

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.2., 2017 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SEGMENTAL AWARENESS OF PAKISTANI ELEMENTARY  
ENGLISH TEACHERS

GHULAMULLAH<sup>1</sup>, Dr. MOHD HILMI BIN HAMZAH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph. D Candidate, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia  
Email: gmullah@yahoo.co.uk

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia  
Email: hilmihamzah@uum.edu.my



GHULAMULLAH

ABSTRACT

The current study is a descriptive study to investigate the extent to which Pakistani Elementary English School teachers have awareness about the sound system of English language. For this purpose, 200 Elementary English School teachers were randomly selected out of 1917 teachers who were teaching in different schools. The data was collected using two tools: structured interviews and questionnaire. Every teacher was interviewed about eight English phonetic symbols of sounds: /i:, e, a:, ɒ, u:, θ, ð, ʒ/. The questionnaire was distributed to explore the teachers' academic and professional education and to find out their opinions about the usefulness of these segments. Although most of teachers were interested in studying the segments, they never studied them properly and they were unable to recognize the symbols.

**Key Words:** pronunciation, phonetic symbols, vowel and consonant sounds, L1 effect, intelligibility

1. INTRODUCTION

English has always been enjoying a prestigious status all over the world as a means of communication among different fields of life (Feng, 2011). Internationally, English language has its variations in the shape of world Englishes (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Thus, communication competence has become a need of this modern era. Heywood (2000) contends that most of the communication is carried out through oral and aural skills, but these skills have always been ignored in educational setup throughout the world (Gambhir, 1995; Saraswati, 2004; Wolff, 2010). Alam (2013), Anwar, Ihsan, Hayat and Pevez, (2016) express that, in Pakistan, too, speaking and listening are severely ignored. This condition causes issues regarding intelligibility and comprehensibility. For example, Rehman, and Bukhari (2012) find that Pakistani Pashto speakers face problems pronouncing the five English consonants /f, v, θ, ð, and ʒ/ due to mother tongue effects. Khan and Qadir (2012) argue that Pakistani Pharai speakers also encounter hurdles in pronouncing the above said sounds.

There are many reasons for the marginalization of pronunciation of English in Pakistan. One of them is incompetence of English language teachers. Bashiruddin and Qayyum (2014) find out that 89% English teachers in Pakistan are not qualified while 11% are qualified in English literature but not in English language teaching. Gul and Aziz (2015) conducted research in three big cities of Pakistan, Lahore, Rawalpindi and

Mianwali, and found that most of the English teachers were incompetent in oral skills. Nawab (2012) too presents the same results in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Kachru (2003) and Khan (1997) point out that another reason for inefficiency of Pakistani English teachers and speakers in oral and aural skills is discrepancy between the sounds of the local Pakistani languages and English language. Urdu (national language of Pakistan) comprises thirty seven consonants and ten vowels sounds while English has twenty vowels sounds and twenty four consonant sounds. For example, phonemes like /ص/س، ث/ (Ali & Ijaz, 2009, p. 16) stand for only their one counterfeit sound /s/ in English. Likewise Urdu phonemes; /ض، ز، ذ، ظ/ have only their one counterfeit sound English Phoneme /z/. Local languages (Rehman, Khan & Bukhari, 2012; Khan & Qadir, 2012; Malghani & Bano, 2014) as mother tongue negatively affect the Pakistani speakers while speaking English.

All the above stated studies have diagnosed the problems about speaking and listening skills. That is, these problems may be potentially related to the lack of training of the teachers of English or the difference between the sounds of regional Pakistani languages and English language. However, all these studies ignored some other genuine reasons that affect the intelligibility and comprehensibility of English teachers as well as learners. Albeit all these studied were intended to remove the stated above reasons yet more work is needed to dig out the factors that harm intelligibility and comprehensibility. The current study focuses on the possible cause of the inefficiency of Pakistani English teachers by hypothesizing that:

*Pakistani English teachers are unaware of English language segments.*

In addition, the current study suggests a remedy to remove the hurdle in attaining the target intelligibility and comprehensibility with the assumption that:

