

Untangling the Tongues: Exploring Pronunciation Development Strategies for Learners of English at High Schools in Oromia Region of Ethiopia

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Abstract

One of the most important aspects of learning a new language is mastering the pronunciation of that language. It is crucial in helping second language learners improve their communication skills and overall performance. Mastering proper pronunciation is a difficult and subtle part of teaching English as a foreign or second language. The focus of this study is to assess the contributing factors affecting ESL students' pronunciation. The study used a quantitative research approach. A total of 189 students from Burayu High School were chosen at random sampling technique for this study. The researchers collected data through a questionnaire. SPSS version 26 was used to analyze the data obtained from the respondents of the survey. Factors influencing pronunciation that were identified in this study include poor motivation, lack of confidence, exposure, practice, interest, an unfriendly atmosphere, one's native language interference, age, personal traits of the learners, instructional approach, and feedback deficiency. The findings also provide valuable insights into preferred pronunciation learning strategies among students of English in the Oromia region of Ethiopia and explore the impact of individual and environmental factors, including first language influence, strengths, and weaknesses of current teaching methodologies in fostering pronunciation development in this specific context. This study will contribute to the development of more effective and learner-centered pedagogical approaches for pronunciation instructions in English language programs designed for English learners in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

Keywords: pronunciation, acquisition, language, learning-teaching, Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Learning proper English pronunciation is a crucial but frequently neglected part of teaching English to students who are not native speakers like Ethiopian students who learn English as a foreign language. Majority of the English teachers ensure that their students study grammar, vocabulary, functional conversation, listening, and reading following most of the strategies of GTM. However, only a few teachers work on their students' pronunciation (Harmer, 2001).

To improve students' English pronunciation, they must comprehend what native speakers of the language say and ensure that their pronunciation is easily understood by others around them. As commonly seen nowadays, there are a lot of conversations going on in English between native speakers, and non-native speakers who use English as a second language. Therefore, it is essential to have sufficient proficiency in pronouncing English to achieve appropriate fluency in spoken communication. However, when it comes to learning English, the majority of students who aren't native English speakers still face challenges including mispronouncing words, stressing syllables incorrectly, wrong word stress, and using incorrect sentence intonation patterns.

In an EFL setting, perfect pronunciation is not something that can be attained with limited training. It typically takes some time for EFL students to become accustomed to speaking with the correct pronunciation. Since teaching students how to pronounce words is an integral element of teaching English as a foreign language, practicing pronunciation is one of the options for students to acquire proper pronunciation. According to Hişmanoğlu (2006), EFL teachers have the responsibility to ensure that their students learn correct pronunciation since sounds play a vital role in communication. Pronunciation instruction is crucial for second language learners in the context of interactions with native and non-native speakers of English. By consistently training students to improve their pronunciation,

teachers may help them gain self-confidence while speaking English (LeBel & McCafferty, 2002; Li, 2016; Murphy, 2017).

Furthermore, bad pronunciation habits are hard to change. Therefore, the acquisition of accurate pronunciation is very important. Learners who repeatedly mispronounce the words will make it hard for native speakers to understand them (Kelly, 2002). Students' ability to pronounce English correctly is, hence, greatly affected by teaching pronunciation. However, EFL teachers no longer prioritize teaching pronunciation while teaching English and it has become a neglected skill (Ikhsan, 2017). Reading and writing, which are more likely to result in test success, are often prioritized in language instruction above pronunciation since teachers have seen-teaching pronunciation as a difficult skill. Since practicing pronunciation is so often ignored as a separate task in the learning process, it is challenging to design a lesson on it alone (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). There are several reasons why pronunciation teaching is often neglected in schools. Some of these reasons include instructors' lack of confidence in their teaching abilities, a lack of emphasis on the topic in the school curriculum, and a lack of accessible, effective resources (Macdonald, 2002).

Many Ethiopian students and teachers are highly aware of the need to work on their pronunciation, for it is an integral aspect of communicative competence. Many students in Ethiopia find it difficult to pronounce the vocabulary sounds based on the proper standard of English pronunciation. They also struggled to use the right features of English sounds that are audible, and they made a lot of mistakes when they tried to mimic English speech. The various difficulties that contributed to the mistakes and errors included issues with hearing, adapting to the phonetic sounds of the native languages, and the effort required to pronounce words correctly. Generally, students' mispronunciation affects their confidence and speaking competence.

Statement of the problem:

English pronunciation among high school students in Ethiopia is typically poor hindering effective communication. English is a crucial subject, however, several students face difficulties in pronunciation due to various causes. This problem negatively impacts their academic performance and limits their opportunities in further education and the job market, where proficiency in English is more important. Insufficient emphasis on speaking and listening skills in English language instruction might be a contributing factor to the inadequate English pronunciation of Ethiopian high school learners. Verbal communication is frequently ignored in preference for reading and writing. Consequently, students have difficulties in pronouncing English phonemes and words as a consequence of insufficient practice. Moreover, little exposure to authentic English language circumstances beyond the classroom contributes to the problem. Many students may not have access to native English speakers, foreign language courses, or interactive learning devices. Lack of exposure to native English speakers or authentic audiovisual materials hinders students' ability to pronounce accurately, exacerbating their language challenges. These problems must be addressed to improve Ethiopian high school students' English pronunciation skills.

Research questions:

1. What are the internal factors that affect students' pronunciation skills?
2. What are the internal factors that affect students' pronunciation skills?
3. What are reasons behind ESL learners' passiveness in acquiring pronunciation skills

Research Objectives:

1. To find out the internal factors affecting students' English pronunciation skills;
2. To find out the external factors affecting students' English pronunciation skills; and
3. To find out the reasons behind ESL learners' passiveness in acquiring the pronunciation of English as a foreign language.

The significance of the study provide insight-into the elements that influence students' proficiency in pronouncing English words correctly. Students may improve their pronunciation skills by considering the elements that affect their skills. Therefore, this study can enhance students' motivation to learn how to pronounce English words correctly. Students can gain a broader understanding of the aspects that impact their English pronunciation abilities from this study as well. Further, this study helps English teachers give them a good foundation to consider what variables impact their students' pronunciation progress. Besides, English teachers will be able to help their students with their English pronunciation if they are familiar with these aspects.

