Teacher Training and Approaches to EFL Pronunciation Teaching

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Abstract

Although previous studies have shown that many language teachers neglect pronunciation teaching, only a few of those studies have been conducted in EFL contexts. This study is therefore designed to investigate current pronunciation teaching practice, particularly teachers' instructional decision-making and their backgrounds, at universities in Tokyo, Japan.

In total 92 teachers participated in an online survey, and results showed that most respondents were teaching pronunciation as opposed previous studies where many in-service teachers reported to be neglecting pronunciation teaching. Furthermore, length of training in pronunciation teaching and confidence in knowledge about effective pronunciation teaching methods were significantly correlated. Respondents' confidence in knowledge about effective pronunciation teaching methods was also found to be a significant predictor of the frequencies of use of explicit pronunciation teaching and mechanical drills, and confidence in diagnosing learners' pronunciation significantly predicted the frequency of providing pronunciation models.

As explicit instruction and providing feedback have been found to be effective in pronunciation teaching, teacher training with an emphasis on pedagogical pronunciation should be encouraged to foster knowledge of pronunciation instructional techniques in language teachers. With the knowledge through teacher training, they further gain confidence in teaching pronunciation and can then make informed instructional decisions.

Keywords: Teacher training, pronunciation teaching, confidence in teaching, teacher cognition, instructional decision-making

1. Introduction

To date, research on teacher cognition has offered a great deal of understanding of teachers' cognitive processes underpinning their instructional decision-making. In regards to language teaching, as Borg [1] points out, it is difficult to synthesize the findings of previous studies on instructional decision-making due to the multiple perspectives used to examine the cognitive processes underpinning instructional decision-making. With respect to the teaching of pronunciation, there is a dearth of research on teacher cognition as a whole, and few studies have been conducted on instructional decision-making. Therefore, this study aims at investigating language teachers' instructional decision-making in relation to their backgrounds.

1.1. Pronunciation teaching practice

As Grant [2] notes, the teaching of pronunciation has evolved over the last few decades. The overreliance on the audiolingual method, which targeted the attainment of native-like pronunciation with particular emphasis on segmentals, a few decades ago has been replaced by more up-to-date goals of intelligible pronunciation. The ultimate goal of pronunciation learning and teaching is to achieve intelligible speech production, and informed instructional decisions are strongly encouraged [3].

In terms of teaching approaches, a number of empirical studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of particular techniques in the teaching of pronunciation. One approach found to be effective is a focus-on-form approach in Saito and Lyster [4]. When learners received explicit instruction on target segmentals (e.g. /l/ & /ɹ/ in their study) followed by contextualized, communicative practice with instructors' incidental corrective feedback, the learners' pronunciation significantly improved. Therefore, both explicit instruction and targeted corrective feedback are integral to the development of learners' accurate pronunciation.

It is also important to note that explicit instruction on pronunciation should be conducted in a way that appeals to multiple sensory systems: visual, auditory, and tactile reinforcements [5] as learners' auditory perception has limited capacity as they become older.

Despite the useful and practical resources, though still insufficient in number, in the teaching of pronunciation (e.g. [5, 6]), several studies have reported the neglect of pronunciation teaching among both ESL and EFL teachers [7, 8, 9, 10]. As Murphy [11] discusses, the major cause of this

neglect pertains to teachers' readiness to teach pronunciation. More specifically, the majority of language teachers feel underprepared to teach pronunciation mainly due to a lack of systematic training in pronunciation teaching in teacher training programs which often offer no pedagogical focus in phonology-related courses.

1.2. Lack of studies in EFL contexts

Research on pronunciation teaching and teacher cognition has been conducted predominantly in ESL contexts. However, EFL contexts are vastly different in terms of learners' needs. While ESL learners have ample opportunities to interact with native speakers and non-native speakers of English outside the classroom, EFL learners' interaction in English is often limited to classroom settings. It is reasonable to consider that EFL learners' motivation to learn intelligible pronunciation is not necessarily as strong as that of ESL learners. This difference in learners' needs and motivation should result in differences in teachers' decision-making. To take this contextual difference into account, studies in EFL contexts should be conducted to explore teacher cognition underpinning their instructional decisions.

