Explicit Phonetic Instruction and Pronunciation Skills of Grade 10 High School Students

Walter Coronado Latorza
Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education
Kauran National High School, Philippines

Cristobal Millenes Ambayon (Corresponding author)
College of Teacher Education, Sultan Kudarat State University
ACCESS Campus, EJC Montilla, Tacurong City, Philippines
Email: jophkris_01@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Explicit Phonetic Instruction-Centered (EPIC) Module is a compilation of topics and exercises in English pronunciation made and modified by the researchers where the explicit phonetic instruction is highlighted as the main approach to enhance the pronunciation skills of the respondents. The study is aimed at evaluating, validating, and determining the effectiveness of the EPIC Module and its actual delivery conducted to the Grade 10 students of Kauran National High School in the Philippines. A panel consisting of five teachers from different schools served as evaluators of the module to validate its content, relevance, acceptability and instructional quality. To determine how the module was delivered, another five English teachers observed and evaluated the researcher-teachers in the implementation of the module. The respondents of the study for both the experimental and control groups were chosen randomly. The researchers used mean in the validation of the module and in the performance of the researcher-teachers based on the delivery of the module. To identify whether there was or no significant difference on the respondents' performance and mean gain scores, t-test was used. The findings revealed that students in experimental group improved their pronunciation skills significantly due to the intervention of the EPIC Module and its excellent delivery. It was statistically verified that the use of EPIC Module apparently improves the English pronunciation skills of the respondents.

Keywords: English Pronunciation, Explicit Phonetic Instruction, Module, Pronunciation Skills, Modular-based Approach

1. Introduction

Ondracek (2011) emphasized that as globalization takes over the present day, good communication becomes a must. In the Philippines, many speak English as their second language but not everyone can speak it fluently and confidently. Although the country's English proficiency is adequate, it is evident that Filipinos lack proper English

pronunciation skills. This leads to people's quick judgment based on one's accent since pronunciation is the most obvious aspect of any language (Hassan, 2014).

For a long time, teaching pronunciation is ignored because of the conservative beliefs that it is easily acquired by students (Silveira, 2012). Thus, learning English pronunciation is a challenging endeavor for some ESL learners (Pesce, 2014). In our country, the curriculum designed by the education sectors mistreats pronunciation as not equal to listening, writing, and grammar. Though speaking is part of teaching pedagogy, pronunciation is not focused and emphasized.

The problems in English pronunciation have also been a struggle to students and a cause of concern to English teachers in Kauran National High School. Their poor performance in articulation had made them feel inferior and insecure during oral discourse and unable to communicate effectively in subjects where English is used as medium of instruction. For English teachers, pronunciation instruction was not given importance since it is assumed that it is already taught in Elementary level, thus oral fluency has been neglected. In addition, the English curriculum regards pronunciation as a fundamental aspect of language learning but it is not part of real-life teaching. Hence, resources for English pronunciation have been very limited thus teachers and students have to recourse to traditional methods and approaches.

It is with these challenges that the researchers pursued to develop Explicit Phonetic Instruction-Centered Module with the main objective to enhance the English pronunciation skills of the students. The module also aimed to substantiate that pronunciation teaching must be done thoroughly in the classroom since the quality of teaching pronunciation affects the ability of the students to acquire and develop their skills in English pronunciation.

2. Objectives and Research Questions

The main goal of this study is to assess the impact of the EPIC Module to improve the English pronunciation skills of the students.

In particular, the study searched out for answers to the following questions:

1. What is the evaluation level of EPIC Module as strategy to develop the students' English pronunciation skills with regards to its:
    1.1. content;
    1.2. relevance;
    1.3. acceptability; and,
    1.4. instructional quality?

2. What is the English pronunciation performance level of the respondents during the pretest and posttest?

3. What is the level of evaluation of the researcher-teachers on the delivery of EPIC Module in the actual teaching as evaluated by:
    3.1. teacher-observers; and,
    3.2. students in experimental group?

