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THE IMPACT OF PRONUNCIATION FEATURES (VOWELS, CONSONANTS, AND INTONATION) ON THE LISTENING PERFORMANCE OF BENINESE EFL BEGINNER LEARNERS

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Abstract : This study examines how pronunciation features—vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation—affect the listening performance of beginner Beninese EFL learners. It explores whether explicit pronunciation instruction can enhance learners' ability to decode spoken English. A mixed-methods approach was used with data from 172 participants. Quantitative information came from questionnaires, while interviews and documentary analysis provided qualitative insights. All participants reported that pronunciation training improved their listening comprehension, and 95% emphasized its importance for speaking competence. Learners confirmed that difficulties with segmental or suprasegmental features often impaired understanding, whereas pronunciation drills and audiovisual aids strengthened both listening and speaking performance. The findings underscore the need for structured pronunciation instruction in beginner-level EFL classrooms in Benin, highlighting its value for improving learners' communicative competence and classroom interaction.

Keywords: pronunciation, EFL students, listening performance, phonetics, classrooms in Benin.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, including Benin, English is taught as a foreign language, yet listening skills often remain insufficiently emphasized in beginner-level instruction. Pronunciation plays a central role in understanding spoken English, particularly through features such as vowel and consonant contrasts, stress, and intonation. As Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) note, pronunciation is not an optional component of language learning but an integral part of communicative competence. This is especially relevant for learners whose mother tongues lack certain English sounds, such as the vowel distinction between /i:/ and /ɪ/ or consonants like /θ/ and /ð/.

With advancements in EFL pedagogy, various tools have been introduced to mitigate these challenges. Rost (2013) emphasizes that listening comprehension is an active process in which learners interpret incoming speech through interaction with prior knowledge. Consequently, audiovisual materials, phonetic charts, and video resources have increasingly complemented traditional grammar- and vocabulary-based instruction. However, Beninese learners often face persistent difficulties because English phonology differs markedly from many local languages, and opportunities for authentic exposure to native or near-native speech remain limited. These limitations frequently demotivate learners and restrict their classroom engagement.

To address these challenges, more targeted instructional approaches are needed—approaches that integrate pronunciation practice with contemporary applied-linguistics methods. This study therefore investigates the role of pronunciation accuracy in the listening performance of beginner-level Beninese EFL learners, focusing particularly on specific pronunciation features and teaching methodologies that may improve learning outcomes. The research is guided by five central questions :

Q1. How does pronunciation accuracy influence the listening performance of Beninese EFL learners and in what ways does it contribute to overall language proficiency among beginners?

Q2. What major difficulties do teachers face when teaching pronunciation to beginner-level learners and what practical strategies can they adopt to overcome these challenges and enhance learner performance ?

Q3. How do phonological techniques contribute to improving listening and communicative competence?

Corresponding hypotheses include the following :

H1. Mastery of pronunciation accuracy significantly shapes listening comprehension, particularly in distinguishing vowel and consonant sounds. Audiovisual resources enhance pronunciation and listening skills by providing clear, contextualized models of native speech.

H2. Integrating grammar instruction with pronunciation drills yields measurable improvements in listening performance. Although classroom management remains challenging, teachers adopt adaptive practices to address learner difficulties while balancing instructional and real-world needs.

H3. Targeted pronunciation strategies and innovative pedagogical tools improve listening outcomes for beginner learners.

This research is therefore significant for understanding how pronunciation affects listening comprehension and general EFL performance in Benin. By analyzing learner difficulties and evaluating the efficacy of different teaching tools, the study seeks to propose practical, context-appropriate interventions. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the development of more effective, empirically grounded methodologies that address the specific needs of Beninese learners and support their progress in listening comprehension and overall language proficiency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the relationship between pronunciation and listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with a particular focus on beginner learners. It draws on communicative competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980), which emphasizes linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic skills as integral to language acquisition. It also incorporates phonological awareness theory (Goswami, 2000), which highlights the importance of sound recognition and manipulation in learning. Together, these theoretical frameworks underscore the interdependence of pronunciation and listening comprehension, forming a foundation for exploring pedagogical approaches that enhance EFL learners' abilities.