Pakistani English teachers think that the teaching of segments can benefit in teaching pronunciation. Many studies conducted by different researchers support the assumption of the current study. For example, Saito (2007) assumed that lack of awareness of English segments fosters intelligibility issues in Japan. Although he chose only one vowel sound (/æ/), the results of his study supported his assumption. Further, Saito (2011) expanded his circle of teaching segments to eight vowel sounds: /æ, f, v, θ, ð, w, l, ô/. In this study, he did not teach these sounds. Instead, he asked the subjects of his study able to compare these sounds with their Japanese counterpart sounds; /a, φ, b, s, z/. Similarly, Gordon, Darcy, and Ewert (2013) intervened the subjects of their study with four vowel sounds /i, ι, æ, ε/ in English.

Thus, the purpose of this current study is to explore whether English teachers in Pakistan are aware of the sound system of English language. If an English language teacher is unfamiliar with this system, then how can he/she teach to his/her learners all about the phonetic and phonological structure of the language? English language has 26 alphabets while there are 44 sounds with less transparency because there is little correspondence between letters and sounds (Cook & Cook, 2016). A transparent language refers to a language “in which the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes is univocal: and only one grapheme corresponds to a phoneme and vice versa” (International Bureau of Education- UNESCO, 2017, p. 11) On the other hand, Urdu is a more transparent language than English itself. Twenty eight alphabets of Urdu out of 38 are borrowed from Arabic alphabets. Burckhardt (2009), Reid (2009) and Lamoureaux (2011) express that there is a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes and between letters and sounds in Arabic. Other 10 letters of Urdu are probably borrowed from Sanskrit as a being Pro-Indo European language with the fact that Sanskrit has a fairly correspondence between written symbols and spoken language (Jha, 2010). Thus, it can be said that Urdu has a fairly transparent correspondence system between letters and sounds. As a result, a Pakistani English teacher may mispronounce the English letters imitating Urdu letters that correspond to their sounds. But, in English, one letter represents many sounds such as the letter “o” which has many vowel sounds /ɔ, ɒ, ə, ə, ʌ, ɑ:; ɔ:/ and the letter “d” which has the consonant sounds /ð, d̪, d, d/.

The findings of the current study would not only emphasize on further investigation on the discussed problems but also indicates that the Pakistani teachers of English must be trained on the segments of English as well as the phonetics and phonology of English language so that they become able to pronounce English word correctly and can teach their students accurately and purposefully with better outcomes.

## 2. Methodology

Mix method approach was used to collect both the quantitative and qualitative data for the study. To collect the quantitative data, a questionnaire was used and the qualitative data was collected through a structured interview using closed-ended questions (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The population of the study was all the Elementary English teachers of District Bahawalpur Punjab, Pakistan. The number of these teachers were 1917 who were teaching in 1223 schools which were scattered in the whole region of District Bahawalpur. Two hundred Elementary English Teachers were randomly selected as a sample for the study. The whole sample was intended for interview and filling the questionnaire. However, practically, only 137 out of 200 sample were interviewed and filled the questionnaire.

### 2.1. Data Collection

The data was collected using two methods; interviews and questionnaire. Two research hypotheses (Gay, 1996) were postulated;

- I. Pakistani English teachers are unaware of English language segments
- II. Pakistani English teachers think that the teaching of segments can benefit in teaching pronunciation

To approve or disapprove the former hypothesis, structured interviews were conducted for data collection. Respectively, five English front, middle and back vowels and two dental and one post alveolar consonants segments /i:, e, a:, o, u:, θ, ð, and ʒ/ (see appendix A) were presented to the Elementary English school Teachers. Then, the teachers were asked to see these segments and whether they recognize them. The researcher rated the awareness of the teachers about the segments as “recognized” and “not recognized”. Then, a closed-ended questionnaire was delivered (see appendix B). The questionnaire had to be filled only by choosing the options of “No or Yes”. The questionnaire comprised 9 questions: the first two questions were related to their qualification and the rest of the questions were about whether they ever studied these symbols and whether these symbols can benefit their teaching proficiency. One hundred thirty seven teachers were interviewed and filled the questionnaire.

