

Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

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In the current age of globalization, acquiring intelligible English pronunciation is considered important for achieving successful communication. However, pronunciation does not receive as much attention as other aspects of second language acquisition and has not been integrated into ESL and EFL teaching. Several surveys have been conducted in English-speaking countries to examine ESL and EFL instructors' teaching practices and attitudes toward teaching pronunciation. These studies showed that many instructors saw teaching pronunciation as important, but that they needed more training opportunities. The present study examines college-level English pronunciation teaching in Japan. College English instructors working in Japan were surveyed to discover their teaching practices and attitudes toward teaching pronunciation. The results indicate that instructors were relatively confident in their knowledge and ability to teach pronunciation. However, it is suggested that more development should be done with pronunciation-related curriculum for English education in Japan.

国際化が進む現代社会において、対話者に通じる英語の発音を習得することは円滑なコミュニケーションを進めるために重要である。しかし、発音は第二言語習得の他の領域ほど注意が向けられていないのが現状である。英語教員の発音指導の実態と発音教育に対する意識についての調査が英語圏で行われてきているが、多くの教員が発音教育の重要性を感じており、指導方法の訓練の機会を求めていることが報告されている。本論文は、日本の大学の英語教員対象のアンケート調査をもとに、発音教育の実態と教員の意識を考察するものである。調査の結果、教員は発音教育に関する知識や指導能力に対して比較的信頼を持っている一方で、発音教育が組み込まれたカリキュラムの更なる充実が日本の英語教育において求められることが示された。

Acquiring intelligible English pronunciation is considered crucial to successful communication in the current age of globalization. For the past three decades, there

has been a renewed interest in pronunciation in second language learning and teaching, and its role and importance have been increasingly recognized (Couper, 2003, 2006; Gilbert, 2010; Isaacs, 2009; Pennington, 1998). However, pronunciation remains peripheral in applied linguistics and does not receive as much attention as other aspects of second language acquisition. It has been pointed out that pronunciation has not been integrated into ESL and EFL teaching and that many teachers have received little or no training in teaching pronunciation (Gilbert, 2010).

Several surveys have been conducted in English-speaking countries to examine ESL instructors' teaching practices and attitudes towards teaching pronunciation. Burgess and Spencer (2000) surveyed instructors in the United Kingdom. They found that the instructors recognized the importance of suprasegmentals but found them difficult to teach. The results also indicated that integrated pronunciation instruction and the controlled practice of speaking, in which attention may be focused on pronunciation, were regarded as important by instructors. Burgess and Spencer argued for strong links between the fields of pronunciation teaching and language teacher education and training.

Macdonald (2002) conducted interviews with eight ESL instructors in Australia who found pronunciation a difficult or problematic area to teach. They indicated a need for a better curriculum, more suitable teaching and learning materials, and an assessment framework to measure students' ability and progress in pronunciation learning. Burns (2006) conducted a survey in Australia with ESL instructors. The instructors reported teaching segmentals more frequently than suprasegmentals. Burns also found variability in instructors' knowledge about pronunciation features and their confidence in teaching them. In addition, most instructors expressed a desire for more professional development support.

Breitkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) surveyed ESL instructors in Canada. They found that most instructors favored a mixture of segmental and suprasegmental instruction. Many instructors also had a desire for training in teaching pronunciation and a need for more materials and pronunciation-related curriculum development.

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

Moreover, based on Breikreutz et al.'s study, Foote, Holtby, and Derwing (2011) conducted a follow-up survey with ESL instructors across Canada. The results indicated that there had been few differences in instructors' responses over the 10 years. More training opportunities had become available, but they were still not enough according to many of the respondents. Instructors also reported focusing slightly more on segmentals than suprasegmentals, unlike the survey conducted 10 years earlier.

