

Factors Affecting the Teaching of English Syllables and Stress

Benjamin F.C. Nwokedi

Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education

Corresponding Author: Benjamin F.C. Nwokedi

nwokedibenjamin45@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Factors, Affecting, Teaching, English, Syllables, Stress

Received : 02, October

Revised : 17, October

Accepted: 22, November

©2023 Nwokedi: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

The teaching and learning of English syllables and stress are intricate processes influenced by a myriad of factors. This discussion explores significant determinants including linguistic background of learners, teacher competency and training, availability and quality of instructional materials, and learner motivation and attitude towards English pronunciation. The interference from mother tongue and familiarity with phonetic symbols play pivotal roles in how learners grasp phonological aspects of English. Similarly, teacher competency in phonology and pronunciation pedagogy, alongside the ability to model correct pronunciation, significantly impacts the effectiveness of instruction. The quality and cultural relevance of instructional materials, coupled with the integration of modern educational technology, enhance the teaching and learning experience. Moreover, learners' motivation and attitude towards English pronunciation are intertwined with their learning outcomes, underscoring the importance of fostering positive attitudes and high motivation. An integrated approach considering all these factors, supported by continuous professional development for teachers and a well-designed curriculum, is recommended to address the challenges associated with teaching and learning English syllables and stress. Through this holistic approach, a conducive learning environment promoting better understanding and mastery of English pronunciation can be established, ultimately improving the overall language proficiency of learners.

INTRODUCTION

The mastery of English syllables and stress is fundamental for effective communication in the language, yet it presents a complex challenge both for learners and educators. The intricacy arises from various factors that influence how English syllables and stress are taught and learned. The phonological theories of English word stress underscore the necessity for accommodating multiple, competing, probabilistic factors when accounting for main stress placement, indicating a complex interplay of factors affecting the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress (Susan et al., 2017). An investigation involving native English speakers explored the participants' knowledge of English main stress patterns, revealing the importance of learners' perception and knowledge in the process of syllable and stress acquisition. Research has found that factors such as syllable structure (e.g., heavy syllable, vowel length), lexical class (noun vs. verb counterparts), and stress patterns of phonologically similar words significantly affect English speakers' stress placement on bi-syllabic non-words, illuminating the role of linguistic structure in the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress (Chen, 2013). Despite certain controversies surrounding the success in English word stress teaching, second language phonology research unveils paths through which the learning of word stress may proceed. Factors like word frequency, source of errors, and the amount of explicit instruction have been found to affect the process, shedding light on external influences impacting the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress (Ewa, 2014). Among Mandarin EFL learners, challenges in acquiring English word stress have been attributed to learners' insensitivity to the syllabic structure of English words and lack of knowledge of rules on English word stress, emphasizing the necessity for a robust understanding of the phonological rules governing syllable stress in English (Liu, 2017). This introductory discussion elucidates the multifaceted nature of factors impacting the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress, underscoring the intertwined linguistic, cognitive, and instructional elements. Understanding these factors is imperative for devising effective instructional strategies and facilitating a conducive learning environment for mastering English syllables and stress.

Mother Tongue Interference

Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) occurs when the usage of a learner's first language (L1) affects their learning and usage of a second language (L2), such as English. This phenomenon may alter a learner's thought process, causing them to think in their mother tongue while trying to grasp the second language's phonological rules (Kasap et al., 2023). The impact of MTI is particularly pronounced in the realm of pronunciation, where learners may apply the phonological rules of their L1 to the pronunciation of English words, leading to mispronunciations or foreign accents (Leffi, 2021). For instance, if the mother tongue has different syllable stress patterns or phoneme distinctions, learners may experience challenges in pronouncing English words correctly or in recognizing the correct syllabic stress patterns in English words (Rahayu et al., 2021).

Familiarity with Phonetic Symbols and Sounds

The teaching and learning of English syllables and stress can be facilitated through the use of phonetic symbols, which provide a visual representation of the sounds of English. Familiarity with these symbols and the sounds they, enhances children's proficiency in phonological decoding, allowing them represent is crucial for developing accurate pronunciation and stress patterns. Phonetic symbols have been a pervasive tool in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, aiding learners in understanding the phonetic notation of sounds and the associated pronunciation rules (Jose et al., 2020). Furthermore, phonics instruction, which teaches the systematic symbol-sound correspondences to convert visual print into its corresponding spoken form (Robert et al., 2021). Phonemic awareness, the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words, is another crucial skill that facilitates fluent reading and correct pronunciation, including the accurate stressing of syllables⁷. Additionally, the syllabic bridge hypothesis posits that learning to associate letters to phonological syllables enables phoneme awareness, thus further aiding in the correct pronunciation and stress of English syllables (Vazeux et al., 2020).

