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# Bridging Pronunciation Gaps: The Impact of Eclectic Teaching Methods in Tertiary English Education

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## Abstract

This article explores the impact of eclectic teaching methods on improving pronunciation skills in tertiary-level English education. Recognizing the unique pronunciation challenges faced by non-native speakers, including segmental and suprasegmental issues, this study highlights the advantages of adopting an eclectic approach that combines techniques from various language teaching methods. Case studies from tertiary institutions illustrate how integrating drilling, minimal pairs, shadowing, and interactive dialogue activities, along with technological tools, enhances learners' pronunciation, confidence, and communicative abilities. Despite challenges such as resource constraints, instructor training, and student resistance, the eclectic approach proves to be a flexible and effective solution for addressing pronunciation gaps. Practical recommendations are provided to support educators in implementing this approach successfully, ultimately empowering students to achieve greater proficiency and fluency in English.

## Introduction

### *Contextual Background*

In tertiary English education, pronunciation remains a challenging skill to effectively teach and learn, particularly for non-native speakers. These challenges arise from various linguistic, phonological, and sociolinguistic factors that impact learners' ability to accurately produce English sounds, rhythm, and intonation patterns. Unlike vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation involves complex motor skills and auditory discrimination, which can be more challenging to master, especially for adult learners. Furthermore, pronunciation often receives less focus in academic English programs, leading to noticeable gaps in oral communication skills for students as they advance in their studies (Suleman & Hussain, 2016). Educators face additional challenges in pronunciation teaching, such as large class sizes, varied proficiency levels, and a lack of specialized resources, all of which can limit the effectiveness of traditional, single-method approaches (Joy, 2019).

### *Purpose of the Study*

Given the need to address these pronunciation gaps, this study explores eclectic teaching methods as a potential solution. Eclectic methods, which involve selecting techniques from various pedagogical approaches, allow teachers to tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. By employing an eclectic approach, instructors can incorporate elements from communicative, cognitive, and pronunciation-focused methods, enhancing student engagement and addressing individual pronunciation challenges



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(Hanafi & Zulfa, 2017). This approach also facilitates flexible adaptation to different learning contexts, which is crucial in tertiary education where students' linguistic backgrounds and goals vary significantly (Al-Khasawneh, 2022).

### *Thesis Statement*

This article investigates the impact of eclectic teaching methods on bridging pronunciation gaps in tertiary-level English education. By examining how combining different instructional techniques enhances pronunciation proficiency and reduces learner difficulties, this study aims to highlight the effectiveness of eclecticism in fostering accurate and confident spoken English in academic contexts.

## **I. Understanding Pronunciation Challenges in Tertiary Education**

### *1. Common Pronunciation Issues*

In tertiary education, English learners frequently encounter two main categories of pronunciation challenges: **segmental** and **suprasegmental** issues. Segmental issues refer to difficulties with individual sounds, particularly vowels and consonants, that may not exist or may differ significantly in a learner's native language. For instance, many learners struggle with English sounds that have no clear equivalent in their mother tongue, such as the “th” sound in *think* or *this*, which often gets substituted with /s/, /d/, or /z/ sounds, depending on the speaker's first language (Joy, 2019). Similarly, vowel distinctions in English, such as between /i:/ (as in *sheep*) and /ɪ/ (as in *ship*), pose difficulties for learners from languages with simpler vowel systems.

Suprasegmental issues, on the other hand, include problems with stress, rhythm, and intonation, all of which are essential to natural and comprehensible English speech. Tertiary-level students often find it difficult to apply correct syllable stress in multi-syllabic words and may struggle with sentence stress patterns, where certain words in a sentence are emphasized to convey meaning or intent. Intonation, the variation of pitch in speech, can also be challenging; for example, learners might have difficulty raising their pitch appropriately at the end of a question or varying intonation to express emphasis or emotion. These suprasegmental issues often lead to speech that sounds monotonous or unnatural, affecting the clarity and comprehensibility of spoken English (Al-Khasawneh, 2022).

### *2. Factors Contributing to Pronunciation Gaps*

The pronunciation gaps observed in tertiary-level English learners are often shaped by a combination of **language interference**, **limited exposure**, and **inadequate practice opportunities**. Language interference, or transfer, is when the phonological rules of a learner's native language affect their English pronunciation. For example, speakers of languages that lack certain English sounds will naturally substitute those sounds with more familiar ones, leading to accent and intelligibility issues (Suleman & Hussain, 2016). Additionally, languages with distinct syllable structures or stress-timing patterns may influence learners' rhythm and stress in English speech, causing further difficulties in pronunciation.

