

**ASSESSMENT OF SELECT WORDS IN ENGLISH THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO
PRONOUNCE: STRATEGIC WAYS TEACHERS CAN HELP PUPILS TO
OVERCOME THE STRUGGLES: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS
IN AKWA IBOM STATE**

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Abstract

This study assessed select words in English that are difficult to pronounce and the strategic ways teachers can help pupils to overcome the struggles. In carrying out the study, descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 60 pupils from each of the three senatorial districts which gave a total of 180 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Difficult Words for Pronunciation in English Questionnaire (DWPEQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.81, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as percentage analysis to answer research questions. The findings of the study revealed that among others, words with silent letters are the most difficult words for pupils to pronounce and also that “explicit phonetic instruction” among other strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupils overcome pronunciation difficulties was the most efficient. The study concluded that pronunciation is critical in language acquisition, affecting communication and proficiency, and that English presents unique challenges to non-native speakers due to its complex phonetic structures and irregular spellings. One of the recommendations was that teachers should ensure that there is a structured approach to pronunciation practice integrated into the daily classroom routine.

KEYWORDS: Words, English, Pronounce, Teachers and Pupils

Introduction

Pronunciation is a critical aspect of language acquisition, significantly impacting communication efficacy and overall language proficiency. In the context of learning English, certain words present unique challenges to non-native speakers due to their complex phonetic structures, irregular spellings, and stress patterns. Addressing these challenges is particularly pertinent for pupils in multilingual settings, where interference from their mother tongue or native languages can further complicate pronunciation efforts (Smith & Ledesma, 2023). The complexity of English pronunciation arises from its rich history of borrowing from various languages, resulting in a multitude of phonemes and intricate spelling conventions. According to Johnson (2022), words such as "colonel," "anemone," and "choir" are notoriously difficult for learners due to their non-phonetic spellings and unusual phoneme combinations. These pronunciation difficulties can hinder learners' confidence and fluency, making it essential for educators to adopt targeted strategies to address these issues effectively.

Phonological interference from a learner's first language (L1) is a well-documented phenomenon that exacerbates pronunciation difficulties in English. For example, speakers of languages that lack certain English sounds may struggle with words containing those sounds. A study by Adeyemi (2018) highlights that Yoruba-speaking pupils often have difficulty pronouncing the English "th" sound, as it does not exist in Yoruba. This linguistic interference necessitates specialised instructional strategies to help learners accurately produce challenging sounds and words.

Effective pronunciation instruction requires a diverse approach that combines explicit phonetic training with engaging, practice-oriented activities. Olatunji (2019) emphasises the importance of visual aids, such as phonetic charts and diagrams, to help pupils understand the articulatory mechanisms of difficult sounds. Additionally, incorporating technology, such as speech recognition software and pronunciation apps, can provide immediate feedback and personalised practice opportunities, enhancing learners' ability to master challenging pronunciations.

Teachers play a crucial role in creating a supportive learning environment that encourages risk-taking and consistent practice. Nwafor (2021) suggests that incorporating pronunciation exercises into daily classroom routines can demystify difficult words and foster gradual improvement. Techniques such as minimal pair drills, where students practice distinguishing and producing pairs of words that differ by only one phoneme (e.g., "ship" and "sheep"), can be particularly effective in addressing specific pronunciation challenges.

The assessment of difficult-to-pronounce English words and the implementation of strategic teaching methods are vital for helping pupils overcome pronunciation struggles. By understanding the sources of these difficulties and employing a combination of explicit instruction,

technological tools, and supportive classroom practices, teachers can significantly enhance their pupils' pronunciation skills. This approach not only improves communication proficiency but also boosts learners' confidence and overall engagement with the English language.

Statement of Problem

The challenge of teaching English pronunciation in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State is exacerbated by the difficulty pupils face with certain words that are inherently challenging to pronounce. This issue impedes not only their oral communication skills but also their confidence in using the language. Teachers often lack strategic methods to address these pronunciation difficulties effectively, resulting in persistent struggles among pupils. This case study aims to identify the specific English words that pose the greatest challenges and to explore innovative, strategic approaches that teachers can employ to help pupils overcome these pronunciation barriers, thereby enhancing their overall linguistic competence and confidence.

Objectives

1. To examine select words that are difficult for pupils to pronounce.
2. To find out the various strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil's overcome pronunciation difficulties.

Research questions

1. What are the select words that are difficult for pupils to pronounce?
2. What are the various strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil's overcome pronunciation difficulties?

