



PECULIARITIES OF ENGLISH VOWELS IN TEACHING CORRECT PRONUNCIATION

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Ataxojayev Toxirjon Maxmudjonovich

docent of the chair of Methodology of teaching foreign languages of KSU

tohirzonatadzanov@gmail.com

Annotation. This article examines the main peculiarities of English vowels and discusses methodological approaches that help teachers develop accurate pronunciation in learners. Special attention is given to vowel length, tense–lax distinctions, diphthongs, reduction, and the role of phonetic training in the classroom.

Keywords: English vowels, pronunciation, phonetics, vowel length, diphthongs, vowel reduction, teaching methodology

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada ingliz tili unli tovushlari va ularning tasnifi o‘rganib chiqilgan, unli tovushlarning tarkibi, ularning o‘ziga xos jihatlari, o‘zbek tili unlilaridan farqlariga oid ma‘lumotlar berilgan. Shu bilan birgalikda ingliz tilida to‘g‘ri talaffuzga o‘rgatishda unli tovushlarni to‘g‘ri talaffuziga oid metodik mashqlar atroflicha tahlil qilingan.

Kalit so‘zlar: ingliz unli tovushlari, talaffuz, fonetika, unlilarning uzunligi, diftonglar, unlilarning qisqarishi, o‘qitish metodlari.

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена изучению гласных фонем английского языка, их особенности при обучении правильному произношению английского языка. Долгие и краткие варианты гласных, их смысловоразличительная функция также проанализированы. Современные методы по обучению английских гласных рассмотрены и проанализированы.

Ключевые слова: гласные фонемы, долгие гласные, краткие гласные, произношение, фонетика, дифтонги, методы обучения.

Introduction. Teaching correct pronunciation is an essential part of foreign language instruction, especially in English, where inaccurate vowel production may lead to misunderstanding. Unlike many other languages, English has a complex vowel system with

numerous contrasts in length and quality. Learners often transfer phonetic habits from their native language, which results in typical pronunciation errors. Therefore, understanding the peculiarities of English vowels is necessary for both teachers and students to achieve intelligible and confident speech.

Teaching of English vowels presents significant challenges for both teachers and learners due to the complex nature of the English vowel system comparatively. Unlike many languages English contains a large number of monophthongs and diphthongs, vowel length distinctions, and reduced vowels in unstressed syllables. This article examines different methods used in teaching English vowels, including the articulatory method, auditory method, contrastive analysis, communicative approach, phonetic transcription, minimal pair drills, visual and technological methods, and game-based learning.

Special attention is given to methodological effectiveness and practical classroom implementation. The study argues that an integrated approach combining traditional and modern methods ensures more effective pronunciation acquisition.

The English vowel system contains a comparatively large number of vowel sounds. Depending on the variety of English, there are about 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. These vowels differ according to tongue position, lip rounding, and vowel length. One important peculiarity of English vowels is that vowel quality or sound type and vowel quantity or length both carry meaning. For example, the words *sit* /ɪ/ and *seat* /i:/ differ only in vowel length and quality, yet they represent completely different lexical items.

Another feature is the presence of tense and lax vowels. Tense vowels, such as /i:/ and /u:/, are pronounced with greater muscular tension and longer duration, while lax vowels like /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are shorter and more relaxed. Learners whose native languages do not distinguish these categories often substitute one sound for another. Vowel length plays a significant role in English pronunciation. Long and short vowels may differentiate meaning, as seen in pairs like:

hit – heat

fit– feat

Students frequently ignore length differences and pronounce vowels uniformly. This can reduce intelligibility. Teachers should therefore emphasize rhythmic timing, minimal pair practice, and auditory discrimination exercises to help learners perceive and produce these contrasts.

Another peculiarity of English is the presence of diphthongs—complex vowels that glide from one position to another within a single syllable, such as /aɪ/ in *time* and /əʊ/ in *go*. Learners often replace diphthongs with simple vowels, especially if their native language lacks such sounds.

Effective teaching techniques include: Visual articulation diagrams, slow, exaggerated pronunciation, repetition with stress patterns, listening and imitation drills. These methods help students understand that diphthongs are not two separate sounds but one continuous movement.

English is a stress-timed language, and unstressed syllables frequently contain the neutral vowel /ə/ (schwa), as in about, teacher, and problem. This phenomenon—vowel reduction—is unfamiliar to many learners who tend to pronounce all vowels clearly. Teaching the schwa is essential because it contributes to natural rhythm and fluency. Activities such as marking stress in words, practicing weak forms, and reading connected speech help students acquire this feature.

Learners usually transfer vowel patterns from their first language. For example, languages with fewer vowel distinctions may lead students to merge several English sounds into one. This interference causes persistent pronunciation errors.

Teachers should contrast English vowel sounds with those of the learners’ native language, using comparative phonetics and targeted drills. Recording and playback activities also allow students to notice and correct their own mistakes.

Effective pronunciation teaching should combine perception and production. Key strategies include:

- Minimal pair exercises to develop phonemic awareness.
- Phonetic transcription to help learners visualize sound differences.
- Listening discrimination tasks to train the ear.
- Articulatory explanations describing tongue and lip positions.
- Use of technology, such as pronunciation apps and audio models.
- Communicative practice, integrating pronunciation into real speech.
- A balanced approach ensures that pronunciation training supports communication rather than isolated mechanical drilling.

