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Enhancing Pronunciation Skills through the Eclectic Method in University-Level English Teaching

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the eclectic approach on enhancing pronunciation skills in university-level English learners, focusing on both segmental and suprasegmental features. Employing a quasi-experimental design, students were divided into experimental and control groups, with the experimental group receiving instruction through varied techniques, including minimal pairs, shadowing, intonation practice, role-play, and technology integration. Results revealed significant improvements in pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and communication confidence among students in the experimental group. Qualitative feedback indicated high student engagement and satisfaction, underscoring the flexibility and comprehensiveness of the eclectic approach. These findings highlight the potential of integrating eclectic pronunciation techniques into university curricula to meet diverse linguistic needs and improve overall communicative competence. Recommendations for further research include examining long-term impacts and exploring the role of digital tools in eclectic pronunciation teaching.

Keywords; Eclectic approach, Pronunciation instruction, University-level English, Segmental and suprasegmental features, Communicative competence

Introduction

1. Background

Pronunciation is a crucial component of English language competency, directly influencing learners' ability to communicate effectively and be understood in academic, professional, and social contexts. For university-level students, particularly those studying English as a second or foreign language, accurate pronunciation is essential for academic presentations, discussions, and other spoken interactions that demand both clarity and intelligibility. However, achieving proficiency in pronunciation can be challenging, as it requires learners to master both segmental aspects (such as individual sounds) and suprasegmental features (like stress, rhythm, and intonation), which are often vastly different from those in their native languages. Many university students encounter persistent difficulties in these areas, leading to reduced confidence and frequent communication breakdowns (Bouchhioua, 2017; Brett, 2020).

2. Literature Review



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Recent studies have explored various approaches to improving pronunciation skills, from communicative methods to audio-lingual techniques, yet each method on its own has limitations in addressing the wide-ranging needs of diverse student populations. The eclectic approach, which combines multiple teaching methods, has gained attention as an adaptable and effective alternative. This approach allows educators to draw on elements of different methods to suit specific linguistic and instructional contexts, making it particularly suitable for pronunciation teaching. Research shows that eclectic methods can help students make significant gains in both accuracy and fluency, as they offer flexibility and adaptability that single-method approaches often lack (Sooria & Prabu, 2023; Valledor et al., 2023). Studies have demonstrated that students respond positively to varied techniques, as these allow them to tackle specific pronunciation challenges through repetitive drills, meaningful communication, and phonetic training (Ghafar, Rahmam, & Abd, 2023; Saidovich & Abduvaliyevna, 2024).

3. Problem Identification

Despite the proven advantages of eclecticism, many pronunciation programs still rely on traditional, singular methodologies, which may fall short of meeting the diverse needs of university students. These programs often lack the adaptability required to address individual pronunciation challenges, particularly in heterogeneous classrooms where students come from various linguistic backgrounds. Current teaching methods may also lack a comprehensive focus on both segmental and suprasegmental aspects, limiting students' ability to develop a well-rounded pronunciation skill set. As a result, there is a pressing need for a more flexible and comprehensive approach to pronunciation instruction in university-level English programs (Azzahra, 2022; Liao, 1996).

4. Study Objectives and Hypothesis

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the eclectic method in enhancing university students' pronunciation skills, particularly focusing on segmental and suprasegmental features. The primary objective is to assess whether the eclectic approach, through a combination of drilling, communicative exercises, phonetic transcription, and real-life dialogue practice, can significantly improve students' pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and communication confidence. The hypothesis is that the eclectic method will lead to measurable improvements in pronunciation skills, empowering students to communicate more confidently and effectively in English (Tabassum, 2018; Kara, 2023).

Literature Review

1. Theories Supporting Eclecticism

Eclectic teaching in language instruction draws upon a combination of methods, each of which contributes unique benefits to pronunciation training. **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** is a foundational theory in eclectic pronunciation teaching, emphasizing meaningful interaction and real-life communication as the primary modes for language learning. This approach values fluency and functional use of language over strict accuracy, encouraging students to practice pronunciation in authentic, context-rich environments (Liao, 1996). By incorporating communicative elements, eclectic methods allow students to develop their pronunciation skills in practical situations, fostering a naturalistic speech rhythm and confidence in using spoken English.

The **Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)** also plays a significant role in eclectic pronunciation instruction. This method relies on repetitive drills and pattern practice to reinforce specific pronunciation features. Through exercises such as minimal pairs, ALM focuses on accuracy at the segmental level, helping students distinguish and master sounds that are challenging due to interference from their native languages. While ALM on its own may be too rigid to meet diverse learner needs, it is highly effective when used in conjunction with communicative activities, as it builds a foundation for accurate sound production (Tabassum, 2018).