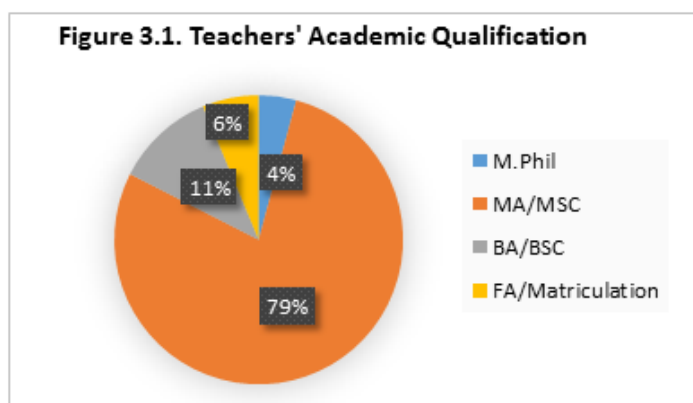
### 2.2. Data Analysis

Participants were asked to identify the selected eight English phonetic sounds to find out whether they could recognize the symbols individually. The purpose of the study was explained to all participants. The researcher rated every subject using a two-point scale: “recognized symbol” and “not recognized symbol”. Then, all the responses were categorized according to the teachers’ awareness regarding the symbols of sounds. Every question of the questionnaire was analyzed separately. The picture of the overall trend of the teachers in percentage regarding the study of segments of English language was drawn with the indication of their academic and professional qualification.

## 3. Findings

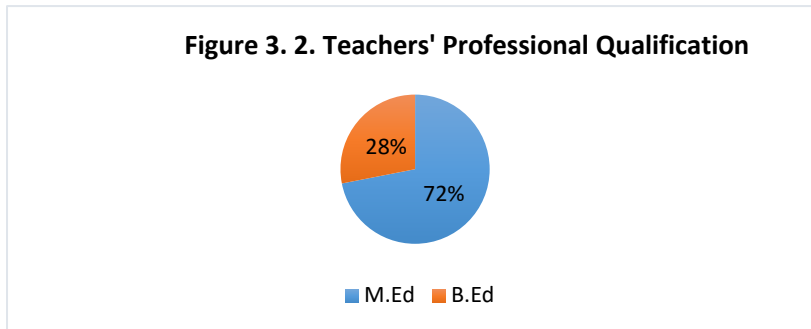
### 3.1. Teachers’ Academic Qualification

After the analysis of the data, it was revealed that majority of the Elementary English School Teachers academically were highly qualified. As shown in Figure 3.1, that 4% out of 137 teachers had M. Phil degrees, 79 % had master degrees in arts or science (MA/MSC), while 11% were university graduates. Only 6% percent were qualified in Matriculation and Faculty of Arts (FA)



**Teachers’ Professional qualification**

Regarding the professional qualification of Elementary English School Teachers, Figure 3.2 presents a vivid portrait. There was no single English teacher who had a professional qualification. Twenty eight percent of the teachers held a degree in Master of Arts in Education while the rest of the teachers had the Bachelor of Arts degree in Education.



