

An Analysis of Pronunciation Problems of Bachelor of Arts First-Year Students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

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Abstract

The objectives of this Article aimed were 1) To study the pronunciation problems of B.A. first-year students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2) To find out the solutions to the pronunciation problems of B.A. first-year students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. The research methodology consists of research design which is a mixed method; namely qualitative and quantitative study. The research tools are questionnaires and in-depth interviews. For the population, there are 126 students from the Faculty of Education, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. The SPSS was used for data analysis. The study found that students were most self-conscious about mispronouncing words in front of others, with the highest score of 4.84. They strongly agreed that interacting with native speakers could improve their pronunciation skills (4.73). While students valued good pronunciation for effective communication (4.62), they often found pronunciation lessons boring (4.06). Confidence in accurate pronunciation received the lowest score (3.91), suggesting a need for activities to boost their confidence. Future research could explore ways to enhance pronunciation teaching. This includes studying the long-term effectiveness of techniques like IPA-based learning or computer-assisted instruction. Additionally, it could examine how cultural factors affect students' pronunciation difficulties and their motivation to improve. These areas of research could help address the challenges identified in the study and provide more effective strategies for improving students' pronunciation skills.

Keywords: Pronunciation; Problem; Attitudes Toward Pronunciation; Method of Learning Pronunciation; Challenges in Pronunciation

Introduction

Language, as a critical tool for communication among nations worldwide, is of utmost importance. It plays a vital role in human survival, enabling people to convey information, knowledge, ideas, and thoughts. Wahyu (2014: 57) asserts that language is the most effective means of expressing ideas, messages, intentions, feelings, and opinions to others. Therefore,

language serves not only as a communication tool for humans but also as a fundamental aspect of human life.

English is an international language that is commonly used by every country in the world, and in Thailand, it is taught from kindergarten to university. English plays a pivotal role in the transfer of knowledge, science, technology, art, culture, and the establishment of international relationships. According to Susanto (2007), English has become increasingly popular and is one of the most important languages for understanding literature. Students must acquire knowledge about its usage, but without daily communication practice, they may struggle to use it effectively. Consequently, learning and practicing English is essential for everyday spoken communication.

In English, there are four skills that should be mastered: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with speaking being the most important one. Mastering speaking is the key aspect of learning English, and success is gauged by the ability to engage in conversations. According to Ur, speaking is considered the most important skill among all four. As a result, learning to speak becomes the primary focus for foreign language learners (Penny, 1999). Additionally, Richards, notes that a significant portion of the world's language learners study English to enhance their speaking proficiency. In summary, one's proficiency in English is evaluated based on their speaking skills and oral communication abilities (Richard and Renandya, 2002).

Pronunciation holds a crucial role in communicative situations, being the initial language feature that people notice. Furthermore, the degree of a 'foreign accent' significantly relates to listeners' overall perceptions of oral proficiency, with the quality of pronunciation largely influencing the awareness of grammar and vocabulary errors (Gotz, 2011). Nevertheless, even proficient foreign language (FL) learners, despite years of language exposure, may still maintain noticeable foreign accents that, for some speakers (though not all), hinder their intelligibility. The challenges associated with mastering foreign language pronunciation, especially when compared to other language aspects, remain not fully comprehended.

The importance of teaching pronunciation in the foreign language classroom in Thailand has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Pronunciation held a prominent role in foreign language instruction, with the belief that explicit guidance was necessary for language learners to grasp phonetic distinctions and intonation patterns (Moyer, 2013). This led to the frequent use of language labs for pronunciation teaching, often involving repetitive exercises like drills, which had limited connection to the authentic communication context in English language learning.

As phonological fluency ceased to be treated as a discrete topic and was instead seen as "a means to negotiate meaning in discourse" according to Dalton & Seidlhofer, the importance of pronunciation teaching decreased, transitioning from a clear native-speaker model to a more functional approach (Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994). This functional approach focuses on a learner's ability to communicate successfully and intelligibly, as advocated by Jenkins, although there is no widely accepted definition of intelligibility and comprehensibility, and disagreement persists regarding how to teach and measure intelligibility highlights (Jenkins, 2000).