Finally, **Direct Methods for Pronunciation** provide targeted instruction on sound articulation, stress patterns, and intonation. By focusing directly on pronunciation rules and using techniques like phonetic transcription, direct methods equip learners with a conscious understanding of English sounds, which is especially beneficial for adult learners who benefit from explicit knowledge of pronunciation mechanics (Brett, 2020). Eclectic pronunciation



teaching integrates direct methods with CLT and ALM, creating a balanced, adaptable approach that improves accuracy, fluency, and expressiveness in spoken English (Sooria & Prabu, 2023).

2. Advantages of Eclectic Pronunciation Techniques

Research supports the use of eclectic pronunciation techniques for their ability to meet individual learner needs, an essential consideration in diverse university settings. By combining various methods, eclectic teaching can address both segmental (individual sounds) and suprasegmental (intonation, rhythm) features of pronunciation, providing students with a comprehensive toolkit. Studies have shown that students respond positively to this flexibility; for instance, using CLT in conjunction with direct phonetic instruction allows students to gain fluency in spontaneous speech while also working on the accuracy of specific sounds through repetitive practice (Ghafar et al., 2023).

Eclectic methods also offer the benefit of **adaptability**. University students often come from varied linguistic backgrounds, each bringing unique pronunciation challenges influenced by their native language phonology. With an eclectic approach, instructors can tailor exercises to address these specific needs, using a mix of drills, phonetic transcription, and communicative dialogue that adapts to each student's progress and difficulties. This flexibility has been shown to foster greater engagement and improvement in students, as they are able to work on particular areas that may not be covered in rigid, single-method approaches (Valledor et al., 2023).

Additionally, eclectic techniques can be adapted to various teaching resources and contexts. By incorporating both traditional and digital tools, such as pronunciation apps, audio recordings, and video simulations, eclectic pronunciation teaching becomes a sustainable and resourceful approach. Studies suggest that this variety not only enriches learning but also enhances motivation, as students experience dynamic, interactive lessons that maintain their interest and engagement (Ajie, Sopian, & Khalid, 2024).

3. Prior Applications in Higher Education

The eclectic approach has been successfully applied in various higher education settings to improve pronunciation skills, particularly in university-level English programs. A case study from a Turkish university demonstrated that integrating communicative activities with audio-lingual drills and phonetic transcription exercises led to significant improvements in students' pronunciation accuracy and fluency. By combining these methods, instructors were able to address both accuracy and conversational fluency, which are essential for students' academic and professional interactions (Kırkgöz, 2008).

Similarly, research conducted at a Saudi Arabian university highlighted the effectiveness of eclectic methods in an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course for medical students. In this case, instructors incorporated role-plays, minimal pair drills, and phonetic instruction to help students navigate medical terminology with correct pronunciation. The study found that the eclectic approach improved both confidence and pronunciation accuracy, as students could practice pronunciation within the specific context of their field, making learning more relevant and application-based (Saidovich & Abduvaliyevna, 2024).

A recent review in Spain synthesized findings from multiple studies on eclectic teaching and concluded that this approach significantly enhances pronunciation skills across varied university contexts. This synthesis noted that students not only improved their pronunciation but also reported higher levels of confidence and enjoyment in learning, indicating that eclectic methods provide both practical and motivational benefits (Valledor et al., 2023).

These applications underscore the versatility of the eclectic approach and its effectiveness in higher education, where students benefit from a pronunciation instruction model that accommodates their diverse linguistic needs and academic goals.

Methodology

1. Research Design



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This study employed a **quasi-experimental design** to assess the effectiveness of the eclectic approach in improving university students' pronunciation skills. Participants were divided into two groups: an **experimental group**, which received pronunciation instruction through eclectic techniques, and a **control group**, which received traditional pronunciation instruction using a single-method approach (e.g., the audio-lingual method). Both groups were given equal instruction time, with pre- and post-tests administered to measure changes in pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and communication confidence. The quasi-experimental design enabled comparison between the eclectic and traditional approaches without fully randomized participant assignment, which was impractical due to course requirements.

2. Participants

The study included **60 university-level students** from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program, aged **18 to 24**, with an average age of 20. Participants were drawn from varied linguistic backgrounds, including native speakers of Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi, representing common L1 groups in the institution. All participants were intermediate or upper-intermediate in English proficiency, with levels verified through a standardized placement test at the beginning of the semester. This diverse sample enabled the study to assess the effectiveness of eclectic techniques across a range of linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels.

