

Teaching English Pronunciation to Spanish Speakers

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Abstract: *The research topic aimed to analyze and investigate teaching English pronunciation of Spanish speakers. In this regard, thorough understanding and analysis of speech sounds, phonetics, speech organs, consonants, vowels, and voiced and non-voiced notes were discussed in a critical manner. The introduction presented the aim, objectives, and research questions along with explaining the rationale of the research topic and determining the scope of the research. The rationale for the research topic was found in the form of importance of learning correct ways of pronunciation especially for non-English speakers. The literature review discussed about the speech sounds, vowels, consonants, speech organs, and production of sounds in a critical manner. The literature review served the purpose of dealing with the research topic in an in-depth manner. It was found that the correct pronunciation is dependent on positioning of tongue and lips and also the movement of air within and outside the mouth and nose. The literature review added great deal of value in this research. The research methodology explained the reason behind selecting the anti-positivism research philosophy and inductive research approach along with the use of questions and graphics for enhancing the pronunciation of students in a well-planned manner. It explained the methodology used in analyzing the major outcomes of the research. The proposed framework explained the framework used in enhancing the pronunciation of students. The conclusion and recommendation concluded that enhancing English pronunciation requires continuous effort along with proper understanding over the production of speech sounds, sound movement, and vowels and consonants production and pronunciation.*

Keywords: *pronunciation, speech sounds, phonetics, vowels, consonants.*

I. Introduction

English has emerged as one of the main languages being spoken in different parts of the world. The global environment seeks people having command over English in terms of communication and exchange of ideas and views. English is a global language that is used for the purpose of communication in countries where it is not a native language. However, with global boundaries shrinking and people exploring different opportunities in different parts of the world, English has emerged as one of the most important languages that one should master in order to be more confident while sharing views and ideas while conversing with people knowing English. The research aims to discover the major obstacles in teaching English pronunciation to Spanish speakers. Every country has different culture and environment along with native language that helps in developing comfort zone with others

Language often helps in exchanging ideas and opinions along with creating a sense of togetherness. However, people who do not speak English considering a difference in native language tend to pronounce certain words in a different manner often creating difficulties in understanding the meaning of certain words. The research aims to identify methods through which English pronunciation can be taught to Spanish speakers in order to strengthen their language and communication skills. It is important to differentiate the pronunciation of alphabets in English and Spanish that may sound similar but actually they are not similar. At the same time, Spanish has few extra letters than English and the way letters are pronounced is completely different raising difficulties in teaching English to Spanish to an extent. The next part of the discussion presents research aims, objectives and goals that will help in conducting the research in a succinct and systematic manner.

The research aims to identify ways through which teaching English pronunciation to Spanish speakers can be made an easy and simple task covering major and minor intricacies of speaking English, pronunciation problem and understanding voicing, mouth position, syllables and specific sounds.

II. Research Methodology

Saunders, et al (2007) said that philosophy is all about beliefs and rationale investigation about knowledge and existence. Moreover, philosophy states the understanding of researchers in terms of ascertaining and underpinning the existence of any phenomenon. Research philosophy can be categorised under positivism and anti-positivism philosophy. Positivism philosophy is based on rules and regulations governed by laws and acceptance of realities existing in the real world. On the other hand, anti-positivism research philosophy is based on observations, analysis and understanding of realities further based on personal interpretation and analysis.

Anti-positivism philosophy allows researchers to explore the reality based on logical estimation of reasons behind it along with evaluating and analyzing its purpose and importance through personal understanding. The present research is based on teaching English pronunciation to Spanish speakers that requires personal observation and analysis and thus, anti-positivism research philosophy seems to be more appropriate and result oriented compared to positivism philosophy. So, considering the research topic, I will prefer anti-positivism research philosophy to accomplish set research objectives. The next part of the discussion presents an idea and understanding over the research approach and its usefulness.

Saunders, et al (2007) said that research approach determines the mindset and understanding of researchers on the underpinning of a particular reality and phenomenon. Research approach can be classified under inductive and deductive approach. Inductive approach starts from a specific discussion and moves to general conclusions while deductive approach starts from general ideas and evidences moving to specific findings and understanding of a phenomenon. Inductive approach is based on observations and personal interpretation while deductive approach is based on general rules and regulations. I believe that inductive approach will be of great help in the current research by discussing intricacies of English pronunciation to Spanish speakers in order to ascertain general findings. Moreover, inductive approach is based on observations and interpretations that will further help the chosen anti-positivism philosophy.

