THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTUITIVE-IMITATIVE APPROACH ON PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL): ANALYZING ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS

LA INFLUENCIA DEL ENFOQUE INTUITIVO-IMITATIVO EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA PRONUNCIACIÓN EN INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA (EFL): ANÁLISIS DE SU EFECTIVIDAD E IMPLICACIONES PEDAGÓGICAS PARA MEJORAR LAS HABILIDADES DE PRONUNCIACIÓN EN LOS ESTUDIANTES DE EFL

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The influence of the Intuitive-Imitative approach on pronunciation instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL): Analyzing its effectiveness and pedagogical implications for enhancing pronunciation skills among EFL learners

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the influence of the Intuitive-Imitative Approach on pronunciation instruction among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, with a non-experimental descriptive design. A survey consisting of 20 Likert-scale items and three open-ended questions was administered to 83 university students. The validity of the instrument was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.770) and expert review. The findings indicated that the Intuitive-Imitative Approach is widely applied in EFL classrooms. It was found that students predominantly use strategies based on imitation and repetition to improve their pronunciation, highlighting the importance of auditory exposure and repetitive practice. Additionally, the results revealed that instructors combine analytic-linguistic and intuitive-imitative approaches, prioritizing the use of audiovisual resources and interactive activities. It is concluded that pronunciation teaching through the Intuitive-Imitative Approach facilitates the natural acquisition of sounds and rhythms of the language, allowing students to develop a more authentic and intelligible pronunciation in English.

Keywords: intuitive-imitative approach, pronunciation, english language teaching, learning strategies, higher education

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La influencia del enfoque intuitivo-imitativo en la enseñanza de la pronunciación en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL): Análisis de su efectividad e implicaciones pedagógicas para mejorar las habilidades de pronunciación en los estudiantes de EFL

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analizó la influencia del enfoque intuitivo-imitativo en la enseñanza de la pronunciación en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque mixto, con un diseño descriptivo no experimental. Se encuestó a 83 estudiantes universitarios mediante un cuestionario de 20 ítems en escala Likert y tres preguntas abiertas. La validez del instrumento fue confirmada a través del coeficiente alfa de Cronbach (0,770) y la revisión de expertos. Los hallazgos indicaron que el enfoque intuitivo-imitativo es ampliamente aplicado en las aulas de EFL. Se identificó que los estudiantes utilizan predominantemente estrategias basadas en la imitación y la repetición para mejorar su pronunciación, destacando la importancia de la exposición auditiva y la práctica repetitiva. Asimismo, los resultados revelaron que los docentes combinan enfoques analítico-lingüísticos e intuitivo-imitativos, priorizando el uso de recursos audiovisuales y actividades interactivas. Se concluye que la enseñanza de la pronunciación mediante el enfoque intuitivo-imitativo favorece la adquisición natural de los sonidos y ritmos del idioma, permitiendo a los estudiantes desarrollar una pronunciación más auténtica y comprensible en inglés.

Palabras clave: enfoque intuitivo-imitativo, pronunciación, enseñanza del inglés, estrategias de aprendizaje, educación superior

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of pronunciation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has long been a subject of considerable debate within the field of applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of language learning, as it plays a vital role in communication. It directly influences both intelligibility and comprehensibility during spoken interactions, which are essential components for effective communication (Derwing & Munro, 2015). However, despite its significance, pronunciation instruction is often overlooked or inadequately addressed in many EFL curricula, leaving learners with limited guidance on how to develop accurate pronunciation skills. This oversight has prompted researchers and educators to explore various methodologies to enhance pronunciation instruction in EFL contexts. Among these, the Intuitive-Imitative Approach has gained considerable attention. This approach, rooted in naturalistic language acquisition, posits that learners can effectively develop pronunciation skills through exposure to spoken language, imitation of native-like models, and repetitive practice (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Unlike methods that prioritize explicit phonetic instruction, the intuitive-imitative approach focuses on experiential learning, wherein learners engage with authentic language input and attempt to mimic native speakers' pronunciation patterns. This approach aligns with communicative methodologies that prioritize fluency and authentic communication over accuracy (Jenkins, 2000), marking it as a potentially effective way to develop pronunciation skills in EFL learners.

