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A study to Evaluate the Problems Faced by the Students in Pronouncing English Consonants at Secondary Level in Tehsil Hazro, District Attock

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the problems faced by the students in pronouncing English consonants at secondary level in Tehsil Hazro District Attock. The focus on consonants was due to their mostly misarticulating among non- native speakers. It often caused from phonological interference, lack of phonetic knowledge and insufficient instructional support. The main objectives of this research were to explore the difficulties faced by the students in pronouncing English consonants, to highlight the factors that affect the pronunciation directly or indirectly and propose pedagogical interventions.

The research method of this study was mixed-method approach. Quantitative data was collected with the help of diagnostic pronunciation test which was administered to 120 students from four public boys' school in tehsil Hazro by using simple random sampling technique. The obtained data was tabulated by using percentage. The test was consist on minimal pairs and consonant clusters mostly created problems in Pakistani contexts, such as /θ/ vs. /t/, /j/ vs. /s/, and final consonant sounds. Qualitative data was collected through semi- structured interviews of 15 English teachers in order to gain insight classroom environment, teaching challenges and student's phonetic awareness.

Major findings and conclusion of the study were that native language had deep impact over the pronunciation of the second language learners, on the basis of the analysis of data it was concluded that mother tongue interference in learning and speaking a foreign language. It is

therefore recommended that the text books along with phonetic transcription may be incorporated in the student's and teacher's training programs.

Keywords: English Pronunciation, Consonant Sounds, Secondary School Students, Pronunciation Problems, Tehsil Hazro (District Attock)

Introduction:

Pronunciation proficiency plays key role for effective English communication yet is mostly neglected in Pakistani secondary school education where grammar and writing have primary position over speaking and phonetic accuracy. In areas like Hazro where multiple mother tongues like Hindko, Ghebi, Punjabi and Pashto may exacerbate learners' struggles with English consonants. This research seeks to highlight which English consonants are mispronounced by the students, analyze the linguistic and instructional factors contributing these errors.

The non English people all over the world are facing this problem badly and the sub-continent is also affected by this problem. (Umar Farooq 2005) English is an international language. English was introduced in sub-continent through 1832 act. In Pakistan English is taught as a second language Pakistani student's complaint against English at secondary level because of poor bases. There is a need to know their problems which create difficulties in pronouncing English consonants at secondary level so the topic was selected for the purpose. Pronunciation is a sound which we utter during conversation. It plays a key role in effective communication while mispronunciations can hinder comprehension and often cause to communication breakdowns (Gilakjani, 2016)

Research Questions

1. Which English consonant sounds are most problematic for secondary-level students in Tehsil Hazro, District Attock?
2. What linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors contribute to the mispronunciation of English consonants among these students?
3. How can phonetic training and pedagogical interventions help reduce pronunciation problems in secondary-level classrooms of Hazro?

Research Objectives

1. To identify the specific English consonant sounds that secondary school students in Tehsil Hazro mispronounce most frequently.
2. To investigate the influence of mother tongue interference, lack of phonetic awareness, and classroom environment on students' pronunciation problems.
3. To propose effective teaching strategies and curriculum reforms (such as phonetic transcription and IPA-based drills) for improving consonant pronunciation at the secondary level.

Literature Review

1. Importance of Pronunciation in language learning

Pronunciation is a basic aspect of communication and language learning as it has direct effect on comprehensibility and intelligibility. According to Derwing and Munro (2005) pronunciation is not only a primary skill but a main component of oral communication. Speakers with poor pronunciation are usually misunderstood regardless of their grammatical accuracy. Gilakjani (2016) says that correct pronunciation enhances self confidence and communicative competence among speakers. In Pakistan English is taught as a second language. Learners' lack of pronunciation proficiency creates hurdles in both academic success and social interaction specifically in higher education. In the Pakistani education system main focus on grammar and reading skills while oral proficiency has got less attention Rahman (2002). This imbalance shows gap in students' phonological development which is making difficult for learners to speak English consonants sounds. Jenkins (2000) presented the idea of Lingua franca Core focusing that consonant accuracy is key for international intelligibility. So, the research in consonant mispronunciation at secondary level is important for improving teaching outcomes in multilingual areas like Hazro.

2. Theoretical perspective on pronunciation

The study of pronunciation problems can be lies in within Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Interlanguage Theory. Lado (1957) suggested Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which highlights that differences between learners' first language and second language are the basic source for the pronunciation mistakes. On the other side Selinkers' (1972) Interlanguage Theory shows that learners generate transitional linguistic system which is influenced by their first language and insufficient second language knowledge. This hypothetical description defines why Pakistani learners make systematic mispronunciations of consonants like /θ/ as in think or /ð/ in this usually replacing them with /t/ or /d/.

