**IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION THROUGH PHONETICS INSTRUCTION IN YEMENI EFL CLASSROOMS**

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| ***Article Info*** | **Abstract** |
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| ***Article History*** *Received:* *Revised:* *Published:* *……………………………….****Keywords****English pronunciation;**phonetic instruction;**classroom instruction.* | *The context of English education in Yemen serves as the starting point for understanding the challenges faced by Yemeni students in mastering English pronunciation. Factors such as the differences in sound systems between Arabic and English, variations in syllable structure and intonation, as well as the influence of local accents or dialects, become the focal points in identifying the difficulties Yemeni students encounter in correctly articulating English sounds.This study aims to examine the effectiveness of phonics training in improving students' pronunciation skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses in Yemen. Using a literature review method, this study collects and interprets data from relevant scientific sources. The results of the literature review show that phonics training significantly contributes to improving Yemeni students' English pronunciation. Such teaching improves students' ability to accurately identify and pronounce English phonemes, increase their ability to understand and interact verbally, and build confidence in speaking English. This study provides valuable insights into the role of phonetics instruction in improving students’ English pronunciation In EFL courses in Yemen. Drawing from these results, a number of suggestions have been made to incorporate phonetic teaching into the curriculum, enhance educational resources and teacher development, and place greater focus on English pronunciation within the framework of English language education in Yemen.* |
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**INTRODUCTION**

Learning to pronounce English correctly can be challenging for students, especially when English is not their first language. Often, pronunciation is not given enough attention in language classes, yet it is essential for clear communication. This is particularly true in global settings where English serves as a common language. Poor pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings, mix-ups, and even cultural faux pas. Conversely, having strong pronunciation skills can enhance a learner's self-assurance and leave a good impression in educational, career, and social situations.Despite the importance of pronunciation in effective communication, many EFL classrooms do not give it enough attention. According to Al-Sobhi & Preece, (2018), EFL teachers prioritize grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, possibly because they lack proficiency or training in teaching it. This lack of focus could hinder EFL learners' language proficiency, particularly in Yemen, where students struggle to apply their phonetics and phonology knowledge to improve their pronunciation.

In Yemen, learners face several challenges in improving their English pronunciation through phonetic and phonological learning. A primary obstacle is the scarcity of readily available educational tools and materials. Additionally, Arabic is the primary language in Yemen in everyday life, so students have few opportunities to interact in English outside of the classroom. The differences in sounds and sound systems between Arabic and English also cause pronunciation difficulties.To overcome these challenges, it is important to enhance the accessibility of appropriate educational resources, including teachers trained in English phonetics and phonology. The learning environment should also be supportive to provide students with opportunities to practice and interact in English. Awareness of the sound differences between Arabic and English also needs to be increased through consistent exercises.

According to Nurman, (2021) "Phonetics has provided valuable insights into the teaching of pronunciation by focusing on the examination of the physical characteristics of sounds and their specific location and manner of articulation within the vocal tract”. Although phonetics and phonology are taught in Yemeni university degree courses for English language teachers, many students still struggle with their pronunciation. This suggests a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, which can be addressed through more effective phonetics instruction in EFL classrooms. Research has shown that explicit pronunciation instruction can significantly improve learners' pronunciation skills Martin, (2020). Still, there is limited research on the effectiveness of phonetics instruction in EFL settings, particularly in Yemen. In this paper, the researcher highlights the importance of teaching phonetics to enhance Pronunciation in EFL classrooms. In order to conduct the study, the questions were formulated as (1) Does phonetics instruction improve English pronunciation in Yemeni EFL learners? aND (2) What are the learners’ attitudes toward phonetics instruction?

