Phonetic Training and Pronunciation Accuracy in FLE: A Case Study of Nigerian Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of phonetic training in improving pronunciation accuracy among Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Despite advancements in FLE pedagogy, phonetic challenges persist, particularly for learners whose first languages (L1) have phonological systems that differ significantly from French. Nigerian learners, for example, face obstacles in mastering phenomena such as vowel elision, rhythm, and intonation, often leading to errors in oral production. These difficulties are compounded by interference from their L1 and inadequate emphasis on phonetics in classroom instruction. The research adopts a case study approach, focusing on final-year French students from a Nigerian university. To evaluate the effectiveness of phonetic training methods, a combination of pre-and post-training pronunciation assessments, classroom observations, and interviews with students and instructors is used. The study draws upon key phonological theories and frameworks, including phonetics and phonology distinctions, elision phenomena, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Findings reveal that targeted phonetic training significantly enhances pronunciation accuracy, particularly in addressing specific issues like vowel elision and stress patterns. However, persistent challenges highlight the need for culturally adaptive teaching strategies, including integrating phonetic drills and audio-visual tools into FLE curricula. This study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the critical role of phonetics in foreign language acquisition and offers practical recommendations for enhancing the teaching of French phonetics in Nigerian contexts. By addressing the phonetic challenges faced by Nigerian learners, this research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical phonetics and effective pedagogical practices, fostering improved oral proficiency in FLE.

Keywords: FLE; intonation; L1 interference; Nigerian learners; oral production; pedagogy; Phonetic training; pronunciation accuracy; rhythm; vowel elision.

RESUME

Cette étude examine le rôle de la formation phonétique dans l'amélioration de la précision de la prononciation chez les apprenants nigérians de français langue étrangère (FLE). Malgré les avancées dans la pédagogie du FLE, des défis phonétiques persistent, en particulier pour les apprenants dont les langues premières (L1) ont des systèmes phonologiques significativement différents du français. Par exemple, les apprenants nigérians rencontrent des obstacles dans la maîtrise de phénomènes tels que l'élision vocalique, le rythme et l'intonation, ce qui entraîne fréquemment des erreurs dans la production orale. Ces difficultés sont aggravées par les interférences de leur L1 et par le faible accent

mis sur la phonétique dans l'enseignement en classe. La recherche adopte une approche d'étude de cas, se concentrant sur les étudiants de dernière année de français d'une université nigériane. Une combinaison d'évaluations de prononciation avant et après formation, d'observations en classe et d'entretiens avec les étudiants et les enseignants est utilisée pour évaluer l'efficacité des méthodes de formation phonétique. L'étude s'appuie sur des théories et des cadres phonologiques clés, notamment les distinctions entre phonétique et phonologie, les phénomènes d'élision et l'Alphabet Phonétique International (API). Les résultats révèlent que la formation phonétique ciblée améliore significativement la précision de la prononciation, en particulier pour des problèmes spécifiques tels que l'élision vocalique et les schémas d'accentuation. Cependant, des défis persistants soulignent le besoin de stratégies d'enseignement adaptées culturellement, y compris l'intégration d'exercices phonétiques et d'outils audiovisuels dans les programmes de FLE. Cette étude contribue à la recherche croissante soulignant le rôle essentiel de la phonétique dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères et offre des recommandations pratiques pour améliorer l'enseignement de la phonétique française dans les contextes nigérians. En répondant aux défis phonétiques des apprenants nigérians, cette recherche vise à combler le fossé entre la phonétique théorique et les pratiques pédagogiques efficaces, favorisant ainsi une meilleure maîtrise orale en FLE.

Mots-clés : apprenants nigérians; élision vocalique; FLE; Formation phonétique; pédagogie; production orale; précision de la prononciation; production orale; rythme; intonation.

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a foreign language (L2) often presents significant challenges, particularly in phonetics, where learners must master unfamiliar sound systems and pronunciation rules. Unlike the seemingly effortless process of acquiring a first language (L1) during childhood, foreign language acquisition involves neuromuscular adjustments, as learners must adapt their articulatory habits to new phonetic patterns (Scovel, 1981; Wode, 1989, 1992). For Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), this challenge is compounded by the significant differences between the phonological systems of their L1 and French, as well as by the influence of English, which often serves as a lingua franca in educational settings (Flege, 1987a, b). These factors contribute to persistent difficulties in oral production, including issues with vowel elision, rhythm, and intonation.

