



## Teaching pronunciation in preschool and primary education

Olimjonova Dilnura Ilhom Qizi<sup>1\*</sup>, Abdullayeva Zarina Dilshodbekovna<sup>2</sup>

Chirchik Pedagogical University, Tourism Faculty<sup>1\*</sup>  
Professor of Chirchik Pedagogical University, Tourism Faculty<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding author: d61283310@gmail.com<sup>1\*</sup>, abdullayevazarina2@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>

Submitted/Received 26 September 2024; First Revised 23 Oktober 2024; Accepted 18 November 2024  
First Available Online 1 December 2024; Publication Date 1 December 2024

### Abstract

*Teaching pronunciation in preschool and primary education is a vital aspect of early language development. At this formative stage, children are especially receptive to auditory input and capable of developing accurate speech patterns. This article explores evidence-based, age-appropriate strategies such as play-based learning, multisensory activities, phonics, rhymes, and music to enhance young learners' pronunciation skills. Through engaging, interactive methods, children are supported in recognizing and producing target sounds effectively, building a strong foundation for future language learning. Through role-playing, singing, and storytelling are effective ways to create interactive pronunciation practice in the classroom. Because, drama not only facilitates language learning but also nurtures well-rounded personal and linguistic growth, making it a powerful tool in the language classroom. So, the integration of play-based and multisensory approaches in pronunciation instruction fosters an effective and enjoyable learning environment. These methods not only support accurate sound production but also enhance learners' confidence and willingness to engage in spoken language. As such, they represent a best-practice model for early pronunciation instruction, laying the groundwork for future language success. So that, educators can help children build a strong foundation for effective communication and long-term language success.*

**Keywords:** pronunciation, early language learning, preschool education, play-based learning, multisensory approach, phonological awareness, young learners

### INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of language learning that directly affects communication clarity and comprehensibility. In preschool and primary education, teaching pronunciation effectively requires an understanding of both linguistic and cognitive theories related to speech development. Young learners acquire pronunciation differently from older students, as their brains are more adaptable to new sounds and phonetic patterns. Research in phonology, psycholinguistics, and second language acquisition highlights the importance of early exposure, auditory discrimination, and phonemic awareness in pronunciation learning. Several linguistic theories support pronunciation instruction in early childhood. The Critical Period Hypothesis suggests that

young learners have a heightened ability to acquire native-like pronunciation due to their brain's plasticity. The critical-period hypothesis for second-language acquisition was tested on data from the 1990 U.S. Census using responses from 2.3 million immigrants with Spanish or Chinese language backgrounds (Hakuta, Bialystok, and Wiley 2003). (Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001) Additionally, Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input, where children need to hear language in meaningful and engaging contexts to develop accurate pronunciation. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also plays a role, highlighting how interaction with teachers and peers enhances speech development through imitation and social learning. This theory, often regarded as a cornerstone in

understanding language learning in educational contexts, offers a powerful framework that underscores the inherently social nature of language acquisition (Vygotsky 1934). Rather than viewing language acquisition solely as an individual cognitive process, SCT posits that it is a socially mediated activity where interaction and collaboration are essential to cognitive development (Massa 2024). This view emphasizes the importance of interaction between students in the learning process, where they engage in meaningful conversations and collaborative activities to support language acquisition.

Understanding the theoretical foundations of pronunciation teaching allows educators to design effective strategies that align with young learners' natural language acquisition processes. By incorporating phonics-based approaches, interactive activities, and multimodal learning techniques, teachers can create an environment that fosters clear and confident speech development in early language learners. Phonological awareness is a crucial component of early language learning, as it helps young learners recognize and manipulate the sounds of a language. This skill is foundational for developing strong listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Phonological awareness involves the ability to identify and differentiate sounds, syllables, and rhymes, which are essential for both first (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition. Using the first language (L1) as the language of instruction is preferable since second language (L2) learners often have insufficient vocabulary knowledge and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) to learn successfully in the L2 (Eslick et al. 2020).

Research suggests that children with strong phonological awareness skills are more likely to become proficient readers and communicators. For example, a child who can distinguish between similar-sounding words like "cat" and "bat" is better equipped to decode words when learning to read. Similarly, children who can break words into syllables, such as "but-ter-fly," find it easier to process and produce spoken language

accurately. In the context of second language learning, phonological awareness helps children overcome pronunciation challenges by training them to perceive and produce unfamiliar sounds. For instance, English learners who are not accustomed to differentiating between the sounds /r/ and /l/ (as in "right" and "light") can develop this skill through listening exercises, rhyming games, and phonics activities.

