



The Effectiveness of Learning Activities in Pronouncing the English Vowel Schwa by EFL College Level Students

ID No. 893

(PP 344 - 360)

<https://doi.org/10.21271/zjhs.27.5.22>

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Received: 17/01/2023

Accepted: 28/03/2023

Published: 15/10/2023

Abstract

Pronunciation is an important element in learning English. One can achieve a good understanding from others by mastering the correct use of the sounds. In this research, the researcher emphasizes the role of pronouncing schwa vowel properly. Most English language learners face difficulties in pronouncing the vowel schwa. Thus, the researcher aims to address this problem.

The application of the work was on the second year students, English Department, College of Education for Humanities. They are 50 male and female students who lack the correct use of the English vowel schwa in isolated words, sentences and situational speech. The participants are divided equally into two groups, control and experimental. The control group is taught according to the traditional method, while the experimental group is given the information in reference to the use of some activities that, according to the model Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), can help in enhancing and activating students' interest to the correct use of any English sound. The T-test is dependent to measure students' achievement.

Keywords: *English schwa vowel, Teaching schwa vowel, Activities to enhance schwa vowel, Producing schwa vowel, Using schwa vowel.*

1. Introduction

The English language has a diverse range of speech sounds, and it is important to learn how they are produced. In fact, all speaking sounds are produced by moving air. In this research, light is shed on the use of the vowel schwa. The English vowel schwa is the most common and important sound; where all of the unstressed vowels must be pronounced as schwa.

Learners are used to making a read or spelling without being given any attention to the vowel schwa, and this is the problem. They need to understand the importance of using schwa as part of the English code. Thus, they have to learn where schwa is appropriate and where it is not, to overcome this problem and make progress in speaking and in writing. To do this, we often have to use information and consider rules about English spelling. This can help in understanding which syllables in the word or utterance are weak and provide a rough guide to the correct pronunciation of weak syllables, and prevent pronouncing a weak syllable as a strong one. This can be achieved by involving learners with number of activities to acquire it consciously.

1.1 Problem of the Study

Learners of the English language are not able to produce or recognize words pronounced with the vowel schwa in isolation or in an utterance. This is due to the lack of knowledge of the correct rules concerning the use of the vowel schwa and the lack of practicing using it. They



used to rely more on what they see written rather than what they hear. Thus, many mispronunciations occur.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The researcher aims at helping English language learners to be proficient in the use of the vowel schwa in isolated words and in connected speech, in order to understand and be understood by other English language speakers.

1.3 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that correct use of the English vowel schwa can be achieved with reference to a number of activities that help in enhancing learners' interest in using the vowel schwa consciously and effectively.

2. Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

In this section a light is shed to defining schwa vowel both phonetically and phonologically beside defining its production.

2.1 What is Schwa

Schwa is one of the short vowels in English language. It is equal to /h/ in consonants (Roach, 2009, p.100). That it sounds like /Uh/, as the sound that is made when we try to think of a word (Houston, 2022, p.1). The vowel schwa symbolized as [ə] can be spelled with any vowel letter. It could be treated as an allophone of one of the short vowels, e.g. [ʌ] and [ə] are, respectively, stressed and unstressed allophones of the same phoneme which is 'u' in the word 'cut' /kʌt/, /kət/ (Roach, 2001, pp.48-49; RenatUk, 2022, p.1). In addition, the vowel schwa is particularly prone to co-articulation. It is being influenced by nearby sounds, and thus varies substantially across contexts, making another characterization more appropriate. When it is followed by one of the consonants l, r, m, n the vowel schwa gets absorbed to be a syllabic consonant (Hudson, 2018, pp.1-2; Brink Siem, 2020, p.2; Rachel, 2020, p.2). Thus, the vowel is dropped and the consonant constitutes the syllable.

Strictly speaking, the vowel schwa can be defined both phonetically and phonologically. Phonetically, it is a sound that is produced with an open and no constriction in the vocal tract, where no contact of the articulators is made to allow air to flow freely along the middle of the tongue through the mouth with continual vibration of the vocal cords making all vowels be voiced. Phonologically, a vowel is a sound that forms the peak of a syllable. Each syllable consists of only one vowel (Crystal, 2008, p.517; Cake, 2022, p.1; Shyok, 2022, p.1). All vowels and diphthongs can make the syllable either stressed or unstressed, whereas the schwa vowel is only for unstressed syllables, due to a reduction in tracheal pressure, decreased muscular effort and a lack of coordinated articulatory gestures.