The primary issue addressed in this study is the effectiveness of the Intuitive-Imitative Approach in improving EFL learners' pronunciation. Despite its widespread application in language classrooms, research on its efficacy remains inconclusive when compared to other traditional pronunciation teaching approaches, such as the analytic-linguistic method. This method emphasizes explicit instruction in phonetic principles, phonemic awareness, and articulatory descriptions (Gilbert, 2008), which contrasts with the more naturalistic and imitative techniques that focus on fluency and repeated practice. The lack of consensus in the existing literature regarding the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach has led to critical questions about the most appropriate pedagogical strategies for enhancing learners' pronunciation in EFL settings. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the attitudes and practices of EFL learners regarding the intuitive-imitative approach, identifying its strengths and limitations, and exploring its implications for pronunciation instruction in the classroom.

The relevance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications in the field of pronunciation teaching. Despite the importance of pronunciation in language acquisition, it remains one of the most challenging aspects for learners, and ineffective teaching methodologies can lead to persistent pronunciation difficulties that hinder overall communicative competence (Behzadi, 2014). This research aims to provide empirical evidence on how learners engage with the intuitive-imitative approach and how its impact compares with other teaching methods, thereby offering valuable insights for educators seeking to optimize pronunciation instruction. Additionally, the study aligns with the growing emphasis on learner-centered approaches to language teaching, which advocate for personalized and context-sensitive strategies that cater to the diverse learning styles and needs of students (Lyster, 2004).

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in second language acquisition (SLA) theories that focus on phonological development and speech perception. For instance, the Speech Learning Model (SLM) (Flege, 1995) posits that adult learners retain the ability to acquire native-like pronunciation, but this ability may be hindered by interference from their first language (L1). Similarly, the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best, 1995) explains how learners perceive and categorize non-native sounds based on their existing phonological framework, which can influence their ability to replicate native-like pronunciation. These theories emphasize the importance of exposure to and imitation of authentic language input, which serves as the theoretical foundation for the intuitive-imitative approach. In addition, the study incorporates the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) paradigm, which stresses the importance of authentic communication and interaction in language learning (Littlewood, 2004), further supporting the experiential nature of the intuitive-imitative approach to pronunciation instruction.

Several studies have explored different methodologies for teaching pronunciation, and the results have been mixed. For example, Roohani (2013) found that while the analytic-linguistic approach was more effective for teaching non-Persian sounds to Iranian EFL learners, younger learners benefited more from the intuitive-imitative approach. In a similar vein, Roohani (2013) demonstrated that imitation-based techniques significantly improved students' pronunciation and listening skills in an Indonesian EFL context. However, Jafari et al. (2021) found that while many teachers employed imitation and repetition, a lack of formal training in pronunciation pedagogy limited the approach's effectiveness. These findings suggest that

the success of the intuitive-imitative approach may depend on a variety of factors, including the learner's age, exposure to native input, and the instructional context.

The study is conducted within the context of higher education in Ecuador, focusing on university students enrolled in an EFL program. Ecuadorian learners often face challenges in pronunciation due to phonological differences between Spanish and English, such as vowel reduction, stress patterns, and consonant articulation (Alghazo, 2021). Furthermore, the prevalence of communicative-based curricula in Ecuadorian universities means that pronunciation is often taught implicitly, without explicit phonetic instruction. By examining the application of the intuitive-imitative approach in this context, this study aims to provide insights that are directly applicable to EFL settings in Latin America and beyond.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze EFL students' attitudes and practices regarding the intuitive-imitative approach in pronunciation instruction. Specifically, the study aims to determine the extent to which this approach is applied in EFL classrooms, identify the most commonly used pronunciation teaching approaches among EFL instructors, and examine the pronunciation learning strategies employed by EFL students.