Saunders, et al (2007) stated that data can be collected from two sources, primary and secondary. Primary data are collected through primary sources like surveys, interviews and studies based on observations while secondary data are collected through secondary sources like academic books and journals, published research papers and internet sources. I will collect primary data through observational studies to be conducted on adult students attending classes at the State University of Guayaquil. These students will be taught English pronunciation through an effective curriculum basically concentrating on vowel sounds and contractions. On the other hand, secondary data will be collected through referring to books and journals offering information over phonetics and its elements along with referring to past research papers. This will help in forming an effective framework that will help in evaluating the research goals and objectives based on personal observation and interpretation.

Saunders, et al (2007) stated that sampling process determines the identification of samples from the available population. Total available population cannot be surveyed, interviewed or observed. In order to derive a sample size, few people are identified in the form of participants through different sampling process. Sampling process include, snow ball sampling based on identifying few participants and requesting them to refer more; convenience sampling process that is based on identifying samples in a convenient manner and random sampling process based on identifying samples randomly. I will use convenience sampling process to identify few students in the form of participants attending classes at the State University of Guayaquil. The idea is to identify at least 25 participants who can be taught English pronunciation by focusing more on vowel sounds and contraction through the formation of an effective curriculum. The next part of the discussion presents an understanding over the data analysis method.

Saunders, et al (2007) stated that data can be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. There is no scope to analyze data using statistical tools in this research and thus I will focus more on qualitative analysis based in theoretical underpinning of information based on observations. At first, an effective curriculum including information over vowel sounds and contraction will be designed and assessed in terms of acceptance and feasibility. Later, the same curriculum will be implemented in terms of identifying its usefulness in terms of impact and influence in learning English pronunciation. It needs to be understood that students are not going to learn overnight and thus the usefulness of implemented measures will be assessed based on simplicity and understanding. The next part of the discussion presents an idea over ethical considerations that always play an important role in initiating and competing research.

Blackburn (2001) stated that ethics are moral principles and norms that define the outlook of individuals. Ethics are based on honesty and transparency that leads fair outcomes and conclusions in the context of research. In the context of the research, I will make sure that all information of participants will be treated as confidential. At the same time their personal details and mode of individual learning will not be share with any third party to respect privacy along with being honest and transparent.

III. Results

The framework has been designed to improve and teach English pronunciation of Spanish students by concentrating on vowel sounds. For this purpose, an understanding over improving vowel sounds have been presented that will further be analyzed on the basis of success and failure in terms of basic understanding and improvement of students. Few students in the form of participants attending classes at the State University of Guayaquil were contacted and targeted for implementing this proposed framework. 25 participants were identified who had interest in learning English language and pronunciation. The proposed framework is based on the findings of the literature where the importance and usefulness of vowels, contractions, and sentence

structure was discussed in an illustrative manner. At the same time, the literature review revealed that teaching English pronunciation to Spanish students can be a challenging task especially when students do not have a basic understanding.

As the majority of the targeted students did not have Basic English pronunciation knowledge, they were first taught the difference between the English and Spanish vowels. At the same time, focus was more on correct vowel pronunciation and understanding of contractions. The students' voices were recorded and used for further modification along with using the Kenilworth's English Teaching Pronunciation that helped in ascertaining the interest level of students along with motivating them. All these activities were carried off one after the other and results and improvements were collected and analyzed by marking weekly progress report. Based on the improvement record, students were offered feedback on enhancing the flow of their pronunciation along with understanding the basic difference between English and Spanish pronunciation of words.

