



Government School English Teachers' Perceptions of Pronunciation in English as an International Language

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Abstract

The widespread use of English around the world has changed its status from being a language spoken by some powerful countries to language used by a large number of non-native speakers around the world (Llurda, 2004). In recent years, the total number of non-native English language teachers is greater than the English language teachers whose native language is English. Therefore, to study English as an International Language (EIL) from the perspective of government school English teachers, whose native language is not English, is essential. This research paper investigates the attitudes and perceptions of government school English teachers in Pakistan regarding pronunciation in English as an international language (EIL). A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 28 government school teachers through online questionnaires. Data obtained through online questionnaires from high school English teachers revealed that English has always been considered the correct standard for English Language Teaching (ELT). The findings suggest that participants perceive English as an international language as a language easily understood by everyone and are using it for various communicative purposes. They are open to and embrace all varieties of English and demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in their behavior and speech when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Findings revealed insights into teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to pronunciation teaching.

Introduction

In recent years, English has become very important worldwide and it is used mostly by those speakers whose native language is not English or they are using English as a second language. Nowadays, English language is used for communication by those speakers who don't speak the same native language, or they are from diverse cultures around the world. They choose English as their way to communicate with each other (Seidlhofer, 2005). According to David Crystal's 1997 estimate, there is 1.2 to 1.5 billion competent users of English worldwide, and among them only 337 million are using it as a first language. As the number of non-native speakers is increasing rapidly, the native speakers of English or now considered as minorities. Widdowson (1994), for instance, argued that the ownership of English no longer belongs to native speakers but to every individual who uses it. Brumfit (2001) similarly explored the concept of ownership of English by calculating the current competent users of English. He claimed that the total number of current competent users of English is almost 700 million (half of them are native speakers) that are living in different parts of the world. This dominance of non-native speakers over native speakers has led some to argue that these non-native speakers play a significant role in shaping the language development, maintenance and associated ideologies. Alptekin (2002) criticized the concept or the model of native speakers for English as a Lingua Franca by stating that it is unrealistic and impractical. Seidlhofer (2005) also challenged the concept of native speaker superiority in EIL context. He suggested that complexities of native speaker language may hinder clear communication

Jenkins (2005a) also highlighted the difference between English as a foreign language and English as a lingua franca, noting that while EFL speakers often aim to emulate native speakers in their language use, ELF speakers primarily use English to communicate with users of English who are from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In such contexts, trying to mimic native speaker pronunciation may not be practical or relevant.

In Pakistan, English has a unique status as an international language, reflecting its colonial history and global importance in various fields such as education, politics, business and governance.

Raza (2008) stated that linguistic competence in English as a lingua franca (ELF) can be challenging for learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds who are holding strong identities especially when pronunciation instruction is limited. He identified three main categories of accents (broad, regional, and non-regional) that learners adopt while interacting in second language. He defined non-regional accent as an accent which identifies speaker's region and country, e.g., Pakistani or South Asian accent. In the same way, accent that is highly localized is termed as broad accent, for example Saraiki or Sindhi accent. Lastly, regional accent, as defined by Raza, is an accent with which a speaker identifies himself or herself, e.g., urban Punjabi and Urdu accent.

Research Question

- i. What are the attitudes and perceptions of government school English teachers regarding EIL pronunciation?

Literature Review

It is no longer necessary that a native speaker of English would be an ideal teacher of English language. Medgyes (2001) talked about non-native English-speaking teachers and native English-speaking teachers and favoured the former one. He was of the view that non-native English-speaking teachers are better learner models as compared to native English teachers because they are adult learners among young learners, and they have learned English language after the acquisition of their first or native language. Next point that he mentioned in favour of non-native English-speaking teachers is that these teachers teach strategies of language more effectively. Non-native English-speaking teachers use language strategies more actively and consciously and they can tell that which strategy is beneficial and work for them. He stated that non-native English teachers, while teaching, provide more information about English language. Native speakers are less aware of the internal mechanisms of their language because of which they provide less information to their students. On the other hand, non-native English teachers have gathered more knowledge about English language as they have learned it consciously. Teachers whose first language is not English, and they are bilingual are more sensitive and responsive to their students as compared to native English teachers. Furthermore, he mentioned one other benefit of having non-native English teachers that these teachers take advantage of their mother tongue, while interacting with non-native learners, by explaining certain concepts in their native language.