Concept of English Language

Given how many areas it has spread to and how many people speak it, English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. In fact, it is frequently referred to as a global language. As mentioned by Okono (2019), the English language has arguably become a world language. In addition to being the native tongue of more than 400 million people, English is thought to be a second or foreign language spoken by over one billion people worldwide. There are reportedly more English speakers speaking the language as a second language than as a first. As mentioned by Okono (2023) English language is used for various purposes and has taken the status of a national language in Nigeria. Because English is so widely spoken, it is frequently used as a lingua franca, allowing speakers of different first languages to communicate with one another in English.

Furthermore, Barta (2023) mentioned that English is classified as a Germanic language, meaning that it belongs to the Germanic language family. To be more precise, English, German, and Dutch are all members of the West Germanic language family. The Indo-European language family, which is descended from Proto-Indo-European, is where the Germanic language family first originated. Although it is now widely used, English originated as a West Germanic language spoken in mediaeval England. Most people in a number of countries, including the US, UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada, some Caribbean countries, and New Zealand, currently speak this as their first language. Approximately 375 million people speak English as their first language, and 750 million speak it as a second language. English as official or special status in at least 70

countries. Just hearing the numbers gives you an inkling of just how important English is (Udemy, 2024).

However, Sanuvickybless (2021) defined the English language as a system of production of meaning for the expression of living by English people who were originally from Germany. English is now spoken as a second, third, and foreign language in many regions of the world due to its spread. The English language is spoken by people all over the world, both native speakers and non-native speakers, and it includes a variety of dialects, accents, vocabulary, syntax, and norms. English is one of the most frequently spoken languages in the world and is used as a medium of teaching and communication in many nations. It covers various dialects of the English language, including American, British, Australian, and others.

Concept of Pronunciation

A word's or a language's pronunciation is how it is spoken. This could relate to commonly accepted phonetic sequences for pronouncing a word or language in a particular dialect (also known as "correct" or "standard" pronunciation) or just the way a certain person pronounces a word or language (Wikipedia, 2024). In a language, words are also produced by the way sounds are uttered. It includes features like intonation, emphasis, and rhythm as well as the actual physical creation of speech sounds by the vocal organs, which include the lips, tongue, and vocal cords. Pronunciation is a critical element of language that directly impacts intelligibility and communication effectiveness (Jenkins, 2016).

The building blocks of pronunciation are phonemes, which are the discrete units of sound in a language. For example, there are about 44 phonemes in English, which include both vowel and consonant sounds. It is essential to pronounce these phonemes correctly in order to discriminate between words. For example, the words "bit" and "beat" differ only in their vowel sounds, illustrating the importance of phonemic precision in communication (Derwing & Munro, 2016). The way that speech varies in pitch, or intonation, greatly affects how sentences are understood. It can communicate a variety of attitudes, emotions, and grammatical meanings. For example, near the end of a sentence, a rising intonation usually denotes a question, whereas a falling intonation suggests an assertion.

Mastering intonation patterns is essential for effective communication, as it helps convey the speaker's intent and adds nuance to their speech (Celce-Murcia et al., 2018). Stress, or the emphasis put on particular words or syllables, is another important factor in pronunciation. English conveys meaning through the employment of both word and sentence stress. For instance, depending on whether the first or second syllable is stressed, the word "present" can be either a noun or a verb. Sentence stress highlights important information within a sentence, aiding listener comprehension (Gilakjani, 2017). The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in speech is referred to as rhythm. English is frequently referred to as a stress-timed language, which means that rather than the number of syllables, the rhythm is established by the spaces between stressed syllables. This rhythmic structure improves the comprehensibility and organic flow of spoken English. (Thomson & Derwing, 2016).

When it comes to intelligibility, or how well a listener can comprehend a speaker, good pronunciation is essential. Misunderstandings and communication breakdowns can result from poor pronunciation, even if the speaker has a wide vocabulary or correct grammar. Studies have shown that even slight improvements in pronunciation can significantly enhance a learner's

communicative competence (Munro & Derwing, 2020). Pronunciation instruction and learning require a variety of techniques and resources. Drills, simple pair activities, and phonetic training are examples of traditional methods; on the other hand, newer ways use technology—such as speech recognition software and language learning apps—to offer interactive practice and instant feedback. Effective pronunciation instruction combines these methods to address individual learners needs and promote accurate, intelligible speech (Levis, 2018).