**English Pronunciation**

English pronunciation encompasses the manner in which words are spoken in the English language, adhering to the guidelines outlined by dictionaries like Oxford Dictionary or Longman Dictionary. It is often regarded as the skill or approach employed to articulate English words in a manner that resembles that of a native speaker. Mastering pronunciation is a crucial component of achieving proficiency in the English language (Khodjayeva, 2020).Pronunciation involves producing each sound and correctly pronouncing words, phrases, and sentences, paying attention to spelling, stress, and intonation. Additionally, there is a method called "phonetic transcription" used to accurately represent the pronunciation of words. Phonetic transcription is a form of written representation in which each letter corresponds to a specific sound (Mäkinen, 2021).The teaching of English pronunciation indeed encompasses three primary areas: sounds, rhythm and stress, and intonation.

Firstly, the domain of sounds is crucial for language learners. It involves the ability to identify and articulate the distinct sounds of a language, often represented through phonetic symbols. In English, these symbols can vary based on the accent, be it British, Australian, or American. The elements of sounds include vowels and consonants, which are considered segmental features (Betu 2019).

Secondly, rhythm and stress form the backbone of English words. The rhythm of English is determined by the presence of stressed syllables, which create the unit of tone. Stress is a crucial aspect in shaping the rhythm of spoken English, as it helps establish the cadence of speech and can significantly alter the meaning of words or sentences (Öztürk (2023) .

Lastly, intonation, the rise and fall of tone in speech, plays a significant role in spoken English. It greatly influences the meaning of utterances and contributes to the overall communicative effect of spoken English. Intonation can express various emotions, ask questions, or provide emphasis, thereby adding a layer of complexity to the language (Fitriati, Syarifah, and Warsono 2020)

In conclusion, the teaching of English pronunciation is a complex process that involves understanding and mastering sounds, rhythm and stress, and intonation. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in how English is spoken and understood.

**Phonetics**

Phonetics is a branch of linguistics focusing on the study of language sounds, including how they are produced and perceived.It examines these sounds irrespective of whether they hold individual meanings or not (Reetz & Jongman, 2020).Phonetics serves as a descriptive foundation for studying a language's phonology. There are several reasons studying phonetics and phonology has value. First, it furthers our understanding of the human mind. Additionally, learning the phonetics of another language builds our capacity to identify and correct pronunciation errors in that language, as well as to teach its pronunciation to others. (Yusuf, 2019).As cited in Abdelhadi, (2022), Chaer divides the process outlines three main types of phonetics:

Articulatory phonetics, also known as organ phonetics or physiological phonetics, examines the functioning of the human speech organs and their role in the production of speech sounds. It investigates both the processes involved in producing these sounds and the methods used to categorize them.

Acoustic phonetics investigates speech sounds as physical phenomena, focusing on their properties as vibrations and natural events. This branch of phonetics examines factors such as the vibrational frequency, amplitude, and intensity of speech sounds. It aims to understand the acoustic characteristics of these sounds and how they contribute to the perception of speech.

Auditory phonetics explores the process by which we perceive and interpret speech sounds through our ears. This branch of phonetics delves into the mechanisms involved in receiving and processing auditory stimuli, focusing on how the ear functions in capturing and transmitting sound signals to the brain. By studying auditory phonetics, we gain insights into how humans perceive and understand speech sounds.

Phonetics is divided into three types: articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetics, and auditory phonetics. Based on phonetics, speech sounds are categorized into three types: vowel sounds (vowels), consonant sounds (consonants), and semi-vowel sounds (semi-vowels). Vowel sounds are created by the lungs producing airflow without any obstructions. On the other hand, consonant sounds are formed when the airflow encounters obstructions in the vocal tract. Semi-vowel sounds, on the other hand, are speech sounds that possess characteristics of both vowels and consonants (Yeaqub, 2018).