In many educational settings, mainly in English learning and teaching practices, there is often an emphasis on native-speakerism, which typically includes British and American English and native speakers are regularly regarded as ideal models. This desire for sounding like native speakers and their English has led to the prevalent phenomenon called native-speakerism as determined in various contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Holliday (2005) argued that an overemphasis on the "native speaker" perspective in English language teaching marginalizes non-native speakers and it also influenced the thinking of ESOL (English to speakers of other language) learners. This approach, most of the times, leads to exclusionary practices, discrimination, and attempts to impose particular cultural norms on learners who are learning English as second language.

Intelligibility is not something that is dependent on speaker or listener rather it is the result of interaction among listener and speaker (Smith, Nelson, 1985). Active accommodation is necessary when speakers from different linguistic backgrounds come in contact and interact with each other (Rajudrai, 2007). Therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers to highlight problems related to pronunciation of adult learners and suggest strategies for their removal in order to achieve improved intelligibility of L2 speech. Low (2014) proposed a shift from speaker-oriented approaches to listener-oriented approaches. She stated that in order to carry successful communication, students should speak in the most intelligible and interpretable ways. Adoption of norms is dependent on the background of the listener. If the listener is from inner circle countries, he would adopt inner circle norms. If he/she is from the outer circle countries, norms of that particular area would be adopted. In English as an international language communication setting, Learners should be exposed to the linguistic features of not only inner circle varieties but expanding circle Englishes too. Phan (2020) conducted a study in which he identified that teachers should use diverse teaching materials that reflect diversity of English language and suggested teachers to use past experiences in language teaching and learning. In this study some teachers noticed that inclusion of such type of diverse teaching materials might be confusing for students who are beginners as compared to those whose English levels are more advanced.

In curriculum development and designing instructional materials, culture plays a very significant role. Content and topics that are created according to the source culture helps in the understanding of instructional material that leads to effective classroom discussions. After colonialism, the textbooks that educators teach to their students are filled with target culture topics and contents and most of the teachers consider them as a source for motivation and cultural awareness. However, it is beneficial in some cases and such topics might be irrelevant or confusing for students. Using students' source culture for understanding the target culture can be a one way of dealing with this

issue. If EIL is concerned with intelligible and effective communication, then there is no need to promote target culture in the content of the textbooks.

Cortazzi and Jin (1990) classified information or content for language textbooks and teaching materials into three types. First type is related to source culture and includes content that is from learners' own culture in which familiar topics of discussion are involved. Second type includes materials that focuses on the target culture or the place where English is used as a first or native language. Third type of teaching materials includes information from cultures of not only English-speaking countries but also from non-English speaking countries around the world.

Content that includes information related to source culture helps learners to know more about their own culture. Learners use the target language or L2 to elaborate and explain their own cultural concepts. Bilingual teachers, with the help of target language, explain cultural concepts to learners who are not aware of that particular aspect of their own culture. He also gave an example of Moroccan Ministry of Education that introduced a textbook in the target language, but the content was based on the Moroccan source culture. He mentioned one of the basic reasons for not depending on native speaker models by stating that if ownership of English does not belong to any single country or nation then there is no point of using teaching methods in EIL that are informed by native speakers.

