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## **Iranian EFL Learners' Beliefs towards Teaching and Learning of Pronunciation\***

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### **Abstract**

One essential yet often-ignored factor in pronunciation teaching is learners' beliefs towards teaching and learning of pronunciation. Awareness of this factor can help both learners and teachers achieve their language learning and teaching objectives. The current study investigated 195 Iranian EFL learners' beliefs and perceptions about various aspects of pronunciation teaching and learning. The learners answered a 30-item Likert-scale online questionnaire which inquired about their views regarding the overall importance of pronunciation instruction, the type of syllabus, the design of classes devoted to pronunciation, the introduction of pronunciation features, the ways of practicing these features, and the role of error correction. To enhance the findings from the questionnaire, the researchers interviewed a subsample of the participants about various pronunciation dimensions specified in the questionnaire. Results revealed that the majority of the participants believed teaching and learning pronunciation was of paramount importance in EFL contexts as it helped them achieve their communicative goals more effectively. The learners also largely preferred a structural over a task-based syllabus for pronunciation instruction but differed regarding whether pronunciation features should be taught in isolation or in communicative contexts, and whether correction of their pronunciation errors should be done by the teacher or peers. Findings of this study can inform the mainstream pronunciation teaching and learning practices and materials designs.

**Keywords:** Pronunciation, English, Iranian EFL learners, beliefs

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### **Introduction**

Pronunciation is an integral part of oral proficiency in a second language (L2). Defined broadly as the act of articulation of sounds that are used to construct and achieve meaning (Diah & Zita, 2006), pronunciation is one of the most noticeable outward linguistic signs indicating whether someone is a native speaker of a language or not. Various factors contribute to the importance of pronunciation in L2 learning. According to Fraser (2000), comprehensible or adequately good pronunciation greatly helps clarity in conveying the message in verbal communication even if the speaker has deficiencies in other areas of language like grammar or vocabulary knowledge; whereas incomprehensible or bad pronunciation may hinder the comprehension of the message and may lead to thorough misunderstandings even if the speaker may possess perfect grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Hinofotis and Baily (1980, as cited in Shankar, 2008, p. 320) note that “up to a certain proficiency standard, the fault which most severely impairs the communication process in EFL/ESL learners is pronunciation”, not vocabulary or grammar. That may be why Gilakjani (2012) regard pronunciation as one of the fundamental pillars of communication, one which should be given equal importance like other linguistic components and skills such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing and speaking. Another issue that highlights the significance of pronunciation in L2 is the occasions in which the L2 learners with poor pronunciation come into contact with native speakers and/or proficient L2 learners. Proper pronunciation is directly linked to efficiency in speaking; therefore, in the judgmental views of proficient L2 learners and native speakers, learners with inadequate pronunciation would be perceived as incompetent or uneducated (Kelly, 2000). The degree to which an L2 learner’s pronunciation is accepted or rejected by native speakers and/or proficient L2 learners can play a major role in making the learner feel as fitting into or distinct from a target community, a phenomenon referred to as identity -social integration or alienation- in a specific context. Pronunciation has a close connection to the concept of identity, “pronunciation is a domain

within which one's identity is expressed" (Zuengler, 1988, p. 34).

Undoubtedly, learners' beliefs about language teaching and learning in general and pronunciation teaching and learning in particular, play a pivotal role in educational decisions language lessons and courses are in greater scope co-constructed by teachers at one hand and learners at the other hand. To date, learners' beliefs and cognitions have barely received adequate attention regarding pronunciation instruction; as Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielakthere (2015, p. 5) assert, "There has [sic] been surprisingly few empirical investigations that would have attempted to tap learners' or teachers' beliefs and preferences concerning pronunciation teaching".

### **Literature Review**

Investigating learners' attitudes towards pronunciation teaching and learning is a potential subfield of survey in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and English language learning and teaching (Borges, 2014). According to Gabillon (2007), pronunciation can be considered as a sensitive area of language that can elicit strong attitudes on the part of the learners and teachers. As Setter and Jenkins (2005) argue such attitudes towards the pronunciation of the target language can contribute to the refinement of the learners' preferences, objectives and even learning outcomes of the L2 pronunciation features.

#### **The Link between Learners' Attitudes and Their Success**

As one of the fundamental research projects in this field, Elliot (1995) has investigated the link between the language learners' phonological accuracy and their attitudes towards L2 pronunciation. Elliot (1995) analyzed 66 L2 Spanish students' speech and elicited their attitudes towards English pronunciation through a Pronunciation Attitude Inventory (PAI) questionnaire. The results revealed that, in general, pronunciation accuracy was significantly affected by the learners' attitudes towards L2 pronunciation.

In another study, Moyer (2007) attempted to explore the relation between pronunciation performance and language attitudes. She

investigated 50 ESL learners' accented speech from 15 nationalities, and their attitudes towards English pronunciation including their perceived capability to improve their pronunciation, their desire in doing so, their self-confidence and comfort in assimilating to the native speakers of the target language, and their desire in residing in an L2 speaking environment. Moyer (2007) reported significant correlations between the learners' accentedness and their language attitudes.