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of language learning, and it is essential to consider the learners' native language and cultural background when teaching English pronunciation. The pronunciation component in teaching English to speakers of other languages is a complex issue, and there are different approaches to teaching pronunciation, including phonetics and phonemics. (Morley, 1991, p. 482)

Phonetics and phonemics are two distinct approaches to teaching pronunciation. Phonetics focuses on the physical properties of speech sounds, while phonemics focuses on the sound system of the language. Understanding the differences between these two approaches is essential for effective pronunciation teaching. (Pennington & Richards, 1986, p. 208)

The teaching of pronunciation is often neglected in language classrooms, despite its importance in effective communication. Teachers should prioritize pronunciation instruction and provide learners with opportunities to practice their pronunciation skills. (Broughton et al., 1980, p. 123)

Contextualizing pronunciation practice is essential for effective learning. Learners should be provided with opportunities to practice their pronunciation skills in real-life situations, rather than just drilling isolated sounds. (Bowen, 1972, p. 83)

2.1 Definition of Pronunciation and Listening

Pronunciation includes the articulation of sounds, intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns. Roach (2009) defines it as “the way in which a word or a language is spoken, including the production of sounds and the way in which they are articulated, the stress and intonation patterns, and the clarity of speech” (p. 9). For EFL learners' accurate pronunciation is essential for decoding connected speech, interpreting meaning, and engaging in effective communication (Luu et al., 2021). It goes beyond articulatory accuracy to encompass clarity and meaningful expression (Aliaga García, 2007).

Listening is an active process of interpreting spoken language by decoding phonetic cues and integrating them with contextual knowledge. Rost (2013) describes listening as “a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know” (p. 59). Successful listening comprehension enables learners to process spoken English effectively, laying the groundwork for broader proficiency.

2.2 The Relationship between Pronunciation and Listening

Accurate pronunciation contributes significantly to listening comprehension. Fraser (2000) argues that pronunciation strengthens listening by improving learners' ability to recognize words and interpret stress and intonation patterns (p. 17). Hismanoglu (2006) similarly emphasizes that pronunciation instruction aids in decoding spoken phrases, thereby supporting meaningful communication. Learners who develop clearer pronunciation are better positioned to understand spoken language and to interact confidently.

The relationship between pronunciation and listening is inherently reciprocal. Sardegna and McGregor (2022) contend that effective pronunciation training improves learners' ability to decode spoken messages accurately, thereby enhancing communicative confidence (p. 121). Clear pronunciation facilitates the integration of phonetic and contextual information, both crucial for listening comprehension. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010)

note that phonological awareness—the capacity to identify and manipulate sound structures—serves as the foundation for decoding speech and achieving communicative competence (p. 14).

2.3 Challenges in Teaching Pronunciation

EFL learners face multiple challenges in acquiring accurate pronunciation. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) identify several contributing factors, including first-language interference, limited exposure to native or near-native input, and insufficient systematic pronunciation training. Sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/, which are absent in many languages, pose persistent production and perception difficulties.

Teachers also encounter significant obstacles in delivering effective pronunciation instruction. Rajadurai (2001) highlights the lack of specialized pedagogical training, limited classroom time, and the marginalization of pronunciation in traditional curricula. Grammar and vocabulary often take precedence, creating gaps in learners' spoken comprehension and production. Additionally, large class sizes and scarce technological resources further limit teachers' ability to address individual learner needs.

2.4 Innovative Approaches to Pronunciation and Listening Instruction

To address these challenges, recent pedagogical innovations integrate pronunciation practice with listening-focused activities. Tongue twisters, for example, help learners improve diction, rhythm, and stress patterns. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) note that exercises such as “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers” and “She sells seashells by the seashore” require learners to articulate difficult sound sequences, thereby enhancing accuracy. Role-playing activities also support pronunciation and listening development. Barthes (1985) describes role-plays as interactive tasks that prompt learners to engage in meaningful dialogue, emphasizing pronunciation, intonation, and listening in authentic communicative contexts (p. 45). These activities enhance both confidence and competence.

Audiovisual tools likewise provide valuable support. Phonemic charts offer visual representations of English sounds, and audio/video recordings expose learners to authentic pronunciation models. García and Smith (2018) argue that technology-based tools, such as language-learning apps and digital platforms, promote independent practice and immediate feedback, leading to improvements in both pronunciation and listening.

Music also serves as an effective resource. Lee and Lin (2015) demonstrate that songs enhance learners' sensitivity to stress and intonation patterns. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of music supports the internalization of challenging phonemes and helps reinforce listening comprehension.

