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SECCIÓN DE IDIOMAS**



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“With infinite gratitude to God for being our guide in every step of our journey.”

“To our professors,we extend our heartfelt appreciation for the patience and dedication with which they imparted their knowledge ,shaping us into the professionals we are today and serving as an endless source of inspiration”.

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Resumen

Este estudio examina los desafíos de pronunciación que enfrentan los estudiantes del curso de Inglés Avanzado II en la Facultad Multidisciplinaria de Oriente de la Universidad de El Salvador. Reconociendo que una pronunciación precisa es esencial para una comunicación efectiva en inglés, la investigación emplea un enfoque cuantitativo para analizar las dificultades específicas que encuentran los estudiantes. Se recopilaron datos de una muestra de 25 estudiantes mediante encuestas y pruebas de pronunciación, que evaluaron sus habilidades en la pronunciación de sonidos vocálicos y consonánticos, así como su uso del acento y la entonación. Los resultados indican que, aunque los estudiantes muestran buen desempeño en la pronunciación de consonantes, experimentan desafíos significativos con los sonidos vocálicos, el acento en las palabras y la entonación. Las respuestas de la encuesta revelan una falta de práctica específica en pronunciación, lo que subraya la necesidad de mejoras en el currículo. Basado en estos hallazgos, el estudio recomienda implementar entrenamiento enfocado en sonidos vocálicos, realizar talleres sobre patrones de acentuación y entonación, y llevar a cabo evaluaciones periódicas para monitorear el progreso de los estudiantes. Estas recomendaciones tienen como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de pronunciación de los estudiantes y, en última instancia, su capacidad para comunicarse eficazmente en inglés.

Palabras clave: Desafíos de pronunciación, comunicación efectiva, acento, entonación, pronunciación de consonantes, práctica de pronunciación

Abstract

This study examines the pronunciation challenges faced by students in the Advanced English II course at the Eastern Multidisciplinary Faculty of the University of El Salvador. Given that accurate pronunciation is essential for effective communication in English, the research uses a quantitative approach to understand the difficulties students encounter. Data were collected from a sample of 25 students through surveys and pronunciation tests that assessed their ability to pronounce vowel and consonant sounds, as well as their use of stress and intonation. The results show that, while students perform well in consonant pronunciation, they face significant challenges with vowel sounds, word stress, and intonation. The survey indicates that many students lack sufficient targeted pronunciation practice, highlighting the need to improve the curriculum. Based on these findings, the study suggests providing focused training on vowel sounds, holding workshops on stress patterns and intonation, and conducting regular assessments to track students' progress. These recommendations aim to help students improve their pronunciation skills and, ultimately, their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Key words: Pronunciation problems, effective communication, stress, intonation, consonant pronunciation, pronunciation practice

Introduction

When learning a foreign language, the pronunciation is an essential skill that directly affects clarity and accuracy in oral communication (Derwing & Munro, 2005). For students in the Modern Languages major at Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental, to achieve effective pronunciation in English is not only a key component of their academic training; but also, it is crucial for their future professional practice. However, many of these students face challenges in this area that can hinder their ability to communicate effectively. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the pronunciation problems faced by students in Advanced English II at the University of El Salvador, particularly in the areas of segmental sounds and suprasegmental features of English that emerge as problematic.

During an observation conducted in April 2024, significant difficulties were identified in the production of certain phonemes, such as /s/, /z/, and /v/, as well as in the correct placement of stress in complex or unfamiliar words. These difficulties are related both to segmental elements, such as the pronunciation of individual sounds, and suprasegmental features, such as intonation and correct stress usage. Additionally, frequent interference from the native language (Spanish) was observed, which manifested in the substitution of English sounds with Spanish phonemes, thus affecting the intelligibility of students when communicating in English (Kenworthy, 1987; Swan & Smith, 2001).

Understanding how these specific pronunciation problems affect the development of English language skills in Modern Languages students can provide a clearer perspective on the challenges they face at an advanced stage, where greater precision and clarity in oral expression are expected. Through a descriptive and quantitative approach, this study aims to quantify and analyze the extent of these pronunciation problems in students of Advanced English II, as well as identify patterns and underlying factors contributing to the persistence of these difficulties. However, due to time constraints, the study was conducted in a single academic term, which may limit the generalizability of the results to different contexts or other learning levels.