In order to achieve international intelligibility, an acceptable model for EIL pronunciation instruction should ideally integrate both local pronunciation elements and some basic phonological traits. This goes beyond simply adhering to native speaker norms. Jenkins (2000) studied non-native English speakers' incomprehensibility and identified key pronunciation components, essential for intelligibility among non-native speakers of English, and called it the *Lingua Franca Core*. Given that English has spread throughout the world and that local linguistic and cultural influences have resulted in different elements of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, she argued for a complete restructuring of the way we assess English language proficiency. There are now a large number of educated second language (L2) users, whose English dialects may differ from those in the Inner Circle. These characteristics are often interpreted as deviating from the standard of native English speakers and as evidence of interference or negative transfer from the first languages of the L2 users. Jenkins referenced Lowenberg's (2002) finding that native and non-native English varieties share striking similarities in their linguistic innovation processes, with the initial linguistic faults eventually evolving into new standard forms if they are used by wider population.

Teachers with a variety of English accents and pronunciation models should introduce and educate their learners about wide range of English language dialects. In the absence of a teacher, students can watch online recordings of speeches made by speakers of several dialects of the target language. In order to adhere to international, social, and pragmatic norms when students connect with speakers of various English dialects around the globe, it is also crucial that the diversity of cultures be recognised and valued. This is especially important for virtual meetings and workshops when people attend from all around the world.

Methods

This study utilized a quantitative research design to collect and analyse data from government schoolteachers regarding their perceptions of pronunciation in English as an international language. The research design focused on administering online questionnaires to participants to collect their responses efficiently. Reliance on self-report, data collected through online questionnaires, may be subject to response bias. Additionally, the sample size of 28 government schoolteachers may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

Participants

Sample size of the study consists of 28 government schoolteachers in Peshawar. Participants are selected based on their experience in teaching English and their willingness to participate in the study voluntarily. Out of the 30 participants, 28, all of whom were female, completed and returned the questionnaire. Their ages ranged from thirty to forty. Due to the small sample size, it's important to note that the survey responses only provide an impression of the perceptions and attitudes of English language teachers regarding pronunciation.

Instrument

While conducting this study, a questionnaire was used which was adopted by Knollmayr (2004). Items in questionnaire focuses on assessing the attitudes and perceptions of government school English teachers. The main aim behind selecting a questionnaire as a research instrument is to know how they perceive EIL and its importance in general.

The questionnaire has two parts. Items in first part were designed to know participants' background information (name, age, level of qualification, and their current occupation). The second part of the questionnaire contains items that are close ended. Item 1 and 2 focused on participant general preference for choosing a particular type or variety of English and reasons behind selecting those varieties. Items 3, 4 and 5 were used to know the importance of pronunciation teaching in classroom and whether it is necessary for an individual to have native like pronunciation or clear and intelligible pronunciation. Items 6 and 7 are intended to know the goal of pronunciation

instruction. Item 8 and 9 tried to elicit participant's preference to teach a non-native variety of English or exposure to multiple varieties of English in a classroom. Item 10 is related to participants' view of ideal pronunciation teacher. Item 11 tries to reveal the general understanding of the terminology of EIL by participants. Item 12 deals with the content of pronunciation instruction. Government schoolteachers may not be aware of the terminology of EIL which is recently emerging phenomenon. Items are intended to see whether there is any awareness of EIL among teachers in general.

Online questionnaires were primary method of data collection. A questionnaire is the instrument for collecting the primary data (Cohen et al., 2013). The questionnaires were designed to gather information about the participants' perceptions of pronunciation in English, including their attitudes and beliefs. The questionnaires were distributed electronically to the participants via email and through an online survey platform.

It included closed-ended questions to capture a range of responses from the participants. The questions covered topics such as their awareness of EIL terminology, the importance of teaching pronunciation, accent adopted while speaking, and importance of native like pronunciation and intelligible pronunciation. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, are used to summarize participants' responses to closed-ended questions.

Results

Individuals' Accent Preferences and the Rationales Behind these Inclinations

Majority of the participants displayed a near-even distribution among the selected accents, ascribing their English accent to either acquiring it in school or aligning with the accent often spoken in that region or sounds best (Table 1).