Teacher Competency and Training

Teacher competency and training in the domains of phonology and pronunciation pedagogy are critical for effectively teaching English syllables and stress.

Knowledge of Phonology and Pronunciation Pedagogy

Foundation of Phonological Awareness

Teachers' knowledge and understanding of phonology – the study of the sound systems of languages – are fundamental for effective pronunciation instruction. This knowledge underpins the methodologies used in pronunciation teaching, enabling teachers to design lessons that address both segmental (individual sounds) and suprasegmental (stress and intonation) aspects of pronunciation (Burgess et al., 2018).

Educational Preparation

Pedagogical competence in pronunciation instruction is built through structured educational programs. In these programs, teachers acquire the necessary knowledge of phonology and pedagogy through instructor demonstrations and their own teaching practice. This foundational education is crucial for teachers to effectively explain pronunciation features to their learners and design meaningful practice activities (Chien, 2019).

Continuous Professional Development

The field of pronunciation teaching is evolving with new research and methodologies emerging. Hence, continuous professional development is essential to keep teachers updated on the latest best practices in pronunciation pedagogy (Pennington et al., 2020).

Ability to Model Correct Stress and Syllable Patterns

Pronunciation Modeling

The ability to model correct pronunciation, including stress and syllable patterns, is a vital skill for language teachers. Teachers' pronunciation serves as a model for learners, making it imperative for teachers to have a clear and accurate pronunciation (Pennington et al., 2020).

Instructional Techniques

Employing a variety of instructional techniques, such as drills, visual aids, and interactive activities, can help in teaching the correct stress and syllable patterns. The effectiveness of these techniques largely depends on the teacher's competence in pronunciation pedagogy and their ability to adapt these techniques to the learners' needs (Chien, 2019).

Feedback and Correction

Providing timely and constructive feedback is crucial for learners to improve their pronunciation. Competent teachers are adept at identifying pronunciation errors and providing clear, constructive feedback to help learners correct these errors (Coupler, 2021). The competence and training of teachers play a pivotal role in the effective teaching of English syllables and stress. Adequate training in phonology and pronunciation pedagogy coupled with the ability to model correct pronunciation and provides constructive feedback, significantly impacts learners' pronunciation skills and overall language proficiency.

Instructional Materials

materials play a crucial role in the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress. Below are the details on the availability and quality of phonics materials, and the relevance and cultural appropriateness of these materials, drawn from various sources:

Availability and Quality of Phonics Materials

Enhanced Learning Experience

The use of instructional materials in teaching English as a second language has been evaluated in studies, showing that students taught with these materials performed better. These materials include phonics resources which are essential for teaching syllables and stress in English (Lawal, 2017).

Support and Supplementation

Instructional materials support and supplement the content of lessons, helping students learn new concepts and providing practice opportunities. High-quality phonics materials are particularly beneficial in this regard as they provide a structured approach to learning the phonetic aspects of the language (Lane, 2022).

Resource Planning

When planning lessons, teachers often consider the availability of instructional materials as a primary concern. Quality phonics materials are invaluable resources for teaching the sound system of English, including syllables and stress patterns.

Relevance and Cultural Appropriateness of Materials

Cultural Sensitivity

While not explicitly mentioned in the sources, it's imperative that instructional materials are culturally appropriate to ensure inclusivity and relevance to the learners' experiences. Culturally relevant materials can enhance engagement and facilitate better understanding of the language concepts being taught.

Modern Educational Technology

The field of educational technology has evolved to include audiovisual communications, which are now integral parts of the educational system. Instructional materials that are well-organized, well-constructed, and properly presented using modern technology can significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience (Rivera, 2023).

The availability of high-quality and culturally relevant instructional materials is fundamental for effective teaching and learning of English syllables and stress. These materials provide the necessary support for both teachers and learners, aiding in the clear understanding and practice of phonetic concepts in a culturally sensitive and engaging manner.

