

Pronunciation-Focused Exercises in the 12th Grade English Language Textbook in Jordan

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(Received 3 / 3 / 2021. Accepted 6 / 4 / 2021)

□ ABSTRACT □

The present study aims at analyzing the pronunciation-focused exercises in the English language textbook for the twelfth grade in Jordan. The researcher analyzed the (Student Book) that is taught to the students in the 12th grade in public schools in Jordan. The student Book contains 5 Modules that include 10 units. The analysis revealed that not all units include pronunciation-focused exercises; and the ones that contain such exercises are: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8. The exercises briefly present: Using the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA), Minimal Pairs, Word Stress and Sentence Stress. The analysis showed that the activities present few consonants and vowels among which sounds that are not found in the Arabic language, the students' mother tongue. In addition, the review of these sounds do not form enough input that enables the learners to distinguish them. The activities that introduce minimal pairs, stress, and intonation tend to be convenient and suitable. Finally, the researcher presents some recommendations to improve teaching and designing pronunciation skills for EFL students.

Key Words: 12th Grade, English Language Textbook, Pronunciation-focused Activities.

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تدريبات اللفظ في كتاب اللغة الانجليزية للصف الثاني عشر في الأردن

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(تاريخ الإيداع 3 / 3 / 2021. قبل للنشر في 6 / 4 / 2021)

□ ملخص □

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل التدريبات التي تتناول اللفظ في كتاب اللغة الانجليزية للصف الثاني عشر في الأردن. قامت الباحثة بتحليل (كتاب الطالب) الذي يدرس لطلبة الصف الثاني عشر في المدارس الحكومية في الأردن. كتاب الطالب يحتوي على خمس وحدات رئيسية تتكون من عشر وحدات فرعية. كشف التحليل على عدم احتواء جميع الوحدات على تدريبات تتناول اللفظ ، وتلك التي تحتوي على هذه التدريبات هي الوحدات: 2،3،4،5،6،8. وتقدم هذه التدريبات مواضيع تتعلق باستخدام الرموز الصوتية العالمية ، الكلمات التي تختلف عن بعضها بصوت واحد فقط ، التشديد في الكلمة ، التشديد في الجملة ، والتنغيم. اظهر التحليل أن التدريبات تقدم القليل من الأصوات الصحيحة وأصوات العلة؛ ومن ضمن هذه الأصوات أصوات غير موجودة في اللغة العربية. علاوة على ذلك، فإن هذه الأصوات غير كافية لتمكين الطلبة من تمييزها. بينما تلك التدريبات المتعلقة بالكلمات التي تختلف بصوت واحد فقط والتشديد في الكلمة والجملة والتنغيم تعتبر كافية و مناسبة. وفي آخر البحث ، قدمت الباحثة مجموعة من التوصيات لتحسين تدريس وتصميم مهارات لفظية لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية / لغة اجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الصف الثاني عشر، كتاب اللغة الانجليزية ، نشاطات التركيز على اللفظ.

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I .Introduction

Acquiring accurate pronunciation is considered a difficult task for most learners. “ Many learners of English as a second language have ‘major difficulties’ with English pronunciation even after years of learning the language”, Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011). The difficulty may range gradually from single sounds, syllables, to full words; segmental and suprasegmental features are thus included when difficulty is debated. The absence of certain sounds, whether a consonant or a vowel in the native or the first language, might be a real obstacle in the way of teaching and learning a language that contains these sounds in its alphabet inventory. In addition, the different phonological systems of languages may be a cause for the mispronunciation of consonant clusters whether in the onset or the coda of a syllable.

The researcher, as a teacher of English as a foreign language, has been encountering various types of difficulties experienced by her EFL students. These difficulties can be classified in fields of pronouncing separate sounds (Consonants & Vowels), pronouncing consonant clusters, pronouncing the stressed syllables correctly, stressing the emphasized words in a sentence, and uttering the suitable intonation. This is due to the fact that English belongs to Germanic languages whereas Arabic belongs to Semitic languages. The two languages have differences in the phonological systems as well as the phonemic entries, which forms some obstacles in pronunciation; for example, some sounds are found in Arabic but absent in English and vice versa.