Spanish is a Roman language that is also a part of Indo-European language family. It is spoken by more than 400 million people across the world. Spanish has five pure vowels and five diphthongs while English has twelve pure vowel sounds and more than eight diphthongs. The length of vowel plays an important role in English language while pronouncing words while the length of vowels does not matter a lot in Spanish language and that is why Spanish speakers find it difficult to pronounce words correctly in English language. Spanish speakers often fail to identify the difference between vowel sounds in English language and thus fail to identify the pronunciation difference between words like fool/full, ship/sheep and cart/cut/cat. It is important to understand that vowel sounds are often produced differently in order to form correct pronunciation. At times, vowels need to be stretched in order to create a long sound while at times; vowels need to be pronounced without prolonging them. In order to correct the pronunciation of vowel sounds in order to pronounce words correctly, it is important to have vowel lessons strengthening the overall knowledge over the production of sounds. It is important to have theoretical understanding of sounds in order to gain a perspective over the importance and usefulness of speech sounds in pronouncing words correctly. The next part of the discussion presents an effective framework through which vowel sounds can be understood in a logical way.

There are ten basic vowel sounds that need to be understood in order to form an understanding over the production of vowel sounds. Vowels are produced with free passage of the air stream where articulators do not touch each other. There is no obstruction in the flow of air from lungs (Johnson, 2003). Much of the production of vowel sounds is dependent on the position and movement of lips and tongue. Different shapes and movements of lips, tongue and jaws produce different vowels sounds. The tongue can be moved up and down and also front and back and lips can be rounded or unrounded. English language has short and long vowels that change the whole art of pronouncing words in a correct manner (Ladefoged, 2000).

IV. Conclusions

Overall, it can be said that teaching English pronunciation to Spanish students requires great deal of dedication. It was found that initially, Spanish students faced issues in pronouncing vowels. However, they were offered lessons on vowels and contractions that helped in improving their pronunciation to an extent. By the end of two weeks, there were major signs of improvements in terms of pronouncing Basic English words in a correct manner. The voices of students were recorded that were further used to assess their level of improvement and that also helped in continuing the proposed framework. In between the learning period, few students showed signs of little interest based on their assumptions of English as a tough language. However, they were further motivated to understand English words and its pronunciation.

It can be believed that the overall task of enhancing the pronunciation level of Spanish students was a challenging one considering the fact that English and Spanish languages are very much different in terms of phonetics, phonology, diction. Though, the first part of the activity majorly concentrated on making students understand the difference in the pronunciation of vowels and use of contractions. The later stage concentrated on making students read in front of others. The voices of students were recorded and mistakes and loopholes in the pronunciation were illustrated and dealt with correction and modification of pronunciation. This further helped in enhancing the English pronunciation of Spanish students. The later learning phase also included the use of Kenilworth's English Teaching Pronunciation materials where two sets of questionnaires were offered to the students. The first set of questionnaires included five questions based on ascertaining the attitude and understanding over the English pronunciation. The second set of questionnaires was based on motivating students by recording their voices and making them listen along with rectifying pronunciation errors. These activities further helped in enhancing the overall pronunciation level of students along with making them feel comfortable.

V. Recommendations for Enhancing English Pronunciation

- In order to enhance the English pronunciation of Spanish speakers, it is important to offer great degree of insights on English alphabets and kinds of vowels and consonants. In English language, vowel sounds play an important role and thus need to be taught in a clear and systematic manner to help in correct pronunciation
- The movement of lips and tongue also plays an important role in the production of speech sounds and thus focus should be more on teaching the movement and shapes of lips and tongue to enhance the English pronunciation of Spanish speakers in a great way
- Students need to speak and write in English in order to have an idea over their pronunciation. This also helps in identifying major pronunciation loopholes that can be further worked on to enhance correct way of pronouncing English words
- It is important to record the voices of students and make them listen. This helps in understanding the overall degree of improvement and drawbacks that can be worked on through mutual support and cooperation
- It is important to have high degree of patience and understanding of students mindsets in terms of teaching them English pronunciation.

VI. Recommendations for Future Research

- The present research is based on teaching English pronunciation to Spanish speakers of a particular university. Future research should include Spanish students from different Universities in order to assess their basic understanding and improvement in the context of English pronunciation
- Future research should involve a separate study on movement of lips and tongue in enhancing the overall act of pronunciation. Furthermore, focus should be more on articulation and ways of determining the actual and correct mode of pronunciation
- Future research should also include an understanding over production of sounds in a thorough manner to make the study more concrete and purposeful. An understanding over the production of sounds has been highlighted in the current research also but future research should include more of it.

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