

The Factors Affecting English Pronunciation of Students at Savan Centre

Author: Mr. Phouthalath Xayyalath; Lecturer in English, English Department, Faculty of Linguistics and Humanities, Savannakhet University, Savannakhet, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).
Tel & WhatsApp: +85620 5522 4414

Co-Author: Khanthanaly Panvilaysone; M.A. in Rural Economic Extension and Sociology Lecturer, English Department, Faculty of Linguistics and Humanities, Savannakhet University, Lao PDR;
✉ Khanthanaly@gmail.com; Tel & WhatsApp: +85620 2248 2323

Abstract

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in effective communication, particularly in English, as accurate pronunciation enhances comprehensibility and facilitates successful interaction. This study investigated the factors affecting English pronunciation among students at Savan Centre, with the objectives of identifying the major influencing factors and proposing effective strategies to address students' pronunciation difficulties. A quantitative research approach was employed, using questionnaires to collect data on internal and external factors. Internal factors included native language, learner characteristics, and perception, while external factors comprised motivation and the classroom environment. The findings indicated that respondents strongly recognized the importance of understanding the fundamentals of English pronunciation, with a ($\bar{X} = 4.25$; $S.D = 0.85$). Regarding external factors, having clear expectations and goals was identified as a major source of motivation, with a ($\bar{X} = 4.25$; $S.D = 0.64$). Furthermore, watching movies to hear authentic English in real-life contexts was perceived as the most effective strategy for improving pronunciation, with a ($\bar{X} = 4.60$; $S.D = 1.21$). The study recommends strengthening pronunciation fundamentals, building speaking confidence, watching English-language media, listening to podcasts and music, interacting with native speakers, setting clear goals, and engaging in regular English-speaking activities with classmates. **Keywords:** English pronunciation, internal factors, external factors, motivation, classroom environment, pronunciation improvement.

1. Introduction

English has become an indispensable medium of global communication and an international language in the twenty-first century. The rapid expansion of globalization has resulted in English being spoken by a greater number of non-native speakers, who use diverse accents and linguistic varieties. Consequently, effective communication requires pronunciation that is sufficiently intelligible rather than necessarily native-like. Jenkins (2002) argues that achieving international intelligibility should be a realistic and relevant goal of pronunciation teaching and learning. However, pronunciation remains one of the most challenging aspects of English acquisition and requires continuous practice (García, 2007; Gilakjani, 2012, 2016). Clear pronunciation is essential because inaccurate production of individual sounds, stress, articulation, or intonation can lead to misunderstanding. Kenworthy (2012) identifies stress, articulation, and intonation as fundamental components of pronunciation, while Kelly (2000) emphasizes that pronunciation is central to effective spoken communication. Good pronunciation contributes

significantly to learners' speaking proficiency and communicative competence. Even when learners possess adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge, poor pronunciation may prevent listeners from understanding their intended meaning. Pronunciation is also a physical skill that requires regular practice rather than merely theoretical knowledge (Kobilova, 2022). Therefore, systematic pronunciation instruction and meaningful opportunities for oral practice are necessary for English learners. The researchers were motivated to investigate this topic after observing that many students can communicate in English but experience difficulties producing English sounds accurately and intelligibly. These difficulties may result from several interacting factors, including first-language interference, learner characteristics, perception, motivation, and the learning environment. Previous studies have identified both internal and external factors influencing pronunciation development. Khan (2020), for example, categorizes these factors into inner factors, such as age, aptitude, learner type, and goals, and outer factors, including first-language interference, motivation, teaching methodology, classroom environment, and institutional variables. Similarly, Derwing et al. (2002) found that learners experience various pronunciation difficulties and employ strategies such as repetition, paraphrasing, writing, and adjusting speech volume when communication breakdown occurs. Students at Savan Centre may encounter difficulties in developing accurate and intelligible English pronunciation because of factors such as native-language interference, learner characteristics, perception, motivation, and classroom conditions. Yowani (2021) notes that pronunciation problems can be associated with insufficient knowledge of English phonology and phonetics, as well as difficulties with segmental and suprasegmental features. Therefore, identifying the specific factors affecting students' pronunciation is essential for developing appropriate instructional strategies.

