

Systemic Barriers and Emerging Strategies in English Pronunciation Teaching: A Review of Contemporary Research across Different Educational Contexts

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Abstract

This narrative literature review examined systemic and institutional barriers affecting pronunciation instruction in ESL/EFL contexts, the challenges experienced by teachers and learners, and instructional strategies that may improve pronunciation teaching. The review was conceptually anchored in pronunciation, suprasegmental features, first language interference, thematic analysis, and systemic barriers. It employed narrative analysis supported by Reflexive Thematic Analysis, using a deductive approach involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. From 20 initially considered articles, 11 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025 were retained as units of analysis based on predetermined selection criteria and analyzed using a thematic coding framework. The findings identified interconnected challenges involving limited teacher confidence and pedagogical preparation, learner anxiety and motivation, first language interference, inadequate curricular attention, insufficient instructional time and resources, and an imbalance between segmental and suprasegmental instruction. The review also found that short-term interventions may produce limited improvement, emphasizing the need for sustained pronunciation development. Promising strategies included contextualized and communicative activities, culturally responsive materials, explicit pronunciation instruction, technology-supported practice, and balanced attention to segmental and suprasegmental features. The study concluded that pronunciation difficulties are primarily systemic rather than solely attributable to teachers or learners and recommended stronger teacher preparation, curriculum integration, institutional support, resource allocation, and sustained communicative and technology-supported instruction. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education by supporting improvements in the quality and effectiveness of English language instruction. Its sustainability impact is primarily educational and institutional, while also supporting technological and sociocultural sustainability through teacher capacity development, appropriate use of technology, and recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, ESL/EFL, First Language Interference, Pronunciation Instruction, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Systemic Barriers, Suprasegmental Features, Technology-Assisted Instruction

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is fundamental to second language learning because it contributes to communicative competence, listener comprehension, and effective oral communication. According to Nugraha et al. (2022), comprehensible pronunciation is considered a marker of learner competence. However, pronunciation remains underrepresented in secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction because of curriculum priorities, limited teacher preparation, inadequate resources, and insufficient professional development. Foote et al. (2012) found that despite increased pronunciation resources and courses, classroom practices showed limited change, with many teachers remaining undertrained and lacking confidence, particularly in prosodic instruction (Foote et al., 2012). This concern is significant because suprasegmental features contribute substantially to intelligibility and communicative effectiveness (Derwing & Munro, 2015). As per Munro & Derwing (2011), intelligible pronunciation is also fundamental to learner confidence and effective communication. Accordingly, this narrative literature review examines systemic and institutional barriers to effective pronunciation instruction, the challenges experienced by teachers and learners, and instructional strategies that may address these difficulties across ESL/EFL contexts.

English proficiency involves more than knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and listening. Clear pronunciation influences how effectively learners communicate and how successfully their messages are understood (Aliaga, 2007). Research emphasizes that suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech are particularly important to intelligibility, fluency, naturalness, and communicative effectiveness (Derwing & Munro, 2015). For secondary ESL/EFL learners, inadequate instruction in these features may result in grammatically accurate but less intelligible speech, potentially affecting academic performance, social confidence, and continued language development. Despite their importance, pronunciation and suprasegmental features receive limited attention in many educational settings. Studies conducted in Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines indicate that curricula frequently prioritize grammar and literacy while providing limited time, resources, instructional guidance, and materials for pronunciation (Tiwari, 2023; Kamengko et al., 2024; Qader et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, difficulties involving pitch and stress among high school learners have been associated with insufficient prosodic instruction (Lagat et al., 2025). These limitations extend beyond linguistic performance because weak pronunciation may influence how learners' competence is perceived even when their vocabulary and grammar are strong (Umar & Aspany, 2024). Pronunciation also supports meaningful interaction across linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Intelligible speech enables learners to communicate ideas, thoughts, and emotions more clearly and participate effectively in increasingly multilingual environments (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). Thus, pronunciation instruction should move beyond recognition of prosodic features toward their functional use in communication, particularly because clear speech facilitates cross-cultural understanding and cooperation (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025).

