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Email: tanusree@iitj.ac.in.

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EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' VIEWS ON INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CASE OF THE LITTORAL REGION

HINDEME ULRICH O.SENA & EGOUNLETIPEDRO MARIUS

DAn/FLLAC-UAC, Calavi, Bénin

ABSTRACT

This paper explores EFL teachers' views on the intermediate students' pronunciation difficulties in Beninese secondary schools of the Littoral region. A questionnaire was distributed to sixty (60) EFL teachers selected from six schools of the said region. The data obtained were analyzed through Microsoft Excel[®] 2007 and rendered in the form of figures. The study results show that participants agree that pronunciation should be taught first before grammar and vocabulary. They indicate that pronunciation is the most difficult aspect to be taught because there are no fixed rules that may help them to do so and more importantly to know that they are not doing it well. The great variability and personal preferences and views attached to this issue seem to have determined answers. That may be why they also agree that the intermediate level is appropriate for teaching pronunciation. However, some participants claim that teaching pronunciation should be for beginners. We believe that beginners should learn simple things about pronunciation, such as vowels and consonants. On the issue of suitability, teacher participants answered diversely. For some of them, the English curriculum goes with the learners' abilities and there is no problem faced. Others answered "no" and explained that the curriculum should be reduced. The time devoted to teaching pronunciation is insufficient and has to be augmented. This is because the longer time devoted to teaching pronunciation the better it is for the learners. As far as the correction of learners' pronunciation is concerned, teachers indicated that correction is useful. But over-correction is to be avoided so as not to make the learners unwilling to speak.

KEYWORDS: Pronunciation Difficulties, EFL Teachers, Perspectives, Intermediate Learners

INTRODUCTION

In Benin, English counts as a foreign language and was included in the different curricula at secondary school. Students start learning English at the very beginning of the secondary school in sixième. From this class on, the English language will be learned for seven years at least. This means that in the country, English is learnt and that we are not in a situation of acquisition. Then, in the formal situation of a classroom, the learners have almost no access to the target language beyond the classroom door. They are there, very often, to receive instructions and practice in the fundamental skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Such an environment is not always effective for language learning. Indeed, one of the general objectives in the foreign language teaching, maybe the most important one, is to teach the learners to speak the target language accurately and intelligibly since to learn a language also means to produce the sounds, utterances, and the words properly and correctly rather than being able to communicate with the people in the target language community.

To reach this goal, speaking activities are done at every stage of the foreign language teaching process. It must be borne in mind that listening and speaking go hand-in-hand in English as a foreign language teaching because speech is a very important medium through which communication is achieved. That's to say, language is primarily speech and it is more basic to language than the written form.

According to Knowles (1987), written language has the advantage that it is permanent so that it can be studied conveniently and at leisure, but spoken language is more 'elusive'. In other words, written language looks like an imperfect version of the spoken language. As individuals, we all learn to speak before we learn to read and write; that is to say, people learn the language by hearing the sounds spoken in their environment. Unlimited numbers of sounds, especially speech sounds, in the language help the learner to understand and to speak the language. In addition, in the world, there are still languages which have never been written down and also societies have had a speech before written forms of their languages. Needless to say, human talk is the oldest form all of the society.

It should be noted here that language learners always come across some difficulties and problems while learning a foreign language. One of the most remarkable difficulties seen in this process happens to be in the pronunciation. So, foreign language learners have lots of problems with pronunciation because of some factors such as mother tongue interference, age, environment and personality. Rivers (1986) urges that all persons, when listening to a foreigner's speaking language, have great difficulty in understanding what they are trying to say, not because of their lack of knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, but because the sounds they produce seemed peculiar and the voice rose and fell in unexpected places. This sentence emphasizes a well-known fact that most of the people learning a foreign language encounter some problems of pronunciation of the new language. Therefore, they fail in oral communication, although they are proficient enough in other skills of the language. That is the reason why we have chosen to explore EFL teachers' views on the issue of pronunciation difficulties in the intermediate classes with a specific focus on the region of the Littoral in Benin.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Learning, a school discipline aims at being proficient in it. This is much more important as far as languages are concerned because learning a language means learning its grammar, vocabulary, phonology and even culture. Since English is one of the core subjects at school, more and more schools are teaching English to their pupils and English centers can be found in any major city in Benin. However, comments go on, at different occasions that many people can speak English, but only a few have intelligible English pronunciation so that they can be understood easily in a direct communication.