By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding pronunciation pedagogy and provides practical recommendations for improving pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms. Ultimately, the findings seek to inform educators, curriculum designers, and language policymakers on how to enhance pronunciation teaching methodologies, helping learners achieve clearer, more intelligible English speech.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in pronunciation instruction. The combination of these methodologies allows for the triangulation of data, offering a more nuanced and detailed exploration of the research questions. Specifically, the study is both descriptive and explanatory, aiming not only to explore students' attitudes and practices but also to establish relationships between different pronunciation teaching methods and their impact on learning outcomes.

The research design is non-experimental and cross-sectional, meaning that data was collected at a single point in time without manipulating variables. This design was chosen to capture a snapshot of the current state of pronunciation instruction practices within the context of EFL education, providing a clear overview of students' experiences and perceptions. The study was conducted at a university in Ecuador, where 83 EFL students participated, allowing for a diverse sample representative of various proficiency levels within the target population. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of students from different proficiency levels, which was crucial for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of how learners at various stages of language acquisition engage with pronunciation learning strategies. This purposive sampling approach provided insight into the different challenges and techniques employed by students, reflecting the varied needs and abilities in a typical EFL classroom setting.

Data collection was carried out using a structured survey, which comprised 20 Likert-scale items designed to assess students' attitudes, experiences, and perceived effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in pronunciation instruction. The Likert-scale items allowed for the quantification of students' responses, facilitating statistical analysis of patterns and trends across the sample. In addition, three open-ended questions were included to gather qualitative insights into students' personal experiences and reflections. These qualitative responses provided valuable context and depth to the quantitative data, enabling a more holistic understanding of students' engagement with the pronunciation instruction process.

The survey instrument underwent rigorous validation procedures to ensure its reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency, yielding a value of 0.770, which indicates satisfactory reliability for the scale used in the study. In addition, expert reviews of the instrument helped ensure its content validity, confirming that the survey accurately captured the relevant dimensions of pronunciation instruction and learners' experiences with the intuitive-imitative approach. The combination of these validation methods ensured that the data collected through the survey was both reliable and valid, providing a sound basis for analysis.

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a widely used statistical software package, which allowed for the calculation of descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations. These statistics were used to identify trends and patterns in students' responses, shedding light on the overall effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach and its relationship with other

pronunciation teaching methods. The qualitative data, consisting of the open-ended responses, was analyzed through thematic analysis. This approach involved coding the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing deeper insights into students' perceptions of the pronunciation instruction they received and highlighting any potential challenges or benefits associated with the intuitive-imitative approach. By employing this mixed-methods analysis, the study ensures a well-rounded examination of the research questions, incorporating both numerical data and rich qualitative insights.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study, ensuring that participants' rights and confidentiality were protected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their anonymity in the research process. Furthermore, all data handling procedures complied with confidentiality standards to ensure that individual responses were kept secure and not identifiable. Ethical transparency was maintained throughout the research process, allowing participants to contribute freely without concern for misuse of their data.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study required students to be actively enrolled in the EFL program at the university, ensuring that the sample accurately represented the population of interest. Students who had received prior phonetic training beyond the standard curriculum were excluded from the study to prevent bias introduced by advanced knowledge or skills in pronunciation instruction, which could confound the results. This criterion helped ensure that the study focused on the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in a typical EFL context, where learners have received a more general exposure to language instruction.

One notable limitation of the study was its reliance on self-reported data. While self-reports provide valuable insights into learners' experiences, they may also introduce bias, such as social desirability bias or the tendency for participants to answer in a way they perceive as more favorable. However, this limitation was mitigated through the use of triangulation, as the findings were cross-referenced with existing literature in the field. This helped contextualize the results and provided a broader framework for interpreting the students' responses. Triangulation ensures that the study's findings are not solely dependent on participants' self-reports but are instead reinforced by corroborative evidence from previous research.