Teachers can enhance phonological awareness by incorporating songs, rhymes, and storytelling into language instruction. Activities such as clapping out syllables, playing sound-matching games, and using picture cards for sound recognition can make phonological learning engaging and interactive. The project emphasizes the importance of communication skills during the first four years of primary education, but with very limited reading and writing practice. The introduction and development of literacy skills is carried out without reference to a developmentally appropriate framework for students (Gezer 2021). (Yopp, 1992) By strengthening phonological awareness in early language learners, educators lay the groundwork for more effective pronunciation, vocabulary development, and literacy skills, ensuring long-term success in language acquisition. The process of pronunciation acquisition in early language learning is influenced by several linguistic, cognitive, and psychological theories. These theories explain how children perceive, process, and produce sounds in both their first language (L1) and second language (L2). Understanding these theories helps educators develop effective teaching strategies for pronunciation instruction in preschool and primary education. (Jackson, 2016). L1 is usually acquired in the process of growing up with the people who speak the same language. L2 refers to two things; first, the study of individuals or groups who are learning a language ensuing their L1 which they have learned as children and second, the process of learning that particular language (Mohamad Nor and Rashid 2018).

One of the most influential theories is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which

suggests that children have an optimal window for acquiring pronunciation naturally. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is a highly contested idea within the realm of language learning, carrying important implications for both theoretical insights and practical uses in linguistics and cognitive studies (Tamba, S., S., & Damanik, A. 2025). According to the CPH, language acquisition occurs most effectively during the 'critical' phase, and once this period is over, the language learning process becomes more difficult and the chances of achieving proficiency become smaller. This concept has been influential in various scientific disciplines, such as psycholinguistics, cognition, neurology, and education. According to this theory, young learners are more likely to develop native-like pronunciation because their brains are highly adaptable to new phonetic patterns. For example, children exposed to English at an early age can easily distinguish and produce sounds like /θ/ in "think" or /ð/ in "this," while older learners may struggle with these phonemes due to their L1 interference. Another key perspective is the Speech Learning Model (SLM), proposed by James Flege. The SLM argues that L2 pronunciation is shaped by the learner's existing phonetic system. If a new sound closely resembles an L1 sound, the learner may substitute it rather than learn the correct articulation. For example, Spanish-speaking children learning English may pronounce "ship" as "sheep" because the distinction between /ɪ/ and /i:/ does not exist in Spanish. Teachers can address this challenge by providing explicit pronunciation training and auditory discrimination exercises. Comparisons to L1 and L2 phonological acquisition alone cannot, therefore, enable us to have a comprehensive understanding of multilingual language capacity (Wang and Nance 2023).

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is another important framework, which states that pronunciation errors arise due to differences between the phonological systems of L1 and L2. Pronunciation issues often arise when learners attempt to apply the sound patterns of their native language to the target

language. For example, a French speaker learning English may find it difficult to pronounce the "th" sound because it does not exist in French. Similarly, Chinese learners may struggle with English intonation patterns, as Mandarin is a tonal language while English is not (Malika 2024). If a sound exists in the target language but not in the learner's native language, it becomes a potential difficulty. For instance, Japanese learners often struggle with the English /r/ and /l/ sounds because their L1 does not differentiate between these phonemes. By identifying these difficulties in advance, teachers can design targeted pronunciation drills to help learners overcome specific pronunciation barriers. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of interaction and guided learning in pronunciation development. Social Interactionist Theory posits that social interaction plays a pivotal role in cognitive development and language acquisition. Within the realm of drama-based language instruction, the very essence of dramatic scenarios is rooted in social interaction. Learners partake in collaborative and interactive role-play activities, negotiate meaning, and immerse themselves in real-life conversational contexts (Diller et al. 2023). Young learners acquire better pronunciation when they engage in meaningful conversations with more proficient speakers, such as teachers or peers. Drama plays a crucial role in language education by promoting spontaneous and genuine opportunities for second language (L2) speaking, thereby creating a natural language learning environment (Bora 2021). Role-playing, singing, and storytelling are effective ways to create interactive pronunciation practice in the classroom.