4. Is there a significant difference on the pronunciation performance between the control group and experimental group during the pretest?

5. Is there a significant difference on the pronunciation performance between the control group and experimental group during the posttest?

6. Is there a significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control group and experimental group on their pronunciation performance?

3. Null Hypotheses

To make the purpose of this study anchored to its direction and to give suitable and logical results and analyses to the problems, the specified null hypotheses below were used.

$H0_1$. There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control and experimental groups in their performance on pronunciation.

$H0_2$. There is no significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control and experimental groups in their performance on pronunciation.

4. Review of Literature

Learning English in the Philippines is significant. At their early age, most Filipinos are first taught informally how to speak English in their homes as a preparation and rudimentary foundation to formal learning in schools. It is for the reason that English, regarded as the second official language in the country, is not only used as medium of instruction in schools but is also the language used in commerce and law. However, over the years, the proficiency level of the Filipino's English proficiency has declined sharply. In an article by Valderama (2019), she urged the education sectors of the Philippines to pay attention to the continued worsening of the English Proficiency Index of the country.

A module, according to Riasat (2005), is a recent approach in the pedagogy of pronunciation. It is a self-learning material patterned accordingly to individual's own pace readily accessible to both the students and teachers. Its flexibility benefits the

students whether they are doing activities independently or collaboratively. It is arranged sequentially with detailed objectives for each activity from which the students can follow clearly and attain through varied techniques. The learners also can monitor their own progress with the assistance of a teacher as a facilitator. Ambayon (2020) complements that modular instruction is more operative in teaching learning method as equated to usual teaching approaches because in this approach the students learn at their own stride. It is unrestricted self-learning panache in which instantaneous reinforcement takes place, comment is provided to practice exercises, and stimulates the students and builds curiosity in them.

In the study of Derwing & Rositter (2002), they identified that most of the difficulties confronted the learners during the conversation failure were the segmental features like the appropriate production of vowel and consonant sounds. Thus, when learners are misinterpreted, they tend to reword, reiterate, write or spell, and alter their voice.

The traditional teaching of pronunciation, involves typically of dictation, imitation, lectures, articulatory explanation, drills like minimal pair, word phrase, and sentence exercises, reading, and games. These forms of strategies are mostly preferred by teachers (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010). In the research of Gilakjani et al. (2011), they comprehensively discussed that the first language influence greatly affects the pronunciation teaching so the teachers must check the students' need in learning pronunciation of English like drilling, conversation, expert guidance, and critical listening.

Kenworthy (1992) explained the roles of both teacher and learner. She emphasized that in order for the students to effectively learn pronunciation, a teacher must help learners hear the sounds, make sounds, provide feedback, update what is going on, establish priorities, distinguishing activities and assessing progress. On the other hand, the role of the learner includes his response all efforts exerted by the teacher and willingness to take responsibility for his or her own learning. Current trends have highlighted the mastery of foreign speakers to exhibit appropriate suprasegmental features of the language like stress, intonation, accent, and rhythm. One way to achieve that is by exposing the learners to the different speakers of the English language (Schaetzel & Low, 2009).

Gordon et al. (2013) revealed in their accounts that made students notice explicit phonetic instruction like guided practice and remedial response can be gainful for second language speakers in the improvement of intelligent discourse. In accordance, explicit phonetic instruction might improve students' way to express the objective language (Hamzah, 2014). In places where English is not utilized consistently and students can't have exposure to actual conversation with local speakers, explicit phonetic instruction adds to instructional materials methods in English (Saito, 2007).

As indicated by Yoshida (2016), some aspects of pronunciation learning rely upon the students themselves, yet there are likewise outside variables that influence the process. These include how much time was spent to train the students and the type of training they received. Teachers should identify the learners' preparation, the amount of practice they had, and the efficacy and variation of their oral exercises. Teachers should also evaluate themselves whether or not they have given objective feedbacks, and their inclination and motivation in teaching pronunciation. Notably, teachers should also assess themselves if they model the pronunciation accurately. All of these factors contribute to the desired outcomes of what are expected of students to perform.