A survey on teaching pronunciation was conducted with EFL teachers in non-English speaking countries as well. Henderson (2013) reported an English pronunciation teaching survey that instructors in 10 European countries had jointly prepared. The results indicated that many instructors were not satisfied with the training they had received for teaching pronunciation; however, they had independently developed necessary skills and were relatively confident in their assessments of their learners' skills.

These studies showed that many instructors saw teaching pronunciation as important, but that they needed more training opportunities. English education in Japan is no exception. Researchers have pointed out that in Japan English pronunciation has not received much attention in secondary education and that not many English teachers have been trained in teaching pronunciation (Arimoto, 2005; Ota, 2012). Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt (2001) reported that pronunciation was not emphasized in college classrooms either. Although the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced English education reform plans for elementary and secondary education, which were designed to develop students' well-balanced English language skills and communication skills (MEXT, 2011, 2014), no specific proposal concerning pronunciation instruction was included. Moreover, in higher education, MEXT did not integrate pronunciation instruction into the internationalization policy (MEXT, 2015). How English pronunciation is taught in college classrooms, therefore, seems to depend on individual instructors.

In the light of these situations, the present study targeted college-level English pronunciation teaching in Japan. College English instructors working in Japan were surveyed to discover their teaching practices and attitudes toward teaching pronunciation.

Method Survey

The survey contained 33 questions that were divided into three sections: teaching experience and practice, beliefs and attitudes, and background information (see Appendix). Multiple-choice questions, yes/no questions, checklists, and Likert scales

were included. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was delivered using the online web tool SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>).

Participants

In total, 53 individuals responded to the survey, and 51 of them completed it. Participants were solicited via personal contacts, a SIG meeting, and the mailing list of a professional association. Many of the participants were teaching at colleges or universities in the Kanto region of Japan; some were in the Kansai region of Japan.

Results

Background Information

Out of a total 51 respondents, 22 were native English speakers, and 29 were nonnative English speakers, including 26 native Japanese speakers. Twenty-six respondents (51%) held a master's degree in TESL/TESOL or SLA (English focused), and six respondents (12%) held a doctorate degree in the same fields. Ten respondents (20%) held a master's degree in English/English literature, and three respondents (6%) held a doctorate degree in the same fields. Four respondents (8%) held a master's degree in linguistics (other than English focused SLA), and five respondents (10%) held a doctorate degree in the same field.

Teaching Experience

More than half of the participants (57%) had been teaching more than 15 years. The others were in the following categories: 3 years or less experience (4%), more than 3 years to 7 years (10%), more than 7 years to 11 years (18%), and more than 11 years to 15 years (12%). A variety of English courses had been taught by the participants. The courses include integrated English (77%), reading (67%), writing (67%), speaking (65%), and listening (63%). In addition, 12% had taught general education pronunciation courses, and 8% had taught specialized pronunciation courses.

Pedagogical Training

Fifty-seven percent of the participants had taken a phonetics or phonology course at university, 24% had received training at a seminar or a workshop, and 20% had taken a pedagogical pronunciation training course at university. Eighteen percent indicated that they had received no training. As for currently available pronunciation-specific training,

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

18% indicated that some training was available at their institutions or in their areas. However, 47% indicated that training was not available to them, and 35% were not sure.

The responses to the question, "Would you like to receive more training in teaching pronunciation?" were *definitely yes* (20%), *probably yes* (34%), *neither yes nor no* (22%), *probably no* (14%), and *definitely no* (10%). Thus, more than half (54%) indicated that they would like to receive more training in teaching pronunciation, and about a quarter (24%) indicated that they would not like to receive more training. Comparing native English speakers' responses and native Japanese speakers' responses, more Japanese respondents expressed a desire for pronunciation-specific training. Sixty-two percent of them indicated that they would like to receive more training (*definitely yes*: 27%, *probably yes*: 35%), and 38% of English respondents would like to receive more training (*definitely yes*: 0%, *probably yes*: 38%).