Secondary learners encounter cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural difficulties when developing English pronunciation. Learners who are still consolidating foundational language and literacy skills may struggle to simultaneously process individual words and attend to stress, rhythm, and intonation. Social pressure may further discourage learners from experimenting with unfamiliar English prosodic patterns because of fear of appearing unnatural or being mocked by peers. First language interference also influences pronunciation development. Learners may transfer intonation contours, tonal patterns, syllable timing, and other phonological characteristics of their first language into English, producing recurring patterns of pronunciation difficulty (Mohammed & Idris, 2020). Eiden and Hidayati (2025) found that teachers working with learners from different regional dialect backgrounds encountered difficulties related to intonation, vowel pronunciation, phonological awareness, and linguistic diversity. Their findings also showed that culturally relevant stories, drama, and other locally grounded activities could make pronunciation practice more relatable and help connect learners' native linguistic backgrounds with English. Teachers experience related instructional challenges. Although many recognize the importance of stress, intonation, and rhythm, gaps in formal preparation can limit their ability and confidence to teach these features. Lee et al. (2020) highlight limited teacher confidence in suprasegmental instruction, while insufficient professional development and inadequate treatment of pronunciation in instructional materials further restrict classroom practice (Tiwari, 2023; Azarias & Capistrano, 2019). Teacher trainees may experience anxiety about pronunciation instruction, while some teachers rely more heavily on intuition than formal phonological knowledge (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Reid & Mihaľová, 2025). Egwuogu (2012) further identified knowledge gaps associated with native language influence among English teachers, which may result in English stress and intonation being substituted with features of indigenous languages (Egwuogu, 2012). Limited correction of learner errors creates another concern. Tiwari (2023) identified oversight of student mispronunciations as a challenge because uncorrected pronunciation patterns may become persistent or fossilized (Tiwari, 2023). Time limitations, especially at the secondary level, further reduce opportunities for focused pronunciation instruction. Eiden & Hidayati (2025) identified difficulties involving intonation, pronunciation accuracy, phonological awareness, and cultural influences (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). These challenges are also relevant to linguistically diverse ESL/EFL environments where learners use first language structures when constructing English responses. Mohammed & Idris (2020) describe this process as language transfer, which may affect how learners organize and produce the

target language (Mohammed & Idris, 2020). Limited exposure to English and insufficient opportunities to use it further complicate pronunciation learning. Azarias & Capistrano (2019) associate inadequate exposure and opportunities for language use with learner anxiety and limited confidence (Azarias & Capistrano, 2019). Collectively, these concerns demonstrate that pronunciation difficulties cannot be attributed solely to individual learners or teachers but must also be understood within the instructional and institutional conditions surrounding language education.

Research across ESL/EFL contexts indicates that pronunciation challenges can be addressed through systematic, explicit, and communicatively integrated instruction. Such approaches can improve learners' pronunciation skills while providing structured opportunities to develop intelligible speech (Alghazo et al., 2023; Kang & Pickering, 2020). Task-based activities, technology-assisted pronunciation training, and online platforms can provide interactive practice and individualized feedback that help learners recognize and correct errors (Dalman, 2025; Mora & Mora-Plaza, 2023; Saito et al., 2023). Thomson et al. (2022) further emphasize the value of combining technology-assisted tools with explicit instruction in stress, rhythm, and intonation to strengthen learner engagement and pronunciation accuracy. Technology-based activities may be particularly useful for secondary learners because interactive and low-pressure practice can reduce anxiety associated with oral performance. At the same time, culturally responsive instruction can use learners' regional languages, songs, stories, and oral traditions as points of comparison for understanding English rhythm and intonation (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). Such practices recognize learners' linguistic identities while supporting awareness of differences between their first language and English. Structured approaches such as the Audio-lingual Method may also provide repetitive practice that helps address patterns associated with first language transfer (Azarias & Capistrano, 2019). These approaches indicate that effective pronunciation pedagogy can combine explicit instruction, technology, structured repetition, culturally relevant activities, and communicative practice rather than treating pronunciation as an isolated classroom skill.

The review is conceptually anchored in pronunciation, suprasegmental features, first language interference, thematic analysis, and systemic barriers. Rogerson-Revell (2018) defines pronunciation as the production of speech sounds for communication, encompassing individual phonemes as well as intonation and rhythm. Within this review, pronunciation emphasizes intelligibility and the ability to produce words correctly. The review employs thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns across the selected literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Suprasegmental features, including stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech, provide an important analytical lens for examining the instructional attention given to pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). First Language (L1) interference refers to the transfer of forms and structures from a learner's first language into the language being learned (Al-Saggaf et al., 2022). In this review, it is understood both as a pronunciation challenge and as a linguistic resource that teachers may consider when developing instructional practices. Systemic barriers provide the central perspective for understanding why pronunciation instruction remains difficult despite recognition of its importance. These barriers refer to difficulties embedded within broader structures and cultural norms rather than problems attributable only to individual teachers or learners (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, as cited in Wong et al., 2025). This perspective allows the review to examine how teacher preparation, curricula, learning materials, instructional time, resources, and professional development collectively influence pronunciation teaching across educational contexts.