- Objectives of the Study: (1) To identify the factors affecting students' English pronunciation at Savan Centre. (2) To propose effective solutions for overcoming students' English pronunciation difficulties.
- Questions of the Study: (1) What factors affect the English pronunciation of students at Savan Centre? (2) What effective solutions can help students overcome their English pronunciation difficulties?

2. Literature Review:

Pronunciation and Phonology: Good pronunciation is essential for effective communication in a foreign language. For beginners, producing unfamiliar sounds can be challenging and may cause hesitation. Therefore, developing confidence in pronunciation is an important part of language learning. Jones (1966) emphasizes that clear speech should be easily understood, whereas unclear articulation, mumbling, and imprecise utterances can hinder communication. Pronunciation instruction should therefore be engaging and practical, helping students produce words and sounds accurately. Chambers (1997) defines pronunciation as the correct manner of producing words and sounds in a particular language. Overall, effective pronunciation improves intelligibility, confidence, and communicative competence in English.

Factors affecting English Pronunciation Skill: Several factors influence English pronunciation among second-language learners. These include age, exposure, native-language accent, phonetic ability, identity, motivation, interest, and attitudes toward pronunciation (Kenworthy, 1987; Eliot, 1995). Stress, intonation, and rhythm also affect intelligibility. Overall, pronunciation is influenced by both internal learner characteristics and external learning conditions (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2011).

Native language: strongly influences English pronunciation because learners may encounter unfamiliar phonemes absent from their first language (Omolu, 2019). Differences between the sound systems of the

first and target languages can cause pronunciation difficulties and errors (Bhela, 1999). However, similarities between languages can facilitate pronunciation learning and support greater accuracy and confidence (Seom, 2021).

Extroverted: learners tend to be confident, willing to take risks, and less afraid of making pronunciation mistakes (Hedge, 2002). In contrast, introverted learners are often quieter, cautious, and less willing to participate in speaking activities. These personality differences can influence learners' opportunities to practice English pronunciation and develop speaking confidence.

Perception: is an important factor influencing language learning because learners interpret experiences differently. It involves selecting, organizing, and interpreting environmental stimuli meaningfully (Ghosh, 2022). Learners' perceptions may determine how they respond to classroom activities, depending on their interests, attitudes, experiences, and perceived relevance. Therefore, positive perceptions can support effective learning.

Motivation: is a crucial factor influencing second-language pronunciation and overall language development. It encourages learners to achieve their learning goals and develop language skills (Dörnyei, 1998; Shaaban, 2002). Motivation is influenced by self-confidence, intelligence, and personal goals (Meléndez, 2006). MacIntyre (1991) identifies two major types: instrumental and integrative motivation.

The classroom environment: significantly influences English pronunciation development, particularly for learners in non-English-speaking countries. A supportive environment provides opportunities for practice, interaction, and meaningful exposure to English (Szyzszka, 2018). Teachers should create engaging activities that simulate real-life communication. Positive social, emotional, and instructional conditions can also enhance motivation and learning outcomes (Ambrose, 2010).

Pronunciation: refers to the way words or languages are spoken through recognized sequences of sounds (Durkin, 2015). Accurate pronunciation begins with practicing individual sounds and words before progressing to phrases and longer utterances (O'Connor, 1998). Phonetic symbols also support learners' phonological awareness and understanding of English pronunciation, facilitating clearer and more accurate speech.

Individual: sounds are an essential component of pronunciation, although languages differ in their vowel and consonant systems (Schmitt, 2009). Learners may find unfamiliar sounds difficult because their first language shapes sound perception. Pronunciation instruction helps learners produce sounds accurately, recognize word stress, and develop clearer, more intelligible speaking skills (Harmer, 2001).