Current Teaching Practice

Curriculum Requirement

Sixteen percent reported that pronunciation lessons were required in the English curricula of their colleges/universities. However, 67% reported that pronunciation lessons were not required in their institutions, and 18% were not sure. This shows that pronunciation is not in a central and integrated position within the curricula in many colleges or universities.

Class Time Spent on Pronunciation

As for the amount of class time spent on pronunciation, the participants selected rough percentages of time they spent on pronunciation in speaking, listening, and integrated English classes. As shown in Table 1, in all of speaking, listening, and integrated English classes, more than half (speaking: 53%, listening: 50%, integrated: 71%) of teachers spent 10% or less than 10% of class time on pronunciation.

Table 1. Class Time Spent on Pronunciation

Class	None	10% or less	11% to 20%	21% to 30%	31% to 40%	41% to 50%	51% or more
Speaking	8	53	33	8	0	0	0
Listening	13	50	25	10	0	3	0
Integrated	12	71	17	0	0	0	0

Note. Number of responses: Speaking = 40, Listening = 40, Integrated = 42.

What did the respondents think about the time they spent on pronunciation? The survey results show that not many respondents thought the time spent was enough to improve their students' pronunciation. Thirty-nine percent thought the time would improve their students' pronunciation *somewhat*, and 22% thought it would do *a little bit*. The others thought it would do *a great deal* (7%), *quite a bit* (20%), or *not at all* (13%).

It should also be noted that responses between native English speakers and native Japanese speakers differed. As shown in Table 2 and Table 3, native Japanese speakers spent more time on pronunciation instruction than native English speakers.

Table 2. Percent of Class Time Spent on Pronunciation by Native English Speakers

Class	None	10% or less	11% to 20%	21% to 30%	31% to 40%	41% to 50%	51% or more
Speaking	11	61	28	0	0	0	0
Listening	24	59	12	6	0	0	0
Integrated	29	65	6	0	0	0	0

Note. Number of responses: Speaking = 18, Listening = 17, Integrated = 17.

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

Table 3. Percent of Class Time Spent on Pronunciation by Native Japanese Speakers

Class	None	10% or less	11% to 20%	21% to 30%	31% to 40%	41% to 50%	51% or more
Speaking	5	45	35	15	0	0	0
Listening	5	38	38	14	0	5	0
Integrated		77	23	0	0	0	0

Note. Number of responses: Speaking = 20, Listening = 21, Integrated = 22.

Aspects of Pronunciation Taught

Fifty-nine percent of respondents reported teaching both segmentals and suprasegmentals, and 47% spent similar amounts of time on both aspects. Thirty percent spent more time on suprasegmentals, and 23% spent more time on segmentals. Eighteen percent reported teaching only suprasegmentals, and 12% reported teaching only segmentals. Eleven percent indicated that they did not teach either, or they were not sure.

As for the aspect(s) they were confident in teaching, 68% were confident in teaching both segmentals and suprasegmentals, 16% were confident in teaching suprasegmentals, and 10% were confident in teaching segmentals. These results indicate that a majority of respondents were confident in teaching both aspects.

Approaches and Activities

As shown in Table 4, five popular approaches and activities used by the participants were repetition (83%), reading aloud (73%), shadowing (63%), minimal pair exercises (56%), and communicative practice (54%). Native Japanese speakers reported using explicit approaches more than did native English speakers. Forty percent of Japanese respondents reported using diagrams or photographs of articulatory organs and teaching phonetic symbols. Native English speakers' responses were *diagrams/photographs of articulatory organs* (20%) and *teaching phonetic symbols* (15%).

Table 4. Approaches and Activities Used to Teach Pronunciation

Activity or approach	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Repetition	83	80	84
Reading aloud	73	60	84
Shadowing	63	55	68
Minimal pair exercise	56	45	64
Communicative practice	54	45	60
Articulatory explanations	46	40	56
Diagrams/photographs of articulatory organs	29	20	40
Teaching phonetic symbols	27	15	40
Kinesthetic reinforcement	23	25	24
Others	10	15	4

Note. All (n = 48); Native English speakers (n = 20); Native Japanese speakers (n = 25).