In this study, therefore, two research questions will be examined.
(1) What pedagogical approaches to pronunciation teaching are implemented in university-level EFL teaching?
(2) What is the relationship between the length of training in pronunciation teaching (LOT) and confidence in a) knowledge of effective pronunciation teaching methods (CEM), b) ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation (CAD), and c) teaching pronunciation (CTP)?
(3) Which of CEM, CAD, and CTP determines the frequency of implementation of different approaches to pronunciation teaching?

2. Method

This study is a report based on an online survey distributed to EFL instructors teaching at universities in Tokyo, Japan.

2.1. The instrument

A series of questions were developed on the Bristol Online Survey Tool. First the respondents' background information, including age, nationality, teaching experience, type of training and length of training in the teaching of English and English pronunciation, was asked. For the question to inquire LOT, the respondents estimated how many hours of training in pronunciation teaching they had undergone in total (e.g. 20 hours). Then their teaching practice in terms of pronunciation teaching in their everyday EFL teaching was inquired. Three other questions were also asked to find out about the participants' CEM, CAD, and CTP. A five-point Likert-type scale was used for these questions (1=very low, 5=very high).

In addition to the question designed to inquire whether the participants were teaching pronunciation or not, seven approaches to teaching pronunciation were presented. Participants were required to respond with regard to the frequency of their implementation of each approach using a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 indicates "never use this approach" and 5 means "always use this approach". The approaches were selected based on a pilot survey conducted prior to this study. These seven approaches are 1) explicit teaching by explaining the sound system of English as well as places and manners of articulation of English phonemes (EXP), 2) providing a model for pronunciation including audio materials and teachers' own pronunciation (MDL), 3) providing learners with time for mechanical drills (DRL), 4) giving incidental corrective feedback on learners' pronunciation (ICF), 5) giving post-task feedback on pronunciation (PTF), 6) providing opportunities for peer-feedback on each other's pronunciation (PFB), and 7) having learners evaluate their own pronunciation (SEV).

2.2. Participants

In total, 92 university-level EFL instructors (47 women, 45 men) with 9 different nationalities (American, Australian, British, Canadian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, New Zealander, and South African) from 36 universities in Tokyo responded to an online questionnaire. Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 65 years, with a mean age of 47.6 years. English language teaching experience ranged from 1 to 38 years, with a mean length of teaching experience of 15.6 years. At the time of the survey, the number of university-level EFL courses being taught by participants ranged from 1 to 11 courses with a mean of 4.2 courses. Courses taught by the participants included, but were not limited to, a stand-alone pronunciation course, a general speaking & listening course, an English discussion course, and a test preparation course (e.g. TOEFL, etc.).

2.3. Procedure

The online questionnaire was distributed through direct emails from the author, an announcement on the author's page on a social networking site, and a mailing list of local conferences for English teachers and researchers. Additionally, snowball sampling was used to maximize the number of responses by

encouraging the participants to forward the link to the survey to their colleagues and acquaintances. All the data were safeguarded onto password-protected online data storage provided by the university of the author.

2.4. Analyses

Descriptive statistics (frequency count) was used to show how frequently each of the seven teaching approaches to pronunciation teaching was used based on a five-point Liker-type scale, where 1 means "never use this approach" and 5 means "always use this approach".

In order to analyze the relationship between LOT and each of CEM, CAD, and CTP, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed using SPSS version 22. For this analysis, all the participants' responses were included.

For the analysis of the predictive relationship between the participants' CEM, CAD, and CTP and each of the seven teaching approaches, first a multiple regression analysis was administered to find significant predictors. When only one predictor was found to be significant, a single regression analysis was administered to examine the predictive relationship between the significant predictor and the frequency of implementation of the teaching approaches. In this analysis, only those who were teaching pronunciation in their EFL teaching were included (n = 82). This sample size met the minimum requirement of 10-15 cases for each predictor recommended by Field [12]. Other assumptions (non-zero variance, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, independent errors, normal distribution of errors, independence of variables, and linearity) were examined as well.

