World Applied Sciences Journal 21 (Special Issue of Studies in Language Teaching and Learning): 133-142, 2013
ISSN 1818-4952

DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2013.21.sltl.2147

The Gap Between Research and Practice in the Teaching of English Pronunciation: Insights from Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract: The gap between research and practice, as in most areas of education, is prevalent in the teaching of pronunciation. This paper reviews the factors that contribute to the gap and proposes investigating teachers' beliefs and practices as a way to address the problem. It then provides an illustration of the gap through a case study of a group of English as a Second Language (ESL)teachers at a tertiary institution. Consistent with previous studies, the teachers' avoidance of pronunciation teaching was found to originate from their own inability to teach the skill. Closer analysis revealed that their technical knowledge in pronunciation content and pedagogy was lacking and further impoverished by their ignorance of research. However, the teachers were also found to demonstrate practical knowledge that enabled them to negotiate certain curricular and learner constraints. This latter knowledge, although efficacious, subsequently produced teaching practices that were at odds with current research. Insights from this study point to a need to close the gap not only by improving teachers' technical knowledge but also attuning pronunciation research to serve teachers' practical needs.

Key words: Teaching of pronunciation · Research-practice gap

INTRODUCTION

Scholars in the field of education have long acknowledged the existence of the gap between research and practice [1]. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Belcher warns of the widening of this gap and calls on researchers to make serious efforts to ensure that their output is relevant to language teaching [2]. Indeed it is a problem that can be found in variousprofessions and disciplines. There is evidencethat the research-practice gap is found in the teaching of pronunciation as well. Derwing and Munro, in discussing the need for more research in L2 accents, mention that there is currently "very little reliance" on existing research by practitioners [3] (p. 383). Levis appraises intonational research and concludes that it is "completely divorced from modern language teaching" [4] (p. 37). Examining the role of English as an International Language (EIL) and by extension, its research, Sifakis and Sougari found that pronunciation teachersin Greece were "not aware of the international spread of English and its implications for instruction" [5] (483). And Fraser, commenting on the state of pronunciation teaching in Australia, states that "There is currently a dearth of reliable research-based information about what works and what doesn't in pronunciation teaching and why - though a large number of opinions can be heard" [6] (p. 6). All these observations are aptly summed up by Levis: "To a large extent, pronunciation's importance has always been determined by ideology and intuition rather than research" [7] (p. 369).

The causes of the gapare many but many scholars now believe that it is essentially a result of diverging professional cultures between researchers and teachers [1]. The gap, however, was not always as pervasive as it is today. Ellis notes that research agendas in SLA were initially set by practitioners who wanted to address classroom-based concerns [8] (p. 5-7). Despite this, the

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growth of research in SLA also means that its agendas are no longer determined by practitioners but increasingly by researchers who are based in universities or other research institutions [9, 10]. The gap is said to have widened even further because of the diverging interests that are underpinnedby different epistemologies held by universities and schools. Labaree illustrates these conflicting worldviews in his description of the transition demanded of teachers who need to do research in doctoral programmes: "the shift from [school] teaching to educational research often asks [these teachers] to transform their cultural orientation from normative to analytical, from personal to intellectual, from the particular to the universal and from the experiential to the theoretical" [11] (p. 16). The different views of knowledge and its relation to research held by researchers and teachers are also demonstrated by Joram whose study uncovers teachers' tendency to consider knowledge of teaching as ungeneralisable and "an enormous bag of tricks which cannot be reduced to a set of more general rules of thumb that might serve to guide the teacher's generation of teaching strategies and practices" [12] (p. 132). According to Joram, while this view may explain the teachers' aversion to research, the university professors in her study believed that knowledge of teaching can be generalised and applied across various contexts, thus explaining their embrace of research [12] (p. 132).

Other than this, researchers are often viewed as belonging to a higher professional status than that of teachers, thus possessing more power in the making of scholarship in teaching ESL [13] (p. 421-423). The unequal distribution of power leads researchers and teachers to "mistrust" each other [9] (p. 3). Teachers thus view research findings presented to them with scepticism, questioning its practicality, conclusiveness and relevance [14] (p. 206-208).

