

Beliefs and Practices of EFL Instructors in Teaching Pronunciation

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Abstract

Pronunciation teaching and learning have stimulated a renewed interest among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers in the past few years. To pursue this line of inquiry, this study set out to investigate the beliefs and practices of Iranian EFL teachers on pronunciation teaching. Convenience sampling was employed to recruit 74 participants who completed a pronunciation teaching and learning questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with volunteered participants. The results revealed that 57% of the respondent teachers mostly worked on suffixes such as the -ed and -s endings always or often in their classrooms. The second most frequently taught feature was word stress (54%), followed by syllable structure, which 53% of the teachers often or always taught. Drama and role-play were the most common strategies often or always used by 49% of the teachers in teaching pronunciation. In addition, interviews with participant teachers revealed that the most common classroom activities were imitation and repetition. Finally, although most participants emphasized the need to teach pronunciation, they did not consider themselves highly qualified. They indicated an insatiable desire for more pronunciation training in teacher education programs to use opportunistic teaching and integrated phases to teach pronunciation. Most of the teachers did not teach pronunciation as a separate lesson since the school curriculum, the pre-specified book, and the time limitation did not let them focus on pronunciation as a separate lesson.

Keywords: EFL; teachers beliefs; pronunciation learning; pronunciation teaching

Introduction

During the last few decades, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers and practitioners concentrated their attention on some aspects of language, such as grammar and vocabulary. However, both in theory and practice, pronunciation has been a low priority for L2 educators (Derwing & Munro 2005; Gilbert, 2010). A plausible explanation might be

that pronunciation teaching, which emphasizes individual sounds and prosody, cannot be fully integrated with other language skills like reading or writing (MacDonald, 2002). In addition, a long-held belief that an overt focus on pronunciation is ineffective and even extraneous in helping learners achieve communicative competence (e.g., Krashen,

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1981) has led English language teachers to ignore pronunciation teaching. However, after many years, the second language (L2) pronunciation field has attracted renewed attention from SLA researchers and practitioners (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Research findings have pointed to the efficiency of pronunciation instruction on L2 learners' language development (e.g., Couper, 2003, 2006; Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1997) and its central role in establishing effective communication (Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998; Hahn, 2004). In addition, L2 teachers can use a range of educational facilities (such as instructional textbooks, teachers' manuals, computer software, mobile apps, and internet resources) to teach pronunciation (Buss, 2016). Since teachers regard their beliefs on language learning and teaching as accurate and adhere to them in their teaching practice (Rubin, 1975), several studies have been set out to know more about the pronunciation beliefs and practices of L2 teachers. The underlying aim of these studies has been to identify the effect of renewed interest in pronunciation in language classrooms (Buss, 2016). To add more to this emerging area of research, the authors attempted to look into Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors' beliefs on pronunciation. As Crystal (2003) reported, English as a foreign language is taught in more than 100 countries. According to Graddol (2000), over a billion people learn EFL worldwide. Therefore, further research is required in various EFL contexts to delve more into teachers' beliefs in pronunciation teaching. In the context of Iran, very little is known about English language teachers' pronunciation teaching perceptions and practices. This study attempts to fill this lacuna in this field of research.

Various teaching methods have emerged because learning theories shift from behavioristic to cognitive and later to constructivist (Brown, 2007). As a result, based on theories or often beliefs about what language learning should be like, educationalists have constantly strived to develop efficient methods to guide language teachers on how to teach (Harmer, 2014). With this "swing of the pendulum" (Prator, 1991, cited in Celce-Murcia et al., 2010) in language teaching methods that have characterized the evolution of language pedagogy, the teaching of pronunciation has undergone the same methodological changes (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010). As Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) clarify, two general approaches to the teaching of pronunciation have been adopted in the language teaching profession: (a) an intuitive-imitative approach and (b) an analytic-linguistic approach. An intuitive-imitative approach is based on L2 learners' ability to imitate the sounds and rhythms of the target language without receiving any explicit instruction. On the other hand, an analytic-linguistic approach provides learners with explicit instruction on phonetic symbols, different parts of the vocal tract called articulators, and vocal apparatus to draw learners' attention to the sounds of the target language (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). An analytic-linguistic approach "was developed to complement rather than to replace the intuitive-imitative approach, which was typically retained as the practice phase used in tandem with the phonetic information" (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p. 4).

Unlike the Grammar Translation Method, with little or no attention to pronunciation, the Direct Method and later Audio-Lingual Method

focused on teaching pronunciation. In Direct Method, the pronunciation was taught through an intuitive-imitative approach in which L2 learners imitated a model, including the teacher or a recording (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In the 1890s, Reform Movement in language teaching emerged, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was developed. Later, Audio-Lingual Method used both intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic approaches to teach pronunciation (i.e., a model for pronouncing a word or a phrase was presented to the learners to imitate and repeat it). Also, the teacher took advantage of phonetic symbols, visual transcriptions, or articulatory charts to adequately demonstrate the correct pronunciation of various target sounds (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996).

Achieving nativelylike pronunciation had been underrated with the advent of the Cognitive Approach in the 1960s since it was regarded as an unattainable goal in learning (Scovel, 1989). Alternatively, teaching grammar structures and vocabulary items was overemphasized. As a result, the 'innovative methods' (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) that emerged during the 1970s developed different ways to deal with pronunciation. For instance, Silent Way Method devised by Gattegno (1972) uses the Sound-Color Chart, which represents all the vowel and consonant sounds of a target language in different colors. The Fidel Chart, which contained all the possible spelling patterns for each sound, was used to teach pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). In addition, Community Language Learning (CLL) Method developed by Curran (1976) employed the 'Human Computer' technique (i.e., students could ask their teacher to provide them with the

correct pronunciation of a word or a phrase) to offer learners ample opportunities to practice pronunciation.