While an increasing body of SLA research has emerged to support the vital role of standard pronunciation in successful communication (Borges, 2014), the effect that personal and social factors can impose on the acquisition and learning of this sub-skill has often been neglected. As Setter and Jenkins (2005) argue, L2 learners' pronunciation and accent can also be affected by the personal and social factors which are mainly learner-based. According to Sardinga, Lee and Kusey (2018), studies surveying learners' attitudes towards pronunciation instruction in ELT have largely focused on students' perceptions of accented speech and the link existing between such perceptions and their "ultimate accuracy attainment" (p. 87). The following part presents a brief overview of the most relevant factors to this study.

### **Factors Affecting the Learning of Pronunciation**

As L2 learners are exposed to the sufficient L2 input, instruction, and interaction, relatively to an equal amount, some of them indicate more aptitude and interest in learning and using the L2 pronunciation features in their productions. This inconsistency can be justified through the operation of some personal and social factors that are prone to impede or slow down the process of pronunciation acquisition. The recognition of these factors is deemed necessary in enabling teachers to integrate effective pronunciation practices into the curriculum (Bradley-Bennett, 2007).

### **Learners' social identity**

Every language is the embodiment of its society, there is a visible interdependency between language and society. Levis (2005) believes

that learners' target language pronunciation or accentedness can act as a distinguishing marker of social belonging since the speakers strive to speak in a way that would make them conform to the ethics of the social groups they fit into or their desire to fit in. Aligned with this assertion, Setter and Jenkins (2005) state that phonology is closely related to learners' identity, since the degree to which we try to foreignize our accent is a demonstration of "how we want to be seen by others, of the social communities with which we identify or seek membership, and of whom we admire or ostracize" (p. 5). Also Jiang, Green, Henley and Masten (2009) claim that the degree of foreign accentedness in an L2 is influenced by the social and cultural identity. Block (2007, p. 27) defined identity as "socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions, and language". The language element implies that it's plausible to have partial recognition of one's identity through his accent, dialect, or pronunciation. Considering EFL contexts, Pishghadam and Kamyabi (2009) found a positive relationship between accentedness and deculturation. Their analysis of both successful and unsuccessful language learners in accent mimicry depict that practicing native-like accent alienates the learners from their own culture. In other words, glamorizing the foreign accent would put the learners on the verge of losing their local identity. This viewpoint can perhaps be identified in the ongoing shift taking place in the instruction of English pronunciation today moving from overemphasizing nativeness to valuing intelligibility as argued by Huensch (2018).

#### **Learners' attitudes towards the target language and language learning**

Even within a homogenous classroom provided with the same language learning environment, some learners are more apt to acquire good pronunciation than others (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). This discrepancy in the degree of pronunciation acquisition is so visible that it can be attributed to personal characteristics of learners like their attitude towards learning an L2. Attitude as one non-linguistic,

affective variable is beyond the instructor's control and influences the development of the pronunciation skill. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, as cited in Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2013, p. 109) define attitude as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object". Consequently, it acts as a criterion that determines one's behavioral intentions falling into actual behavior. As indicated through the Elliot's study (1995), L2 learner's attitudes towards acquiring native or native-like pronunciation, measured by Phonetic Attitude Inventory (PAI), acted as a determining role in L2 pronunciation acquisition. In other words, if learners are positively concerned with learning the target pronunciation, they will tend to have the better pronunciation of the allophones of the target language (Elliot, 1995).

#### **Learners' sense of self-efficacy and self-assessment**

Various studies have explored the variables of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (Szyszka, 2011). As Dörnyei (2005) argues, while self-confidence and self-esteem imply broader conceptions, attitudes concerning self-efficacy include beliefs about one's own capabilities to accomplish certain standards. The notion of self-efficacy has been linked to a number of other factors, such as learners' strategy use (Macaro, 2013), willingness to communicate in L2 (Léger & Storch, 2009), and motivation (Smit, 2002). As indicated by Dłaska and Krekeler's study (2008), learners' self-assessments of their pronunciation performance were reliable in 85% of all cases.

#### **Learners' motivation**

As one of the influential factors, L2 learners' motivation seems to affect their L2 phonological attainment (Borges, 2014). The findings of the study conducted by Smit (2002) demonstrates that motivational factors do have a part in predicting the learners' success in achieving desired standards. In this investigation, Smit (2002) examined the interplay between the learners' motivational attitudes and their achievement in learning advanced EFL pronunciation. The correlation between the students' scores on the pronunciation tests and their responses to a self-devised motivation questionnaire revealed that

those learners with positive attitudes towards learning L2 pronunciation are more likely to perform successfully on an advanced university pronunciation test. Furthermore, she contends that ideal L2 learners with an above-average proficiency in English, and self-confidence can highly achieve pronunciation standards on the ground that they are intrinsically motivated enough to work more independently and intensively on their L2 phonological repertoire.