2. Literature Review

The ability to pronounce words clearly and correctly is an essential element of effective oral communication. Learners are more likely to communicate successfully when they have a high capacity for intonation and pronunciation, even when they make avoidable mistakes in vocabulary and grammar (Modesti, 2015). How well we can create the sounds that convey meaning when we speak refers to pronunciation ability. That is why it is not always simple to grasp someone's pronunciation.

Devid and Ronald (2001) stated that proper pronunciation is the ability to recognize and imitate a language's most important phonemes to convey meaning in spoken language. Pronunciation is a skill, while its development might be improved by knowledge.

Developing fluent pronunciation might be challenging for some ESL students. There are several aspects that impact one's ability to pronounce words with a native-like accent. A person's motivation, age, exposure, intrinsic phonetic aptitude, motivation, identity, and linguistic ego are all factors that might affect an individual's pronunciation. Defitranita (2017), Munandar (2015), and Sukandi and Sani (2017) all agree that it is difficult to provide a comprehensive list of elements that influence pronunciation.

According to Djiwandono (2008:124), intelligibility, fluency, correctness, and native-like are the four symbols of good pronunciation. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) stated some factors impacting students' proficiency in pronouncing words correctly are things like attitude, teaching, exposure to the target language, motive, mother tongue, and age. Gatbonton, Trofimovich, and Magid, (2005) identified factors that impact students' ability to grasp pronunciation including their age, the quantity and type of past practice, aptitude, learner attitude and motivation, and native language.

Elliot (1995) explained that most language teachers would rather spend class time on other aspects of language than on pronunciation since they consider it the least important of the fundamental abilities. Perhaps teachers rationalize ignoring pronunciation because they assume that adult students of foreign languages find it more challenging to master the target language's pronunciation than other aspects of second language learning. Lack of knowledge and resources among educators causes pronunciation to be neglected in the classroom (Elliot, 1995; Hoque, 2021).

Adults may struggle more than children with pronunciation due to the effects of age on language learning, which means they are less likely to have a native-like accent. A biological or neurological period ends at about the age of 12, and after this period it becomes exceedingly difficult to achieve full mastery of a second language, particularly pronunciation (Barros, 2003; Hoque, 2016).

The term "exposure" is defined by Al Zoubi (2018) as the time that students spend interacting with the language they are trying to learn. The results show that the subjects often engaged in activities both in and out of class that helped students improve their pronunciation of the English language. Learning strategies, including self-instruction, naturalistic learning, and self-directed naturalistic learning, are together referred to as "outside-of-class language exposure" (Benson, 2013; Hoque et al., 2018; Hamid et al. 2023). What this indicates is that exposure gained through classroom instruction settings alone is insufficient. Students should actively seek out input from a variety of sources outside of class, including extensive listening, extensive practice with native or non-native speakers, and constructive criticism from teachers and classmates. Exposure to the target language makes it simpler to learn proper pronunciation (Murcia et al., 2010; Hoque et al. 2021).

While research specific to the Ethiopian context is ongoing, studies in different parts of the world including Bangladesh (Hoque, 2013; Islam, 2021; Yasmin et al., 2024), Egypt (Adel, et al., 2023), India (Himadri & Sharma, 2018), Somalia (Börjesson, 2014), and Taiwan (Chen, 2009), examining factors influencing pronunciation acquisition in similar multilingual environments can offer valuable insights. Future research within Ethiopia can explore these factors in more detail and identify context-specific recommendations for enhancing pronunciation teaching practices.

There is a lack of insightful investigations into the issues and problems of English pronunciation among secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary learners of English in different regions of Ethiopia. A few research studies have been already conducted to figure out the problems and find solutions. A study conducted by Gebeyanesh Mamo (2016) explores that teachers' low concern for teaching and students' ignorance of learning proper orthography and pronunciation, weak methodologies of teaching EFL, lack of ideal situations to use EFL, etc. excreted from Afaan Oromo in everyday communications. Omokhua (2022) analyses of interference of the Afan Oromo language in learning EFL orthography and pronunciation through a case study of Batu secondary school students in the East Shewa Zone of Oromia Region of Ethiopia. Similarly, studies like Gashaw, A. (2014, 2016, 2017), Wudu, M.(2021), Belay, E. (2022), Wudu, M. (2021), Haile & Mendisu(2024) report common findings like L1 interference, lack of learner motivation, English environment, lack of teacher competence, etc. In-depth investigations into the minute details of learning English pronunciation by Ethiopian secondary, higher secondary, and college students in different regions of Ethiopia.

There are still many students with excellent pronunciation, but the majority of Ethiopian students face difficulties in pronouncing like native speakers. Even though the factors that influence pronunciation when learning a new language have been the subject of several research, no one has addressed this issue as of now. This is a gap between the theories and practical implications. Therefore, this research aims to fill the existing gap and offers a comprehensive investigation into the internal, external, socio-academic, and environmental issues that make it difficult for Ethiopian learners to pronounce English correctly in a foreign or second language.

3. Methods

The research design of this study was a quantitative technique. A mixed research approach was employed in this study. To collect data, the researchers employed a Likert-scale questionnaire with 12 items of questions. Participants include 189 students of grade 12 aged between 16 to 18 at Burayu High School in Burayu township of Oromia region in Ethiopia who were purposively selected for the survey of the study. The data was analyzed with SPSS Version 26, and the findings are displayed in tables and figures.

4. Findings

This section dissects the factors influencing English pronunciation acquisition among Ethiopian students. We analyze the data to identify key contributors and challenges in pronunciation development.

The discussion explores how instructional methods, learner characteristics (e.g., interest, learning style, attitude, motivation), and the influence of the L1 of the learners (Oromo tribal language) interact to shape pronunciation outcomes (Kenworthy, 1987). Furthermore, we examine the roles of the classroom environment (Brown, 2007) and exposure to native English pronunciation (Derwing, et al. Eds., 2022); Hoque, 2020) in this context. These insights inform our understanding of pronunciation acquisition in multilingual settings and pave the way for improved teaching practices that enhance Ethiopian students' success (Rahman, 2018).