2.5 Phonological Awareness and Its Role in Language Learning

Phonological awareness involves identifying and manipulating sound structures such as phonemes, syllables, and rhyme patterns. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) assert that phonological awareness supports the mapping of sound-to-symbol relationships, which is essential for decoding spoken and written language (p. 33). Developing this skill enables learners to recognize and produce accurate sounds, thereby improving listening comprehension.

Rajadurai (2001) explains that pronunciation training enhances learners' ability to evaluate their speech and detect errors. Early phonological interventions—such as phoneme blending and segmentation activities—significantly improve both listening and speaking skills. These practices strengthen learners' understanding of English phonology and contribute to communicative effectiveness.

2.6 Integrating Pronunciation into the EFL Curriculum

Integrating pronunciation into the broader EFL curriculum yields substantial benefits. Sardegna and McGregor (2022) argue that clear pronunciation allows learners to engage in meaningful interactions and express themselves with confidence. Fraser and Perth (1999) add that pronunciation instruction enhances critical listening skills, enabling learners to identify and correct errors in their own speech (p. 19). When embedded within a comprehensive curriculum, pronunciation instruction supports the development of listening comprehension and overall communicative proficiency.

Pair work and group discussions provide learners with opportunities to practice pronunciation in collaborative settings. Couper (2017) observes that such activities encourage learners to refine their pronunciation and develop listening skills through constructive feedback from peers and instructors. Visual aids, music, and technology-based tools further enrich the learning experience, making it more dynamic and accessible (García & Smith, 2018).

2.7 Implications for EFL Teaching

The findings from this review have notable implications for EFL teaching. First, educators should prioritize pronunciation as a core component of the curriculum. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) recommend incorporating structured pronunciation exercises—such as phonetic drills and role-plays—into lessons to ensure continuous practice.

Second, educators should leverage technology-enhanced tools to support pronunciation and listening development. García and Smith (2018) highlight that apps and online platforms provide flexible, self-paced practice and immediate feedback, making them particularly useful in resource-limited classrooms.

Finally, early interventions that promote phonological awareness should be emphasized, especially for beginner learners. Kelly (2001) underscores the value of activities that help learners identify and manipulate sounds, as these foundational skills support successful language acquisition (p. 78). Techniques such as blending exercises, sound games, and phoneme identification tasks can significantly enhance pronunciation and listening proficiency. Overall, this literature review demonstrates the critical role of pronunciation in improving listening comprehension and communicative competence in EFL learners. By addressing challenges in pronunciation instruction and adopting innovative teaching methods, educators can cultivate a supportive learning environment that promotes

language proficiency. Integrating pronunciation into the EFL curriculum and emphasizing phonological awareness offers a comprehensive approach to improving learners' listening and speaking abilities.

2.8 Acknowledging the Phonological Distance between English and Beninese National Languages such as Fon, Yoruba, Bariba, Goun, etc.

The phonological distance between English and languages like Fon and Yoruba significantly impacts language learning and teaching, necessitating tailored instructional approaches. Ukaegbu, Odeh, & Nwosu, (2022). Phonological Outcomes of Yoruba and English Contact on Urhobo. "This study highlights the phonological adaptations that occur in language contact situations, providing insights into the complexities of language learning and teaching. Language contact between English and Fon or Yoruba leads to unique phonological features, underscoring the need for further research into these linguistic interactions. While there isn't a direct reference for this specific citation, studies on language contact and phonology", such as those by Winford (2007) and Myers-Scotton (2002), Ukaegbu, Odeh, & Nwosu, (2022) "offer valuable insights into the complexities of language contact and its phonological implications. Phonological distance measures can quantify differences between English and languages like Fon and Yoruba, with significant implications for language teaching and learning. Unfortunately, recent studies directly addressing phonological distance measures between these languages are scarce. However, research in phonology and language acquisition may provide relevant insights into effective instructional strategies".

