

PRONUNCIATION ISSUES AMONG ISLAMIC EDUCATION STUDENTS SPEAKING ENGLISH KEYWORDS

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Abstract: *Effective English speaking, especially for those learning the language as a foreign language (EFL), depends heavily on pronunciation. Pronunciation is still a major problem for students at Islamic educational institutions because of their mother language's heavy interference and little exposure to spoken English. This study investigates the pronunciation issues that Islamic education students face when speaking English and looks at the causes of these issues. Data were gathered through speaking exercises, classroom observations, and interviews with Islamic education students using a descriptive qualitative method. The results show that mispronounced vowel and consonant sounds, improper word stress, and trouble making sounds that are absent from the students' native tongue are prevalent pronunciation issues. Phonological interference, lack of communicative practice, and low confidence in speaking English were identified as the main factors influencing these challenges. The study highlights the need for pronunciation-focused instruction and communicative speaking activities tailored to the context of Islamic education students. These findings are expected to provide insights for English teachers and curriculum designers in improving speaking instruction within Islamic education settings.*

Keywords : *English pronunciation; Islamic education students; speaking skills; phonological interference; EFL learners*

INTRODUCTION : English has developed into a universal language that is essential for academic communication, worldwide interaction, and education. English competence, especially speaking abilities, is becoming more and more crucial for students at Islamic educational institutions to access global knowledge, take part in intellectual discourse, and communicate across cultural boundaries. Pronunciation, however, continues to be one of the most enduring difficulties encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly those whose educational background prioritizes religious subjects over exposure to communicative language. Pronunciation is a key component of intelligible spoken communication. Mispronunciation may lead to misunderstanding, reduced confidence, and limited participation in oral interaction. Islamic education students often experience unique pronunciation difficulties due to limited exposure to English phonological systems, strong influence from their first language (L1), and instructional contexts that prioritize grammar and

reading over oral communication. Despite growing attention to EFL pronunciation, research focusing specifically on Islamic education students remains limited.

This study aims to investigate the pronunciation challenges encountered by Islamic education students in English speaking and to identify the dominant factors contributing to these difficulties. The findings are expected to contribute to more effective pronunciation instruction in Islamic education contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since pronunciation has a direct impact on learners' capacity to successfully convey meaning, it has long been seen as a crucial component of speaking competence in second language acquisition. A key element of oral proficiency is accurate pronunciation, which promotes comprehensibility, intelligibility, and listener understanding. Effective pronunciation teaching not only improves intelligibility but also boosts learners' confidence and willingness to participate in oral communication, according to Derwing and Munro (2015). Pronunciation is often overlooked in EFL classes, despite its significance. There is a persisting belief that learners' pronunciation would spontaneously improve via exposure and practice without specific instruction, and many teachers have no professional training in pronunciation pedagogy. Because of this, teaching pronunciation is frequently neglected in favor of teaching grammar, vocabulary, or reading comprehension.

First language (L1) interference is one of the main causes of pronunciation problems among EFL learners. Flege's Speech Learning Model (2018) states that when specific sounds or patterns are absent from their L1, learners have a tendency to transfer phonological elements from their native language into the target language. Both segmental errors, such as incorrect vowel and consonant production, and suprasegmental errors, like improper emphasis, rhythm, and intonation, are often caused by this transfer.

Pronunciation difficulties are especially noticeable for pupils whose linguistic backgrounds include Arabic, Malay, or other languages frequently spoken by Islamic education students. These learners frequently have trouble with stress-timed rhythm, consonant clusters, and vowel length distinctions—all of which are very different from the syllable-timed rhythm present in many of their home languages. Furthermore, learners frequently substitute more familiar sounds from their L1 for uncommon English phonemes like /θ/ and /ð/.

Pronunciation issues are made worse by a lack of exposure to real English input. Students studying Islamic education often attend classrooms where English is used more as a written academic subject than as a spoken communication tool. According to Rahman and Yusoff (2020), instructional strategies in these settings frequently place a strong emphasis on reading comprehension, grammar proficiency, and translation exercises, with little opportunity for oral communication. This emphasis on instruction limits students' access to natural pronunciation models and lessens their opportunities to practice speaking in relevant, conversational contexts. As a result of inadequate feedback and little interaction with fluent English speakers, learners may have fossilized pronunciation problems. Learners' pronunciation performance is significantly influenced by affective variables in addition to linguistic and instructional aspects. EFL students frequently express anxiety, a fear of making mistakes, and a lack of confidence, especially when speaking. According to Horwitz et al. (2019), speaking anxiety deters students from actively practicing pronunciation because they can be afraid of receiving a poor grade from teachers or classmates. Limited past exposure to spoken English and the lack of a

supportive communicative context may exacerbate this fear in Islamic education pupils. Because of this, students might steer clear of speaking opportunities, which would reinforce incorrect pronunciation patterns and impede long-term progress.