Areas of difficulty in pronouncing some words in English

Pronunciation of the English language is difficult due to its large vocabulary and complex history. These issues are caused by a number of things, such as regional accents, phonetic irregularities, and the impact of the speaker's mother tongue. It is imperative that educators, linguists, and language learners comprehend the nature and prevalence of these speech problems.

Phonetic Inconsistencies

Phonology is concerned with the sound system of any particular language (Okono, 2023). The absence of phonetic consistency in English is one of the main causes of pronunciation problems. English frequently deviates from this pattern, in contrast to phonetic languages, where there is a direct correlation between letters and sounds. Words like "colonel," "bourgeois," and "choir" defy straightforward pronunciation rules, leading to widespread confusion among learners (Smith & Nelson, 2018). These anomalies result from the language's historical development, which was shaped over centuries by a wide range of languages.

Impact of Native Languages

The native language of a speaker has a significant impact on how they pronounce English. Mispronunciations often come from phonetic transfer, which is the application of sounds from a learner's first language to English. For instance, Mandarin speakers may struggle with the distinction between "r" and "l," as these sounds are not differentiated in Mandarin (Wang & Jongman, 2018). Similarly, Arabic speakers often find it difficult to pronounce the "p" sound, as it does not exist in Arabic, leading them to substitute it with a "b" sound (Alkhairy, 2020).

Common Pronunciation Challenges

Some English sounds are difficult for everyone to pronounce. The "th" sound, which is included in the words "this" and "thing," can be particularly challenging for people with diverse linguistic backgrounds to pronounce. According to a study by Saito (2019), Japanese and Korean learners of English often substitute "th" with "s" or "z" sounds due to the absence of the "th" sound in their native languages. Additionally, words with silent letters, like "knight" and "psychology," create confusion because they contradict the phonetic expectations of learners (Cook, 2021).

Regional Variations and Accents

Regional accents complicate the pronunciation of English even further. A study by Evans and Iverson (2020) found that learners exposed to different English accents, such as British, American, and Australian, often face increased difficulty in mastering pronunciation. The vowel and consonant sounds in these accents can differ greatly, therefore depending on which accent learners are exposed to the most, their pronunciation may become inconsistent.

Teaching and learning strategies

Successful teaching techniques are crucial to assisting students in overcoming these pronunciation difficulties. Explicit phonetic instruction, utilising visual aids and phonetic symbols, has been shown to improve pronunciation accuracy (Thomson & Derwing, 2016). Furthermore, practice speaking and listening in context, especially with native speakers, can help students become accustomed to the subtleties of the English language. (Kang & Moran, 2019). Technology also plays a pivotal role, with language-learning apps providing interactive and adaptive pronunciation exercises (Levis, 2018).

Factors that Determine Deficiency in Pronunciation

Pronunciation errors are caused by a variety of intricate interactions. Comprehending these variables can aid instructors and students in formulating efficacious approaches to tackle and surmount articulation challenges within language acquisition environments.

Phonetic Complexity and Language Acquisition: An important aspect that affects pronunciation ability is a language's phonetic complexity. The subtleties of pronunciation rules and phonetic inventory differ greatly between languages. For example, learners may face difficulties while learning languages with tones that significantly change meaning, such as Mandarin Chinese. (Smith, 2021). Pronunciation errors might occur when such phonetic nuances are difficult to acquire.

Age of Language Acquisition: Studies show that pronunciation can be affected by the age at which a person starts learning a language. In general, younger learners are more flexible in their acquisition of native-like pronunciation than older learners, who could have more difficulty with phonetic accuracy (Gonzalez-Bueno & Llanes, 2020). These phenomena support the critical period theory and points to a possible neurological cause for older learners' pronunciation issues.

Mother Tongue Influence: Mother tongue is one's native language (Okono and Enang, 2020). The impact of one's original language on the pronunciation of a second language is another important consideration. Learning phonemes and prosodic patterns that are foreign to a learner's language can be particularly difficult (Derwing & Munro, 2015). For instance, English language learners could find it challenging to appropriately produce particular consonant clusters if they are not present in their home tongue.

Motivation and Exposure: For pronunciation to develop, motivation and exposure to the target language are essential. Strongly motivated learners who spend a lot of time in contexts where the target language is spoken are more likely to become proficient in pronouncing words correctly. Accurate pronunciation abilities might be hampered by a lack of drive or exposure.