The discussions of the related studies and findings all point to a valid notion that the quality of teachers' performance in teaching is also critical in pronunciation pedagogy along with the quality of approaches the learners receive.

5. Research Methodology

The researchers conducted the study at Kauran National High School, Kauran, Ampatuan, Maguindanao, Philippines. The locale of this study is under the Division of Maguindanao 1, Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE) of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

6. Research Design

The experimental type of research was involved in this study to determine the quality of EPIC Module with regards to its content, relevance, acceptability, and instructional quality. It was also employed to determine the performance of the researcher-teachers on the delivery of the EPIC Module. Moreover, this design was undertaken to give distinct comparison and differences in the English pronunciation of the respondents during the pretest and posttest.

7. Participants

A total of sixty (60) randomly selected Grade 10 students (n=30 for control group and n=30 experimental group) during the S.Y. 2018-2019 took part in the experimentation of this study. Also, five (5) English teachers were invited to act as evaluators and validators of the EPIC Module. Furthermore, five (5) English teachers from the locale of the study acted as teacher-observers who assessed the researcher-teachers in the actual classes for three times during the entire implementation of the module.

8. Sampling Technique

Subjects of the study were the sample of the two sections of Grade 10 students namely Grade 10 Dove and Grade 10 Maya. The overall class of eighty-eight (88) students undertook a simple random sampling through a lottery method. After identifying the sixty (60) respondents of the study, they again underwent draw lots to identify their group. Thus, the respondents were equally divided into two groups: thirty (30) for control group and thirty (30) for experimental group.

9. Research Instrument

To gather data and attain the desired results, the researchers used the following measurement tools: EPIC Module, Evaluation and Validation Instrument of the EPIC Module, Pronunciation Test (Pretest and Posttest), and Researcher-teacher's Evaluation Tool by Teacher-Observers and Students in Experimental Group.

The EPIC Module, as the prime instrument in the experimentation, was developed and compiled by the researchers themselves. Topics and exercises included in the module were the segmental and suprasegmental features of English language pronunciation. These became the framework of the researchers in structuring the Pronunciation Test Instrument. The test conducted during the pretest and posttest was comprised of two parts: Part I- Segmental Features and Part II-Suprasegmental Features. The segmental features were composed of five (5) single word-series according to the position of the vowels on the Vietor Triangle, ten (10) phrases and ten (10) sentences. On the other hand, suprasegmental features were focused on the ten (10) word stress, ten (10) sentence stress, and ten (10) intonation patterns. Overall, the test is composed of one hundred (100) items equivalent to 100 points. This was done orally which were documented through the use of video recorder intentionally to analyze carefully the pronunciation features of the respondents. The judgment and analysis on the pretest and posttest were done by the researchers themselves.

10. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers conducted the pretest to both experimental and control groups consecutively without prior notice. Each respondent was tested individually and were being filmed to ensure the accuracy of their pronunciation and in order for the researchers to play the videos multiple times to assure consistent results.

The study was made through three (3) months and two (2) weeks experimentation. The ample time paved way for a progressive gathering of desired or expected results.

During the implementation period, five (5) English teachers from the locale of the study participated to observe the researcher-teachers of their actual teaching and application of the module to the students in experimental group. In order to get reliable data, they observed the class for three times using the evaluation form prepared by the researchers. When the experimentation was done, the respondents were subjected to posttest. The experimental group, being the recipient of the intervention, independently assessed the researcher-teachers' performance according to the criteria set in the evaluation form.

All data collected were saved for analysis and interpretation purposes.

11. Statistical Treatment

For data analysis, the researchers applied the statistical methods like finding the standard deviation, calculating the mean, and testing the hypothesis through t-test. To get the overall results for the evaluation of the module and the performance of the researcher-teachers, means were calculated. Meanwhile, the respondents' performance results in the pretest and posttest were examined through standard deviations and means. Moreover, t-test was utilized for the computation of the significant difference on the pronunciation between control group and experimental group during the pretest and posttest. The same treatment was undertaken to identify whether there was or no significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control group and experimental group.