Q1: "My age significantly affects my ability to improve pronunciation skills."

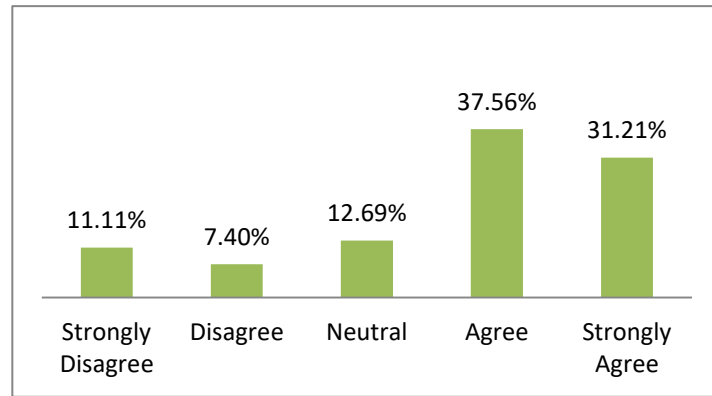


Figure 1. Age factor impacting pronunciation skills among Ethiopian learners of English

Figure 1 shows that 11.11%, strongly disagreed with the notion that age significantly affects pronunciation skill improvement, and 7.4% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. These participants believe that age is not a significant determinant in the enhancement of pronunciation abilities. The result also reveals that 12.69% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This shows that this group of respondents was uncertain regarding the role of age in pronunciation skill enhancement. The neutrality might stem from a lack of strong conviction or perhaps insufficient information or personal experience to form a definitive opinion on the matter. 37.56%, of the participants agreed that age significantly affects pronunciation skill improvement, and 31.21% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. These participants believe that age is a significant determinant in the enhancement of pronunciation abilities. Overall, the result highlights the influence of age on the ability to improve pronunciation skills and the complexity of the issue, and the various factors that individuals consider when evaluating the impact of age on language acquisition and skill development.

Q2: "To what extent do you believe that your aptitude influences your pronunciation proficiency?"

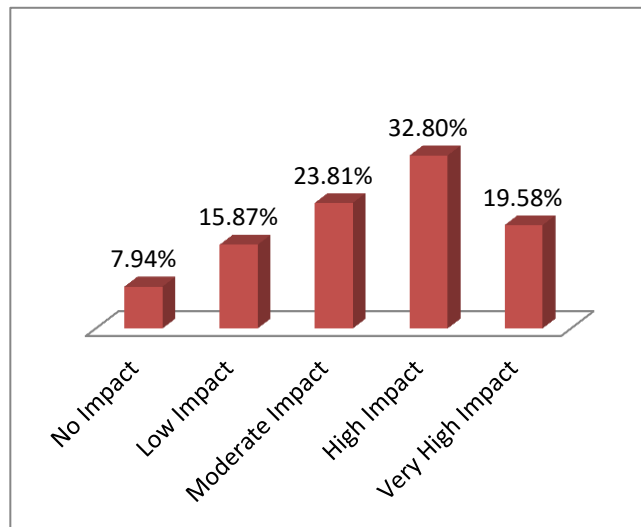


Figure 2. Influence of aptitude in pronunciation of English among Ethiopian learners

Figure 2 indicates that 7.94 of respondents agreed that their aptitude has no impact on their pronunciation skills. Besides, 15.87% of respondents acknowledged that their aptitude has a low impact on their pronunciation proficiency. This indicates that individuals with certain cognitive predispositions may have a slight advantage in mastering pronunciation skills more efficiently. 23.81% of respondents believe that aptitude moderately influences pronunciation proficiency. They argue that individuals with higher cognitive aptitude may grasp pronunciation more quickly and accurately. Unlike this, 32.80% of respondents believe that aptitude plays a very significant role in pronunciation proficiency. According to this viewpoint, individuals with higher cognitive aptitude possess a natural predisposition to excel in linguistic tasks, including pronunciation. This indicates that such individuals may demonstrate faster progress and higher accuracy in acquiring pronunciation skills compared to those with lower aptitude levels. Moreover, 19.58% of respondents assert that aptitude has a very high impact on their pronunciation proficiency. This result illustrates that cognitive abilities heavily dictate an individual's capacity to master pronunciation skills. From this perspective, individuals with superior cognitive aptitude are fated to achieve higher levels of

pronunciation proficiency, while those with lower aptitude may struggle despite their best efforts.

Q3: "How many different types of your learning style (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) might impact your pronunciation skill?"

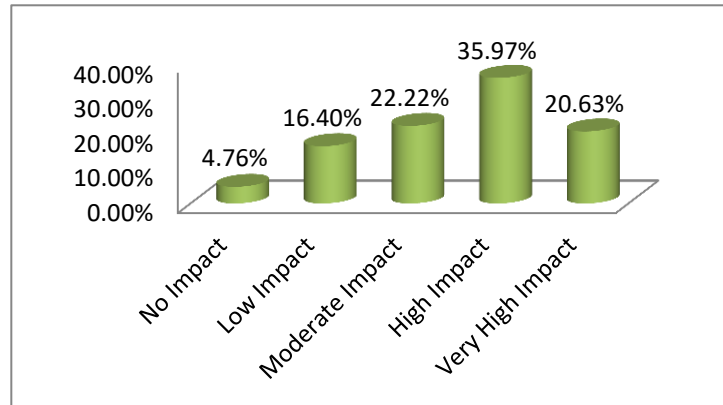


Figure 3. The impact of auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic styles on the English pronunciation development of Ethiopian learners

Figure 3 implies that the majority (35.97%) of respondents believe that their learning styles have a high impact on their pronunciation skill development. This suggests that individuals recognize the importance of tailoring learning approaches to suit their preferred styles to enhance pronunciation proficiency effectively. Additionally, 20.63% of the respondents believe that their learning styles have a very high impact on their pronunciation skill development. These results could be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the crucial role that auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods play in language acquisition. Auditory learners may benefit from listening to native speakers or language materials to refine their pronunciation, while visual learners might find it helpful to observe mouth movements and mimic them. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, may prefer interactive activities or physical engagement to reinforce pronunciation skills. However, 4.76% and 16.40% of the respondents agreed that their learning styles do not affect their pronunciation skill development and they perceive themselves as adaptable learners who can effectively utilize multiple learning styles or integrate various approaches to enhance pronunciation skills. However, 22.22% of the respondents believe that their learning styles have a moderate impact on their pronunciation skill development. Overall, the result highlights the significance of considering individual learning styles, particularly in the context of pronunciation proficiency. Therefore, language learners can optimize their learning experiences and maximize their potential for pronunciation improvement by recognizing and accommodating various learning preferences.

