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CAUSES OF PRONUNCIATION ERRORS AMONG ESP STUDENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR THEIR CORRECTION.

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Abstract. Pronunciation errors represent a persistent challenge in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education, often affecting intelligibility and professional communication. This study investigates the causes of pronunciation errors among ESP students and identifies effective strategies for their correction. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 35 undergraduate ESP students from diverse professional fields. Data were collected through pronunciation tests, classroom observations, and questionnaires. Findings indicate that the primary causes of pronunciation errors include interference from the first language (L1), insufficient phonetic training, limited exposure to authentic English, and cognitive factors such as anxiety. Strategies for correction include focused phonetic training, use of minimal pairs, technology-assisted practice, and learner-centered feedback. The study highlights the importance of systematic pronunciation instruction in ESP courses to enhance professional communication competence.

Keywords: ESP, pronunciation errors, phonetic interference, error correction, phonetic competence, English teaching methodology

Introduction. Pronunciation competence is a critical aspect of communicative proficiency in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as it directly affects intelligibility and professional communication (Morley, 1991; Roach, 2009). Despite extensive teaching efforts, many ESP learners continue to produce persistent pronunciation errors, which may hinder their academic and professional performance. Pronunciation errors can arise from multiple sources, including first language (L1) interference, lack of phonetic awareness, inadequate exposure to authentic English, and psychological factors such as anxiety and low self-confidence. Identifying these causes and implementing effective correction strategies is essential to improve ESP students'

phonetic competence and professional communication skills. This study aims to explore the primary causes of pronunciation errors among ESP students and propose evidence-based strategies for their correction, thereby contributing to more effective ESP instruction.

Research has long highlighted the challenges of teaching pronunciation in ESP contexts. Morley emphasizes that pronunciation is not only a matter of articulation but also of intelligibility in professional communication. Roach notes that suprasegmental features, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation, often cause more significant comprehension difficulties than segmental features.L1 interference is widely acknowledged as a major source of errors. Learners often transfer phonetic patterns from their native language, leading to mispronunciations . Additionally, insufficient phonetic training in traditional ESP curricula results in learners being unable to self-correct or perceive errors. Limited exposure to authentic English, particularly in specialized professional contexts, further exacerbates these challenges .

Several studies highlight effective strategies for addressing pronunciation errors. Minimal pair exercises, repetition drills, auditory discrimination tasks, and technology-assisted learning tools have been shown to enhance phonetic accuracy Learner-centered feedback, emphasizing corrective guidance without discouraging learners, also improves pronunciation outcomes.

Methodology. A mixed-methods design was employed to analyze the causes of pronunciation errors and evaluate corrective strategies. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the problem. The study involved 35 ESP undergraduate students from a higher education institution. The participants were non-native English speakers from diverse professional fields, including education, medicine, and speech therapy.

Pronunciation test: Assessed segmental and suprasegmental errors in reading and speaking tasks.

Classroom observations: Monitored students' pronunciation patterns and error types.

Questionnaire: Collected students' perceptions regarding causes of their pronunciation difficulties and attitudes toward correction strategies.

Participants completed a pronunciation test at the beginning of the study. Observations and questionnaires were conducted during regular ESP classes. The collected data were analyzed to identify frequent errors, their causes, and the most effective correction strategies.

Quantitative data from the pronunciation tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the most common error types. Qualitative data from observations and questionnaires were coded thematically to determine underlying causes and learner attitudes toward correction.3.6 Ethical Considerations.

All participants provided informed consent. Data confidentiality was maintained, and participation was voluntary. Analysis of the collected data revealed several key factors contributing to pronunciation errors among ESP students. These causes can be categorized as linguistic, educational, and cognitive factors: L1 Interference (Native Language Influence): One of the most prominent causes of pronunciation errors is the influence of students' first language (L1). Learners tend to transfer phonetic patterns from their native language into English, which affects vowel and consonant production as well as stress placement. For example, Uzbek-speaking students often mispronounce English /θ/ and /ð/ sounds, substituting them with /t/ or /d/, due to the absence of these sounds in their L1. Similarly, syllable-timed native languages can lead to incorrect stress patterns in English, which is a stress-timed language. L1 interference is consistent with previous research, which identifies cross-linguistic influence as a major source of persistent pronunciation difficulties in ESP contexts.

