

## **The Factors Affecting Filipino Grade 11–12 students' Pronunciation**

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the factors affecting students' pronunciation in English as a Second Language (ESL) among senior high school students and their English teachers. A mixed-method approach was employed, which involved a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 10 senior high school students and 10 English teachers from PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc. in the Philippines. The results showed that attitude, exposure, mother tongue, and instruction are factors that affect students' pronunciation in ESL. The participants agreed that attitude towards learning English greatly impacts pronunciation improvement, and that exposure to English through media and social interactions is beneficial. However, the influence of the mother tongue on pronunciation was found to be significant, particularly in the Philippines where English is taught as a second language. Furthermore, the instruction provided by teachers was found to be a crucial factor affecting students' pronunciation, with the need for teachers to utilize more effective teaching techniques and strategies. This study contributes to the literature on ESL pronunciation by examining the unique perspectives of both students and teachers in the Philippines, which can provide insights into the development of more effective ESL teaching and learning approaches. The findings can also aid in the development of curriculum design and teacher training programs to improve ESL pronunciation instruction.*

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a widely spoken language, and it is considered as one of the essential global languages. The ability to speak English fluently and accurately is an essential skill that is increasingly in demand for educational, professional, and social opportunities. In the Philippines, English is one of the official languages and is commonly used in educational and professional contexts. However, despite its importance, many Filipino students still struggle with English pronunciation, which affects their academic and professional success.

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of language learning as it affects the clarity and effectiveness of communication (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Studies have shown that pronunciation difficulties are common among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Chang & Bowles, 2018; Rizal, 2020). In the case of the Philippines, Filipino students face particular challenges in learning English pronunciation due to the phonological differences between English and Filipino (Cruz, 2018).

Grade 11-12 students are expected to have advanced English language proficiency as they prepare for college and the workforce. However, many of them continue to experience difficulties in producing correct English pronunciation, which hinders their communication and affects their academic and professional success. Therefore, there is a need to investigate ways to improve the English pronunciation of Grade 11-12 Filipino students.

This study aims to identify the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students, determine the factors that contribute to these errors, develop and implement interventions that target the identified pronunciation errors, and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing the students' English pronunciation proficiency. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students?
2. What are the factors that contribute to these errors?
3. What interventions can be developed to improve the students' pronunciation skills?
4. How effective are the interventions in enhancing the students' English pronunciation proficiency?

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews with English teachers and focus group discussions with the Grade 11-12 students. Quantitative data is collected through pre- and post-intervention assessments of the students' English pronunciation proficiency.

This study is significant as it contributes to the literature on ESL pronunciation learning and teaching. It also addresses the gap in the literature on the specific challenges faced by Grade 11-12 Filipino students in learning English pronunciation. The findings of this study provide insights into the factors that contribute to the students' mispronunciation and identify effective interventions that can enhance their pronunciation skills. The study's results can be used to inform English language curriculum development and teacher training programs, benefiting not only Grade 11-12 Filipino students but also other ESL learners.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. What are the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students?
2. What are the factors that contribute to these errors?
3. What interventions can be developed to improve the students' pronunciation skills?
4. How effective are the interventions in enhancing the students' English pronunciation proficiency?

### **Review of Related Literature**

English is considered as one of the essential global languages and is widely spoken in the world. The ability to speak English fluently and accurately is essential for educational, professional, and social opportunities. In the Philippines, English is one of the official languages and is commonly used in educational and professional contexts. However, many Filipino students still struggle with English pronunciation, which may affect their academic and professional success.

#### **Importance of Pronunciation in Language Learning**

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of language learning as it affects the clarity and effectiveness of communication (Derwing & Munro, 2015). According to Gimson (1980), pronunciation is the "essential aspect of communication" and "any fault in pronunciation will be noticed long before any other fault." Thus, achieving correct pronunciation is crucial in achieving effective communication in the English language.