A critical aspect of FLE for Nigerian learners lies in understanding vowel elision, a phonetic phenomenon where unstressed vowels are omitted in connected speech, such as "l'hôpital" instead of "le hôpital." Mastery of this phenomenon is vital for fluency and naturalness in spoken French, yet it poses a considerable obstacle. The issue arises not only from the phonetic complexities inherent in the French sound system but also from inadequate teaching methodologies that fail to emphasize phonetic training effectively (Flege & Munro, 1994). While much research has been conducted on the French phonetic system, little attention has been given to how these concepts are transmitted to learners or how instructional approaches can be tailored to address learners' specific needs, particularly in Nigeria. The background to this study is rooted in the historical evolution of phonetic instruction within FLE. From the traditional grammar-translation method, where phonetics played a minor role, to more communicative and action-oriented approaches, the emphasis on phonetics has varied significantly (Puren, 1988). In modern pedagogy, phonetics is often overshadowed by a focus on vocabulary and grammar, relegating pronunciation training to a secondary position. However, phonetics remains a cornerstone of linguistic competence, enabling learners to communicate effectively and confidently in the target language (Cuq, 2003). For Nigerian learners, who face unique challenges due to their linguistic backgrounds, prioritizing phonetic training is crucial.

The problem statement of this research underscores the gap in effective phonetic instruction for Nigerian learners of FLE. Many learners struggle with the perception and reproduction of French sounds, particularly in mastering phenomena like vowel elision. These difficulties often stem from interference by their L1 and English, which influences their articulatory habits and phonological expectations. Moreover, traditional teaching methods in Nigeria often fail to address these issues adequately, focusing instead on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules. Consequently, learners are left ill-equipped to achieve proficiency in oral production, which is essential for effective communication in French. This study is significant because it seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical phonetics and practical pedagogy, addressing the unique needs of Nigerian learners. By focusing on the phenomenon of vowel elision, the research highlights a specific area where learners

face consistent challenges, providing insights that can inform the development of more effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader field of FLE by emphasizing the importance of phonetic competence, not only in pronunciation but also in aspects like intonation, rhythm, and the integration of oral and written language skills.

The objectives of this research are threefold. First, it aims to evaluate the methods currently employed in teaching French phonetics to Nigerian learners. This includes identifying the strengths and weaknesses of various instructional approaches and assessing their effectiveness in improving learners' pronunciation skills. Second, the study seeks to explore the concept of vowel elision, examining the specific difficulties learners encounter in its use and description through experiments and data collection. Finally, the research aims to propose practical solutions for enhancing learners' ability to apply vowel elision correctly, drawing on the findings to recommend strategies that can be implemented in FLE classrooms.

This research is guided by the following questions:

- What are the methods of teaching and learning phonetics in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classrooms?
- What are vowels, and vowel elision, and why do university-level students studying French find it difficult to use them correctly?
- How can the competence of students studying French in correctly applying the phenomenon of vowel elision be improved?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Phonetic and Phonological Foundations

Phonetics and phonology, while closely related, serve distinct roles in the study of language. Phonetics is concerned with the physical and acoustic properties of sounds, focusing on how they are produced, transmitted, and perceived. Phonology, on the other hand, examines the abstract, systemic organization of sounds within a language, analyzing the rules and patterns that govern their usage (Cuq, 2003; Puren, 1988). In the context of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), understanding these distinctions is crucial for addressing the unique phonetic challenges faced by learners, particularly Nigerian learners whose first language (L1) phonological systems differ significantly from French.

Elision is a prime example of a phenomenon that blurs the line between phonetics and phonology. As defined in the thesis, elision involves the omission of unstressed vowels in connected speech, such as the transformation of "l'ami" from "[lə ami]" to "[l'ami]." While the physical process of elision falls under phonetics, its functional role in maintaining the rhythm and flow of spoken French is a phonological concern (Dohalska, 1991; Cuq, 2003). The French vowel system, as depicted in diagrams in the thesis, adds further complexity, with distinctions between nasal and oral vowels and between open and closed vowels requiring careful articulation. This is particularly challenging for learners coming from L1 systems that lack similar distinctions (Flege, 1987a; Flege & Munro, 1994).