Since the late 1980s, the course of teaching and learning English in Benin has gone through many changes, especially when the communicative approach became recently a buzzword among people in the fields of language education. As a result, the English curriculum has been revised for more communication. Most people hoped that with communicative teaching, students would be much improved in oral communication.

But, it turns out that this is not true, since there still are learners with serious pronunciation errors which results in their communication breakdown. Hinofitis and Baily (1980) reported that up to a certain proficiency standard, the fault which most severely impairs the communication process in EFL learners is pronunciation, rather than vocabulary or grammar. Their arguments make pronunciation more important in improving the communicative competence of learners.

According to Davenport and Hannahs (1998), humans have a variety of ways of producing sounds, not all of which are relevant to language (example: coughing, burping, etc.). Sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a particular language. We can also talk about the distinctive sounds of Fongbè, Goungbè, French and English languages. In this sense, we can talk about pronunciation as the production and reception of sounds of speech. In addition, the sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in contexts of use. Here, the code combines with other factors to make communication possible. Thus, one can talk about pronunciation with reference to acts of speaking. Since learning a language means learning a new way of using the speech organs, new way of controlling the speech organs in order to produce sound peculiar to the new language, this process can be more difficult as some of the speech organs are not visible and their movements are far back in the pharyngeal cavity thus difficult to control. However, if a person learns a foreign language, she/he should communicate with foreigners, and if she/he cannot produce intelligible speech they certainly will fail in communication. Due to the influence of their mother tongue, many learners, especially intermediate ones, encounter great difficulties in learning to pronounce English words. Therefore, the problem of learners' failure in pronouncing English correctly needs to be addressed.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The objective of this work is to explore EFL teachers' views on the intermediate students' pronunciation difficulties in Beninese secondary schools of the Littoral region.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, I am going to find elements to answer the following questions:

- Do intermediate students apply the rules of pronunciation they learn in class when they speak actually?
- Do intermediate students speak English or just memorize rules in their brain for examinations?
- Why do EFL intermediate students fail at speaking English accurately though they are aware of its rules pronunciation?
- How to help them cope with this situation?

HYPOTHESES

To succeed in this, it is assumed that:

- EFL intermediate students do not apply the rules of pronunciation they learn in class when they speak actually
- EFL intermediate students tend to memorize rules in their brain for examinations
- EFL intermediate students fail at speaking English accurately though they are aware of its rules, pronunciation because they lack opportunities to practice the language.
- A regular practice of English speaking with Beninese EFL intermediate students in the classrooms will help them pronounce it accurately.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of Pronunciation Teaching

In the early centuries, grammar and vocabulary were the dominant aspects concerning foreign language teaching. Teaching pronunciation was neglected. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2000:2), it is for this reason that “grammar and vocabulary have been much better understood by most language teachers than pronunciation”.

Two general approaches to the teaching of pronunciation have been developed: an intuitive-imitative approach that was used before the late nineteenth century; and an analytic linguistic approach. The intuitive- imitative approach depends on the learner’s ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language. Tape recorders and language labs were used in this approach. The analytic–linguistic approach utilizes information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet and charts of the vocal apparatus. It focuses the learner’s attention on the sounds and rhythms of the target language. This approach was developed to complement rather than to replace the intuitive- imitative approach.

Throughout the twentieth century, different methods were used in foreign language teaching, such as the Grammar Translation Method, in which the teaching of pronunciation is largely irrelevant. These methods for which the teaching and learning of pronunciation is a genuine concern are dealt with below.

Direct Method

It was at the turn of the twentieth century that the direct method became widely known and practiced. In this method, pronunciation is taught through intuition and imitation-students imitate a model which is the teacher and do their best to approximate the model through imitation and repetition.