"Languages like Fon, Yoruba, and Bariba exhibit distinct phonological features that differ from English, emphasizing the importance of understanding these differences for effective language instruction. Given the current research landscape, studies on the phonology of African languages and language acquisition", such as those by Williamson & Blench (2000), Ukaegbu, Odeh, & Nwosu, (2022) can offer valuable perspectives on the phonological characteristics of these languages.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of pronunciation on the listening performance of novice EFL learners and its role in developing their phonological knowledge throughout the learning process. Methodology serves as a fundamental component of high-quality research, guiding procedures for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014). This section outlines the methods for data collection, analysis, sampling, and the rationale behind these methodological choices, demonstrating how they address the study's research questions.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative data from interviews. A mixed-methods design is advantageous because it combines numerical and narrative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Participants included 172 EFL learners and teachers from both formal and informal educational institutions in Benin. Data from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed, while interview data were transcribed and thematically coded to identify key patterns in pronunciation and listening skills development.

3.1 Questionnaire for EFL Learners

A structured questionnaire was administered to 172 EFL learners from selected schools in Benin. The purpose was to identify learners' perceptions of how pronunciation affects their ability to comprehend spoken English. Questionnaires are widely recognized as effective tools for gathering information about learners' attitudes and experiences (Dörnyei, 2001).

The questionnaire addressed the following areas :

- **Meaning of Audiovisual Tools :** Learners evaluated whether audiovisual tools—such as videos, phonetic charts, and listening exercises—helped improve pronunciation and listening comprehension. Audiovisual resources offer both visual and auditory stimuli, enabling learners to perceive phonetic cues and develop phonological awareness (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).
- **Integration of Grammar and Vocabulary:** Learners assessed how grammar and vocabulary contribute to pronunciation and understanding spoken English. These components form essential elements of communicative competence, and their integration with pronunciation instruction strengthens overall language proficiency (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).
- **Technique Effectiveness:** Learners reflected on the effectiveness of teaching techniques such as repetition drills, tongue twisters, and role-play. These instructional methods have been shown to support accurate sound production and enhance the decoding of spoken language (Fraser, 2000).

Statistical analysis was conducted to identify trends and correlations between pronunciation instruction and listening performance.

3.2 EFL Teachers' Interview Guide

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers regarding pronunciation instruction. Semi-structured interviews ensure that key issues are addressed while allowing flexibility to explore participants' experiences in greater depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interview guide covered:

- **Challenges in Teaching Pronunciation:** Teachers discussed difficulties such as limited

resources, large class sizes, and a lack of exposure to native English speakers. These challenges, also reported globally, function as barriers that must be addressed to improve pronunciation teaching (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

- **Use and Effectiveness of Audiovisual Tools :** Teachers described how phonemic charts, videos, and online platforms support accurate pronunciation. Such multisensory tools are especially beneficial for beginners (Lee & Lin, 2015).

- **Strategies for Integrating Grammar and Vocabulary:** Teachers explained how they combine grammar and vocabulary instruction with pronunciation teaching. Effective integration supports learners' engagement with sound, meaning, and structure simultaneously (Kelly, 2001).

- **Teaching Methods :** Teachers compared the effectiveness of traditional, textbook-based approaches with creative, student-centered methods such as project-based learning and role-plays (Couper, 2017).

Interview data were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify common patterns in pronunciation instruction and listening development.

3.3 EFL University Learners' Interview Guide

Follow-up interviews were conducted with university-level EFL learners to explore their perspectives on pronunciation instruction and listening challenges. In-depth interviews are well suited for capturing rich, detailed descriptions of learners' experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interview questions focused on :

- **Impact of Oral and Written Communication Strategies:** Learners evaluated how strategies such as discussions and written assignments influenced their interest in pronunciation and listening. Integrated oral-written tasks have been shown to reinforce phonological awareness and listening ability (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

- **Teaching Style Comparison:** Learners compared textbook-based instruction with creative teaching methods. Studies show that multimedia-supported and gamified approaches enhance engagement and facilitate language acquisition (García & Smith, 2018).

- **Pronunciation and Listening Challenges :** Learners identified challenges such as distinguishing minimal pairs, understanding fast speech, and limited exposure to native models. These constraints often impede listening comprehension (Fraser & Perth, 1999).

- **Impact of Challenges on Listening Performance :** Learners described how pronunciation difficulties affect their ability to understand spoken English. Mispronunciation or misperception of sounds can hinder comprehension during lessons, discussions, or lectures (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

The interview data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge naturally from participants' responses. This approach provided deeper insight into how pronunciation difficulties relate to listening comprehension.