A continuing gap exists between research emphasizing the importance of pronunciation and actual classroom practice. Pronunciation receives less attention than grammar, reading, and writing, while suprasegmental instruction remains particularly limited. Existing evidence also identifies recurring challenges involving teacher confidence, professional preparation, instructional resources, first language interference, learner anxiety, limited exposure to English, and insufficient opportunities for structured practice. Because pronunciation contributes to intelligibility and fluency, these instructional gaps require greater attention (Nugraha et al., 2022). The narrative literature review therefore synthesizes contemporary research on pronunciation teaching in ESL/EFL contexts to identify major challenges encountered by educators, examine evidence-based and innovative instructional practices, determine implications for teacher training and professional development, and develop recommendations addressing instructional gaps. The review focuses on studies published from 2019 to 2025 and includes research conducted in varied ESL/EFL contexts rather than limiting the evidence to the Philippines. Studies were identified through Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, relevant journals, and reference lists using terms related to pronunciation teaching, suprasegmentals, instructional challenges, practices, and innovative strategies. Twenty articles were initially considered, and 11 were retained after evaluating their relevance to pronunciation challenges, instructional strategies, and implications. The retained studies were then subjected to thematic analysis and synthesis. Through this scope, the review seeks to clarify how systemic conditions shape pronunciation teaching and identify practices that may better support secondary English language learners.

The study is directly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education because it addresses the quality and effectiveness of English language instruction for secondary ESL/EFL learners. By examining barriers

that limit pronunciation teaching and identifying evidence-based approaches for improving intelligibility, fluency, teacher preparation, instructional resources, and classroom practice, the review supports efforts toward more effective language education. Its emphasis on teacher training, appropriate pedagogical strategies, and adequate learning opportunities also reinforces the importance of improving instructional quality for learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The review contributes primarily to educational and institutional sustainability by identifying conditions that can support more consistent and effective pronunciation instruction. Strengthening teacher preparation, professional development, curriculum attention, instructional materials, and classroom practices may help institutions sustain pronunciation pedagogy rather than treating it as a peripheral aspect of English education. Improved pronunciation competence may also support learners' communicative confidence, academic participation, and preparation for future professional opportunities. The study also has relevance to technological sustainability in education because it identifies technology-assisted tools and online learning environments as resources for interactive pronunciation practice and individualized feedback. Its attention to learners' regional languages and cultural backgrounds further supports sociocultural sustainability by recognizing linguistic diversity as a resource that can be incorporated into culturally responsive pronunciation instruction. Collectively, these dimensions emphasize a sustainable approach to ESL/EFL education in which instructional quality, teacher capacity, technology, and linguistic diversity are integrated to support effective and communicative pronunciation learning.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a narrative literature review supported by Narrative and Reflexive thematic analysis. Narrative analysis served as the primary mode of synthesis because the selected studies presented systemic barriers, instructional challenges, and pedagogical strategies as interconnected rather than independent concerns. Reflexive analysis was incorporated to acknowledge analytical limitations, alternative interpretations, and the researchers' theoretical perspective. The researchers specifically adopted Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) by Braun and Clarke. Byrne (2022) defined RTA as a theoretically flexible interpretative approach for identifying and analyzing patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The analysis involved data familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. A deductive approach was applied because coding and theme development were guided by existing findings and the predetermined focus of the review. This approach allowed the researchers to interpret pronunciation teaching challenges primarily through systemic and institutional conditions while recognizing that other theoretical perspectives could generate alternative interpretations.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The review was not confined to a single geographical locale. It covered ESL/EFL educational contexts in which English pronunciation was taught to secondary or higher-level learners. The reviewed studies represented varied cultural, linguistic, and institutional settings, including Nepal (Tiwari, 2023), Bangladesh (Qader et al., 2024), Malaysia (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020), Indonesia (Kamengko et al., 2024), and the Philippines (Abellana, 2025; Bombales & Montejo, 2025). Studies from Europe (Reid & Mihaľová, 2025) and China (Ping & Tao, 2025) were also included. These contexts enabled the review to examine common pronunciation teaching issues across diverse educational systems.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

