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An Exploration of the Views of Turkish EFL Instructors on Pronunciation Teaching

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Abstract. The aim of this study was to investigate the views of Turkish EFL instructors in higher education institution on English pronunciation teaching. The study was conducted with 156 instructors working at English preparatory programs in various foundation universities in İstanbul. The research was conducted with a mixed method approach. Quantitative data was gathered by means of a questionnaire; and semi structured interviews were carried out to gather qualitative data. The results of the study shed light on the perspectives of Turkish EFL instructors on pronunciation teaching and their pronunciation teaching practices. The general tendency of the participants was slightly positive in terms of the importance attached to pronunciation teaching and significant differences were found between pronunciation teaching practices and taking phonology classes and years of experience. The analysis of the interview also supported the questionnaire results regarding views of instructors on pronunciation. In addition, the results revealed that the instructors in the study focus on segmental features, mostly using repetition and exercises limited to the course books they use while teaching pronunciation. The results also revealed that instructors needed education on pronunciation and pronunciation teaching.

Keywords. pronunciation, self-perspectives, pronunciation teaching practices

Introduction

English has become one of the most commonly used languages in various fields all around the globe. Since the influence of the language has increased greatly in terms of international discourse (Christiansen, 2015), the attention paid to English language teaching (ELT) has also increased. ELT has gone through different stages throughout the history focusing on different aspects and skills of the language based on the needs of the time. However, in terms of the attention and focus dedicated, pronunciation is considered neglected among other skills, such as grammar, reading or writing. (Kelly 1969; Brown & Yule, 1983).

There are some studies trying to provide insight in this issue of pronunciation teaching. Gilbert (2008) states that time constraint is one of the reasons that causes instructors to spend less time on pronunciation. In another study, the time given to pronunciation in universities was reported to be inadequate (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2006). Time allocation is also generally altered against pronunciation classes to be able to spare more time for other skills in many institutions.

Another problem ELT teachers encounter regarding pronunciation teaching is lack of confidence. Due to receiving little or no training on how to teach pronunciation, they are not as confident or willing to focus on pronunciation teaching. (Fraser, 2000). In another study, it is also reported that teacher training on pronunciation is not adequate (Henderson et al., 2012).

The results of another study carried out in Europe indicate that only 20% of the participants received training on pronunciation teaching.

The perceptions of teachers in terms of both pronunciation teaching instructions and the importance they attach to this skill do seem parallel based on some of the studies in the field. In order to save more time for other skills, some instructors consider pronunciation as an aspect that requires learners' individual efforts (Bekleyen, 2011). In another study carried out with learners, more than half of the participants (61%) reported that their teachers have no focus on pronunciation in their lessons. In another study, Yağız (2018) states that Turkish EFL teachers are not motivated and willing to improve their pronunciation teaching practices. In terms of pronunciation teaching instruction, studies indicate that pronunciation teaching is carried out with a limited perspective which only includes error-correction, without referring to any detailed explicit, detailed explanation or consolidation. The teaching practices reported in these studies merely included repetition-based practices using modeling approach (Tejeda & Santos, 2014; Geylanioglu & Dikilitaş, 2016). In one study led by Yavuz and Keser (2019), on the other hand, the participants who were teacher candidates, reported that pronunciation skill should be valued equally as other skills and they were in favor of having a native-like pronunciation.

Other studies regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching mainly focus on the errors of Turkish EFL learners and overcoming the difficulties they have in producing desired sounds (Aktuğ, 2015; Akyol, 2013; Demirezen, 2010; Demircioğlu, 2013; Yılmaz 2019). However, there are few recent studies referring to the perspectives of teachers towards pronunciation. Thus, the perspectives of EFL teachers on pronunciation teaching is a subject that still needs further investigation. In order to provide insight into the perspectives of Turkish EFL instructors on their pronunciation and pronunciation teaching practices, this study sought answers for the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of Turkish EFL instructors on their pronunciation and pronunciation teaching practices?
2. What are the teaching practices Turkish EFL instructors use in their classes?