Hayati (2010) indicates that environmental, physical, psychological, instructional, and other factors affect the process of learning and teaching English, particularly its sound system. He divides these factors into two groups : *Direct* and *Indirect*; the former is related to both the teacher and the student, and the latter is related to the impact of the teaching and learning task.

Gilakjani (2011) declares that pronunciation is not intensively and seriously taken into consideration although it requires effort and focus in teaching since it is difficult for many learners. Thus, huge effort should be made to change this carelessness about teaching pronunciation into a more serious and intensive teaching situation in which this aspect of language is granted more attention and interest.

Pronunciation can be introduced in interesting ways. “Role-Playing / Simulation is an extremely valuable method for L2 learning. It encourages thinking and creativity and lets students develop and practice new language and behavioral skills in a relatively non-threatening setting, and can create the motivation and involvement necessary for learning to occur”, Tompkins (1998). Therefore, this technique should be implemented in teaching pronunciation since it reduces stress and anxiety and changes the educational setting into a friendly and joyful atmosphere.

Some methodologists, in addition to Tompkins, also suggest using various techniques such as role-playing and dramatization in order to immerse students in communicative learning environment that makes the educational process more natural. Among those methodologists are Richards & Rodgers (2001), Rifkin (2003), Hayati (2006), Larsen-Freeman (1986) and many other experts in this field.

II.1 The Question of the Study

Are the pronunciation-focused exercises in the 12th Secondary Grade English Language Textbook enough and adequate for the students?

II.2. Category of Analysis

The units included in the Modules in the 12th Secondary Grade English Language Student Book.

II.3. Unit of Analysis

The exercises that focus and discuss the Pronunciation of English consonants and vowels, stress and intonation.

II.4. Methodology and Research Design

The present study follows the qualitative descriptive approach in which there are description and explanation of data (Document Analysis). The researcher describes the exercises and activities that focus on English pronunciation of both consonants and vowels in the student book of the 12th secondary grade. In addition to this, she qualitatively explains the suitability and sufficiency of these activities for students in such stage.

II.5. Operational Definitions

12th grade: It is the final optional stage in the Secondary Education in Jordan that precedes University and ends with a comprehensive national exam that is considered a decisive axis in determining the students' future track of study.

English Language Textbook (Action Pack 12): It is the official Textbook used in teaching English as a foreign language in Jordan. It is used in public schools. It follows the Communicative Approach Teaching which includes focusing on the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing).

Pronunciation-focused Activities: These are activities found in different units in the English Language Textbook that is used in teaching the 12th grade students. They focus on pronunciation (Consonants, vowels, minimal pairs, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation).

II.6. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data are collected from the exercises and activities in the 12th grade English Language Textbook. Then, the researcher investigates the exercises that include Pronunciation. The book contains six modules, each module includes a number of units or only one unit that talk about relevant ideas and subjects. The number of the occurrence of the exercises that focus on pronunciation is counted, followed by classifying the sounds and topics being introduced.

III. Discussion and Conclusion

After surveying the units in the modules included in the 12th grade English Language Textbook, the researcher found out that all the modules contain activities and exercises that focus on pronunciation except the first one.

1. Module 1 includes only one unit that doesn't contain any pronunciation-focused exercises.
2. Module 2 includes two units 2 & 3. Each unit offers examples on the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA).
3. Module 3 includes two units 4&5. Both units discuss Minimal Pairs.
4. Module 4 includes two units 6&7. Only unit 6 discusses pronunciation, Word Stress.
5. Module 5 includes two units 8&9. Unit 8 discusses Word Stress, Part 2.
6. Module 6 includes one unit, Unit 10. In this unit, Intonation is presented.

The first activity related to pronunciation is found on page (17) in *Action Pack, Student's Book*. Students are asked to listen and match the words with their phonetic transcriptions.

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. / æŋgri / | a. importance |
| 2. / kɑ:m / | b. school |
| 3. / sku:l / | c. exercise |
| 4. / eksəsaɪz / | d. angry |
| 5. / ɪmpɔ:təns / | e. calm |

The second activity is found on page (23). Students are asked to listen to words and then write them using the IPA. They can check their answers in a dictionary.

1. Technology
2. Audience
3. Healthy
4. Carrying

The third activity is found on page (31). Students are asked to listen to a Minimal Pairs exercise, then they are asked to say which sounds they heard.