Joram's findings discussed above are in line with McIntyre's argument that "the kind of knowledge that research can offer is of a very different kind from the knowledge that classroom teachers need to use" [15] (p. 359). Teachers are thus seen to produce and make use of practical knowledge to solve problems in their work while researchers create propositional knowledge that mainly describes teaching and learning [1]. Although researchers might expect them to do so, teachers rarely make use of the propositional knowledge researchers create because it does not really serve their needs [15]. Ellis equates this 'propositional knowledge' with 'technical knowledge', pointing out the fact that it can be learned [8]. In the rest of the paper, only the term 'technical knowledge' will be used. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is the result of experience and is not easy to explicate without conscious effort.

The difference between the two kinds of knowledge is pivotal in this study. To locate where teachers' practice differs from what researchers say, we need to examine teachers' practical knowledge and its relation to their technical knowledge, if any. An effective way to do thisis through an investigation of teachers' beliefs.

Teachers' Beliefs: Teachers' beliefs have been shown to have a profound impact on teaching. In a review of a number of studies in mainstream education and language teaching, Borg identifies "teacher cognition" as a major antecedent for the events that take place in the classroom [16] (p. 91). It is important to note that Borg defines teacher cognition as "what teachers know, believe and think" [16] (p. 81). Given this definition, it follows that a teacher's knowledge, beliefs and thoughts (about teaching) constitute one and the same thing. Based on a similar point of view, we argue that a study of teachers' beliefs can provide a window into the knowledge that teachers utilise to organise their teaching of pronunciation. We argue further that this knowledge includes both technical and practical forms. Taking this position, we adopt Zheng's definition of beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions felt to be true" [17] (p. 74). Also crucial to this definition is the view that beliefs and knowledge are intertwined [18] (p. 313).

Methodologically, however, teachers' beliefs are not as straightforward that they couldbe captured for analysis. Borg points out that studies that rely on post-teaching data collection to describe what happens during teaching can be misleading [16] (p. 98). To address this shortcoming Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis argue that data from observation of teachers' practice must be collected to complement their stated beliefs [19].

Two Current Issues In Pronunciation Instruction: It is often noted that the rise and fall of pronunciation instruction is associated with the dominant teaching methodology of the time [20, 7]. It was neglected during the grammar-translation method, revived by audiolingualism and de-emphasised again following the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Although CLT is no longer as dominant as it was in the 70s and 80s, many teachers continue to employ certain techniques of this method, often to their own detriment

since the teachers' authority is played down and explicit teaching of language items is kept to a minimum [21]. These prevailing aspects of CLT have also been observed to constrain the teaching of pronunciation because the practice of language skills via communication takes centre stage and any extended instruction on how to pronounce properly is seen as getting in the way of the meaning that is conveyed in the interaction. Despite the dampening effects of CLT on the teaching of pronunciation, some of the most important research in this field in recent years has come from the observation that effective communication and good pronunciation are intertwined. This line of investigation has led researchers to explore the roles of discourse and sociolinguistics in pronunciation and its teaching. Each of the two issues to be discussed in this section is related to either one of these research areas. These are the teaching of suprasegmental features and the use of English as an International Language (EIL).

Due to the close association that existed between the teaching ofpronunciation and audiolingualism, a view that has persisted in this post-CLT climate is that instruction of pronunciation consists of nothing more than articulatory phonetics in which "sounds to be learned [are] isolated [and] contrasted with the L1 sounds" [22] (p. 81). The sounds that are learned this way are called 'segmentals' and include vowel and consonant sounds. Recent advocates of pronunciation instruction, however, claim that the emphasis on segmentals is misplaced. Several researchers highlighted the importance of 'suprasegmentals' (i.e. intonation, rhythm, stress, etc.) to effective verbal communication, arguing for their inclusion in language curricula. Pennington, for example, describes some of these features in detail and outlines how they can be taught effectively [23]. The integration of computer technology into many of these techniques adds a great deal of sophistication to the teaching of suprasegmentals. The role of technology itself in improving the quality of the instruction is becoming an important area of research within the teaching of suprasegmentals.

Another major issue in teaching pronunciation is related to a more social view of communication. Researchers investigate variables that are associated with the variety of English regarded as the norm for a given group of learners. At the heart of this research is the issue of intelligibility. In some ESL classes, students are made to imitate the sounds of native speakers of English because such pronunciation is regarded as the most intelligible. Other teachers may aim for less native-like pronunciation because this is what intelligibility means to them. Research in this area, however, indicates that intelligibility is not a simple matter of choosing (or maintaining) an accent. Due to factors such as globalisation and the restrictive effects of maturity on L2 phonetic articulation, some claim that native norms are not realistic aims. Instead, learners should aim for sounds that especially facilitate intelligibility between non-native speakers given that English is currently more frequently used in this manner. One well-known proposal, the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) [24], specifies such sounds.