**3.2. The Study of English Segments during Teaching or Studentship and Training**

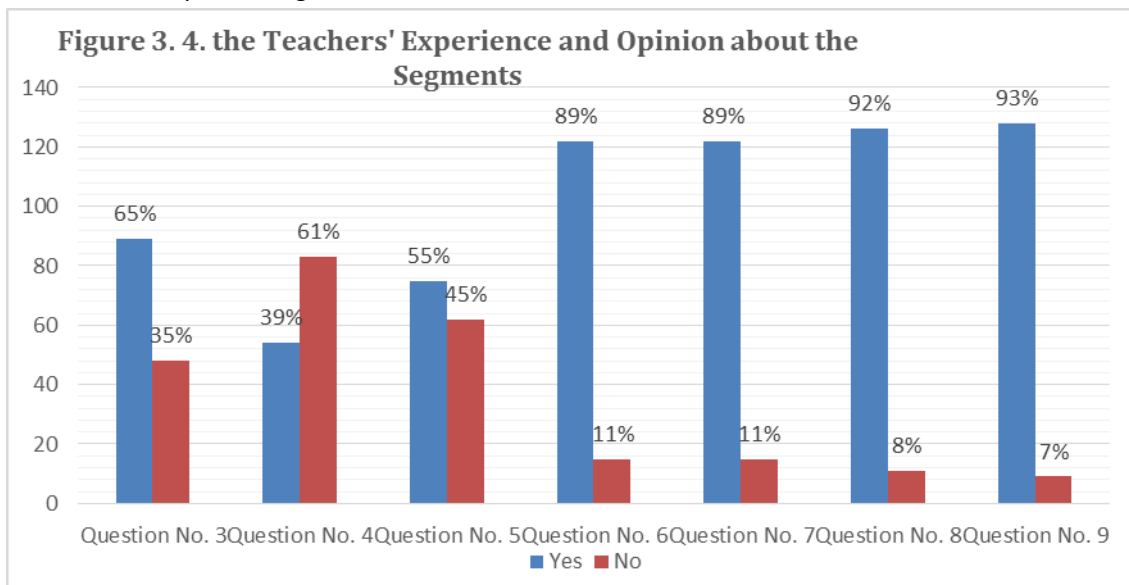
It was investigated whether teachers previously studied these English sounds during their teaching to their students. It was revealed that most of the teachers tried to study these symbols during their teaching because 65% teachers responded “yes” while 35% expressed that they never studied these symbols. However, the study of these segments during teachers’ own study is vice versa where 39% teachers admitted they studied the segments during their own study while majority admitted that they did not study even during their undergraduate years. Fifty five percent of the teachers were taught these symbols during their pre-service training or induction whereas the rest of the teachers indicated that they never studied these segments.

**3.3. Usage of Dictionaries Regarding Identification of Segments**

Majority of the teachers studied these symbol using English dictionaries because they thought that these symbols could help them in pronouncing words accurately. Therefore, coincidentally, the teachers’ opinion regarding the study of the symbols using dictionaries and the usefulness of these symbols was equal that was 89%. There were a small number of teachers; only 11% who did not bother to see these symbols even using dictionaries because they thought that the symbols were a useless portion of dictionaries.

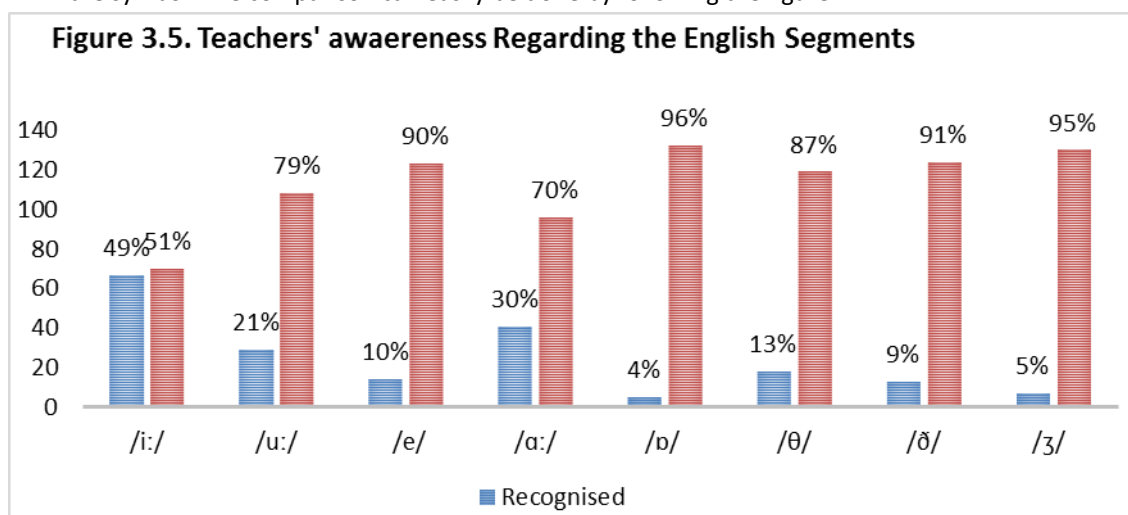
**3.4. The Usefulness of the Study of the Segments in Teaching and Oral Skill**

This study highlighted the need of the study of the English segments, which was almost agreed upon by 92% to 93% teachers. They admitted that these segments could not only enhance their achievement as teachers but also improve their speaking skills. However, only 7% to 8% teachers were indifferent to the benefits of the study of the segments.