The introduction of the Communicative Approach in the 1980s, which seems to be presently dominant in language pedagogy, has called for a subtle change in pronunciation teaching. A certain threshold level of pronunciation has been established for non-native speakers who are communicatively competent in English. As Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) maintained, "A more modest and realistic goal is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate" (p. 8). In practice, communicatively-oriented teaching methods have tried to use a variety of techniques and materials to teach language segmental features such as listening and imitating, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids, developmental approximation drills, the practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, and recordings of learners' production. Later, since these techniques appeared theoretically incompatible with discourse-based approaches to communicative language pedagogy, teaching supra-segmental features of the language, including rhythm, stress, and intonation, started to gain momentum (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

As Wong (1987) indicates, teaching pronunciation is not just linguistic. Language teachers need to consider factors related to language learners such as their age, attitude toward target language, motivation to learn, aptitude, and the type of prior L2 instruction. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about learning a language will likely affect teaching practice. L2

researchers have highlighted the importance of teachers' beliefs in shaping and orienting their teaching practices (e.g., Barcelos, 2007; Freeman, 2016; Graus & Coppen, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Richards, 2008). Rokeach (1968) asserts, "Beliefs are pre-dispositions to action." Also, Borg (2006) remarks that teachers' beliefs and conceptions can influence their actions and classroom practices. Researchers have attempted to explore teachers' perceptions regarding second language pronunciation in various ESL and EFL contexts in the last few years. For instance, Burgess and Spencer (2000) surveyed the views of ESL instructors in the UK.

The majority of the participants stated that they tried to integrate pronunciation teaching with the four language skills and dealt with pronunciation difficulties as they arose in the classroom. For example, they used chanting, drama and role-play, drills, and the phonemic alphabet to teach pronunciation. Though Suprasegmental was very difficult for them to teach and learn, the participant teachers stated that they believe these features have paramount importance in teaching. Breitzkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) also examined ESL teachers' perceptions regarding pronunciation teaching in Canada. These teachers regarded pronunciation instruction as crucial and efficient even after the first years of arrival in the second language context.

Furthermore, they questioned the belief that foreign accent removal should be the primary objective of a pronunciation program and presumed that students could be comprehensible while speaking with an accent. In another study, Baker (2011) interviewed ESL instructors and analyzed their pronunciation teaching journals. Baker concluded that the

recent emphasis placed by some researchers on the teaching of prosody had affected the teachers' cognitions and practices.

Nevertheless, they were unconfident about their teaching and wanted more training in teaching pronunciation. Burns (2006) studied teachers' perceptions in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program. They discovered that they needed more professional development even though they were reasonably confident in teaching pronunciation. Recently, Buss (2016) examined the beliefs and practices of Brazilian EFL instructors regarding pronunciation. The findings showed that the teachers' teaching techniques are likely to be old-fashioned: the primary approach was to deal with word-level aspects, specifically difficult sounds, via repetition as the need arose. Although most of the respondents asserted to be relaxed teaching pronunciation, like other teachers in previous studies, they wished to have more pronunciation training (e.g., Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011).

As the above brief review shows, examining teachers' views and perceptions towards pronunciation teaching is necessary and valuable. Such inquiries can enrich our understanding of teachers' deeply held views on the importance of pronunciation teaching and how these beliefs influence their teaching practices.

The research questions guiding the present study are as follows:

1. Which aspects of pronunciation receive more attention from Iranian EFL teachers (i.e., how often do teachers teach different pronunciation aspects)?

2. What are the self-reported practices of Iranian EFL teachers regarding pronunciation when teaching adult learners (i.e., how often do teachers use different pronunciation activities)?
3. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and opinions on pronunciation learning and teaching?
4. What kinds of learners' pronunciation problems do teachers report?

Method

Design

A mixed-method design was used in this study to benefit from the advantages of both types of data collection (Dornyei, 2007). First, quantitative data was gathered by using a questionnaire. Then, the qualitative data was obtained through interviews, which offer deeper insights into and perspectives on the topics that emerged from the quantitative analysis. Therefore, utilizing the mixed-method approach provides a richer set of data and helps overcome the limitations of previous related studies (e.g., Buss, 2016; Foote et al., 2011), which have used questionnaires to gather data.

Participants

To achieve the purposes of the current study, the authors asked 74 EFL teachers to complete a questionnaire. Using convenience sampling, the authors selected the participant teachers from different private English language schools in Zanjan, Iran, including Kish, Iran Zamin, Radman, Safir, and Parsian institutes. This sampling procedure was applied to select all available participants. The participants were between the ages of 25 and 50. Almost half of the participants were males ($n = 36$), and the other half were

females ($n = 38$). 51.06 % of the teacher participants had a bachelor's degree (BA), 14.89% held a postgraduate diploma, 29.78% had a master's degree (MA), and 4.26% held a doctorate (Ph.D.). All of the respondents reported formal education in English language teaching. Fifteen (out of 74) volunteered to take part in follow-up interviews.

Instruments

Questionnaire

To find answers to the research questions, the authors used a Likert-scale questionnaire which consists of 60 closed-ended questions to elicit information on four main topics: how often different pronunciation activities are used (15 questions taken from Buss, 2016), opinions and beliefs about pronunciation (17 questions taken from Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2011), how often different pronunciation aspects are taught (18 questions taken from Burgess and Spencer, 2000) and most serious pronunciation problems experienced by learners (10 questions taken from Buss, 2016). To facilitate understanding, first, the questionnaire was translated into the Persian language as the participants' native language to suit the study's educational and cultural context. Then, the translated version was back-translated into English and reviewed by two experts to ensure its content validity. Next, it was piloted with eight teachers not included in the main phase of the study to test its reliability through Cronbach alpha. The reliability of the translated questionnaire turned out to be 0.87, which is within the acceptable range.

Interview

To understand Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions regarding pronunciation, the

authors interviewed some volunteer teachers (15 out of 74). The interviews aimed to augment the quantitative data by gathering additional information about the participants' views on pronunciation teaching in their classrooms. The interview questions were adapted from Burgess and Spencer (2000) and Foote, Holtby, and Derwing (2011). In addition, three experts reviewed them to ensure their validity and reliability.

Data collection

First, the participants were recruited using convenience and availability sampling. Then, the authors administered the questionnaire among teachers in language institutes to gather data about the beliefs and practices of Iranian EFL teachers regarding pronunciation. The questionnaire included four separate parts. In part 1, the participants responded, "how much they have taught different aspects of pronunciation". In part 2, they were asked, "How often different pronunciation activities are used". In part 3, teachers' beliefs and opinions about pronunciation were collected. And finally, in part 4, the most severe pronunciation problems experienced by learners were investigated. The questions in parts 1, 2, and 4 were asked from respondents in three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

The authors used interviews to gather qualitative data. The interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed to find common themes and categories. A digital voice recorder with a clip-on microphone attached to the teacher recorded the interviewees' voices. The interview took 9 to 20 minutes, with an average of 12 minutes. In order to have a high-quality voice recording, a peaceful atmosphere

was provided to the interviewees. The interviewees skipped the unclear or intangible interview questions. After interviewing, the recorded voices were checked to ensure the quality of the recorded voices.