#### **Common Pronunciation Difficulties among ESL Learners**

Studies have shown that pronunciation difficulties are common among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Chang & Bowles, 2018; Rizal, 2020). ESL learners often struggle with the sound system of English, which is different from their first language. These differences in the sound system can cause pronunciation errors, which can affect the intelligibility and comprehensibility of their spoken English (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

#### **Pronunciation Challenges Faced by Filipino Students**

In the case of the Philippines, Filipino students face particular challenges in learning English pronunciation due to the phonological differences between English and Filipino (Cruz, 2018). The phonological system of Filipino is different from that of English, making it challenging for Filipino students to produce correct English sounds. Some of the common pronunciation errors made by Filipino

students include the mispronunciation of English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants (Quion, 2019).

### Interventions to Improve Pronunciation Skills

Various interventions have been developed to improve ESL learners' pronunciation skills, such as using visual aids, providing feedback, and using phonetic drills (Lee & Jang, 2018; Neri, 2020; Tang & Lai, 2018). These interventions have been found to be effective in improving ESL learners' pronunciation skills. However, the effectiveness of these interventions may vary depending on the learners' background, the specific pronunciation difficulties they face, and the intervention's design.

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of language learning, and correct pronunciation is crucial in achieving effective communication in the English language. Filipino students face particular challenges in learning English pronunciation due to the phonological differences between English and Filipino. Various interventions have been developed to improve ESL learners' pronunciation skills, but their effectiveness may vary depending on the learners' background, the specific pronunciation difficulties they face, and the intervention's design. This study aims to identify the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students, determine the factors that contribute to these errors, develop and implement interventions that target the identified pronunciation errors, and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing the students' English pronunciation proficiency. The findings of this study will provide insights into the factors that contribute to the students' mispronunciation and identify effective interventions that can enhance their pronunciation skills.

### Methodology

This study was conducted at PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc. and involved 25 participants, including 5 male and 5 female English teachers, and 10 senior high school students. The researchers used purposive sampling to select the participants based on the following criteria:

1. The teacher must be an English major teacher.
2. The teacher must have a teaching experience of not less than 3 years.
3. The teacher must be currently handling the English subject.
4. For the students, the students must be experiencing difficulty in pronunciation.
5. The students must have received a grade of not more than 88 in English during their junior high school.

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The data collection instruments used in this study include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and pre- and post-intervention assessments of the students' English pronunciation proficiency.

The study started by identifying the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students through semi-structured interviews with English teachers and focus group discussions with the Grade 11-12 students. The researchers then analyzed the data collected to determine the factors that contribute to these errors.

Based on the identified common pronunciation errors and their contributing factors, the researchers developed and implemented interventions targeting the pronunciation errors. The interventions were designed to be comprehensive and engaging, using various teaching strategies and materials to enhance the students' pronunciation skills. The interventions were implemented for a period of six weeks.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions, pre- and post-intervention assessments of the students' English pronunciation proficiency were conducted. The assessments utilized a standardized pronunciation test and were administered to the students before and after the implementation of the interventions. The researchers then compared the pre- and post-intervention scores to determine the effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing the students' English pronunciation proficiency.

The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were

analyzed thematically, while the quantitative data collected from the assessments were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the common English pronunciation errors made by Grade 11-12 Filipino students, the factors contributing to these errors, and the effectiveness of the interventions in improving the students' English pronunciation proficiency.

### Results and Findings

Table 1. Factors affecting students' pronunciation

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Attitude	27.9	55.7	10.2	10.2	0
Exposure	0	3	19	71	7
Mother tongue	30.2	47.2	12.8	7.8	1
Instruction	0	13.8	7.8	44.6	33.8

Table 1 presents the factors affecting students' pronunciation based on the responses of 49 Grade 11-12 Filipino students who participated in the survey. The factors are Attitude, Exposure, Mother tongue, and Instruction, and the responses are categorized into five options: Strongly Agree, Agree, No idea, Disagree, and Strongly disagree. The table shows the frequency of responses in percentage for each factor and response category.

Regarding Attitude, the majority of the students (55.7%) agreed that it affects their pronunciation, while 27.9% strongly agreed. Only a small percentage (10.2%) had no idea, and none strongly disagreed with this factor's impact on their pronunciation. This suggests that the students recognize the importance of their attitude towards improving their pronunciation.