In the tabulation and calculation of the data, the use of Microsoft Excel was maximized. On the other hand, in all statistical tests, the level of significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

12. Analyses and Results

Table 1: Summary of Teachers' Evaluation of EPIC Module

Indicators	Mean	Description
Content	4.58	Excellent
Relevance	4.56	Excellent
Acceptability	4.70	Excellent
Instructional quality	4.58	Excellent
Overall	4.61	Excellent

As presented in Table 1, evaluators assessed the EPIC Module to be Excellent with regards to its Content, Relevance, Acceptability, and Instructional Quality with means of 4.58, 4.56, 4.70, and 4.58 respectively. This indicates that the module is a valid instrument to be used to improve the English pronunciation of the respondents.

This reflects to the study of Buch et al. (1978) that effective module possesses systematic directions with specific objectives for every exercise. The activities must be organized and capable of self-learning.

Table 2: Level of Performance in Pronunciation of the Students in Pretest and Posttest

			Pretest				Posttest		
Groups	n	Mean	SD	Equi-valent	Descript-ion	Mean	SD	Equi-valent	Descript-ion
Control	30	26	14.5	66	Beginning	33.93	14.7	68	Beginning
Experimental	30	27.7	15.4	66	Beginning	89.4	10.17	93	Advanced

Table 2 reflects that the pretest result of both students in control and experimental groups exhibited a Beginning level with means of 26 and 27.7 and equivalent ratings of 66 respectively. This means that both groups at this level struggle with their understanding and fundamental knowledge and skills in pronunciation may have not developed adequately to perform the tasks especially in the production of vowel and consonant sounds, words, phrases, sentences, stress, and intonation. The similarity in results can be inferred that they have the same level of proficiency due to the same level of prior knowledge and skills in pronunciation.

On the other hand, the posttest result reveals that each control and experimental group increased in their means with 33.93 and 89.4 respectively. However, it is important to note that the experimental group demonstrated a remarkable increase from Beginning to Advanced with an equivalent rating of 93 while the control group stays the same as Beginning with an equivalent rating of 68. This demonstrates that after the application of the module, the respondents in the experimental group has able to attain the essential skills they need to enhance their pronunciation.

The result further confirms the effectiveness explicit phonetic instruction strategy as Carey (2002) stated that in teaching pronunciation, the application of stress, rhythm, and intonation should not only be explained but also be applied in actual drills and activities.

Table 3: Summary of Level of Evaluation of the Researcher-teachers on the Delivery of EPIC Module as Evaluated by Teacher-observers and Students in Experimental Group

Indicator	Mean	Description
Teacher-observers	4.67	Excellent
Students in Experimental Group	4.78	Excellent
Overall	4.73	Excellent

As itemized in Table 3, the delivery of the module was assessed to be Excellent. Both the observers and students have ascertained the researcher-teachers as effective implementers of the module. As a result, the researcher-teachers have established an excellent implementation of the module which is crucial in the learning outcome of the experimental group. This means that the EPIC Module was even more operative because of the outstanding performance of the researchers in teaching the module.

This further strengthens that the function, proficiency, and personality of teachers in pronunciation pedagogy are substantial factors in helping the students recognize their needs to enhance their skills (Shabani & Ghasemian, 2017).

Table 4: Pretest Scores t-Test Analysis between Control Group and Experimental Group

Groups	n	df	Mean	SD	t- computed	t- critical	Interpretation

Groups	n	df	Mean	SD	t-computed	t-critical	Interpretation
Control	30	58	26	14.51	0.44*	1.67	Not Significant
Experimental	30		27.7	15.40			

*Not significant at 5% level

Table 4 exhibits that students in the experimental group have comparable pretest results (M = 27.7, SD = 15.40) with the students in the control group (M = 26, SD = 14.51), t (58) = 0.44. This implies comparable cognitive ability between groups and whose skills in pronunciation have similar level of performance prior the implementation of the intervention used in the study.