This study contributes to the understanding of pronunciation problems in advanced English students and highlights the importance of instruction that addresses both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. The research also aims to serve as a reference resource for future studies and for teachers interested in teaching strategies that improve pronunciation competence in advanced English students.

This article is organized as follows: Section 1 explains the methods used for collecting and analyzing data; Section 2 presents the results; Section 3 discusses the implications; Section 4 concludes with the study's contributions; and Section 5 recommends for improving pronunciation skills in different contexts.

I. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was a quantitative non-experimental approach, which involves observing and analyzing variables without modifying them or influencing their relationships. According to Creswell (2014), researchers often employ a quantitative approach when research questions demand numerical data analysis, a qualitative approach when questions require narrative or descriptive data, and a mixed-methods approach when both types of data are necessary (p. 4). This approach allowed for examining pronunciation challenges in students by collecting and interpreting numerical data without any experimental intervention.

The quantitative non-experimental methodology in this study allows researchers to examine existing relationships and patterns within a real-world educational context without introducing controlled variables. According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), this approach is valuable in educational research for its capacity to generate reliable, generalizable data from natural settings, enabling researchers to observe and measure phenomena as they occur (p. 340). Unlike experimental studies, which may alter participants' experiences, non-experimental research is observational, making it particularly suited to studies that seek to understand prevalent issues such as pronunciation challenges by objectively analyzing measurable data gathered from students in their actual learning environment.

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design, with an emphasis on systematically evaluating and detailing the characteristics and scope of the observed phenomena. This approach seeks to quantify relationships between variables, delivering a thorough statistical overview of the collected data. Through the use of structured quantitative tools, researchers gather numerical information that allows for statistical analysis to reveal patterns and trends. Creswell (2014) describes descriptive quantitative research as an approach for testing objective theories by examining relationships among variables that can be measured, allowing data to be analyzed using statistical procedures (p. 51).

The study was performed at the Universidad de El Salvador, Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental, Departamento de Ciencias y Humanidades, Sección de Idiomas. The selected population consisted of forty-five students who attended the Advanced English II Course. For this reason, among the attendees from this population, twenty-five students composed the sample. To ensure the data gathered from the sample was representative, a simple random probability sampling method was applied. This approach allowed each of the forty five students an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study.

The technique used for this work was a survey. The instrument to gather the information was a test for the evaluation of Segmental and Suprasegmental Features. The survey was chosen due to its many benefits, including facilitating effective communication and assessing oral accuracy. It offered a practical and efficient way to gather extensive information from the sample within a short timeframe. A questionnaire served as the survey instrument, consisting of twenty closed-ended questions. The questions in the survey were designed with yes or no answers, allowing for easy and rapid tabulation, ensuring that both the process and the resulting data were clear and precise.

A test was utilized as a second data collection instrument, designed face to face application in the classroom where the subject is taught to facilitate sharing with the chosen sample. The instrument contains closed-ended questions like where the stress of a word is, where it has intonation, which word ends with a consonant or vowel, and so questions were asked related to the indicators of the variables. One key reason for employing this method was to obtain accurate data regarding the students. The findings from the test were compared with the survey results to enable a more detailed analysis of pronunciation and effective communication, assessing the students' development in relation to their academic proficiency in knowledge and pronunciation skills.

Overall and based on our methodological approach, this is a **quantitative study** with a **descriptive, cross-sectional design**, as it was conducted at a single point in time. Since no variables were manipulated, it falls under a **non-experimental design**.

It focused on two main dimensions: **Segmental Features**, It specifically examined **consonant sounds** and **vowel sounds** as indicators, analyzing how these sounds impact pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility. On the other hand, **the Suprasegmental Features** dimension was explored through the indicators of **stress** and **intonation**, which are crucial for determining the rhythm and melody of speech. By addressing both segmental and suprasegmental aspects, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of pronunciation difficulties that affect clarity and communication in English

II. Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the data collected through surveys and tests administered to the students. Overall, the results reveal various difficulties related to the production and perception of key aspects of English pronunciation. The survey data indicate that a significant percentage of students struggle with consonant articulation, vowel sounds, and proper use of stress and intonation. Likewise, the test data show weaknesses in identifying specific phonological features, such as stress placement, vowel and consonant sounds, and intonation patterns in different types of sentences. The following tables provide a detailed breakdown of the results to highlight the areas where students face the greatest challenges.