English: letters do not always correspond directly to specific sounds. Therefore, learners need to understand the relationship between letters and pronunciation, particularly vowel sounds (Ali, 2015). Letters represent written forms, whereas sounds are spoken. English spelling can be inconsistent, with the same letter representing different sounds and different letters representing similar sounds (O'Connor, 1998).

Stress: refers to the emphasis placed on particular syllables within words or words within sentences (Muhammad, 2018). In English, stressed syllables are generally louder, longer, and higher in pitch than unstressed syllables. Stress is suprasegmental and applies to syllables rather than individual sounds (Ladefoged, 2006). Word and sentence stress are important.

The act manner of pronouncing phonetic: According to (Peter N. Ladefoged), phonetics is the study of speech sounds and their physiological production and acoustic qualities. It deals with the configurations of the vocal tract used to produce speech sounds, the acoustic properties of speech sounds,

and the manner of combining sounds to make syllables, words, and sentences. and also need to understand about consonant sounds, vowel sounds were the substitution of the sound [ʌ], [a:], [æ], [ɒ], [ɔ:], [ɜ:], [e], [ə], [ɪ], [i:], [ʊ], [u:] and diphthongs were: the monophthongization of the sound [aɪ], [aʊ], [eə], [əʊ], [eɪ], [ɪə], [ʊə], [ɔɪ] and to make it easier and more accurate to distinguish sounds in different words. Example: Foot: The vowel sound /ʊ/ (as in "put") is used, Boot: The vowel sound /u:/ (as in "food") is used, Shoot: The vowel sound /u:/ (as in "food") is used, Suit: The vowel sound /u:/ (as in "food") is used. Despite similar spellings, these words have undergone different historical vowel shifts and phonetic developments, resulting in their distinct pronunciations. The phonetic symbols visually represent speech sounds, helping learners understand and distinguish different sounds. It uses correctly if focus the rules of phonetics and explores the benefits of English language teaching, including improving pronunciation accuracy, enhancing listening skills, and promoting effective communication. It emphasizes how phonetic symbols aid in developing phonological awareness and understanding spoken English, and use effective strategies for teaching accurate pronunciation.

The act manner of pronouncing two-syllable: According to (Oxford Online English, n.d.) word two-syllables 95% for noun stress on the first syllables such as picture, money and water. The word two-syllables 100% verbs have the stress on the second syllables such as computer, study, Japan. The rules for the compound words for compound nouns, the stress is on the first syllables example: Inside, jackpot and airport. According to (Jennifer, 2017) word stress two-syllables for noun and adjective in all the word stress on the first syllables example: dirty, clever, funny, and about the verb in all stress on the second syllables example: record, project, and export. To summarize noun and adjective two- syllables 95% stress on the first example: table, agree and city, but for the verb stress on the second syllables example: listen, begin and believe. The rules for the compound words for compound nouns, the stress is on the first syllables example: Inside, jackpot and airport.

The Act and Manner of Pronouncing More Than Two Syllables: Words with more than two syllables may have stress on different syllables. Certain endings provide useful patterns; for example, words ending in *-tion*, *-sion*, and *-ic* commonly receive stress near the end. Other endings, such as *-cy*, *-ty*, *-phy*, and *-gy*, often receive antepenultimate stress. Compound words follow additional patterns.

Confidence: Confidence plays an important role in developing English pronunciation and speaking ability. Learners who feel confident are generally more willing to communicate, practice, and accept feedback. Self-confidence can influence motivation, willingness to communicate, and pronunciation practice. Regular speaking practice, interaction with others, and constructive feedback can strengthen learners' confidence and pronunciation skills.

Watching Movies: Watching English-language movies can support pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, and speaking development. Movies expose learners to authentic speech, different accents, natural pronunciation, expressions, and conversational patterns (Liando et al., 2018). Subtitles can connect spoken and written forms, while audiovisual materials may increase learners' motivation, attention, enjoyment, and participation in pronunciation activities (Reza & Widodo, 2017).