#### **Learners' strategy use**

Language learning strategies defined as “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning” (Griffiths, 2008, p. 87) have been subject to various examinations and analyses as a contributing factor to L2 learners' phonological acquisition (Borges, 2014). Based on the taxonomy of pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) provided by Calka (2011), which is grounded on the findings of her own study, L2 learners' most frequently used strategies include rote learning, imitating native speakers, attending to pronunciation features, and humoring their own pronunciation mistakes. Contrarily, the students' least frequently employed strategy was consulting online phonetics and phonology sources and books among the participants of this study.

#### **Pronunciation and error correction**

While the factors considered so far were majorly learner-centered, and learner-initiated, error correction or corrective feedback generated by the teacher targeting pronunciation errors is rather of an external nature that can induce certain attitudes towards pronunciation learning on the part of the learners. As Lee, Jang, and Plonsky (2015) state, research has shown that the improvement of L2 learners' pronunciation errors can be facilitated through corrective feedback. However, according to Baker and Burri (2016), the attitudes towards corrective feedback targeting the learners' mispronunciations, have rarely been investigated. Kang (2010), for instance, investigated the attitudes of 238 ESL learners towards pronunciation instruction in New Zealand through interviews and questionnaire surveys. The findings of her study revealed that the majority of the participants

desired to sound like native speakers, and they favored the kind of corrective feedback that facilitates the attainment of such proficiency in L2 pronunciation. Also, in Iranian context, Peerdadeh and Entezamara (2016) explored the attitudes of 82 Iranian EFL learners towards oral error corrections on their pronunciation errors through an adopted questionnaire, and reported that the participants had absolutely positive attitudes towards classroom oral corrective feedback, because they did not want to repeat a mistake on and on, and wanted to have sufficient phonology knowledge to improve their L2 pronunciation.

### **Purpose of the study**

Reviewing the relevant literature reveals that there is a dearth of research done on EFL learners' beliefs towards teaching and learning of pronunciation, especially in the Iranian EFL context. Therefore, the current study aims to follow up on this line of inquiry by surveying 195 Iranian EFL learners' beliefs and perceptions of various aspects of pronunciation teaching and learning. More specifically, the study seeks to find the answer to the following question:

What are the Iranian EFL learners' beliefs concerning:

- the overall value of pronunciation instruction,
- the choice of the syllabus,
- the design of the classes devoted to pronunciation,
- the introduction of the pronunciation features,
- the ways of practicing these features,
- and the role of error correction in this area?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 195 Iranian EFL learners, 78 males and 117 females, ranging from beginner to near-native or native level of English proficiency. Their age ranged from 19 to 40+. They were at graduate, undergraduate, or postgraduate levels of



education of various disciplines at different universities across Iran. They had been learning English for a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 20 years. In answer to the question, in the demographic information part of the questionnaire, that asked how they self-rate their pronunciation in the English language, 50% rated it as good, 28% as excellent, 10% as adequate, 10% as near-native or native and 2% as weak.

### **Instrumentation**

The main instrument administered in this study was a pronunciation survey questionnaire. This questionnaire was fashioned on a tool for investigating beliefs about form-focused instruction designed by Pawlak (2013a, 2013b) presuming that different aspects of pronunciation are prone to be viewed as target language forms and hence the same categories can be employed. The precise statements in the questionnaire intended to provide in-depth insights into various aspects of pronunciation teaching and learning.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The questionnaire comprised 30 Likert-scale items, and the respondents indicated their extent of agreement on a five-point scale (1-strongly agree, 5-strongly disagree) to the following categories: (1) the overall importance of pronunciation instruction (in connection with different skills), (2) the type of syllabus (i.e., structural, task-based, etc.), (3) the design of classes devoted to pronunciation (i.e., isolated vs. integrated), (4) the introduction of pronunciation features (i.e., deduction vs. induction, the use of the mother tongue, metalanguage and demonstration), (5) the ways of practicing these features (controlled vs. communicative practice), and (6) the role of error correction in this area (i.e., focus, timing, source, corrective technique).

The estimated reliability index of the questionnaire, calculated by the Cronbach alpha coefficient, was. 0.81. The validity of the questionnaire was established by collecting content validity evidence from two experts in L2 pronunciation who were asked to review the statements. Some minor changes were made to the statements based

on the experts' comments. For instance, two statements related to corrective feedback provision were removed from "the overall importance of pronunciation" and put into "the role of error correction in pronunciation teaching and learning". The questionnaire was accessible online with the clear-cut instructions and the respondents were able to get access to the questionnaire and complete it in less than 10 minutes, record and submit it online. The averages and frequencies of the learners' responses were tabulated and they collapsed into 3 major categories (i.e., strongly agree/ agree, undecided, strongly disagree, disagree), the percentages of the responses were computed subsequently.