The Reform Movement

In 1890s, phoneticians such as Henry Sweet, Wihelm Vietor, and Paul Passy contributed to the teaching of pronunciation and formed the International Phonetic Association in 1886, then developed the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). During this period, teachers focused on teaching the spoken form of the language, and the learners were given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

Audiolingualism

This method appeared after the Second World War. In this method, pronunciation is very important. According to Lindsay and Knight (2006: 18), “correct pronunciation was strongly encouraged from the beginning”. The teacher models a sound or a word and the students imitate or repeat. Furthermore, the teacher often uses the technique of minimal pair drills. These drills are based on using words that differ by a single sound in the same position. For example, the teacher says the words ‘sheep, ship’ and asks the learners if these words are the same or different. Then, he can use other examples and ask his learners to identify which sound is produced: the sound that is included in the word ‘sheep’ or that of ‘ship’.

Community Language Learning

It was developed by Curran (1976) for teaching second and foreign languages. In this method, students sit around a table with a tape recorder. The teacher stands behind one of the students, with hands on the student’s shoulder. He asks the student to say something in his native language he wants to be able to say in the target language. Then, the teacher says the utterance in the target language; the student repeats it once and twice until he can produce it fluently. Then, the

utterance is recorded on tape. After recording some utterances, they are played back and students match the new target language with the word –for- word translation provided by the teacher.

Pronunciation Teaching Today

Mac Carthy (1967:137) states that everyone who teaches a modern language by word of mouth cannot escape the necessity for pronouncing it and for teaching the pronunciation of it to his pupils. Currently, the communicative language approach is the dominant one in language teaching. It focuses on the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of the language for meaningful purposes as stated by Lindsay and Knight (2006: 20): “It is no actually a method, but an approach to teaching based on the view that learning a language means learning how to communicate effectively in the world outside the classroom”.

According to Celce-Murcia et.al (2007:7), this approach indicates that if nonnative speakers of English fall below the threshold level of pronunciation, they will have oral communication problems regardless of how good they are at mastering grammar and vocabulary. The goal of pronunciation technique then is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate.

The Importance of Pronunciation

In the process of communication, pronunciation plays a crucial role, since successful communication cannot take place without correct pronunciation. Poorly pronounced segments and suprasegments may have the result of disorienting the listener and inhibiting comprehension.

Pronunciation has been seen as a very complex aspect of language teaching (Kelly, 1969). It is believed that only few learners can ever attain native-like pronunciation in the foreign language, especially those who learn to speak a second language after puberty (Lenneberg, 1967).

Research on pronunciation is a hot issue in second language acquisition (SLA), and researchers attempted to find the affecting factors for pronunciation. Among these studies, some studies focus on the learning age affecting SLA (Harley, 1986; Mackay, Flege, & Imai, 2006), some studies addressed the length of residence in the target language country (Flege, Bohn, & Jang, 1997; Flege & Liu, 2001), and other studies focus on the frequency of using L2 (Flege, Mackay, & Meador, 1999).

Kenworthy (1987) listed the factors that affect native-like pronunciation. These variables include native language, age, exposure, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, motivation, and concern for good pronunciation. Incontestably, it is not easy to give an intact list for affecting factors in pronunciation.

Among innumerable researchers, age seems the indispensable topic for pronunciation. Most of the research (Flege, 1999; Moyer, 1999; Piske Mackey & Flege, 2001) has been used as evidence to support the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967). The general consensus was the younger the better. Younger children learn L2 more easily and quickly than older children (Mayberry & Lock, 2003; Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2008). However, most of these studies concentrated only in immigrant communities.

The influence of psychological factors in SLA has examined by other studies, such as the capacity of the learners' working (van den Noort, Bosch, & Hugdahl, 2006). Some studies consider the factors other than age (Moye, 2004; Scovel, 1988), and focused on the differences of individual language learners in second language phonological competence.

However, some factors have not been explored extensively in L2 pronunciation research, for example phonological memory.