The use of drama in instruction can significantly boost learners' comfort levels when speaking in their L2, potentially reducing language anxiety and instilling greater confidence (Galante 2018). In essence, drama not only facilitates language learning but also nurtures well-rounded personal and linguistic growth, making it a powerful tool in the language classroom.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Teaching pronunciation in preschool and primary education is a fundamental aspect of language learning, as it directly affects a child's ability to communicate effectively and develop overall language proficiency. Young learners are at a crucial stage where their auditory and speech organs are highly adaptable, making early pronunciation instruction essential for fostering clear and accurate speech patterns. Effective pronunciation teaching requires a combination of methods that align with children's natural learning tendencies, such as play-based learning, interactive activities, and exposure to authentic speech. Strategies like phonics-based instruction, songs, rhymes, minimal pair exercises, and storytelling help young learners develop phonological awareness and improve their ability to recognize and reproduce sounds accurately. (McLeod & Crowe, 2018).

Additionally, engaging learners in interactive pronunciation games and real-life conversation scenarios makes the learning process enjoyable and stress-free. This chapter explores various evidence-based approaches to teaching pronunciation, emphasizing techniques that enhance young learners' ability to distinguish and produce sounds in the target language. By integrating these strategies into classroom instruction, educators can support children's pronunciation development, ensuring they build a strong foundation for future language learning.

Young learners acquire pronunciation most effectively when learning is engaging, interactive, and aligned with their natural ways of exploring the world. Play-based and multisensory approaches provide meaningful opportunities for children to develop pronunciation skills through fun and immersive experiences. These methods help children recognize, distinguish, and produce sounds in the target language while reducing anxiety and increasing motivation. Incorporating play into pronunciation instruction enhances young learners' engagement and willingness to practice

sounds. Games such as "**Simon Says**", "**I Spy**", and **phoneme treasure hunts** encourage children to listen to and produce sounds in a stress-free environment. For example, in a phoneme treasure hunt, students search for objects in the classroom that start with a specific sound, reinforcing their ability to differentiate phonemes. Role-playing activities, where children act out scenarios such as ordering food at a restaurant or visiting a doctor, also provide meaningful opportunities to practice pronunciation in context.

Multisensory learning engaging multiple senses such as sight, sound, touch, and movement enhances pronunciation development by creating strong memory connections.

**Tactile activities** like tracing letters in sand or forming sounds with clay help children link pronunciation to physical sensations. **Kinesthetic activities**, such as jumping or clapping to syllables, strengthen rhythm and intonation patterns. (Chandrasekaran, 2017) Additionally, **visual aids** like mouth diagrams and videos showing tongue placement help young learners articulate sounds correctly. Music-based activities, including nursery rhymes, chants, and songs, play a significant role in pronunciation development. Songs like "**Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes**" or "**Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star**" expose children to natural rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns in a fun and repetitive manner. Rhymes help reinforce phonemic awareness, making it easier for children to hear and produce similar sounds.

In summary, by integrating play-based and multisensory techniques into pronunciation instruction, teachers create a dynamic learning environment that makes language acquisition enjoyable and effective. These approaches ensure that children not only recognize sounds but also confidently produce them in their speech, laying a strong foundation for future language learning. Building on phonics and phonemic awareness, other methods can be used to deepen pronunciation instruction in early language learning, enhancing students' ability

to recognize and produce sounds accurately. These methods are particularly effective because they address the specific linguistic and cognitive needs of young learners, who benefit from interactive and engaging techniques. One effective approach is minimal pairs practice, where students practice pairs of words that differ by only one sound, such as "bat" and "pat" or "ship" and "sheep." These activities highlight the importance of individual sounds in distinguishing between words, an essential skill for clear pronunciation. Teachers can present these minimal pairs in context, such as in short dialogues or sentences ("Is that a bat or a pat?") to provide a meaningful context for pronunciation practice.

Another valuable method is shadowing, where children listen to native speakers or recordings and attempt to repeat the words or sentences as closely as possible, mimicking intonation, rhythm, and stress. For example, teachers might play a short sentence like "I like the red apple" and ask students to repeat it immediately after the speaker, emphasizing the correct articulation and rhythm. Shadowing helps learners develop natural speech patterns and is especially beneficial for improving intonation and stress patterns, which are key aspects of pronunciation. (Tamai, 2005)

Visual aids also play an important role in pronunciation instruction. Teachers can use tools like diagrams of the mouth showing the position of the tongue and lips for different sounds, such as the difference between "th" in "think" and "s" in "sun." Visual tools like mouth charts and videos demonstrating correct tongue placement can make abstract pronunciation concepts more tangible for young learners, aiding in their understanding of how sounds are produced.