Overall, the study employed a mixed-methods design to gain a comprehensive understanding of how pronunciation affects English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' listening skills. By combining surveys and interviews, the researchers collected both numerical data and rich qualitative insights, offering a holistic picture of the issue. Examining the experiences of both students and teachers regarding pronunciation instruction allowed the study to propose useful strategies for developing more effective teaching methods aimed at improving learners' listening abilities.

3.4 Connection of Pronunciation and Listening to Communicative Competence

Connecting pronunciation and listening to communicative competence is essential. "Effective pronunciation is crucial for communicative competence, as it enables learners to convey meaning and express themselves clearly in the target language (Morley, 1991). Research has shown that pronunciation instruction can improve learners' overall communicative competence (Pennington & Richards, 1986)." "Listening skills are essential for communicative competence, as they enable learners to understand and interpret spoken language (Rost, 2002). Research has shown that listening instruction can improve learners' ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in the target language (Field, 2008)."

"Pronunciation and listening skills are closely linked to communicative competence, as they enable learners to communicate effectively and accurately in the target language (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Teachers should prioritize pronunciation and listening instruction to help learners develop their communicative competence." These passages highlight the importance of pronunciation and listening skills in a communicative approach to language teaching. By prioritizing these skills, teachers can help learners develop their overall communicative competence.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section presents the study's findings in relation to the five research objectives, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of pronunciation on EFL learners' listening performance. The findings are organized with appropriate transitions to introduce tables and guide the reader through the analysis. Results are interpreted with particular attention to the phonetic and phonological dimensions of language learning.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1.1 Learners' Attitudes Toward English and Its Role in Language Learning

This subsection explores learners' perceptions of the English language and its importance in their learning process. Questionnaire responses offer insight into their motivation and enthusiasm for studying English. The first table presents the results of the behaviours of EFL students about the target language.

Table 1 : Learners' Attitudes Toward the English Language

Question	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you like English ?	Yes	150	87%
	No	22	13%

Source : Field Study, 2024

Analysis :

The data show that 87% of learners have a positive attitude toward English, indicating a high level of motivation. Motivation is a crucial factor in the acquisition of complex skills such as pronunciation, as motivated learners are more willing to engage in challenging phonetic tasks (Dörnyei, 2001). Qualitative interview feedback further revealed that many learners associate English with academic and professional advancement, which strengthens their commitment to mastering its phonological features. Among the 13% who expressed less enthusiasm, several reported persistent difficulties in producing certain English vowels—particularly contrasts such as /i/ versus /i:/.

4.1.2 The Effect of Pronunciation on Learners' Listening and Speaking Skills

To assess the role of pronunciation in developing listening and speaking skills, the study analyzed both questionnaire and interview data. The findings reflect learners' recognition of pronunciation as a crucial component of their oral and auditory language abilities.

Table 2 : Impact of Pronunciation on Listening and Speaking Skills

Question	Skills	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How does teaching pronunciation influence your English level?	Listening	Useful	172	100
		Not useful	0	0
	Speaking	Useful	164	95
		Not useful	8	5

Source : Field Study, 2024

Analysis :

All learners (100%) agreed that pronunciation instruction improves their listening skills. This is because explicit pronunciation practice increases learners' awareness of phonemes, stress patterns, and intonation—features essential for decoding spoken language. Learners noted that paying attention to minimal pairs (e.g., *ship* /ʃɪp/ vs. *sheep* /ʃi:p/) significantly enhanced their ability to identify words in continuous speech. Fraser (2000) supports this, arguing that clear pronunciation training enhances auditory discrimination, which positively influences efficient language processing.

Regarding speaking skills, 95% of learners reported that pronunciation instruction helped them replicate native-like speech patterns. Interview data showed that practicing consonant clusters (e.g., /str/ in *street*) and vowel reductions such as schwa (/ə/ in *banana*) made their speech more fluent and rhythmic. The remaining 5% did not find pronunciation training helpful and stated that classroom activities were largely repetitive and lacked personalized feedback.

4.1.3 Learners' Perspectives on Integrating Pronunciation into the Teaching Process

This section discusses learners' views on including pronunciation as a central component of EFL instruction. Responses suggest strong learner awareness of the value of systematic pronunciation training.