Furthermore, to consolidate the results of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a sub-sample of the randomly selected participants (20 learners) who volunteered to take part in the interview (see the Appendix for the interview questions). The participants were asked questions about the importance of pronunciation, instructional techniques for learning and teaching it and other themes raised in the questionnaire. They could answer the interview questions either in Persian or English. Responses to the interview questions contained identifying recurring themes with tabulating the most frequent themes as well. Appropriate quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures were applied to analyze the data.

## **Results**

### **The Questionnaire Analysis**

The participants' beliefs about various aspects of pronunciation teaching and learning are presented successively in Tables 1 to 6 below. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the participants held the belief that teaching and learning pronunciation is of paramount importance in EFL pedagogical settings. This is particularly evident in the responses to the statement 3 where 83.4% of the respondents were perfectly willing to learn pronunciation, statement 1 where 80.8 % of them agreed that knowing details of L2 pronunciation plays a facilitative role in listening comprehension, although; 14% were against and a marginal number of 5.2% were undecided about that

stance. As indicated in the responses to the statement 5, 73.1% also believed that knowing pronunciation helps them to achieve their communicative goals in the L2, with 13.5% being undecided and 13.5% against that idea. Similarly, 63.7% of agreement to statement 2, suggests that learning and practicing pronunciation brings about quicker improvement in L2 learning. This stance was further supported by responses to statement 4, where 58.1% of the respondents believed that a good command of pronunciation features is an attribute of a good language learner; however, a nearly equal percentage were either undecided about or against this view (21.2% and 20.7% respectively). The values of standard deviation to the statements of this category, fluctuated between 1.11 and 1.14, an indication of individual differences in responding to the statements.

**Table 1:** The Participants' Beliefs about the Overall Importance of Pronunciation Instruction

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)
1	Knowing a lot about pronunciation helps my listening comprehension	80.8	5.2	14	1.94 (1.14)
2	I believe that my English will improve quickly if I learn and practice pronunciation	63.7	20.7	15.6	2.30 (1.11)
3	I like learning English pronunciation	83.4	6.7	9.8	1.75 (1.12)
4	Good learners of a second language usually know a lot about pronunciation	58.1	21.2	20.7	2.49 (1.11)
5	Knowing pronunciation helps communication in a second language	73.1	13.5	13.5	2.14 (1.12)

A agree, U undecided, D disagree, M mean, SD standard deviation

Regarding the participants' beliefs about syllabus type, Table 2 shows

that more than half of the participants (59.1%) preferred to be presented with a list of isolated pronunciation features to be covered in a course study with only 16% believing the other way round (statement 6). In other words, the results imply that many EFL learners have a preference for structural model of introducing the pronunciation features rather than a task-based model in which pronunciation features are attended through some communicative tasks. Furthermore, the results of statement 7 indicated that only 33.7% of learners thought it would be a good idea to be provided with only those pronunciation features that cause communication problems for them; it is worth mentioning; however, 40.4% of the respondents kept a broader perspective in this regard and believed that a good command of pronunciation can not only enhance achieving communicative goals but also help cultivate other aspects of L2 learning such as accuracy, skill learning, etc.

**Table 2:** The Participants' Beliefs about the Syllabus Type

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)
6	I like to get a list of pronunciation features that will be taught in a course	59.1	24.9	16	2.38 (1.08)
7	I like to study only the pronunciation features which are a problem in communication	33.7	25.9	40.4	3.07 (1.14)

A agree, U undecided, D disagree, M mean, SD standard deviation

Table 3 comprises statements focusing on the issue of whether pronunciation features should be decontextualized and taught in isolation or be embedded in communicative activities in which respondents seem to be less decisive in their stances. On the one hand, analysis of the responses to statements 8 and 12 demonstrated

that, a majority of respondents, (i.e., 49.8% and 60.8% respectively) embraced the viewpoint that there should primarily be a focus on a specific pronunciation feature followed by a pertinent explanation and secondarily an engagement in practice activities dealing with those features, with only 24.9% and 19.2% disagreeing with those propositions respectively. This stance is further supported with responses to statement 10 where 67.4% maintained that they would like to be consciously aware of pronunciation features they are supposed to learn, although 19.7% were undecided towards that method. On the other hand, responses to statement 11 show that a noticeable 81% of the participants highlighted the efficacious role of communication in acquiring pronunciation features, a finding which is further strengthened by responses to statement 13, in which 78.8% preferred to learn pronunciation features while working on different skills and activities with just 12.4% of disagreement. Another worth-considering issue is the significance of the segmental and supra-segmental features. As evidenced in responses to statement 9, 51.8% of the respondents believed that attending to supra-segmental features like stress, rhythm and intonation should take priority over the individual sounds. However, 33.2% of the responses were recorded in the undecided category which may point out to the respondents' lack of knowledge or unawareness about the suprasegmental features of L2 pronunciation.