Although many of these issues are still unresolved, it can be concluded that research on the teaching of pronunciation is very vibrant because it is responsive to the communicative needs of the learners and more importantly, it creates a pool of theoretical resources for teachers to draw on. Therefore we would expect that the actual teaching of pronunciation is equally dynamic, fulfilling the usual expectation of research feeding into practice.

Context of the Study: The institution in which the study took place is a small semi-rural,branch-campus university in Malaysia. English was a compulsory subject to the students. Diploma-level students received six hours of instruction (per week) and bachelor's degree students received between two to four hours. Most of the subjects were taken by students during the first two years of their programmes. The communicative curriculum offered English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposesand emphasised the four major skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing with grammar and vocabulary integrated into each one of them. Grammar may also be taught separately for some subjects. A fewsubjects had a separate assessment for speaking but no special marks were allocated for pronunciation. The proficiency level of the students ranged from lower-intermediate to high-intermediate.

Methodology: A mixed method case study design was usedconsisting of a survey, teaching observations and semi-structured interviews with mostly non-proportionally sampled participants. For the survey, all 27ESL teachers at the university were involved. Ten of them were part-time teachers who taught at least one class in the evening. The study explored the following:

- The extent to which pronunciation was taught by the teachers;
- The teachers' rationales underlying their practices;
- The fit between the teachers' rationales and what is espoused in pronunciation teaching research.

The study began with a survey that asked all the teachers to choose from a given list the activities that they carried out to teach pronunciation. These activities were selected based on the literature on pronunciation teaching techniques for general ESL students and ESL students from this particular socio-geographical background (see previous section). They were also invited to write down any activities that were not included on the list. The questionnaire also asked them to choose the phonetic or phonological features that they taught. This survey enabled a bird-eye's view of the practices of the teachers.

This was followed by class observation of three teachers (two full time, one part time), carried out 12 times by one of the authors; each teacher was observed three times over a period of four weeks (1 teacher x 3 observations x 4 weeks).The lessons were tape-recorded and transcribed. The purpose of these observations was to examine in detail some aspects of the practices described by the participants in the survey.

Finally, seven voluntary teachers (five full time, two part time) were interviewed by the same author. Most of the questions required them to explainor clarify the patterns of beliefs and practices identified in the earlier survey and observations.

Findings: Findings from the survey, observations and interviews are discussed below under three themes that reflect the three issues identified earlier: how the teachers taught pronunciation, why they did so and compatibility between research and their practices.

The Extent To Which Pronunciation Was Taught: From the survey it was discovered that all participants claimed that they taught pronunciation. Theactivities with the frequencies with which they were citedare listed in Table 1.

Given that pronunciation should be taught incidentally in the communicative approach, it is not surprising to find error correction as themost frequently used activity. It is easily embedded in other language activities andcan be the basis of focus-on-form instruction in a communicative curriculum [25]. On the other hand, while reading aloud is a frequently used technique to teach pronunciation, it is more suitable for lower-level students. The proficiency level of the majority of the students in this university was certainly higher than this. This findingthus raises questions about why the technique is ranked very highly on the list.

Table 1: List of pronunciation teaching activities selected by the teachers

Teaching activity	Frequency
Repeating a sound after the teacher (as in error correction)	23
Reading aloud	22
Dictionary work	10
Oral drills e.g. tongue twisters	9
Choral reading	3
Games	2
Role-play	2

Table 2: List of pronunciation features selected by the teachers

Pronunciation features	Frequency
'θ' and 'ð' sounds	25
Individual vowels	20
Individual consonants	20
Long/short vowels	18
Voiced/voiceless consonants	16
Two- and three-initial clusters	16
Intonation	12
Sentence stress	9
Aspiration	7
Linking	6
Final clusters	5
Deletion	4
Assimilation	3
Rhythm	2

In order to get a clearer idea of the way pronunciation was taught at the institution, the pronunciation features (both phonetic and phonological) that the teachers claimed to include in their instruction are examined next. Table 2 shows these features with their selection frequencies.

The finding indicatesthat segmentals were given more emphasis in the teaching. Segmentals, however, are usually taught to beginning or lower-level students [26]. The dominance of these sounds has again led to questions about the fit between the teachers' instruction and their students' proficiency level.