3. Results

3.1. Pronunciation teaching approaches

As summarized in Table 1, out of 92 EFL instructors, ten responded that they did not teach pronunciation at all in their EFL teaching. Among the remaining 82 participants, the most commonly implemented pedagogical technique in pronunciation teaching was providing pronunciation models. Most of the participants (n = 51) provided pronunciation models, either using audio materials or their own pronunciation, often or always when they taught pronunciation. On the other hand, the vast majority of the participants tended not to incorporate peer-feedback and self-evaluation in their pronunciation teaching. Of 82 participants who responded that they were teaching pronunciation, 53 never used and 14 seldom used peer-feedback, and 54 reported that

they never used and 14 seldom used self-evaluation as part of their pronunciation teaching. Also it was found that most of the participants at least sometimes gave feedback on the learners' pronunciation incidentally, or after the students completed their tasks. Furthermore, approximately half of the participants responded that they seldom or never used explicit explanation of the sound system and places and manners of articulation when teaching pronunciation.

Table 1: Frequencies of approaches to pronunciation teaching

	EXP	MDL	DRL	ICF	PTF	PFB	SEV
0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
1	17	5	24	10	8	53	54
2	25	4	15	15	19	14	14
3	17	22	19	29	30	10	7
4	17	23	16	21	18	3	4
5	6	28	8	7	7	2	3
Total	92	92	92	92	92	92	92

Note: 0=No pronunciation teaching, 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

3.2. LOT and the level of confidence

Despite the mixed findings on pedagogical approaches to pronunciation teaching, three factors related to teachers' confidence (CEM, CAD, & CTP) in pedagogical pronunciation are rather consistent. As shown in Table 2, most of the participants reported that their confidence levels in CEM, CAD, and CTP were at a medium level or above, with mean scores of 3.12, 3.55, and 3.49 respectively. In other words, most of the participants were quite confident in both diagnosing the learners' pronunciation and in teaching pronunciation. They were also somewhat confident in knowing effective methods in pronunciation teaching, although the level of confidence in knowledge of effective teaching methods was slightly lower than both confidence in diagnosing learners' pronunciation and confidence in teaching pronunciation.

Table 2: Distribution of CEM, CAD, & CTP

	CEM	CAD	CTP
1: Very low	5	4	2
2: Low	14	8	7
3: Mid	46	29	41
4: High	19	35	28
5: Very high	8	16	14
Total	92	92	92
Mean	3.12	3.55	3.49

With respect to the length of training in the teaching of pronunciation, the number of hours participants reported that they had undergone teacher training in pedagogical pronunciation ranged from 0 to 120 hours, with a mean length of 18.1 hours. Among these participants, 30 percent had

received no training, and 12 percent had received over 40 hours of training. The training here included doctoral level course work, master's level course work, undergraduate level course work, language teaching certificate programs (e.g. CELTA, etc.), workshops and seminars at professional conferences, and workshops and seminars at in-house faculty development sessions.

Table 3 provides a matrix of the Pearson's correlation coefficients for the LOT, CEM, CAD, and CTP. LOT was positively related to CEM with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .393$, $p < .001$. In other words, there was a medium-level relationship between the length of training in pedagogical pronunciation and the confidence in knowledge of effective methods in pronunciation teaching. The results also showed that CEM was positively related to CAD and CTP with coefficients of $r = .637$ and $.664$ respectively at less than .001 significance level. Therefore, there was quite a strong relationship between confidence in knowing effective pronunciation teaching methods and confidence in ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation, and also between confidence in knowledge of effective methods of pronunciation teaching and confidence in pronunciation teaching. Finally, CAD was positively related to CTP with a coefficient of $r = .701$, with a significance value p less than .001. That is, there was a strong relationship between confidence in ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation and in pronunciation teaching.