Q4: "How much do you think your interest in improving pronunciation affects your progress?"

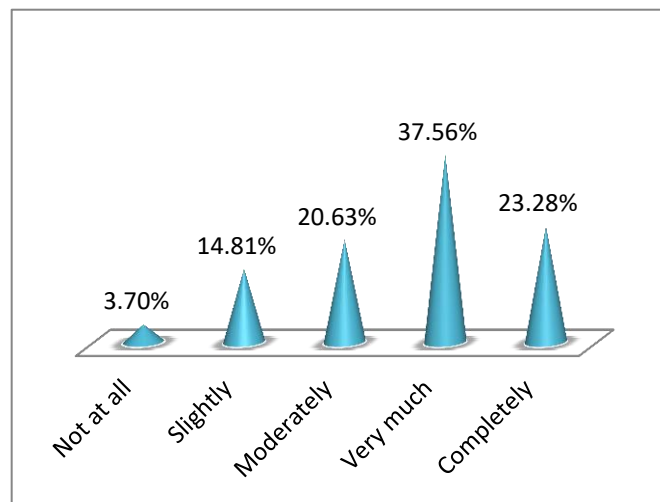


Figure 4. The effect of the interest of the English learners of Ethiopia on their academic progress

Figure 4 indicates that 3.7% of respondents believe that their interest in improving pronunciation does not affect their progress at all. This suggests that a small number of individuals do not perceive any correlation between their interest and learning pronunciation. It could imply that this group of students prioritize other aspects of language acquisition or feel confident in their pronunciation skills without actively seeking improvement. 14.81% of the respondents believe that their interest in improving pronunciation slightly affects their progress whereas, 20.63% of the respondents believe that their interest in improving pronunciation moderately affects their progress. This suggests that a considerable number of individuals recognize a moderate influence of their interest in pronunciation on their progress in language

learning. These respondents believe that improving their pronunciation skills to a certain extent contributes moderately to their overall proficiency and communication abilities. 37.56% of the respondents believe their interest in improving pronunciation highly affects their progress. This suggests that the majority of individuals perceive a strong correlation between their interest in pronunciation and their overall progress in language learning. They prioritize pronunciation practice and perceive it as a crucial factor in achieving fluency and effective communication. 23.28% of respondents strongly believe that their interest in improving pronunciation is integral to their language learning progress. They consider pronunciation as a foundational aspect of language acquisition and prioritize it extensively in their learning strategies. In general, the result illustrates the influence of interest in improving pronunciation on language learning progress and they realize it as a critical component that significantly shapes their overall language proficiency and communication effectiveness.

Q5: "To what degree do you think the influence of your first language affects your pronunciation accuracy?"

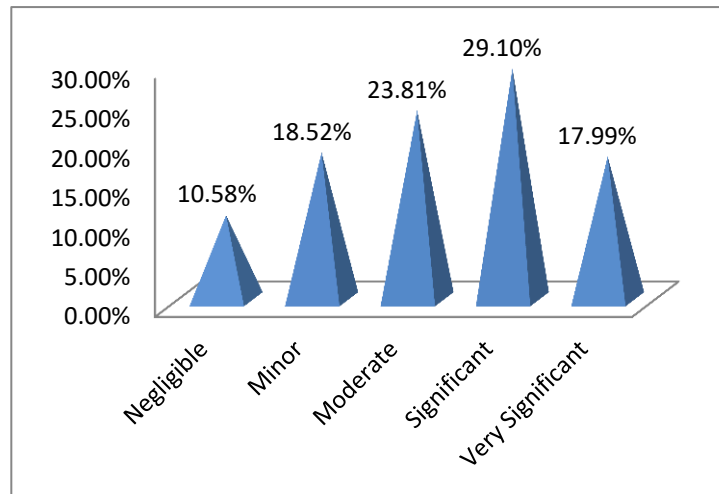


Figure 5. Influence of the L1 of the Ethiopian English learners in their pronunciation accuracy

Figure 5 shows that 10.58% of the participants perceive no influence of their first language on their pronunciation accuracy while 18.52% of the participants perceive an insignificant influence of their first language on their pronunciation accuracy. These respondents believe that their native language does have a noticeable effect on their ability to accurately pronounce sounds in a second language. 23.81% of respondents of the participants believe that their first language moderately influences their pronunciation. 29.10% of respondents of the participants believe that their first language significantly influences their pronunciation accuracy. This indicates that the majority of individuals believe that the influence of their first language on their pronunciation accuracy is significant. They perceive their native language as having a noticeable impact on their ability to accurately pronounce sounds in a second language. Moreover, 17.99% of respondents strongly perceive the influence of their first language on their pronunciation accuracy. These respondents believe that their native language strongly influences their ability to accurately pronounce sounds in a second language. Overall, the result highlights the influence of the first language on pronunciation accuracy in a second or foreign language and students recognize that considerable difficulties stemming from the influence of their native language.

Question 6: " How do you rate your motivation to improve your pronunciation skills?"