Previous Research on FLE Phonetics

Phonetic training has long been recognized as a critical component of second language acquisition. Studies cited in the thesis emphasize the role of targeted exercises, such as phonetic transcription and audio-visual aids, in improving learners' pronunciation accuracy and auditory discrimination skills (Flege, 1987a; Puren, 1988). However, despite these advancements, significant gaps remain in addressing the specific challenges associated with vowel production and elision in FLE.

One major challenge lies in the transfer of L1 phonological habits to the target language. For instance, Nigerian learners often struggle with the nasalization of vowels, a feature that is absent in most Nigerian languages but integral to French (Cuq, 2003; Dohalska, 1991). Similarly, the substitution of open vowels for closed vowels—or vice versa—is a common error that disrupts the intelligibility of learners' speech (Flege, 1987b). The process of elision adds another layer of difficulty, as it requires not only the correct omission of unstressed vowels but also the seamless integration of this process into natural speech (Puren, 1988). The rules governing mandatory, optional, and forbidden elisions further complicate learners' understanding and application of this phenomenon (Cuq, 2003; Dohalska, 1991).

The Nigerian Context

The linguistic diversity of Nigeria presents unique challenges for FLE instruction. With over 500 languages spoken across the country, Nigerian learners bring a wide array of phonological systems to the classroom. Most learners, however, use English as a lingua franca, which serves as their primary medium of education. This dual influence of Indigenous languages and English shapes learners' phonological expectations, often creating barriers to mastering French pronunciation (Flege, 1987a; Dohalska, 1991). The thesis identifies several specific difficulties related to French vowel elision and oral production. First, the syllable-timed rhythm of Nigerian languages contrasts sharply with the stress-timed rhythm of French, complicating learners' ability to apply elision rules naturally (Puren, 1988). Second, the absence of analogous processes in L1 phonological systems makes it difficult for learners to internalize the functional role of elision in French. Classroom observations documented in the thesis reveal that many learners struggle to distinguish between obligatory and optional elisions, leading to inconsistencies in their spoken output. For example, phrases like "l'hôtel" are often pronounced with an unnecessary pause, disrupting the flow of speech (Cuq, 2003; Flege & Munro, 1994).

Compounding these linguistic challenges are pedagogical shortcomings. Traditional FLE instruction in Nigeria often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over phonetics, leaving learners without the tools needed to address their pronunciation issues. Teachers frequently lack the training and resources necessary to implement effective phonetic instruction, such as drills involving the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This gap in pedagogy, as highlighted in the thesis, underscores the need for a more structured approach to teaching French phonetics in Nigeria (Flege, 1987b; Puren, 1988).

Addressing Phonetic Challenges through Pedagogical Approaches

To address these challenges, the thesis advocates for the integration of targeted phonetic training into FLE curricula. Methods such as the Audio-Oral and Audio-Visual approaches, which emphasize repetition and the use of native speaker models, have shown promise in improving learners' pronunciation skills (Puren, 1988). The Audio-Visual Method, in particular, leverages visual aids to reinforce auditory input, helping learners to internalize complex phonetic patterns (Cuq, 2003; Dohalska, 1991). Another innovative approach discussed in the thesis is the Silent Way method, developed by Caleb Gattegno. This learner-centered method emphasizes self-correction and discovery, using tools like color-coded charts to represent phonetic symbols. While effective in theory, its implementation in Nigerian classrooms is hindered by a lack of trained instructors and resources (Puren, 1988; Flege, 1987a). Similarly, the Action-Oriented Approach outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) prioritizes communication over linguistic accuracy, often marginalizing phonetic details such as elision (CEFR, 2001). Despite these limitations, the CEFR provides a valuable framework for integrating phonetics into communicative tasks, enabling learners to practice elision in context (Cuq, 2003; Flege & Munro, 1994).