Instructional Methods: Pronunciation is influenced by the efficiency of the teaching strategies employed in language acquisition. Accurate sound production can be improved by providing students with specific pronunciation practice and direct education in phonetics and phonology (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). On the other hand, failing to pay enough attention to pronunciation when teaching a language might lead to enduring inadequacies.

Individual Variation in Learning Strategies: The disparities in pronunciation proficiency among language learners can be attributed to variations in their learning methodologies. While some students may be better served by specific rules and analytical methods, others may gain more from mimicry or auditory feedback. Pronunciation issues can be helped by acknowledging and accommodating individual learning styles.

Anxiety and self-confidence: Pronunciation is also affected by psychological elements like confidence and fear. Excessive anxiety might make it difficult to produce precise sounds since it causes tension and self-consciousness. (Derwing & Munro, 2015). On the other hand, students who are more at ease and self-assured frequently have superior speaking abilities.

Peer and Teacher Feedback: The input provided by instructors and peers is crucial for improving pronunciation. Feedback that is constructive aids students in recognising and fixing pronunciation mistakes (Levis, 2018). Relentless pronunciation problems must be addressed with consistent practice and feedback opportunities.

Technology and Pronunciation Tools: Thanks to technological advancements, language learners can now improve their pronunciation using a variety of tools and programmes. These resources frequently make use of speech recognition technology and offer interactive activities customised to meet the needs of certain students. (Chun & Kern, 2016). Technology can be used to enhance more traditional approaches to language learning and enable more focused practice with pronunciation.

Cultural and Social Factors: Pronunciation can be affected by social and cultural variables. Within a language community, different geographies and social settings have varying pronunciation standards (Coupland, 2020). Understanding these sociocultural aspects is essential for language learners who want to become proficient communicators in their target language.

Classes of Words Difficult to Pronounce in English

English pronunciation challenges stem from a variety of linguistic and phonetic problems that non-native speakers face. Scholars from Nigeria have recognised a number of word categories that present specific difficulties because of their distinct phonetic structures, erratic spellings, and stress patterns. It is vital to comprehend these challenges in order to devise efficacious pedagogical approaches that facilitate learners' enhancement of their pronouncing abilities.

Words with Silent Letters: English learners frequently get confused by silent letters, which can lead to inconsistent pronunciation. There are silent letters in words like "knight," "psychology," and "debt" that are not uttered, which can cause mistakes. Olatunji (2019) highlights that silent letters, often remnants of older spellings and pronunciations, are particularly challenging for learners whose native languages have more phonetic orthographies. For example, the silent "p" in "psychology" and the silent "k" in "knight" are not intuitive and need to be practiced and memorised.

Irregularly Spelled Words: Spelling irregularities are a well-known problem in English, and they can seriously impede pronunciation. Spelling conventions do not apply to words like "colonel," "anemone," and "choir". According to Adeyemi (2018), such irregularities confuse learners, who might mispronounce these words based on their spelling. "Colonel," for example, is pronounced "kernel," deviating significantly from its written form. Because of this mismatch between sound and spelling, practice and rote learning are required.

Words with Consonant Clusters: For language learners from languages where consonant clusters are absent, clusters of consonants without a vowel in between can be very challenging. Phrasal

phrases such as "twelfths," "crisps," and "strengths" require students to master intricate consonant combinations. Nwafor (2021) notes that the Yoruba language, for instance, typically avoids such clusters, leading Yoruba-speaking learners to struggle with English words that include them. Pronunciation can be improved by breaking these clusters down into smaller, easier-to-manage pieces for students to learn.

Words with Unfamiliar Phonemes: Pronunciation can be difficult in English because many phonemes are unique to English. The sounds "th" in "thought" and "this" are two good examples. According to Johnson (2022), these sounds are particularly troublesome for Nigerian learners whose native languages lack equivalent phonemes. For instance, learners who speak Yoruba frequently pronounce "th" as "t" or "d," which leads to mispronunciations like "dis" for "this." Learners can achieve proper production of these foreign sounds with targeted phonetic training.

Homophones: Words that sound similar but have distinct spellings and meanings are known as homophones, and they can be confusing to learners and cause pronunciation mistakes. Words like "their" and "there," "knight" and "night," "to," "too," and "two" are examples of this difficulty. Ojo (2020) points out that the subtle differences in context and meaning necessitate a strong understanding of phonetic nuances, which can be particularly demanding for learners.