3. Eclectic Techniques Used

The experimental group was taught using a range of eclectic techniques to address segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features. The methods used were:

- **Minimal Pairs:** Students practiced distinguishing and producing pairs of similar sounds, such as /f/ vs. /s/ and /ɪ/ vs. /i:/, to improve accuracy in segmental pronunciation.
- **Shadowing:** Participants listened to and repeated native-speaker recordings, focusing on mimicking both pronunciation and intonation in real-time.
- **Intonation Practice:** This involved exercises that emphasized natural sentence intonation, stress patterns, and rhythm, helping students to improve the expressiveness of their spoken English.
- **Role-Play:** Students engaged in dialogue-based activities to practice pronunciation in context, focusing on fluency and intelligibility in conversational settings.
- **Technology Integration:** Mobile applications and software, such as *ELSA Speak* and *Praat*, were used to provide instant feedback on pronunciation accuracy. Audio recordings allowed students to listen to their progress and compare it with native examples.

These techniques provided a comprehensive and adaptable approach, accommodating various pronunciation needs within the experimental group.

4. Data Collection and Tools

Data collection was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to capture changes in pronunciation and participants' perceptions of the eclectic approach. The tools used included:

- **Pre- and Post-Tests:** A standardized pronunciation assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the study to both control and experimental groups. Tests measured segmental accuracy, intonation, and overall fluency.
- **Audio Recordings:** Students recorded themselves reading a scripted passage at the start and end of the study. These recordings were analyzed to track changes in pronunciation accuracy and fluency over time.



- **Feedback Forms:** Participants in the experimental group completed a feedback form at the end of the study, providing qualitative insights into their learning experiences, perceived improvements, and attitudes toward the eclectic approach.

For analysis, audio data was processed using **Praat**, a software program for phonetic analysis, to measure accuracy in sound production and analyze intonation patterns. Pronunciation applications also tracked students' individual progress and identified specific areas for improvement throughout the study.

5. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both **quantitative and qualitative methods** to assess the impact of eclectic pronunciation techniques.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical tests, including paired sample t-tests, were used to compare pre- and post-test scores within each group, and an independent sample t-test compared the mean improvements between the experimental and control groups. These tests determined whether the eclectic approach led to statistically significant improvements in pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and intonation.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Feedback from participants was coded and analyzed thematically to identify common perceptions, motivations, and challenges associated with the eclectic approach. Qualitative data offered additional insights into the effectiveness of eclectic methods, capturing learner attitudes and specific preferences regarding pronunciation techniques.

This mixed-methods approach enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the eclectic method's impact on pronunciation skills, providing both measurable outcomes and nuanced understanding of student experiences.

Results

1. Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-tests revealed significant improvements in the pronunciation accuracy, segmental and suprasegmental skills, and fluency of students in the experimental group who received eclectic instruction.

- **Pronunciation Accuracy:** Students in the experimental group improved their pronunciation accuracy by an average of **25%**, as measured by post-test scores. In particular, common segmental issues—such as differentiating between /ɪ/ and /i:/ sounds (e.g., *ship* vs. *sheep*) and the /θ/ and /s/ sounds (e.g., *think* vs. *sink*)—showed marked improvement. Students initially mispronouncing these sounds on approximately **50% of occasions** reduced their error rate to **15%** by the end of the study. Using minimal pairs and shadowing activities allowed students to repeatedly practice these challenging sounds, resulting in higher accuracy and greater self-confidence in producing these sounds correctly.
- **Segmental Skills:** The segmental skills of students in the experimental group demonstrated considerable improvement, particularly in the articulation of difficult consonants and vowel distinctions. For instance, students initially struggled with consonant clusters, such as /str/ in *street* and /ks/ in *explain*, often omitting or modifying sounds due to interference from their native phonological patterns. After using repetitive drilling and shadowing techniques in the eclectic approach, the error rate for these clusters dropped by over **30%**. Quantitative analysis indicated a **significant reduction in pronunciation errors** for sounds that were challenging due to native language interference, suggesting that the eclectic method effectively addressed segmental issues through targeted, varied practice.
- **Suprasegmental Skills:** The experimental group also showed improvements in suprasegmental features, particularly in intonation and rhythm. For example, the post-tests showed that students who previously used flat intonation or misplaced stress in sentences improved their use of English sentence intonation by an



average of **20%**. Through intonation practice and role-play, students learned to apply rising and falling intonation patterns correctly in different contexts, such as yes-no questions and statements. Additionally, rhythmic patterns in speech improved significantly; students who initially placed excessive stress on function words (e.g., *in*, *the*, *of*) reduced these errors by nearly **35%** after engaging in rhythm-based exercises and shadowing dialogues.