Findings and Discussion

Results of the Questionnaire

Frequency of Pronunciation Teaching

The researchers analyzed the quantitative data gathered by the questionnaire using Excel software. They calculated the mean score for each item questionnaire item. Research question 1 explored how often teachers taught different pronunciation aspects. Eighteen items of the questionnaire are related to aspects of pronunciation teaching. Table 4.1 shows the percentage of teachers' responses to each item regarding learners' proficiency level (B= Beginner, I= Intermediate and A= Advanced) and whether they have taught these aspects (Never or Rarely, Sometimes and Often or Always). In addition, items rated by teachers as 'never' taught and 'always' taught were highlighted in different colors. To illustrate, dark green, light green, very light green, very light orange, light orange, and red represent the highest means towards the lowest means. As depicted in Table 4.2. for item 17 (Allophones), 74% of the teachers responded that they 'never' or 'hardly ever' provide learners with instruction on this aspect. On the other hand, 57% of the respondents reported working on suffixes such as the -ed and -s endings always or often. The second most frequently taught features were word stress (54%), followed by syllable structure, which was 'often' or 'always' taught by 53% of the teachers.

Table 4.1 Percentage of answers to each item										Table 4.2 Analysis of highlighted and most frequent items in Part I			
Part I. How often different pronunciation aspects are taught.										Frequency Percentage			Most frequent items
Features	Never or rarely (%)			Sometimes (%)			Often or always (%)			never	sometimes	always	
	B	I	A	B	I	A	B	I	A				
1. Problematic sounds: e.g. the th sounds (thanks, mother)	4%	2%	8%	4%	21%	19%	25%	10%	7%	14%	44%	42%	
2. Suffixes (-ed, -s): e.g. the -ed endings (cooked, played, started); the -s endings (hats, cards, watches)	1%	3%	10%	6%	19%	4%	26%	11%	21%	14%	28%	57%	Suffixes
3. Word stress: e.g. about = aBOUT; develop = develop	6%	1%	3%	6%	22%	9%	22%	10%	22%	9%	37%	54%	Word stress
4. Syllable structure: e.g. stop has one syllable: /stop/, not three: /is.ta.pil/.	6%	4%	8%	5%	18%	6%	23%	11%	20%	18%	29%	53%	Syllable structure
5. Silent letters: e.g. night and debt	1%	1%	10%	9%	23%	5%	23%	8%	20%	12%	37%	51%	
6. Minimal pairs: e.g. bad and bed; leave and live; rat and hat	8%	6%	8%	18%	23%	21%	6%	4%	6%	21%	62%	16%	
7. Connected speech: e.g. Send it sounds like senit; short time sounds like shortime.	10%	3%	4%	23%	26%	20%	0%	5%	10%	16%	69%	15%	
8. Accents: Differences between English accents (e.g. British English vs. American English)	9%	1%	2%	7%	22%	9%	18%	10%	23%	12%	38%	50%	
9. Intonation: e.g. We have homework tonight (falling intonation) and We have homework tonight? (rising intonation)	3%	2%	5%	21%	22%	9%	9%	9%	19%	10%	52%	38%	
10. Utterance stress: Stress placement on certain words in utterances (e.g. I want that BAG or I want THAT bag)	8%	4%	4%	18%	22%	20%	7%	9%	9%	16%	60%	25%	
11. Schwa: /ə/: e.g. the sound in arrive and parent	7%	1%	3%	4%	23%	11%	22%	9%	20%	11%	38%	51%	
12. Weak forms: e.g. in I need an answer, the word an is less strong than the other words.	18%	5%	7%	9%	21%	7%	6%	7%	19%	30%	37%	33%	
13. Stress-timed rhythm: e.g. COWS EAT GRASS takes roughly the same time to say as The COWS could EAT the GRASS.	21%	10%	9%	9%	19%	19%	4%	4%	5%	40%	47%	13%	Stress-timed rhythm
14. Phonetic alphabet: I teach it in full to classes	21%	5%	6%	4%	21%	20%	8%	7%	7%	33%	45%	22%	
15. Voiced or voiceless: e.g. /g/ is voiced but /k/ is voiceless	22%	10%	7%	5%	18%	20%	7%	5%	6%	39%	43%	18%	Voiced or Voiceless
16. Assimilation: e.g. meat pie pronounced /mip paɪ/	22%	7%	6%	7%	23%	9%	4%	4%	18%	35%	38%	27%	
17. Allophones: e.g. in full there are 2 /l/ sounds: clear [l] at beginning; dark [ɫ] at end	30%	22%	22%	1%	7%	6%	2%	3%	6%	74%	14%	11%	Allophones
18. Consonant clusters: e.g. twelfths: /twelfθs/	23%	4%	4%	7%	22%	22%	4%	7%	7%	31%	51%	18%	

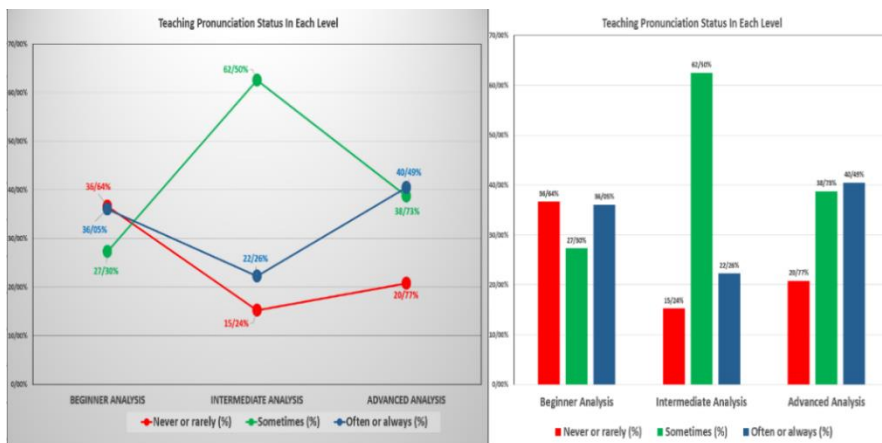
Moreover, 24.23% stated that they never taught pronunciation in the classroom, whereas 42.79% cited they sometimes taught pronunciation, and it was taught often by 32.98% of instructors. (Table 4.3). The beginner, intermediate, and advanced candidates expressed their ideas. 36.64% of teachers answered they ‘never,’ 27.30% ‘sometimes,’ and 36.05% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to beginner levels. 15.24% of teachers answered they ‘never,’ 62.50% ‘sometimes,’ and 22.26% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to intermediate levels. Finally, 20.77% of teachers answered they

‘never,’ 38.73% ‘sometimes,’ and 40.49% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to advanced levels.