1. Which words contain the /p/ sound and which contain the /b/ sound? Write 1 (/p/) or 2 (/b/) for each word.
2. Which words contain the /n/ sound and which contain the –ing sound / ŋ /? Write 1 (/n/) or 2 (/ ŋ /) for each word.

The fourth activity is found on page (39). Students are asked to listen to pairs of words and say which sounds they hear.

1. Which words contain the **i** sound /ɪ/ and which contain the **ee** sound / i: /? Write **1** (/ɪ/) or **2** (/i:/) for each word.
2. Which words contain the **a** sound / æ / and which contain the **ar** sound / ɑ: /? Write **1** (/æ/) or **2** (/ɑ:/) for each word.
3. Which words contain the **e** sound / e / and which contain the **ir** sound /ɜ: /? Write **1** (/e/) or **2** (/ɜ:/) for each word.

The fifth activity is found on page 45. Students are asked to listen to words and then say how many syllables every word contains. Then they are to tell which syllable receives the main stress. Finally, they can check their dictionaries to be sure about their answers.

The words are:

Secondary, compulsory, organization, development, tuition, achievement, academic, contradictory.

The sixth activity is found on page 60. Students are first asked to listen to two questions and say which word is stressed in each one.

- a. What do you think?
- b. What do you think?

Secondly, they are asked to listen to sentences said in four different ways. Then they are asked to match each one to its implied meaning. These are the sentences:

- a. Perhaps I can buy something else.
- b. Perhaps I could hire one.
- c. Someone else might be able to.
- d. I know you think I can, but you're wrong.

The seventh activity is found on page 69. Students are asked to listen to a sentence said in four different ways, then they are asked to match each one to its implied meaning.

The first ever Alia flight was in 1963 CE.

- a. There were other flights before 1963, but not Alia flights.
- b. Alia's first flight was not in 1964 CE.
- c. There were no Alia flights at all before 1963 CE.
- d. Alia did other things before its first flight in 1963 CE.

Students are then asked to say sentences in which there are stressed words written in **bold**. They are then asked to tell how the meaning in each sentence differs.

- a. **I** retired when I was 60, which was in 1999 CE.
- b. I **retired** when I was 60, which was in 1999 CE.
- c. I retired when I was **60**, which was in 1999 CE.
- d. I retired when I was 60, which was in **1999** CE.

The last activity is found on page 75. Students are asked to listen and repeat two questions and they should say which one shows *puzzlement*, and which one shows *encouragement*.

- a. *How can I get work experience without getting a job first?*
- b. *Before you find a full-time job, why don't you consider doing voluntary work?*

After that, students are asked to listen and repeat the questions below:

- c. *What advice can you give?*
- d. *Are there any jobs which train young while they are working?*

The first activity introduces symbols of some sounds from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). These symbols represent consonants as well as vowels among which are sounds that do not exist in the Arabic phonemic inventory. Thus, pronouncing such sounds was a little bit challenging for some students; this may be due to the scarcity of listening to native speakers and the lack of focus on pronunciation in general. These sounds are : / ʃ, ʒ, ʒ:, æ, ɑ:, u: /, only (u: & æ) vowels are found in Arabic whereas the first consonant which is a combination of (n+g or n+k) does not exist in Arabic. The other vowels might be difficult for Arab learners of English since they do not form part of the phonemic inventory of Arabic language. The researcher, as a teacher of English language in schools and universities for long years, believes that the most challenging vowel in the ones above is the schwa /ə/; the majority of the students whether in schools or EFL students at universities cannot pronounce it appropriately. The same thing can be said about the /ʃ/ sound.

The second activity does not introduce more symbols, it only requires students to listen to some words then transcribe them using IPA and they can check their answers in dictionary. Nevertheless, the words in the exercise have sounds whose symbols have not been introduced to the students previously such as / e, ɒ, dʒ, θ /. These sounds except /ɒ/ are found in the Arabic phonemic system, which makes it easier for the students to pronounce them without making much effort.

The third activity introduces Minimal Pairs. This exercise is essential because it is considered a test that distinguishes phonemes that are distinctive i.e. change meaning. The exercise presents examples that focus on consonants rather than vowels, specifically /p vs. b/ and /n vs. ʃ/. In Arabic language, there is no /p/ sound; therefore, students often replace it with /b/ which results in misunderstanding such as replacing *pack* with *back* or *pay* with *bay*. Another phoneme that is not pronounced correctly by most students is /ʃ/ which is produced when /n/ is followed by /g / or /k/; therefore, the word /kɪʃ/ might be pronounced as /king/ which is considered as a deviation from the native-like manner.