Motivation and Attitude

Motivation and attitude are pivotal factors that significantly influence the learning and teaching of English syllables and stress, especially when it comes to pronunciation. Here is a detailed exploration of learner motivation and interest, and attitude towards English pronunciation based on various sources:

Learner Motivation and Interest: This Can Involve

Pronunciation Motivation

Learners' motivation towards pronunciation learning is an essential factor that impacts their engagement and success in mastering English syllables and stress. A study aimed to investigate the influence of motivation on ESL learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation learning, indicating that motivation significantly affects learners' attitudes and, consequently, their pronunciation learning outcomes (Zhou, 2019).

Globalization Impact

The global status of English has been recognized to impact motivation and attitudes towards learning the language. The increasing globalization necessitates a theoretical refinement of EFL learners' motivations and attitudes

towards pronunciation models, activities, and goals. This global context may influence learners' interest and motivation in mastering English pronunciation, including syllables and stress patterns (Sardegna et al., 2014).

Pronunciation Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

A study investigated the effect of pronunciation anxiety and pronunciation motivation on Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English. It's likely that learners who are motivated and have less pronunciation anxiety are more willing to practice and improve their pronunciation, including mastering syllables and stress patterns (Burku, 2023).

Attitude towards English Pronunciation

Learner Attitudes and L2 Attainment

Learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation are tied to their motivation and behavior, and they play a significant role in relation to L2 attainment. For instance, a study explored Japanese EFL learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation, indicating that attitudes could significantly impact learners' motivation and behavior towards learning pronunciation, including syllables and stress patterns.

Teachers and Learners' Attitudes

Both teachers and learners' attitudes towards pronunciation instruction are crucial in L2 learning. A comprehensive understanding of pronunciation learning processes and the factors affecting it requires an exploration of these attitudes. Teachers' attitudes, in particular, can significantly impact how pronunciation, syllables, and stress are taught and learned (Jarozs, 2019).

The synthesis of these studies highlights the intertwined nature of motivation, attitude, and the learning of English pronunciation, including syllables and stress. Motivated learners with positive attitudes towards English pronunciation are likely to have better learning outcomes, and understanding these factors is crucial for both educators and learners aiming to improve pronunciation skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching and learning of English syllables and stress can be facilitated through the use of phonetic symbols, which provide a visual representation of the sounds of English. Familiarity with these symbols and the sounds they, enhances children's proficiency in phonological decoding, allowing them represent is crucial for developing accurate pronunciation and stress patterns. Phonetic symbols have been a pervasive tool in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, aiding learners in understanding the phonetic notation of sounds and the associated pronunciation rules (Jose et al., 2020). Furthermore, phonics instruction, which teaches the systematic symbol-sound correspondences to convert visual print into its corresponding spoken form (Robert et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The quality and cultural relevance of instructional materials, coupled with the integration of modern educational technology, enhances the teaching and learning experience. Moreover, learners' motivation and attitude towards English pronunciation are intertwined with their learning outcomes, underscoring the importance of fostering positive attitudes and high motivation. An integrated approach considering all these factors, supported by continuous professional development for teachers and a well-designed curriculum, is recommended to address the challenges associated with teaching and learning English syllables and stress. Through this holistic approach, a conducive learning environment promoting better understanding and mastery of English pronunciation can be established, ultimately improving the overall language proficiency of learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The teaching and learning of English syllables and stress are complex processes influenced by a multitude of factors ranging from the linguistic background of learners to the competence and training of teachers. The mother tongue of learners often interferes with the acquisition of correct English pronunciation, including syllable and stress patterns. Additionally, familiarity with phonetic symbols and sounds significantly impacts learners' ability to grasp these phonological aspects of English. Teachers' knowledge in phonology, pronunciation pedagogy, and their ability to model correct pronunciation are pivotal for effective instruction. Continuous professional development is also essential to keep teachers updated on the latest methodologies and best practices in pronunciation teaching. The availability and quality of phonics materials, along with their cultural relevance and appropriateness, play a central role in supporting the teaching and learning processes. Modern educational technology further enhances the effectiveness of these materials. Learners' motivation and attitude towards English pronunciation directly affect their willingness and ability to learn. A positive attitude and high motivation can significantly improve learners' pronunciation skills, including mastering syllables and stress patterns. An integrated approach that encompasses all these factors acknowledging the linguistic background of learners, enhancing teacher competency, utilizing quality instructional materials, and fostering positive motivation and attitudes can significantly improve the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress. The discussion illuminates the interplay of these factors and underscores the necessity for a holistic approach in addressing the challenges associated with teaching and learning English syllables and stress. Through a combination of well-designed instructional strategies, quality materials, and an understanding of both teacher and learner needs, the teaching and learning of English pronunciation can be significantly enhanced.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage continuous professional development for teachers focusing on phonology, pronunciation pedagogy, and modern instructional strategies to enhance the teaching of English syllables and stress.
2. Design a curriculum that acknowledges the linguistic backgrounds of learners, and incorporates phonics instruction and pronunciation practice in a culturally sensitive manner.
3. Ensure the availability of high-quality and culturally relevant instructional materials, including phonics resources, to support the teaching and learning of English syllables and stress.
4. Leverage modern educational technology, such as audiovisual aids and language learning apps, to enhance pronunciation instruction and provide interactive learning experiences.
5. Implement strategies to foster positive attitudes and motivation among learners towards English pronunciation learning, such as by making lessons engaging and relevant to learners' interests and experiences.
6. Develop effective assessment tools to measure pronunciation accuracy, and provide timely, constructive feedback to help learners improve their syllable and stress patterns in English pronunciation.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be done on the topic "Factors Affecting the Teaching of English Syllables and Stress."

