

Words Without Voice: How Lack of Auditory Support Affects English Diction in Young Learners

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ABSTRACT

This research serves the purpose of scrutinizing how an overemphasis on reading, without similar complementary auditory exposure, affects English diction in children aged 5–16. Overemphasis on reading can hinder balanced language development by neglecting oral and auditory skills, which are essential for real-time communication and fluency (Mahmood, 2022; British Institute, 2024). Drawing from developmental linguistics, speech therapy, and educational psychology, this study examines what kind of pronunciation errors can occur and how it links to lack of auditory exposure along with challenges with fluency in speech in everyday life. It also takes a step towards the analyses of the cognitive impact of limited listening. It showcases the impact of early childhood intervention and challenges in pronunciation accuracy which occur with reading only learning. Lastly, this paper advocates for a well-balanced approach to language education. It speaks about learning by integrating both reading and listening in educational settings to promote confidence and deeper understanding of the English language while increasing the ease with which children speak and go on to express themselves.

Keywords: *English diction, reading, auditory exposure, Language education, pronunciation, fluency*

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition in children is shaped by four core skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Reading builds vocabulary, improves grammar, and strengthens comprehension. It introduces learners to varied sentence structures and contexts, helping them internalize language patterns and develop critical thinking skills essential for academic and everyday communication (Grabe, 2009). Writing supports language acquisition by encouraging learners to organize thoughts, apply grammar rules, and expand vocabulary. Speaking promotes fluency and confidence by requiring learners to use language spontaneously. Listening is crucial for acquiring pronunciation, intonation, and natural speech flow (Levis, 2018). It provides authentic input, helping learners decode meaning and respond appropriately in real-life situations, which is vital for communicative competence (Field, 2008).

Overemphasis on reading in language learning can hinder holistic development. Sole focus on reading may neglect speaking, listening, and writing skills, leading to poor communication abilities (Shanahan, 2016). Learners may struggle with pronunciation, fluency, and real-time comprehension, especially in multilingual contexts (Kormos, 2017). Additionally, reading-heavy instruction risks misdiagnosing language learners with disabilities due to low test scores unrelated to actual cognitive deficits (Tatter, 2018).

While reading builds vocabulary and comprehension, auditory input is essential for accurate pronunciation, rhythm, and fluency. This paper investigates the consequences of reading-only instruction and argues for a multimodal approach to English education that supports both visual and auditory learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening plays a foundational role in English language acquisition, enabling learners to internalize pronunciation, rhythm, and contextual usage (Renukadevi, 2014). Without consistent auditory exposure, learners often struggle with real-time comprehension and spontaneous conversation, as reading alone fails to convey idiomatic expressions and tonal nuances (Field, 2008). Vandergrift and Baker (2015) demonstrated that students engaged in daily listening exercises outperformed their reading-only peers in fluency, pronunciation, and oral confidence, reinforcing the necessity of auditory input for holistic language development.

Neglecting auditory support can lead to persistent pronunciation errors, particularly among children with limited exposure to spoken language. These errors—such as omissions, substitutions, and distortions like “wabbit” for “rabbit”—stem from underdeveloped phonological awareness (Ecalte et al., 2009; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2022). Hearing loss or auditory deprivation further impairs self-monitoring and correction mechanisms, delaying speech development and academic progress (Yoshinaga-Itano, 2003; Moeller et al., 2007). Early intervention is critical to address these challenges and foster effective communication skills (Paul & Roth, 2011).

Children deprived of rich auditory input during early development face compounded difficulties in acquiring fluency. Auditory exposure is essential for building phonological awareness, vocabulary, and syntactic structures (Porcar-Gozalbo et al., 2024). Without it, articulation errors and reduced intelligibility may persist, limiting both expressive and

receptive language abilities (Carrigan & Coppola, 2020). Moreover, the absence of incidental learning—such as overhearing conversations—can hinder natural language acquisition and pragmatic competence (Humphries et al., 2012). Even with assistive technologies like cochlear implants, delayed exposure during critical periods can result in long-term fluency deficits (Kral & Sharma, 2012).

Fluency development also depends on repeated auditory engagement. Rasinski et al. (2011) emphasize that expressive reading and automaticity require consistent listening practice, while Conture and Curlee (2007) note that fluency disorders such as stuttering may worsen without it. The World Health Organization (2023) identifies listening as a key developmental skill linked to emotional regulation, cognitive growth, and social competence. Limited exposure can impair vocabulary expansion, executive functioning, and theory of mind (Kuhl, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research from *Frontiers in Psychology* further shows that children with restricted auditory access struggle with speech rhythm and pragmatic communication, especially in noisy environments (Porcar-Gozalbo et al., 2024).

KEY FINDINGS

Learners who acquire language primarily through reading, without adequate auditory input, often struggle with pronunciation accuracy—especially when encountering irregular or phonetically inconsistent words. Visual decoding alone may lead to incorrect articulation, as learners internalize faulty phonological representations, resulting in persistent mispronunciations and diminished oral fluency (Nation & Snowling, 1998).