Table 1. Accent adopted while speaking

Q1. What accent do you typically adopt while speaking?	Paklish English		British English		American English	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	24	85.7	1	3.5	3	0.7

A total of 13 individuals cited that they learned it at school as their rationale, while only 7 cited their identity as influencing their accent and 8 cited that they choose it because it sounds best while speaking (Table 2).

Table 2. Reasons for selecting a specific type of accent

Q2. What is the primary reason for selecting a specific English accent while speaking?	Identification		It sounds best		Learned it at school	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	7	25	8	28	13	46.4

The significance and objectives of pronunciation instruction

Table 3 includes Q3, Q4, and Q5 of the questionnaire. All of the participants agree that teaching pronunciation at school is important, except for 6 participants (Table 3). In table 3, 22 of the participants agree that having native like pronunciation is important. Interestingly, 28 participants also agree that intelligible and comprehensible pronunciation in necessary.

Table 3. Pronunciation

Statement	Important		Not important	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Q3. How important do you think pronunciation teaching is at school?	22	78.57	6	21.42
Q4. Is it crucial for participants to have native like pronunciation?	22	78.57	6	21.4
Q5. How would you rate the importance of having clear and intelligible pronunciation?	28	100	0	0

Table 4 contains items 6 and 7 of the questionnaire. Items in table 4 also represent the same contrast between opinions. In Table 4, 25 of the participants agree that teachers should help students to become as native-like as possible while 17 of the participants agree that teachers should teach pronunciation that is clear and intelligible.

Table 4. Intelligibility of Accent

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Q6. Do you agree with the goal of pronunciation teaching to help learners become as native like as possible?	25	89.3	3	10.8
Q7. In your opinion should pronunciation teaching focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility?	17	60.7	11	39.3

Teaching of native and non-native varieties of English

Majority of the participants believe that exposure to different varieties of English in pronunciation classes is essential (Table 5). However, there is almost equal variation between them regarding teaching of a native and non-native variety of English such as Paklish or Pakistani English and native English (Table 6).

Table 5. Importance of exposure

Opinion	Important		Not important		May be	
	Frequency		Frequency		Frequency	
Q8. Do you think it is important to expose students to different varieties in pronunciation classes?	24	85.7	1	3.5	3	10.7

Table 6. Preference for teaching a non-native variety

Opinion	Yes		No	
	Frequency		frequency	
Q9. Should preference be given to teach a non-native variety of English?	15	53.6	13	46.4

In Table 7, 22 of the participants are of the view that a competent bilingual teacher is the ideal pronunciation teacher, only 6 of the participants believe that a native teacher from England or America would be an ideal teacher.

Table 7. Ideal Pronunciation teacher

Opinion	Native speaker		Bilingual teacher	
	Frequency		Frequency	
Q10. What would an ideal pronunciation teacher look like?	6	21.4	22	78.6

Table 8 shows that majority of the participant understand "English as an international language" as the English easily understood by listeners.

Table 8. Understanding of EIL

Statement	English with a specific accent		English easily understood by everyone		English spoken by native speakers	
	Frequency		Frequency		Frequency	
Q11. What is your understanding of the term English as an international language (EIL)?	6	21.4	18	64.3	14	14.3

Content Used in Language Instruction Books

In Table 9, 12 of the participants believe that multimedia resources that demonstrate different English accents should be used while teaching pronunciation in the context of EIL. 6 of them believe that recordings of native speakers in pronunciation instruction should be used.