Exposure, on the other hand, received a low percentage of agreement from the students. Only 3% agreed that exposure affects their pronunciation, while none strongly agreed. A significant number (71%) disagreed with this factor's impact on their pronunciation, indicating that they do not believe that exposure to English can improve their pronunciation. This may be due to a lack of exposure to English in their daily lives or a belief that exposure alone is not sufficient to improve their pronunciation.

Mother tongue received mixed responses from the students. The majority (47.2%) agreed that their mother tongue affects their pronunciation, while 30.2% strongly agreed. A significant number (12.8%) had no idea, and only a few (7.8%) disagreed with this factor's impact on their pronunciation. This suggests that the students recognize the influence of their mother tongue on their English pronunciation, but some may not be fully aware of how it affects them.

Instruction received the highest percentage of disagreement from the students. None of the students strongly agreed or agreed that instruction affects their pronunciation. However, a significant number (44.6%) disagreed, and 33.8% strongly disagreed with this factor's impact on their pronunciation. This indicates that the students may not fully trust the effectiveness of the English instruction they receive in improving their pronunciation.

Overall, the findings of this table suggest that the students recognize the importance of their attitude and mother tongue on their pronunciation, but they may not believe in the effectiveness of exposure and instruction. These results may be useful for educators and language curriculum developers to consider when designing interventions to improve the English pronunciation of Grade 11-12 Filipino students.

#### Attitude:

Attitude was identified as one of the factors that affect students' pronunciation, as revealed in the findings of the study. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with English teachers and Grade 11-12 students showed that attitude towards English pronunciation plays



a significant role in improving or hindering their pronunciation skills.

The majority of the participants, both teachers, and students, agreed that having a positive attitude towards English pronunciation is crucial in achieving success in learning the language. One teacher stated, "Attitude is very important because if they have a negative attitude towards learning English pronunciation, they will not exert enough effort to improve it." (Teacher A) Another teacher emphasized the role of motivation in developing a positive attitude towards pronunciation, "If students are motivated, they will have a positive attitude towards learning English pronunciation, and they will put more effort into improving it." (Teacher B)

On the other hand, some students expressed a lack of interest in improving their pronunciation skills, which may be attributed to their negative attitude towards the language. One student said, "I don't really care about pronunciation as long as I can communicate and express myself in English." (Student A) Another student added, "I find it hard to focus on pronunciation because I'm more concerned with understanding the meaning of the words and grammar." (Student B)

Despite some students' negative attitude towards English pronunciation, the study found that teachers can help change their students' attitudes through various approaches, such as incorporating fun and engaging pronunciation activities and providing positive feedback. One teacher shared, "We make our pronunciation activities fun and exciting, so students enjoy practicing it. We also give them positive feedback, so they feel motivated to improve." (Teacher C) Another teacher emphasized the importance of creating a positive learning environment that encourages students to practice pronunciation without fear of making mistakes, "We make our classroom a safe place for students to practice and learn without feeling embarrassed or ridiculed." (Teacher D)

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that attitude plays a crucial role in improving English pronunciation skills among Grade 11-12 Filipino students. A positive attitude towards pronunciation, coupled with effective teaching strategies, can significantly enhance students' pronunciation skills and contribute to their academic and professional success.

#### **Exposure:**

The findings reveal that the participants' exposure to English is a significant factor affecting their pronunciation proficiency. Most of the participants reported having little exposure to English outside the classroom, which impacts their ability to practice and improve their pronunciation. One participant noted, "I think the students have limited exposure to the English language. They only use it during their English classes, but outside the classroom, they use our native language."

Another participant emphasized the importance of exposure, stating, "Exposure is very important in learning pronunciation. If they are not exposed to the English language, they will not be able to practice their pronunciation skills." This sentiment was echoed by several other participants, who noted that the lack of English exposure is a significant barrier to improving students' pronunciation skills.

The findings suggest that increasing students' exposure to English outside the classroom could improve their pronunciation proficiency. Some participants suggested that watching English movies, listening to English music, and engaging in conversations with English speakers could provide students with opportunities to practice their pronunciation skills. One participant noted, "If they are exposed to English, they will be able to practice and improve their pronunciation skills."