Listening: Listening is a fundamental language skill that provides learners with essential input for developing communication abilities. Nunan (1998) emphasizes its importance in language learning, while Rost (2002) connects listening proficiency with speaking development. Listening to authentic materials, including podcasts and music, can help learners recognize pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, thereby improving comprehension and oral communication.

Speaking: Speaking is a fundamental language skill for effective communication and academic development. It enables learners to express ideas, interact with others, and participate confidently in social and educational contexts. Storytelling and discussion activities can improve fluency, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence (Akhyak & Indramawan, 2013). Regular speaking practice therefore supports overall communicative competence.

Motivation: Motivation significantly influences learners' English pronunciation and speaking development. Studies indicate that motivation, interest, self-confidence, and attitudes contribute to learners' willingness to practice and communicate. Intrinsic motivation may support more accurate pronunciation, while varied teaching techniques, media, encouragement, rewards, and supportive classroom conditions can strengthen learners' effort, interest, and desire to improve.

Classroom Environments: A supportive classroom environment plays an important role in students' language learning and achievement. Effective classroom management, positive teacher–student relationships, appropriate teaching practices, and supportive social and emotional conditions can facilitate learning (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). A comfortable environment encourages learners to participate actively, maintain motivation, and develop their language abilities.

3. Methodology

The study employed a questionnaire as the main instrument for quantitative data collection. Adapted from Marza (2014), the questionnaire comprised three parts: personal information, factors affecting pronunciation, and open-ended questions. The factors section covered internal factors, including native language, learner type, and perception, and external factors, including motivation and classroom environment. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, with SPSS. The oral test evaluated learners' production of sounds, inflectional morphemes, and consonant clusters, with participants' responses recorded and scored based on pronunciation accuracy.

4. Result

Findings of the Study: Answering Question One of the Study: The first question was "What are the common pronunciation errors committed by EFL third level students in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a University?" For the purpose of answering this question, a pronunciation test was given to students to check their pronunciation errors. The following results show how many errors were committed. The Oral Pronunciation Test: Table (1) below presents total and percentages of participants who answered the three questions. Their answers are to be briefly discussed below.

Table 1: Internal Factors

No	Internal Factors	($\bar{X}$)	SD	The level in English Pronunciation
1	Native language makes your English pronunciation more difficult	3.15	1.27	Moderate
2	Familiarity with the native language will affect the English pronunciation	3.30	1.03	Moderate
3	Extrovert learners are more confident in pronouncing English.	3.90	1.12	High.
4	Introvert learners are not confident in their English pronunciation.	3.25	1.21	Moderate
5	The basics of English pronunciation are important.	4.25	0.85	High

6	Children can recognize pronunciation better than adults.	3.95	0.76	High
TOTAL		3.63	0.20	High

Table 1 above showed that, the internal factors for the basics of English pronunciation are important were the highest level ($\bar{X} = 4.25$ and S.D = 0.85). The second highest was children can recognize pronunciation better than adults ($\bar{X} = 3.95$ and S.D = 0.76). The third highest was extrovert learners are more confident in pronouncing English ($\bar{X} = 3.90$ and S.D = 1.12). Then, introvert learners are not confident in their English pronunciation was ($\bar{X} = 3.30$ and S.D = 1.21), next, familiarity with the native language will affect the English pronunciation was ($\bar{X} = 3.25$ and S.D = 1.03). And native language makes your English pronunciation more difficult was ($\bar{X} = 3.15$ and S.D = 1.27). This indicates that internal factors were very high level of English pronunciation comprehension.

