

Research Summary

Are Canadian instructors changing their approach to pronunciation teaching?

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Overview of the study

This study replicated a survey that had been conducted ten years prior to see if the attitudes and practices amongst English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors in Canada had changed. The researchers also looked at what kinds of former instruction in pronunciation teaching the ESL instructors had received. In the study conducted in 2001, ESL instructors focused on both the sounds of English and the rhythm, stress, and intonation as a mix. However, this was found to have changed slightly in this study. What the researchers found was that instructors now focused more on the sounds of English. One thing that remained constant between both studies was that instructors still feel like they are in need of more pronunciation instruction.

Research Method

159 ESL instructors participated in this survey. Participants came from eight provinces across Canada, but the majority came from British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. The participants had varying degrees of prior exposure to pronunciation training. The survey was made up of 45 questions that covered several topics. Some of these topics included: beliefs about pronunciation instruction, background information on both the participants and their ESL programs, training opportunities available to them, and what pronunciation teaching resources they use. The survey was a mix of open-ended questions, yes/no questions, Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and checklists. Overall, the survey took 20-25 minutes to complete.

Results

The results of this study were split into four sections:

Background Information: The results found that 85% of the teachers who responded to this survey had previously had students request pronunciation instruction.

Pedagogical Training: 50% of the respondents remarked that other teachers in their programs had pronunciation training and 66% of the respondents themselves had received varying levels of pronunciation training.

Approaches and Materials: The results showed that on average, teachers dedicated 6% of class time to pronunciation with 56% of teachers using some type of pronunciation-specific textbook to assist their teaching. The sounds of English, and rhythm, stress, and intonation were all noted as equally the most challenging to teach. Most teachers mentioned using activities that targeted the sounds of English.

Beliefs and Attitudes: Most teachers had positive attitudes towards teaching pronunciation. However, 75% wished that they had more training in teaching pronunciation.

Discussion

In comparison with the study conducted in 2001, there were some minor changes. One of these changes was that more instructors have received pronunciation training. However, the amount of pronunciation instruction in programs has significantly decreased from 73% to 46%. The awareness of the difficulties for language learners caused by rhythm, stress, and intonation increased, but this awareness was not implemented in the classroom with teachers choosing activities that focus on sounds more often. Future recommendations include consistent integration of pronunciation instruction into ESL classes and the use of resources that target all parts of pronunciation equally.

Original Text: Foote, J.A., Holtby, A.K., & Derwing, T.M. (2011). Survey of the teaching of pronunciation in adult ESL programs in Canada, 2010. *TESL Canada Journal*, 29(1), 1–22.