The participants with beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels expressed their ideas (Table 4.3). 36.64% of teachers answered they ‘never,’ 27.30% ‘sometimes,’ and 36.05% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to beginner levels. 15.24% of teachers answered they ‘never,’ 62.50% ‘sometimes’ and 22.26% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to intermediate levels. Finally, 20.77% of teachers answered they ‘never,’ 38.73% ‘sometimes,’ and 40.49% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to advanced levels.

Figure 1

Status of pronunciation instruction in three different level



Features Taught and Activities Used

Research question 2 explored how often teachers used different pronunciation activities. Fifteen items of the questionnaire are related to this issue. As Table 4.4 shows, the least frequent techniques are using mirrors, interactive media, and chanting. About 70% of the teachers said they never used mirrors for students to observe

their articulation. Interactive media and chanting are never or rarely used by 67% and 63% of the teachers, respectively. On the other hand, drama and role-play are the most common strategies often or always used by 49% of the teachers. The next most common activity, applied by 44%, is to teach pronunciation using imitation and repetition.

Table 4.4 Percentage of answers to each item										Table 4.5 Analysis of highlighted and most frequent items in Part II			
Activities	Part II. How often different pronunciation activities are used.									Frequency Percentage			Most frequent items
	Never or rarely (%)			Sometimes (%)			Often or always (%)			never	sometimes	always	
	S	I	A	B	I	A	B	I	A				
1. Imitation and repetition: e.g. learners listen to the teacher or to a CD and repeat, trying to imitate as closely as possible.	1%	3%	8%	6%	19%	19%	26%	11%	6%	12%	44%	44%	Imitation & Repetition
2. Phonetic alphabet: I use it to help in teaching.	6%	4%	5%	9%	21%	21%	18%	9%	9%	14%	50%	35%	
3. Drills: e.g. repetition drills contrasting minimal pairs (chip/cheap, fit/fet, bit/beat)	4%	1%	6%	21%	22%	7%	10%	10%	20%	11%	50%	40%	Drills
4. Marking: Having learners mark pronunciation features in a passage of text (e.g. underline the stressed words or draw intonation arrows).	7%	8%	6%	22%	21%	19%	4%	6%	7%	21%	62%	17%	
5. Tactile reinforcement: Having learners feel where/ how they are speaking (e.g. asking them to touch their throats while pronouncing voiced and voiceless sounds).	15%	7%	18%	6%	23%	9%	8%	3%	6%	45%	39%	16%	
6. Interactive media: e.g. online games and animated libraries, pronunciation software	22%	22%	23%	6%	8%	4%	6%	4%	6%	67%	17%	16%	Interactive Media
7. Drama and role-play: E.g. practicing and performing dialogues in pairs or groups paying special attention to pronunciation.	5%	5%	8%	6%	9%	18%	22%	19%	8%	18%	33%	49%	Drama & Role play
8. Visual aids: e.g. diagrams of the vocal tract, representations of how a sound is articulated	21%	19%	21%	7%	9%	6%	6%	6%	7%	60%	21%	18%	
9. Classroom games: e.g. minimal pairs bingo	22%	9%	20%	8%	18%	9%	4%	6%	6%	51%	34%	15%	
10. Focus on rules: Explicitly teaching English phonetic and phonological rules and showing how they differ from the rules of Persian.	20%	17%	9%	6%	9%	7%	7%	8%	18%	45%	22%	33%	
11. Recordings: Having learners record and listen to their pronunciation	23%	20%	7%	6%	9%	17%	4%	6%	9%	50%	32%	18%	
12. Phonetic alphabet: I teach it in full to classes.	20%	5%	4%	6%	23%	21%	8%	6%	7%	29%	50%	21%	
13. Chanting: e.g. using Jazz Chants to practice rhythm.	22%	19%	22%	5%	11%	10%	6%	3%	1%	63%	26%	11%	Chanting
14. Body movement: E.g. having learners stomp, clap, tap their fingers or nod their heads according to stress and intonation patterns.	4%	9%	21%	8%	18%	7%	21%	6%	5%	35%	33%	32%	
15. Mirrors: Having learners observe their own articulation in a mirror.	23%	21%	25%	6%	11%	5%	4%	1%	4%	70%	22%	9%	Mirrors

Also, 39.43% indicated that they never use activities in the classroom, whereas 35.70% reported they sometimes use pronunciation activities, and it was taught often by 24.87% of instructors. (Table 4.6). The candidates expressed their ideas in three different proficiency levels.

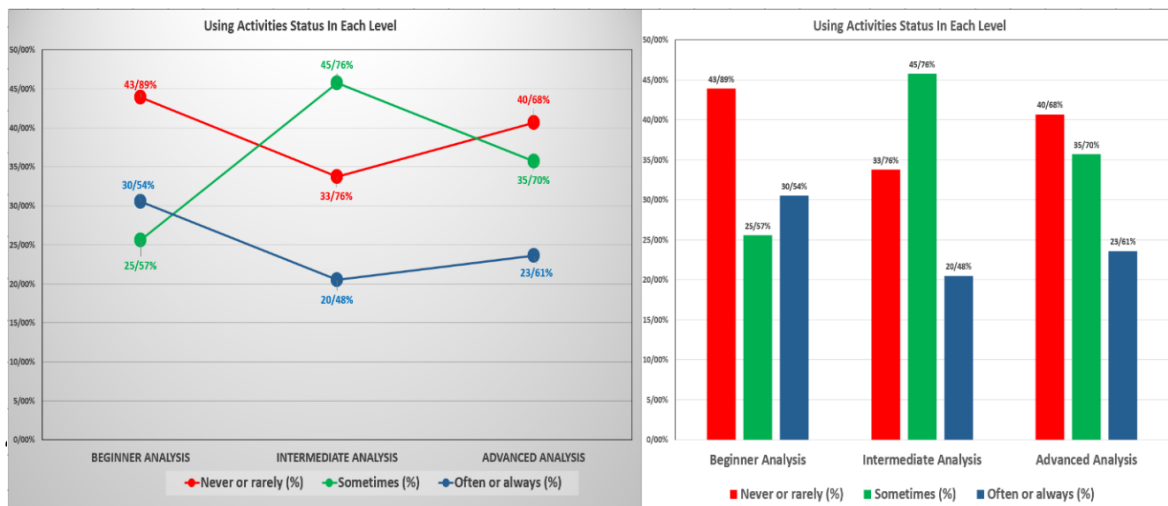
As table 4.6 displays, 43.89% of teachers who taught beginner level learners answered they