As a narrative literature review, the study did not directly recruit human respondents. Instead, its units of analysis were 11 selected empirical studies addressing pronunciation teaching in ESL/EFL contexts. The reviewed literature included studies concerned with pedagogical strategies and practices (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025; Bombales & Montejo, 2025; Abellana, 2025; Reid & Mihaľová, 2025; Purwanto, 2019; Alsuhailbani et al., 2024; Ping & Tao, 2025) and studies examining systemic barriers and challenges related to pronunciation teaching (Tiwari, 2023; Qader et al., 2024; Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Kamengko et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies represented teachers, teacher trainees, teacher-education students, and English language learners across different ESL/EFL environments.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The researchers initially considered 20 journal articles relevant to pronunciation teaching. References were generally limited to studies published not earlier than 2019 to maintain relevance to contemporary ESL/EFL instruction, although the manuscript also indicated that peer-reviewed journals published from 2018 onward were examined. The final thematic synthesis focused on empirical studies conducted between 2019 and 2025. Articles were screened according to their relevance to the teaching of pronunciation to secondary or higher-level English learners, particularly studies examining challenges encountered by teachers, factors affecting pronunciation instruction, pedagogical practices, and strategies for addressing identified difficulties. Systematic abstract reading was conducted for the initial 20 articles. Each study was then evaluated according to the established selection

criteria, including its relevance to the objectives of the review and the usefulness of its findings. Following screening and quality evaluation, 11 articles were retained for coding and thematic synthesis.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used predetermined literature-selection criteria and a thematic coding framework as the primary means of organizing and evaluating the documentary data. The screening criteria guided the researchers in determining whether each article contained relevant findings on pronunciation teaching challenges, instructional practices, strategies, and implications. Systematic abstract reading was used to assess the initial articles before final inclusion. For the selected studies, the researchers used concept-driven and descriptive coding. Keywords, significant findings, and recurring concepts were identified and grouped according to their relevance to the objectives of the review. Predetermined concepts associated with pronunciation teaching guided the deductive coding process, while descriptive coding supported the identification of important ideas contained in the reviewed studies.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers first gathered journal articles addressing pronunciation instruction among ESL/EFL learners, particularly those discussing teacher challenges, influencing factors, and strategies for improving pronunciation teaching. The initial 20 articles underwent systematic abstract reading and relevance assessment. The studies were examined to determine whether their findings corresponded with the objectives and scope of the literature review. After screening, 11 articles were retained. The researchers conducted preliminary readings of each selected article to familiarize themselves with the data and identify significant findings. Relevant information was recorded and organized according to predetermined concepts derived from the focus of the review. The researchers subsequently reread the selected materials and conducted line-by-line examination of relevant results to generate codes, patterns, and themes. Potential themes were then checked against the complete dataset to determine their consistency with the review objectives. Additional sources and multiple data references were cross-checked to strengthen the credibility of the synthesis. The final stage involved organizing the interpreted findings into a narrative report. According to Byrne (2022), this stage represents the completion and final inspection of the analytical report before presenting the synthesized findings. The objectives of the review guided the organization of the final discussion.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The 11 selected empirical studies were analyzed using narrative thematic analysis combined with Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The process began with data familiarization through repeated reading, followed by deductive and descriptive coding, identification of initial themes, review and refinement of themes, and preparation of the narrative synthesis. Coding focused on findings related to pronunciation teaching challenges, instructional practices, systemic conditions, and emerging strategies. The analysis first identified concerns involving teacher confidence, competence, preparedness, and pedagogical knowledge. Asikin and Ibrahim (2020) found that confidence and actual competence did not always correspond among teacher trainees. Kamengko et al. (2024) similarly indicated that inadequate institutional preparation encouraged teachers to undertake independent upskilling (Kamengko et al., 2024). Concerns about correcting pronunciation and teachers' own accents were also reported (Kamengko et al., 2024; Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020). Reid and Mihačová (2025) further demonstrated that confidence without systematic knowledge could result in methodological limitations (Reid & Mihačová, 2025). Teachers also experienced difficulty translating phonological knowledge into classroom practice. Asikin & Ibrahim (2020) identified difficulties in simplifying phonological concepts for different proficiency levels (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020), while Tiwari's (2023) findings indicated limitations in teachers' own pronunciation proficiency. According to Asikin and Ibrahim (2020), overly technical pre-service phonetics instruction also failed to provide adequate classroom-oriented preparation. Bombales & Montejo (2025) likewise suggested difficulties in sustaining pronunciation improvement. Professional self-remediation emerged as a response to these limitations. Asikin & Ibrahim (2020) reported the use of peer collaboration, online resources, and simplified instructional techniques, while Kamengko et al. (2024) identified similar efforts toward independent professional improvement. However, these practices also indicated the need for stronger institutional support and systematic professional development. Affective and motivational barriers were also coded. Kamengko et al. (2024) identified difficulties sustaining learner motivation because pronunciation improvement requires repetitive and prolonged practice. In examination-oriented settings, pronunciation may receive less learner attention when other language competencies are prioritized (Qader et al., 2024). Tiwari (2023) further identified learners' reluctance to modify established pronunciation habits and pronunciation-related anxiety. Limited assessment and feedback also affected sustained motivation, as Qader et al. (2024) reported minimal integration of pronunciation into assessment, while Tiwari (2023) identified restricted opportunities for individualized feedback. Native language interference formed another major analytical category. Qader et al. (2024) identified recurring pronunciation patterns influenced by Bengali phonology, while Asikin and Ibrahim (2020) found difficulties associated with Malay influence on vowels and rhythm. Abellana (2025) similarly identified recurring phonemic confusions and word-stress difficulties among Filipino learners. These patterns indicated that first language influence was systematic rather than random. However, teachers often lacked specialized contrastive-analysis skills. Qader et al. (2024) and Asikin and Ibrahim