**Phonetic instruction in EFL Context**

Phonetic instruction within the context of English as a foreign Language(EFL) is recognized as an essential yet intricate element of language education. It plays a vital role in equipping students with the skills necessary for effective communication and comprehension in English, focusing on the other ability to perceive and articulate the language’s distinctive phonetic sounds. This facet of language learning , while challenging , is crucial for non-native speakers, as it significantly impacts their proficiency in engaging in clear and comprehensible verbal interaction.Several studies have examined the nuances of phonetics instruction in EFL contexts. AbdulWahid (2023) highlights the challenges lecturers encounter in teaching pronunciation, particularly the difficulty in conveying certain sounds to students. In a different study, Tabandeh, Moinzadeh, and Barati (2019) explored the effectiveness of various instructional methods on Persian EFL learners' acquisition of English lax vowels. Their findings indicated that explicit instruction coupled with focused tasks markedly improved learners' phonetic accuracy, both in controlled and spontaneous settings.

The use of mobile-based learning as a tool for phonetics instruction has also gained attention. Haggag (2018) implemented a mobile-based program aimed at developing pre-service teachers' segmental elements in phonetics courses. This approach resulted in notable improvements in the participants' achievements and satisfaction levels.Furthermore, explicit instruction in phonetics has been shown to enhance learners' perception of target phonemes. In the context of teaching Spanish as a foreign language, Kisslig's study demonstrated that such instructional methods effectively improved learners' ability to recognize and produce specific sounds.These studies collectively illustrate the complexities and varied approaches in phonetics instruction within EFL settings, underscoring the need for innovative and effective teaching strategies to enhance language proficiency among non-native speakers.

**EFL Classroom**

In Yemen, English is recognized as a foreign language rather than a second language. As a result, the teaching and learning of English mostly take place within the classroom, rather than in everyday communication. Despite having at least six years of English education in school, students are expected to possess only basic skills that will be useful for future employment competition. It is widely acknowledged that proficiency in English plays a crucial role in expanding employment opportunities. Individuals with strong English skills are more likely to secure better job positions compared to those with limited proficiency. Unfortunately, it is disheartening to note that Indonesian students often lack competence in proper English, despite the clear importance it holds for their future careers (Kanie et al., 2021).

In EFL classrooms, it is appropriate to discuss the monolingual approach in English language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Within the field of language education, a core principle that underlies the process of learning English is the monolingual ideology. This ideology asserts that the only acceptable language for learning and using in the classroom is English. Consequently, within the monolingual ideology, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often associated with imitating native English speakers. In situations where students struggle to speak English accurately, they may resort to code-switching with their local languages. It is worth noting that in the current context, code-switching is increasingly acknowledged and referred to as functional code-switching, which is then encompassed within the concept of translanguaging. This is particularly relevant in EFL classrooms where multiple languages are present (Liando et al., 2022).

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The method in this research is a library research method based on a qualitative approach. Windle & Silke, (2019) states that in the literature study to obtain data, researchers collect, analyze, organize, sources derived from, articles, books, reports, and other research on Improving English Pronunciation Through Phonetics Instruction In Yemeni EFL Classrooms. According to Suryaningsih, (2022) The literature study consists of four essential stages: gathering necessary materials, preparing a bibliography, managing time effectively, and reading and documenting research materials. In the qualitative approach, researchers create a complex picture, examine words, detailed reports from respondents' views, and conduct studies on experienced situations (Arkandito et al., 2016). Additionally, a qualitative approach is employed, which means that data analysis and findings are not derived from statistical procedures or other forms of calculation (Guest et al., 2020).

Data collection used documentation techniques to collect journals with the keywords English Pronunciation, Phonetics Instruction, and EFL Classroom from various sources. The research model used was the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model. Qualitative data analysis activities are carried out interactively and continuously until completion, so that the data is saturated. This analysis consists of 3 main things: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Lisabela, 2019).

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

The research conducted aimed to investigate the effectiveness of phonetics instruction in improving English pronunciation in Yemeni EFL classrooms. The study focused on the implementation of phonetics instruction as a means to enhance English pronunciation skills among Yemeni English language learners The findings of the research indicated that phonetics instruction had a positive impact on improving English pronunciation among the participants. Through explicit instruction on phonetic symbols, sound production, and oral practice, the learners demonstrated enhanced pronunciation skills and accuracy. The phonetics instruction helped them identify and differentiate between English sounds, particularly vowels and consonants, leading to improved pronunciation and reduced pronunciation errors.