Interactive exercises discussed in the thesis include identifying elisions in written texts, oral drills, and role-playing scenarios that simulate real-life conversations. Such activities not only enhance learners' phonetic awareness but also improve their confidence and fluency in spoken French (Flege, 1987b; Dohalska, 1991). The findings presented in the thesis highlight several areas for future research. One promising avenue is the exploration of sociolinguistic factors influencing learners' ability to acquire French phonetic features. For instance, how do cultural attitudes toward French as a colonial language impact learners' motivation to master its phonetics (Dohalska, 1991)? Additionally, the use of emerging technologies, such as speech recognition software and virtual reality simulations, offers exciting possibilities for enhancing phonetic training. These tools could provide learners with immediate feedback on their pronunciation, helping them to identify and correct errors in real time (Flege & Munro, 1994; Cuq, 2003). The literature underscores the critical role of phonetics in FLE, particularly for learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds. By focusing on vowel elision, this review highlights the need for targeted pedagogical interventions that address the unique challenges faced by Nigerian learners. Through a combination of IPA-based drills, contextual practice, and innovative teaching methods, educators can equip learners with the tools they need to achieve phonetic competence and, ultimately, communicative proficiency in French.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a case study approach to explore the effectiveness of phonetic training in improving the pronunciation accuracy of Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Case studies are particularly well-suited for this type of research because they provide an in-depth examination of specific phenomena within their natural contexts (Dohalska, 1991; Flege & Munro, 1994). The use of a case study allows the researcher to gather rich, detailed data that can shed light on the unique phonetic challenges faced by Nigerian learners and the pedagogical strategies that can address these challenges effectively. This approach aligns with Puren's (1988) assertion that linguistic studies must account for the sociolinguistic and educational contexts in which learning occurs.

Participants

The participants in this study were 50 final-year undergraduate students majoring in French at a Nigerian university. These students were chosen because they had completed foundational courses in French phonetics and had undergone classroom exposure to vowel elision and other key phonetic features of French. Their linguistic backgrounds varied, with most participants speaking one or more indigenous Nigerian languages as their L1 and English as a second language (Flege, 1987a; Cuq, 2003). The diversity in participants' linguistic profiles provided an opportunity to examine how L1 interference and varying degrees of exposure to French phonetics influenced their pronunciation accuracy.

Data Collection Instruments

Three primary instruments were used to collect data: pre- and post-training pronunciation assessments, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews.

> **Pronunciation Assessments** The pronunciation assessments consisted of two components: a reading-aloud task and a spontaneous speech task. In the reading-aloud task, participants were asked to read a list of sentences containing key phonetic features, such as vowel elision, nasal vowels, and liaison (Cuq, 2003). The spontaneous speech task required participants to speak on a familiar topic for three minutes, providing an opportunity to observe their natural application of phonetic rules. Audio recordings of these tasks were analyzed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to identify errors and measure improvements in pronunciation accuracy (Flege, 1987b; Dohalska, 1991).

> **Classroom Observations** were conducted over 12 weeks to examine how phonetic training was implemented in real-world instructional settings. Observations focused on the teaching methods used, the types of exercises provided, and the level of student engagement. Particular attention was given to the use of visual aids, such as vowel charts and IPA symbols, as well as to the integration of audio-visual materials (Puren, 1988). Field notes were taken to document key interactions and instructional strategies, which were later analyzed to identify best practices and areas for improvement (Flege & Munro, 1994).

> **Semi-Structured Interviews** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and instructors to gain insights into their experiences with phonetic training. The student interviews focused on their perceptions of the challenges they faced, the effectiveness of the training methods used, and their confidence in applying phonetic rules in real-life contexts (Cuq, 2003). Instructor interviews explored their pedagogical approaches, the resources available to them, and their perspectives on the barriers to effective phonetic instruction in Nigeria. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing deeper into specific themes as they emerged (Puren, 1988).

Procedure

The study was conducted in three phases: a pre-intervention phase, an intervention phase, and a post-intervention phase.