Table 3 : Learners' Perspectives on Pronunciation Integration

Question	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What do you think about pronunciation integration in the teaching process ?	Helpful	155	90
	Not helpful	17	10

Source : Field Study, 2024

Analysis :

The majority (90%) viewed pronunciation integration positively, noting that activities such as stress drills and intonation practice enabled them to better interpret spoken English. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) support integrating pronunciation with vocabulary and grammar to strengthen communicative competence. The 10% who found pronunciation integration unhelpful cited a lack of engaging, context-rich activities. Their qualitative feedback

indicated a preference for interactive approaches such as role-plays and technology-based tools rather than textbook-only exercises.

4.1.4 Effectiveness of Language Learning Tools in Enhancing Pronunciation and Listening Skills

This section examines the role of audiovisual aids, phonemic charts, and listening exercises in supporting pronunciation and listening performance.

Table 4 : Effectiveness of Language Learning Tools

Question	Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you think language learning tools are useful?	Yes	170	98.83
	No	02	01.17

Source : Field Study, 2024

Analysis:

170-98.83% participants against 2-01.17% agreed that language learning tools significantly enhance pronunciation and listening skills. Audiovisual aids—particularly videos demonstrating articulatory placement—were identified as especially helpful. Learners highlighted that phonemic charts increased awareness of sound–symbol relationships, aiding the accurate production and identification of sounds such as /θ/ (*think*) and /ð/ (*this*). Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) similarly emphasize that audiovisual tools engage learners visually and aurally, facilitating phonological awareness. Interview data also revealed that tools allowing self-paced practice, such as pronunciation apps with instant feedback, were highly valued.

4.1.5 Impacts of Pronunciation Activities, Visual Aids, and Music on Language Skills

This section examines how pronunciation activities, visual aids, and music contribute to learners’ development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 5 : Impacts of Pronunciation Activities, Visual Aids, and Music on Language Skills

Language Skill	Answer	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Listening	Impactful	170	98.83
Speaking	Impactful	170	98.83
Reading	Impactful	170	98.83
Writing	Impactful	170	98.83
Accuracy	Improved	164	95
Fluency	Improved	170	98.83

Source : Field Study, 2024

Analysis:

170 learners (98.83%) reported that pronunciation activities, visual aids, and music positively influenced all four language skills. Pronunciation activities such as minimal pair drills and tongue twisters enhanced their ability to distinguish close sounds—e.g., /p/ vs. /b/—thus improving both auditory perception and speech accuracy. Music was identified as particularly effective for teaching rhythm and intonation. Learners noted that repetitive patterns in songs and rhymes helped them internalize English’s stress-timed rhythm. Lee and Lin (2015) confirm that music supports the development of native-like prosody. Learners also reported that phonetic diagrams illustrating tongue placement were especially helpful for producing difficult sounds like /ʒ/ (*measure*), making abstract concepts more concrete.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings highlight the central role of pronunciation in EFL learning among Beninese learners and confirm all five hypotheses. This study examined learners’ listening performance, pronunciation accuracy, teaching challenges, and the effectiveness of phonological techniques, generating practical implications for EFL instruction.

5.1 Impact of Pronunciation Accuracy on Listening Performance

Hypothesis 1 (H1) : Mastery of pronunciation accuracy significantly influences listening comprehension, particularly with vowel and consonant distinctions.

The results strongly support H1. Most learners (98.83%) agreed that accurate pronunciation improves their listening comprehension. Accurate production and recognition of phonemes such as /p/–/b/ and /θ/–/s/ are especially challenging for beginners. Minimal pair exercises (e.g., *ship* /ʃɪp/ vs. *sheep* /ʃi:p/) were consistently cited as improving auditory discrimination. Interviews revealed persistent difficulties with contrasts such as /i:/ vs. /ɪ/ (*seat* vs. *sit*), confirming Fraser’s (2000) view that accurate pronunciation underlies effective listening comprehension.

5.2 Role of Audiovisual Resources in Improving Pronunciation and Listening

Hypothesis 1 (H1) : Audiovisual resources significantly improve pronunciation and listening comprehension.

The data fully confirm H2. Learners reported that videos, phonemic charts, and language apps provided clear models of native pronunciation. Subtitled videos helped learners link sounds to their written forms, reinforcing sound-symbol correspondence. Visual diagrams of tongue position were especially helpful for problematic sounds such as /z/, /dʒ/, and /ŋ/. Learners valued applications offering real-time feedback. These findings align with Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016), who highlight the effectiveness of multisensory resources in pronunciation instruction.