(2020) indicated that this limitation affected teachers' ability to diagnose and systematically address L1-related pronunciation problems. The analysis also examined systemic and institutional barriers. According to Tiwari (2023), pronunciation frequently received less curricular attention than other language areas. Qader et al. (2024) likewise identified the marginalization of explicit pronunciation instruction within the Communicative Language Teaching framework (Qader et al., 2024). Asikin and Ibrahim (2020), Kamengko et al. (2024), and Tiwari (2023) further identified limited instructional time as a persistent barrier, while Qader et al. (2024) emphasized the difficulty of providing individualized pronunciation feedback in large classes. Resource limitations were similarly evident. Asikin and Ibrahim (2020) reported inadequate access to ICT tools and language laboratories, Qader et al. (2024) identified shortages of audiovisual and digital resources, and Tiwari (2023) noted inconsistent pronunciation content in textbooks. Another coded theme involved the imbalance between segmental and suprasegmental instruction. According to Reid and Mihaľová (2025), teachers tended to prioritize individual sound correction while giving less attention to lexical stress and connected speech. Bombales and Montejo (2025) reported a similar limitation, with suprasegmental features receiving minimal attention (Bombales & Montejo, 2025). Eiden and Hidayati (2025) also identified intonation and vowel pronunciation as significant instructional difficulties. The reviewed evidence indicated that instructional time continued to favor segmental features despite the communicative importance of stress, rhythm, and intonation (Reid & Mihaľová, 2025; Bombales & Montejo, 2025). The effectiveness of intervention programs was also considered. Bombales and Montejo (2025) reported only slight improvements following a Pronunciation Intervention Program, with limited changes in intelligibility. The findings suggested that short-term interventions may be insufficient for developing stable pronunciation patterns. Difficulties with consonant clusters continued even after intervention (Bombales & Montejo, 2025), while vowel production also remained challenging because of linguistic variability and first language influence. The researchers further synthesized how teacher preparation, curriculum priorities, instructional time, resources, and teacher confidence interacted rather than operated independently. Similar systemic patterns appeared across the reviewed contexts, including Nepal (Tiwari, 2023), Bangladesh (Qader et al., 2024), Malaysia (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020), Indonesia (Kamengko et al., 2024), and the Philippines (Abellana, 2025; Bombales & Montejo, 2025), as well as Europe (Reid & Mihaľová, 2025) and China (Ping & Tao, 2025). Finally, the analysis identified emerging instructional strategies. Contextualized, multimodal, and interactive approaches were emphasized, particularly for linguistically diverse learners (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). Purwanto (2019) identified the value of audio, video, pictures, drills, repetition, and listening activities when integrated with authentic communication (Purwanto, 2019). Bombales and Montejo (2025), highlighted explicit articulatory instruction as another approach for improving learners' awareness of sound production. Eiden and Hidayati (2025) emphasized interactive activities, regular practice, feedback, learner motivation, and cultural sensitivity, while Reid and Mihaľová (2025) recommended combining receptive and production-based techniques with communicative tasks (Reid & Mihaľová, 2025). Regional linguistic backgrounds were also interpreted as potential pedagogical resources. Eiden and Hidayati (2025) identified the value of culturally relevant resources such as local songs, stories, and poems for contextualizing pronunciation instruction (Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). Abellana (2025) emphasized communicative activities such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations that allow learners to apply pronunciation in meaningful situations. Technology-supported learning constituted the final emerging category. Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) reported improved performance through web-based pronunciation training using YouGlish, particularly in consonant-cluster production (Alsuhaibani et al., 2024). Ping & Tao's (2025) study further indicated opportunities for integrating multisensory detection and algorithmic feedback into pronunciation instruction, while Abellana (2025) identified communicative and technology-supported strategies as promising means of extending pronunciation practice beyond limited classroom time. Overall, the thematic analysis organized the literature around interconnected teacher, learner, linguistic, systemic, curricular, and technological factors shaping pronunciation teaching in ESL/EFL contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Challenges Affecting Pronunciation Teaching and Learning