Relatively few studies have specifically investigated students in Islamic education settings, despite the fact that a large body of research has looked at pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners in broader contexts. These settings may have different effects on language learning processes than traditional educational settings due to their own sociocultural values, curricular priorities, and instructional traditions. The dearth of context-specific research draws attention to a significant gap in the literature and emphasizes the necessity of investigating pronunciation difficulties in Islamic educational settings. Designing successful pronunciation training that is pedagogically relevant, culturally sensitive, and attentive to the particular requirements of Islamic education students requires an understanding of these difficulties.

METHOD

In order to investigate pronunciation difficulties faced by Islamic education students in English-speaking environments, this study used a qualitative descriptive research approach. Because it enables a thorough assessment of learners' pronunciation challenges, perceptions, and learning experiences within their particular educational setting, a qualitative method was deemed appropriate. The focus of the study was not to measure improvement quantitatively, but to describe and interpret recurring pronunciation patterns and the underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

Thirty undergraduate students who were enrolled in an Islamic education program at a university where English is a required subject made up the participants. Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants so that their exposure to English education and academic backgrounds would be comparable. Since each participant had taken at least one semester of English classes, they were all familiar with fundamental speaking exercises, which made them appropriate for analyzing pronunciation problems in oral communication.

To improve the data's authenticity and richness, a variety of devices were used in its collection. The main sources of data were semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, and oral speaking exercises. As part of the speaking assignments, students were required to read aloud from a few English texts and give brief oral presentations on well-known subjects. The researcher was able to identify a variety of pronunciation traits because these activities were created to elicit both controlled pronunciation output and natural speech production. To guarantee precise and thorough analysis, all speaking performances were audio recorded with the participants' permission.

In order to find recurrent pronunciation problems associated with segmental features—such as vowel and consonant production—and suprasegmental features—such as word stress, phrase stress, and intonation patterns—the recorded data were transcribed and examined. To guarantee systematic examination, pronunciation errors were classified according to known phonological frameworks. The participants' most common pronunciation difficulties were then highlighted by grouping recurrent patterns.

Semi-structured interviews were used in addition to the speaking exercises to learn more about how students perceived their pronunciation issues and the variables affecting their speaking abilities. The learners' experiences in English-speaking classes, their degree of confidence, their exposure to spoken English, and their perceptions of the reasons for pronunciation issues were the main topics of the interviews. Together with the data from the speaking task, the interview data were audio recorded, verbatim transcribed, and evaluated.

Data familiarization, preliminary coding, theme formulation, and interpretation were all part of the thematic analysis process. The identification of important themes and patterns that emerged from the interview responses and oral performance data was made possible by this methodical methodology. By comparing results from speaking tasks and interviews, data triangulation was used to assure reliability and increase the validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Islamic education students experience a range of pronunciation challenges in English speaking. These difficulties are multifaceted and result from affective states, instructional strategies, and language issues. The results are discussed in relation to previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by learners in Islamic education contexts.

Segmental Pronunciation Challenges

Students frequently mispronounced English consonants that do not exist in their native tongue, especially /θ/, /ð/, and /v/, according to the analysis of the speaking activities. These sounds were frequently replaced with more recognizable phonemes, like /t/, /d/, or /f/, which made them less understandable. For instance, the sound /θ/ was frequently perceived as /t/, whereas /ð/ was substituted with /d/, demonstrating distinct patterns of phonological transfer from the learners' mother tongue. Vowel production was shown to be a major issue in addition to consonant difficulties. Many pupils made pronunciation mistakes that changed the meaning of words because they were unable to distinguish between long and short vowels.

These results corroborate earlier studies that highlighted the significant impact of first language phonological systems on the pronunciation improvement of EFL learners. According to Flege's (2018) theory, proper pronunciation is challenging when learners' L1 lacks some English sounds, especially when there is little explicit instruction and concentrated practice. The recurrence of these segmental errors indicates that pronunciation issues may eventually become calcified in the absence of focused correction.

Features that are Suprasegmental

In addition to segmental problems, the study found significant challenges with suprasegmental elements such as intonation patterns, word emphasis, and sentence stress. The clarity and naturalness of their speech were impacted by the inappropriate stress placement that many students used, especially in multisyllabic terms. Furthermore, regardless of the type of sentence or communicative purpose, students frequently employed flat or monotonous intonation patterns. During oral communication, this lack of intonational diversity decreased speech expressiveness and occasionally led to misunderstandings.

These suprasegmental difficulties point to a lack of exposure to real spoken English and a lack of focus on prosodic elements in the classroom. Learners may develop erroneous speech patterns that impair overall intelligibility because pronunciation instruction frequently concentrates on individual sounds rather than rhythm and intonation. This result is consistent with earlier research showing that, despite their critical role in effective communication, suprasegmental traits are often disregarded in EFL environments.

Environmental and Instructional Factors

Students' pronunciation development was discovered to be significantly influenced by instructional strategies and learning environments. Participants had few opportunity to practice speaking English in class, according to interview data. Grammar explanation, reading comprehension, and written exercises were the main focus of English instruction; oral communication and pronunciation practice received less priority. Pronunciation correction was infrequently given, and when it was, it was typically implicit rather than explicit.