Recent research has demonstrated that acculturation may play a prominent role in the learners' language acquisition (Hamers, 1994; Toohey, 2001; He, 2006). Among these studies, some researchers argue that attitudes towards the target language and target community may affect L2 proficiency (e.g., Hamers, 1994; Toohey, 2001) while others indicate that learners' attitudes do not affect L2 proficiency. Also, Norton & Toohey (2001) reported that social factors may influence children' L2 acquisition. But, it has not been examining the specific effects of social identity on language learners' L2 pronunciation accuracy.

Factors Affecting Native-Like Pronunciation

Wong (1987) stated that the teaching of pronunciation "*is not exclusively a linguistic matter*". Indeed, there are a variety of factors such as internal factors such as age brain development, ear perception, attitude, individual differences (in terms of extraversion, introversion, attitude, motivation, identity, efforts and goal setting) and external factors such as native language, degree of exposure to the language being learnt, and finally educational factors that must be taken into account as far as pronunciation is concerned..

Intelligibility

The more reasonable goal for teaching pronunciation for second language learners is achieving intelligibility. One definition of the word intelligibility is that stated by Kenworthy (1994: 13): "Intelligibility is being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation". From this definition, I can conclude that intelligibility is the same as understandability. While learning a new language, learners find themselves using unconscious strategies in order to cope with the new set of sounds. Those that very often may lead to intelligibility problems include sound substitution, links between words, the use of stress and that of intonation.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

As could be read in Gnonlonfoun (2014:63), research design is nothing but how the research is set up. Here, we have chosen to use a descriptive approach to research. A questionnaire has been used to collect the data. Guidelines indicated by Gnonlonfoun (2014, cited in Houssou-Kpèvi, 2016) have been followed to design the questionnaire. Participants have been encouraged to give their opinions freely.

A total number of 60 teacher participants have been selected randomly at the rate of 10 per school from six secondary schools of the region (CEG Akpakpa-center, CEG Suru-Lere, CEG Gbégamey, CEG Houéyiho, CEG Dantokpa, and CEG Zogbo). Care has not been taken to ensure a balance between the number of male and female participants since it is not the purpose of the study to make differentiated gendered analyses.

Data collection was organized from January to March 2016 during the 2015-2016 academic years. Authorities in the schools selected were informed about the researchers' will to carry out research in their schools. After this step, the questionnaires were distributed to the 60 participants at the rate of 10 teachers per each of the secondary schools selected. Of these, 49 questionnaire sheets were handed back.

Houssou-Kpèvi (2016) points out that the data analysis process often starts with a large quantity of data that will be cut down to small sets. In this study, data analysis has been done through the use of Microsoft Excel[®] 2007 spreadsheets set up on a Windows[®] 7 operating systems.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The aim of question one is to know the degree of expertise among the teachers in the domain of teaching pupils in secondary schools. The answers of the teachers show that the scale of the period of years of experience of the teacher participants ranged from one to thirty years.

In question two, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation were indicated and the teachers were requested to tick the appropriate answer, that is to say, the most important aspect that should be taught. Their answers are as follows:

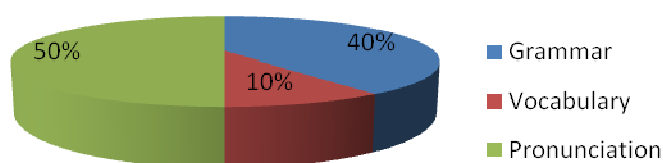


Figure 1: Degree of Importance of the Aspects of the English Language to be taught

The above Figure shows that the most important aspect that should be taught is pronunciation, and then comes to grammar and finally vocabulary which is represented by the least percentage. In fact, there are a limited number of teachers who claims that Vocabulary is the most important aspect to be taught. They tend to justify their answers to this question diversely: for those who state that pronunciation is the most important aspect to be taught, teaching pronunciation helps learners to speak English accurately. In addition to that, the teachers state that the learners seem not to give too much attention to pronunciation that is why it should be taught. Those teachers who state that grammar is the most important aspect to be taught base their arguments on the fact that grammar is the skeleton of any language. Therefore, learners cannot ignore it when learning a foreign language. Once again, only a limited number of teachers, state that vocabulary is the most important aspect to be taught. They support their opinion by saying that mastering any language depends on the richness of the vocabulary the learners have and how they use it.