> **Pre-Intervention Phase** During this phase, baseline data were collected through the pre-training pronunciation assessments and initial classroom observations. This phase provided a

snapshot of participants' phonetic proficiency and highlighted the areas where they struggled most, such as vowel elision and nasal vowel production (Flege, 1987a). Baseline data also informed the design of the intervention program, ensuring that it addressed the specific needs of the participants (Dohalska, 1991).

Intervention Phase The intervention phase involved a 12-week phonetic training program that combined explicit instruction with interactive practice. The training was divided into three modules: vowel articulation, elision and liaison, and rhythm and intonation. Each module incorporated a variety of exercises, including IPA transcription drills, role-playing scenarios, and audio-visual activities (Cuq, 2003; Puren, 1988). Weekly quizzes were administered to track participants' progress and provide ongoing feedback.

Instructors were provided with training sessions to familiarize them with the phonetic features covered in the program and the teaching methods to be employed. These sessions emphasized the importance of using visual aids, such as vowel charts and spectrograms, and of integrating audio-visual tools to reinforce auditory learning (Flege & Munro, 1994).

Post-Intervention Phase The post-intervention phase involved administering the same pronunciation assessments used in the pre-intervention phase to evaluate improvements in participants' phonetic accuracy. Classroom observations were repeated to assess changes in instructional practices and student engagement. Follow-up interviews were conducted with both students and instructors to gather their reflections on the training program and its impact on their learning and teaching experiences (Cuq, 2003).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the pronunciation assessments, classroom observations, and interviews were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Analysis The audio recordings from the pronunciation assessments were transcribed using the IPA and analyzed for errors in vowel elision, nasalization, and other key phonetic features. Error rates were calculated for each participant, and paired t-tests were conducted to determine whether the differences between pre- and post-training error rates were statistically significant (Flege, 1987a; Dohalska, 1991). Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize the frequency and types of errors observed.

Qualitative Analysis The qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed thematically. Field notes and interview transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes, such as challenges with vowel elision, the effectiveness of specific teaching methods, and the role of resources in shaping instructional practices (Puren, 1988; Cuq, 2003). Thematic analysis provided a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing phonetic training outcomes and informed the development of practical recommendations for FLE instruction in Nigeria.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of data collection. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the anonymity of their identities in all published reports (Flege & Munro, 1994). They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Approval for the study was obtained from the university's ethics review board.

Limitations of the Study

While the case study approach provides valuable insights into the phonetic challenges faced by Nigerian learners of FLE, it has limitations in terms of generalizability. The findings of this study are specific to the context in which it was conducted and may not apply to other settings or populations (Dohalska, 1991). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews may introduce bias, as participants' responses could be influenced by social desirability or recall errors. Future research could address these limitations by employing a larger sample size and incorporating objective measures, such as spectrographic analysis, to validate the findings (Flege, 1987a; Cuq, 2003). This methodology provides a comprehensive framework for examining the effectiveness of phonetic training in improving the pronunciation accuracy of Nigerian learners of FLE. By combining quantitative and

qualitative approaches, the study captures both the measurable outcomes of phonetic training and the contextual factors that shape its implementation. The insights gained from this research have the potential to inform more effective teaching practices and contribute to the broader field of second language acquisition.

RESULTS

Overview of Findings

The results of this study highlight significant improvements in the pronunciation accuracy of Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) following targeted phonetic training. These improvements were particularly evident in areas such as vowel elision, nasalization, and rhythm. The analysis of pre-and post-training assessments, combined with observations and interviews, revealed key trends and insights into the effectiveness of the intervention program. These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of explicit phonetic instruction in enhancing oral proficiency (Cuq, 2003; Flege & Munro, 1994).

Pronunciation Assessments

The pre-and post-training assessments provided quantitative evidence of participants' progress. As shown in Table 1 of the thesis, the average error rate for vowel elision decreased from 52% in the pre-assessment to 18% in the post-assessment, representing a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.05$). This reduction in error rates was particularly pronounced for obligatory elisions, such as in phrases like "l'ami" and "l'hôpital," which were frequently mispronounced during the pre-assessment but correctly articulated by most participants after training.

Table 2 further illustrates the progress made in nasal vowel production. Before the intervention, many participants substituted nasal vowels with their oral counterparts, as seen in words like "fond" ("[fõ]" pronounced as "[fo]"). Post-intervention data showed a 35% increase in the correct production of nasal vowels, underscoring the effectiveness of targeted drills and IPA-based exercises (Dohalska, 1991; Flege, 1987a).

Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table

One of the most insightful findings of this study comes from the Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table included in the thesis. This table provides a detailed analysis of how participants' pronunciation was perceived by native French-speaking listeners before and after the intervention. The table highlights discrepancies between intended utterances and their perceived counterparts, shedding light on the specific phonetic features that contributed to intelligibility issues (Cuq, 2003; Puren, 1988). Before the intervention, listeners frequently misinterpreted participants' utterances due to errors in vowel elision, nasalization, and liaison. For example, the word "l'homme" was often perceived as "le homme" due to the omission of elision. Similarly, the nasal vowel in "fond" was frequently misheard as its oral counterpart, leading to confusion in meaning. As documented in the table, these errors resulted in an overall intelligibility score of 42% during the pre-assessment phase. After the intervention, the Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table showed a marked improvement in intelligibility, with scores rising to 85%. Listeners reported fewer instances of misinterpretation, particularly in phrases where elision and nasalization were applied correctly. For example, the phrase "l'ami est ici" was accurately perceived by all listeners post-training, compared to only 40% during the pre-assessment. This improvement underscores the importance of targeted phonetic training in enhancing not only production accuracy but also listener comprehension (Flege & Munro, 1994; Dohalska, 1991).

The table also highlights the role of rhythm and intonation in influencing listener perception. Participants who successfully incorporated stress-timed rhythm and appropriate intonation patterns were rated as more intelligible by listeners, even when minor phonetic errors persisted. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the interplay between segmental and suprasegmental features in achieving effective communication (Puren, 1988; Cuq, 2003).

	Les phrases	Transcription

1a	*Nous devons être d'accord je pense*	[nu**dv**ɔž ɛtrədakɔrʒəpɑ̃s]
1b	*Il me paraît que c'est très juste*	[ilməparɛ**ks**ɛtrɛʒyst]
1c	*Ce n'est pas y avoir vu le jour…*	[sənɛpaiavwarvy**l**ʒur]
1d	*Comme on serait d'un cercle*	[kɔmɔ**sr̃** ɛ …]
1e	*Car il vous devient à ce point nécessaire*	[karilvu**dv**jea**spw**enɛsɛsɛr]

Table 1. Listeners' "input" (extracts of the standardized transcript from Sacha Guitry's "L'esprit de Paris"

S/N	Les phrases	Transcription
2a	*Nous avons être d'accord je pense*	[nu**zav**ɔž ɛtrədakɔrʒəpɑ̃s]
2b	*Il m'a paraît (~ il m'apparaît)*	[il**ma**parɛ…]
2c	*Ce n'est pas y avoir du jour*	[sənɛpaiavwar**dy**ʒur]
2d	*Commencerait d'un cercle*	[kɔmɑ̃**sr**ɛ…]
2e	*Car il vous bien d'espoir nécessaire*	[karilvu**bj**edɛ**spw**arnɛsɛsɛ]

Table 2. Listeners' "intake" (transcript of high-frequency errors)

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations provided valuable insights into the instructional practices that contributed to these improvements. Instructors frequently used visual aids, such as vowel charts and IPA symbols, to reinforce key concepts. As noted in the thesis, these tools helped students internalize the distinctions between French vowel categories, facilitating their application during speaking tasks (Puren, 1988). The use of audio-visual materials, including recordings of native French speakers, further enhanced learners' auditory discrimination skills. One of the most effective strategies observed was the integration of interactive activities, such as role-playing scenarios and group discussions. These activities provided learners with opportunities to practice phonetic rules in context, promoting both accuracy and fluency. Observations also revealed increased student engagement during these sessions, with many participants actively seeking feedback and demonstrating greater confidence in their oral production (Cuq, 2003).