Limited exposure to native-like English pronunciation is another contributing factor. In many tertiary institutions, English is often taught as a second or foreign language without much opportunity for students to interact with native speakers or advanced-level English users. This lack of immersive experience limits students' ability to hear and internalize natural pronunciation patterns. Furthermore, pronunciation



instruction is often less prioritized than grammar or vocabulary, meaning students may lack the structured practice needed to overcome these challenges (Joy, 2019).

Finally, many students face inadequate practice opportunities in class, as pronunciation is often given minimal focus in tertiary-level curricula. In larger classes, it can be challenging for instructors to provide personalized feedback or sufficient practice time for each student. Pronunciation exercises often require individual or small-group work, which may be difficult to implement due to resource and time constraints. Without consistent and targeted practice, learners struggle to develop the muscle memory and auditory discrimination skills essential for mastering English sounds and intonation patterns (Hanafi & Zulfa, 2017).

### *3. Impact on Communication and Academic Success*

Pronunciation challenges directly affect a student's ability to communicate effectively in academic settings, potentially hindering their academic performance and social integration. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings or require listeners to make extra effort to interpret what is being said. This difficulty in being understood can undermine learners' confidence in their spoken English and may even discourage them from actively participating in class discussions or academic presentations (Al-Khasawneh, 2022). For example, incorrect word stress or vowel length can alter the meaning of words entirely, leading to communication breakdowns in settings where precision is crucial, such as during presentations or group discussions.

Academic success in tertiary settings often depends on a student's ability to participate effectively in oral activities, whether they are engaging in debates, giving presentations, or simply interacting with peers and instructors. When pronunciation issues become a barrier to clear communication, students may miss out on valuable learning opportunities, and their academic performance could suffer as a result. Moreover, inadequate pronunciation can negatively impact students' employability post-graduation, especially in fields where English proficiency is essential, such as international business or research. Thus, addressing these pronunciation gaps is critical not only for immediate academic success but also for students' long-term professional growth (Suleman & Hussain, 2016).

Addressing these challenges through an eclectic approach in language teaching, which draws on multiple methods to adapt to the needs of diverse learners, offers a promising solution. By combining traditional and modern techniques, educators can better support students in overcoming pronunciation barriers and achieving greater fluency and confidence in spoken English.

## **II. Theoretical Overview of Eclectic Teaching Methods**

### *1. Definition and Rationale*

Eclecticism in language teaching refers to the practice of integrating techniques and strategies from various established teaching approaches to create a tailored and flexible learning experience. This approach is based on the idea that no single teaching method can fully address the diverse needs of learners, particularly in a subject as complex and multidimensional as pronunciation. By selectively incorporating elements from different methodologies, teachers can better align instruction with specific learning objectives, classroom dynamics, and student proficiency levels (Hanafi & Zulfa, 2017). The rationale behind eclecticism lies in



its ability to adapt to the unique linguistic, cognitive, and cultural backgrounds of learners, allowing for a more holistic and inclusive approach to language acquisition (Al-Khasawneh, 2022).

Eclecticism is especially effective in pronunciation teaching because it allows instructors to use varied techniques that address both segmental (individual sounds) and suprasegmental (stress, rhythm, intonation) aspects of pronunciation. This flexibility makes it possible to implement tailored exercises that help learners with specific pronunciation challenges, whether these involve mastering particular phonemes or developing a more natural intonation pattern.

## 2. Key Theories Integrated in Eclectic Methods

In eclectic teaching, multiple language acquisition theories and methods are blended to support learners in developing accurate pronunciation. Some of the key theories integrated include:

- **Phonetics and Phonology:** These fields provide a scientific foundation for pronunciation teaching, focusing on the articulation and acoustic qualities of sounds. By incorporating phonetics, teachers can offer precise guidance on sound production, often using visual aids such as diagrams or pronunciation apps to illustrate tongue placement and airflow.
- **Communicative Approach:** This approach emphasizes using language in real-life contexts and prioritizes functional communication over rigid accuracy. In pronunciation, this means encouraging students to speak naturally, with an emphasis on intelligibility rather than perfect native-like pronunciation. The communicative approach allows for the development of a more fluent and confident speaking style, even if minor pronunciation errors persist (Tarnopolsky, 2018).
- **Audio-Lingual Method:** Known for its repetitive drilling techniques, the audio-lingual method reinforces pronunciation through extensive practice. Although it may not be sufficient as a standalone method, its repetitive drills are useful in helping learners internalize difficult sounds and patterns. Techniques from this method, such as minimal pairs and structured repetition, are often used to improve students' pronunciation of specific sounds.
- **Pronunciation-Focused Direct Methods:** This approach is centered on the explicit teaching of pronunciation rules and patterns. It involves teaching students specific pronunciation strategies, such as stress-timing in English, as well as practical exercises that focus on intonation and rhythm. Direct methods enable students to consciously work on pronunciation, which can be especially beneficial for adult learners who may benefit from explicit knowledge of sound rules.