Resources/Materials

Sixty-seven percent of participants reported using general skills textbooks to teach pronunciation. Other resources or materials used by the participants are as follows: videos (31%), Internet resources (27%), pronunciation-specific textbooks (24%), and pronunciation software (9%).

Thirty percent thought it easy to find resources and materials, but 28% thought it difficult to find them. The others thought it neither easy nor difficult to find resources and materials.

Beliefs and Attitudes

The participants were asked to respond to a series of questions to examine their beliefs about and attitudes toward teaching pronunciation.

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

Importance of pronunciation

As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, the participants generally recognized the importance of pronunciation. Thirty-six percent felt pronunciation extremely or very important in relation to other English skills, and 35% felt pronunciation extremely or very important to successful communication.

Native Japanese speakers placed importance especially on pronunciation. More than half of Japanese respondents (53%) felt pronunciation extremely or very important in relation to other English skills and to successful communication.

Table 5. How Important Do You Feel Pronunciation Is in Relation to Other English Skills?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely important	10	0	15
Very important	26	10	38
Moderately important	48	62	38
Slightly important	14	24	8
Not important at all	2	5	0

Note. All ($n = 50$); Native English speakers ($n = 21$); Native Japanese speakers ($n = 26$).

Table 6. How Important Is Pronunciation to Successful Communication?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely important	8	0	15
Very important	27	5	38
Moderately important	55	73	46
Slightly important	8	18	0
Not important at all	2	5	-

Note. All ($n = 51$); Native English speakers ($n = 22$); Native Japanese speakers ($n = 26$).

It should be noted that Matsuura et al. (2001) reported different results concerning the importance of pronunciation. They reported that only 68.3% of the teachers agreed that pronunciation is an important aspect of teaching communication although 91% of the students agreed with the importance of learning correct pronunciation. Matsuura et al. suggested the trends in EFL education at that time focused on the development of communicative competence through integrated skills rather than isolated skills such as pronunciation. In the present second language learning and teaching situation, the importance of explicit pronunciation instruction is becoming more recognized, which seems to have led to the present findings.

Explicit Instruction and Communicative Practice

Table 7 shows that almost half (48%) of the teachers thought explicit pronunciation instruction was very important; 8% thought that the features and rules of pronunciation should be explicitly taught to students *a great deal*, and 40% thought that they should be taught *quite a bit*. Moreover, native Japanese respondents especially recognized the importance of explicit pronunciation instruction; a majority of them selected *a great deal* (12%) or *quite a bit* (54%).

Table 7. To What Extent Do You Think That the Features and Rules of Pronunciation Should Be Explicitly Taught to Students?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
A great deal	8	5	12
Quite a bit	40	19	54
Somewhat	42	52	35
A little bit	8	19	0
Not at all	2	5	0

Note. All ($n = 50$); Native English speakers ($n = 21$); Native Japanese speakers ($n = 26$).

As for communicative practice, Table 8 shows that a majority of the respondents thought it very effective for improving students' pronunciation (*a great deal*: 13%, *quite a bit*: 46%). There was not much difference between native English speakers' responses and native Japanese speakers' responses.

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

Table 8. To What Extent Do You Think That Communicative Practice Is More Effective for Improving Students' Pronunciation?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
A great deal	13	11	12
Quite a bit	46	42	46
Somewhat	27	26	31
A little bit	15	21	12
Not at all	0	0	0

Note. All (n = 48); Native English speakers (n = 19); Native Japanese speakers (n = 26).

Self-Evaluation

Table 9 shows that almost half (49%) had high confidence (*extremely confident*: 12%, *quite confident*: 37%) in their knowledge of English phonetics and phonology. More native English speakers expressed high confidence in their knowledge (*extremely confident*: 14%, *quite confident*: 43%) than did native Japanese speakers (*extremely confident*: 12%, *quite confident*: 24%).