**Table 3:** The Participants' Beliefs about the Design of Classes Devoted to Pronunciation

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)
8	I prefer to practice individual sounds before I use them in speech	49.8	25.4	24.9	2.61 (1.14)
9	I believe that intonation and rhythm are more important than individual sounds	51.8	33.2	15	2.49 (1.03)

10	I like to know exactly which pronunciation feature I am learning	67.4	19.7	12.9	2.26 (1.02)
11	I like learning pronunciation by using English in communication	81	6.7	11.4	1.93 (1.10)
12	I like learning pronunciation by seeing the explanation, and then practicing	60.6	20.2	19.2	2.40 (1.08)
13	I prefer to learn pronunciation as I work on different skills and activities	78.8	8.8	12.4	2.03 (1.05)

*A* agree, *U* undecided, *D* disagree, *M* mean, *SD* standard deviation

Table 4 illustrates statements regarding the introduction of the new pronunciation features through two distinct approaches of deduction (i.e., rule provision) or induction (i.e., rule discovery) and the ways through which the introduction of these features should proceed. Results to statement 17 suggest that, as many as 66.8% tended to rely on teacher initiation and explanation of the target pronunciation features but 17.1% did not have that preference. The results should not, however, be interpreted as indicating that induction as an instructional technique is not a viable option, since 60.7% (statement 16) endorsed the idea of being provided with spoken texts with new pronunciation features rather than rules. 50.8% (statement 15) also claimed it was beneficial to discover pronunciation rules with other students, and 42% (statement 14) had the predilection to discover the pronunciation rules on their own with 18.2%, 21.2%, and 30% holding opposite views respectively. Comparing the results to statements 17, 15, and 14 manifested that teacher-reliance took priority over peer-reliance, and self-reliance in learning the new pronunciation features. As regards to ways of introducing the pronunciation features, more than half of the students (i.e., 64.7%) favored demonstrations and visual aids as indicated in statement 20, with only 9.9% of disagreement. The learners were divided in their views towards the role of mother tongue in teaching pronunciation (statement 18), 44.6% of the students viewed it as facilitative while 36.8% disagreed and

18.7% remained undecided. As for the role of metalanguage or the use of terminology in teaching pronunciation features (statement 19), although almost 43% were in favor of its use, a remarkable 36.8% of the respondents did not take a stance and 20.2% remained skeptical in this regard.

**Table 4:** The Participants' Beliefs about the Introduction of the Pronunciation Features

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)
14	I like to discover pronunciation rules by myself	42	28	30	2.80 (1.13)
15	It is best to discover pronunciation rules together with other students	50.8	27.5	21.2	2.62 (1.10)
16	I prefer to be given spoken texts with new pronunciation features rather than rules	60.7	21.2	18.2	2.37 (1.14)
17	It is best when the teacher explains pronunciation features	66.8	16.1	17.1	2.28 (1.04)
18	I find it helpful when the teacher uses my mother tongue to explain pronunciation	44.6	18.7	36.8	2.93 (1.34)
19	I believe that the use of terminology is important in teaching pronunciation	43	36.8	20.2	2.73 (1.06)
20	It helps me when teachers use demonstration in teaching pronunciation (e.g., charts)	64.7	25.4	9.9	2.26 (0.95)

A agree, U undecided, D disagree, M mean, SD standard deviation

Table 5 encompasses statements which seek students' preferences for practicing pronunciation features considering key differences between controlled practice through controlled activities and free practice through communicative tasks in learning pronunciation. It also contains statements that make a distinction between production-oriented versus reception-based techniques in the acquisition of pronunciation features. As responses to statement 22 suggests, 78.8% of the respondents were cognizant of the beneficial role of freer practice and preferred to use pronunciation features in communication, with only 10.9% of disagreement. Meanwhile, answers to statement 23 reveal that about half of the respondents (50.2%) leaned towards controlled practice and preferred traditional activities such as minimal pairs. However, it is noteworthy that 32.6% were undecided, which may imply their hesitance over the impact of this type of practice. Regarding whether comprehension should proceed production, 51.3% of the subjects agreed on the importance of knowing how a sound is made before its production with 21.3% of disagreement on this issue (statement 21). A noticeable number of respondents, 84%, held the belief that listening to authentic communication is instrumental in learning pronunciation features, with a marginal 7.8% of disagreement.

**Table 5:** The Participants' Beliefs about Practicing the Pronunciation Features

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)
21	I prefer to first understand how a sound is made before I have to produce it	51.3	27.5	21.3	2.58 (1.10)
22	I believe it is important to use pronunciation features in communication	78.8	10.4	10.9	2.06 (1.03)
23	Doing typical exercises	50.2	32.6	17.1	2.58



	(e.g., minimal pairs) is the best way to learn pronunciation						(0.97)
24	I like to listen to authentic communication in order to learn pronunciation	84	8.3	7.8	1.76		(1.00)