English vowels possess several peculiarities—length distinctions, tense–lax contrasts, diphthongs, and vowel reduction—that make them challenging for learners. Mastery of these features is essential for intelligible and natural speech. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students through systematic phonetic training that combines listening, articulation, and communicative practice. By addressing the specific difficulties of English vowels and applying effective methodological techniques, educators can significantly improve learners’ pronunciation competence and overall communicative ability.

Many learners struggle with vowel length, quality, and reduction. Therefore, the choice of teaching methods plays a crucial role in developing accurate vowel pronunciation. This article discusses various methods used in teaching English vowels:

1. The Articulatory or Phonetic Method

The articulatory method focuses on teaching learners how vowels are physically produced. Teachers explain:

Tongue height (high, mid, low)

Tongue position (front, central, back)

Lip rounding

Length (short vs. long)

For example, learners compare /i:/ (as in sheep) and /ɪ/ (as in ship) by observing tongue position and vowel length. Diagrams of the vowel chart are frequently used to demonstrate articulation.

Advantages: Develops awareness of speech organs; helps learners consciously control pronunciation; particularly useful for adult learners.

Limitations:

- Can be too theoretical for beginners.
- Requires careful explanation and demonstration.

2. The Auditory Method

The auditory method emphasizes listening and repetition. Learners imitate native speaker models provided by teachers or audio recordings.

Activities include:

- Listen-and-repeat exercises
- Shadowing
- Choral and individual repetition

For example, students listen to minimal pairs such as cat – cut and repeat them multiple times.

Advantages:

- Develops listening discrimination.
- Encourages natural pronunciation habits.
- Simple to implement.

Limitations:

- Learners may repeat incorrectly without noticing errors.
- Requires high-quality audio input.

3. Minimal Pair Drills. Minimal pairs are word pairs differing in only one sound, such as:

ship – sheep

full – fool

hat – hut

This method trains learners to distinguish similar vowels through comparison.

Classroom Techniques:

Discrimination exercises (teacher says one word, students identify it)

Production drills

Dictation activities

Pedagogical Value:

Minimal pair drills are especially effective in correcting vowel length and quality distinctions.

4. Contrastive Analysis Method

This method compares English vowels with those of the learners' native language. Teachers identify problematic sounds that do not exist in the mother tongue.

For example, if learners' native language has fewer vowel distinctions, they may substitute similar sounds for English vowels. By highlighting differences, teachers help learners avoid interference errors.

Advantages:

- Targets specific pronunciation problems.
- Efficient for focused correction.

Limitations:

- Requires teacher knowledge of both phonetic systems.
- Does not guarantee correct production without practice.

5. Phonetic Transcription Method

Teaching students to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) helps them understand vowel symbols and pronunciation differences. For example:

/æ/ in cat; /ʌ/ in cup; /ɜ:/ in bird

Transcription exercises include: Reading phonetic texts; Transcribing words; Using dictionaries with IPA

Advantages:

- Encourages learner independence.
- Helps with dictionary use.
- Improves accuracy.

Limitations:

- May be difficult for young learners.
- Requires systematic instruction.

6. Communicative Approach

In the communicative method, vowel practice is integrated into meaningful communication rather than isolated drills. Examples: Role plays, Dialogues, Information gap activities, Storytelling.

For instance, students practice diphthongs while discussing weekend plans or daily routines.

Advantages:

- Connects pronunciation to real communication.
- Increases motivation.
- Promotes fluency.

Limitations:

- May reduce focus on accuracy if not monitored carefully.

7. Visual and Technological Methods

Modern technology enhances vowel teaching through:

1. Interactive phonetic software
2. Speech analysis applications
3. Video demonstrations
4. Online pronunciation platforms

Visual tools such as vowel charts, mouth diagrams, and waveform displays help learners see pronunciation differences.

Benefits: Immediate feedback; Increased learner engagement; Individualized practice. Technology makes abstract vowel distinctions more concrete.

8. Game-Based Learning

Games reduce anxiety and increase motivation in pronunciation practice.

Examples: Vowel bingo; Pronunciation competitions; Sound matching games, Tongue twisters.

Games are particularly effective for young learners, making repetitive practice enjoyable.

9. Integrated Approach

No single method is sufficient on its own. Effective vowel teaching requires combining: Articulatory explanation; Listening discrimination, Minimal pair drills, Communicative practice, Technological support.

An integrated approach addresses both perception and production skills and ensures balanced development.

Conclusion

Teaching English vowels requires systematic and varied methodology due to the complexity of the English vowel system. The articulatory, auditory, contrastive, and communicative methods each offer specific advantages. Minimal pairs and phonetic transcription enhance accuracy, while technological and game-based approaches increase engagement and motivation. The most effective strategy is a balanced, integrated approach that combines theoretical explanation, auditory discrimination, controlled practice, and

communicative application. Through careful method selection and consistent practice, learners can significantly improve their vowel pronunciation and overall communicative competence.

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