Table 9. How Confident Are You in Your Knowledge of the Phonetics and Phonology of English?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely confident	12	14	12
Quite confident	37	43	24
Somewhat confident	27	14	40
Slightly confident	22	24	24
Not confident at all	2	5	0

Note. All (n = 49); Native English speakers (n = 21); Native Japanese speakers (n = 25).

On the other hand, as shown in Table 10, not many respondents were confident in their knowledge of Japanese phonetics and phonology. Only 20% had high confidence

(i.e., *extremely/quite confident*), and 22% (native English speakers: 19%, native Japanese speakers: 23%) indicated that they were not confident in their knowledge at all.

Table 10. How Confident Are You in Your Knowledge of the Phonetics and Phonology of Japanese?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely confident	8	5	12
Quite confident	12	19	8
Somewhat confident	38	24	50
Slightly confident	20	33	8
Not confident at all	22	19	23

Note. All (n = 50); Native English speakers (n = 21); Native Japanese speakers (n = 26).

Moreover, Table 11 shows that almost half (48%) of the teachers had high confidence (i.e., *extremely/quite confident*) in their ability to teach English pronunciation. More native English speakers were confident in their pronunciation instruction than native Japanese speakers.

Table 11. How Confident Are You in Your Ability to Teach English Pronunciation?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely confident	12	19	8
Quite confident	36	38	27
Somewhat confident	36	24	50
Slightly confident	12	14	12
Not confident at all	4	5	4

Note. All (n = 50); Native English speakers (n = 21); Native Japanese speakers (n = 26).

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

Finally, as shown in Table 12, a majority of respondents (67%) had high confidence (i.e., *extremely/quite confident*) in their own English pronunciation skills. Native Japanese speakers' responses showed relatively high levels of self-confidence in their own pronunciation skills (*extremely confident*: 8%, *quite confident*: 35%).

Table 12. How Confident Are You in Your Own Pronunciation Skills?

Response	All (%)	Native English speakers (%)	Native Japanese speakers (%)
Extremely confident	24	45	8
Quite confident	43	50	35
Somewhat confident	25	5	42
Slightly confident	6	0	12
Not confident at all	2	0	4

Note. All ($n = 51$); Native English speakers ($n = 22$); Native Japanese speakers ($n = 26$).

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of the present survey of teaching pronunciation indicate that:

1. Pronunciation does not receive much attention and is not integrated into English education in many colleges and universities. Pronunciation lessons are not generally required in curricula, and pronunciation-specific training is not available to many instructors despite their desire for more training in teaching pronunciation.
2. A majority of instructors teach both segmentals and suprasegmentals, and common pronunciation teaching approaches include repetition, reading aloud, and shadowing. Instructors are relatively confident in their knowledge of English phonetics and phonology and their ability to teach pronunciation. However, the time spent on pronunciation instruction is limited, and many instructors do not think it is enough time to improve students' pronunciation skills.
3. There seem to be some differences in teaching approaches and attitudes between native English instructors and native Japanese instructors. In general, native Japanese instructors think both explicit instruction and communicative practice are effective, and more of them use explicit approaches to teach pronunciation. On the other hand, native English instructors generally favor communicative practice to teach

pronunciation. In addition, native Japanese instructors especially feel the importance of pronunciation in learning English.

Based on these findings, pronunciation-related curricula should be developed for English education in Japan. Pronunciation-specific training and professional development support should also be provided to instructors.

It is also recommended that instructors consistently integrate pronunciation into their general English classes and spend more time on pronunciation instruction. Teaching approaches commonly used by the respondents were repetition, reading aloud, and shadowing. However, in order to improve students' pronunciation more effectively, explicit pronunciation instruction should also be given to students. Researchers have claimed that explicit instruction can help students to notice the differences between native speakers' pronunciation and their own pronunciation and raise their level of awareness of their own phonological acquisition process (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Pennington, 1998).