Methodology

A mixed method research design was used in this study. Quantitative and qualitative data gathered and analyzed to answer the research questions. The qualitative data gathered in the study served both as a means to identify the teaching practices of Turkish EFL instructors and to consolidate the quantitative data in regard to the perspectives of Turkish EFL instructors on pronunciation. The study took place in Istanbul with 156 English instructors working at English preparatory programs in various foundation universities. The participants were selected through convenience sampling.

The quantitative data was collected through a Likert scale adopted from another study led by Sarıkaya (2013) for her post graduate study in Bilkent University in Turkey. The scale included 21 items 15 of which were related to the pronunciation teaching perspectives and 6 were regarding instructors' self-perspectives of their own pronunciation. The scale included 5 statements: 0 "strongly disagree", 1 "disagree", 2 "undecided", 3 "agree" and 4 "strongly agree". The questionnaire also included questions for some demographic information regarding the age, years of experience, taking phonology classes, degree of education and the amount of time spent abroad. After the data was gathered, it was analyzed on SPSS by means of One-way ANOVA and Independent Samples T-Tests to see whether there were any significant differences between the variables and instructors' views on pronunciation (Pallant, 2010).

The qualitative data was gathered by means of a semi-structured interview with including questions regarding the perspectives of instructors on pronunciation teaching and the pronunciation teaching practices they use in their lessons. 10 participants were selected among the group that had answered the questionnaire. Convenience sampling was used in selecting the interviewees. The interviews were held on Microsoft Teams and recorded on computer hard disk. Then, each interview was transcribed and analyzed manually by codes and themes.

Findings

The results of the quantitative data analysis showed that, the participants of the study values pronunciation teaching and attach importance to their pronunciation. The means scores of the pronunciation teaching practice scale (PTP) was 2.7, which showed a tendency toward 3 (agree) regarding pronunciation teaching items in the questionnaire. The mean score of participants' self-perspectives of their pronunciation (SPP) was 2.5, which also showed a rather positive attitude considering the score 2 stands for "undecided" and 3 stands for "agree" in the scale.

When compared with the variables given in the demographic information part, participants' years of experience ($p=.011 < .05$) and whether they had phonology classes ($p=.010 < .05$) showed significant differences with the PTP. In terms of SPP, the results indicated significant difference between participants' years of experience ($p=.02 < .05$).

The mean value in PTP for those who took phonology classes was slightly higher than those who did not ("Yes", $N=108$, $M=2.78$; "No", $N=48$, $M=2.56$), showing a positivity towards the significance of pronunciation teaching practices. The effect size of PTP was calculated with Cohen's $d = .46$, which yielded a medium size according to Cohen's criteria (Pallant, 2010, p.232). The variable of years of experience also showed a significant difference with $p=.01 < .05$. The results indicated a small effect size with $d=.07$ in PTP scale with a significant difference between 3-5 and 10+ years of experience. The test results also showed a significant difference between participants' years of experience in teaching and their views on their own pronunciation (SPP) with $d=.02 < .05$. The effect size was also small with $d=.06$.

According to the quantitative data analysis regarding the SPP, 58,4 % of the participants ($N=90$) agreed that they needed to read more about phonological characteristics of individual English sounds. Similarly, 56,4% agreed that they needed to learn more about stress, intonation, and rhythm. However, most participants ($N=120$) stated that they saw themselves as good models for pronunciation in their classes.

The first interview question was regarding the views of instructors on pronunciation. 8/10 of the participants reported that EPT was important, especially in A1-A2 (CEFR) level classes. In respect to the desired level of pronunciation, half of the participants stated that intelligibility should be the goal. 3/10 of the participants reported that stress and intonation were crucial aspects of EPT and two reported that they thought avoiding fossilization was important. Only two participants reported that they did not consider pronunciation important compared to the other skills.