This emphasis on instruction is a reflection of a larger tendency in EFL curriculum, especially in Islamic educational institutions where written tests are frequently used to gauge academic success rather than oral performance. As a result, pronunciation teaching is neglected, which exacerbates pupils' speech challenges. These results corroborate previous research that suggests chronic pronunciation problems among EFL learners are caused by inadequate instructional focus on pronunciation.

Affective Elements

Affective aspects were found to be a key factor impacting pronunciation performance among Islamic education students, in addition to linguistic and instructional problems. Affective variables include psychological and emotional factors including confidence, anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. These factors have all been demonstrated to have an impact on students' propensity to speak up and engage in speaking exercises.

Speaking anxiety was one of the most often reported affective problems. Nervousness, a fear of making mistakes, and a reluctance to speak in front of people are all signs of anxiety in EFL speaking situations. Students frequently avoid vocal engagement or limit their verbal output to safer, shorter responses as a result of these emotional reactions, which reduces possibilities for significant pronunciation practice. According to earlier studies, anxiety severely impairs oral communication skills and lowers students' participation in speaking exercises, which leads to a vicious cycle of avoidance and recurring pronunciation mistakes. Speaking anxiety can result from emotional impediments to language use, such as anxieties of poor language performance, unfavorable peer criticism, or insufficient preparation for speaking duties.

Another emotional obstacle that was frequently mentioned was low self-confidence. Learners' willingness to take chances, try different pronunciations, and persevere despite communication breakdowns are all strongly correlated with their level of confidence when speaking a foreign language. Students who lack confidence may be reluctant to speak, make little use of speaking practice chances, or completely stop participating in class discussions. According to research, students who are more confident tend to talk more fluently and are more eager to participate in communicative activities, whereas students who are less confident find it more difficult to express themselves and take part in oral discussions.

Furthermore, social and instructional classroom settings have an impact on emotional aspects. Anxiety about speaking performance was found to be strongly correlated with a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties in a study of Islamic university students. This suggests that learners' psychological states are both causes and consequences of

pronunciation difficulties. Students' oral involvement was further reduced by their frequent reports of shame and anxiety of making mistakes when speaking English.

Peer pressure and the educational environment both contribute to affective barriers, according to the literature. For instance, children may experience anxiety if they believe that the classroom setting is competitive or if they anticipate receiving unfavorable feedback from teachers and peers. Students' willingness to practice spoken language might be considerably decreased by these situational anxiety factors.

It is important to comprehend these affective dimensions because they interact with cognitive and linguistic processes in speech creation, rather than only reflecting emotional distress. High levels of anxiety can interfere with word retrieval, articulatory precision, and mental planning, all of which have a direct effect on speaking performance and pronunciation quality. Therefore, increasing learners' pronunciation results requires tackling affective barriers like anxiety and confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the pronunciation issues that Islamic education students encounter in English-speaking environments and found that these issues are complex and interrelated. The results show that students' speaking intelligibility is greatly impacted by both segmental characteristics, such as incorrect vowel and consonant production, and suprasegmental characteristics, such as stress and intonation patterns. First language interference, limited exposure to real spoken English, instructional strategies that emphasize written skills, and affective barriers like fear and insecurity all have a significant impact on these pronunciation issues.

The findings suggest that in Islamic educational environments, pronunciation teaching needs to be given more attention. Students are less likely to acquire confident and clear spoken communication when pronunciation is considered an incidental part of learning English. Consequently, it is crucial to incorporate pronunciation teaching as a fundamental component of speaking education. With the help of regular modeling, guided practice, and helpful criticism, English language instructors are urged to give clear teaching on both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. Students' exposure to spoken English can be increased and active pronunciation practice can be encouraged by incorporating communicative activities like role-plays, oral presentations, and interactive conversations.

Pronunciation development is greatly aided by the learning environment in addition to pedagogical techniques. Students' speaking fear can be lessened and they are encouraged to take chances when speaking English in class if the environment is encouraging and non-threatening. To boost students' confidence, educators should use positive feedback techniques and encourage peer support. Students are more likely to participate in meaningful speaking practice, which is crucial for improving pronunciation, when they feel comfortable making mistakes.

Important ramifications for curriculum design in Islamic educational institutions are also highlighted by this study. Grammar and reading-focused education should be balanced with chances for oral communication and pronunciation development in English courses. Pronunciation education can be made even more effective with institutional assistance, such as teacher training in pronunciation pedagogy and access to real listening materials.

This study has limitations even though it offers insightful information about pronunciation difficulties in Islamic educational settings. The limited number of participants and qualitative descriptive approach limit how far the results may be applied. Future studies may use longitudinal or experimental methods to look at how well particular speech instruction strategies work over time. Further research could also compare pronunciation difficulties in various educational contexts or examine the function of technology-assisted pronunciation learning.

Islamic educational institutions can better equip students with the oral communication skills required for academic success and meaningful participation in global discourse by methodically addressing pronunciation challenges through pedagogically sound instruction, supportive learning environments, and curriculum development.

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