The study highlighted the significance of incorporating phonetics instruction in EFL classrooms in Yemen, emphasizing its role in addressing the common pronunciation difficulties faced by Yemeni learners. By providing explicit guidance and practice opportunities, phonetics instruction can assist learners in developing accurate pronunciation skills, thus enhancing their overall English language proficiency. There are several reasons why learners in Yemen have difficulty practising proper English pronunciation:

**Limited Accessibility**

Access to resources for learning English pronunciation is scarce in many parts of Yemen, particularly in rural areas. Schools often lack qualified teachers who can model accurate pronunciation and help students identify and correct errors. Textbooks rarely include audio materials or extensive pronunciation guidelines. Technology that could provide exposure to the native speakers is unavailable in many schools . The lack of access to pronunciation learning tools like dictionaries , recordings, Language labs, and even basics like alphabet cards or mirrors makes it extremely difficult for students to develop strong pronunciation habits.

**Educational Curriculum**

The national curriculum in Yemen predominantly on English grammar, reading, and writing proficiency.pronunciation receives strikingly little attention in terms of instructional time, classroom activities, assessments , and learning objectives. With no pronunciation components included in high-stakes examinations, teachers were obliged to prioritize other skills. This imbalance in the curriculum severely limits students’s opportunities to study, practice, and receive feedback on English pronunciation inside the classroom.

**Lack of English Language Environment**

For most learners in Yemen, their educational settings provide the only consistent exposure to English. Outsides school,Arabic serves as a lingua franca in everyday life. English media, entertainment, advertising, etc. have limited presence. learners infrequently hear or interact with fluent English speakers within their communities. This Arabic - dominant environment surrounds students with pronunciation models that reinforce first language habits and makes it challenging to acquire new phonetic skills or a native-like accent in English.

**Cultural and Belief Factors**

Some cultures have strong beliefs regarding native language pronunciation and foreign languages. Some learners may feel reluctant to produce sounds that are not present in Arabic or sound unfamiliar to them. This can be an additional barrier to developing good English pronunciation.It is important to note that difficulties with English pronunciation are not unique to learners in Yemen. It can happen in various countries where English is not the native language or not widely used. To help learners in Yemen or anywhere else improve their English pronunciation skills, there needs to be better access to appropriate educational resources, sustained pronunciation practice, and a supportive environment.

Overall, the research showed that phonetics instruction helps learners improve English pronunciation skill .Having activities in class focused on learning the sounds, rhythms, stress, and intonation patterns of English helped students from all backgrounds get better at speaking clearly and correctly.Also , the research shows it’s important for EFL classrooms to spend time breaking down and practicing the little details of English pronunciation. Thiscan help all motivated students get past the common difficulties in speaking a second language . Lessons should be built step by step so students feel comfortable making new sounds. With the right encouragement and practice, any student can improve their English pronunciation by understanding phonetics. Teachers need to use engaging tools to train students’ ears and mouths. Classes must be supportive, so no one feels shy to try. Ultimately,integrating phonetics instruction into the language curriculum is important to support learners in achieving better pronunciation skills.

 **Discussion**

According to Tarigan in Bogdashina, (2022), speaking skills can be distinguished into two categories: speaking as an art and speaking as a science. Speaking as an art emphasizes language as a tool of communication in society, while speaking as a science emphasizes the mechanisms of speech and listening, basic exercises for teaching sound and voice, speech sounds in utterance sequences, vowels, consonants, and speech pathology.