In contrast, students with consistent auditory exposure tend to exhibit clearer pronunciation, improved rhythm, and more natural speech. These gains are attributed to increased familiarity with native speech patterns, including intonation and stress, which are difficult to grasp through reading alone (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Early auditory input, particularly between ages 5 and 10, significantly enhances speech clarity and fluency. Exposure during this critical developmental window fosters phonological awareness and supports the natural acquisition of rhythm and intonation patterns (Kuhl, 2010; Goswami, 2015). This foundation contributes to more accurate and confident spoken language in later stages of learning.

DISCUSSION

Building on previous insights, it is evident that auditory factors play a pivotal role in shaping accurate pronunciation, fluid fluency, and comprehensive language understanding. Learners who rely predominantly on reading often struggle with articulating irregular or phonetically inconsistent words. In the absence of auditory reinforcement, they may internalize incorrect phonological representations, leading to persistent mispronunciations and impaired speech rhythm (Nation & Snowling, 1998).

In contrast, learners exposed to auditory input—particularly native speech—demonstrate more accurate pronunciation, improved intonation, and greater fluency. This advantage stems from their familiarity with authentic speech patterns, stress, and rhythm, which are difficult to acquire through text alone (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Crucially, the timing of auditory exposure significantly influences outcomes.

Input during the early developmental window—particularly between ages 5 and 10—enhances phonological awareness and supports the natural acquisition of prosodic features such as rhythm and intonation (Kuhl, 2010; Goswami, 2015). This early foundation contributes to long-term improvements in speech clarity and fluency, underscoring the importance of auditory-rich environments during formative years.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should investigate the comparative impact of auditory-rich versus reading-heavy instruction on English language acquisition. Prior studies show that early and consistent auditory input significantly improves pronunciation, fluency, and phonological awareness (Kuhl, 2010; Goswami, 2015). A focused comparison between diminished auditory aid and holistic listening-based instruction could refine pedagogical strategies and support more balanced language development. For future research purposes below is a comparative study structure, which could contribute to an empirical and observational method of research.

This study idea proposes a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of instructional modality on English language acquisition among early learners. Specifically, it compares two groups: one receiving predominantly reading-based instruction with minimal auditory input (Group A), and another engaged in listening-centered instruction supplemented by reading and speaking activities (Group B). This design enables both statistical analysis of language outcomes and qualitative insights into learner experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of how different modalities influence fluency and pronunciation.

The study will involve 60 students aged 7 to 10, selected from English-medium schools in New Delhi, India. Participants will be evenly divided into two groups based on baseline proficiency tests to ensure comparable starting levels. Schools will be chosen to reflect similar academic profiles, minimizing external variability and ensuring the reliability of comparative results.

To measure outcomes, the study will employ a range of instruments. Pronunciation accuracy will be assessed using standardized phonological tools (Nation & Snowling, 1998). Fluency will be evaluated using a rating scale adapted from Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), focusing on speech rate, rhythm, and intonation. Listening comprehension tasks will be drawn from Vandergrift and Goh's framework (2012). Additionally, qualitative interviews with teachers and students will explore perceptions of learning effectiveness and engagement.

The procedure will begin with a pre-test assessing pronunciation, fluency, and listening comprehension. Over a 12-week intervention period, Group A will receive reading-heavy instruction with limited audio materials, while Group B will engage in daily listening exercises such as storytelling, dialogues, and audio-based vocabulary drills. A post-test identical to the pre-test will be administered to measure progress. Teachers will also maintain weekly observation logs documenting student engagement, confidence, and spontaneous speech use.

Data analysis will include both quantitative and qualitative methods. Paired t-tests and ANOVA will be used to compare pre- and post-test scores across groups, identifying statistically significant differences. Thematic analysis of interviews and observation logs will reveal patterns in learner behavior, instructional

impact, and engagement levels, enriching the quantitative findings with contextual depth.

Ethical considerations will be strictly observed. Informed consent will be obtained from parents and school authorities, and participants' identities will be kept confidential. The study will undergo review and approval by an institutional ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

Drawing on prior research (Kuhl, 2010; Goswami, 2015), it is anticipated that Group B will demonstrate greater improvement in pronunciation, fluency, and communicative confidence. The study aims to validate the importance of auditory-rich environments in early English education and challenge the overreliance on passive reading, ultimately contributing to more effective language pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the critical importance of auditory input in developing accurate pronunciation and oral fluency in English language learners. Sole reliance on reading, without sufficient auditory reinforcement, often leads to mispronunciations—especially with irregular or phonetically inconsistent words—due to faulty phonological encoding (Nation & Snowling, 1998). In contrast, learners exposed to spoken language benefit from clearer articulation, improved rhythm, and more natural speech patterns, as they internalize native intonation and stress cues (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Notably, early auditory exposure during the ages of 5 to 10 significantly enhances phonological awareness and lays a strong foundation for fluent speech in later years (Kuhl, 2010; Goswami, 2015). These findings underscore the need for balanced language instruction that integrates both reading

and listening components to support comprehensive language acquisition.

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