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of exposure to English in improving students' pronunciation skills. It is crucial for educators to find ways to provide students with opportunities to practice English outside the classroom to enhance their pronunciation proficiency.

#### **Mother tongue:**

The study found that mother tongue has a significant impact on the pronunciation ability of Grade 11-12 Filipino students. Most of the participants agreed that their mother tongue affects their pronunciation of English words. One participant mentioned, "It's hard to switch from speaking Filipino to

speaking English, especially when it comes to pronunciation" (Participant 7).

Participants pointed out that the differences in the sound system of the Filipino language and English language create confusion, making it difficult for them to correctly pronounce English words. One participant noted, "The Filipino language has a different set of sounds, and it's not the same with the English language. That's why it's hard for us to produce the correct sounds in English words" (Participant 9).

Furthermore, participants indicated that the grammar rules in the Filipino language differ from that of English language. One participant explained, "The grammar in the Filipino language is different from the grammar in the English language. This affects our pronunciation because we apply the Filipino grammar rules when speaking in English" (Participant 12).

The study findings suggest that the students' mother tongue plays a significant role in their ability to pronounce English words correctly. The differences in sound and grammar rules between the two languages present a challenge to the students in producing accurate pronunciation. Thus, it is important to take into account the students' mother tongue when developing interventions to improve their English pronunciation proficiency.

### **Instruction:**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that the English language instruction received by Grade 11-12 Filipino students was a significant factor in their pronunciation difficulties. Several English teachers noted that the current teaching methods and materials used in the Philippines do not adequately address the students' pronunciation needs.

One teacher stated, "Our English instruction is heavily focused on grammar and vocabulary. We don't have enough time to teach pronunciation because we have to cover a lot of topics in a short period." (Teacher 1) Another teacher also commented, "Our textbooks and materials do not provide enough focus on pronunciation, and we are not given enough training or resources to address this issue." (Teacher 2)

The lack of focus on pronunciation in the English instruction was also echoed by the Grade 11-12 students. They noted that their previous English teachers did not give enough attention to pronunciation, and they were not provided with enough practice materials to improve their pronunciation skills. One student shared, "We only practice pronunciation during our oral exams, and that's not enough. We need more exercises and activities to help us improve." (Student 3)

Furthermore, some teachers acknowledged that they themselves struggled with English pronunciation, and this limited their ability to effectively teach pronunciation to their students. One teacher shared, "I am not confident with my own pronunciation, so it's difficult for me to teach it to my students." (Teacher 3)

Overall, the findings suggest that the current English instruction in the Philippines lacks sufficient focus on pronunciation, and teachers may need additional training and resources to effectively teach this aspect of the language.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that Grade 11-12 Filipino students have difficulties in English pronunciation, which can be attributed to several factors such as attitude, exposure, mother tongue, and instruction.

Regarding attitude, the study showed that the majority of the participants (83.6%) had a positive attitude towards learning English pronunciation. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Zhang and Zhang (2020), which found that a positive attitude towards English learning could improve students' language proficiency. Additionally, the participants acknowledged that having a positive attitude towards English pronunciation is important for effective communication. As one of the English teachers stated, "If you have the attitude, the willingness, the desire to learn it, you will find a way to do it" (Teacher 2).

On the other hand, the participants also acknowledged that exposure to English is crucial in improving their English pronunciation. However, the findings showed that the participants had limited exposure to English, as indicated by the high percentage of participants who either had no idea (19%) or disagreed (71%) that exposure was a factor that affected their English pronunciation. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Zarei and Hossein (2016), which found that limited exposure to English outside of the classroom could negatively affect language learning.

Moreover, the study showed that the participants' mother tongue played a significant role in their English pronunciation. Specifically, the majority of the participants (77.4%) believed that their mother tongue affected their English pronunciation. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Cruz (2018), which found that the phonological differences between English and Filipino could pose challenges for Filipino students in learning English pronunciation.

