

ASSESSMENT OF THE PRONUNCIATION OF SAUDI STUDENTS OF ENGLISH THROUGH DIFFERENT TYPES OF TESTING PROCEDURES (EXPERIMENTAL STUDY: ALBAHA UNIVERSITY)

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ABSTRACT: *This paper pursues the assessment of the pronunciation of Saudi University students of English through a repertoire of testing methods including oral and paper-pencil tests. Assessment aims to measure the correspondence between these testing methods and the performance of students. An oral test and paper-pencil tests were conducted as two different testing methods to provide data in the topic at issue. Moreover, impressionistic questionnaire was distributed to both teachers and students of English to express their own point of view in relation to these testing procedures. Results revealed that Saudi score higher marks via a paper-pencil test than in an oral test. This suggests that students show poor performance in oral tests probably because the oral-based assessment of English pronunciation demands a more natural conduct from students. The use of different testing methods is more representative of the pronunciation abilities than a single method.*

KEYWORDS: Pursue, Assessments, Oral Test, Pronunciation, Robust, Paper-Pencil Test, Reading Aloud

INTRODUCTION

The assessment procedure relating to students' performance of English pronunciation represents an increasingly important pedagogical issue taking place in EFL classes. Importance takes place because the feedback which obtained from the assessment represents a robust element for the enhancement of both teacher and student performance. This is one reason which motivates language teachers, researchers and applied-linguists to work on pronunciation assessment. Presently, academic and educational institutes exert more effort pursuing the assessment of language tests. Their assessment comprises language abilities such as proficiency level, learning abilities, placement, and academic achievement, grammar, writing and reading skills, throughout different disciplines of language study. However, the content of these tests are mostly unrepresentative (Hakuta and Jacks 2009). Testers do not choose widely from the course they taught covering all the basic skills of a language. Therefore, arguably language tests lack reliability measure the intended skills, etc. which they are supposed to measure. According to Mahmud (2014) Indonesian students have problems answering TOEFL test due to several conflicting reasons. Part of these reasons includes little knowledge of the basic skills of English along with less practice and less motivation. Both language courses and tests do not provide sufficient space pronunciation abilities which play essential role in speech intelligibility. This study attempts to assess the pronunciation of Saudi students of English with respect to the testing procedures of English pronunciation adopted in EFL classes at Albaha University. Focus will be on measuring the performance of students in pronunciation skills obtained via multiple testing procedures including oral, written testing and impressionistic questionnaire. The study wants to provide insight into pronunciation

assessment through different testing procedure which arguably does not receive any serious attention from language researchers (Ali 2011).

The State of the research in the field

The assessment of English pronunciation tests implemented at Albaha University forms the major theme of this study. The study aims to measure the pronunciation of these students via different types of testing procedures. It is supposed that the use of a single type of English pronunciation will not provide reliable assessment of students' performance. The involvement of different types of pronunciation tests of good qualities will give efficient assessment (positive backwash) regarding candidates' performance. The topic is derived from our observations of the reality of the teaching and testing of English language at Albaha University.

Objectives

- To pay more attention to the testing of pronunciation skills in Saudi EFL classrooms.
- Results of the study can give us inspirations into the establishment of appropriate testing and teaching strategies in EFL classes.
- Results represent a good contribution to the development of effective pronunciation EFL students at Albaha University and international circles.

The Creativity of the Study

The creativity of the study bases on the following points:

This paper forms one of the unique studies that attempt to relate the performance of Saudi students at Albaha University in English pronunciation to the use of different testing assessment procedures. Thus, the paper pursues positive feedback about the link between performance of students when they take pronunciation tests via testing different procedures.

The Study Design

Method of data collection

The study adopts integrating methods of pronunciation testing for data collection this is because a single testing procedure per se is not sufficient for the assessment of pronunciation skills. The integrating methods include (i) an oral /production test and (ii) written test (a paper-pencil test). The paper-pencil test is intended to measure depth of pronunciation knowledge of the target participants. Moreover, an impressionistic questionnaire also takes place to provide impressions about the efficiency of testing procedures used for `pronunciation. Extending the repertoire of the testing methods allows us to achieve comprehensive assessment.

Assessment material

This refers to language skills and language aspects to be represented in the assessment of English language in Saudi universities. Pronunciation skills that are taught and tested represent the target material of the assessment. Pronunciation abilities represent the major language ability to be considered in language assessment. It covers sub-skills like pronunciation abilities on word including vowel and consonant and consonant clusters pronunciation and connected speech prosodic abilities include intonation and stress, etc. Material also includes reading aloud tasks, pronunciation diagnostic assessment and oral communication assessment. The purpose behind this is to see how candidates perform intelligible pronunciation Gerhiser & Wrenn (2007) and (see 2016)

Participants

Test takers comprise 20 male students from Albaha University who are preparing for a bachelor degree of English. The target students attended phonetics and phonology course of English as explicit knowledge which extended for 15 weeks. During these courses they received enough training and practice in different types of pronunciation activities.