Fleges' (1995) Speech Learning Model gives another context that learners' ability to perceive and produce second language sounds rely on how different they are from existing first language sounds. When English consonants fall together local language sounds like Urdu /t/ vs. English dental / / learners intend to mix them causing to continuous errors.

3. International studies on consonant pronunciation problems

Avery and Ehrlich (1992) denote that consonant clusters, final consonants and interdental fricatives are mostly creating problems for the students from Asian language backgrounds. For instance, Arabic learners feel consonant clusters challenging inserting vowels to simplify them Tahaine (2010). Similarly Japanese learners face problems with final consonants as /t/ and /d/ usually omitting them Yule (2010).

Bansal (1969) described that Indian Learners of English language replace retroflex consonants for English alveolar sounds causing to unintelligibility. These findings show that Pakistani learners affected by Urdu, Hindko, Pashto and Punjabi are likely to cope with parallel issues.

4. Pronunciation Problems in the Pakistani context

Mahboob (2003) highlighted that English is taught in Pakistan as a compulsory subject from early classes but no focus on pronunciation. Rahman (1990) suggested that the colonial legacy of English promoted a division between upper level institutions that focus on spoken English and public schools where oral practice is less focused. As a result, learners in rural schools such as those in Hazro are facing the issue of phonological competence.

Empirical studies verify that Pakistani learners are facing problem with specific consonants. Jabeen and Kazemian (2015) researched that Urdu speaking learners mispronounce interdental sounds like /θ/, /ð/ and substitute them with dental or alveolar plosives as /t/, /d/. Nawaz and Akram (2014) found that Punjabi speaking learners struggle with final consonants as /k/ and /g/ usually replace them with glottal stops. On the other hand Pashto speakers face difficulty for making difference between voiced and voiceless pairs such as /p/ and /b/ Ali and Akbar (2010). These findings are harmonized with the current study's focus on consonant clusters and problematic contrasts in the tehsil Hazro.

5. Factors Affecting Pronunciation at the Secondary Level

Different interrelated factors have deep affect on Pakistani learners' pronunciation are as under:

Mother Language Interference:

Mother language strongly influences second language pronunciation. Odlin (1989) said that transfer from L1 is impossible and Pakistani learners' multiple L1s make complex the acquisition of English consonants.

Lack of Phonetic Training:

There is a lack of training in phonetics and phonology for the teachers at the secondary level. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) focus that teachers' less awareness of pronunciation pedagogy cause in students depend on rote memorization rather than accurate articulation.

Classroom Environment:

Overcrowded classes and limited opportunities for oral practice further increase the issue. As Ali and Sultana (2016) explain secondary classrooms seldom provide interactive activities like minimal pair drills.

Central method in pronunciation pedagogy is the integration of minimal pairs, phonetic transcription and communicative practice as suggested by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010). Minimal pair drills for example *ship* vs. *sip*, *bat* vs. *pat* permit learners to perceive and articulate contrasts between problematic consonant sounds. For Phonetic transcription the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) assists learners visualize sound differences that may not exist in their First language.

Psychological Factors:

Horwitz (2001) highlighted that speakers become uncomfortable while speaking English in front of classmate because of being ridicule which create hurdles in pronunciation practice.

