



FROM LEARNING TO ACQUIRING: THE IMPACT OF PHONOLOGICAL INSTRUCTIONS ON ESL LEARNERS' PROSODY AT MASTERS LEVEL IN PAKISTAN, OKARA

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Abstract

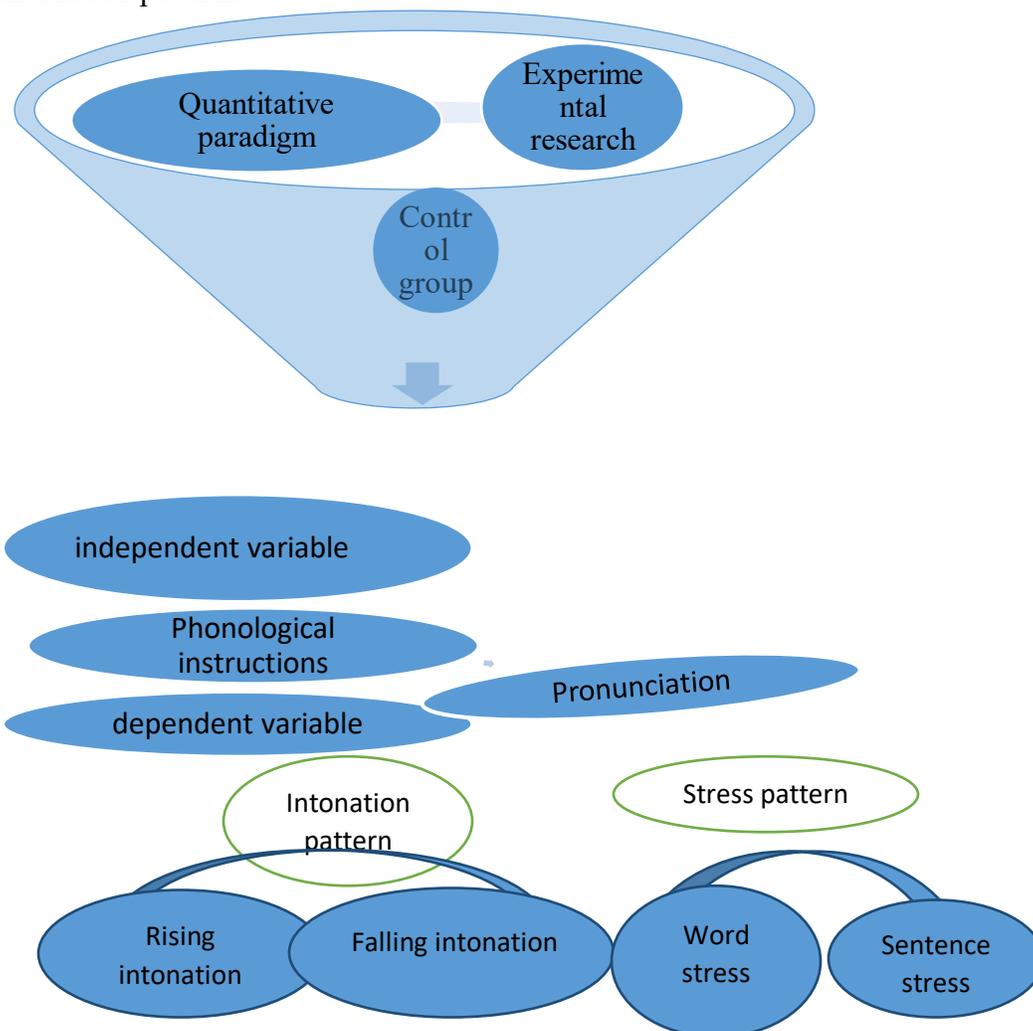
Pronunciation is one of the most important features of speaking skill. Developing countries like Pakistan where pronunciation and phonological awareness are not emphasized in teaching learning environment. Unfortunately, it is considered a neglected area in teaching, learning of English language. A pure experimental research was done to examine the effect of phonological awareness on ESL learners' prosodic features while speaking at post graduate level in Okara District. Fifty five randomly selected students were taken as subject of this experimental research. Experimental group was given phonological instructions precisely based on stress, intonation and rhythmic features on onset and register, by employing phonetic videos and audios while control group was taught by the traditional way. Pretest and posttest data were measured by using 1-5-point Likert scale and collected data was analyzed by using SPSS. Findings show that there is positive effect of phonological instructions on ESL learners' pronunciation, prosodic features and comprehension.