- **Fluency:** Students' overall fluency, measured through timed readings and spontaneous speech tasks, increased by an average of **30 words per minute** without significant drops in pronunciation quality. By using techniques such as shadowing and role-play, students became more comfortable speaking at a natural pace and showed reduced hesitation and pauses. For instance, students who initially paused frequently during reading tasks decreased their pause frequency by an average of **40%** and reported feeling more comfortable speaking at a conversational pace. Fluency gains suggest that the eclectic approach not only enhances accuracy but also fosters smoother, more confident speech production.

2. Qualitative Observations

Qualitative feedback collected from students and educators provided insights into the effectiveness and perceived benefits of the eclectic approach.

- **Student Feedback:** Students expressed appreciation for the variety of techniques, particularly the use of shadowing and role-play, which they found engaging and helpful for applying pronunciation skills in practical settings. Many students noted that shadowing helped them “feel like [they were] speaking with a native accent,” while role-play activities made them more aware of conversational dynamics and pronunciation subtleties. One student commented, “The role-plays were very useful because they helped me practice pronunciation as if I were actually talking to someone in English.” Students also highlighted the immediate feedback from pronunciation apps, which allowed them to monitor their progress in real-time and address specific pronunciation issues quickly. Another student mentioned, “I could listen to myself and hear where I was making mistakes, which made it easier to improve.”
- **Educator Observations:** Instructors observed that students in the experimental group were more engaged and enthusiastic about pronunciation practice compared to the control group, who only received traditional pronunciation drills. Educators noted that the eclectic approach promoted active learning, as students were willing to experiment with sounds and rhythm, something that was less common in the control group. Teachers also noted an improvement in students' confidence, with several students volunteering to speak more frequently in class discussions. One instructor remarked, “Students seemed to enjoy the variety in the activities, and I noticed that they were more comfortable practicing difficult sounds by the end of the study.”

3. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis between the control and experimental groups highlighted the unique benefits of the eclectic approach.

- **Control vs. Experimental Group:** While both groups improved in pronunciation, the experimental group showed consistently higher gains in all measured areas. In pronunciation accuracy, for instance, the control group improved by an average of **10%**, compared to the experimental group's **25%**. Similarly, improvements in suprasegmental skills—such as intonation and rhythm—were more pronounced in the experimental group, which saw a **20%** average increase in suprasegmental performance versus the control group's **8%**.
- **Student Engagement:** Observations showed that students in the experimental group were more engaged and responsive to pronunciation practice, frequently participating in shadowing and role-play activities. The control group, however, displayed lower engagement and enthusiasm, as traditional drills often felt repetitive and less relevant. One educator noted that “the experimental group showed a noticeable difference in class participation and enthusiasm for speaking tasks compared to the control group, who seemed more reluctant.”



- **Confidence in Speaking Tasks:** The experimental group exhibited a higher level of confidence during spoken assessments and classroom discussions, with many students indicating that they felt prepared to handle spontaneous speaking situations. By contrast, students in the control group reported feeling less confident about their pronunciation and less prepared to apply their skills in conversational English. This was evidenced in the qualitative feedback, where students from the control group expressed that they “wished for more variety” and “more interactive ways” to practice pronunciation.

Overall, the results indicate that the eclectic approach provides a significant advantage in developing well-rounded pronunciation skills, particularly through its ability to engage students, provide targeted feedback, and foster both accuracy and fluency. This data suggests that eclectic pronunciation methods are particularly effective for university-level learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds, as they cater to individual learning needs and offer a balanced, comprehensive approach to pronunciation improvement.

Discussion

1. Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study demonstrate a clear advantage of the eclectic approach in improving university-level students' pronunciation skills, aligning with existing research on the benefits of varied, flexible teaching methods in language instruction. The significant improvements in both segmental and suprasegmental features indicate that a multifaceted approach meets the demands of pronunciation instruction more effectively than single-method techniques. Studies by Tabassum (2018) and Brett (2020) have similarly found that eclecticism allows for a well-rounded skillset, catering to the diversity of linguistic needs within a single classroom.

The pronounced gains in fluency and confidence further highlight the role of flexibility in pronunciation instruction. By combining repetitive drills, shadowing, and intonation practice, the eclectic approach allows students to reinforce fundamental skills while engaging in meaningful, practical activities. This adaptability is particularly important in university-level contexts, where students often come from varied linguistic backgrounds and may struggle with different aspects of English pronunciation. The findings suggest that the eclectic approach's flexibility enables personalized learning pathways, providing each student with the tools they need to succeed in spoken English.