A agree, U undecided, D disagree, M mean, SD standard deviation

Table 6 depicts the participants' beliefs concerning the provision of corrective feedback on pronunciation errors. As response to statement 27 shows, a noticeable number of respondents, close to 65% dispreferred peer-correction and questioned the pedagogic viability of this option. This stance is somewhat consolidated if we look at the answers to statements 28 and 29 where 72% and 68.9% respectively found teacher as an effective agent in correcting their mistakes in different stages of L2 learning. Interestingly, only 15.7% and 15% held the opposite views. Considering the timing of correction, statement 25, shows that about half of the participants, 50.8%, valued accuracy in speech and expected the teacher to apply immediate correction whenever a mistake occurred. Nonetheless, 31.6% disagreed, possibly not wishing to be interrupted during communication, which is supported by the statement 30 where 48.2% were in favor of correcting global errors that created a breakdown in communication. On the other hand, delayed correction was favored by 54.9% of the participants and disfavored by 26.9% (statement 26). However, it should be noted that more respondents were against immediate correction (31.6%) than delayed correction (26.9%), which may imply that the former is a bit more advantageous in this context.

**Table 6:** The Participants' Beliefs about the Corrective Feedback on the Pronunciation Errors

NO	Statement	Respondents (N= 195)			
		A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	M (SD)

25	I like the teacher to correct my pronunciation mistakes as soon as I make them	50.8	17.6	31.6	2.71 (1.28)
26	I like the teacher to correct my pronunciation mistakes after an activity is completed	54.9	18.1	26.9	2.56 (1.33)
27	I prefer to be corrected by other students rather than the teacher	10.9	24.4	64.7	3.84 (1.06)
28	When I make pronunciation errors in speaking, I like my teacher to correct them	72	10.4	15.7	2.14 (1.19)
29	Teachers should correct students when they make pronunciation errors in class	68.9	16.1	15	2.17 (1.15)
30	I believe that teacher should only correct errors which interrupt communication	48.2	20.7	31.1	2.76 (1.31)

A agree, U undecided, D disagree, M mean, SD standard deviation

### The Interview Analysis

Before attending to the analysis of the participants' views, it should be mentioned that the interviewees were mainly university students, aging from 19 to 26, 13 males and 7 females, at different language proficiency levels (1 beginner, 4 pre-intermediate, 5 intermediate, 6 upper-intermediates and 4 advanced).

To analyze the data obtained through the interview, the researchers employed the Thematic Analysis Method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step began by familiarizing with the data, transcribing each interview, and recording all the details. Then, to

generate the initial codes, the data was examined again. This process involved searching the key words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs that could provide a better overview of the participants' general views about teaching and learning English pronunciation. For instance, one of the interviewees stated:

*In a real communication with someone who doesn't speak your mother language, it is not enough to know the words. You need to have good pronunciation just to be understood. Not to mention the prestige a good pronunciation adds to your character.*

This part was coded as “comprehensibility” and “prestige”. Another example is the statement by another participant who believed “knowing the correct pronunciation of words helps you to talk more correctly and more comfortably, and makes it easier to communicate”. The codes assigned to this sentence were “accuracy in speaking”, “fluency in speaking” and “better communication”. Afterwards, the initial codes, based on their similarities and overlaps were classified and examined to reach the overarching themes. For instance, in the previous example, the three initial codes were merged into one general theme, “communication enhancement”. We cannot include all the statements from the interviewees here due to space constraint and suffice to one or two statements to exemplify or back up the identified themes.

First of all, all of the participants, without exception, declared that learning English pronunciation is of paramount importance and it should definitely receive more attention and care. The major reasons they provided were mainly the “prestige” it adds to your speech, the improvement it provides in communicating in the target language, the “confidence” it gives the learners to speak more, the “motivation” it induces on the part of the learners to enhance their language proficiency in English, and the role it can play to improve other skills such as listening and speaking. One of the intermediate interviewees mentioned:

*Bad pronunciation leads to 50% loss of the quality of your communication, since your L2 proficiency is judged directly through your pronunciation. In my opinion, good pronunciation can even compensate for poor use of grammar, because the role of pronunciation is more vital and significant in making your speech more interesting, more comprehensible, and more beautiful.*

Regarding the importance of segmental versus suprasegmental features, the results interestingly varied. The beginner participant was of the opinion that suprasegmental features are more important than segmental ones, a belief that was echoed by another learner at the pre-intermediate level. However, the majority of the learners, especially those at upper-intermediate and advanced levels, did not prioritize segmental over suprasegmental features and stated that both are equally significant, though almost all of them maintained that context is a determining factor. One upper-intermediate contradicted her peers, however, saying “I would go with the individual sounds, because rhythm and intonations vary from place to place among native speakers drastically. What makes your speech comprehensible (or incomprehensible) is the individual sounds”.

Many interviewees, especially advanced learners, considered watching movies, listening to songs and/or to native or very competent L2 speakers in communication the best ways of learning and improving English pronunciation. For instance, one advanced learner said that “I noticed that many of the essential features of native speaker’s way of pronunciation are reflected in the songs I listen to; they [those features] do not exist in my textbooks audios.” One advanced female learner also claimed that a new pronunciation feature sticks with her when she notices or uses that in real communication.