Words with Unpredictable Stress Patterns: Pronunciation can be complicated by the irregular and unpredictable nature of English word stress. Based on where the stress is placed, words like "record" (noun) and "record" (verb) have different meanings. Adebajo (2017) emphasises that understanding and mastering these stress patterns is crucial for proper pronunciation and comprehension. Emphasising the necessity for targeted training on stress rules and patterns, misplacing stress can change meanings and make speech less understandable.

Cases of Difficulty in Pronouncing Some English Words

Non-native English speakers frequently struggle with pronunciation, and this problem is most noticeable in Nigeria, a nation home to more than 250 different ethnic groups and languages. The mispronunciation of the "th" sound, which is lacking in several Nigerian languages, is one prominent example. According to a study by Akande and Salami (2014), speakers from Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa backgrounds often replace "th" with "t" or "d," leading to pronunciations like "tink" for "think" and "dis" for "this." This substitution is deeply rooted in the phonetic structures of their native languages, which lack the dental fricatives found in English (Akande & Salami, 2014).

Prominent Nigerians frequently draw attention to these pronunciation issues in public addresses. One prominently Igbo politician, for example, frequently mispronounced "development" as "dewelopment" in speeches given during election season. This demonstrates the impact of Igbo phonology, in which "w" is frequently used in place of the less common "v" sound. These occurrences are not just common but also noteworthy since they show larger linguistic trends and the influence of mother tongue structures on English pronunciation. The situation involving Hausa speakers highlights how difficult it is to pronounce English in Nigeria. English

words frequently have sounds added or subtracted because Hausa is a tonal language with a less complex consonant structure than English. A study by Usman (2016) highlighted that many Hausa speakers struggle with the English "p" and "v" sounds, often replacing them with "f" and "b," respectively. As an illustration, "very" could be said to sound like "bery" and "pat" like "fat" (Usman, 2016). In both official and informal contexts, these pronunciation patterns are noticeable and have an impact on how understandable spoken English is.

Furthermore, the pronunciation of standard English is made more difficult by the influence of Pidgin English, which is the lingua franca in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin is a language that combines aspects of several indigenous languages and English. It reduces several English phonemes, which causes pronunciation differences. According to Eze (2017), this linguistic blend results in a version of English where words like "thing" are pronounced as "tin" and "people" as "pipul." Such pidginized pronunciations are widespread and often spill over into formal English usage, especially among individuals who are more comfortable with pidginized English (Eze, 2017).

Strategic ways that can be used to help Pupils overcome the Struggles

Problems with pronunciation can seriously impede students' ability to learn a language and communicate. Teachers need to use strategic approaches that meet the varied requirements of students if they are to effectively address these issues. Among these tactical techniques are:

Explicit Phonetic Instruction: Giving students clear phonetic training is essential to assisting them in comprehending the articulatory processes underlying challenging sounds. Teachers can demystify complicated pronunciations by explaining the precise actions and locations of the tongue, lips, and vocal chords needed to generate each sound. According to Olatunji (2019), visual aids such as phonetic charts and diagrams are instrumental in this process. With the aid of these resources, students can more accurately and confidently produce difficult phonemes by helping them visualise and internalise the process.

Use of Technology: Technology-enhanced pronunciation drills provide instantaneous, tailored feedback—a crucial component of ongoing progress. Pronunciation apps and speech recognition technologies can assess students' speech and offer real-time fixes. In addition to facilitating repeated practice in a constructive setting, these technology tools also help to develop competence and confidence. As highlighted by Adeyemi (2018), integrating technology in language learning can significantly enhance pupils' engagement and mastery of difficult sounds.

Minimal Pair Drills: In minimal pair drills, students practise identifying and creating word pairs that differ by just one phoneme, like "ship" and "sheep." This method increases students' awareness of minute variations in sound and helps them replicate these sounds more precisely. Nwafor (2021) emphasises that minimal pair drills are particularly effective for addressing specific pronunciation challenges and should be a regular part of classroom activities. You can incorporate these activities into your everyday routine to support proper pronunciation and encourage steady growth.

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment: Teachers are essential in fostering a learning environment in the classroom that rewards experimentation and regular practice. Students' nervousness and resistance to practicing challenging sounds can be considerably reduced in a supportive environment where mistakes are seen as teaching opportunities. Ojo (2020) suggests that positive reinforcement and constructive feedback are essential in maintaining pupils'

motivation and perseverance. Teachers can more successfully assist students in overcoming their pronunciation difficulties by cultivating a culture of encouragement and patience.