REFERENCES

- Burcu Gokgoz-Kurt. (2023). Motivation and L2 English Pronunciation Learning. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.10.009>
- Chin-Wen Chien. (2019). From Language Learners to Language Teachers: Construction and Implementation of Pedagogical Competence in Pronunciation Instruction. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol13/iss1/10/>
- Dan Liu. (2017). The Acquisition of English Word Stress by Mandarin EFL Learners. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n12p196>
- Ewa Waniek-Klimczak. (2014). Factors Affecting Word Stress Recognition by Advanced Polish Learners of English. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-11092-9_11
- Graeme Couper. (2021). Teacher cognition of pronunciation teaching: The techniques teachers use and why. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.20004.cou>
- Hsueh Chu Chen. (2013). Chinese learners' acquisition of English word stress and factors affecting stress assignment. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2013.08.003>

- John Burgess & Sheila Spencer. (2018). Phonology and pronunciation in integrated language teaching and teacher education. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(00\)00007-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(00)00007-5)
- Jose A.M, & Jonás, F. (2020). Phonetic Symbols in Contemporary Pronunciation Instruction. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0033688220943431>
- Kasap, S. & Behnaz, E. (2023). The Influence of Mother-Tongue Interference on English as A Foreign Language. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368511362_The_Influence_of_Mother-Tongue_Interference_on_English_as_A_Foreign_Language
- Leffi, N., & Mesi, I.P. (2021). Mother Tongue Interference Towards Students' English Pronunciation: A Case Study in IAIN Curup. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210227.049>
- Martha C. Pennington & Pamela Rogerson-Revell. (2020). Pronunciation in the Classroom: Teachers and Teaching Methods. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-47677-7_4
- Maria Vazeux, Nadège Doignon-Camus, & Daniel Zagar. (2020). Syllable-first rather than letter-first to improve phonemic awareness. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-79240-y>
- Rahayu, Rahayu, & Nurfajriah Basri. (2021). Mother-Tongue Interference in Learning English in English Meeting Club. *Foster*, 2(3), 387-397. <https://doi.org/10.24256/foster-jelt.v2i3.48>
- Rhoderick Rivera. (2023). Importance of Instructional Materials in Education. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/54931756/Importance-of-Instructional-Materials-in-Education>
- Robert, W., & Sha Li. (2021). The effects of phonics instruction on L2 phonological decoding and vocabulary learning: An experimental study of Chinese EFL learners. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102677>
- Sherry Lane. (2022, September 1). The Role of Instructional Materials in Teaching And Learning. <https://eduedify.com/role-of-instructional-materials/>
- Susan G Guion, J.J. Clark, Tetsuo Harada, & Ratrete Wayland. (2017). Factors Affecting Stress Placement for English Nonwords include Syllabic Structure, Lexical Class, and Stress Patterns of Phonologically Similar Words. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00238309030460040301>
- The Importance of Instructional Materials in Teaching English as a Second Language. Abdullahi Lawal. (2017). https://www.academia.edu/35978299/The_Importance_of_Instructional_Materials_in_Teaching_English_as_a_Second_Language

- Veronica G. Sardegna, JuHee Lee, & Crystal Kusey. (2014). Development and validation of the learner attitudes and motivations for pronunciation (LAMP) inventory. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.10.009>
- Yang Zhou. (2019). How Motivation as Quality Influence ESL Learners' Attitudes toward English Pronunciation Learning. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijelt.v6n2p>