‘never’, 25.57% ‘sometimes’, and 30.54% ‘often’ taught pronunciation. 33.76% of teachers answered they ‘never’, 45.76% ‘sometimes’, and 20.48% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to intermediate level learners. 40.68% of teachers answered they ‘never’, 35.70% ‘sometimes’, and 23.61% ‘often’ taught pronunciation to advanced levels.

Table 4.6 General analysis based on Learners Level and Type of features									
Part 2. How often different pronunciation activities are used.									
Activities	Never or rarely (%)			Sometimes (%)			Often or always (%)		
	B	I	A	B	I	A	B	I	A
Total percentage in each level	14/61%	11/30%	13/52%	8/51%	15/32%	11/87%	10/17%	6/86%	7/85%
Total percentage of frequency	39/43%			35/70%			24/87%		
Based on Level	Never or rarely (%)			Sometimes (%)			Often or always (%)		
Beginner Analysis	43/89%			25/57%			30/54%		
Intermediate Analysis	33/76%			45/76%			20/48%		
Advanced Analysis	40/68%			35/70%			23/61%		

Figure 2

Status of using activities in three different levels



General Beliefs

Research question 3 explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and opinions on pronunciation learning and teaching. Seventeen items of the

questionnaire provided some statements regarding beliefs and opinions about pronunciation and asked teachers to express their agreement level (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Percentage of answers to each item				Table 4.8 Analysis of highlighted and most frequent items in Part III			
Part III. Beliefs and opinions about pronunciation.				Frequency Percentage			
Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	never	sometimes	always	Most frequent items
				1. Teaching pronunciation does not usually result in permanent changes in the speech of EFL students.	62%	17%	
2. Pronunciation teaching is often unnecessary, as most learners are able to pick up on pronunciation when frequently exposed to good input.	64%	19%	17%	64%	19%	17%	
3. A heavy accent is a cause of discrimination against nonnative speakers.	32%	49%	19%	32%	49%	19%	
4. Teaching pronunciation is difficult.	51%	21%	28%	51%	21%	28%	
5. The goal of a pronunciation teaching should be to eliminate, as much as possible, foreign accent.	32%	28%	40%	32%	28%	40%	
6. The best person to teach pronunciation is a native speaker.	30%	28%	43%	30%	28%	43%	Native teachers
7. It is not possible to teach pronunciation communicatively.	77%	21%	2%	77%	21%	2%	Communicatively
8. There is an age-related limitation on the acquisition of native-like pronunciation.	38%	26%	36%	38%	26%	36%	
9. Pronunciation instruction is only effective for highly motivated learners.	43%	38%	19%	43%	38%	19%	
10. Native speakers should be the model for pronunciation teaching.	17%	17%	66%	17%	17%	66%	Natives as model
11. Some individuals resist changing their pronunciation in order to maintain their identity. (Biasness)	23%	49%	28%	23%	49%	28%	
12. I don't like teaching pronunciation.	85%	9%	6%	85%	9%	6%	Dislike teaching Pron
13. When teaching pronunciation, the teacher should avoid, as much as possible, comparing English to Persian.	43%	23%	34%	43%	23%	34%	
14. Pronunciation teaching should help make students comfortably intelligible to their listeners.	6%	23%	70%	6%	23%	70%	Intelligibility
15. Pronunciation is best learned through language immersion, without the need for rules or theoretical explanations.	30%	34%	36%	30%	34%	36%	
16. Most learners don't like teachers to correct their pronunciation.	30%	38%	32%	30%	38%	32%	
17. Pronunciation instruction improves language accuracy rather than communication.	36%	26%	38%	36%	26%	38%	

In addition, items that teachers rated as 'totally agree' and 'totally disagree' were highlighted in different colors in Table 4.8. For instance, 85% of the teachers disagreed with item 12 (Dislike teaching pronunciation). On the other hand, 70% of the teachers reported that pronunciation should make the students comfortably intelligible to their listeners.

As shown in the table, the participants believed that learners need to be taught to learn pronunciation: most teachers (64%) disagreed that frequent exposure to good input is enough for most learners to acquire pronunciation. Also, 66% of the teachers believed that native speakers should be the model for pronunciation

teaching, 36% of the respondents indicated that instruction could improve learners' communication in English, and 77% stated that it is possible to teach pronunciation communicatively. Regarding the objective of pronunciation teaching, 70% agreed that it aids learners to be more intelligible to their listeners. Forty percent of the teachers thought that eliminating foreign accents as much as possible should be the goal of pronunciation teaching. The participants also seemed to enjoy teaching pronunciation, and most of them disagreed that it is difficult.

Some respondents stated that a native English speaker is not necessarily the best

person to teach pronunciation (30%). A small percentage (28%) believed that some people resist changing their pronunciation to maintain their L1 identity, whereas 49% were neutral or unsure about this issue. In addition, 49% of participants were uncertain whether a heavy accent could lead to discrimination.

The Most Serious Pronunciation Problems to Learn and Teach

This section tries to answer the research question ‘What are the most serious pronunciation problems experienced by your students?’ The most common problems reported by teachers were stress (69%) and the sounds /θ/ as in thanks and /ð/ as in mother (60% of respondents). The participants also mentioned that pronunciation of English vowels

(mainly, differentiation between tense and lax vowels), the rhythm of the words (38%), students’ intonation when speaking English (35%), the insertion of an [i] as a syllable simplification strategy (i.e., epenthesis) (18%) are also problematic. Regarding their challenges when giving pronunciation instruction, 51% of the respondents agreed that teaching pronunciation is complicated. Intonation, vowel sounds, rhythm, and minimal pairs are the most difficult features to teach. Table 4.9 shows percentages of teacher responses regarding learners’ proficiency level (B= Beginner, I= Intermediate and A= Advanced) and based on whether they have taught these aspects or not (Never or Rarely, Sometimes and Often or Always).