The second interview question was about the teaching practices instructors use in classes. Focusing on the problematic sounds of English for Turkish learners was the most commonly used practice in classes with $f=9$. Most participants in this group reported that they focus on [θ] and [ð] sounds specifically. The second popular practice instructors reported that they used was repetition with $f=7$. Instructors stated that they provide the correct utterance ask the students to repeat, as well as using audio materials to provide the correct pronunciations of the words and sounds. Seven participants stated that they mainly use the exercises provided by the course book materials. Half of the participants ($N=5$) stated that they make use of minimal

pairs and introduce words with similar sounds. Some participants (f=4) also reported that they make use of IPA while teaching pronunciation in their classes. The rest of the practices used by the participants were roleplaying (f=2), showing the place of articulation(f=2) and drilling (f=1) exercises for pronunciation teaching.

The third interview question sought answer to the self-perspectives of the participants regarding their pronunciation. The question asked whether the participants thought that they needed to improve themselves on pronunciation teaching, and if so, in what ways. The analysis of the question showed that all participants were open to improvement regarding pronunciation teaching. They all agreed that they needed further education and training on certain aspects of pronunciation teaching. Need for education on pronunciation teaching methodology and techniques was the code that had highest frequency with f=10. Three participants specifically pointed out the lack of education on IPA and they reported that they needed to improve their knowledge and practice on IPA. One participant also stated that it would be beneficial to learn how to give feedbacks.

Conclusion

This study attempted to reveal the views of Turkish instructors of English on pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. The analysis of the questionnaire showed that, contrary to the results of previous studies (Brown & Yule, 1983; Kelly, 1969; Demirezen, 2009; Demircioğlu,2013; Fraser, 2000), English instructors participated in this study attached importance to pronunciation teaching. Although the mean score of PTP did not show a great difference (M=2.7), the result had a positive tendency close to 3 (agree) on Likert scale. This could mean that instructors do not neglect pronunciation teaching practices in their classes, which is parallel with the study carried out by Yavuz and Keser (2019). Considering the variables in the study, instructors' years of experience and whether they had taken phonology classes showed significant differences with PTP. Those who had had phonology classes showed slightly positive results compared with those who had not with M=2.78 and M=2.56, respectively. This might be interpreted that education on pronunciation could have a positive effect on teaching perspectives of instructors.

The analysis of SPP items also indicated that instructors in the study were open to improvement in terms of pronunciation and pronunciation teaching practices. More than half of the participants agreed that they needed further training/education on the pronunciation of some individual sounds and suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. This could mean that institutions might consider organizing certain in-service training programs on pronunciation. The SPP analysis also revealed that most participants in the study considered themselves as good role models regarding pronunciation in their classes, which showed that most participants feel confident, although they stated that they needed some further training or education on certain aspects of pronunciation. This also shows contrast with Fraser (2000) who stated that due to the lack of training, teachers did not feel confident in pronunciation. This conflict also could be investigated via class observations to have a clear explanation of the situation.

The semi-structured interview questions supported the results provided by the analysis of quantitative data. Almost all participants (N=8) reported that they thought pronunciation teaching was important, which consolidates the questionnaire results. They also consider pronunciation teaching to be more important with A1-A2 level students. The analysis of the question regarding the in-class pronunciation teaching practices revealed that focusing on individual sounds and repetition were the top teaching practices applied in classes, which supports the previous studies (Tejeda & Santos, 2014). Instructors stated that they focus on the

problematic sounds for Turkish learners, such as [θ] and [ð] sounds. Apart from these practices, half of the participants (N=5) reported that they use minimal pairs to show individual sound differences in classes. Few participants (N=3) used integrated exercises to practice pronunciation in classes. These findings showed that most participants of the study pay attention to segmental features in their pronunciation teaching practices. This could mean that instructors might need further training on pronunciation teaching practices, especially on suprasegmental level.

Another point supported through the interviews was related to the needs of the instructors regarding pronunciation and pronunciation teaching practices. The participants clearly stated that they needed education or training on pronunciation and theoretical and methodological background of pronunciation teaching. Most reported that they did not know any specific method but merely used the exercises and practices provided in the course book materials. Some also stated that it would be useful to learn different types of activities regarding pronunciation teaching. In this respect, organizing training sessions on how to teach pronunciation could be fruitful for the instructors.

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