3.1.1 Teacher Confidence, Competence, and Pedagogical Preparedness

The reviewed studies showed that teacher confidence and actual pedagogical competence do not always correspond. Effective pronunciation teaching requires both professional confidence and adequate knowledge (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Reid & Mihaľová, 2025). Teachers were reported to seek assistance and improve their skills despite inadequate institutional support (Kamengko et al., 2024). Limited teacher proficiency was also evident, with Tiwari (2023) documenting instances in which English teachers themselves had difficulty pronouncing certain words. Simplifying pronunciation instruction because of limited knowledge or differences in learner proficiency could further affect learners' foundational understanding (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Tiwari, 2023). The reviewed studies nevertheless showed that teachers engaged in self-remediation and professional development, as evident in Asikin & Ibrahim (2020) and Kamengko et al. (2024). These findings suggest that pronunciation teaching difficulties are not solely attributable to teachers' willingness or confidence. Pedagogical competence must accompany confidence because teachers need sufficient knowledge to model pronunciation, diagnose errors, and design appropriate strategies. Reliance on personal experience and traditional approaches may limit instructional effectiveness when teachers lack formal preparation. Institutional support is therefore

important because teachers who independently attempt to address their weaknesses still require structured preparation and continuing professional development.

3.1.2 Learner Motivation, Anxiety, and First Language Interference

The findings identified affective and motivational barriers as significant learner-related challenges. Kamengko et al. (2024) found that learners could lose motivation because pronunciation development requires repetitive and sustained practice, which may lead to boredom and frustration. Pronunciation also received lower value among learners when it was not explicitly prioritized within the curriculum, as reported by Qader et al., (2024). Peer pressure and classroom culture likewise influenced learners' willingness to practice pronunciation (Tiwari, 2023). First language interference was another recurring finding. Predictable pronunciation difficulties included vowel shifts, sound substitutions, omissions, and other patterns associated with differences between English and learners' native languages (Abellana, 2025; Asikin and Ibrahim, 2020; Qader et al., 2024). These errors require teachers to understand how learners' existing phonological systems influence English production. However, limited knowledge of contrastive analysis can make it difficult for teachers to determine the source of recurring pronunciation problems (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Qader et al., 2024). Without targeted correction, such errors may become persistent.

3.1.3 Systemic and Institutional Constraints

The studies consistently showed that pronunciation receives less curricular attention than grammar and other language skills (Asikin and Ibrahim, 2020; Kamengko et al., 2024; Qader et al. 2024; and Tiwari, 2023). Limited instructional time further restricted sustained pronunciation practice. Insufficient materials and resources were also reported by Asikin and Ibrahim (2020), Qader et al., (2024) and Tiwari (2023), limiting opportunities for teachers and students to engage in effective pronunciation activities. These findings show that pronunciation teaching challenges extend beyond the immediate control of teachers and learners. Curriculum priorities influence instructional time, assessment, materials, and classroom practices. When pronunciation receives limited institutional attention, teachers have fewer opportunities and resources to implement sustained instruction. Consequently, stronger coordination between teachers, curriculum developers, institutions, and other educational stakeholders is needed to address these interconnected barriers rather than treating pronunciation difficulties as individual teacher or learner shortcomings.