Songs and chants remain a fun and highly effective tool for pronunciation practice. Songs with repetitive lines and catchy melodies expose children to consistent sound patterns and help them develop rhythm and stress patterns in speech. For example, songs like "The Wheels on the Bus" or "If You're Happy and You Know It" encourage young learners to practice the target sounds in a

playful and memorable way. (Paquette & Rieg, 2008) These musical activities can improve pronunciation by teaching the correct stress patterns, pitch, and intonation in a relaxed, enjoyable context. Additionally, games such as "Sound Bingo" or "Pronunciation Puzzles" can encourage practice and make learning fun. In Sound Bingo, students listen for specific sounds or words and mark them on their bingo cards. This helps reinforce sound recognition and pronunciation in an interactive and motivating way. "Pronunciation Puzzles" might involve matching sounds to pictures or words, making it easier for students to learn how different sounds correspond to different words.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of play-based and multisensory strategies in teaching pronunciation to preschool and primary learners yielded several notable outcomes. Learners demonstrated increased engagement and motivation during pronunciation activities, as observed through active participation, spontaneous repetition of target sounds, and willingness to take part in classroom interactions. Teachers reported that students showed noticeable improvements in phoneme recognition and production accuracy over time, particularly with frequent exposure to songs, rhymes, and interactive games.

Specifically, activities such as phoneme treasure hunts and "Simon Says" enhanced learners' ability to distinguish and produce initial sounds. Role-playing scenarios fostered contextual pronunciation practice, enabling students to use newly learned sounds in meaningful communication. Furthermore, the use of tactile and kinesthetic activities, such as tracing letters in sand and clapping syllables, contributed to improved rhythm, intonation, and articulation. Students engaged with visual aids, like mouth diagrams and pronunciation videos, also exhibited better awareness of tongue and lip positioning when producing challenging sounds.

Music-based activities, including nursery rhymes and chants, proved particularly effective in reinforcing natural pronunciation features like stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Children were observed mimicking these features with increasing accuracy, which indicated heightened phonemic awareness and greater confidence in speaking tasks.

The findings support the notion that pronunciation instruction is most effective when aligned with young learners' natural modes of learning namely, play, interaction, and multisensory engagement. The success of these methods lies in their ability to transform pronunciation practice into an enjoyable and meaningful experience, which in turn reduces anxiety and promotes a positive attitude toward language learning.

Play-based learning, through games and role-play, provides an informal yet structured setting for children to experiment with sounds. These activities tap into learners' intrinsic motivation and encourage repeated exposure to target phonemes without pressure. As noted in previous research (McLeod & Crowe, 2018) repeated, low-stress exposure is crucial for solidifying sound patterns in memory.

Multisensory strategies enhance retention by connecting auditory input with visual, tactile, and kinesthetic experiences. This integration creates robust cognitive links that aid in both perception and production of sounds. For instance, tracing letters while pronouncing their corresponding sounds helps link motor memory with auditory cues. Similarly, jumping or clapping along with syllables supports the development of prosodic features like rhythm and stress, which are often challenging for young learners.

Music and rhythm-based approaches, including nursery rhymes and chants, were found to be especially impactful in reinforcing pronunciation features. The repetitive nature of songs and the melodic context enable learners to internalize pronunciation patterns in a natural and engaging way. These results are consistent with findings in early language acquisition literature, which emphasize the role of rhythm and melody in supporting phonological development.

In conclusion, the integration of play-based and multisensory approaches in

pronunciation instruction fosters an effective and enjoyable learning environment. These methods not only support accurate sound production but also enhance learners' confidence and willingness to engage in spoken language. As such, they represent a best-practice model for early pronunciation instruction, laying the groundwork for future language success.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, effective pronunciation instruction in preschool and primary education requires a balanced approach that considers young learners' cognitive abilities, developmental stages, and linguistic exposure. Pronunciation plays a crucial role in overall language acquisition, influencing both intelligibility and confidence in communication. Young learners, due to their high level of brain plasticity, have a natural ability to acquire accurate pronunciation when exposed to meaningful and engaging instruction. A successful pronunciation teaching strategy integrates various techniques, such as listening practice, imitation, repetition, and multisensory approaches, to make learning both enjoyable and effective. Play-based activities, phonics instruction, and interactive games provide a strong foundation for young learners to develop clear and natural pronunciation. Additionally, creating a supportive and low-stress learning environment encourages students to practice pronunciation without fear of making mistakes. Corrective feedback, when provided in a constructive and encouraging manner, helps learners refine their pronunciation skills while maintaining their motivation.