Key Words: *Prosody, Phonological Instructions, Intonation, Stress Patterns, Comprehensibility, Intelligibility*

1. Introduction

Language is one of the most important and basic tools of communication among human beings (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025). Language learning has always been an important topic for debate among psychologists, philosophers and linguists (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). On learning the language and its acquisition process, the theorists have come up with various theories. Despite all the difficulties ESL learners have to face in learning a language, the pronunciation is the most crucial one, especially ESL, EFL learners face difficulties to identify grammatical categories which differentiate in their meaning's mere on prosodic features (Ramzan et al., 2020, 2023, 2025). Correct and intelligible pronunciation makes the language understandable. Farhat, P. A., & Dzakiria, H. (2017) conducted an experimental research and concluded that pronunciation is a neglected field in ESL/ EFL setting and pronunciation can be learnt. Wrong pronunciation is the basic hindrance between the smooth communications it always creates comprehensibility and intelligibility errors (Nawaz et al., 2020, 2021). According

to Young (2005) studying a language which is new for the learners' pronunciation must have the first place in learning process and more emphasis should be on the correct and intelligible pronunciation and on prosodic features as stress, rhythm and intonation patterns. Young (2005) postulates that many language learners do not put themselves into a strong practice and careful efforts to target language pronunciation. Waqar and Omer (2015) suggest that pronunciation has important role in ESL/EFL learners. Fraser (2000) pointed that ESL/EFL learners face multiple problems which are related to pronunciation. In 21th century due to easy access of teaching learning techniques and material ESL/EFL teachers are seriously trying to find out the new strategies for teaching the correct pronunciation as research done by Min, S. J., & Pak, H. H. (2007) to solve EFL learners issues regarding syntactic ambiguities by using prosodic features. The current research highlights the problems which ESL learners face in the pronunciation at post graduate level. Researcher has selected only two aspects of the pronunciation i.e. stress and intonation patterns.





Theoretical Framework

Since 1950, second language learning has been remained a burning issue in the field of applied linguistics. Overskeid (2008) explains Behaviorism theory did its best for second language learning this movement of behavioral learning is originated with the publication of J.B. Watson's book on behavioral psychology in 1913. According to Cooter and Reutzel, (2004) say that language learning process is based on human role model imitation and repetition. Behaviorism theory is being used in its very advanced form in the field of educational psychology. Psycholinguistics use it in the field of behavioral counseling and behavioral therapies for the treatment of different phobias (Abdelrady et al., 2025). As behaviorists give importance to the stimulus and response with multiple trials and feedbacks. Renzetti, et al., (2012) mentioned the social learning theory expanded the behavioral approach of learning it states that learning is a social factor which takes place by the conscious power. Researcher used amalgamation of these two theories as research framework. This study is based on to minimize pronunciation difficulties of ESL/EFL learners by putting multiple activities in practice in selected framework.

Problem Statement

ESL/EFL learners face severe pronunciation difficulties while reading aloud, speaking and listening a proficient and fluent English speaker or native English speaker. As we know English native speakers have diversity in meanings based on high and low tone and onset- coda stress and intonation patterns. Pronunciation difficulties not only a problem of weak students but competent ESL learners also face same problems in Pakistani educational context.

Research Objectives

To find out the impact of phonological instructions in betterment of ESL learners' pronunciation.

To investigate and solve the stress related problems in ESL learners' pronunciation at Masters Level.

To investigate and solve the intonation related problems in ESL learners' pronunciation at Masters Level.