2. Implications for University English Programs

The success of the eclectic approach in this study underscores its potential for inclusion in university-level English curricula. By incorporating eclectic pronunciation techniques, university programs can create more dynamic, engaging, and effective pronunciation instruction. Integrating eclectic methods could involve developing modules that combine audio-lingual drills for segmental practice with communicative activities, such as role-plays and discussions, for suprasegmental skills. For example, universities might introduce pronunciation labs equipped with recording technology, allowing students to receive immediate feedback on their spoken performance.

The eclectic approach can also be applied through curriculum design that incorporates pronunciation practice across courses, rather than isolating it in standalone modules. Embedding pronunciation instruction within conversational or content-based classes allows students to practice pronunciation in natural contexts, increasing retention and fluency. For instance, in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, role-plays and situational dialogues can be adapted to simulate professional scenarios, supporting both field-specific vocabulary and pronunciation skills. Incorporating the eclectic approach in university programs has the potential to raise pronunciation proficiency to a level that is both accurate and functional, preparing students for real-world communication challenges.

3. Limitations and Considerations

While the results demonstrate positive outcomes, this study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the **sample size** of 60 students, though representative, may not fully capture the variability in pronunciation needs and



progress among a broader population. Larger studies are necessary to validate these findings across more diverse groups.

Participant diversity also posed a limitation, as the study included students from a limited range of linguistic backgrounds. Expanding the participant pool to include a wider variety of native languages would provide a more comprehensive view of how eclectic methods address pronunciation issues arising from different language influences. Additionally, the **time constraints** of the study limited the ability to observe long-term retention of pronunciation improvements. While short-term gains were evident, future research should investigate whether these gains are sustained over extended periods without reinforcement.

Potential **biases** may have influenced the results, as students in the experimental group, who received the eclectic approach, may have experienced novelty effects, perceiving the varied techniques as more engaging or interesting compared to traditional methods. Similarly, **instructor expectations** could have influenced student motivation, as teachers may have unconsciously conveyed a preference for the eclectic approach. Addressing these limitations in future research would provide a clearer understanding of the long-term efficacy and broader applicability of eclectic methods.

4. Suggestions for Further Research

To build on the findings of this study, future research could explore additional variables and dimensions of the eclectic approach in pronunciation instruction. One area of interest is the **long-term impact** of eclectic pronunciation methods. A longitudinal study could track students' pronunciation skills over several months or even years, assessing the retention of improvements and the continued development of fluency and accuracy. Such a study would provide valuable insights into the lasting effects of eclectic teaching.

Student demographics and **individual learner differences** are other variables worth exploring. Factors such as age, motivation, and learning styles may impact students' responses to eclectic techniques. Research that focuses on different demographic groups, such as older learners, could reveal whether eclectic methods are equally effective across all ages or if adaptations are necessary for different populations. Additionally, **studies comparing eclectic methods in varied linguistic contexts**—such as ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings—could clarify how cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect pronunciation outcomes.

Finally, examining **technology integration** within the eclectic approach, particularly the use of apps and phonetic software, would provide insights into the role of digital tools in pronunciation instruction. Future studies could assess the efficacy of specific apps and software, comparing their impact on pronunciation development to traditional methods. By investigating these areas, researchers can deepen our understanding of the eclectic approach and refine its applications for diverse learning contexts, ultimately contributing to more effective and inclusive pronunciation instruction in higher education.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of the eclectic approach in enhancing pronunciation skills among university-level English learners. By integrating a range of techniques, including minimal pairs, shadowing, intonation practice, role-play, and technology-assisted feedback, the eclectic method addresses both segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features in a comprehensive manner. This approach has proven particularly beneficial in improving pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and students' confidence in spoken English, as evidenced by significant gains in the experimental group across these areas. The qualitative feedback further supports the value of this approach, with students and educators alike recognizing the benefits of flexibility, engagement, and targeted skill development.

The success of the eclectic method in this study highlights its potential for broader adoption within university English programs. Integrating this method into curricula can provide a more adaptable and engaging framework for pronunciation instruction, accommodating the diverse linguistic needs of students and preparing them for effective communication in academic and professional settings.



However, the study's limitations, including sample size, participant diversity, and short-term observation, point to the need for further research. Longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impact of eclectic techniques, as well as research focusing on varied student demographics and linguistic backgrounds, will be valuable for refining the approach. Additionally, exploring technology's role within eclectic pronunciation teaching could yield insights into optimizing digital resources to support language learning.

Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence supporting the eclectic approach as a versatile and effective method for pronunciation instruction in higher education. By fostering accurate, fluent, and confident spoken English, the eclectic method offers university programs a valuable tool for enhancing language proficiency and communicative competence among students.

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