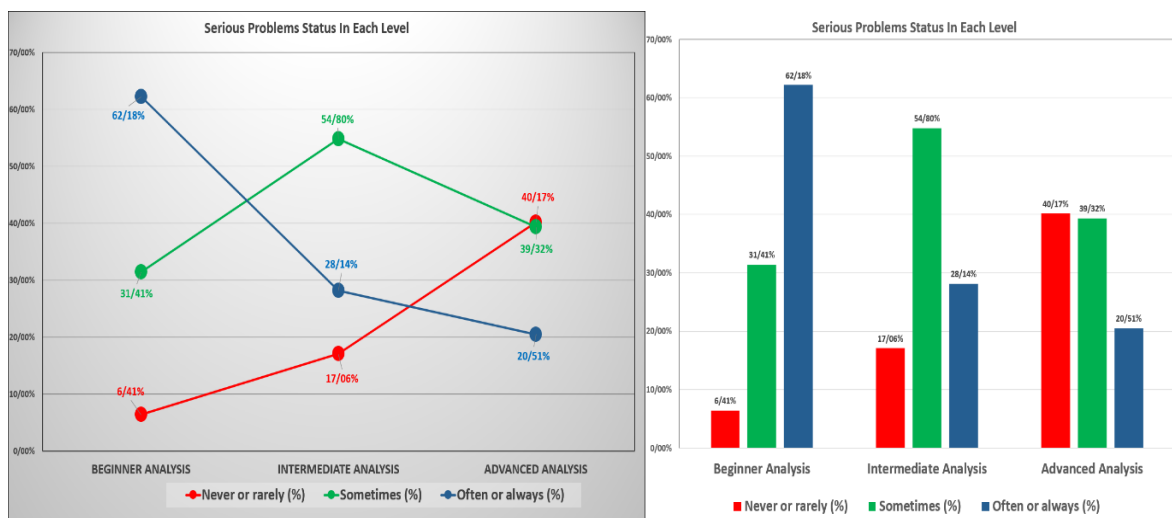
Table 4.9 Percentage of answers to each item										Table 4.10 Analysis of highlighted and most frequent items in Part IV			
Part IV. Most serious pronunciation problems experienced by learners.													
Language features	Never or rarely (%)			Sometimes (%)			Often or always (%)			Frequency Percentage			Most frequent items
	B	I	A	B	I	A	B	I	A	never	sometimes	always	
1.The sounds of th, /θ/ and /ð/	1%	3%	7%	2%	19%	7%	30%	11%	19%	11%	28%	60%	The sounds of th, /θ/ and /ð/
2.Vowel sounds	4%	8%	18%	7%	21%	13%	22%	4%	2%	30%	41%	28%	
3.Word-final consonants or epenthesis	1%	8%	23%	21%	21%	8%	11%	4%	3%	32%	50%	18%	Word-final consonants
4.Intonation	2%	5%	8%	8%	21%	21%	23%	7%	6%	15%	50%	35%	
5. Suffixes: -ed and/or -s endings	0%	6%	21%	8%	23%	11%	25%	4%	2%	28%	41%	31%	
6.Rhythm	1%	6%	7%	9%	19%	21%	24%	9%	5%	13%	49%	38%	
7.Stress	1%	4%	5%	6%	9%	8%	27%	21%	21%	9%	22%	69%	Stress
8.Sounds that do not exist in Persian in general	2%	4%	4%	4%	8%	21%	28%	22%	8%	10%	33%	57%	Sounds that do not exist in Persian
9.Minimal pairs in general	4%	7%	21%	21%	20%	12%	9%	6%	1%	31%	52%	16%	Minimal Pairs
10.The retroflex /r/, especially in word-initial position	5%	7%	21%	20%	21%	11%	9%	5%	2%	33%	52%	16%	The retroflex

As table 4.11 represents, 6.41% of beginner level teachers answered they ‘never’, 31.41% ‘sometimes’, and 62.18% ‘often’ had found serious pronunciation problems at this level. 17.06% of the intermediate level teachers answered they ‘never’, 54.80% ‘sometimes’, and

28.14% ‘often’ had found serious pronunciation problems at this level. Finally, 40.17% of the advanced level teachers answered they ‘never’, 39.32% ‘sometimes’, and 20.51% ‘often’ had found serious pronunciation problems at this level.

Figure 3

Status of facing serious pronunciation problems in three different levels



Interviewee’s profile

The interviewees had about 2 to 20 years of teaching English experience (three of them had a two-year experience, four of them three years, two of the four years, one of the five years, one of the eight years, one of the ten years and one 20 years of teaching experience). All interviewees were taught in private language institutes. Six interviewees held an MA degree in TEFL; five had a BA degree. Two of them did not have any academic degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and had learned English in language institutes. In addition, almost all teachers have taught learners of different levels, and most of them have been teaching students of intermediate and advanced levels.

The Results of the Interview

The authors transcribed interviews conducted by volunteer teachers (N=15) and then qualitatively analyzed them to find common themes and categories. A digital voice recorder with a clip-on microphone attached to the teacher recorded interviewees' voices. Each interview took 9 to 20 minutes. These follow-up interviews helped the researchers expand their understanding of the teachers’ beliefs and opinions about teaching pronunciation in EFL classrooms. In addition, the authors assured the interviewees about the answers' anonymity.

The authors used ‘interview profiles’ suggested by Seidman (1998) to analyze the interview data. As Dornyei (2007) asserts, “A special feature of an ‘interview profile’ is that it

is primarily a compilation of the interviewee's own words, using the first-person voice of the participant, with only minimal transitional additions and clarifications by the researcher" (p. 255) which summarizes participant accounts by highlighting the most salient points.