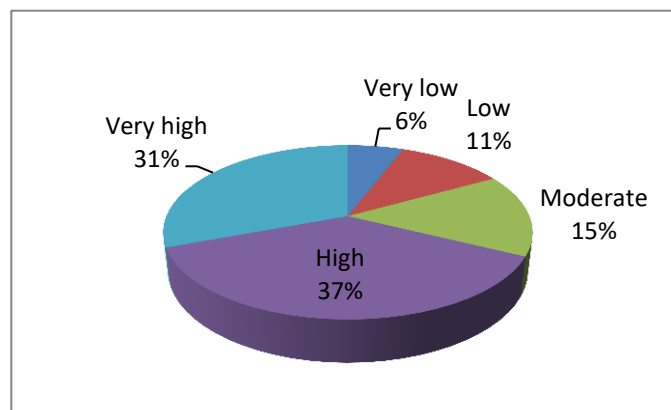


Figure 6. Rate of learner motivation in the improvement of their English pronunciation skills in the Ethiopian context

Figure 6 indicates that 6% and 11.11% of respondents believe that they have very low and low motivation to improve their pronunciation

skills respectively. This indicates that a small number of individuals have a relatively low level of motivation to improve their pronunciation skills. 15% of respondents believe that they have moderate level of motivation to improve their pronunciation skills. This suggests that some respondents have a moderate level of motivation to improve their pronunciation skills. This group of students recognizes the importance of pronunciation in effective communication and is willing to invest some effort into improving it, although it may not be their highest priority. 37% of respondents have a high level of motivation to improve their pronunciation skills. They perceive pronunciation as a crucial aspect of language proficiency and prioritize it accordingly, actively seeking opportunities to enhance their pronunciation through practice and feedback. 31% of respondents have a very high level of motivation to improve their pronunciation skills. This group of participants considers pronunciation improvement as a top priority in their language learning journey, dedicating significant time and effort to mastering pronunciation to achieve fluency and effective communication. Generally, the result illustrates the importance of motivation to improve pronunciation skills and it shows the learners strong commitment to mastering pronunciation for effective communication. These findings highlight individuals should have the motivation to improve their pronunciation skill

Q7: "Rate the impact of different teaching methodologies on your pronunciation improvement."

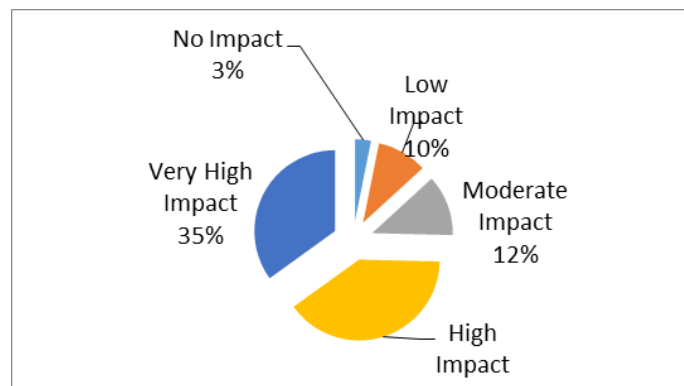


Figure 7. The impact of motivation in improving the pronunciation skills of the English learners of Ethiopia

Figure 7 depicts that 10.05% of respondents believe that teaching methodologies have no impact of their pronunciation improvement. This indicates that a few individuals perceive a low impact of teaching methodologies on their pronunciation improvement. They may believe that teaching methods have a limited or less significant influence on pronunciation improvement. Furthermore, 12.16%. of respondents believe that teaching methodologies moderate impact on their pronunciation improvement. This suggests that a considerable number of respondents perceive a moderate impact of teaching methodologies on their pronunciation improvement. These respondents believe that the methods employed by teachers have a noticeable influence on their ability to improve pronunciation. On the contrary, 39.68% of respondents believe that teaching methodologies have a high impact on their pronunciation improvement. This indicates that majority of individuals perceive a high impact of teaching methodologies on their pronunciation improvement. They attribute a substantial number of their progress in pronunciation to the effectiveness of teaching methods and the proficiency of their teachers in providing guidance and feedback. Besides, 34.92% of respondents believe that teaching methodologies have a very high impact on their pronunciation improvement. This suggests that a large number of individuals perceive the impact of teaching methodologies on their pronunciation improvement as very high. These respondents believe that the methods employed by teachers play a critical role in their ability to make significant signs of progresses in pronunciation proficiency. In general, the result illustrates the impact of teaching methodologies on pronunciation improvement, and highlights the role of teachers and teaching methodologies in pronunciation improvement

Q 8: "To what extent does the classroom environment influence your pronunciation learning?"

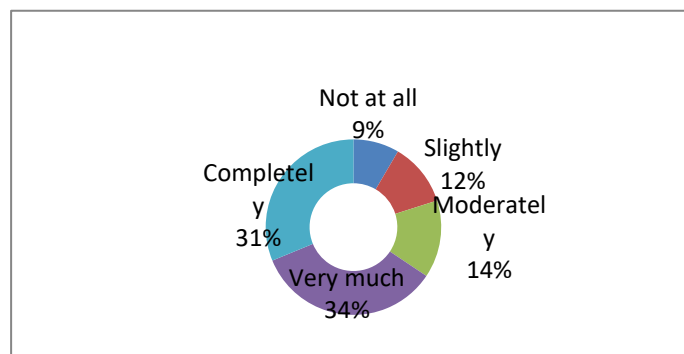


Figure 8. Influence of classroom environment on learning English pronunciation skills by Ethiopian students