With regard to discovering the pronunciation rules in context or studying them in isolation, the participants at lower levels, in general, preferred studying pronunciation “rules in isolation” or at least checking them in reliable sources, and being provided with a complete list of all the pronunciation features, while those at higher levels

mostly preferred discovering those “rules in context”, and receiving instruction only on those features that are problematic to them.

Finally, regarding corrective feedback targeting pronunciation errors, the participants at lower levels mainly preferred “teacher correction”, “correction of all errors”, including both global and local ones, and “immediate feedback” on errors (without interrupting the learner’s speech). However, interviewees at higher levels typically preferred “self-correction” in the first place, and some “peer correction” as the second option. They favored correction of “global errors” as the main priority as well, and also immediate corrective feedback in a way that does not interrupt the learner’s flow of speech. One of the upper-intermediate participants remarked: “the global ones [are more important], the smaller ones can be accepted as different accents”.

### DISCUSSION

Results obtained through the questionnaire in this study can be open to multi-dimensional interpretations and may lie in contradiction to some mainstream beliefs and expectations. Regarding the learners’ beliefs about the overall importance of pronunciation, unlike some previous proclamations which consider pronunciation being the “Cinderella” of TESOL and a luxury “add-on” (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2000), today’s EFL learners are cognizant of the significance of pronunciation in helping them fulfil their manifold communicative purposes and have welcoming attitudes towards learning this target language subsystem. They believe that mastery of pronunciation can put them in the category of good language learners who can develop their language skills more effectively and achieve their communicative goals more efficiently. However, in this study, some learners did not agree with the proposition that mastery of pronunciation is one of the characteristics of “a good language learner”. This opposite view might emanate from teachers’ over-attendance to other language sub/skills like grammar, vocabulary, reading, etc. which may have inculcated in the learners that pronunciation skill is not as important as the other sub/skills. The learners, therefore, have failed to place pronunciation

in their checklist as one of the determining factors in successful L2 learning, a finding which is in line with Underhill's (2012) assertion that "students are not really afraid of pronunciation until they meet their teachers". Teachers' negligence of pronunciation can be due to their lack of competence in teaching pronunciation or lack of class time devoted to pronunciation instruction (Gilbert, 2008). Furthermore, as Trofimovich and Isaacs (2017) assert, difficulty in measuring the improvement in the course of time is another impeding factor in assessing pronunciation in general.

About the syllabus type, results manifested that learners have preference towards structural syllabus rather than the task-based syllabus; this finding is also in agreement with that of Pawlak et al. (2015) who argue that the dispreference for the task-based syllabus is likely to be pertinent to the way pronunciation is presented in most EFL course-books in which pronunciation features are pre-selected, ordered learners' conscious awareness of those features. This interpretation can also account for the claim that a striking number of learners in this study had a tendency to be first presented with a structural model of pronunciation instruction which includes most aspects of L2 pronunciation and then with a task-based model through which they could only focus on pronunciation features that could pose communicational barriers. The findings, however, are in a total contradiction to those of Alghazo (2015).

Concerning the learners' beliefs about the design of pronunciation-based lessons, the learners were in two minds about the value of isolating the pronunciation features; on the other hand, about half of the participants favored this intuitive style of learning in which they would receive teachers' explanation prior to production and practice. On the other hand, the learners showed a rather robust desire for integrating pronunciation features in different skills and communicative activities; they also realized the importance of acquiring suprasegmental in addition to segmental features. The latter findings are promising in two respects: first, learners seem to be becoming increasingly aware that the ability to use newly acquired

pronunciation features in meaningful communicative activities is a more reliable test of their learning, especially given the importance of comprehensibility and intelligibility over nativeness or nativelikeness as a more attainable goal for L2 within the current English as an international language paradigm (Jenkins, 2000, 2005). Second, as pointed out by Gilakjani (2012) among other researchers, one of the problems in learning pronunciation is that teachers do not attend sufficiently to suprasegmentals such as stress, rhythm and intonation, but the results of this study indicate that learners do see these features as essential in learning in L2 pronunciation system. The results can imply that the learners favor perceptual training, which can encourage them to boost their perceptions and production of segmental and suprasegmentals (Lee & Lyster, 2017).

The learners' preferences for language of instruction was another controversial issue. While some learners looked at the use of the mother tongue in teaching pronunciation positively, an approximately equal number saw otherwise and disapproved of its use. This may suggest a moderate stance should be taken towards the use of L1 in L2 pronunciation instruction; in fact, code-switching may be a viable pedagogical option through which both L1 and L2 can be employed taking into account the situational needs of the target learners, their proficiency levels and nature of the tasks. It is worth-mentioning that code-switching has been proved to be of significant value to ESL/EFL classes (e.g. Ellis, 2004; Forman, 2010, 2012).