Table 9. Resources for teaching EIL

Opinion	Multimedia resources for different accents		exercises tailored to EIL context		recordings of native speakers	
	Frequency		frequency	%	Frequency	
Q12. What resources and materials do you find most helpful for teaching EIL pronunciation?	12	42.9	10	35.7	6	21.4

Discussion

This study is conducted to know how government English language teachers perceive the significance of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) pronunciation. The survey findings revealed that these teachers recognize the predominance of using English with non-native speakers and understand its role in international settings. They also value the importance of clear and intelligible pronunciation in language learning and 64 percent of them describe "International English" as English that is comprehensible, intelligible and understood by everyone and almost 53 percent of responses were in favour of teaching non-native variety of English. However, there exists a gap between

this belief and the common understanding that it is crucial for learners to have native like pronunciation of English language.

Most of the participants prefer to adopt Paklish English because they learned it at school which means that the education system plays a huge role in shaping language preferences and practices. Participants are influenced by teaching methodologies, instructional materials use in schools which may emphasize a hybrid form of English. This aligns with Raza's (2010) statement that linguistic competence is challenging for those learners who are holding strong identities and they adopt non regional Paklish accent. In table 4, 17 of the participants believe that the main goal of pronunciation instruction is to help students to speak in intelligible and comprehensible ways and this was defined by low (2014) that there must be intelligibility and comprehensibility in students' speech. Item 10 in the questionnaire inquired about an ideal pronunciation teacher for non-native learners of English. The data collected revealed that 78 percent participants prefer a bilingual English pronunciation teacher over a native speaker, indicating their perception of the importance of having a non-native variety of English.

Medgyes (2001) stated that being a non-native English teacher is beneficial in a sense that it provides better learner models. He further claimed that it is no longer necessary that only a native speaker of English would be an ideal teacher. This means that, for effective communication, pronunciation that is intelligible is necessary. Students should not focus on native elements of English language. Participants' preference for a bilingual pronunciation teacher suggests that functional and communicative aspect of English language is necessary rather than adoption of native English norms. Results show that participants consider multimedia resources more beneficial for teaching various English accents in pronunciation classes. This indicates a desire to familiarize students with diverse English accents, which may include native and non-native varieties. While the first viewpoint prioritizes bilingual teacher and practical skills over native accents, the second viewpoint suggests an appreciation for linguistic diversity and exposure to different accents, which may include native and non-native varieties. These two perspectives complement each other, indicating participants' holistic approach to teaching and learning pronunciation in the context of English as an international language.

Cortazzi and Jin's approach to English language education, as mentioned earlier, to include instructional materials that are based on learner's own context, somehow aligns with the results. Most of the participants agree that we should include aspects of culture according to the diverse needs of learners because they come from different contexts. Therefore, EIL pronunciation in English language education should be adaptive and flexible so that it fulfils the needs of learners. This resonates with the idea of Pennycook (2010) who stated that teachers should teach English language with a greater sense of flexibility and adaptability because it is a local, emergent, and hybrid language.

Conclusion

The study is quite limited and does not offer substantial information regarding the size of the sample; however, the findings are considered representative of attitudes that are commonly found in the wider English-teaching population. Survey results revealed that people are aware of the international importance of English and the importance of speaking clearly for effective communication. While participants expressed a preference for teaching a non-native variety of English to learners of English, focusing on clarity and comprehensibility, there remains an inconsistency between this understanding and the persistent belief in the necessity of native like pronunciation of English as an international language. The fact that the participants preferred to learn mixed English such as Paklish through education shows the influence of education system on language practice. Additionally, their preference for bilingual English teachers over native English teachers is based on the hypothesis that non-native English teachers may be better role models and may resist theories of effective teaching methods. Therefore, EIL pronunciation teaching should involve such a flexible and culturally sensitive approach that would accept and appreciate linguistic diversity and at the same time maintain a focus on efficient, intelligible, comprehensible communication skills irrespective of native speaker norms.

Recommendations

Pronunciation is just one aspect of English as an international language. The future scope in EIL regarding ELT should also include other areas such as curriculum development, teacher training programs, production of instructional materials that are cross-culturally appropriate, as well as textbooks evaluation and classroom pedagogy.

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