Moreover, it is recommended that instructors gain more knowledge of Japanese phonetics and phonology. The survey results show that few respondents were confident in their knowledge of Japanese phonetics and phonology. Researchers have claimed that L1 transfer is prevalent in phonology (Ioup, 1984; Osburne, 1996) and that listeners process spoken language in ways that are tailored to suit the phonological structure of their native language (Murty, Otake, & Cutler, 2007). In particular, the suprasegmental features of Japanese are very different from those of English. Understanding Japanese phonetics and phonology would help to teach pronunciation to Japanese students (Koike, 2014).

Finally, the survey results suggest differences in teaching approaches and attitudes between native English instructors and native Japanese instructors. More Japanese instructors feel the importance of pronunciation in learning English and use explicit pronunciation instruction. One reason for this difference is that Japanese instructors have the advantage of being native speakers of Japanese; they can give instruction more explicitly by using the students' first language. On the other hand, many native English instructors do not seem to expect a high standard of students' pronunciation skills. They seem to focus more on fluency and automaticity in teaching pronunciation.

Conclusion

This study focused on college English instructors' teaching practices and attitudes towards pronunciation teaching. Although the number of survey respondents was not large, the results may help us understand the situation and problems of college-level English pronunciation teaching in Japan. Further research, however, should be done to expand

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

the investigation through the examination of students' beliefs and attitudes toward pronunciation learning. I believe that a pronunciation-related curriculum should be further developed to help instructors improve students' pronunciation skills effectively.

Bio Data

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Appendix

Survey Questions

Teaching Experience and Practice

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. What kind of pronunciation-specific training did you receive?
3. Is any pronunciation-specific training currently available to you at your institution or in your area?
4. Are pronunciation lessons required in the curriculum of your university's general education English courses?

Koike: Survey of English Pronunciation Teaching: College Teachers' Practices and Attitudes

5. What English course(s) have you been teaching?
6. In your Speaking courses (if applicable), how much time do you spend on pronunciation?
7. In your Listening courses (if applicable), how much time do you spend on pronunciation?
8. In your Integrated English courses (if applicable), how much time do you spend on pronunciation?
9. Which aspect(s) of pronunciation (segmentals, suprasegmentals) do you teach?
10. If you chose both segmentals and suprasegmentals in Question 9, which aspect do you spend more time on?
11. To what extent do you think that the time you spend is enough to improve your students' pronunciation skills?
12. Which approaches/activities do you use to teach pronunciation?
13. What resources/materials are you using to teach pronunciation?
14. Is it easy to find the resources/materials you need to teach pronunciation?

Beliefs and Attitudes

15. How important do you feel pronunciation is in relation to other English skills?
16. How important is pronunciation to successful communication?
17. To what extent do you think that the features and rules of pronunciation should be explicitly taught to students?
18. To what extent do you think that communicative practice (contextualized instruction) is more effective for improving students' pronunciation?
19. How confident are you in your knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of English?
20. How confident are you in your knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of Japanese?
21. How confident are you in your ability to teach English pronunciation?
22. Which aspect(s) of pronunciation (segmentals, suprasegmentals) are you confident in teaching?
23. How confident are you in your own pronunciation skills?
24. Would you like to receive more training in teaching pronunciation?

Background Information

25. What is your native language?
26. What was your major for your bachelor's degree?
27. In which country did you receive your bachelor's degree?
28. If you have more than one bachelor's degree, please write the major and the country below.
29. What was your major for your master's degree? (if applicable)
30. In which country did you receive your master's degree? (if applicable)
31. If you have more than one master's degree, please write the major and the country below.
32. What was your major for your doctorate degree? (if applicable)
33. In which country did you receive your doctorate degree? (if applicable)