By detailing these methodological strategies, the study ensures transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor. The mixed-methods design, combined with robust data collection and analysis

procedures, allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. This approach ensures that the study's findings are grounded in reliable evidence and provides a solid foundation for future research in pronunciation pedagogy. Moreover, by addressing potential biases and methodological limitations, the study offers a transparent and replicable framework that future researchers can build upon, contributing further to the field of EFL pronunciation instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the collected data offers significant insights into the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in pronunciation instruction, shedding light on both its application in EFL classrooms and its impact on student learning. The data collected through the survey was processed using SPSS, allowing for the generation of descriptive statistics that provided a quantitative understanding of the trends and patterns in students' attitudes, experiences, and engagement with various pronunciation learning strategies. By examining the data in this way, the study was able to identify key factors that influence the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach. The quantitative findings highlighted the prevalence of specific strategies employed by learners, such as imitation and repetition, as well as students' self-reported improvements in pronunciation skills following exposure to these techniques.

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification of recurring themes and patterns within the data. This qualitative analysis offered deeper insights into learners' perceptions, providing a richer understanding of how students personally experience the intuitive-imitative approach. The qualitative data revealed nuanced details about students' emotional responses, their challenges with pronunciation learning, and the factors they felt contributed to their success or frustration in improving their pronunciation. This combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis provides a comprehensive picture of the learners' experiences and the overall impact of the approach on their pronunciation development.

The results of the study indicate that the intuitive-imitative approach is widely implemented in EFL classrooms, suggesting that it is a commonly used strategy for pronunciation instruction. A significant proportion of students reported that they regularly engaged in imitation and repetition exercises as part of their language learning process. The majority of participants acknowledged that imitating native-like pronunciation models, whether through listening to audio recordings or interacting with native speakers,

played a crucial role in improving their pronunciation. These findings suggest that exposure to authentic, native-like pronunciation models is perceived as a key factor in learners' pronunciation development.

However, the results also reveal important disparities in the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach. While many students reported improvements, the data highlights that the effectiveness of the approach was not uniform across all participants. Learners' exposure to native input, including the frequency and quality of such exposure, emerged as a key variable that influenced their success with the approach. Students who had more opportunities to interact with native speakers or were regularly exposed to high-quality, authentic listening materials were more likely to report significant improvements in their pronunciation. In contrast, those with limited access to native input or who had less frequent exposure to such resources appeared to struggle more with pronunciation improvement.

Additionally, personal learning strategies also played a significant role in determining the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach. The data indicated that some learners were more adept at integrating imitation and repetition into their practice routines, while others faced challenges in consistently applying these techniques. Learners who actively incorporated additional strategies, such as seeking feedback from teachers or peers, or who engaged in self-directed practice using online resources, tended to report more substantial progress in their pronunciation. This highlights the importance of individual learning styles and the need for tailored approaches that account for learners' varying levels of motivation, engagement, and access to resources.

Overall, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data suggests that while the intuitive-imitative approach holds promise for improving pronunciation in EFL contexts, its effectiveness is influenced by a range of factors, including learners' exposure to native-like input, the quality of that exposure, and individual learning strategies. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how the intuitive-imitative approach works in practice and offer valuable insights for refining pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms.

Table 1
Pronunciation Improvement Metrics Before and After Training

Metric	Before Training	After Training
Incorrect Pronunciations	22.85	0.95
Listening Skills Score	28.2	78.7
Total	51.05	79.65

Note. This table shows a significant improvement in pronunciation accuracy and listening skills

The comparison of pronunciation metrics before and after training provides compelling evidence of a significant improvement in both pronunciation accuracy and listening comprehension among the participants. The data reveals a notable reduction in the number of incorrect pronunciations, indicating that the intuitive-imitative approach has been effective in helping students better align their pronunciation with native-like models. This improvement suggests that the exposure to and imitation of authentic pronunciation models, combined with consistent practice, have led to more accurate production of sounds, stress patterns, and intonation.

In addition to the reduction in pronunciation errors, the increase in listening skills scores further underscores the positive impact of the training. The enhancement in listening comprehension indicates that, through the process of imitation and repetition, students not only improved their ability to produce accurate pronunciation but also became more attuned to the subtleties of spoken language. This improvement in listening skills is particularly important, as it highlights the interconnected nature of pronunciation and listening ability—two essential components of communicative competence.