The computed t-value (0.44) is less than the t-critical value (1.67) at .05 level of significance at 58 degree of freedom. Hence, there is a sufficient evidence to accept the null hypothesis that no significant difference exists between the pronunciation performance of control and experimental groups during the pretest.

Table 5: Posttest Scores t-Test Analysis between Control Group and Experimental Group

Groups	n	df	Mean	SD	t-computed	t-critical	Interpretation
Control	30	58	33.93	14.71	16.98*	1.67	Significant
Experimental	30		89.4	10.16			

*Significant at 5% level

In Table 5 above, it reveals the significant difference between the posttest scores of the experimental group and control group on their pronunciation performance as indicated, t (58) = 16.98. Students in the experimental group have higher posttest results (M = 89.4, SD = 10.16) with the students in the control group (M = 33.93, SD = 14.71). This indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Hence, it is neglected.

Table 6. Mean Gain Scores t-Test Analysis of Control Group and Experimental Group

Groups	n	df	Mean	SD	t-computed	t-critical	Interpretation
Control	30	58	7.93	9.48	22.41*	1.67	Significant
Experimental	30		61.7	9.10			

*Significant at 5% level

Lastly, Table 6 illustrates the significant difference between the mean gain scores of the experimental group and control group on their pronunciation performance as indicated, t (58) = 22.41. Students in the experimental group have higher mean gain scores results (M = 61.7, SD = 9.10) with the students in the control group (M = 7.93, SD = 9.48).

As evidenced in the table, the computed t-value (22.41) is higher than the critical value (1.67) at .05 level of significance. Thus, the evidence to reject the null hypothesis is very strong.

The substantial increase in the mean gain scores of the experimental group attests that the use of explicit phonetic instruction improved the opportunities of the students to master their target skills. The intervention yielded a promising result and had greatly achieved its prime purpose.

Derwing and Munro (2005) confirmed that it is beneficial for students to be explicitly instructed to discern the difference between their articulation and those of native speakers. Hence, pronunciation activities must be explicitly taught.

13. Discussion and Conclusion

In view of the outcomes derived from the statistical results and findings of the study, the EPIC Module and its effective delivery and instruction proved to be a significant influence in the improvement of the English pronunciation skills of the respondents.

The modular approach with explicit instruction as the main strategy increased active learning among students and provided them adaptable and engaging exercises. Moreover, it is not only the aspect of using modular approach that maximized the learning capabilities of the learners to improve their pronunciation but also the excellent instruction of the researcher-teachers in applying the module. This means that the teachers' role and quality of teaching bear imperative and constructive effect in improving the pronunciation skills of the students.

The results of this study can be substantial to language teaching, to the academic officials who need up-to-date data in designing curriculums, to the English teachers who are the prime movers and facilitators of learning, to the students especially those who motivate themselves to master the English language, to the researchers who maybe inspired to investigate further about the most relevant teaching strategies in pronunciation, and to the community for references and academic extension activities.

The researchers therefore recommend that pronunciation should be given emphasis in teaching English especially to L2 learners. The notion that pronunciation is easily learned must be abolished because learners need to be guided closely. Thus, it should be a part of actual teaching and one way to enhance it is through explicit phonetic instruction. Relevant trainings for English teachers are encouraged for developing related competency-based learning modules to improve the quality of instruction and for them to not settle on what they only know and practice. As facilitators of learning, English teachers should equip themselves of the current trends in communicative language teaching by pursuing further education or by attending workshops to enhance their own pronunciation skills as they are the direct models in the classroom. The researchers also propose to education sectors a need to revisit the curriculum to give weight and attention to pronunciation as part of instruction in the classroom. Finally, for future studies, interrelated modules for the enhancement of students' skills in other aspects of speech are encouraged.

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