Figure 8. displays that 8.46% of respondents perceive that the classroom environment does not influence on their pronunciation learning. This indicates that they perceive no influence of the classroom environment on their pronunciation learning. This suggests that a small number of individuals believe that factors within the classroom setting, such as the physical environment or classroom dynamics, do not impact their ability to learn pronunciation effectively. In addition, 11.64% of respondents of respondents perceive that the classroom environment has little influence on their pronunciation learning. This indicates that small number of individuals perceive a minor influence of the classroom environment on their pronunciation learning. They believe that while the classroom environment plays a role, its impact on their pronunciation learning is relatively limited. Unlikely, 14.28% of respondents of respondents perceive that the classroom environment has moderate influence on their pronunciation learning. This suggests that a considerable number of respondents perceive a moderate influence of the classroom environment on their pronunciation learning. These respondents believe that factors such as classroom resources, teaching methods, and peer interactions contribute to their ability to learn and practice pronunciation effectively. 34.39% of respondents perceive that the classroom environment has high influence on their pronunciation learning. This indicates that majority of individuals perceive the classroom environment as having a substantial influence on their pronunciation learning. These respondents believe that factors such as the quality of instruction, classroom activities, and the supportiveness of the learning environment significantly impact their ability to improve pronunciation. 31.22% of respondents of respondents strongly agreed that the classroom environment influences on their pronunciation learning. This suggests that a significant number of individuals perceive the classroom environment as completely influencing their pronunciation learning. These respondents believe that the classroom setting plays a fundamental role in shaping their pronunciation skills and view it as indispensable to their overall progress in pronunciation proficiency. Overall, the result illustrates the influence of the classroom environment on pronunciation learning, and they attribute significant progress in pronunciation to the supportive and conducive atmosphere of the classroom. These findings highlight the importance of the learning environment in pronunciation learning

Q9: "How effective do you think your textbook pronunciation syllabus is in enhancing your pronunciation skills?"

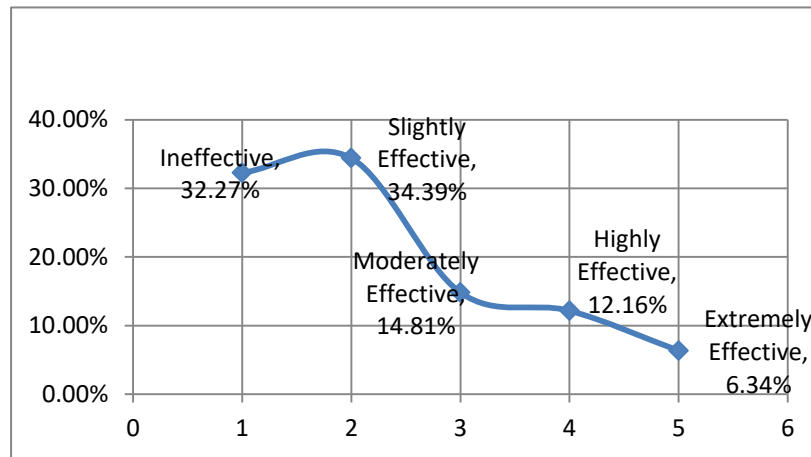


Figure 9. Effectiveness of textbook pronunciation syllabus in enhancing English pronunciation skills of Ethiopian learners of English

Figure 9 illustrates that 32.27% of respondents perceive their textbook pronunciation syllabus as ineffective in enhancing their pronunciation skills. This suggests that a significant number of individuals believe that the materials and methods provided by their textbooks do not help improve their pronunciation, potentially indicating a mismatch between the syllabus content and their learning needs. Moreover, 34.39% of respondents perceive their textbook pronunciation syllabus as having a minor effectiveness in enhancing their pronunciation skills. They may feel that the syllabus could be improved to better address their pronunciation learning goals. 14.81% of respondents perceive their textbook pronunciation syllabus as moderately effective in enhancing their pronunciation skills. These respondents believe that while the syllabus provides some useful materials and guidance, there is room for improvement in terms of its comprehensiveness or relevance to their pronunciation learning needs. On the contrary, 12.16% of respondents perceive their textbook pronunciation syllabus as highly effective in enhancing their pronunciation skills. These respondents believe that the materials and methods provided by the syllabus are well-designed and adequately support their pronunciation learning goals. 6.34% of respondents perceive their textbook pronunciation syllabus as extremely effective in enhancing their pronunciation skills. These respondents believe that the syllabus provides comprehensive and tailored materials and methods that significantly contribute to their progress in pronunciation proficiency. In general, the result illustrates the effectiveness of textbook pronunciation syllabi in enhancing pronunciation skills and very few students believe that the syllabus plays a significant role in supporting their pronunciation learning goals. These findings highlight the importance of evaluating and adapting syllabus content to better meet the needs and preferences of learners in pronunciation instruction.

Q10: "How often do you practice pronunciation to improve your skills?"

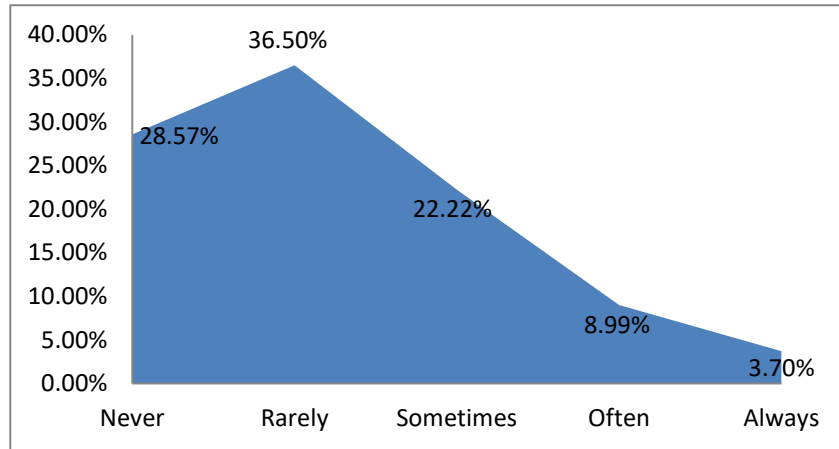


Figure 10. Impact of pronunciation practice to improve English language skills among Ethiopian students

Figure 10 illustrates that 28.57% of respondents agreed that they never practice pronunciation to improve their skills. This suggests that a remarkable number of individuals do not actively engage in pronunciation practice, potentially indicating a lack of perceived importance or motivation to work on this aspect of language learning. Furthermore, 36.5% of respondents agreed that they practice pronunciation rarely. This group of respondents may not prioritize it consistently in their language learning routine or may struggle to find time for regular practice. 22.22% of respondents engage in pronunciation practice sometimes. This group of students may recognize the benefits of practice but may not incorporate it into their language learning routine as consistently as they would like. Unlikely, 8.99% of respondents agreed that they practice pronunciation frequently as part of their language learning routine. They prioritize pronunciation practice and recognize its importance in improving their overall language proficiency and communication skills. In addition, 3.7% of respondents consistently practice pronunciation as an integral part of their language learning process. They consider pronunciation practice as essential for achieving fluency and effective communication, and they make a concerted effort to incorporate it into their daily language learning routine. Overall, the result illustrates frequencies of pronunciation practice as a crucial component of their language learning journey.