The fourth activity also presents Minimal Pairs, but this time vowels are introduced. The vowels are / i: vs. ɪ /, / ɑ: vs. æ / and /e vs. ɜ:/ among which /ɑ: & ɜ:/ are not found in the Arabic language phonemic repertoire. Some students find it difficult to pronounce the

vowels that do not exist in their mother tongue; as a result, words like *first, girl, burn & car, bar, dark...*etc. might be mispronounced.

The fifth activity presents a more challenging task. It introduces *Word Stress*, a subject that is rarely discussed or practiced due to its suprasegmental nature that demands knowledge of syllabification and stress shift that is related to addition of various affixes. Before listening to the words in the exercise, students should have a previous knowledge and background that relate to the definition of *stress* such as loudness, duration and pitch. Most EFL learners face difficulty in recognizing and producing stress; the researcher, as an instructor of English language as a foreign language, observes this difficulty especially since there are no clear-cut rules that may help students guess the stressed syllables and pronounce them appropriately.

A more challenging activity is introduced in the sixth exercise. The first part of the sentence stress is introduced, which presents the fact that not all the words in the sentence are stressed. Students are informed that content words that provide the listener with new information such as verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs are usually stressed at the level of the sentence while functional words such as pronouns, prepositions, articles are usually unstressed in connected speech.

Sentence Stress (Part 2) is introduced in the seventh activity. A sentence is said in different ways and the students guess which words are stressed: The agent, the action, the date, or the alternative agent. Undoubtedly, the students should listen carefully and attentively in order to guess the stressed words, particularly when the speaker intends to stress a word that is usually unstressed for the purpose of emphasis. The activity trains students to listen to native speakers and be acquainted with different intonations.

The most advanced part of pronunciation appears in the last activity in which *Intonation* is introduced. Students listen to questions and repeat them; these questions imply puzzlement or encouragement. In this activity, students have to distinguish different intonations of voice and they also should practice these intonation patterns. This task might be easier for them due to the fact that Arabic language, which is their native language, includes such patterns of intonation like most human languages.

The analysis shows that the sounds, whether consonants or vowels, that are presented at the beginning of the activities form a very narrow set of the sounds of the English Language. It seems that more sounds should be introduced specially those that are not part of the Arabic language inventory. For example, the sounds /ʒ, eə, ɪə, uə, əu, ɔɪ, aɪ, aʊ, ɒ, ʌ/ are considered sounds that need to be practiced repeatedly since they may constitute a barrier in pronouncing utterances correctly. Unfortunately, these sounds are not focused on in the activities that present pronunciation in the textbook subject of the study. More examples on the sounds mentioned above should be given and the students should listen to them and repeat them continuously in order to master their pronunciation. Moreover, central diphthongs had better be introduced and focused on because they form very difficult sounds for many students.

Minimal pairs, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation are sufficiently introduced. The examples are sufficient and adequate; nevertheless, more clarification and explanation of stress rules should be displayed to the students. Most EFL learners find it difficult to grasp stress whether in recognition or uttering. This might be a cause of mispronouncing some sounds and consequently misunderstanding, specifically in the case of communicating with native speakers of the language.

IV. Recommendations

The researcher presents the following recommendations :

1. Raising the number of examples on each exercise whether it is presenting segmental or suprasegmental content.
2. Introducing more sounds (Consonants and Vowels) specially those which are not part of the Arabic Language phonemic inventory.
3. Focusing on the vowels that are not found in Arabic whether cardinal (Long and Short), diphthongs, or triphthongs.
4. Exposing students to more audio input that includes native pronunciation of different sounds, words, phrases and sentences.
5. Encouraging students to pay attention to such drills and activities by focusing on these activities and doing some of them as homework. Teachers are the leaders for such encouragement.
6. Encouraging students to join Pronunciation Clubs (if they are available) at school in order to have extra intensive exposure to the pronunciation of sounds, words, phrases, and sentences as a whole.
7. Introducing more opportunities for practice of the sounds (that students face difficulty in pronouncing them) in the reading texts or the listening exercises.

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