Because these sounds are known to be less complicated to teach, the teachers' focus on them implies that phonological processes such as linking, deletion and assimilation, which are important in characterising longer utterances, were avoided. This assumptionappears to be supported by the predominance of error correction and reading aloud in Table 1 in that those, too, are uncomplicated activities. Analysis of data from the observations is, therefore,needed to shed light on this matter.

Although the survey findings suggest that that the teachers taught pronunciation on a regular and sustained basis, it was foundfrom the observations that the actual teaching was very minimal. The ESL class met three times

per week with each lesson lasting for about two hours. The lessons were based on grammar and the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

A grammar lesson was typically delivered in a mass lecture where the students would spend their time listening to the teacher lecturing on grammatical rules as well as takingdown notes. The teachers gave very little attention to pronunciation in this class as the focus was almost exclusively on form. For example, it was observed that in one of Teacher B's lessons a faulty phonological aspect of a student's reading aloud of an answer was treated orthographically:

Student: Neither the women nor the child read(s) the notice.
(The –s in "reads" was not clearly pronounced)
Teacher B: "Read" with –s or without –s?
Student: With –s.
Teacher B: Good.

Notice that the excerpt above also illustrates the most frequently used technique to teach pronunciation, that is,error correction.

A similar teaching pattern was observed in the listening, reading and writing lessons as well. While it is reasonable to attribute the lack of attention to pronunciation to the teachers' overall lesson objectives, it wasfound thatgrammar was more readily integrated into the main objective of any lesson.It is safe to assume that the lack of attention to pronunciation was really a matter of choice.

There were a few instances in which the teaching of pronunciation did occur. These were found mostly in thespeaking and reading classes. In a speaking lesson, for example, Teacher A was observed to respond to a student's faulty pronunciation of 'suggest' in the following way:

Teacher A: You don't say "I [sages]"; it should be "I [s□'□est]"

Nevertheless, even in the speaking lessons the teachers observed were found to be preoccupied with the grammaticality of the utterances. For instance, while commenting on the role-play scripts prepared by their students, the teachers would point out various grammatical errors that needed to be corrected before the role-plays were carried out. However, the same level of attention was not given to pronunciation. In one of Teacher C's speaking lessons, an error in a student's sentence stress in a role-play was left uncorrected. This is shown in the excerpt below, with the researcher's observation notes:

Student A: Come inside, come inside.
(Asking student B to come into her imaginary house. Apparently the space behind a bag she had placed on the floor earlier was "inside" the house. B did not appear to understand this but took a step forward, not quite reaching inside.)
Student A: Come, come.
Student B: Inside already.
Student A: Come inside, come inside
(*Almost in the same tone as before* but now gesturing more emphatically while pointing to the space behind her which was supposed to be "inside". B took another step forward.)
Student B: Inside now.
(A did not seem to be satisfied but just let B stand where she was. The role-play did not continue smoothly after this, possibly because of the lack of understanding shown just now. A's failure to place increased stress on the word "inside" was significant. Had she said "Come INSIDE", B would have got a clearer meaning of where it was. Teacher C appearedto not pay any attention to the stress error although it had affected the role-play.)

In this role-play, it was observed that due to an inappropriate use of sentence stress, the message that the student wanted to convey failed to get across. However, Teacher C did not point outthe error to the students.

In the reading lessons, confirming an earlier finding from the survey (Table 1), the students were often asked to read aloud from the passages. It was during this activity that pronunciation was most explicitly dealt with. As an example, below is an excerpt from Teacher B's reading lesson concerning the pronunciation of 'initiated':

Teacher B: It's [□□'n□□ie□t□d] not [□nisieit]. Can you repeat after me?
Student: [□nisieit□d]
Teacher B: [□□'n□□ie□t□d]
Student: [□n□□ie□t□d] (word stress pattern still wrong)
Teacher B: Okay. Continue.

Even here it can be seen that the activity is a form of error correction. In addition, the teacher was only concerned with correcting segmental sounds. Word stress, a suprasegmental feature, was left uncorrected probably due to the difficulty to do so.

Given the observed practices, to what extent was pronunciation really taught by these teachers? While it is true that they did teach pronunciation, it was discovered that the teaching was incidental andvery minimal, usually restricted to error correction. On the other hand grammar, despitethe special lessons dedicated to it, was continually integrated into the teaching of other aspects of language.