Interview Data

The semi-structured interviews with participants and instructors corroborated the findings from the assessments and observations. Students reported feeling more confident in their ability to apply phonetic rules, particularly in challenging areas like elision and nasalization. One participant noted, "I used to avoid words with nasal vowels because I was unsure how to pronounce them, but now I feel more comfortable using them in sentences." Similarly, instructors highlighted the importance of the intervention program in addressing specific phonetic challenges, emphasizing the value of visual aids and interactive exercises (Flege & Munro, 1994). However, both students and instructors identified persistent challenges. Some students continued to struggle with optional elisions, particularly in informal speech contexts where the rules are less rigid. Instructors also expressed a need for additional resources, such as advanced audio-visual materials and spectrographic analysis tools, to further enhance phonetic training (Puren, 1988).

Quantitative and Qualitative Themes

The quantitative data from the assessments and the qualitative insights from the observations and interviews revealed several key themes:

Impact of Explicit Instruction: The findings highlight the effectiveness of explicit phonetic instruction in improving pronunciation accuracy. As shown in Table 3, participants who received explicit instruction on vowel elision and nasalization outperformed those who relied solely on general communicative practice.

Role of Listener Perception: The Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table underscores the critical role of listener perception in evaluating phonetic accuracy. Improvements in intelligibility scores post-training demonstrate the value of aligning production-focused training with listener-based outcomes (Cuq, 2003).

Role of Visual and Auditory Tools: The use of visual aids, such as vowel charts, and auditory tools, such as native speaker recordings, played a critical role in facilitating learners' understanding of phonetic distinctions. These tools were particularly effective in addressing common errors, such as the mispronunciation of nasal vowels (Puren, 1988).

Contextual Application: Interactive activities that simulated real-life communication enabled learners to apply phonetic rules in context, enhancing both accuracy and fluency. Observations revealed that these activities fostered greater learner autonomy and engagement (Flege, 1987a).

Persistent Challenges: Despite the overall success of the intervention, certain areas, such as optional elisions and stress-timed rhythm, remained challenging for some learners. These findings underscore the need for ongoing practice and reinforcement (Dohalska, 1991).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study offer significant insights into the role of targeted phonetic training in improving pronunciation accuracy among Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). This section discusses the implications of these results, linking them to broader theoretical frameworks and practical considerations in second language acquisition. It also addresses persistent challenges and potential areas for further exploration.

The Role of Explicit Phonetic Instruction

The results emphasize the effectiveness of explicit phonetic instruction in addressing segmental and suprasegmental challenges. Participants demonstrated significant improvements in vowel elision, nasalization, and rhythm, which are critical for achieving intelligibility in French. These findings align with Cuq's (2003) assertion that explicit instruction fosters phonetic competence by providing learners with systematic guidance on articulatory mechanisms and phonological rules. The notable decrease in error rates—particularly in obligatory elisions—underscores the importance of explicit practice in internalizing complex phonetic phenomena (Flege & Munro, 1994).

Listener Perception and Communicative Effectiveness

The Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table reveals the pivotal role of listener perception in evaluating the success of phonetic training. Improved intelligibility scores highlight the extent to which training interventions addressed key phonetic issues. For example, the accurate production of nasal vowels and the proper application of elision significantly enhanced the comprehensibility of participants' speech. These findings support Flege's (1987a) view that intelligibility depends not only on segmental accuracy but also on the ability to integrate phonetic features within meaningful communicative contexts. Furthermore, the emphasis on listener-based outcomes aligns with Dohalska's (1991) framework, which advocates for a holistic approach to pronunciation training that considers both speaker and listener perspectives.

Integration of Visual and Auditory Tools

The study highlights the critical role of visual aids, such as IPA vowel charts, and auditory tools, such as native speaker recordings, in facilitating phonetic learning. These resources enhanced learners' ability to distinguish between French vowel categories and improved their auditory discrimination skills.

Observations from classroom settings indicate that learners who engaged with visual and auditory tools demonstrated higher levels of accuracy in both controlled and spontaneous speech tasks. These findings echo Puren's (1988) recommendation for incorporating multi-modal resources into phonetic training to support diverse learning styles.

Contextualized Practice and Learner Autonomy

Interactive activities, such as role-playing and group discussions, emerged as essential components of the training program. These activities enabled learners to apply phonetic rules in real-life contexts, fostering both accuracy and fluency. The observed increase in learner engagement and confidence suggests that contextualized practice not only reinforces phonetic competence but also promotes autonomy in language use. This finding resonates with Cuq's (2003) argument that communicative tasks enhance the integration of phonetic knowledge into functional speech.