When the teachers were asked if they teach pronunciation as a separate lesson, their responses showed that most do not teach pronunciation as a separate lesson:

James: *Not really. Whenever there is a problem with learners' pronunciation in my classes, I take a couple of minutes and teach them that specific point. I hardly ever teach pronunciation as a separate lesson. I teach pronunciation implicitly.*

Some of the interviewees also mentioned that the pre-specified book, the school curriculum, and the time limitation do not let them focus on pronunciation as a separate lesson:

Serina: *No, not at all. The reason is that we as teachers have to stick to the curriculum we have already provided with. So we do not have much time to teach pronunciation as a separate lesson.*

Some of the interviewees also mentioned that they consider students' level of proficiency when it comes to pronunciation teaching. For example, in response to question six, which asked about the integration of pronunciation teaching with other skills, almost all teachers mentioned that they try to integrate it with reading, speaking, and listening skills:

Navid: *Yes, I believe that speaking comes from listening. I try to integrate listening, speaking, and pronunciation. When you listen and reinforce your listening, you can be a good speaker, and by listening, you can imitate your*

pronunciation and have him or her as a role model. So in this way you can strengthen your pronunciation, besides listening and speaking.

The interviews revealed that the teachers do not have a systematic approach to pronunciation teaching, and they deal with pronunciation when it is part of the lesson in the book. However, as they mentioned, they deal with problems as they arise most of the time:

Foad: *As I said before, I start solving the problems as they arise. Because I do not know what kinds of things the students are weak at. We wait to see what comes up.*

Melissa: *I deal with them as they arise. I do not correct the students. I repeat the correct form of the words later, not on the spot. I think this method is more effective.*

When the authors asked the interviewees about the methods they used in teaching pronunciation, they mentioned that they had used them according to the learners' proficiency level. For instance, most interviewees pointed out that back-chaining is suitable for low levels and minimal pairs for elementary and advanced learners. However, some also stated that drills are very effective for beginners and intermediate levels:

Carolyn: *You know Back-chaining is suitable for elementary levels and beginners, not advanced. I use this method for beginners when I am teaching conversation.*

Teachers also found drills a helpful method in teaching pronunciation when students confront a new word:

Kenya: *I use drills when I recognize that some students are afraid of pronouncing new words. For example, I say it loudly and ask them to repeat it, and I ensure they have no problem and*

all of them can say it correctly. Sometimes we repeat it many times.

Mason: *I can say that I repeat the words in most of my classes at all levels, and they repeat after me. They listen to the words, then repeat them, and it is effective in all levels, I think.*

Teachers also pointed out that role play can be used to teach pronunciation indirectly:

EFL teachers found videos and group work helpful in improving learners' pronunciation:

Carolyn: *When we are teaching pronunciation in a group, the students are not under stress. They are not afraid of receiving feedback. When they are relaxed, they learn.*

Mason: *I use videos to teach pronunciation indirectly. I select a part of the movie; then, I ask the student to listen and imitate the character's pronunciation to enrich their pronunciation.*

Another interview question, which asked about the teachers' main difficulties encountered in pronunciation teaching, evoked various responses from the teachers:

Carolyn: *One of the difficulties is that students do not like pronunciation teaching. It is boring for them. Another difficulty is the limitation we have in the institutes. We do not have laboratories.*

James: *As I said before, the students do not believe that pronunciation is as important as other skills. I think motivation is the main difficulty because some students are not motivated to learn pronunciation as accurately as they should. They believe they can speak and communicate, but they do not need to pronounce the words 100 % correctly. So I think the main difficulty for teaching pronunciation is motivation. If you can motivate the students, they learn correct pronunciation, but it is*

complicated to persuade them to change the way they speak if you cannot motivate them.

Serina: *the answer is that we teachers did not learn well because we lacked suitable training and resources. We have learned how to teach grammar and other skills, but not pronunciation.*

When teachers were asked about "How do they think their pronunciation teaching has changed over their career?" they answered that:

Jack: *day after day, I try to improve my pronunciation because if they find out that their teacher is wrong in the case of pronunciation or even other skills, they will not pay attention to their teacher. So I do my best to improve and update myself by listening to different podcasts, movies, and other sources.*

James: *These days, students are more curious and exposed to the English language through films, songs, and other sources. The teacher should pay more attention to his or her pronunciation. Moreover, they will get it if the teacher pronounces it by mistake.*

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, EFL teachers in this study seemed to focus their pronunciation teaching primarily on suffixes (such as the -ed and -s endings). The second most frequently taught features were word stress and syllable structure, which almost half of the teachers often taught. Other previous studies also tended to focus on word-level aspects (e.g., Burns, 2006; Buss, 2016; Tergujeff, 2012).

Research question two explored how often teachers use different pronunciation activities. The participant teachers often or always used drama and role-play as the most

common strategy. Teachers' next most common strategy was pronunciation teaching through imitation and repetition. The preference for these traditional methods might result from the type of training received by Iranian instructors. On the other hand, the least frequent techniques involved mirrors, interactive media, and chanting. About 70% of the teachers indicated that they never used mirrors for students to observe their articulation. Buss (2016) also claimed that many teachers disagreed with item 12 (i.e., Dislike teaching pronunciation). In addition, 70% of the teachers agreed entirely with item 14 (Teaching pronunciation increases intelligibility).

Research question three explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and opinions on pronunciation learning and teaching. The participant teachers believed that learners need to be taught to learn pronunciation: a majority of them disagreed with the belief that frequent exposure to good input is enough for most learners to acquire pronunciation. Most of the teachers also believed that native speakers should be the model for pronunciation teaching. This finding is in line with Sifakis and Sougari (2005). This result, however, differs from Buss's (2016) study in which EFL teachers did not consider native speakers the best model for teaching pronunciation. According to language learning theories (e.g., Asher, 1977; Krashen, 1981; Postovsky, 1974), the received input helps learners acquire the target language. Accordingly, if L2 learners are exposed to large amounts of comprehensible input, they might succeed in language learning. In EFL settings where learners do not have enough opportunity to hear the native speaker model of the target language, teachers should attempt to maximize

learners' exposure to the target language and encourage them to experience enough authentic oral discourse of native speakers outside of the classroom (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). The findings of some of the studies have shown that providing learners with enough exposure to the target language as well as extensive training help learners improve their perception and production of different target sounds (e.g., Bradlow, Pisoni, Akahane-Yamada, & Tohkura, 1997; Harada, 2006; Wang & Munro, 2004).

The respondents also stated that instruction could improve learners' communication in English and most of the teachers believed it is possible to teach pronunciation communicatively. As Celce-Murcial et al. (2010) clarify, teaching pronunciation via communicative practice requires the teacher to use open-ended tasks to negotiate meaning. These tasks should be carefully designed to highlight the targeted pronunciation feature. Role-play, storytelling, debate, and problem-solving are practical communicative tasks. These tasks require the learners to focus on the form and content of their speech (Celce-Murcial et al., 2010).

