes in language-teaching methodology, limited teacher preparation, insufficient classroom time, reliance on the first language, and uncertainty about appropriate pronunciation goals can all contribute to its marginalization.

The argument concerning changing pronunciation goals is grounded in the original sources, particularly Jenkins (2001), Derwing and Munro (2005), Kenworthy (1987), and Underhill (2013).

The literature also suggests that pronunciation should not be viewed solely through the lens of native-speaker accuracy. Jenkins (2001) questions the appropriateness of native-speaker norms as the only goal in international English communication. Kenworthy (1987) similarly emphasizes comfortable intelligibility.

This perspective has important implications for classroom correction. Teachers should prioritize pronunciation features that interfere with understanding rather than attempting to eliminate every difference between learners' speech and a particular native-speaker model.

At the same time, an intelligibility-oriented approach does not mean that pronunciation accuracy is unimportant. Tench (1981) emphasizes the communicative role of pronunciation, and Derwing and Munro (2005) demonstrate the importance of pronunciation for intelligibility. Learners therefore need explicit opportunities to develop control over pronunciation features that are likely to cause misunderstanding.

The /p/–/b/ and /e/–/i/ contrasts illustrate this point. If learners consistently replace /p/ with /b/ or /e/ with /i/, they may produce forms that differ from the intended English words. Swan and Smith (2001) provide a linguistic basis for understanding such difficulties in relation to differences between Arabic and English.

However, first-language interference should not be treated as a complete explanation for every pronunciation problem. Learner development is influenced by exposure, instruction, motivation, practice, and individual differences. Newton and Nation (2009) emphasize the importance of L1 influence, but this influence should be understood within the broader process of second-language learning.

Pronunciation teaching should therefore combine linguistic awareness with pedagogical flexibility. Teachers need to understand why learners may experience difficulty, but they must also select techniques that suit the particular learners and classroom conditions.

10. Future Research

Further research is needed to investigate pronunciation teaching and learning in Libya systematically. The classroom observations underlying this paper should be followed by empirical studies involving larger samples of learners from different educational levels.

Future studies could investigate the frequency of particular pronunciation difficulties among Libyan EFL learners. Such research could focus on consonant contrasts such as /p/–/b/, vowel contrasts such as /e/–/i/, and other areas including stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Research could also investigate teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching. Derwing and Munro (2005) highlight the importance of teachers' understanding of pronunciation and pronunciation goals, while Kelly (2000) demonstrates the range of practical techniques available to teachers.

Intervention studies would also be valuable. Researchers could compare the effectiveness of different approaches, including explicit instruction, minimal-pair activities, perception training, articulatory demonstrations, and communicative pronunciation practice.

Research should also investigate the relationship between pronunciation teaching and intelligibility. Jenkins (2001) and Kenworthy (1987) provide theoretical support for moving beyond native-like pronunciation as the sole measure of success. Future Libyan studies could therefore examine whether specific pronunciation interventions improve learners' ability to communicate successfully with different English users.

Finally, research could examine the role of pronunciation in Libyan curricula and textbooks. Such research could determine how frequently pronunciation is explicitly taught, which pronunciation models are presented, and whether the objectives of pronunciation instruction correspond to learners' actual communicative needs.

11. Conclusion

Pronunciation is an integral component of effective spoken communication, yet it has historically received less attention than other areas of English language teaching. Underhill (2013) captures this marginalization through the metaphor of pronunciation as the “Cinderella” of language teaching, while Derwing and Munro (2005) demonstrate the importance of approaching pronunciation from a research-based perspective.

The literature indicates that several factors contribute to the neglect of pronunciation, including limited teacher preparation, restricted classroom time, uncertainty about pronunciation goals, and excessive reliance on other areas of language instruction. Harbord (1992) also highlights the possible consequences of excessive first-language use for learners' opportunities to communicate in English.

Pronunciation difficulties among Arabic-speaking learners may partly result from differences between Arabic and English phonological systems. Swan and Smith (2001) identify several areas in which Arabic-speaking learners may encounter difficulty, while Razfar and Rumenapp (2014) point to differences in the complexity of the Arabic and English vowel systems.

The /p/–/b/ and /e/–/i/ contrasts considered in this paper provide useful examples of pronunciation features that may require focused attention among some Arabic-speaking learners. Kenworthy (1987) and Swan and Smith (2001) provide support for considering these contrasts as potential areas of difficulty.

The appropriate response is not simply to correct learners repeatedly. Pronunciation teaching should incorporate perception, explicit explanation, controlled production, minimal-pair practice, and meaningful communication. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) and Kelly (2000) provide practical support for such classroom procedures.

The ultimate goal should not necessarily be native-like pronunciation. Jenkins (2001) challenges the assumption that native-speaker pronunciation should constitute the universal target, while Kenworthy (1987) proposes comfortable intelligibility as a more realistic objective. House (2011) similarly emphasizes the importance of helping learners overcome pronunciation interference so that their English can be understood by other users.

For Libyan EFL education, pronunciation should therefore be treated as an integral component of language teaching rather than as an optional or secondary activity. Teacher education should provide both phonological knowledge and practical pronunciation-teaching skills, while classroom instruction should provide learners with regular opportunities to listen to, practise, monitor, and use English pronunciation.

The classroom observations that motivated this study should not be generalized without further empirical evidence. Nevertheless, they highlight an important area for research and pedagogical development. More systematic research into pronunciation teaching and learning in Libya could contribute to the development of classroom practices that are realistic, communicatively relevant, and responsive to the needs of Libyan EFL learners.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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