Persistent Challenges

Despite the overall success of the intervention, certain challenges persisted, particularly in the application of optional elisions and the mastery of stress-timed rhythm. These issues reflect the inherent difficulty of transferring abstract phonetic concepts to spontaneous speech. Learners often defaulted to syllable-timed rhythms characteristic of their L1, which hindered their ability to produce stress-timed patterns in French. Additionally, optional elisions—which depend on contextual factors—proved difficult to internalize, leading to inconsistencies in informal speech settings (Dohalska, 1991; Flege, 1987b).

Implications for Pedagogy

The findings of this study have significant implications for FLE pedagogy. First, they underscore the need for integrating phonetic training into standard curricula. By prioritizing phonetic competence, educators can equip learners with the tools needed to achieve both accuracy and intelligibility in oral communication. Second, the results highlight the importance of aligning training methods with listener-based outcomes. This approach ensures that learners' speech is comprehensible in real-world interactions, thereby enhancing their communicative confidence.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underline the transformative potential of targeted phonetic training in enhancing the pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility of Nigerian learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). By emphasizing areas such as vowel elision, nasalization, and rhythm—features that frequently pose challenges due to L1 interference—the intervention program demonstrates that explicit instruction, visual aids, and interactive practice can significantly bridge phonetic gaps. This aligns with previous research that underscores the value of systematic phonetic training in second language acquisition (Cuq, 2003). The Listener's Input/Intake Transcript Table is particularly pivotal in this study, offering empirical evidence of the relationship between phonetic training and listener comprehension. The improved intelligibility scores post-training reflect not only progress in phonetic accuracy but also the broader impact of training on real-world communication outcomes. These findings advocate for a holistic approach to FLE instruction that prioritizes listener-oriented phonetic training alongside production-focused methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Integration of Phonetic Training in Curricula**: It is essential to incorporate phonetic training modules into FLE curricula, particularly in contexts where learners face significant L1 interference. These modules should address foundational features like vowel elision and nasalization, progressing to more complex aspects of French pronunciation.
- **Use of Visual and Audio-Visual Tools**: The effectiveness of visual aids, such as IPA vowel charts and spectrograms, should be maximized. Instructors should also leverage audio-visual resources, including recordings of native speakers and interactive pronunciation software, to reinforce learning.
- **Contextual and Interactive Practice**: To ensure retention and application, learners should engage in role-playing scenarios, guided discussions, and other contextual activities that

simulate real-life communication. Such activities foster both accuracy and fluency while encouraging learner autonomy.

- **Training for Instructors**: Instructors must receive specialized training to effectively teach phonetics. Workshops and professional development programs can equip them with the skills and resources needed to address learners' phonetic challenges.
- **Access to Advanced Resources**: Institutions should invest in advanced phonetic training tools, such as spectrographic analysis software and virtual reality simulations, to enhance the learning experience. These resources can provide learners with immediate feedback, helping them refine their pronunciation in real-time.
- **Ongoing Research and Evaluation**: Further research is needed to explore the long-term outcomes of phonetic training and its adaptability across diverse linguistic and educational contexts. Regular evaluations of instructional methods and learner progress can ensure that pedagogical strategies remain effective and responsive to learners' needs.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings from this study provide a strong foundation for future research into phonetic training for Nigerian learners of FLE. One key avenue for exploration is the long-term impact of phonetic training on oral proficiency. Future studies could track learners over extended periods to assess whether the gains observed in this study are sustained and how they influence overall language competence. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence-driven pronunciation tools and virtual reality simulations, could further enhance phonetic training methods by offering immediate feedback and immersive practice environments (Flege & Munro, 1994).

Another critical area for research is the sociolinguistic context of phonetic training. Studies could examine how learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape their attitudes toward phonetics and their willingness to adopt new pronunciation norms. Finally, expanding the scope of research to include larger and more diverse participant samples would improve the generalizability of findings, providing deeper insights into the challenges and strategies for phonetic training in multilingual settings like Nigeria.

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