5.3 Integration of Pronunciation with Grammar and Exercises

Hypothesis 2 (H2) : Integrating grammar and vocabulary with pronunciation drills enhances listening comprehension.

The results support H2. Learners reported that grammar and vocabulary lessons reinforced pronunciation training, particularly through activities involving sentence stress and rhythm. Understanding stress patterns in compound words (e.g., *blackboard*) helped learners process spoken input more effectively. Interviews showed that combining grammar exercises with pronunciation drills enabled learners to perceive how stress and intonation affect meaning—for example, in the sentence *She didn't steal the money*. This aligns with Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), who advocate integrating pronunciation into broader communicative instruction.

5.4 Role of Phonological Techniques in Improving Communicative and Listening Competencies

Hypothesis 3 (H3) : Targeted pronunciation strategies and innovative didactic tools improve listening performance among beginners.

H3 is strongly supported. Learners and teachers identified minimal pairs, tongue twisters, and prosody exercises as highly beneficial. Music played a significant role in helping learners internalize English rhythm, contrasting sharply with syllable-timed local languages. Teachers also cited pronunciation apps and visual aids as essential tools allowing individualized practice. These findings confirm that targeted phonological strategies significantly enhance listening outcomes.

5.5 Challenges Faced by Teachers and Strategies to Overcome Them

Hypothesis 2 (H2, continued) : Despite classroom challenges, teachers can adopt effective strategies for pronunciation instruction.

H3 is confirmed. Teachers reported challenges such as large class sizes, resource limitations, and learner difficulties with specific phonemes. Nevertheless, several effective strategies were implemented, including:

- Contextual role-plays simulating real-life communication
- Peer feedback to support cooperative learning
- Use of authentic materials such as podcasts and recorded dialogues

Teachers emphasized creating a low-anxiety classroom environment where learners feel encouraged to attempt difficult sounds. These findings echo Fraser & Perth's (1999) recommendation for learner-centered, contextually relevant pronunciation teaching.

5.6 Implications for EFL Teaching

1. **Integrating Pronunciation:** Pronunciation must be a central component of EFL instruction, supported through drills, minimal pairs, and intonation practice.
2. **Maximizing Audiovisual Resources:** Videos, phonemic charts, and apps should be systematically incorporated into lessons.
3. **Linking Pronunciation to Grammar/Vocabulary:** Integrating pronunciation with other linguistic components improves both comprehension and production.
4. **Using Multisensory Approaches:** Music and visual aids enhance rhythm, intonation, and learner engagement.
5. **Addressing Teaching Challenges :** Teachers should employ diverse, learner-centered strategies, supported by ongoing professional development.

5.7 Discussions on pronunciation and listening relating to curriculum constraints and teacher preparedness

5.7.1 Pronunciation and Curriculum Constraints:*

"The curriculum often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, which can lead to neglect of pronunciation instruction (Morley, 1991). Teachers may feel constrained by the curriculum and may not have the time or resources to devote to pronunciation instruction." "The emphasis on standardized testing and assessment can also lead to a focus on grammar and vocabulary at the expense of pronunciation (Shohamy, 2001). This can result in learners who are proficient in grammar and vocabulary but struggle with pronunciation."

5.7.2 Listening and Curriculum Constraints

The curriculum often focuses on listening comprehension as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself (Field, 2008). This can lead to a lack of attention to the development of listening skills in their own right." "The emphasis on standardized testing and assessment can also lead to a focus on listening comprehension as a test-taking skill, rather than as a means of communication (Buck, 2001). This can result in learners who are proficient in test-taking but struggle with real-life listening."

5.7.3 Teacher Preparedness

Teachers may not feel adequately prepared to teach pronunciation, particularly if they have not received training in pronunciation instruction (Breitkreutz et al., 2001). This can lead to a lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation and a reliance on intuition rather than evidence-based practice." "Teachers may also struggle to integrate listening instruction into their teaching practice, particularly if they are not familiar with current research and theory in the field (Vandergrift, 2007)." These discussions highlight the challenges that teachers and learners may face in terms of pronunciation and listening instruction due to curriculum constraints and teacher

preparedness. By understanding these challenges, teachers and curriculum designers can work to develop more effective pronunciation and listening instruction that meets the needs of learners.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines recommendations for improving pronunciation and listening instruction in Benin.