Survey's results

This section presents the analysis of students' pronunciation based on segmental (consonant and vowel sounds) and suprasegmental (stress and intonation) features. It highlights specific difficulties identified through survey data, such as problems with producing certain sounds, stressing words correctly, and using appropriate intonation. The aim is to better understand the areas where students need support to improve their pronunciation.

Segmental Units Analysis

Consonant Sounds

Table 1 Consonants Sounds Survey's data

<i>Problems with consonant sounds</i>		
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Consonant problems production	9	36%
Difficult to Pronounce Consonant Combinations	0	0%
Trouble Pronouncing Verbs in the Past Tense	7	28%

Source: Survey's data

Description: The results of table N°01 shows that 36% of the students have problems producing consonants, 0% have difficulty pronouncing consonant combinations, 28% have problems pronouncing verbs in the past tense.

Vowel Sounds

Table 2 Vowel Sounds Survey's data

<i>Problems with vowel sound</i>		
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Trouble Differentiating and Pronouncing Vowel Sounds	12	48%
Difficulty Pronouncing Diphthongs	0	0%
Maintaining Correct Pronunciation in Casual Speech	14	56%

Source: Survey's data

Description : The results of table N°02 shows that 48% have difficulty differentiating and pronouncing vowel sounds, 0% have difficulty pronouncing diphthongs, 56% maintain correct pronunciation in informal speech.

Suprasegmental Units Analysis

Stress

Table 3 Survey's data

<i>Problems with Stress</i>		
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Difficulty Stressing the Correct Syllable in a Word	18	72%
Trouble with Stress on Words in Sentences	11	44%
Problems Placing Stress on Words with Prefixes/Suffixes	15	60%

Source: Survey's data

Description: The results of table N°03 shows that 72% have difficulty putting emphasis on the correct syllable in a word, 44% have problems with stressing words in sentences, 60% have problems putting emphasis on words with prefixes or suffixes.

Intonation

Table 4 Survey's data

<i>Problems with Intonation</i>		
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Difficulty with Rising Intonation in Questions	1	4%
Difficulty with Falling Intonation in Statements	8	32%
Trouble Varying Pitch in Long Sentences	10	40%
Difficulty Changing Intonation According to Context	8	32%

Source: Survey's data

Description: The results of table N°04 shows that 4% have difficulty raising the intonation in questions, 32% have difficulty lowering the intonation in statements, 40%

have difficulty varying the tone in long sentences, 32% have difficulty changing the intonation according to the context.

Test's results

Segmental and Suprasegmental Units Analysis

Table 5 Test data

<i>Test Data</i>		
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Difficulty identifying specific characteristics of vowel sounds.	8	32%
Difficulty identifying specific characteristics of consonant sounds.	4	16%
Difficulty recognizing stress placement in specific words.	11	44%
Difficulty interpreting intonation patterns in questions and declarative sentences.	14	56%

Source: Test data

Description: The results of table N°05 shows that 32% have difficulty identifying specific features of vowel sounds, 16% have difficulty identifying specific features of consonant sounds, 44% have difficulty recognizing stress placement on specific words, 56% have difficulty interpreting intonation patterns in interrogative and declarative sentences.

Analysis of results

This section presents the analysis of data collected using two instruments: a survey and a pronunciation test, both administered to twenty-five third-year undergraduate students studying Modern Languages. The survey contained thirteen questions with yes/no responses, and the test included twenty multiple-choice questions.

The following section will focus on analyzing the results by interpreting students' responses to identify specific areas of difficulty in pronunciation, based on both segmental and suprasegmental features. The data was analyzed to identify pronunciation difficulties, focusing on segmental (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental (stress and intonation) units. The results are structured and coded into categories for detailed analysis.

The data analysis plan involved categorizing and coding the responses based on subcategories aligned with pronunciation challenges. Statistical software such as SPSS, Excel, and Word facilitated content analysis, identifying patterns and trends in pronunciation difficulties. The analysis aimed to reveal areas where students experienced significant challenges, thereby responding to the research objectives of identifying specific pronunciation issues.

The results from the survey reveal that, while students generally feel confident in their ability to pronounce consonant sounds and combinations accurately, significant difficulties arise in distinguishing and producing specific vowel sounds. For example, many students reported confusion between the sounds /ʌ/ in "sun" and /æ/ in "bat." This misperception of vowel sounds can lead to miscommunication and hinder the effectiveness of verbal interactions. Additionally, students expressed a desire for more practice opportunities focusing specifically on vowel pronunciation, indicating a gap in their previous instruction.