Table 2: External Factors

No	External Factors	($\bar{X}$)	SD	The level in English Pronunciation
1	Expectations and goals will make me more motivated.	4.25	0.64	High
2	Pronounce like a native speaker.	3.55	0.89	High
3	Classroom Environment affects students 'pronunciation.	3.95	1.15	High.
4	Tools modern and complete will help improve pronunciation.	3.95	1.05	High
TOTAL		3.93	0.22	High

Table 2 above showed that, the external factors for expectations and goals will make me more motivated was highest level ($\bar{X} = 4.25$ and S.D = 0.64). The second highest was classroom environment affects students 'pronunciation ($\bar{X} = 3.95$ and S.D = 1.15). The third highest was tools modern and complete will help improve pronunciation ($\bar{X} = 3.95$ and S.D = 1.05). And pronounce like a native speaker ($\bar{X} = 3.55$ and S.D = 0.89). This indicates that external factors were high level of English pronunciation comprehension.

Table 3: Improving English pronunciation.

No	Improving English pronunciation	($\bar{X}$)	SD	The level in English pronunciation
1	Phonetic symbols aid in developing phonological awareness and understanding English pronunciation.	3.40	0.96	Moderate
2	I will use correctly if focus the rules of phonetics.	3.67	0.76	High
3	Practice speaking English often and be confident in your pronunciation can help you pronounce English well.	4.15	1.05	High
4	Dare to speak with native speakers to get feedback to improve the English pronunciation.	3.85	0.86	High
5	Watching movies is a great way for you to improve your English pronunciation.	4.50	0.89	Very high
6	I can sharpen many of my English language skills by watching movies in English.	4.00	0.64	High

7	Movies allows me to hear real English used in real situations, which will improve my pronunciation skills.	4.60	1.21	Very high
8	Listening can help me interpret information accurately and develop new skills.	4.30	0.77	High
9	Listening to podcasts from native speakers can help you imitate their pronunciation and rhythm.	4.25	1.15	High
10	Speaking could improve the students' fluency in pronunciation.	3.30	0.67	Moderate
11	Improving pronunciation accuracy for effective communication.	3.50	0.87	High
12	A goal will help us to be more motivated to improving English pronunciation.	3.88	0.74	High
13	Expectations from family will help me be more motivated to improve English pronunciation.	3.60	0.77	High
14	Practice speaking English with your classmates to build confidence in English pronunciation.	4.55	1.03	Very high
15	Teachers with good English pronunciation will have an impact on students' correct pronunciation.	3.90	0.90	High
16	The activities of speaking English in the classroom and having complete tools can improving students pronounce well.	3.95	0.75	High
TOTAL		3.96	0.17	High

Table 3 indicates that watching movies to hear authentic English in real-life situations received the highest mean score ($\bar{X} = 4.60$, $SD = 1.21$). Practicing speaking with classmates ranked second ($\bar{X} = 4.55$, $SD = 1.03$), followed by watching movies to improve pronunciation ($\bar{X} = 4.50$, $SD = 0.89$). Listening, podcasts, frequent speaking practice, classroom activities, teacher pronunciation, phonetic rules, and communication also received high ratings. Overall, the findings indicate that respondents strongly valued movies, listening activities, speaking practice, and classroom interaction as effective ways to improve English pronunciation. Open-ended responses further emphasized watching movies, listening to podcasts or music, learning pronunciation basics, and practicing with classmates.

5. Conclusion

This study examined factors affecting English pronunciation among 20 students at Savan Centre in Savannakhet Province. Data were collected through questionnaires during an eight-week period from 4 March to 26 April 2024. The findings showed that internal factors had ($\bar{X} = 3.63$; $SD = 0.20$), while external factors had ($\bar{X} = 3.93$; $SD = 0.22$). Watching movies to hear authentic English received the highest rating ($\bar{X} = 4.60$; $SD = 1.21$). The study recommends regular practice, listening activities, speaking with others, and building confidence to improve pronunciation.

6. Suggestion

The study found that perception and classroom environment were the major factors affecting students' English pronunciation at Savan Centre. To improve pronunciation, learners should understand pronunciation fundamentals, practise regularly, build confidence, and pay attention to stress and intonation. Watching English movies, listening to podcasts and music, communicating with native speakers and classmates, and using pronunciation applications can provide valuable practice. Future researchers should examine additional factors, use larger samples, consult more theoretical sources, and allocate sufficient time to obtain more comprehensive and reliable findings.