Question three is about knowing which aspect among the three named above (Grammar, Vocabulary and pronunciation) is difficult to be taught. This question is addressed to the teachers because, they are in the best position possible to provide sound and reliable answer to it in that they have the experience required that allows them to do so. Their answers are presented in the Figure below:

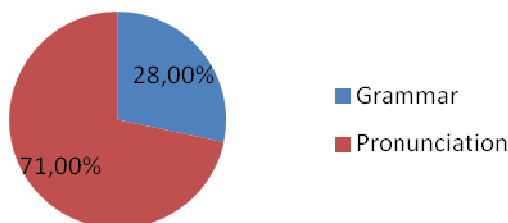


Figure 2: The Degree of Difficulty of Teaching Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation

The Figure shows clearly that pronunciation is considered by the majority of teachers as the most difficult aspect to be taught, because there are no fixed rules that may help them to do so and more importantly to know that they are not

doing it well. The great variability and personal preferences and views attached to this issue seem to have determined their answers. Other teachers have claimed that grammar is difficult to be taught because of some complex features such as the present perfect and the present continuous tense. But they are limited. It is worth noting that, surprisingly enough, no teacher has mentioned a difficulty in teaching vocabulary.

Question four aims at finding the appropriate level (beginners, intermediate or advanced levels) for teaching pronunciation so that the learners get the benefits. Results are presented below:

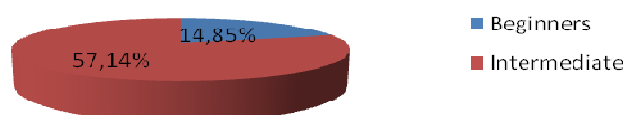


Figure 3: The Most Appropriate Level for Teaching Pronunciation

As shown in the Figure above, there are 57.14% of teachers who state that the appropriate level for teaching pronunciation is with intermediate learners. At the same time, 14.85% of the teacher participants claim that teaching pronunciation should be for beginners. However, we are of the opinion that we should never say that beginners should not be taught pronunciation. This will be dangerous and biased. Beginners should rather learn simple things about pronunciation, such as vowels and consonants. Complex things about pronunciation can be taught in the ensuing levels.

The purpose of question five is to see whether the curriculum goes with the learners' real level or not. As such, this question poses the problem of the suitability of the English curriculum for the learners involved in this study.

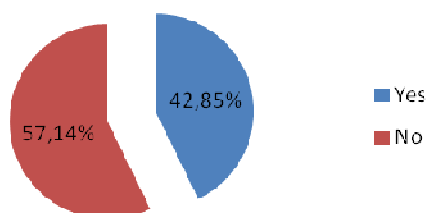


Figure 4: The Appropriateness of the English Curriculum

It is to be noted that a small majority of teacher participants answered positively to this question. This may be because they think that the English curriculum goes with the learners' abilities and there is no problem faced by them concerning the said curriculum. Other teachers answered "no" and gave different justifications for it. One reason is that the curriculum seems over-loaded and it is suggested to reduce it. Another reason advanced was that the curriculum seems not to equate with the learners' real level. In other words, it is not appropriate for this level and it would be better if it is designed for first-year secondary school levels.

In question six, some techniques were named and the teachers asked to opt for the most appropriate one (s). Their answers are presented below:

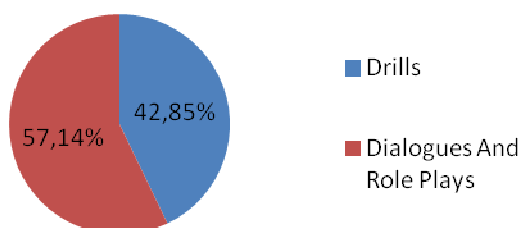


Figure 5: The Use of Techniques in Teaching Pronunciation

Here, the teachers seem to be shared as to the answers about the questions. Indeed, nearly half of them said that drills are the techniques that should be used in teaching pronunciation. The reason behind their choice may be that drills are based on repetition which helps the learners in pronouncing the language accurately. Drills are used generally in teaching vowels and consonants. At the same time, the other half (42, 85%) opted for dialogues and role plays because they help the learners in practicing the language in a communicative way. I think that the dialogues and role plays are useful for teaching suprasegmentals.