Preferences about the introduction of pronunciation features, oscillated between two disparate approaches of deduction and induction. This finding implies that there should be no necessity in consensus on deciding the most appropriate approach to the teaching of L2 pronunciation since according to Yates and Zielinski (2009, p.19) this effort is simply "foolish" and "there is no one recipe for success for any kind of teaching". Besides, individual differences and variations in learners' age, level of proficiency, goals of L2 learning, experience in learning this subsystem, etc. can further justify the obtained results. Nearly half of the respondents were in favor of

explicit instruction by use of terminology and the effective role of metalanguage in raising their awareness (Chang, 2006) and according to Ellis (2006) and Macaro's (2003) assertion metalinguistic explanations provide descriptive or declarative knowledge of rules and according to Munro and Bohn (2007), the use of metalanguage in explicit instruction provides learners with the target phonetic details and encourage them to focus on the right cues. Additionally, these findings are in line with Darcy's (2018) assertion that explicit instruction of pronunciation elements leaves the room for explicit feedback which can ultimately lead to learners' raised awareness. However, some learners remained skeptical, perhaps due to the fact that the use of terminology depends on the teachers' level of expertise and since some EFL teachers lack expertise in this regard, learners may not be able to notice its effect.

In regard to provision of the corrective feedback, the results revealed that a high percentage of learners opted teacher correction over peer correction. This finding is not surprising as previous research has also shown that EFL/ESL learners are generally more apt to select teacher correction and consistently give it a higher ranking than other alternative forms as peer correction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Ur, 2012). Those research studies showed that language learners find teacher correction more time-saving, more effective and accurate than other types of correction. Considering the timing of correction (i.e., immediate versus delayed correction), the results indicated that the learners were less decisive in this regard and maintained a conservative stance. This can at some levels be related to the divergence of the proficiency levels of the learners in this study, as the respondents were dispersed on the scale of beginner to native or near native-levels of proficiency. Based on previous research findings (e.g., Shabani, 2016; Li, Zhu, & Ellis, 2016) the beginner to intermediate level learners favored accuracy-based approach (i.e., one that focuses on all features of pronunciation) and upper-intermediate to advanced level learners preferred fluency-based approach (i.e., one that focuses only on features that cause communication problems).



## CONCLUSION

In brief, this research study was an attempt to contribute to a constructive understanding of EFL learners' beliefs about various aspects of teaching and learning pronunciation and the ways in which these beliefs affect their phonological competence. Besides using a Likert-scale questionnaire, the researchers conducted an interview with some of the learners in order to strengthen the quantitative results and gain more in-depth insights. Findings from the interview analysis mainly confirmed the results obtained from the questionnaire. Learners regarded pronunciation an important skill in L2 as it would enable them to achieve their communicative goals more effectively. They also stated that good pronunciation increases their self-esteem and motivation. The L2 learners were divided in their opinions regarding learning pronunciation features in isolation or context-rich communicative activities. Finally, on the issue of corrective feedback, upper-intermediate and advanced learners preferred to be given the chance to self-correct, which may be due to higher confidence in their L2 ability. The results of this study has some implications for ELT practitioners and program designers. First and most importantly, in practical sense, if teachers gain some insights into L2 learners' beliefs, they can better appreciate and if necessary revise their approaches in attending to different aspects of pronunciation and integrate some methodological strategies and practices that are more tailor-made to learners' needs, preferences and proficiency levels. This may in turn trigger more sense of involvement and autonomy on the side of learners in classroom activities. Second, in broader sense, the authorities and administrators should value learners' voices and give them right to have a word in the process of decision making for designing and developing the curriculum; more learner satisfaction about various aspects of L2 pedagogy can bring about an educational atmosphere that is more conducive to productive attainment.

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### **Appendix: The Interview questions**

#### **A. The Overall Importance of Pronunciation Teaching and Learning**

1. How important is pronunciation in the process of second language learning? Talk about the benefits of good pronunciation.
2. When it comes to speech in pronunciation, which one outweighs the

other: segmental features (individual sounds) or suprasegmental features (rhythm, intonation, etc.)?

**B. Beliefs about Syllabus Type**

3. How were you taught English pronunciation? What are your preferences in pronunciation teaching?

**C. Beliefs about Practicing Pronunciation Features**

4. How do you try to learn or improve pronunciation? What are some of the personal techniques that you rely on?

**D. Beliefs about Introducing Pronunciation Features**

5. Do you go for discovering the pronunciation rules in context or studying them in isolation? Support your answer.

6. Which factors can help you in better understanding pronunciation features? (e.g. using English in communication, seeing the explanation and then practicing, working on different skills and activities, etc.)

**E. Beliefs about Corrective Feedback on Pronunciation Errors**

7. How do you deal with pronunciation errors? Do you prefer self, peer, or teacher correction? Why?

8. Which errors should be corrected? Global ones (that totally block communication and understanding) or both global and local ones (that slightly block communication and understanding)?

9. Considering teacher correction in pronunciation, should it be immediate (while doing the task) or delayed (after finishing the task)? Why?