References

- Abercrombie, D. (1949). Teaching pronunciation. *English Language Teaching approach*, 3(1), 113-122.
- Bhela, B. (1999). Native language interference in learning a second language: Exploratory case studies of native language interference with with taget language usage. *International Education Journal*, 1(1), 22-13.
- Burden, M. W. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1988) 'Pronunciation Worries' reprinted in Collins, B. and Mees, I.M. (2008) *Practical Phonetics and Phonology*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 232-235.
- Crystal, D. (2001). Pronunciation for international intelligibility. *English Teaching Professional*, 1-7
- Derwing, T., & Rosssiter, M. (2003). The Effects of Pronunciation Instruction on the Accuracy, Fluency, and Complexity of L2 Accented Speech. *Applied Language Learning*, 1-17.
- Dörnyei. (1998). *Motivation in second and foreign language learning*. *Language Teaching*, 31 (1), 117-135.
- Dörnyei. (2005). *The psychology of the language Learners: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition* (1st ed.). US: Lawrence Erlbaum Addociates Publishers.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). Attitudes, orientations, and motivations in language learning: Advances in theory, research, and applications. *Language Learning*, 53(S1), 3- 32.
- Dinda Amalia, N. H. (2020). Introvert Learners' Need Analysis of English-Speaking Activity. *Indonesian Journal of English Education*, 93-108.
- Eilot. (1995). Foreign Language Phonology: Field independence, attitude, and the success of formal instruction in Spanish pronunciation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(iv), 530-542.
- García, A. (2007). The Role of Phonetic Training in L2 Speech Learning. *Proceedings of the Phonetics Teaching and Learning Conference (PTLC2007)*.
- Gilakjani, P. (2012). A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Pronunciation Learning and the Strategies for Instruction, Islamic Azad University Lahijan Branch. Lahijan: Iran.
- Gilakjani, P. (2016). What Factors Influence the English Pronunciation of EFL Learners? *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*.
- Gilakjani, A. P., & Ahmadi, M. R. (2011). Why is pronunciation so difficult to learn? *English Language Teaching*, 4(3), 74-83.
- Hasibuan, S. H. (2019). The Analysis of English Pronunciation Errors by English Education Students of FKIP UMSU.
- Ian Antaris, F. A. (2019). Factors Affecting Pronunciation Difficulties of 8th Grade Students of MTSN Palu Barat . 13.

- James, R. B. (2010). *Teaching Pronunciation Gets a Bad R.A.P.: A Framework for Teaching Pronunciation*. Hankuk: University of Foreign Studies.
- Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English pronunciation* (2nd ed.). London: Longman press.
- Kenworthy, J. (2012). Teaching English Pronunciation, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
- Marza, N. E. (2014). Pronunciation and Comprehension pf Oral English in the English as a Foriegn Language Class.
- Meléndez. (2006). *Motivation and acquisition of pronunciation in EFL students in El Salvador* (Master's thesis). Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
- Muhammad, H. &. (2018). Assessing Teaching Stress and Intonation through Technology.
- Omolu, F. A. (2017). *Correlation of Employment Status, Motivation and Achievement in Learning*. "Teaching Training and Education of University Muhammadiyah Palu 1(2): 31-47
- Sahatsathatsana, S. (2017). *Pronunciation Problems of Thai Students Learning English Phonetics*: Journal of Education, Mahasarakham University, 67-84.
- Seom, S. (2021). Factors Influencing English Pronunciation Learning and Suggestions for Pronunciation Teaching. 3.
- Shaaban, K., (2002) Affect in Language learning. Retrieved form <http://abisamra03.tripod.com/motivation/>
- Susmitha, S. (2014). The role of teaching & learning English pronunciation: The case of education colleges in Coimbatore. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(9), 75–77.
- Szyszk. M. (2018). Pronunciation learning environment: EFL students' cognitions of in-class and out-of-class factors affecting pronunciation acquisition. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*, 4(1), 121–139.