The aim behind question seven is to know which technique is actually used by the teacher and why he has chosen to use this technique and to know whether there is a common technique or whether each teacher uses a specific one according to his pupils.

Here, teacher participants indicated that they use drills and claim that, in drills, the semantic aspect is neglected. This is to say that there is no focus on meaning which make the learners concentrate on the pronunciation and try to say the word as it is uttered by the teacher. Others have mentioned their somewhat timely use of dialogues because the learners can practice almost everything aspect of the language being learnt, especially pronunciation aspects, through dialogues: sounds in isolation, stress, intonation, etc.

Question eight is asked in order to know whether or not there is a need to teach pronunciation in the absence of a language laboratory. The answers provided by participants are indicated below:

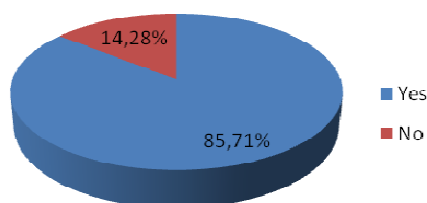


Figure 6: The Necessity of the Language Laboratory in Teaching Pronunciation

Considering the data on the Figure above, it appears that the majority of teachers claims that using a language laboratory is necessary in teaching pronunciation. The reason behind their opinion could be that language laboratories provide authentic spoken language excerpts as done by native speakers which strongly help the teachers much in teaching pupils. It is to be mentioned that a limited number of teachers say that it is not necessary to use a language laboratory. In this case, the teacher will play a very important role because he is the only source the learners refer to.

Question nine has been asked to know how much time each teacher gives to teaching pronunciation. The answers from the teachers indicated that a large majority of them give twenty to thirty minutes per week to phonetics courses. Some of the teachers claim that the time devoted to phonetics courses depends on the units and lessons. The course books are divided into units and lessons, each of which having its goals.

Question ten is, actually, a part of question nine. It was asked to see if teachers are satisfied with the amount of time devoted to teaching pronunciation. Their answers are presented in the Figure below:

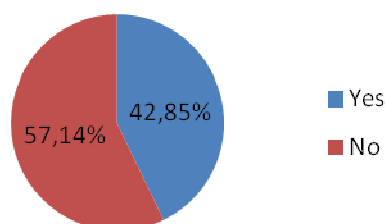


Figure 7: Sufficiency of Time Devoted to Teaching Pronunciation

The above Figure shows that 42.85% of participants say that the time devoted to teaching pronunciation is enough, because the learners do not need a very long time. Moreover, they learn simple things which do not require too much time. 57.14% of teachers say that the time devoted to phonetics courses is not enough. Pupils need time to practice speaking English. They claim that the longer time devoted to teaching pronunciation the better it is for the learners.

The purpose of question eleven is to know the area which is difficult for learners in learning pronunciation. Teachers tick the appropriate answer: consonants and vowels, stress or intonation. Answers are presented in the Figure below:

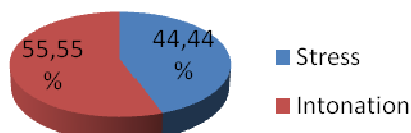


Figure 8: The Phonetic Aspects That are Difficult to be Learnt

The data show that, according to teachers, learners do not have difficulties in learning consonants and vowels. The teachers opt for stress and intonation. Indeed, the majority of the teachers think that learners find problems within stress and intonation because of the lack of fixed rules. They claim that learners cannot understand why the intonation is rising in one case and falling into another one. Another reason is that learners find stress and intonation very boring and seem to be lost. The last reason is that there is not enough practice in using stress and intonation in speaking.

The purpose of question twelve is to know if the teaching of intonation for beginners is beneficial or it must be delayed to the following levels.