Regarding the objective of pronunciation teaching, 70% agreed that it helps learners to be intelligible to their listeners. Some of the teachers assumed that 'eliminating foreign accents as much as possible' should be the goal of pronunciation teaching. The participants also seemed to enjoy teaching pronunciation, and most of them disagreed that it is difficult. In addition, some of the respondents believed that a native English speaker is not necessarily the best person to teach pronunciation (30%). The most likely explanation for this finding is that

Iranian EFL teachers are well aware of the superiority of the 'intelligibility principle' to the 'nativeness principle' (Levis, 2005). Some researchers (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2005; Field, 2005) distinguished three notions: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. According to these researchers, intelligibility is how a listener understands an utterance or message. Comprehensibility is defined as a listener's perception of how difficult it is to understand the utterance or message.

Moreover, accentedness refers to a listener's perception of how different a speaker's accent is from that of the L1 community. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) believed that intelligibility and comprehensibility are more important than accentedness. In this regard, Jenkins (2000) insists on a non-native model for English as an international language. She maintains that pronunciation teaching for non-native speakers should focus on communication and intelligibility rather than nativism. Moreover, Derwing and Munro (1997) found that intelligibility does not correspond precisely with accentedness (i.e., native speaker norms), suggesting that EFL learners do not need to mimic native speaker pronunciation to be understood by natives.

Regarding research question four: 'What are the most serious pronunciation problems experienced by your students?' The participants frequently reported problems with segments, especially with stress (69%) and the th sounds /θ/ as in thanks and /ð/ as in mother (60%). Some teachers also mentioned problems with the pronunciation of English vowels. They referred to vowels in general and specifically to the problem of differentiating between tense and lax vowels, like /i/ in sheep and /ɪ/ in ship.

The rhythm of the words was listed as a common problem, and so was the students' intonation when speaking English. Regarding challenges when giving pronunciation instruction, half of the respondents agreed that pronunciation, especially intonation, vowel sounds, rhythm, and minimal pairs, was complicated to teach. Brawerman-Albini and Kluge (2010) and Albini and Kluge (2011) also reported similar findings, indicating that English intonation can be challenging for Brazilian teachers. Buss (2016) also found that L2 teachers regarded intonation as more challenging to teach than any other feature. Burgess and Spencer (2000) also found that although instructors recognized the importance of suprasegmentals, they found them difficult to teach. In the same vein, Burns (2006) found that instructors preferred the teaching of segmentals over suprasegmentals.

The interviewees' responses revealed that although teachers include pronunciation teaching in their classrooms, most of them do not teach pronunciation as a separate lesson since the school curriculum, the pre-specified book, and the time limitation do not let them focus on pronunciation as a separate lesson. Regarding when to teach pronunciation, Harmer (2014) suggests that dealing with pronunciation in classrooms can be done as a) whole lesson, devoting the whole lesson sequence to pronunciation, and some school timetable pronunciation lessons at various stages during the week, b) discrete slots by inserting short, separate pronunciation slots into lesson sequence. For instance, they work on specific phonemes, either separately or in pairs over weeks, c) integrated phases by getting students to focus on pronunciation issues as an integral part of a lesson; for example, by drawing their

attention to particular pronunciation feature when students are listening to a recording, or by opportunistic teaching, stopping what we are doing in the class and spend some minutes on some pronunciation issues that have arisen in the course of an activity). In this study, most teachers mainly used opportunistic teaching and integrated phases to teach pronunciation. Furthermore, the teachers did not have a systematic approach to pronunciation teaching, and they dealt with pronunciation when it was part of the lesson in the book. As they mentioned, they dealt with problems as they arise most of the time. In addition, almost all of the teachers mentioned that they try to integrate pronunciation teaching with skills like reading, speaking, and listening.

The interviewees mentioned that they selected pronunciation teaching methods according to the learners' proficiency level. For instance, most interviewees pointed out that back-chaining is suitable for low levels and minimal pairs for elementary and advanced learners. Some also stated that drills are very effective for beginners and intermediate levels. Teachers also found drills helpful in teaching pronunciation when students confront a new word. EFL teachers also found videos, role plays, and group work helpful in improving learners' pronunciation.

When teachers were asked about the main difficulties they encountered in pronunciation teaching, they evoked various responses, including the students' lack of interest and motivation, limited facilities and resources in institutes, learners' aims and goals, differences between L1 and L2 sounds, teachers' limited knowledge and training.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that the teaching practices of teacher participants are traditional, as the teachers tend to emphasize word-level features and individual sounds. They rely mainly on activities that involve repetition and imitation. Almost all participants expressed a desire for more professional development in the field and training courses that familiarize them with various pedagogical approaches and tools in the area of pronunciation teaching. Indeed, there is a need for more teacher education in the field and for a greater understanding of what constitutes good teacher education to improve student outcomes.

With the advent of communicative language teaching, the primary goal of language instruction is communication, i.e., using language to communicate. As Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) assert:

This focus on language as communication brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation since both empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a threshold level of pronunciation for non-native speakers of English; if they fall below this threshold level, they will have oral communication problems no matter how excellent, and extensive their control of English grammar and vocabulary might be. (p. 8)

Accordingly, the primary aim of teaching pronunciation to learners of English is not to make them sound like native speakers since this goal would be unrealistic. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), a modest goal is to establish intelligibility in oral communication and enable learners to surpass the threshold level. Today, English language teachers find traditional pronunciation techniques and practices useful and effective in teaching different aspects of the English sound system. Among these techniques,

according to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), are: listen and imitate, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, visual aids, tongue twisters, developmental approximation drills, the practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, and recording of learners' production (p. 9). To make pronunciation teaching more effective, teachers should have comprehensive knowledge of the English sound system and make themselves familiar with different pedagogical techniques to address their students' pronunciation needs efficiently.

Despite the points mentioned above, the present study has some limitations. First, teachers from a limited number of language institutes participated in this study. Further research is also needed in different contexts to compare the results. Second, the sample size for this study was not large, and thus further research is needed to make more robust generalizations. Third, this study only examined teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching. Future research should investigate the actual practices of EFL teachers regarding pronunciation teaching in EFL classrooms.

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