As for the pronunciation features that the teachers did pay attention to, there are two noticeable aspects: (i) these features were often easily corrected when pronounced wrongly and (ii) mispronunciation of these features usually resulted in either gross errors in grammar (e.g. verb agreement) or in pronunciation itself (e.g. the word *initiated*). This explains why suprasegmental features such as the stress pattern were not dealt with by the teachers observed.

Teachers' Rationales for their Pronunciation Teaching Practices: Why did the teachers teach pronunciation this way? Findings from the interviews indicate that although the teachers generally agreed on the importance of the teaching of pronunciation, it did not necessarily mean that they wanted to include it in their own instruction, as can be seen in the following responses:

> "Pronunciation is important, no matter how good your grammar is, you won't get your message across if you do not have the right pronunciation. But to be honest with you, I do not really give much attention to pronunciation. Well, time constraints are one factor for me not to teach pronunciation and to make it worse, it is not even stated in the syllabus." (Teacher G)
>
> "Yeah, it is important. But the thing is, students need more attention in other parts of the language. Grammar for one thing. Um, because of the time constraints, because of time constraints…we can't afford to focus much on pronunciation." (Teacher B)
>
> "Pronunciation, in my opinion, is to polish one's language. But the problem is these students do not have that, that strong foundation in English. So for me, teaching pronunciation is like, you know, giving a pair of spikes to someone and expecting him or her to be a good runner. I mean you can see that they are still weak in other basic areas of language, grammar, for instance." (Teacher C)
>
> "Um, it *is* important, but it's not in the syllabus, so I tend to overlook. And another reason is, you know, as a part time teacher, I cannot use, well, you know, no access to the language lab. Yeah, that's another, another reason why I do not teach pronunciation." (Teacher D)

Their responses demonstrate that although the teachers perceived the teaching of pronunciation as important, it was obviously not a skill that receivedhigh priority. The syllabus, as well as the time constraints it imposed, appears to play an influential role in their decision. In addition, when asked of their own perception of formal instruction of pronunciation, the teachers pointed to the role of the students themselves in ensuring its success. The following excerpts will illustrate:

> "Formal instruction is beneficial in teaching pronunciation *if* the students are aware of its benefits. So what I'm saying is students' attitudes may also affect our teaching." (Teacher D)
>
> "If the students have a high level of motivation to learn and actually want to improve their pronunciation and improve their English, I think it would work. With students who just don't want to, you can spend hundreds of hours without making any single progress." (Teacher E)

It is obvious that the teachers were sceptical of the benefits of formal teaching of pronunciation. In spite of the pessimism, none of them went to the extent of claiming that such teaching is not beneficial at all. However it is clear from Teacher C's response that what is more important for these teachers in building a 'strong foundation' in English is grammar.

In an effort to invite the participants to describe further the problems that they were facing, we asked them they were askedto describe their teaching aims. In part we were inspired by Pennington's proposal that the teaching of pronunciation should be based on clear aims to minimise confusion for the teacher [23]. It was on this subject that the participants began to talk about speech models and their relationship to native speakers:

Interviewer: What is your aim in teaching pronunciation?
Teacher A: To make their pronunciation at least 80% close to the native speakers'. So it is the responsibility of the instructors to give good examples, to give the right pronunciation. I somehow believe the instructors should try to imitate the native speakers.

Interviewer: So are you saying that native speakers would make better teachers?
Teacher A: Yes, they have the advantage.

Teacher A's view that native speakers would provide a better model is shared by Teacher B:

Interviewer: What is your aim in teaching pronunciation?
Teacher B: For the students to be understood by others. So, here, teachers have to be good models.
Interviewer: Do you think native speakers would make better instructors when it comes to pronunciation?
Teacher B: For pronunciation, yes. Because they can give really correct pronunciation and the students will get more exposure to the accent.

From the excerpts, it is obvious that Teacher A and Teacher B had more confidence in native speakers as the provider of norms to their students. Others, however, suggested that elements of a national identity must form the basis of a good speech model. Teacher C and Teacher F brought up the subject of 'intelligibility' in their responses:

Interviewer: What is your aim in teaching pronunciation?
Teacher C: Students should pronounce intelligibly. Universal intelligibility is needed; however, very subtle nuances of pronunciation are not needed. The problem is now there is a lack of good models. We need people who are good like those graduates from Kirkby.[1] They actually have a neutral accent.
Interviewer: What is your aim in teaching pronunciation?
Teacher F: Intelligibility.
Interviewer: What is your preferred speech model?
Teacher F: In Malaysia there's plenty of people who speak English very intelligibly and can go on to speak it…to speak the same way at the international level and can be perfectly understood. I think this is the kind of people that should be made models. So, yes, in answer to your question.
Interviewer: Do you think native speakers would make better speech models?
Teacher F: In my opinion it would be all the more confusing for the students. I think it's nice for them to listen to the native speakers talking on TV and radio but to actually turn them into a speech model, I think it'd be quite disastrous because in Malaysia, the majority of us simply do not talk like that. So if we make a model out of these native speakers, I'm sure it would lead to very strange results, to say the least. I mean what are they going to sound like? Are they going to sound like Malays trying to speak like an American or British and so on?

Teacher A and Teacher B share their view with many other ESL/EFL practitioners around the world [cf. 27, 28]. Nevertheless, there is also evidence of a rejection of this view. Teacher C clearly preferred a pronunciation that is not entirely British and one that is "neutralised" by features of the local variety. Teacher F rejected native speakers' models along the same lines and explicitly highlighted a desire to preserve a Malaysian identity (ethnically referred to by him as 'Malay').

The two different views above also illustrate how complex a good model of speech can be both at the local and international levels (see similar findings in [29]). Overall there exists some vagueness as to how the students taught by these teachers should sound like. Their imprecise conception of a good speech model for their students is also evident in these teachers' descriptions of Malay accentedness. Specifically, although many of the interviewed teachers agreed that their students should not sound "too Malay", they could not agree upon the defining quality of the accent. This is illustrated firstly by Teacher B's response:

Interviewer: How do you mean 'too Malay'?
Teacher B: It's the rhythm, right? Like when you speak English, but you don't follow the correct rhythm; you stress in the wrong places. You make it sound too Malay.

Here, Teacher B was clearly referring to the difference between the stressed-timed English and the syllable-timed Malay. Teacher D, on the other hand, had a slightly different opinion:

[1] This refers to a teacher training college for Malaysians in Kirkby, North England which operated in the 50's and 60's.

Teacher D: To speak English with Malay accent is okay if not too much.
Interviewer: What do you mean by 'too much'?
Teacher D: You know, um, the intonation especially. They use Eglish but the intonation is Malay. It's important, you know, especially later when they are looking for a job. When they sound too Malay, I think that can give them a negative self-image.

It is interesting to note that, despite the admission that intonation and rhythm are important in one's speech, these teachers hardly taught them in class. Teacher F's definition of Malay accentedness was also characterised by the same vagueness. He seemed to frame it against the level of education that a Malay student should have:

Interviewer: [Do you mind] if the speech of your own students has some influence of Malay?
Teacher F: […] I think students of this university should sound or should reflect their level of education. So, Malay accented or not, I think it's important for them to simply sound educated or at least when formal situation is concerned, they should sound educated. It's not good if this Malay accentedness gets in the way of that impression of being educated.

Although Teacher F did seem to be aware of the importance of context in determining the appropriateness of one's speech, his lack of precision in determining how much Malay accent was acceptable was indicative of the vagueness of the speech model that he envisioned earlier. Therefore, it can be concluded that these teachers were uncertain of how a good model for their students should be both for intelligibility at local and international levels.

Where the Gap Lies: The teaching practices of these teachers undoubtedly point to the existence of a gap between what is espoused by research and what really takes place in the classroom. Firstly, the teachers' focus on segmentals ran counter to the call for more attention to be given to suprasegmentals. Secondly, there was no indication of English as an International Language (EIL) being integrated into their instruction despite the more frequent teaching of segmentals. This claim can be supported by the teachers' practice of teaching individual sounds and the simultaneous absence of any considerations for intelligibility targeted at a broader worldwide community of English speakers. Thirdly, the teaching of pronunciation itself was more likely to take the form of grammatical error correction than a genuine attempt at teaching English sounds. What arises from these findings now is the need to identify the factors that contributed to the creation of this gap.

Our study discovered that the teachers were not able to display much technical knowledge with regard to pronunciation. This includes knowledge of phonetic/phonological issues such as the importance of stress or what makes an L2 speech resemble that of an L1. Similarly, the teachers were not able to show sufficient technical knowledge regarding how to teach pronunciation; as this can be seen in their inability to teach stress patterns. Teacher D's comment on the lack of access to language laboratories as a major obstacle also exemplifies the teachers' limited technical knowledge regarding effective teaching techniques that may not involve high end technologies [cf. 23].