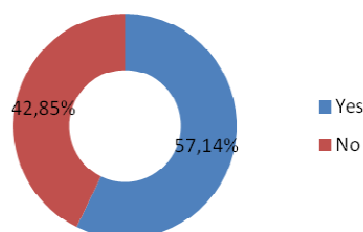


Figure 9: The Appropriateness of Teaching Intonation for Beginners

Statistics appearing on the Figure show that some teachers, support the idea of focusing on the teaching of suprasegmentals from the earliest stages. However, others say that intonation should not be taught for beginners. They have to learn just consonants and vowels.

The aim behind asking question thirteen is to know if it is more important, when the teacher introduces a new word, that the learner knows the meaning of the word or pronounces it accurately.

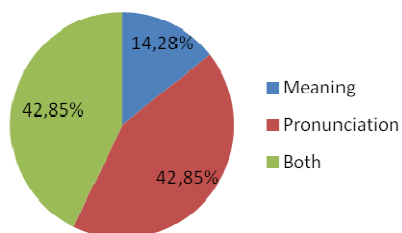


Figure 10: The Important Aspect in Introducing a New Word

Here, only a limited percentage of teachers care about meaning without pronunciation. For them, what is important is to know the meaning of the words to enrich one's vocabulary regardless of knowing how to pronounce it. Half of the remaining teachers opt for pronunciation and the other half for both. It means that the both groups of teachers care about teaching the pupils how to pronounce the new words with a focus, of course, on meaning.

Question fourteen was asked for the sake of knowing, whether it is always beneficial to the learners when the teacher corrects their pronunciation or not. The answers are displayed below:

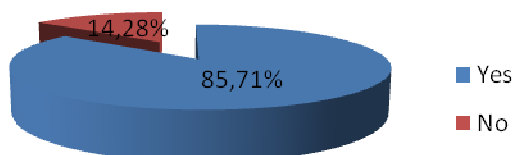


Figure 11: The Usefulness of Correcting the Learners' Pronunciation

On viewing the figure, one can notice that the majority of teachers answer positively. Some respondents answered negatively. The reason is that it is not always useful to correct the learners' pronunciation. Over-correction may make the pupils unwilling to speak, to avoid being corrected by the teacher. The teacher should know when and how to correct the pupils' pronunciation.

Question fifteen was asked to know the frequency of correcting the learners' pronunciation. This question is termed as: "Do you correct your learners' pronunciation?" Three options are made available to respondents: *i- always*, *ii- sometimes*, *iii- rarely* or *iv- never*. The participants' answers are presented below:

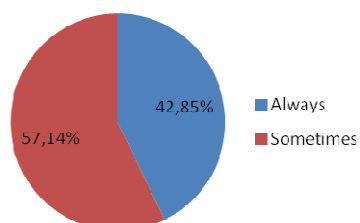


Figure 12: The Frequency of Correcting the Learners' Pronunciation

The results show that 42. 85% of respondent teachers always correct their learners' pronunciation. This means that whenever the learners make an error, the teacher corrects him. At the same time, 57. 14% say that they sometimes correct their learners' pronunciation. They argue that they do this when the learners' pronunciation destroys the meaning. And I am of the opinion that, in such cases, it should be corrected. But if it is acceptable there is no need to interfere each time and disturb the learners.

Question sixteen's aim is asked to discover the best method in testing pronunciation based on the teachers' experience. The answers of participants are presented below:

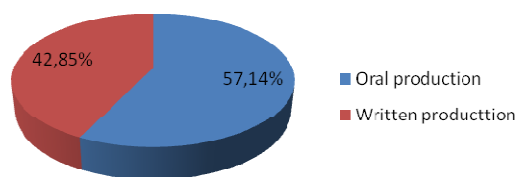


Figure 13: How the Learners' are tested in Pronunciation

Here too, the results are the same as in the preceding question. Indeed, the results show that 57.14% of teachers test their learners in pronunciation by focusing on their oral production. 42.85% of respondent teachers focus on the learners' written production. In fact, the two ways are used with each other. Some aspects need to be tested in a written way, for example the transcription of vowels and consonants.

Question seventeen requests the respondents' opinions since they are asked to indicate the real reasons behind the learners' failure in pronouncing English sounds. Through their experience, the teachers can diagnose precisely the cause of this problem.