By combining these theories, eclecticism addresses the full spectrum of pronunciation challenges, allowing instructors to offer varied, relevant, and accessible instruction that meets the needs of different learners.

## 3. Advantages of Eclectic Teaching

The eclectic approach is advantageous in pronunciation teaching because it offers **flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness** to individual learner needs. Flexibility is one of its primary strengths, as eclectic teaching allows educators to experiment with different techniques and modify them as needed. For example, a teacher might begin with structured audio-lingual drills to establish foundational pronunciation patterns and later incorporate communicative activities to enhance fluency and natural speech.



Adaptability is another advantage, as eclecticism makes it possible to adjust instructional strategies based on students' unique linguistic backgrounds and learning styles. Some students may require visual aids to understand pronunciation mechanics, while others may benefit from listening activities or peer feedback sessions. By using an adaptable approach, instructors can create a supportive and responsive learning environment that addresses these varying preferences.

Finally, eclectic teaching is effective in meeting individual learner needs. Unlike rigid, one-size-fits-all methods, eclecticism allows for the customization of instruction. This individualized approach is particularly beneficial in diverse tertiary classrooms, where students often possess different levels of language proficiency and varied pronunciation challenges. By drawing from a broad repertoire of methods, teachers can target specific pronunciation issues, providing students with the tools they need to overcome their particular difficulties and become more effective communicators.

### III. Application of Eclectic Methods in Pronunciation Teaching

#### 1. Combining Techniques

Eclectic methods in pronunciation teaching often involve combining a variety of techniques to address the diverse needs of students and the multifaceted nature of pronunciation. Some commonly used techniques include:

- **Drilling:** This method involves repetitive practice of sounds or phrases, helping students internalize difficult pronunciation patterns. Drilling is particularly useful for reinforcing correct articulation of sounds and muscle memory. Through repetition, learners gain confidence in producing sounds accurately.
- **Minimal Pairs:** Practicing minimal pairs (e.g., *ship* vs. *sheep*) helps learners distinguish between sounds that may be confusing due to their similarity or nonexistence in the learner's first language. Minimal pair exercises are especially effective for students who struggle with vowel distinctions or other problematic sounds.
- **Intonation Practice:** Teaching intonation—the rise and fall of pitch in speech—helps learners convey meaning beyond individual words. Intonation practice can include sentence repetition with an emphasis on pitch changes to show emotion, ask questions, or make statements. This improves students' ability to communicate nuanced meanings in conversation.
- **Shadowing:** Shadowing involves having students listen to native speech and repeat it as closely as possible, mimicking both pronunciation and intonation. This technique allows students to hear natural speech patterns and practice speaking in real time, which builds fluency and reinforces authentic pronunciation.
- **Interactive Dialogue:** Role-playing or practicing dialogues can allow students to use pronunciation techniques in a conversational context. Engaging in dialogue with partners or small groups encourages real-time correction and helps students apply pronunciation rules in natural speech.

These techniques, when used together, allow for a well-rounded approach to pronunciation that addresses individual sounds, fluency, and natural speech rhythm. Combining methods ensures that learners develop both segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation skills in an integrated manner (Tarnopolsky, 2018).



## 2. Use of Technology and Tools

Technology plays a pivotal role in eclectic pronunciation teaching, providing tools that enhance both learning and feedback. Some valuable technological aids include:

- **Software and Phonetic Apps:** Programs like *Sounds of Speech* or *ELSA Speak* offer interactive lessons on sound articulation, helping students visualize and understand the physical aspects of pronunciation. Phonetic apps provide exercises that break down sounds and syllables, allowing for self-paced practice and individualized feedback.
- **Recording Feedback:** Recording and playback allow students to hear their own pronunciation and compare it to model examples. Teachers can provide individualized feedback through recorded comments, identifying specific areas for improvement. This form of feedback helps learners become more aware of their pronunciation strengths and weaknesses.
- **Video Resources:** Videos provide learners with access to authentic spoken English and visual cues, such as mouth movement and facial expressions, which aid in understanding pronunciation. Platforms like YouTube offer countless educational videos on pronunciation, while platforms like TED Talks expose students to a variety of English accents and natural intonation patterns.