Table 3: Correlation coefficients for LOT, CEM, CAD, & CTP

		LOT	CEM	CAD	CTP
LOT	Pearson Correlation	1	.393**	.155	.188
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.163	.090
	N	82	82	82	82
CEM	Pearson Correlation	.393**	1	.637**	.664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	82	82	82	82
CAD	Pearson Correlation	.155	.637**	1	.709**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.163	.000		.000
	N	82	82	82	82
CTP	Pearson Correlation	.188	.664**	.709**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.000	.000	
	N	82	82	82	82

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.3. Confidence and teaching approaches

First, based on the results of a multiple regression analysis, none of CEM, CAD, and CTP were found to predict the frequency of use of ICF, PTF, PFB, and SEV. Also only one of CEM, CAD and CTP was found to be a significant predictor of EXP, MDL, and DRL. Therefore, the results for EXP, MDL, and DRL were tested further using a simple

regression analysis. Either CAD or CTP was excluded from the analyses as a multicollinearity between CAD and CTP was found. However, all the other assumptions were met at an acceptable level suggested by Field [12].

CEM was found to be the only significant predictor of frequency of use of explicit pronunciation teaching at the .05 significance level. Therefore, a simple regression analysis was administered to examine the relationship between CEM and EXP. Table 4 summarizes the regression model. The value of R^2 is .055, which means that CEM can account for 5.5% of the variation of EXP. Therefore, there must be other variables that have an impact on EXP. Table 5 shows an analysis of variance (ANOVA) for CEM and EXP. F is 4.636, which is significant at $p < .05$. Therefore it can be concluded that the regression model above predicts the frequency of use of explicit pronunciation teaching.

Table 4: Regression model summary for CEM and EXP

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.234a	.055	.043	1.2056

a. Predictors: (Constant), CEM
b. Dependent Variable: EXP

Table 5: ANOVA for EXP and CEM Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.738	1	6.738	4.636	.034b
	Residual	116.286	80	1.454		
	Total	123.024	81			

a. Dependent Variable: EXP
b. Predictors: (Constant), CEM

Another dependent variable examined in this study was MDL. As Table 6 summarizes, CAD explains 12.1% of the frequency of use of MDL. The ANOVA results revealed that $F = 10.983$, which was significant at $p < .01$ level. Therefore, it can be concluded that the regression model for CAD and MDL predicted the frequency of providing pronunciation models well. In short, the more confident in ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation, the more likely the participants provided learners with pronunciation models. However, this model accounts only for 12.1%, so other variables clearly have an influence on use of pronunciation models.

Table 6: Regression model summary for CAD and MDL

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.347a	.121	.110	1.0869

a. Predictors: (Constant), CAD
b. Dependent Variable: MDL

Table 7: ANOVA for MDL and CAD regression model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.974	1	12.974	10.983	.001[b]
	Residual	94.501	80	1.181		
	Total	107.476	81			

a. Dependent Variable: MDL
b. Predictors: (Constant), CAD

Finally, use of DRL was examined employing a simple regression analysis with CEM as a predictor. The results showed that CEM accounts for 6.5% of the variation of DRL as shown in Table 8. As Table 9 summarizes, $F = 5.562$, which was found significant at $p < .05$. In other words, the regression model can predict the use of DRL well. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of confidence in knowledge of effective pronunciation teaching methods predicted how often the participants used mechanical drills in their pronunciation teaching. Again, the model revealed that more than 93% of use of mechanical drills cannot be explained by the confidence in knowledge about effective pronunciation teaching methods alone.

Table 8: Regression model summary for DRL and CEM

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.255[a]	.065	.053	1.3120

a. Predictors: (Constant), CEM
b. Dependent Variable: DRL

Table 9: ANOVA for DRL and CEM regression model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.573	1	9.573	5.562	.021[b]
	Residual	137.707	80	1.721		
	Total	147.280	81			

a. Dependent Variable: DRL
b. Predictors: (Constant), CEM

4. Discussion

The results from the correlation coefficients indicate that length of training in pronunciation pedagogy is correlated with confidence in the knowledge of effective pronunciation teaching methods. This was found to predict the frequencies of using explicit pronunciation teaching and mechanical drills in this study. As lack of confidence in pronunciation teaching methods has been pointed out as one of the major reasons for teachers' neglect in pronunciation teaching, this finding adds support for what previous studies have been suggesting. That is, teacher training should offer courses with a particular emphasis on pedagogical pronunciation [11].