Q11: " There is sufficient exposure to authentic spoken language that contributes to improving my pronunciation skill"

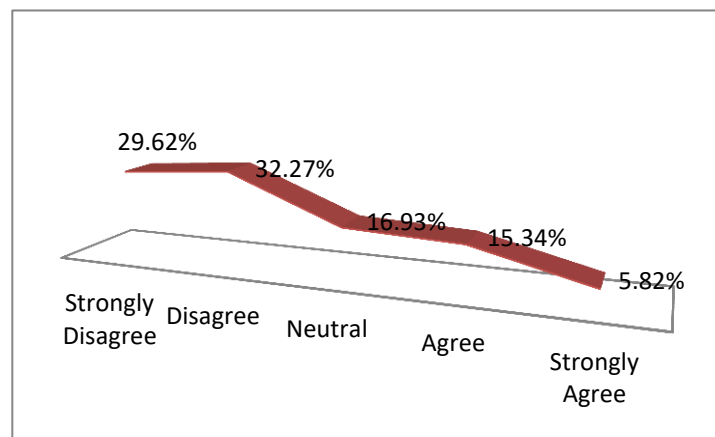


Figure 11. Support of exposure to authentic spoken English that contributes to improving pronunciation skills of the English learners of Ethiopia

Figure 11 depicts that 29.62% of respondents disagreed with the statement. They believed no target language exposure contributes to their pronunciation skill improvement. They may perceive limitations in quantity of authentic spoken language exposure available to them. Furthermore, 32.27% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. They believed that there is very little target language exposure that contributes to their pronunciation skill improvement. These respondents believed that limitations in the quality or quantity of authentic spoken language exposure available to them. 16.93% of respondents were neutral with the statement. This suggests that some respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. They may feel uncertain about the amount or effectiveness of exposure to authentic spoken language in improving their pronunciation skills, indicating a need for further exploration or assessment of their language learning environment. On the contrary, 15.34% of respondents agreed with the statement. This indicates that a small number of individuals agreed that there is sufficient exposure to authentic spoken language contributing to their pronunciation skill improvement. They perceive their exposure to authentic spoken language as beneficial to their pronunciation learning. 5.82% of respondents strongly agreed with the

statement. This suggests that few individuals strongly believe that there is sufficient exposure to authentic spoken language contributing to their pronunciation skill improvement. They perceive their language learning environment as rich in opportunities for exposure to authentic spoken language, which significantly contributes to their pronunciation proficiency. Generally, the result illustrates the importance of target language exposure to in improving pronunciation skills. These findings highlight the importance of assessing the quality and quantity of exposure to authentic spoken language in language learning environments and addressing the limitations to enhance pronunciation skill development.

Q12: "My personality traits (e.g., confidence, extroversion) influence my pronunciation improvement?"

Table 1. Influence of personality traits, e.g., confidence, extroversion, etc. on pronunciation improvement of the Ethiopian learners of English

Level of Agreement	Percent
Strongly Disagree	8.99%
Disagree	10.05%
Neutral	7.4%)
Agree	38.09%
Strongly Agree	35.44%
Total	100%

Table 1 illustrates that 8.99% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. This indicates that their personality traits influence their pronunciation improvement. This suggests that a small number of individuals feel that their personality traits, such as confidence and extroversion, do not play a significant role in their ability to improve pronunciation. Moreover, 10.05% of respondents disagreed with the statement. This indicates that they do not perceive it as a major factor compared to other aspects of language learning. 7.4% of respondents were neutral. This suggests that a small number of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. They may feel uncertain about the extent to which their personality traits influence their pronunciation improvement. However, 38.09% of respondents agreed with the statement. This indicates that the majority of individuals agreed that their personality traits influence their pronunciation improvement. They believe that factors such as confidence, extroversion, and perhaps other personality characteristics play a significant role in shaping their pronunciation proficiency and learning approach. Moreover, 35.44% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This suggests that a significant number of individuals strongly agreed that their personality traits strongly influence their pronunciation improvement. They perceive their confidence, extroversion, and other personality traits as integral to their pronunciation learning process, influencing their motivation, learning style, and approach to practice. Overall, the result illustrates the influence of personality traits on pronunciation improvement and they believe that factors such as confidence and extroversion play a crucial role in shaping their pronunciation proficiency and learning experience. These findings highlight the complex relationship between individual personality and language learning outcomes.

5. Discussion of the Findings:

The investigation explored numerous factors affecting pronunciation skill development among Ethiopian learners of English at secondary, higher secondary, and college levels. The findings reveal a multifaceted interplay between individual characteristics, learning approaches, and environmental influences.

Key Findings include age, aptitude, individual learning styles, L1 influence, learner interest, motivation, teaching methods, classroom environment, textbook/pronunciation syllabus, learner practice frequency, exposure to authentic TL, and personal traits of the learners.

Age: A substantial portion (68.77%) of respondents believe that age is a factor in pronunciation development, with over half (37.56%) strongly agreeing. This suggests a perceived difficulty in acquiring correct pronunciation later in life. This brings into line with the Critical Period Hypothesis, which proposes a limited window in childhood for language acquisition, potentially impacting pronunciation development (Lenneberg, E. H.,1967; Harley, B., & Wang, W.,2014; Keeley, T. D.,2016; Siahhaan, F., 2022). However, research also indicates that adults can achieve high levels of pronunciation proficiency with focused instruction and practice (Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. 1995; Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M.,1999).

Aptitude: While some learners (15.87%) acknowledge a low impact of aptitude, most respondents (66.61%) believe aptitude plays a moderate to very high role in pronunciation proficiency. Individual differences in cognitive abilities, such as auditory discrimination and phonological awareness, can influence pronunciation learning [Skehan, P.,1998). However, motivation, learning strategies, and the quality of instruction also play a significant role (Dörnyei, Z.,2014).