3.1.4 Imbalance Between Segmental and Suprasegmental Instruction and Limited Interventions

The synthesis revealed that classroom pronunciation instruction frequently emphasizes individual sounds, vocabulary, vowels, and consonants while giving less attention to stress, rhythm, intonation, and other suprasegmental features (Reid and Mihaľová, 2025; Bombales and Montejo, 2025; & Eiden and Hidayati, 2025). The studies also showed that pronunciation improvement remained limited despite the implementation of some intervention programs, particularly when instruction was brief or isolated. This imbalance is important because pronunciation competence requires both segmental accuracy and appropriate prosodic features. Concentrating primarily on individual sounds may not sufficiently develop the stress, rhythm, and intonation necessary for intelligible communication. The findings on intervention effectiveness likewise suggest that pronunciation improvement requires sustained practice rather than short-term remediation. The limitations documented in Bombales and Montejo, (2025) support the need for pronunciation instruction that is integrated consistently throughout language learning rather than delivered only through temporary intervention programs.

3.2 Emerging Strategies for Effective Pronunciation Instruction

3.2.1 Contextualized, Communicative, and Culturally Responsive Approaches

The reviewed studies identified culturally responsive and communicative instruction as promising strategies. Locally familiar songs, poems, stories, and other culturally relevant materials were used to improve learner engagement and contextualize pronunciation concepts (Eiden and Hidayati, 2025). Explicit pronunciation instruction was also found to complement communicative activities, particularly when addressing English phonemes that may be absent from learners' first languages. According to Bombales & Montejo (2025) and Abellana (2025), explicit instruction can be combined with meaningful speaking activities to address specific pronunciation difficulties. These findings indicate that learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds can function not only as sources of pronunciation interference but also as instructional resources. Using familiar materials allows teachers to connect unfamiliar English sounds and prosodic patterns with learners' existing experiences. Communicative tasks such as role-plays, discussions, storytelling, and presentations can then provide opportunities to apply pronunciation in meaningful situations. Such approaches also support learner confidence because pronunciation is practiced as part of communication rather than only through isolated drills.

3.2.2 Technology-Supported Pronunciation Practice

Technology-assisted instruction also emerged as a useful strategy. Accessible technological tools were found to support specific pronunciation skills, including consonant-cluster production (Alsuhaibani et al., 2024). Technology can provide additional opportunities for listening, repeated practice, self-monitoring, and feedback beyond limited classroom instructional time. The findings suggest that technology can complement rather than

replace teacher-directed pronunciation instruction. Digital resources can extend practice opportunities and allow learners to repeatedly hear and produce target forms. Their usefulness, however, depends on meaningful integration with explicit teaching and communicative activities. The reviewed evidence further indicates that effective strategies may still produce limited outcomes when systemic barriers such as inadequate resources, insufficient training, and limited instructional time remain unresolved.

3.3 Implications for Pronunciation Pedagogy

3.3.1 Curriculum Integration and Institutional Support

The findings showed that pronunciation is structurally less prioritized within English curricula across several educational contexts (Kamengko et al., 2024; Qader et al., 2024; Tiwari, 2023; Asikin and Ibrahim, 2020). This lower priority was reflected in limited instructional time, resources, assessment attention, and opportunities for sustained practice. The results imply that pronunciation should be systematically integrated into English language curricula rather than treated as a minor component of speaking. Clear pronunciation objectives should address both segmental and suprasegmental features and should be supported by appropriate instructional time and resources. Curriculum and assessment structures must also recognize pronunciation as part of communicative competence because teachers are unlikely to sustain pronunciation instruction when institutional systems continue to prioritize other language components.

3.3.2 Teacher Preparation and L1-Informed Instruction

The reviewed studies identified a gap between teacher preparation and classroom application (Reid and Mihaľová, 2025; Kamengko et al., 2024; Tiwari 2023; & Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020). Teachers needed stronger preparation in error diagnosis, contrastive analysis, differentiated instruction, and explicit pronunciation pedagogy. According to Asikin & Ibrahim (2020) and Kamengko et al. (2024), mentoring and continuing professional support may help address the knowledge-application gap. Systematic and predictable L1 interference further emphasizes the need for linguistically informed teacher preparation (Abellana, 2025; Qader et al., 2024; and Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020). Teachers should understand differences between English and learners' first-language phonological systems so that recurring errors can be anticipated and addressed through targeted instruction. Abellana (2025) further supports diagnostic approaches that identify individual pronunciation difficulties, allowing instruction to respond to learner needs rather than relying solely on generalized techniques.