Incorporating these tools into pronunciation teaching supports independent learning, allowing students to practice outside of class and reinforcing in-class instruction. The immediate feedback from phonetic apps and recording tools also helps students track their progress, which enhances motivation and engagement in learning pronunciation (Suleman & Hussain, 2016).

## 3. Practical Classroom Activities

Practical activities form the backbone of eclectic pronunciation teaching by creating engaging, hands-on experiences that make pronunciation practice enjoyable and meaningful. Some effective classroom activities include:

- **Pronunciation Games:** Games like “Pronunciation Bingo” or “Sound Matching” create a playful environment where students can practice sounds and stress patterns. For example, Bingo games using minimal pairs help students differentiate between similar sounds while enjoying a competitive activity. Pronunciation games are particularly useful for group learning and reinforcing correct sound production.
- **Peer Feedback Sessions:** Working in pairs or small groups, students listen to each other’s pronunciation and offer constructive feedback. This not only allows them to practice sounds but also to develop awareness of common pronunciation errors. Peer feedback sessions can be structured with specific prompts or target sounds, helping students learn from each other’s experiences.
- **Phonetic Transcription Exercises:** Translating words or sentences into phonetic script encourages students to understand sound structures and how they relate to spoken English. For example, learners might transcribe a list of target words into IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols, focusing on correct vowel and consonant representation. These exercises provide an analytical approach that helps learners identify and reproduce sounds accurately.



- **Real-Life Scenarios:** Simulating real-life situations, such as ordering food at a restaurant or making a phone call, allows students to practice pronunciation in practical contexts. Role-playing with classmates helps learners apply their pronunciation skills in interactive and functional ways, which can make the learning process more memorable. Real-life scenarios also enhance students' confidence, as they prepare to use English in authentic interactions.

These activities combine the structure of traditional pronunciation exercises with the flexibility of interactive, student-centered learning. By engaging in a variety of practical activities, learners develop pronunciation skills in a supportive environment that fosters both accuracy and fluency (Hanafi & Zulfa, 2017).

#### IV. Case Studies or Observational Data

##### 1. Examples from Tertiary Education

In recent years, tertiary institutions have increasingly adopted eclectic teaching methods to address the unique pronunciation needs of non-native English speakers. These methods have been tailored to the specific student population and linguistic context of each institution, with promising results. For example, in a case study from a Ukrainian university, eclectic techniques were implemented in English pronunciation classes for engineering students. Given the students' technical focus and limited exposure to spoken English, instructors combined elements of the audio-lingual method, communicative approach, and phonetic transcription exercises to strengthen pronunciation skills (Tarnopolsky, 2018). The audio-lingual method provided essential repetition of difficult sounds, while communicative exercises allowed students to practice real-life dialogues.

Similarly, in a Saudi university, an eclectic approach to pronunciation was introduced in an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course for medical students. Teachers integrated role-play scenarios, minimal pairs exercises, and intonation practice, focusing on medical terminology to improve students' spoken communication in clinical settings. Observational data from these sessions indicated that combining repetitive drills with context-specific dialogue significantly enhanced students' ability to pronounce complex medical terms, particularly those that differed phonetically from Arabic (Al-Khasawneh, 2022).

##### 2. Outcomes and Observations

The outcomes of these eclectic teaching implementations in tertiary education demonstrate clear, positive impacts on students' pronunciation abilities. In the Ukrainian case study, post-course evaluations showed that students not only improved their ability to produce challenging sounds but also reported increased confidence in their speaking skills. Feedback from instructors indicated that students were better able to participate in discussions and presentations, with noticeable improvements in both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation (Tarnopolsky, 2018).

In the Saudi university example, students and instructors alike observed significant progress in pronunciation accuracy and fluency. Students reported feeling more comfortable using medical terminology in English, and instructors noted a reduction in pronunciation errors during practical exams and clinical role-plays. The use of real-life scenarios in the eclectic approach was particularly praised, as it allowed students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Al-Khasawneh, 2022).



These case studies illustrate the benefits of using eclectic methods to improve pronunciation in tertiary education settings. By allowing for the flexibility to combine methods, institutions can provide tailored, effective pronunciation instruction that enhances students' linguistic confidence and communication skills. Such outcomes underscore the potential of eclectic approaches as a valuable strategy for addressing pronunciation challenges in higher education.

## V. Benefits and Challenges of Eclectic Pronunciation Teaching

### 1. Benefits

The adoption of eclectic methods in pronunciation teaching brings a range of advantages, particularly in enhancing students' confidence, communication skills, and comprehension. By combining techniques, eclectic methods provide a more personalized approach to pronunciation, allowing students to tackle specific pronunciation issues that might otherwise remain unaddressed in traditional classes. This individualized focus leads to **improved student confidence**; as learners see tangible progress in their pronunciation, they feel more comfortable participating in discussions, presentations, and informal conversations in English (Suleman & Hussain, 2016).