Incorporating Pronunciation into Daily Lessons: Consistent exposure and practice are ensured when pronunciation practice is incorporated into regular courses as opposed to being taught as a stand-alone exercise. This can be accomplished through a variety of interactive exercises, including group discussions, read-alouds, and tongue twisters that emphasise the use and practice of challenging vocabulary. Regular practice embedded in daily routines helps pupils develop better pronunciation habits and makes the learning process more natural and less daunting (Adebanjo, 2017).

Parental Involvement: Fostering parental participation in phonemic awareness exercises can enhance education outside of the classroom. By doing things like reading aloud to their kids, utilising instructional applications, and creating a comfortable practice space at home, parents may help their kids grow. According to Yusuf (2022), parental support is crucial for reinforcing what is learned in school and for providing additional practice opportunities. Working together, educators and parents can guarantee a consistent, encouraging approach to helping students with their pronunciation.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 60 pupils from each of the three senatorial districts which gave a total of 180 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Difficult Words for Pronunciation in English Questionnaire (DWPEQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.81, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such percentage analysis to answer research questions.

Result and Discussion

Research Question 1

The research question sought to find out the select words that are difficult for pupils to pronounce. To answer the research percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1:

Percentage analysis of the select words that are difficult for pupils to pronounce.

SELECT WORDS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Words with Silent Letters	35	19.44**
Irregularly Spelled Words	49	27.22
Words with Consonant Clusters	30	16.67
Words with Unfamiliar Phonemes	22	12.22

Homophones	26	14.44
Words with Unpredictable Stress Patterns	18	10*
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the select words that are difficult for pupils to pronounce. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the select the “Words with Silent Letters” 35(19.44%) were rated as the select words most difficult for pupils to pronounce, while “Words with Unpredictable Stress Patterns” 18(10%) was rated the least. The result therefore is in agreement with the opinion of Olatunji (2019) who highlighted that silent letters are often remnants of older spellings and pronunciations and are particularly challenging for learners whose native languages have more phonetic orthographies.

Research Question 2

The research question sought to find out the various strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil’s overcome pronunciation difficulties. To answer the research percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the various strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil’s overcome pronunciation difficulties.

STRATEGIC METHODS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Explicit Phonetic Instruction	35	19.44**
Use of Technology	29	16.11
Minimal Pair Drills	25	13.89*
Creating a Supportive Learning Environment	32	17.78
Incorporating Pronunciation into Daily Lessons	31	17.22
Advice on Parental Involvement	28	15.56
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the various strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil’s overcome pronunciation difficulties. From the result of the data analysis, it

was observed that the strategic method tagged “Explicit Phonetic Instruction” 35(19.44) was rated as the highest strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil’s overcome pronunciation difficulties, while “Minimal Pair Drills” 25(13.89%) was rated the least strategic methods. The result therefore is in agreement with the opinion of Olatunji (2019) who stated that visual aids such as phonetic charts and diagrams are instrumental in aiding students pronounce difficult words accurately and confidently.

Conclusion

Pronunciation is critical in language acquisition, affecting communication and proficiency. English presents unique challenges to non-native speakers due to its complex phonetic structures and irregular spellings. The findings of the study also concluded that among others, words with silent letters are the most difficult words for pupils to pronounce and also that “explicit phonetic instruction” among other strategic methods teachers can employ to help pupil’s overcome pronunciation difficulties was the most efficient. Phonological interference from a learner's first language, such as Yoruba speakers struggling with the English "th" sound, exacerbates these difficulties. Effective pronunciation instruction requires a diverse approach combining explicit phonetic training, visual aids, and technology like speech recognition software. Teachers play a crucial role in creating supportive environments with regular pronunciation exercises. Addressing these challenges enhances communication proficiency and boosts learners' confidence and engagement with English.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should ensure that there is a structured approach to pronunciation practice integrated into the daily classroom routine. This can include the use of phonetic charts, visual aids, and minimal pair drills to help pupils distinguish and accurately produce challenging sounds.
2. Pupils should be encouraged to practice pronunciation regularly, both in and outside the classroom. Engaging in activities such as listening to English audio materials, repeating difficult words, and using pronunciation apps can help improve their skills.
3. Parents should actively support their children’s pronunciation practice at home by creating a conducive environment for learning. This can include setting aside time for practice, using educational resources like pronunciation apps or videos, and encouraging their children to speak English regularly.

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