Insufficient Phonetic Training:Many students lacked systematic phonetic instruction, including exercises that target articulatory placement, minimal pairs, and stress patterns. Traditional ESP courses often prioritize vocabulary, reading, and professional terminology over pronunciation. Consequently, students may have limited awareness of sound contrasts and intonation patterns, which leads to recurring mispronunciations. Observations in this study confirmed that students were frequently unable to self-correct without teacher intervention, highlighting the need for structured phonetic training. Limited Exposure to Authentic English:Exposure to authentic English, particularly in professional or ESP-specific contexts, was found to be limited. Most students had few opportunities to listen to native speakers in realistic work scenarios, such as medical consultations, classroom instruction, or technical

discussions. This lack of exposure results in imitation errors, where students reproduce inaccurate pronunciation patterns they have heard from non-native speakers or inaccurate recordings. Research suggests that authentic listening and interaction are essential for accurate phonetic acquisition .

Cognitive Factors (Anxiety and Fear of Mistakes):Cognitive and psychological factors were also identified as significant contributors to pronunciation errors. Many students reported anxiety during speaking tasks and fear of making mistakes in front of peers. This affective filter can lead to hesitation, avoidance of complex words, and inconsistent pronunciation, which negatively impacts phonetic accuracy. Such findings align with Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), who note that affective factors often exacerbate linguistic errors in ESP learning environments. The study also explored effective strategies to address these pronunciation challenges, integrating both traditional and technology-assisted approaches:

Focused Phonetic Training:Targeted exercises on difficult sounds, stress patterns, and intonation contours help students develop articulatory awareness. For instance, drills that isolate problematic phonemes such as /θ/, /ð/, or vowel contrasts can systematically reduce errors. Stress and intonation patterns can be practiced through shadowing exercises and repeated reading of ESP dialogues.

Minimal Pairs and Auditory Discrimination Tasks:Minimal pairs (words differing by a single phoneme, e.g., "ship–sheep") are highly effective for helping learners distinguish similar sounds. Auditory discrimination activities train students' listening skills to detect differences in pronunciation, which is critical for accurate production. Incorporating these exercises into ESP lessons improves both perception and articulation.

Technology-Assisted Practice:Digital tools such as pronunciation apps, AI-based speech recognition software, and recorded dialogues provide immediate, objective feedback. VR simulations can immerse learners in profession-specific scenarios (e.g., classroom teaching, medical consultations) where they must pronounce words and phrases accurately. This approach increases engagement, allows for repeated practice, and helps learners self-monitor their errors.

Learner-Centered Feedback:Constructive, individualized feedback is essential for addressing

errors without discouraging learners. Teachers can provide corrective guidance, model accurate pronunciation, and encourage self-reflection. Feedback that emphasizes improvement rather than criticism boosts learners' confidence and reduces anxiety, enabling more consistent phonetic development.

Integration and Effectiveness:These strategies are most effective when combined into a systematic instructional framework that addresses linguistic, educational, and cognitive factors simultaneously. The study confirms that targeted phonetic training, supplemented with technology and learner-centered feedback, aligns with best practices in pronunciation teaching. Observations and questionnaire data indicate that students using these methods demonstrate higher accuracy, faster error correction, and increased confidence in professional ESP communication tasks.

Pronunciation errors among ESP students arise from a combination of linguistic, educational, and cognitive factors. Addressing these errors requires systematic phonetic instruction, technology-assisted practice, and learner-centered feedback. Implementing these strategies can significantly enhance phonetic competence and professional communication. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of corrective strategies and investigate domain-specific pronunciation challenges across various ESP fields.

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