Furthermore, a substantial number of participants indicated that they rarely engage in activities that emphasize the importance of pronunciation in their English studies. This lack of exposure contributes to the persistence of pronunciation difficulties, highlighting the need for curricular adjustments that prioritize phonetic training. Overall, the survey results underscore a pressing need for targeted instruction that addresses the nuances of English vowel sounds.

The results of the pronunciation test corroborate the findings from the survey, indicating that while students demonstrate proficiency in producing consonant sounds, they struggle significantly with stress patterns and intonation. Many students exhibited difficulty in recognizing and applying the correct stress in multi-syllabic words, resulting in flat, monotone delivery that diminished the expressiveness of their speech. For instance, students often fail to emphasize the appropriate syllables in words such as “photograph” versus “photography,” which alters the meaning and clarity of their communication.

Additionally, the analysis of intonation patterns revealed that many students lack the ability to use rising and falling intonation effectively, which is crucial for conveying questions, statements, and emotions in spoken English. This deficiency can lead to misunderstandings, as listeners may struggle to interpret the intended meaning without clear suprasegmental cues. The test results highlight the necessity for focused instruction on both stress and intonation to enhance students’ overall pronunciation skills and communicative competence.

These findings align with the overall objectives of the research, emphasizing areas where students excel and others where additional training and resources could significantly improve pronunciation skills. The analysis revealed that while students are generally comfortable with English consonants and diphthongs, difficulties persist in distinguishing specific vowel sounds, managing syllable stress, and applying appropriate intonation in varying contexts. Future instructional approaches should focus on enhancing clarity in vowel distinctions, understanding stress in complex words, and refining intonation patterns, especially in more nuanced situations like lists and statements.

III. Discussion

In this study it was found that most of the students have no problems with English consonants or complex combinations, 48% have difficulties differentiating some vowel sounds, something that needs improvement, good general command, although there are slight confusions with voiced and unvoiced sounds, 72% have problems with stress in complex words, good command of basic intonations, but there are difficulties with variations in complex contexts, there is a good general command, but improvements are needed in vowels, stress and intonation in more complex situations. Which suggests that the biggest pronunciation problem found in students is stress in complex words with 72% of students having this problem, followed by differentiating some vowel sounds with 48%. This is consistent with the research “The problems of unintelligible pronunciation in the oral production of third-year students from the Bachelor’s degree in Modern Languages at the Eastern Multidisciplinary Faculty were documented in a 2021 study conducted by López (2021).” which also observed as a result “The vast majority of them revealed that they sometimes had doubts about producing a certain intonation or accentuation in words, phrases and sentences because they did not know how to do it. They also stated that such a situation affected them in a significant way to express themselves adequately, and that it generated difficulties in understanding the speech. The results indicate that 70% of the participants had problems with falling intonation and 30% with rising intonation. From this result it can be inferred that the participants suffer from this problem at the time of producing and receiving the speech. It should be noted that the greatest problem is with falling intonation and a smaller percentage with rising intonation. However, in general terms they have difficulties with intonation” and “54% of the participants had problems with the production and perception of the middle central vowels / ʌ /, / ə /, / ɜ / and / ɝ /; 36% of them had difficulties with the production and perception of the front vowels / ɛ /, / i /, / æ / Finally, 10% had problems with the production of the back vowels / ɑ / and / ɔ /”.

In this investigation we found that most of the students have no problems with English consonants or complex combinations, 48% have difficulties differentiating some