The participants responded basing themselves on their experience. One reason advanced is that learners hear and use the English language only in the classes. They do not speak for enough time so that their pronunciation can be developed. Another reason is that the learners are not exposed to native speakers. As mentioned earlier in this study, the amount of exposure to the native speakers of the language plays a very important role in learning its pronunciation. And the absence thereof is the source of the difficulties indicated. The last reason suggested by the teachers is that the curriculum does not focus too much on learning pronunciation.

Question eighteen is about knowing the most appropriate suggestions that can be given by teachers in order to teach pronunciation at the level under investigation in the secondary schools. Teachers suggest that to develop teaching pronunciation, laboratories and recorders should be used, because they are very useful in that the pupils listen to native speakers. The oral skills should be developed by using dialogues, listening to songs etc.. Teachers suggest that it would be better if the attention shifts from writing skills to listening and speaking skills. Other teachers suggest that the pronunciation should be taught to beginners by introducing simple sounds such as short and long vowels with enough time of practice until they get familiar with the units of the new language, then complex aspects can be introduced. Last but not the least, it has also been suggested that it would be better to avoid teaching pronunciation in secondary schools. But in my opinion, this suggestion is not realistic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendations to the government and school authorities are related to the design of a specific Pronunciation syllabus that may cover all the different levels of English language learning at the secondary school level. In the design process, a number of variables must be taken into account. Celce-Murcia et. al.(2000: 320-5) list them as learner variables (variables associated with the learners themselves), setting variables (variables dealing with constraints placed on the syllabus by the local, in which the language syllabus is being implemented), institutional variables (which have to do with the educational situation in which the learners find themselves), linguistic variables (which deal with the first language of the learners), methodological variables (which are related to the specific teaching approach adopted by the teacher or institution). These need to be taken into account for the said syllabus to be effective. We further suggest that all teachers pay more attention to student's pronunciation and try to correct them any time possible. We find it

important to stress that the task of improving students' pronunciation is the responsibility of all language teachers and not only English teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that participants agree on the fact that the pronunciation should be taught first before grammar and vocabulary. Teachers then indicate that pronunciation is, for the majority of them, the most difficult aspect to be taught, because there are no fixed rules that may help them to do so, and more importantly to know that they are not doing it well. The great variability and personal preferences and views attached to this issue seem to have determined their answers. That may explain why they also agree the appropriate level for teaching pronunciation is with intermediate learners. However, it is important to note that some of the teacher participants claim that teaching pronunciation should be for beginners. We believe that beginners should learn simple things about pronunciation, such as vowels and consonants.

Teacher participants disagreed on the issue of suitability. For some of them, the English curriculum goes with the learners' abilities and there is no problem faced. Others answered "no" and justified their answers by saying that the curriculum should be reduced. The time devoted to teaching pronunciation is insufficient and has to be augmented. This is because the longer the time devoted to teaching pronunciation is; the better it is for the learners. As far as the correction of learners' pronunciation is concerned, teachers indicated that correction is useful. But over-correction is to be avoided so as not to make the learners unwilling to speak.

It is worth noting that there are several limitations to the present study. Indeed, the study relies on a questionnaire to explore the views of teacher participants on their students' pronunciation difficulties. Therefore, their honesty is presumed but not assured. Second, this study is about pronunciation as a language element. The variety of English discussed in this report is that often known as Received Pronunciation (RP). Therefore, other aspects of language learning such as vocabulary, grammar, and the four skills are not discussed. Third, a part of the questionnaire is based on multiple-choice questions. This procedure prevents the participants from giving their reasons about negative beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Fourth, the scope of the present topic is also limited because it has to do with teachers' views of intermediate EFL students. Thus, the results of the present study cannot be applied to students of other levels, such as students of beginner and advanced levels. In addition, the number of participants has not covered the whole EFL teachers in the region. We have assumed that the sample population is representative of the whole population. Fifth, it often appears that people's beliefs are, in fact, consistent with their practice, that is, their beliefs shape and, perhaps, determines their practice. Therefore, in order to help other teachers critically think about their beliefs, more exploratory studies should be carried out, so as to increase the database of students and teachers' beliefs and, consequently, both actors' reflection and action.

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