The results of this study also showed that what research has been informing teachers in terms of teaching techniques has partially been applied to language teaching practice among Japanese teachers (e.g. explicit instruction and incidental feedback in Saito & Lyster [4]). This was reflected in those respondents who had gained confidence in knowledge of effective pronunciation teaching methods and subsequently implemented explicit instruction in their pronunciation teaching.

On the other hand, the results showed that those teachers who were confident in their ability in diagnosing learners' pronunciation tended to provide pronunciation models. However, given that the distribution of the frequency of providing pronunciation models was slightly skewed, though it was distributed at the acceptable level, the level of confidence in ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation might not be a strong predictor of the frequency of use of pronunciation models. In fact, the participants were likely to provide pronunciation models regardless of their level of confidence in diagnosing learners' pronunciation.

The level of confidence in knowledge of effective teaching methods also predicted the frequency of implementation of mechanical drills. However, it should be noted that the participants implemented multiple approaches to pronunciation teaching rather than merely relying on having learners engage in mechanical drills.

Another important finding of this study was that corrective feedback, both incidental and post-task, was a common technique incorporated into pronunciation teaching among the participants. Although the confidence in three areas related to pronunciation teaching were not statistically significant predictors of the frequency of use of corrective feedback, it should be considered a positive finding in that, regardless of the level of confidence in pronunciation teaching, most instructors provided feedback on learners' pronunciation, and this has been found effective in facilitating pronunciation learning [13].

It should also be noted that the difficulties in finding statistically significant predictive relationships between the participants' backgrounds and frequencies of different teaching approaches to pronunciation teaching may stem from the multiple approaches implemented by individual participants. That is, when teachers use multiple approaches to pronunciation teaching without relying on a single approach, it may be difficult to predict a particular teaching approach over others based solely on the participants' background variables.

Finally, although a survey study has its limitations, such as the issues in the reliability of the self-reported responses [1] and in the possibility of a gap between the populations being investigated and

the sample collected [14], the advantage of a large scale survey should be valued as it allows for a number of statistical analyses. However, further research is needed to explore at least a few of the participants' actual pronunciation teaching and instructional decision-making processes in depth. Further qualitative studies would allow greater details to be explored: especially what accounts for the ten participants' neglect of pronunciation teaching, the relationship between the confidence and teaching approaches, and the frequent use of pronunciation models and incidental as well as post-task corrective feedback. Although this was beyond the scope of the present study, future studies along the same lines may wish to take this into consideration.

5. Conclusion

Contrary to the findings from the previous studies, the vast majority of EFL teachers surveyed in this study teach pronunciation in their EFL teaching. Most of them are at least somewhat confident in their knowledge about effective teaching methods in pronunciation teaching, ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation, and pronunciation teaching in general. In addition, they tend to adopt two or more approaches to pronunciation teaching, and probably this non-reliance on a single teaching approach explains the difficulty in identifying a predictive relationship between the teachers' backgrounds and their instructional choices in teaching approaches.

In this study, confidence in three areas (knowledge about effective pronunciation teaching methods, ability to diagnose learners' pronunciation, and pronunciation teaching) predicted the frequencies of use of three teaching approaches (explicit pronunciation teaching, providing pronunciation models, and providing time for mechanical drills). However, each merely accounts for a small portion of the variation in teaching approaches. In order to find stronger models, further studies incorporating other predictors, such as the teachers' interests and beliefs, should be conducted.

Although the limitation of surveys should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this study, it is still apparent that teacher training in pedagogical pronunciation plays a vital role in developing teachers' expertise in pronunciation teaching. It can also be said that the expertise leads to confidence in teaching eventually. As Murphy [11] suggests, in order to facilitate the implementation of effective teaching in pronunciation, teacher training, not only courses in general phonology and phonetics, but also those with a particular emphasis on pedagogical

pronunciation should be offered in teacher training programs worldwide.

6. Acknowledgement

7. References

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