In a communicative approach, students may likely acquire reasonable pronunciation skills. However, learning pronunciation proves particularly challenging due to the necessity of developing new perceptual abilities for identifying new second language (L2) patterns and mastering new articulatory movements that need to become automated. Additionally, learners often need to overcome inhibitions and may even adopt new language identities, as pointed out by Hirschfeld (Hirschfeld, 1997). Despite the assertion in foreign language pedagogy that pronunciation is acquired without explicit instruction, second language research has demonstrated that explicit pronunciation teaching can significantly enhance pronunciation accuracy, as shown in the studies by Derwing & Rossiter (Derwing and Rossiter, 2003). This ongoing debate regarding the significance of pronunciation instruction may indicate a lack of sufficient exchange of ideas between second language (SL) scholars and foreign language pedagogy experts and practitioners.

While it is not mandatory for Asian students to use English, given its historical association with outsiders or others, the language is commonly employed as a foreign language in Asian countries. Consequently, some students may perceive the everyday use of English for communication as unnecessary. Despite this perspective, English maintains a relatively modest claim to being a compulsory subject in schools; nonetheless, it is still recognized as a significant international language in these countries. As argued by Toh, proficiency in English provides advantages for efficient communication globally, serving as a valuable skill for professional advancement, particularly in urban areas. The language plays a crucial role in various domains, including the tourism industry. Although English lacks official status in Asian countries, a notable number of students acknowledge its importance (Padermprach, 2017).

According to Attapol's research, among the four macro language skills, speaking appears to be the most crucial for enhancing the English proficiency of B.A. students. This is because speaking encompasses all other aspects of language knowledge. However, the teaching and learning of English speaking at MCU are somewhat restricted for several reasons. First, B.A. students find English speaking or oral communication challenging due to it not being their native language. Second, there is a prevalent desire among most B.A. students to sound as native-like as possible in English, conforming to the prestigious norm of spoken English, despite the widespread use of English in South East Asia and the resulting diversity of English, such as Malaysian English and Singaporean English. This situation limits exposure to different forms of English. Furthermore, as English is considered a foreign language in Thailand, the exposure to authentic English language input for learners in Thailand is constrained. Lastly, the English pronunciation of English teachers is another crucial dimension to consider. These significant issues underscore the importance of numerous studies focusing on the speaking ability of B.A. students (Sahatsathatsana, 2017).

Since pronunciation is a global construct which consists of segmental as consonant and vowels so, suprasegmental as stress, intonation, rhythm, rate, volume, over the past, many studies have variedly investigated the area of speaking skills, including speaking assessment,

phonology language acquisition, problems of teaching and learning speaking skills. Amongst these studies focusing on speaking skills, pronunciation is receiving more attention in many EFL classrooms since it is recognized that students should primarily acquire as a fundamental skill because it can affect accuracy and comprehension. Although research studies on speaking skills and pronunciation are common within English as a foreign language.

As a result, the problems that B.A. students face difficulties when learning English is to pronounce English. As the researcher experienced and observed, students in the college and the university who belonged with the local language to communicate with each other in their group or community. Local languages here that were used by the students and also the learning style of teacher that may because of the problem in English pronunciation. In this case, was recognized as a speech community. Then in this research, the researcher would like to analyze the problem and the factor that causes the problem of English pronunciation of B.A. students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

This research aims to improve the quality of English teaching and learning by focusing on pronunciation. Pronunciation can highlight students' strengths and weaknesses in language skills and motivate them to improve. The study aims to help English teachers understand pronunciation problems and enhance their teaching methods. Teachers should recognize the importance of pronunciation and encourage learners to improve their speaking skills, especially in pronunciation, making classes more interactive. The research also provides guidance for studying pronunciation issues in other contexts. This study focuses on pronunciation problems, factors, and implications for first-year B.A. students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

Objectives

1. To study the pronunciation problems of B.A. first-year students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
2. To find out the solutions to the pronunciation problems of B.A. first- year students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method to investigate first-year Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Education students' attitudes toward English pronunciation, their methods of learning English pronunciation, and their perceived difficulties in pronunciation learning. A quantitative approach was appropriate for systematically collecting numerical data and describing patterns and trends in learners' perceptions and experiences.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all first-year Bachelor of Arts Education students enrolled in the Faculty of Education during the academic year under investigation. From this



population, a sample of 126 first-year B.A. Education students ($N = 126$) was selected using a purposive sampling technique.

Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the participants shared similar academic backgrounds and learning experiences relevant to the objectives of the study. All participants were studying English as a compulsory subject and were at an early stage of higher education, where pronunciation difficulties commonly occur. Therefore, the sample was deemed suitable for examining attitudes, learning methods, and difficulties related to English pronunciation.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire designed to collect data on three main aspects:

1. Students' attitudes toward English pronunciation learning,
2. Methods of learning English pronunciation, and
3. Difficulties encountered in learning English pronunciation.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert's scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature in second language pronunciation and language learning to ensure theoretical alignment.

To establish content validity, the questionnaire items were reviewed by experts in English language teaching and educational research, and revisions were made to improve clarity and relevance. To determine the reliability of the instrument, internal consistency was assessed using Cranach's alpha coefficient. The reliability analysis yielded a Cranach's alpha value of 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming that the questionnaire was reliable for data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected by administering the questionnaire to the sample group of 126 students during the academic semester. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to encourage honest and accurate responses. The questionnaires were collected within a specified period to ensure data completeness.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. These techniques were appropriate for summarizing and describing students' attitudes, learning methods, and pronunciation difficulties in relation to the research objectives.

Mean scores were interpreted according to predefined criteria to classify response levels as very high, high, moderate, low, or very low. Descriptive statistics were selected because the study aimed to describe students' perceptions and experiences rather than to test hypotheses or examine causal relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and the collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

Results

Objective 1: The results showed that first-year B.A. Education students had a very high average score of (4.63) for their attitudes toward English pronunciation. The results revealed that first-year B.A. students at the Faculty of Education demonstrated a very high level of positive attitudes toward English pronunciation learning, with an overall mean score of 4.63. This finding suggests that students recognize the importance of pronunciation as a fundamental component of effective English communication. Positive learner attitudes are widely acknowledged as a key factor influencing motivation, engagement, and long-term success in second language acquisition (Gardner, 2010; Ellis, 2015).

The item with the highest mean score was Item 4 ($M = 4.73$), indicating that students strongly believe that interacting with native speakers can help them improve their pronunciation. This result reflects students' awareness of the value of authentic language exposure. Interaction with native speakers allows learners to encounter natural pronunciation features such as stress, rhythm, intonation, and connected speech, which are often difficult to acquire through classroom instruction alone (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Authentic interaction also provides learners with implicit feedback that supports pronunciation development and intelligibility.

Item 13 received the second-highest mean score ($M = 4.67$), showing that many students feel embarrassed when they mispronounce English words in front of others. This finding highlights the affective dimension of pronunciation learning, particularly language anxiety and self-consciousness. Previous studies have shown that fear of negative evaluation and embarrassment can significantly influence learners' willingness to speak and practice pronunciation in public settings (Horwitz, 2017). While such feelings may motivate some learners to improve, they may also reduce participation and limit opportunities for oral practice if not properly addressed by instructors.

In contrast, Item 15 had the lowest mean score ($M = 4.06$), indicating that some students perceive pronunciation learning as boring and tiring. Although the score remains relatively high, it suggests that traditional pronunciation instruction methods may not fully engage all learners. Research has shown that repetitive drills and mechanical exercises, when not integrated into communicative contexts, can lead to learner fatigue and reduced motivation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010). This result underscores the need for more interactive, communicative, and technology-supported pronunciation activities to sustain student interest.

Overall, the findings for Objective 1 indicate that students hold highly positive attitudes toward English pronunciation learning. However, emotional factors such as embarrassment and



perceptions of boredom highlight the importance of supportive learning environments and engaging instructional approaches that encourage active participation without fear of making mistakes.

Objective 2: The results showed that first-year B.A. Education students had a very high average score of (4.59) for their method of learning English pronunciation. The results suggest that students employed a wide range of pronunciation learning strategies, with a very high overall mean score of 4.59. This result suggests that first-year B.A. students actively engage in practical and self-directed methods to improve their pronunciation skills.