The results of this comparison suggest that the intuitive-imitative approach is a valuable tool for enhancing learners' pronunciation, as it effectively addresses both the production and perception aspects of language. By fostering an environment where students are exposed to native-like pronunciation models and encouraged to engage in active imitation, the approach facilitates the development of a more accurate and intelligible pronunciation. Furthermore, the concurrent improvement in listening comprehension suggests that the approach may also contribute to broader language acquisition, enhancing students' overall ability to understand and interact with spoken English.

Overall, the findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in driving measurable improvements in pronunciation and listening skills. These results provide strong support for the integration of this approach into EFL pronunciation instruction, offering valuable insights into how exposure to authentic language input and practice through imitation can lead to enhanced language skills.

Figure 1

Impact of Imitation-Based Pronunciation Training
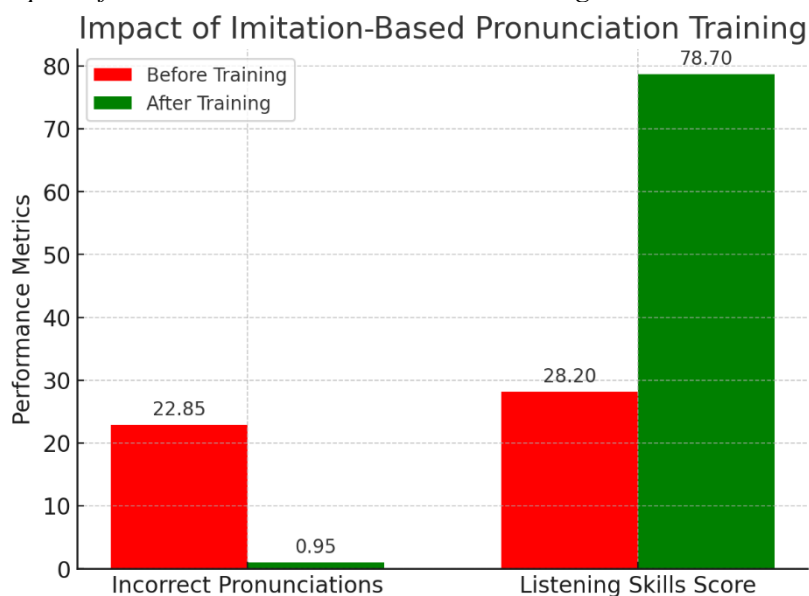
The bar chart provides a clear and visually impactful representation of the effects of imitation-based pronunciation training, highlighting a dramatic decrease in pronunciation errors and a notable improvement in listening comprehension following the training. This visual depiction underscores the substantial role that imitation, as a learning strategy, plays in enhancing learners' pronunciation skills. The reduction in pronunciation mistakes suggests that learners are able to more accurately replicate the sounds, stress patterns, and rhythms of native-like speech after engaging in imitation exercises. Similarly, the increase in listening comprehension scores suggests that learners are not only improving their pronunciation but also their ability to better understand spoken language, further solidifying the interconnected nature of pronunciation and listening abilities in language acquisition.

The findings presented in the bar chart are consistent with the broader goals of the study, which aims to explore the effectiveness of the intuitive-imitative approach in pronunciation instruction. The chart emphasizes the importance of repeated exposure to authentic speech models, as well as the active process of imitation, as key factors contributing to enhanced pronunciation outcomes. The visual evidence provided by the chart helps reinforce the idea that, through practice, learners can significantly reduce pronunciation errors and improve their auditory discrimination skills, leading to more effective and efficient language learning experiences.

In the subsequent discussion section, the pedagogical implications of these findings are explored in greater depth, with a focus on how language educators can leverage the power of imitation-based approaches to optimize their pronunciation teaching strategies. The discussion highlights the need for educators to embrace a variety of teaching methods that cater to the diverse needs of learners, taking into account their individual learning styles, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds. It is suggested that educators incorporate imitation-based techniques in a structured and deliberate manner, combining these with targeted phonetic instruction to address specific pronunciation challenges. This integrated approach would not only enhance learners' pronunciation accuracy but also their overall language skills, ensuring a more holistic and comprehensive approach to language teaching.