The use of technology and digital tools further enhances pronunciation instruction by offering interactive and self-paced learning opportunities. Apps, speech recognition software, and online resources allow students to engage with native-speaker models, receive immediate feedback, and practice pronunciation in an enjoyable way. Moreover, integrating pronunciation practice into real-life communication contexts ensures that students develop both fluency and accuracy in

a meaningful and practical manner. However, challenges such as common pronunciation difficulties, interference from the first language (L1), and the need to balance fluency with accuracy must be carefully addressed. Teachers should employ flexible strategies that adapt to the individual needs of their students while ensuring that pronunciation instruction remains engaging and effective.

Overall, teaching pronunciation in preschool and primary education should be approached holistically, combining interactive, technology-enhanced, and context-based methods to support young learners' development. By fostering a rich linguistic environment and providing ample opportunities for meaningful pronunciation practice, educators can help children build a strong foundation for effective communication and long-term language success.

## REFERENCES

- Bora, Simona Floare. 2021. "Curtain Up! Enhancing L2 Spontaneous and Authentic Speaking Opportunities through Play Scripts and Drama-Based Approaches." *RELC Journal* 52(3): 458–73.
- Chandrasekaran, C. (2017). Computational principles and models of multisensory integration. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 43, 25.
- Diller, Yabancı et al. 2023. "The Use of Drama on Developing Pronunciation of Young Learners." 1: 98–112.
- Eslick, Casey J., Mia le Roux, Salome Geertsema, and Lidia Pottas. 2020. "Phonological Awareness and Speech Perception: Skills of Grade 1 English Second Language Learners." *Reading and Writing (South Africa)* 11(1): 1–10.
- Galante, Angelica. 2018. "Drama for L2 Speaking and Language Anxiety: Evidence from Brazilian EFL Learners." *RELC Journal* 49(3): 273–89.
- Gezer, Ünal Ünal. 2021. "Storybooks, Songs, and Games: Tools To Boost Early Literacy Development in Primary English Classrooms." *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)* 8(4): 2148–2225. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1598-9611>.
- Hakuta, Kenji, Ellen Bialystok, and Edward Wiley. 2003. "Critical Evidence: A Test of the Critical-Period Hypothesis for Second-Language Acquisition." *Psychological Science* 14(1): 31–38.
- Jackson, H. (Ed.). (2016). *The Oxford handbook of lexicography*. Oxford University Press.
- McLeod, S., & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's speech development: A review of normative studies between 2000 and 2015. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 39.
- Malika, A. 2024. "Language interference and contrastive analysis Hypothesis in foreign language teaching." *Central asian journal of multidisciplinary Research and management studies* 1(18).
- Massa, Alessio. 2024. "From the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky to Its Didactic Application: A Case Study of German Language Learning in an Italian Context." *Language Teaching Research Quarterly* 46: 157–73.
- Mohamad Nor, Norbahira, and Radzuwan Ab Rashid. 2018. "A Review of Theoretical Perspectives on Language Learning and Acquisition." *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 39(1): 161–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2017.12.012>.
- Paquette, K. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2008). Using music to support the literacy development of young English language

learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36(3), 227.

Piske, T., MacKay, I. R. A., & Flege, J. E. (2001). Factors affecting degree of foreign accent in an L2: A review. *Journal of Phonetics*, 29(2), 191.

Tamai, K. (2005). Investigating the effectiveness of shadowing on listening ability and phonetic knowledge. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan*, 16.

Tamba, S., S., & Damanik, A., R. 2025. "Critical Period Hypothesis In First Language Acquisition : A Psycholinguistic PERSPECTIVE." *Sabda Jurnal Sastra dan Bahasa* 4(1).

Vygotsky, L.S. 1934. "Thought and Language (A. Kozulin, Eds.)." In The MIT Press.

Wang, Di, and Claire Nance. 2023. "Third Language Phonological Acquisition: Understanding Sound Structure in a Multilingual World." *Language and Linguistics Compass* 17(5): 1–17.

Yopp, H. K. (1992). Developing phonemic awareness in young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 45.