In the same vein, the teachers' struggle in defining an acceptable Malay accent and its intelligibility to other speakers of English was indicative of how research in EIL had not trickled down to inform the pedagogical decisions they made (see also [5]). This is also a lack of technical knowledge.

Nevertheless, the teachers demonstrated a rich understanding of their teaching situation and the demands that were placed on them. They spoke of curricular requirements to be met (although this may be dismissed as an 'exam-oriented' attitude by some). They also placeda lot of emphasis on grammar and to a lesser extent, vocabulary (as well as the four major skills). This is obviously what 'worked' for them given the time constraints and the motivation of their students. A consequence of their practices is a heavy reliance on error correction that was actually aimed at teaching grammar more than pronunciation itself. Although through their technical knowledge of language teaching they knew that pronunciation was important, their practical knowledge of language teaching at this institution led them to de-emphasise its instruction. This is a problem that would not be easily solved given their lack of technical knowledge of pronunciation teaching identified earlier.

Previous studies have similarly shown that the teaching of pronunciation may not take place at all in some ESL classrooms because teachers do not know how to do so [30, 31]. What the findings of this study also

show is that the teachers and researchers were operating on different planes, each with a different set of issues, thus perpetuating the gap. It can also be said that research was addressing issues that did not matter to the teachers, for example in the researchers' constant calls for the teaching of suprasegmentals and EIL features. And, by the same token, the teachers were ignorant of some of the research findings that could prove to be useful to them, for example by being oblivious to what researchers consider an intelligible accent.

What can be done to close the gap? Many have suggested that the onus is on the teacher to bridge the divide [32]. However, acknowledging that teachers possess their own expert knowledge requires researchers to similarly make the effort to learn from them and equally share that responsibility. This observationechoes that of Belcher when she states: "It is interesting that, although there has been much discussion of teachers as researchers and critical consumers of research, there has been less public discussion of the need of language researchers to be, or be informed by, language teachers" [2] (p. 397).

The importance of grammar to the teachers in this study is obviously a fact that cannot be ignored by researchers. Although it may be regarded as a matter of concern for assessment purposes, the fact that these teachers were very committed to teaching it shows that mastery of grammar was an outcome that they genuinely wanted for their students. It is in this aspect that perhaps research on EIL can be fine-tuned to meet the needs of such teachers.

The importance of assessment itself, as evidenced in their comments on time and curricular constraints, is also a reality for teachers that researchers cannot afford to ignore. Because assessments are closely tied to the curricula on which teachers base their instruction, researchers also have to consider how their findings can be incorporated into these existing blueprints for teaching. This is also true because curricular changes do not normally occur at frequent intervals. Rather than asking to change a whole curriculum, it would be more conceivable for researchers to suggest smaller-scale changes to an existing curriculum. Such changes might include demonstrating to the teachers that pronouncing discrete morphemes (e.g. the plural /z/) in verbal communication is just as important as spelling them out in written communication. Communication breakdowns arising from such mispronounced words can then be illustrated using EIL situations. Grammar should be shown as a language aspect that works hand-in-hand with pronunciation (e.g. good pronunciation is most/least necessary for which grammatical expressions?). We believe that this is one useful direction in which EIL research can be extended. Findings from such research will more readily appeal to grammar-focused teachers and over time will lead them to change how they assess speaking. This in turn can lead to an improvement of how pronunciation is viewed and taught. It is also possible that their students' motivation in learning how to pronounce properly will also change for the better due to this.

Attuning research to suit the needs of teachers however, does not diminish the fact that they do need training in teaching pronunciation. For the teachers in this study, teaching suprasegmentals is clearly a skill that they could benefit from. Although EIL research may not emphasise suprasementals, they are still relevant to Malaysians who regularly use English among themselves. When attention to pronunciation begins to take place, research on how to teach suprasegmentals, such as [23], will become more relevant as teachers will need to utilise the information for themselves.

CONCLUSION

Through an investigation of teachers' beliefs and practices, this study has illustrated the gap that can exist between research and practice. It is certainly true that teachers must increase their uptake of research and its findings to build their technical knowledge because it has been proven in this study that there is a place for such knowledge in their practice; however, researchers must equally strive to make their research more relevant to teachers by taking into account the latter's practical knowledge and refine their findings from this perspective. Realising that there is much to learn from each other is a step in the right direction to close the gap.

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