### 3.5. Teachers' Awareness about the Segments of English Language

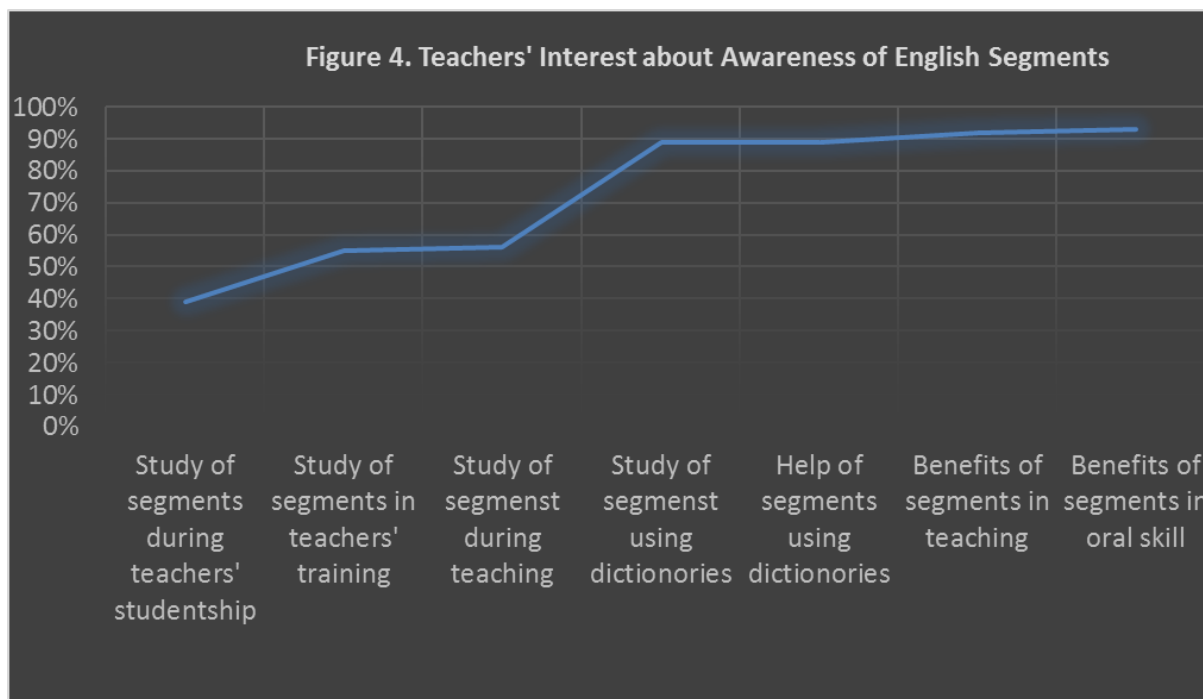
1. Approximately half of the teachers were able to recognize the symbols of the sounds /i:/ while the other half could not recognize the said sound.
2. The symbol of the sound /u:/ was rather difficult to be identified by Elementary English School Teachers; 79% teachers were unable to pronounce the said symbol. Only 21% teachers asserted that they could recognize the symbol and tried to pronounce it.
3. The symbol of the sound /e/ was also too difficult to be pronounced by the teachers; 90% out of 137 teachers were unaware of the said symbol while 10% were able to recognize the said symbol.
4. The symbol of the sound /a:/ was the second one that was easy to be identified by the teachers; 30% teachers were able to recognize the said symbol, while 70% of the teachers could not pronounce or recognize the said symbol.
5. The most difficult symbol was the /ɒ/ sound which could be identified only by 4% of the teachers and 96% of the teachers were totally unaware of the said sound.
6. The symbol of the sound /θ/ was also a problematic one in which only 13% of the teachers were able to recognize it while 77% percent were unable to identify the said symbol.
7. The symbol of the sound /ð/ could be recognized by 91% of the teachers whereas mere 9% were able to pronounce the said sound.
8. The symbol of the sound /ʒ/ was the second one that was too difficult to be pronounced by the teachers; 5% of the teachers were able recognize the said symbol while 95% were clearly unaware of the symbol. The comparison can easily be done by following the figure