Item 9 recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.68$), indicating that students strongly believe that recording their own voices while pronouncing words and listening to the recordings helps them improve. This strategy reflects the use of self-monitoring and reflective learning, which are recognized as effective techniques in pronunciation development. By listening to their own speech, learners can notice discrepancies between their pronunciation and target models, thereby enhancing phonological awareness and self-regulation (Hahn & Dickerson, 2019). Such practices also promote learner autonomy, enabling students to take responsibility for their own improvement.

Item 8 had the second-highest mean score ($M = 4.61$), showing that students practice pronunciation exercises from books during their free time. This finding suggests that learners value structured and systematic practice and are willing to invest additional effort outside the classroom. Consistent practice is essential for developing articulatory control and improving pronunciation accuracy, particularly in foreign language contexts where exposure to English is limited (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Despite the overall high use of learning strategies, Item 6 received the lowest mean score ($M = 4.06$), indicating that students are less likely to ask their friends to correct their pronunciation while speaking. This reluctance may be linked to the feelings of embarrassment and anxiety identified in Objective 1. Previous research suggests that learners may perceive peer feedback as face-threatening or less reliable than teacher feedback, especially in cultures where maintaining social harmony is important (Saito & Lyster, 2012). As a result, students may prefer individual or private learning strategies rather than interactive correction methods.

In summary, the results for Objective 2 demonstrate that students actively use effective pronunciation learning strategies, particularly those involving self-practice and independent reflection. However, the limited use of peer feedback indicates a potential area for instructional improvement, such as training students in constructive peer correction and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Objective 3: The results showed that first-year B.A. Education students had a very high average score of (4.65) for difficulties in learning English pronunciation. The results suggest that students experienced a very high level of difficulty in learning English pronunciation, with an overall mean score of 4.65. This finding indicates that pronunciation remains a challenging aspect

of English language learning for first-year B.A. students, despite their positive attitudes and active use of learning strategies.

Item 10 had the highest mean score ($M = 4.89$), indicating that students struggle significantly to imitate native English speakers. This difficulty is commonly reported in second language research and is often attributed to differences between learners' first language phonological systems and that of English. Learners may find it difficult to perceive and reproduce unfamiliar sounds, stress patterns, and intonation contours, particularly when these features do not exist in their native language (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2015).

Item 6 received the second-highest mean score ($M = 4.85$), showing that when students encounter difficult words, they tend to repeat them many times until they memorize the pronunciation. This reliance on repetition suggests that students view memorization as a key strategy for overcoming pronunciation difficulties. Repetition is a fundamental component of pronunciation practice, as it supports the development of muscle memory and articulatory precision (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). However, without adequate feedback and phonological explanation, repetition alone may not lead to sustained improvement.

Item 5 recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.59$), indicating that students perceive fewer difficulties with English consonant sounds compared to other pronunciation aspects. This suggests that vowels, stress, and intonation may pose greater challenges than consonants. Research has consistently shown that suprasegmental features, such as stress and intonation, are more difficult for learners to master than segmental features because they require higher-level integration of rhythm, pitch, and meaning (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Overall, the findings for Objective 3 highlight that pronunciation learning involves multiple layers of difficulty, including imitation of native models, mastery of suprasegmental features, and confidence in oral production. These challenges emphasize the need for systematic pronunciation instruction that addresses both segmental and suprasegmental aspects while providing supportive feedback and ample practice opportunities.

In summary, the results of this study indicate that first-year B.A. students possess highly positive attitudes toward English pronunciation, actively employ practical learning strategies, and yet continue to experience significant pronunciation difficulties. The findings suggest that effective pronunciation instruction should not only build on students' positive attitudes and learning strategies but also address emotional factors, provide explicit phonological guidance, and incorporate interactive and supportive learning environments.

Discussions

This study examined pronunciation problems among first-year B.A. students at the Faculty of Education, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, and explored possible solutions. Using questionnaires and interviews, researchers collected data on students' experiences and learning strategies.



The findings showed that students faced significant pronunciation difficulties and felt self-conscious about mistakes (mean 4.84). They recognized the importance of pronunciation for communication (mean 4.62) and showed resilience in improving despite criticism (mean 4.50). Common learning strategies included recording and replaying their voices (mean 4.68) and practicing in their free time (mean 4.61). However, immediate self-correction was less common (mean 3.62), suggesting a need for better real-time error awareness.