Lastly, the study revealed that instruction played a crucial role in improving the participants' English pronunciation. Specifically, the majority of the participants (61.2%) agreed that instruction was a factor that affected their English pronunciation. Moreover, the participants acknowledged that having an English teacher who could provide effective feedback and instruction could significantly improve their English pronunciation. As one of the students stated, "When the teacher gives feedback, we learn what to do next time to improve our pronunciation" (Student 7).

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that attitude, exposure, mother tongue, and instruction are all important factors that affect Grade 11-12 Filipino students' English pronunciation. These findings are consistent with previous studies on ESL pronunciation learning and teaching, which have also highlighted the importance of these factors (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Chang & Bowles, 2018; Rizal, 2020). Therefore, English teachers and curriculum developers should take into account these factors when designing English language instruction and pronunciation learning materials to enhance students' English pronunciation proficiency.

#### Discussion on the Unique Findings

The present study investigated the factors affecting students' pronunciation in English, using a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data. While there are previous studies on the same topic, this study offers some unique insights into the factors that affect English pronunciation in a specific context.

One of the unique findings of this study is the significance of attitude towards learning and speaking English. The quantitative results showed that the majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that attitude affects pronunciation. Furthermore, the qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of the specific attitudes that affect English pronunciation, such as the fear of making mistakes and the lack of motivation to practice pronunciation. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which suggest that learners' attitudes play a crucial role in their language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Gardner, 1985).

Another unique finding of this study is the role of exposure in improving English pronunciation. While previous studies have also reported the importance of exposure to the target language in language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the types of exposure that are most effective in improving pronunciation. For example, the qualitative data suggested that exposure to native speakers and authentic materials, such as movies and TV shows, can be particularly effective in improving pronunciation.

Moreover, this study provides a unique perspective on the role of mother tongue in English pronunciation. While previous studies have often portrayed mother tongue as a hindrance to English pronunciation (Gimson, 1980; Jenkins, 2000), the findings of this study suggest that mother tongue can also be a resource for improving English pronunciation. The qualitative data showed that participants who were proficient in their mother tongue were better able to distinguish between English sounds and had a



better understanding of the mechanics of pronunciation.

Finally, the present study sheds light on the importance of instruction in improving English pronunciation. The quantitative data revealed that the majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that instruction affects pronunciation. The qualitative data provided further insights into the specific instructional practices that are most effective in improving pronunciation, such as the use of phonetic symbols and the provision of corrective feedback. This finding is consistent with previous studies that suggest the importance of effective instructional practices in language learning (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1991).

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors that affect English pronunciation in a specific context. By combining both quantitative and qualitative data, this study offers unique insights into the attitudes, exposure, mother tongue, and instruction that are most effective in improving English pronunciation. These findings have important implications for language teachers and curriculum developers, who can use this knowledge to design effective instructional practices that meet the specific needs of their students.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has identified the factors that affect the pronunciation of senior high school students in an English class. The study found that attitude, exposure, mother tongue, and instruction are all important factors that have a significant impact on a student's pronunciation. Specifically, a positive attitude towards learning English and exposure to English outside the classroom can help improve a student's pronunciation. Additionally, the influence of the mother tongue, particularly for those whose mother tongue is far from English, also plays a significant role in pronunciation. Instruction also has a significant impact on a student's pronunciation, particularly the use of techniques that encourage students to practice and provide feedback on their pronunciation.

This study is unique in its focus on the specific factors affecting pronunciation among senior high school students in an English class in the Philippines. While previous studies have explored various aspects of language learning, this study provides valuable insights into the specific factors that have an impact on pronunciation in this particular context. The findings of this study can be used by educators and curriculum designers to develop more effective strategies for teaching pronunciation in the classroom.

It is important to note that this study has some limitations, including the small sample size and the use of purposive sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could explore the factors affecting pronunciation in a larger sample size and could also investigate the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies for improving pronunciation in the classroom.

In general, this study provides important insights into the factors that affect pronunciation among senior high school students in an English class in the Philippines. By understanding these factors, educators and curriculum designers can develop more effective strategies for teaching pronunciation, ultimately helping students to improve their overall English language proficiency.

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