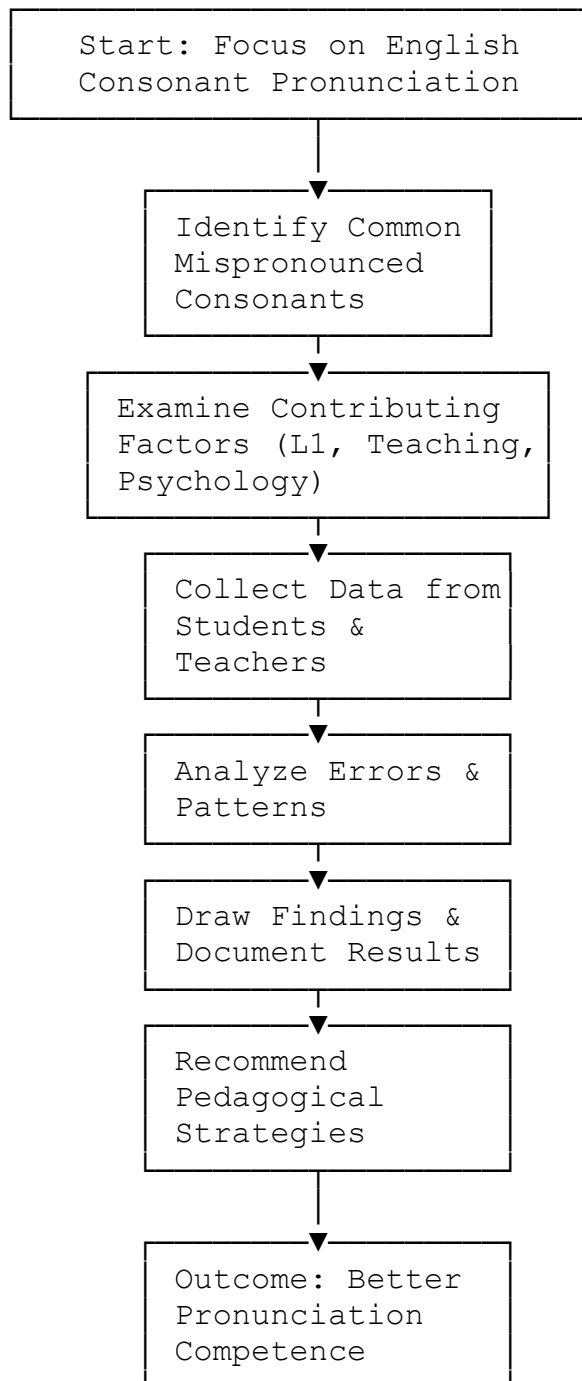
The literature review highlights a multi layer approach for improving consonant pronunciation, focusing on intelligibility through Lingua franca Core, by using minimal pairs and International Phonetic Alphabet based transcription, attempting technology based tools, investing in teacher training, enhancing communicative activities and revising curricula. Altogether, these hurdles hold promise for addressing the persistent problems faced by Pakistani learners at the secondary level specifically in linguistically diverse regions as Tehsil Hazro.

Gaps in Existing Research

Former studies draw attention to pronunciation problems in Pakistan but few have emphasized especially on secondary level learners in rural multilingual areas. Research is either urban based or made at the university level Mahboob (2003) Jabeen and Kazemian (2015). In addition, there is little research that combines both students' performances through diagnostic tests and teachers' perspectives through interviews. The present study so, fills a critical gap by focusing on Hazro where Punjabi, Hindko, Urdu and Pashto interrelate to shape learners' consonant pronunciation. To cope with this gap the present research used several tools including a diagnostic test, classroom observations, teacher interviews and supplementary field notes (Appendices A-D attached). These instruments confirmed triangulation of data, validating the findings and aligning them with the issues highlighted in the reviewed literature

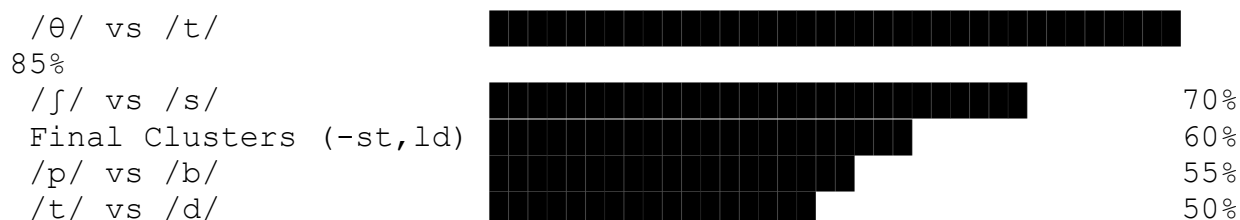
The following flow chart along with bar graph will describe a brief picture of the research article:

Flowchart



◆ Bar Graph (Same Style – Textual Representation)

Mispronounced Consonants (% of Students)



The flowchart (Figure 1) illustrates the research design in a stepwise manner, beginning with the identification of pronunciation problems in English consonants, moving through the examination of contributing factors and data collection, and culminating in findings and pedagogical recommendations aimed at improving students' phonetic competence. Complementing this, the bar graph (Figure 2) visually presents the most frequently mispronounced consonant contrasts and clusters among Hazro students, with /θ/ vs /t/ and /ʃ/ vs /s/ being the most problematic. Together, these visuals provide both a procedural overview of the study and empirical evidence of the most critical pronunciation difficulties, thereby reinforcing the central arguments of the research.