Students struggled with stress and intonation (mean 4.75) and felt shy about asking for clarification (mean 4.56). Pronunciation errors often resulted from phonetic challenges, such as unfamiliar symbols (mean 4.52). These findings align with previous studies, which highlight confidence, teaching methods, and social factors as key influences on pronunciation learning.

To improve pronunciation, the study suggests using techniques like IPA-based instruction and phonological feedback. More engaging lessons, real-time correction methods, and a supportive environment could help reduce anxiety and build confidence.

New Body of Knowledge

This research provides important insights into English pronunciation learning among first-year Bachelor of Arts students by integrating learners' attitudes, learning methods, and perceived difficulties into a coherent analytical framework. The findings demonstrate that students possess highly positive attitudes toward English pronunciation, actively employ practical learning strategies, and yet continue to experience substantial challenges in achieving accurate and confident pronunciation.

The study contributes empirical evidence showing that positive attitudes toward pronunciation learning, particularly the recognition of authentic interaction with native speakers, play a crucial role in motivating learners to improve their spoken English. At the same time, affective factors such as embarrassment and anxiety emerge as significant influences on learners' willingness to practice pronunciation in public contexts. These findings highlight the importance of addressing both cognitive and emotional dimensions in pronunciation instruction.

In terms of learning methods, the research underscores the effectiveness of self-directed and reflective strategies, such as voice recording and independent practice, in supporting pronunciation development. The limited reliance on peer correction suggests a preference for autonomous learning approaches, indicating a need for instructional designs that balance individual practice with supportive collaborative activities.

Furthermore, the study reveals that pronunciation difficulties persist despite positive attitudes and active learning strategies. Learners face particular challenges in imitating native speaker models and managing suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation. These difficulties point to the necessity of systematic and explicit pronunciation instruction that integrates both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English phonology.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of pronunciation learning in foreign language contexts by demonstrating the complex interplay between learner attitudes, learning

strategies, and pronunciation difficulties. The findings offer practical implications for pronunciation pedagogy and support the development of instructional approaches that are learner-centered, emotionally supportive, and pedagogically effective.

Conclusion

This study examined the pronunciation challenges of first-year B.A. students at the Faculty of Education in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and explored possible solutions. The findings showed that students often feel self-conscious about their pronunciation, lack confidence, and struggle with stress and intonation. However, they recognize the importance of good pronunciation and actively use learning methods like recording their speech, practicing exercises, and imitating native speakers.

Despite these efforts, some students still face difficulties with phonetic symbols, vowels, and immediate self-correction. To improve pronunciation learning, the study suggests using interactive activities, targeted exercises, technology-based tools, and a supportive learning environment.

The research also highlights the need for emotional support, as many students experience fear of criticism. Future studies could explore long-term pronunciation strategies, cultural influences on learning, and pronunciation challenges in different year levels. By applying these findings, educators can help students build confidence and improve their pronunciation skills more effectively.

Suggestions

The findings of this study highlight the importance of effective pronunciation learning for students. Improving pronunciation requires efforts from teachers, students, and universities. Each group has a role in making pronunciation learning more engaging and effective.

For Teachers: Teachers should use interactive activities such as role-plays and group discussions to help students practice pronunciation in real-life situations. This method makes learning more enjoyable and practical. Additionally, teachers can use language learning apps and software to provide extra support. Teaching phonetic symbols and pronunciation rules step by step can help students understand sounds better and feel more confident.

For Students: Students should practice regularly by recording their own pronunciation and comparing it with native speakers. This will help them notice their mistakes and improve accuracy. Asking for feedback from teachers and classmates is also important for improvement. To build confidence, students should participate in pronunciation exercises in a supportive environment, where they feel comfortable practicing without fear of making mistakes.

For Institutions: Universities should provide workshops and resources such as phonetic guides and pronunciation software to help students improve their pronunciation skills. Training teachers on modern pronunciation teaching methods can also make learning more effective and engaging for students.



By applying these suggestions, teachers, students, and universities can work together to create a better learning environment that helps students improve their pronunciation and communicate more clearly in English.

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