Regarding speaking as a science, which emphasizes the sound aspect of language, there are several aspects commonly used as measures to assess someone's speaking skills, namely intonation, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and speaking fluency. Pronunciation is an essential part of language since language is primarily spoken. But, numerous EFL learners have often found it challenging to speak freely because of their weak pronunciation (Riadil & Yosinth, 2021). Pronunciation is essential in the growth of vocabulary since it involves distinguishing sounds that come together to create words and ideas. To master good and correct pronunciation, regular and systematic practice is needed (Chan, 2018). However, the importance of teaching pronunciation is often overlooked, especially in the case of English being taught as a foreign language. Certain teachers argue that pronunciation should be taught with minimal or no direct instruction. Consequently, students do not achieve a level of fluency that resembles that of a native speaker. This poses challenges for students when it comes to effectively communicating in casual conversations (Salamonson et al., 2019).

Learning pronunciation proficiency is a significant challenge in English language acquisition. Mispronunciations can significantly impact the intended meaning of a sentence. Therefore, it is vital to integrate pronunciation instruction into English language teaching by using familiar elements like, such as names and pictures, as tools for intriducing new vocabulary. Recognizing the significance of pronunciation as a fundamental aspect of language learning is essential (Sundari, 2018).The following is an explanation of the pronunciation system in English according to Mulya & Mujiyanto, (2018):

Vowels: Vowels can be described as sounds produced when air flows freely through the throat and mouth without any obstruction or constriction, leading to a lack of audible friction." There are three vowels in English divided into three groups: front, middle, and back vowels.

Diphthongs: Diphthongs are sounds produced by the movement from one vowel position to another. In phonetics, we use two letters to represent diphthongs. The initial letter indicates where the sound begins, and the second letter indicates where the sound goes.

Consonants: Consonants are sounds or letters (vowels or consonants) that, in their production, do not allow air to flow smoothly through the mouth and throat, but encounter obstruction or constriction, resulting in audible friction.

Sounds produced by the human speech apparatus originate from the cooperative actions of organs surrounding the human speech organs. There are two important things to understand for phonetic learners: place and manner articulations. Understanding both is not easy; comprehension cannot be achieved solely through reading and observing (Rowe & Levine, 2022). It is undeniable that pronunciation, which is closely related to phonetics and phonology, can be briefly defined as the study of the sound system and is one of the most challenging skills in learning and mastering English (Fatimah, 2020).

Phonetics is a scientific field that examines how humans produce speech sounds, analyzes the waveforms of emitted speech sounds, and explores how the human auditory system receives speech sounds for analysis by the brain (Cabrera & Gervain, 2020).

According to Getie, (2020) there are several factors that generally hinder progress in learning English:

1. Differences in the sound systems between the native language and the foreign language

Othman & Abubaker, (2021) states that students whose mother tongue is Arabic and are learning English tend to pronounce English words similar to the sounds of their native language, Arabic. Aulia, (2018) states that the main problem in teaching and learning English pronunciation lies in the differences in the sound systems between English and the students' native language, causing the students to mispronounce certain English sounds because they do not exist in their mother tongue.

1. Inconsistency of certain sounds in English

Altamimi & Rashid, (2019) points out that the main difficulty for anyone with a less complex vocal system in their native language is the inconsistency of vowel sounds. Plag, (2018) states that it is not easy to determine the exact sound for certain letters in specific words. Farrah & Halahlah, (2020) found that there are 23 common pronunciation problems, some of which are related to vowel sounds.

1. Influence of mother tongue interference and spelling on pronunciation

Hawkins, (2018) in their research state that the sounds [p] and [b] are two distinct phonemes, each distinguished by native speakers. Al-Zoubi, (2019) states that Arab students learning English struggle with the sounds [p] and [b] due to the influence of their mother tongue. Their tongues become stiff when pronouncing [p] and [b], resulting in pronunciation errors until they master the English sounds.