Research Hypotheses

- i. Learners who are taught phonological instructions perform better in pronunciation than the learners who are not taught phonological instructions.
- ii. Learners who are taught instructions regarding stress pattern perform better in pronunciation than the learners who are not taught instructions regarding stress pattern.
- iii. Learners who are taught instructions regarding intonation perform better than the learners who are not taught instructions regarding intonation.

2. Literature Review

Pronunciation has always been playing a great role to enhance comprehensibility and intelligibility. Kayaoğlu et al, (2013) pointed out that there are numerous research studies which are done on the importance of pronunciation. Some researchers focused on the theoretical grounds of pronunciation as conducted by Blanche (2004) few others researchers did research work on pronunciation teachings with technology as done by Levis (2007) and some other researchers performed their researches on different



instructional techniques for teaching pronunciation well and the example is the work of Saran and Seferoglu (2010). Derwing, T.M. (2010) mentioned that numerous researchers did efforts to less pronunciation difficulties but still it is a neglected field. Researcher did research to use phonological instructions as a tool for the betterment of ESL learners' pronunciation. It is usual in Pakistani educational context that students are not given the phonological awareness at school level and even at the advanced level (Akram & Yang, 2021; Akram et al., 2019, 2020), students receive very typical and little knowledge about target language phonetics and phonology. According to Pakistan's National Research Council (2013) students who have better skill and knowledge about English language are reported to get better opportunities in their lives due to the growing status of English language in Pakistan (Chen & Ramzan, 2024). Due to the lack of phonological awareness, majority ESL learners who learn English through Pakistani educational system, speak English without proper stress and intonation patterns (Ramzan & Khan, 2024). In English language, it could be said that stress and intonation play a crucial role not only for correct pronunciation but also for semantic and grammatical functions. According to Kesercioğlu and Aycan (2015) intonation pattern plays four vital functions, semantic function due to intonation differences a sentence can be explained differently, attitudinal function of intonation, intonation usually describes the feelings, attitude and context of the sentence, grammatical function of intonation means intonation plays the same role in speaking as punctuation plays in the written text, accentual function, intonation gives effect of prominence on stressed syllables and especially for placing the tonic stress. According to Field (2005) a second language learner needs no more than an intelligible pronunciation. Moreover, there is debate over the years to define the comprehensibility and intelligibility in pronunciation. AL-Dilaimy (2012) discusses the problems in pronunciation of ESL learners' classroom and these problems are based on production perception and intonation patterns. According to Nunan (2001) our speaking style represents our identities (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021), social background and status (Parveen & Akram, 2021). Bond (1999) indicates that native speakers and listeners rely on the stressed syllables than unstressed or weaker linguistics forms, wrong shift of stress can create the complete misconception. According to Celik (2001) intonation patterns should take not a luxury but an essential element of comprehensible interchange. Yangklang (2013) says that stress and intonation patterns in ESL learning process not only provide the good skill of speaking but enhance the listening skill also. Schaezel and Georgetown (2009) indicate that there are different and miscellaneous strategies which are helpful to enhance the ESL learners' pronunciation however some (teachers) rely on rules learning, few teachers believe on positive attitude towards the pronunciation errors. Mentioned by Richards (2015) that students should learn the pronunciation in native context to get better understanding. Abbasi et al. (2017) postulates that in Pakistani teaching and learning setting ESL learners put wrong force on the phonemes and this wrong muscular force paved the way for wrong stress and intonation patterns as they produce British English dental fricatives [θ, ð] as dental stops /tʰ, d/. Similarly, native speakers produce aspirated stops with stress while at unstressed positions aspirated stops are produced as unseparated ones; however Pakistani learners wrongly pronounce these, hardly make correct use of this rule (Davenport & Hannahs,