vowel sounds, something that needs improvement, good general command, although there are slight confusions with voiced and unvoiced sounds, 72% have problems with stress in complex words, good command of basic intonations, but there are difficulties with variations in complex contexts, there is a good general command, but improvements are needed in vowels, stress and intonation in more complex situations. Which suggests that the biggest pronunciation problem found in students is stress in complex words with 72% of students having this problem, followed by differentiating some vowel sounds with 48%. This is consistent with the research “problematic phonemes for spanish-speakers’ learners of english by Lopez ,which also observed as a result“ The vast majority of them revealed that they sometimes had doubts about producing a certain intonation or accentuation in words, phrases and sentences because they did not know how to do it. They also stated that such a situation affected them in a significant way to express themselves adequately, and that it generated difficulties in understanding the speech. The study concluded that English instructors must develop teaching strategies that address these specific difficulties through activities such as reading aloud, using minimal pairs, and providing explicit instruction in the correct articulation of English sounds. It also recommended implementing innovative pedagogical approaches like flipped learning to improve students' pronunciation and intelligibility. Our results indicate that 70% of the participants had problems with falling intonation and 30% with rising intonation. From this result it can be inferred that the participants suffer from this problem at the time of producing and receiving the speech. It should be noted that the greatest problem is with falling intonation and a smaller percentage with rising intonation. However, in general terms they have difficulties with intonation” and “54% of the participants had problems with the production and perception of the middle central vowels / ʌ /, / ə /, / ɜ / and / ɚ /; 36% of them had difficulties with the production and perception of the front vowels / ɛ /, / i /, / æ / Finally, 10% had problems with the production of the back vowels / ɑ / and / ɔ /”.

IV. Conclusion

During the course of this study, the analysis of segmental units showed that vowel differentiation was one of the main challenges students faced, with 48% of participants struggling to clearly distinguish certain vowel sounds. This difficulty negatively affected their intelligibility and sometimes caused misunderstandings in communication. Although fewer issues were found with consonant sounds, the persistent problems with vowels highlight the importance of reinforcing training in this area to improve accuracy in oral production.

In terms of suprasegmental units, the most significant issue identified was the correct placement of stress in complex words. Data revealed that 72% of students had difficulty applying accurate stress patterns, which considerably affected clarity and overall communicative effectiveness. Problems with intonation were also observed, particularly in sustaining natural rising and falling patterns during speech, though these appeared less frequently than stress-related difficulties.

Overall, the study confirmed the initial hypothesis that students experience pronunciation challenges that compromise both clarity and accuracy in communication. Segmental weaknesses, especially vowel differentiation, limit intelligibility, while suprasegmental issues, particularly stress, represent the most critical barrier to effective oral communication. Despite the limitation of having focused on a single academic term, the results achieved the objectives of identifying the main pronunciation problems and analyzing the factors contributing to them, providing valuable insights for future improvement strategies.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained from the study, several practical recommendations can be made in order to address the pronunciation difficulties observed among students. These recommendations extend both to instructors, who play a central role in guiding and supporting learners, and to students, who must take an active role in improving their own pronunciation skills.

For instructors, it is important to incorporate targeted pronunciation training within regular lessons instead of treating pronunciation as a separate or secondary skill. A particular emphasis should be placed on areas where students struggle the most, such as stress patterns in multisyllabic words and the accurate production of vowel and consonant sounds. This focus is essential because English is a stress-timed language, and incorrect stress or vowel differentiation often leads to misunderstandings. Teachers could design practical activities that highlight these aspects, such as identifying stressed syllables, repeating words with varied stress patterns, or practicing minimal pairs (*ship/sheep*, *record/record*).

Another recommendation for instructors is to employ engaging techniques that encourage active participation. Pronunciation practice is more effective when students are involved through activities such as tongue twisters, group repetition drills, or role-playing tasks that simulate real-life communication. In addition, teachers may take advantage of technology and multimedia resources. Using phonetic videos, interactive applications, or online dictionaries with audio features can allow students to repeatedly hear and practice sounds. Incorporating feedback sessions where teachers correct errors and provide strategies can further support learners' progress.

For students, the responsibility of improving pronunciation requires consistent practice outside the classroom. One effective strategy is to dedicate time each day to listening and repeating exercises that target specific sounds. Shadowing activities, where learners imitate authentic English audio, can help internalize natural patterns of

speech. Students are also encouraged to engage with authentic media, such as movies or series with English subtitles, since these expose them to real-world pronunciation and intonation patterns. Listening to podcasts or news broadcasts can further expand exposure to different accents and speaking speeds. Additionally, recording their own speech and comparing it with native models can help them self-assess and monitor improvement.

In conclusion, pronunciation is a skill that requires both guidance from instructors and dedication from students. By combining structured classroom activities with consistent individual practice, learners can progressively overcome difficulties with stress, vowel differentiation, and consonant production. Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance pronunciation but also improve overall communicative competence, leading to clearer, more confident, and more effective use of the English language.

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