To describe additional qualities of speech, such as teeth clenching, lisping, and sounds made with the gap between the lips and the palate, an expanded set of symbols, an addition to the International Phonetic Alphabet, can be used. English pronunciation through phonetic teaching in EFL classes in Yemen has several significant benefits. Here are some reasons why it is important to enhance English pronunciation through phonetic teaching in EFL classes in Yemen:

1. Enhancing effective communication: Good pronunciation allows students to communicate more clearly and effectively in English.Through studying phonetics and enhancing their pronunciation, students can avoid mistakes in word pronunciation that can hinder understanding and reduce confidence in speaking English.
2. Expanding speaking skills: Proficiency in pronouncing English sounds correctly helps students develop better speaking skills. Students can express thoughts and ideas more fluently, enrich their vocabulary, and enhance fluency in speaking English.
3. Understanding broader cultural context: Enhancing English pronunciation through phonetic teaching also helps students to better understand and respond to a wider cultural context. The skill to articulate words correctly assists students understand and appreciate accent and dialect variations in English, as well as distinguish between formal and informal pronunciation.
4. Boosting confidence: When students can pronounce English sounds well, they will feel more confident in communicating with native English speakers or in different English-speaking situations. This helps overcome the embarrassment or anxiety that often arises from difficulties in pronouncing English correctly.
5. Assisting listening comprehension: Having a good understanding of English sounds also helps students in understanding what they hear. By enhancing English pronunciation through phonetic teaching in EFL classes in Yemen, students can develop better speaking skills, improve communication abilities, broaden cultural understanding, and build confidence in using English. This will provide a strong foundation for students to succeed in international communication and gain advantages in the academic and professional world.

Supported by the research of Isaacson et al., (2020) by conducting training and coaching to improve speaking fluency through guided practice in pronouncing words using phonetic symbols, trainees receive ample input on how to pronounce words accurately and correctly. Significant improvement can be observed among the trainees in pronouncing English words correctly. Knowing the sounds and phonetic symbols in English pronunciation has been proven to enhance students' pronunciation skills and speaking fluency. To get English language skills, it is also necessary to be disciplined in order to create a comfortable atmosphere. Research by Muluk et al., (2021) Discipline plays a vital role in creating a positive and secure environment for learning. It is crucial to establish and communicate classroom rules right from the beginning, as this forms the foundation of effective classroom management. By implementing rules, we can discourage students from arriving late and facilitate better control over any disruptive behavior. When it comes to showing discipline, it is essential to lead by example. As an educator, it is important to exhibit good discipline yourself and demonstrate how to maintain it. When students see how you act with discipline, they will learn to do the same and appreciate its value

In summary, maintaining discipline is key to fostering a comfortable and safe learning environment. Setting clear rules and expectations from the start helps prevent tardiness and misbehavior, while exemplifying good discipline sets the tone for students to emulate. For learners' attitudes, alternative media for phonetic teaching is needed to prevent learners from getting bored during learning, and one of the effective methods is using songs as a medium. Supported by the findings of Seguiche & Israel, (2023), the utilization of phonics songs in phonics reading classes for young learners can be an effective medium to assist teachers who adopt a phonics approach in their classes for young learners in Yemen.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that teaching phonetics plays an important role in improving students' English pronunciation in EFL classes in Yemen. Based on the literature review method, this study identified the main challenges faced by Yemeni students in pronouncing English, including differences in sound system, syllable structure, intonation, and the influence of local accent or dialect.The literature review findings show that phonetic instruction works well for Yemeni students to improve their English pronunciation. Phonetic instruction helps students to recognize and make English sounds correctly, Understand and communicate better in English, and feel more confident in speaking English. In the context of English language education in Yemen, phonetic teaching can be integrated into the curriculum to provide students with opportunities to develop better pronunciation skills. Increased resources and training for teachers who teach in EFL classrooms in Yemen are needed so that they can implement phonetic instruction effectively. Furthermore,there is a need for increased emphasis on English pronunciation within the English language education framework in Yemen.

By implementing good phonetic teaching, students in EFL classes in Yemen can overcome difficulties in pronouncing English and develop better speaking skills. This will enable them to communicate more effectively, expand their cultural understanding and gain confidence in using English.Additionally, to utilize media such as songs . This approach has been found to be beneficial in enhancing students’ linguistics capabilities and focusing on imitation to improve their communication skills.

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