Findings and Recommendations

Findings

The findings of this study show that secondary level learners in Tehsil Hazro face considerable challenges in pronouncing English consonants with errors occurring systematically rather than randomly. Diagnostic test results highlighted that students struggled especially with sounds that function differently in their mother tongues like Hindko, Pashto, Punjabi, Urdu and Ghebi. For example consonants such as /p/, /b/, /t/, /θ/, /s/ and /ʃ/ were consistently confusing while final consonant clusters like -st in best or -ld in cold were either exempted or simplified. These patterns are causing of phonological interference where students replace English sounds with those nearest in their first language phonemic inventory. Observational data like interviews with teachers further showed that mother tongue interference braced with limited classroom exposure to spoken English and reinforced these mispronunciations over time. Another key finding is the lack of systematic pronunciation teaching, teachers explained that they prioritized grammar, reading comprehension and writing in preparation for board examinations while less focus on phonetic training. This institutional slackness was reflected in students' low phonetic awareness many students were unaware with the International Phonetic Alphabet and had no concept of how sounds are produced in articulation organs. In addition, socioeconomic differences caused these difficulties as students from under resourced schools limited access to multimedia tools, audio input, or supplementary pronunciation exercises. Apart from the

technical articulation issues the study found a psychological dimension that students felt embarrassment when asked to pronounce words aloud, fear of being ridicule by peers, which further led to limited practice. Jointly, these findings demonstrate that pronunciation problems are not merely linguistic but are rooted in a broader nexus of linguistic, socio cultural, pedagogical and psychological factors. These factors highlight that while students display eagerness to learn English, the structural and instructional environment does not equip them with adequate tools to master consonant sounds causing in persistent errors that hamper intelligibility and confidence in oral communication.

Recommendations

The above mentioned findings reflect that the study recommends a multi faceted approach that fulfils both linguistic deficits and instructional shortcomings to improve consonant pronunciation at the secondary level. First, at the curricular level phonetic transcription must be included explicitly into English textbooks along with IPA symbols and contextualized pronunciation drills that point out consonants which are the most problematic for Pakistani learners. This coordinates with Rahman (2002) and Jenkins (2002) argue for intelligibility that focused on instruction rather than unachievable like native speakers' pronunciation. Teachers should be trained to use minimal pairs for example pat vs. bat, *ship* vs. sip and phonetic transcription to make students aware to slight sound contrasts. On the other side pedagogical level teachers need professional development training session in phonetics and pronunciation pedagogy, enabling them to model sounds accurately and provide corrective feedback without stigmatizing learners. Ali and Akbar (2010) highlight teachers' competence in phonology is crucial for effective classroom delivery. Technology enhanced learning can further strengthen practice by using low cost resources such as mobile apps, pronunciation software and audiovisual recordings allow students to hear and repeat accurate models outside the classroom caused less dependence on teacher input alone. During teaching in classroom pronunciation should not be left over as a mechanical drill but developed into communicative tasks such as debates, role plays, peer dialogues so students practice become meaningful in consonant articulation contexts as proposed by Levis (2005). Furthermore, teachers should adopt positive reinforcement strategies to lessen students' nervousness and humiliation, creating an environment where practicing aloud is normalized rather than mocked. At the policy level, examination boards must modify assessment frameworks to comprise oral competence along with written skills in so doing motivate schools and teachers to prioritize pronunciation. As a final point, collaboration with parents and community is crucial while awareness session can develop supportive home environments where learners are motivated to practice English pronunciation without tension. By making reforms in curriculum, teacher training, technological support, communicative practice and systematic changes in assessment, the study recommends a comprehensive roadmap that not only solves the issue of consonant mispronunciation but also improves students' overall communicative competence. Such steps will make the learners especially from

Hazro and adjacent areas, capable to fulfill the requirements of English as a global lingua franca without facing the pronunciation problems.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Diagnostic Pronunciation Test

- A set of minimal pairs and consonant clusters administered to 120 students (e.g., *ship/sip, bat/pat, think/tink, best/bes*).
- Focused on problematic consonants and final consonant sounds common in Pakistani learners' errors.

Appendix B – Observation Checklist

- Classroom and playground observation tool to note frequency and accuracy of English consonant pronunciation.
- Categories: substitution errors, deletion of consonants, cluster reduction, and L1 influence.

Appendix C – Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Teachers)

- Questions for 15 English teachers, exploring classroom practices, challenges in teaching pronunciation, and awareness of phonetics.
- Example: "Which consonant sounds do your students mispronounce most often?"

Appendix D – Student Feedback Sheet

- Brief reflection tool where students reported their difficulties, embarrassment factors, and strategies used to practice consonant sounds.

Appendix E – Field Notes / Other Sources

- Researcher's notes on classroom environment, student reactions during pronunciation activities, and informal discussions with peers and parents.