Individual Learning Styles: The majority (56.6%) recognize the importance of tailoring learning approaches to their preferred styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) for effective pronunciation development. Research supports the effectiveness of incorporating various learning styles in pronunciation instruction. Auditory learners may benefit from listening exercises and shadowing, while visual learners might find it helpful to observe mouth movements and use visual aids (Fleming, N. D., 20015). Kinesthetic learners can benefit from activities that involve physical engagement, such as practicing minimal pairs with gestures.

Learner Interest: Most learners (71.44%) perceive a moderate to strong correlation between their interest in improving pronunciation and their overall progress. This highlights the importance of motivation in pronunciation learning. Studies have shown that learners with a strong interest in improving their pronunciation are more likely to engage actively in practice activities and achieve better results

(Gardner, R. C.,1985).

First Language Influence: A significant majority (71.41%) acknowledge the influence of their first language on pronunciation accuracy, with many perceiving a substantial impact. The sounds and structures of a learner's first language can interfere with the acquisition of new sounds and pronunciation patterns in a second language [Flege, J. E., & Bohn, O. S. (2021).

Motivation: The survey indicates a strong emphasis on motivation, with over two-thirds (68%) of respondents reporting high to very high motivation to improve pronunciation skills. Motivation is a crucial factor in language learning success, including pronunciation development. Learners who are motivated to improve their pronunciation are more likely to invest time and effort in practice activities [Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E.,2021).

Teaching Methodology: The majority (74.6%) of learners perceive teaching methodologies to have a moderate to very high impact on their pronunciation improvement, highlighting the importance of effective teaching strategies. Teachers play a vital role in creating a supportive learning environment and providing explicit instruction on pronunciation features, along with opportunities for guided practice and corrective feedback (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

Classroom Environment: A large majority (85.61%) acknowledge the influence of the classroom environment on pronunciation learning, suggesting the significance of a supportive and conducive learning atmosphere. Factors such as classroom size, student-teacher interaction, and access to technology can all impact pronunciation learning opportunities (Brown, H. D.,2001).

Textbook Pronunciation Syllabus: While some learners find their textbook pronunciation syllabus helpful (28.97%), a significant portion (66.66%) perceive it to be ineffective or have only minor effectiveness, indicating a need for improvement in syllabus design. Effective pronunciation syllabi should be clear and well-structured, and provide learners with a variety of engaging practice activities that cater to different learning styles (Roach, P. 2009).

Pronunciation Practice Frequency: A concerning finding is that a substantial number of respondents (65.07%) never or rarely practice pronunciation, highlighting a potential gap between perceived importance and actual practice habits. Regular and focused pronunciation practice is essential for developing accurate and fluent pronunciation skills in a second/foreign language acquisition(Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J., 2005).

Exposure to Authentic Target Language (TL): A significant portion (61.89%) of learners expressed limitations in exposure to authentic spoken language, which is crucial for pronunciation development. Exposure to authentic spoken language allows learners to hear native-like pronunciation models and develop their listening comprehension skills, which are essential for pronunciation acquisition (Selinker, L., & Gass, S. M. (2008).

Personality Traits: The majority (73.53%) of respondents believe personality traits, such as confidence and extroversion, influence their pronunciation improvement, suggesting a complex interplay between individual characteristics and learning outcomes. Personality traits can influence a learner's motivation, willingness to take risks, and approach to practice, all of which can impact pronunciation development (Ehrman et al., 2003).

These findings of the current study offer valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers in designing appropriate and effective materials for pronunciation instructions for Ethiopian secondary, higher secondary, and college learners of English.

6. Conclusion

Teaching students proper pronunciation is a top priority for ESL instructors. No one will be able to comprehend a speaker if they have very bad pronunciation. Many ESL/EFL courses pay little emphasis on teaching pronunciation, even though it is a very difficult skill to acquire. The study's overarching goal is to identify the internal and external variables that are significantly impacting students' pronunciation issues. Problems with motivation, self-assurance, exposure, practice, interest, native language, age, personality, teaching style, and feedback were among these issues. This skill is completely disregarded in English language classes, as has been noted on several occasions. Teachers and students can benefit from a better grasp of these aspects by focusing their efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

Students should take typical of what is causing them the greatest difficulty with their pronunciation and work to fix it. Students can make significant signs of progress in their speech improvement efforts if they can figure out a suitable solution to this challenge. Also, educators have the opportunity to grow in terms of how they engage their students and how they teach concepts like pronunciation in the classroom.

Students' comprehension of native speakers and their capacity for fluent, efficient communication are both enhanced by pronunciation education. Improving one's pronunciation is a challenging aspect of picking up a new language. To fix their students' pronunciation, English language instructors must be knowledgeable in the phonetics and phonology of the English language (Susmitha, 2014; Hoque et al., 2024).

The language instructors have a lot of work to do. First, assisting students in developing their aural and phonological competence from a second language perspective. Secondly, differentiating between the aspects of sound that permit focus. Šebestová (2007) states that many learning styles and factors impact pronunciation learning and that classroom activities should be chosen accordingly. A good rule of thumb for educators is to base their priorities on what their students want to achieve. Additionally, one of the most important motivating factors in continuing to study pronunciation is feedback on the learner's progress. The relationship between different learning styles and

the results of language acquisition is an area that may benefit from more study and investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial or non-financial interest and/or personal relationships that could influence this research article.

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Author's Contribution

Dr. Mohammed Shamsul Hoque, conceptualized and developed the arguments presented in the article, provided critical insights and edition and revision of the paper. **Lamessa Oli** contributed to questionnaire development, data analysis, interpretation, the and ensured the overall clarity of the paper and wrote the manuscript. **Dr. Thamarai Selvi M.D** contributed to the literature review, validation of the arguments presented. Besides, **Abu Sayed Md. Mahmudul Haque Chowdhury** contributed to improve the language usage. Furthermore, **Dr. MD. Mohoshin Reza** contributed to the edit and revision of the paper.

We, authors, discussed the research findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviews and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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