5.1.1 Recommendations to School Authorities

- **Improve Teacher Training** : Schools should provide professional development focused on pronunciation instruction, especially on teaching vowel contrasts (/i:/ vs. /ɪ/) and consonant distinctions (/θ/ vs. /s/).
- **Integrate Pronunciation into the Curriculum** : More activities—such as minimal pair drills and prosody practice—should be embedded in the curriculum.
- **Provide Pronunciation Resources**: Schools should invest in audio materials, phonemic charts, and language labs to support independent and classroom-based practice.

5.1.2 Recommendations to the Government

- **Allocate Resources to Language Education** : Provide schools with technological tools (interactive whiteboards, audio systems, apps) and fund pronunciation laboratories.
- **Establish National Guidelines for Pronunciation Instruction** : National curricula should explicitly include pronunciation outcomes and assessment standards.
- **Strengthen Teacher Training Institutions**: Teacher training programs should include specialized courses and workshops on pronunciation pedagogy and technology integration.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS

5.2.1 Suggestions to EFL Teachers

- **Integrate Pronunciation Exercises Regularly**: Teachers should incorporate pronunciation practice systematically into lessons. This may include minimal pair drills, role-plays, sentence stress practice, and other activities tailored to learners' levels to strengthen both auditory discrimination and production skills.
- **Use Technology for Pronunciation Practice** : Teachers are encouraged to use language-learning apps, online platforms, and audio tools to increase exposure to authentic models. Real-time feedback apps, for example, help students identify and correct mispronunciations.
- **Engage Students in Interactive Listening Activities**: Learners should be active participants in listening and pronunciation tasks, such as recorded dialogues, shadowing exercises, and group discussions. These activities promote learner engagement and improve both listening and speaking abilities.

5.2.2 Suggestions to EFL Students

- **Practice Pronunciation Regularly**: Pronunciation requires frequent practice both in class and at home. Students are encouraged to rehearse recorded sentences, repeat words aloud, and practice articulation exercises such as tongue twisters to refine accuracy.
- **Use Available Resources**: Students should make use of pronunciation resources provided—language labs, phonemic charts, and online platforms. Tools offering minimal pair quizzes or phonetic transcription tasks provide valuable reinforcement.
- **Participate in Group and Peer-Feedback Activities**: Pair work, group discussions, and peer feedback sessions give students opportunities to practice pronunciation in a low-pressure environment. Peer evaluation allows learners to identify weaknesses and gain confidence in both listening and speaking.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how pronunciation influences the listening comprehension of beginner EFL learners in Benin. Using a mixed-methods design, the research combined quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations. Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted to ensure robust interpretation of the relationships among pronunciation, listening performance, and teaching methodologies.

The findings demonstrate that pronunciation is a significant factor in enhancing both listening comprehension and speaking fluency. Most participants confirmed that accurate pronunciation facilitates the perception of spoken English by enabling learners to decode phonemes, interpret stress patterns, and process intonation more effectively. Learners further reported that pronunciation practice strengthened their fluency, accuracy, confidence, and motivation.

The study also highlighted the value of pronunciation-related pedagogical techniques—such as flashcards, pair work, and songs—in supporting language acquisition. These tools helped learners distinguish difficult sounds (e.g., /θ/ vs. /s/) and internalize English rhythm and intonation. Classroom observations supported the conclusion that multisensory and interactive activities enhance retention of key pronunciation features.

Additionally, the research emphasized the importance of integrating pronunciation into the EFL syllabus. When instruction is tailored to the specific phonological challenges faced by Beninese learners—such as vowel contrasts and consonant clusters—pronunciation and overall proficiency improve considerably. Teachers play a central role in this process, underscoring the need for continuous professional development in pronunciation pedagogy.

Modern resources such as phonemic charts, language labs, and pronunciation apps were also identified as valuable supports for effective teaching and learning.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of pronunciation in EFL performance in Benin. It calls for a systematic, pronunciation-focused approach that incorporates innovative tools and learner-centered methods to strengthen listening and speaking skills. The mixed-method design provided a detailed investigation of the challenges and opportunities in pronunciation instruction.

The findings have significant implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to improve EFL programs for beginners. Future research could examine the long-term effects of pronunciation training on learners' reading and writing abilities, and investigate the effectiveness of tools and methodologies across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Such studies would deepen awareness of pronunciation's role in EFL education and expand its practical application.

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