3.3.3 Balanced, Technology-Supported, and Sustained Pronunciation Instruction

The findings showed a persistent imbalance between segmental and suprasegmental instruction (Reid & Mihaľová, 2025; Bombales & Montejo 2025; and Eiden & Hidayati, 2025). They also identified technology as a potential means of extending practice opportunities (Ping & Tao, 2025; Abellana, 2025; Alsuhaibani et al., 2024; and Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020). At the same time, brief pronunciation interventions did not consistently produce substantial improvements. These findings imply that teachers should provide balanced attention to individual sounds, stress, rhythm, intonation, pausing, and connected speech. Technology-supported practice may supplement classroom instruction through online pronunciation resources, speech-recognition applications, and recording activities. However, technology and short-term programs cannot substitute for sustained instruction. The findings of Bombales and Montejo, (2025) reinforce the importance of continuous pronunciation development, especially for features such as vowel quality, consonant clusters, and prosody that may resist brief intervention.

3.4 Recommended Classroom Practices and Future Directions

3.4.1 Integrating Pronunciation into Communicative Language Activities

The synthesis showed that pronunciation is frequently given less attention than grammar, reading, and writing despite its importance to intelligibility and spoken communication (Tiwari, 2023; Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020; Kamengko et al., 2024; and Qader et al., 2024). The findings also indicated that learner anxiety, limited motivation, linguistic diversity, and insufficient practice opportunities influence pronunciation development. These findings support integrating pronunciation into regular speaking, listening, oral reading, storytelling, debates, role-plays, discussions, and presentations rather than teaching it as an isolated skill. Teachers may also balance segmental and suprasegmental activities through stress marking, rhythm exercises, guided oral reading, intonation practice, shadowing, and connected-speech activities. Supportive classroom conditions, constructive feedback, rehearsal opportunities, pair or small-group practice, and recognition of gradual progress may help learners participate with greater confidence.

3.4.2 Culturally Responsive Materials and Continued Research

The findings further showed that learners' regional languages and cultural backgrounds influence pronunciation development and can be used as pedagogical resources. Locally familiar songs, folktales, narratives, community dialogues, and other authentic materials can provide meaningful contexts for comparing English pronunciation with learners' first-language patterns. Future practice may therefore incorporate activities that help learners identify and compare phonemes, stress, rhythm, and other features across languages while maintaining meaningful communication. The reviewed chapter also identifies a need for further research examining pronunciation

development over time, across different learning environments, and through technology-supported approaches. Continued investigation may clarify how sustained, culturally responsive, balanced, and technology-assisted pronunciation instruction can support clearer and more confident communication among ESL/EFL learners.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The review concludes that challenges in pronunciation teaching are primarily systemic rather than solely attributable to teachers or learners. Inadequate teacher preparation, limited curricular priority, insufficient resources, time constraints, and weak institutional support restrict effective pronunciation instruction despite teachers' commitment and learners' capacity for improvement. Culturally responsive approaches, technology-assisted instruction, and communicative activities show potential, but pronunciation development requires sustained and long-term integration throughout language education. Therefore, pronunciation should be recognized as a fundamental component of communicative competence alongside reading, writing, and grammar.

Educational institutions should strengthen pronunciation instruction through coordinated improvements in teacher preparation, curriculum design, institutional policies, resource allocation, and community participation. Pronunciation should be integrated into regular language activities and taught through engaging, communicative, culturally responsive, and technology-supported approaches that provide learners with meaningful opportunities to practice without fear of making mistakes. Teacher training and curriculum programs should also provide greater attention to both segmental and suprasegmental features, while future research should continue examining innovative approaches that support fluency, rhythm, naturalness, and overall pronunciation development.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The study observed ethical considerations appropriate to a narrative literature review. Since the research relied on previously published empirical studies and did not directly involve human participants, ethical compliance centered on the responsible selection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of existing scholarly sources while maintaining academic integrity throughout the review process.

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