#### 4. Discussion

In the light of the above data, there were three prominent trends; (i) there is a gradual increase of interest of the element English school teachers of District Bhawalpur, Punjab Pakistan in English segments; (ii) two symbols of long sounds /i:/ and /a:/ were rather easy to be recognized by the teachers because 49% teachers were able to pronounce or recognize the symbol /i:/ and 30% identified the symbol /a:/; (iii) The last trend that can be clearly identified is that almost majority of the teacher were unaware of all the symbols of the sounds.

The increase of interest in the English segments was remarkable because their interest increased gradually from teachers' own study to their teaching, to their pre-service training, to their induction, to using the dictionaries and to their opinion about the usefulness these segments respectively. This trend can be seen in Figure 4. From this trend, it can be concluded that the teachers were interested in the learning of English segments and they thought that the study of these segments not only helped in teaching but also improved their speaking skill.



The second trend is also worth mentioning in that the two sounds out of eight (/i:/ and /a:/) were easier than the other sounds. Here, the question arises why these sounds were easier than the other sounds? Whether they are easy to be pronounced or to be recognized or teachers' mother tongue effect made these sounds easier for the Pakistani Elementary English School Teachers. May be there can be other factors that are hidden in the depth of linguistic phenomenon. To explore its real causes, another investigation is required.

The most important trend that was the real problem for the current study is that almost all the teachers were unaware of the stated symbols of sounds (English segments). This trend proves the study hypothesis "Pakistani English teachers are unaware of English language segments". Although majority Elementary English School Teachers of District Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan were highly qualified by having M. Phil, Master and Bachelor degrees, they did not study the English segments properly that could help them in their career.

## 5. Recommendations

Since teachers play a vital role in all educational scenarios, they must be competent enough regarding their particular fields. However, as far as language learning is concerned, it becomes more crucial that every language teacher must have a full command of oral skills. Some important notes must be kept in minds such as:

- i. Teachers must be qualified in their respective fields. For example, some professional courses ought to be introduced by the institutions or government to improve speaking and pronunciation skills.
- ii. Teaching a subject (English) and teaching a language (English), these are two different skills, it is a need of hour that teachers must be trained to improve oral skills of the English language to teach language to their learners. The teaching of segments can play an important role in this connection.
- iii. Teachers and learners should both try to create an exposure for oral practice during lectures.
- iv. Dictionaries must be used in the classroom to identify the segmental sounds of pronunciation.
- v. Provision of the native models would be a helpful source to improve pronunciation.

## 6. Conclusion

Putting in a nutshell, it can be said that the majority of the Elementary English School Teachers of District Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan had passed M. Phil, Master and Bachelor degrees but there were very few who had studied English segments or the sound system of English language. However, they think that the



study of these segments can improve teaching skill as well as oral communication. Over all, all the English teachers were unaware of English segments (symbols of sounds) but two symbol of sounds; /i:/ and /ɑ:/ were easy to be recognized.

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**Appendix A**

**Structured interview**

Can you recognize the following symbols or able pronounce them?

/i:/

/u:/

/e/

/ɑ:/

/ɒ/

/θ/

/ð/

/ʒ/

**Appendix B**

**Questionnaire**

1. What is your academic qualification?
  2. What is professional qualification?
  3. Did you ever study the above said symbols in the textbooks of your students while teaching?  
 Yes  No
  4. Did you ever study the above said symbols in your textbooks while you were students?  
 Yes  No
  5. Did you ever study the above said symbols in your in-service training?  
 Yes  No
  5. Do you see these symbols while using English dictionary?  
 Yes  No
  6. Do these symbols help you in pronouncing the words while using dictionary?  
 Yes  No
  7. Do you think that the study of these symbols will benefit in your teaching?  
 Yes  No
  8. Do you think that the study of these symbols will benefit in your speaking skill?  
 Yes  No
-