Description of Assessment Battery

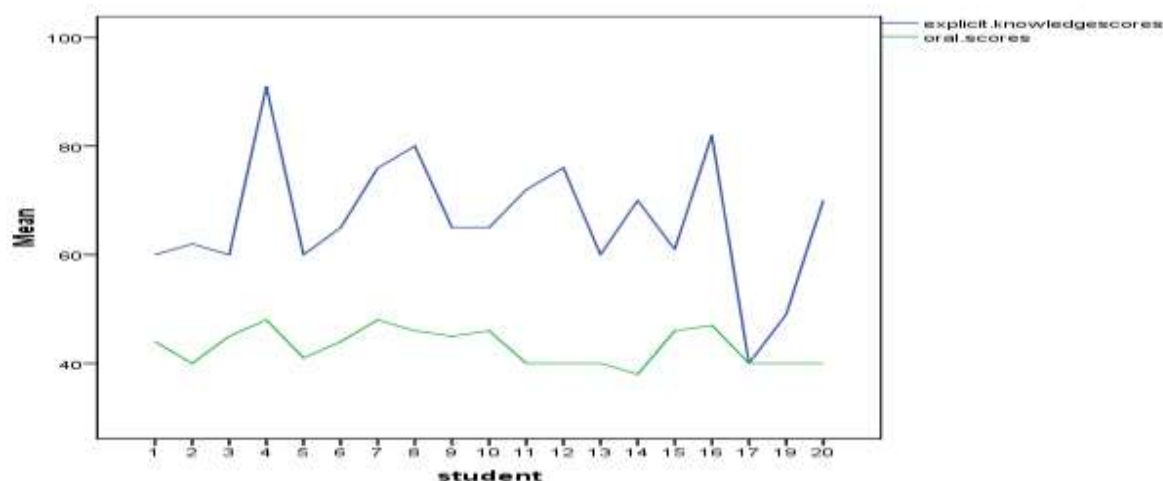
This section describes the assessment process of English pronunciation of this study. In this concern test takers are asked to correspond to two tests (i) an oral /production test and (ii) written test (paper-pencil testing). Test takers are also asked to correspond to impressionistic questionnaire regarding the assessment of English pronunciation. During test administration raters are asked to listen to students' oral performance and to give scores. They are also asked to assess the students' responses of the paper-pencil test. Distribution of the marks ranges between 100 to zero scores in each test. Questionnaires were also distributed to the teachers and students of English to write their impressions about the testing of English pronunciation via oral and paper-pencil testing procedures.

Test specifications

The study considered both direct and indirect testing approaches which form common measures in language testing. Indirect methods may be more common in direct assessment of pronunciation. The tests continue for approximately two hours. Content of pronunciation testing includes items such as (i) short, long and diphthong vowels (ii) consonant sounds, stress and intonations patterns on both separate words and connected speech. Students are asked to perform these tasks orally. On the other hand, in the written test students are asked to correspond to test items like phonemic transcription of English words, homophones, etc. in writing. Importantly for face validity we asked colleagues in the department of English and applied linguistics to check the specifications, content and structure of both oral and paper-pencil tests for scrutiny.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 Performance of Saudi students in oral (oral production) and written tests (explicit knowledge) of English pronunciation



As figure (1) shows Saudi students have high scores in paper-pencil test of explicit knowledge of English pronunciation. Most scores ranges between 60% and 80%. However, students show lower scores in relation to oral production of English pronunciation where the majority of their percentage ranges between 40% and 50%. These results suggest that the students find the correspondence to pronunciation tests that are conducted via oral testing procedure more difficult than pronunciation tests which were conducted via paper-pencil-tests. The results imply that Saudi students find the oral test of English pronunciation more difficult than paper-pencil tests. This is probably due to the nature of oral testing where students are asked to talk in a more natural way as they do in everyday communication. In the same the students asked to stick to accuracy of pronunciation properties such as stress, intonation and pauses, correct production of speech sounds. However, in paper-pencil testing of English pronunciation students find more room think, plan and answer test items. It is possible to say that nature of oral production where different features of spoken language are required forms the reason behind the poor performance in oral testing discussed above. Previous studies emphasized the rationale and reliability of using both oral and paper- pencil testing of English pronunciation (Joughin 2010 and Buck 1989).

Moreover, the computation of correlation coefficient measurement between the performance of the students in oral and paper-pencil tests revealed statistically a positive correlation that is significant at (0.05) ($r = .477$, *appendix1*). This result suggests some association between the performance of the students in the two tests; i.e. when students scores go up in paper-pencil tests, their scores also go up in the oral tests. Importantly the results of the written questionnaires show that around 60 -70% percent of teachers and students at Albaha University support the idea behind the involvement of different testing methods of English pronunciation.

CONCLUSIONS

Assessment of English pronunciation at Saudi EFL classroom requires the involvement of both oral and paper-pencil testing procedures. This is because the results point to some positive association between the performance of the students in the two testing procedures.

The involvement of different testing methods (oral and paper-pencil testing) is more representative of the pronunciation abilities than a single method.

Students tend to score lower scores in the oral tests than in the paper-pencil tests. This is probably because pronunciation testing which was conducted via oral tasks requires more natural and fast performance than in the paper-pencil testing.

Implications

More space should be given to multiple assessment of English pronunciation in EFL classes.

The use of language labs forms crucial equipment boosting pronunciation skills in an EFL class.

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Appendix 1 Correlation coefficient between the performance of Saudi students of English in pronunciations taken through oral and paper-pencil tests

Correlations		explicit. knowledgesc ores	oral.scores
explicit.knowledgescores	Pearson Correlation	1	.477'
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.039
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	2492.737	332.474
	Covariance	138.485	18.471
	N	19	19
oral.scores	Pearson Correlation	.477'	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	332.474	194.947
	Covariance	18.471	10.830
	N	19	19

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).