2013). According to Abbasi et al. (2017) Punjabi speaking ESL learners add extra schwa sound while pronouncing a word based on consonant cluster as /sk,/ /st,/sp/ etc and this extra vowel gives wrong stress patterns. Gass and Selinker (2001) and Puga et al. (2017) also reported this type of study in the case of German ESL learners, German ESL learners also face the stress and intonation problems due to the less practice of phonological rules and lack of teachers' knowledge about the English prosodic features. Researcher in this research included the few consonant sounds also with long and short vowel sounds and rise and fall intonation patterns. Cruttenden (2014) says in British English it is usual to have the 50% falling tones which followed by the rise and fall rise tone which include the forty percent, and this is the common way of speaking and ten percent include the very complicated tonal variations. Gut (2009) also have approximately same findings about the tonal variations which are used by non-native English speakers according to Gut's findings nonnative English speakers remain 65% monotone and simple movements of pitch is used 18% rise and 16% fall and in the case of complex tonal variations are found very rare and the digit is 1.5%. In Pakistani context ESL learners put wrong stress and intonation patterns not only with long vowel sounds but with short vowel sounds also. Likewise, same issue is observed with production of few consonants sounds such as /ch/, (h) and with few other consonants sounds. ESL learners pronounce vowels sounds with high pitch and strong stress where they want to give prominence and replace short vowel sound into long vowel sound as in the example of word "apple" ESL learners adds extra vowel sound before dark /l/. Another case in this context is pronunciation of /p/, /t/, /k/ sounds especially in polysyllabic words most of Pakistani ESL learners pronounce these sounds with full emphasis and aspiration even at middle and end position. This gives the rationale to the present study because it is based on the phonological instructions with drill, practice and rules learning for stress and intonation patterns of ESL learners. In Pakistani English-speaking context, it is also noted that Pakistani ESL learners reduce vowel sounds in some letters e.g. in the pronunciation of word "eight" Pakistani ESL learners usually replace starting /ei/ sound with /a/ sound as in the pronunciation of "bat" this type of replacement create problems of stress patterns. According to Roach (2009) phonological awareness and phonological instructions are the key and crucial elements to acquire the stress and intonation patterns.

3. Methodology of the Research

The nature of the research was quantitative research. An experimental research design was employed in this research work. Pretest – posttest control group design is considered true experimental design. In this research work population was the post graduate ESL learners from District Okra. In perspective of present research work researcher collected data from target population. Target population was three hundred and sixty in numbers. Multistage sampling technique used for selecting true representative sample without any biasness, every stage which involved in this research process was objective and systematic. Sample was selected through random sampling techniques. As the purpose of the research was to keep the gender variable constant in this research work, that is why only females' learners were selected from a Post graduate GOVT women college.

4.1 Procedure of the Research

Treatment duration was six weeks and in each week three hours were allocated to teach phonological instructions with activities and by using videos and audios tapes, listen, repeat and speak practices and involved students native like conversations without judging them during these practices. Total 18 lectures were delivered and each ended with feedback test. Material for treatment was taken from (www.WordStress.info), <https://www.learning-englishonline.net/languagecourse/introduction/>. (Resource material) An English Pronunciation Course, Beijing, Higher education press 2000, Handouts: illustration of stress patterns and intonation patterns, Recordings of native speakers, sound scripting, thoughtco.com.

Stress Pattern Changes with Noun and Verb Homographs (image was downloaded from www.WordStress.info)

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[Download Audio](#)

Figure 3.2 [Listen to Example](#) 🎵

1. Audio Sessions for Stress and Intonation Patterns taken from <https://www.learning-english-online.net/language-course/introduction/>

Pretest and posttest contained five activities based on reading aloud of different parts of speech as noun, verb and adjective categories stress patterns, contrastive stress, listening comprehension, fine out true intonation patterns, speaking activities based on brief dialogue and paragraph reading.

Data Collection Tool

Researcher herself developed a test which was used as a data collection tool. There was no prepared test available on any web site which meets the needs of this experimental research from which we could analyze the state of understanding of the students of said groups. The developed data collection tool was sufficient enough to cover the content of stress and intonation patterns. Internal validity of developed test tool was maintained by expert opinions of related field experts. Data was collected to develop the test from different authentic pronunciation web sites. Researcher used 1-5 Likert scale as a measurement tool which further validated internal validity of data collection tool. Hardison (2004) also used 1-7-point Likert scale for rating the prosodic features in his experimental research work but experimental research of Hardison (2004) was based on computer assisted prosodic features teaching not on phonological teaching technique.

4. Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed by using SPSS statistical software version 15 with compatibility of window 10. There were two stages of analysis which based on application of two t-tests, paired sample t-test and independent sample t –test. This figure explains difference between results before phonological treatment and after.

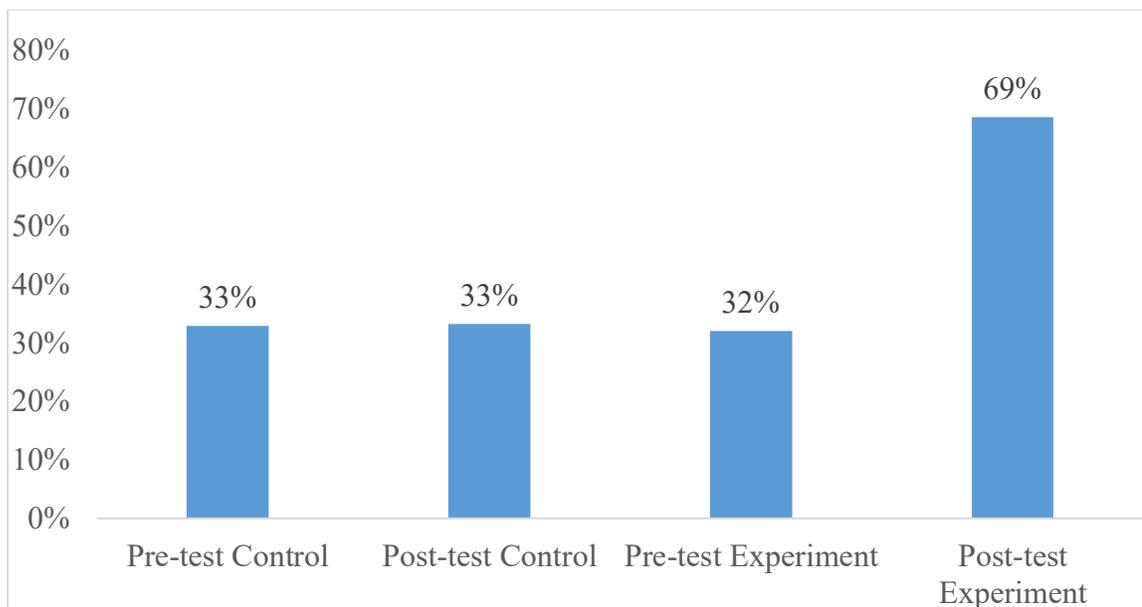


Figure 4.1 control group pretest, posttest and experimental group pretest, posttest Figure 4.1 explains the overall findings of the research experiment and it explains the cumulative percentage of control group pretest and posttest in pronunciation and experimental group pretest and posttest percentage in pronunciation. According to above figure control group got 33% in pretest pronunciation and control group obtained 33% in pre and posttest no difference reported according to above figure. Experimental group secured 32% in pretest of pronunciation, obtained 69% in posttest and it shows noteworthy difference. In light of data analysis findings, it can be concluded that findings provide the evidence that stated hypothesis are accepted and proved.

5. Conclusion

Present research work was based on to analyze the impact of phonological instructions on ESL learners' prosodic features while pronouncing and speaking English Language. In Pakistani context English has had status of second language and students used to learn English throughout their whole academic career. In spite of that status, English pronunciation is a neglected and problematic field in Pakistani educational system. English learning process was just based on grammar practicing rules and vocabulary memorizing practices. Present research was an endeavor to solve pronunciation related problems by giving phonological awareness and by using the intuitive-imitative and integrated teaching techniques to provide the pleasant learning environment. Henceforth, it was proved that phonological awareness positively influenced ESL learners' pronunciation.

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