The study concludes with a series of actionable recommendations for language educators, emphasizing the importance of a balanced and flexible teaching approach that integrates the strengths of imitation-based learning with explicit phonetic training. By adopting such a methodology, educators can create more effective and engaging learning environments that foster improved pronunciation outcomes, ultimately helping learners achieve greater fluency and intelligibility in their spoken English.

CONCLUSIONS

After carefully analyzing the survey results, several important conclusions have been drawn regarding the role of the Intuitive-Imitative Approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pronunciation instruction. First and foremost, the Intuitive-Imitative Approach is commonly employed in EFL classrooms, with a significant emphasis on mimicry exercises, sound repetition, and the imitation of various sounds during pronunciation practice. This observation suggests a clear preference for experiential learning methods that focus on mimicking native-like pronunciation patterns, as opposed to relying solely on complex phonetic rules or explicit grammatical instruction. The approach appears to center on the idea that learners can internalize accurate pronunciation through consistent exposure to spoken language and repetition of sounds. However, despite the widespread use of these techniques, there is a relatively low level of engagement with self-assessment methods such as recording and reviewing one's own pronunciation. This highlights a potential area for improvement, where students could benefit from being encouraged to engage in more reflective practices, helping them monitor their own progress and identify areas for improvement. While mimicry exercises and dialogue repetitions are effective, integrating self-assessment could elevate the

Intuitive-Imitative Approach to a higher level of engagement and self-awareness, ultimately enhancing pronunciation outcomes.

The analysis of teaching strategies also reveals that EFL instructors employ a wide variety of methods in their pronunciation instruction. While the Intuitive-Imitative Approach is a significant part of the pedagogical toolkit, the analytic-linguistic approach remains notably prevalent. This method, which involves the frequent use of pronunciation charts and explicit explanations of language rules, reflects a more structured, formal approach to teaching pronunciation. Alongside these methods, the integrative approach—combining both experiential and analytical elements—is also being utilized by many teachers. This suggests a balanced and multifaceted approach to pronunciation instruction, where structured, rule-based teaching is complemented by more fluid and experiential strategies like imitation. This diversity of teaching strategies indicates that EFL instructors recognize the complexity of pronunciation acquisition and are adapting their methods to accommodate different aspects of the learning process. As such, a comprehensive and engaging curriculum that incorporates a variety of instructional techniques will likely prove to be the most effective in addressing the diverse learning preferences and needs of students.

Additionally, the findings highlight the fact that pronunciation learning is a highly complex and multifaceted process. Imitation emerges as a dominant cognitive strategy among students, with learners frequently relying on mimicry as a core means of improving their pronunciation. However, other strategies, including metacognitive and memory strategies, also play a significant role in the learning process. These strategies are important for helping students monitor their own progress and retain pronunciation patterns over time. For instance, learners who employ metacognitive strategies are better able to assess their strengths and weaknesses, while those who use memory aids may find it easier to retain difficult sounds or speech patterns. The variety in strategy use underscores the necessity of tailoring instructional approaches to meet the unique preferences and needs of individual students. It is clear that a one-size-fits-all approach to pronunciation teaching is unlikely to be effective. Instead, personalized strategies should be developed that cater to the diverse cognitive and learning styles found within the classroom.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations for educators can be made. First, teachers should continue to utilize the Intuitive-Imitative Approach, with an emphasis on mimicry exercises and dialogue repetitions, as these techniques have been shown to have a positive impact on pronunciation improvement.

However, it is also recommended that teachers integrate self-assessment strategies into their instruction, particularly by encouraging students to record and reflect on their own pronunciation progress. This can help students become more independent learners and develop greater self-awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement. Furthermore, a comprehensive pronunciation curriculum should be developed that integrates elements from various approaches—such as the analytic-linguistic, intuitive-imitative, and integrative approaches. This combination will ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that addresses all aspects of pronunciation learning, from the explicit understanding of phonetic rules to the more intuitive processes of imitation and self-reflection. Such an approach would likely be more effective in catering to the diverse needs of EFL learners, helping them achieve clearer and more intelligible speech in English.

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