Moreover, eclectic pronunciation instruction improves **communication skills** by integrating both segmental and suprasegmental elements—students learn to pronounce individual sounds correctly and to use natural intonation, stress, and rhythm in speech. Such a holistic approach strengthens students' overall intelligibility and fluency, essential for effective academic and professional communication. Lastly, **comprehension** is enhanced through pronunciation practice, as students develop a clearer understanding of native speech patterns and are better able to distinguish similar sounds. These benefits ultimately empower students to navigate complex spoken interactions in English with greater ease.

### 2. Challenges

Despite its advantages, eclectic pronunciation teaching is not without challenges. One of the main obstacles is **resource limitations**. Effective eclectic teaching often requires specialized materials, such as pronunciation software, audio resources, and access to authentic listening materials, which may not always be available in all institutions. This can limit the breadth and depth of the eclectic approach, particularly in under-resourced settings.

**Instructor training** is another challenge. Teachers who are not familiar with various pronunciation teaching methods may find it difficult to implement an eclectic approach effectively. To teach pronunciation through eclectic methods, instructors must understand and be able to blend different techniques, such as audio-lingual repetition, communicative practice, and phonetic transcription exercises. Without sufficient training, instructors may struggle to use these techniques optimally, potentially leading to inconsistent or ineffective instruction (Joy, 2019).

**Time constraints** also pose a difficulty, especially in tertiary education where pronunciation may be just one component of a broader English curriculum. Eclectic methods often require extended practice time, individualized feedback, and interactive activities, which may be challenging to fit into limited class periods.

Additionally, **student resistance** can affect the success of eclectic pronunciation teaching. Some students may be unfamiliar with eclectic methods and may initially resist non-traditional exercises,



especially if they are accustomed to more rigid, structured approaches. This resistance can reduce student engagement and hinder the effectiveness of the eclectic approach.

### 3. Solutions and Recommendations

To address these challenges, institutions and educators can implement practical strategies to support the successful adoption of eclectic pronunciation teaching.

- **Resource Sharing and Development:** Institutions can pool resources across departments or partner with other schools to provide access to pronunciation software and authentic audio materials. Open-source pronunciation apps and online resources can also be valuable, cost-effective tools to supplement in-class instruction.
- **Professional Development and Training:** To overcome the challenge of instructor training, universities should offer professional development workshops focused on eclectic pronunciation teaching. Such training should provide instructors with hands-on experience in blending different methods and adapting to diverse classroom needs.
- **Efficient Use of Class Time:** Instructors can maximize limited time by using a flipped classroom model, where students engage in pronunciation exercises and practice outside of class through assignments, online apps, and recordings. This allows classroom time to focus on feedback and interactive activities. Teachers can also design concise but effective pronunciation drills that fit within shorter lesson segments.
- **Introducing and Normalizing Eclectic Methods:** To address student resistance, teachers can begin with traditional methods and gradually introduce eclectic techniques, explaining the purpose and benefits of each approach. Early success in pronunciation improvement often helps reduce resistance, as students recognize the value of the methods in enhancing their speaking skills.

These recommendations can help institutions and educators harness the full potential of eclectic pronunciation teaching, overcoming common challenges and creating a supportive environment for students to develop strong, confident pronunciation skills.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the eclectic approach to pronunciation teaching in tertiary English education presents a compelling solution to the diverse challenges faced by non-native speakers. By integrating techniques from various language teaching methodologies, eclectic teaching provides a flexible and responsive framework that can address both segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation issues. The advantages of this approach are evident in the improved confidence, communication skills, and comprehension it fosters among learners, enabling them to become more effective and self-assured English speakers. Case studies and observational data from tertiary institutions highlight the tangible progress made through eclectic methods, underscoring their value in academic and professional settings.

However, the implementation of eclectic pronunciation teaching does come with challenges, including resource limitations, the need for instructor training, time constraints, and occasional student resistance to new methods. Practical strategies such as resource-sharing, professional development,



efficient use of class time, and gradual introduction of eclectic methods can mitigate these obstacles, allowing institutions to maximize the benefits of this approach.

Ultimately, eclectic pronunciation teaching offers a well-rounded, adaptable model that addresses the complexities of pronunciation in a way that is both learner-centered and results-oriented. By continuing to explore and refine eclectic methods, educators can ensure that students develop strong, clear pronunciation skills that enhance their linguistic competence and open up new academic and professional opportunities.

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