2.2 Describing the Production of the Vowel Schwa

Understanding the mechanisms of sound production is necessary before defining any difficulty in pronunciation. Here is a fundamental description of processing sound production; it is of three main phases:

2.2.1 The Airstream Mechanism

The Airstream mechanism represents the creation of airflow in the vocal tract (Roach, 2001, p.107). It is a main element for the production of sound, that it represents the first part in this process. It is called initiation, as the organ that initiates the airstream is named the initiator. Three initiators are used in spoken human language (Oliver, 2022, p.1): the diaphragm together with the ribs and lungs (pulmonic mechanisms), the glottis (glottalic mechanisms) and the tongue (lingual or velaric mechanism). They are either egressive (outward) or ingressive (inward) for airflow production (Crystal, 2008, p.18). In egressive, a speech sound



is produced by pushing air out through the mouth or nose. In ingressive, a speech sound is created by drawing air inward through the mouth or nose (Spells, 2021, p.1).

When we speak, we expel air from our lungs (Ello, 2022, p.3). The movement of lung air is done by the respiratory muscles (Wade, 2022, p.1), a downward movement of the rib cage and/or an upward movement of the diaphragm forces the air out of the lungs, causing a pulmonic airstream (Wohlgemuth, 2009, p.2). English speech sounds are produced by an egressive pulmonic airstream mechanism, as airflow is initiated in the lungs (actually the diaphragm and ribs) to be pulmonic initiation (Gillett, 2022, p.1), which is pushed out, to be egressive. With pulmonic sounds, a stream of air passes through a usually-fixed glottis. Because the oral cavity is so much smaller than the lungs, vowels cannot be pronounced with glottalic initiation. They use the more common pulmonic egressive airstream mechanism (SineBot, 2020, pp.1,3).

2.2.2 The Phonation of the Sound

Phonation is a complicated process, where sounds are produced by the vocal folds through quasi-periodic vibration. During phonation, the vocal folds are brought together by muscles attached to the arytenoids (cartilages structure). The sound of the voice can be changed by tightening or relaxing the laryngeal muscles, and by traveling through the throat and mouth (the supra-laryngeal vocal tract) it is further changed. Then the vowel sound is radiated from the lips as a modified form of the larynx-buzz (Huckvale, 2017, p.6).

The vocal folds are a pair of folds of muscular tissue inside the larynx. It can be moved wide open, slightly narrowed or tightly closed according to the sound produced. In producing the vowel schwa or any vowel, they can be closed enough to touch each other lightly, and the air passes between them, causing them to vibrate. This is called 'voicing, or phonation', with no constriction (friction) to occur (Ibid). Immediately above the larynx there is a passageway called the pharynx, where its role in speech is small. Above the pharynx there is two passageways: one goes up into the nasal cavity with the air escapes through the nose, the other closes off the access to the nasal cavity by raising the soft palate (velum) which is dependent on producing vowels. The end of the velum is a small piece of tissue named the uvula. Then the air goes through the tongue and the palate (the upper surface of the mouth) and the teeth to the lips (the outer end of the vocal tract) (Roach, 2001, p.14).

2.2.3 The Articulation of the Sound

The oral cavity is responsible for producing or articulating the vowel sound. Its size and shape can be modified by the movement of the tongue and the opening or closing of the jaw with raising the soft palate to seal off the nasal cavity (Huckvale, 2017, p.2). To get the vowel right, it is important to know the correct mouth position: (a) the position of the lips (rounded, spread, or neutral); (b) the part of the tongue raised (front, central, back), and the height to which it moves (high, mid, low), for slight movements of the tongue produce differences in vowel duration (short/long) and quality (monophthong/diphthong); (c) the amount of muscular tension required to produce them, where vowels articulated in extreme positions are more 'tense' than those articulated nearer the centre of the mouth to be 'lax' (Crystal, 2008, p.517; Celce-Murcia, et al., 2010, pp.114-118, 124; Rachel, 2020, p.1).

Vowels are sorted on a two-dimensional diagram; the vertical dimension shows the distance of the tongue body from the roof of the mouth, while the horizontal dimension shows the forward or backward displacement of the tongue body (Roach, 2001, p.19). This can be clearly represented in terms of a vowel quadrilateral (see figure 1 below) adopted from (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p.132). Figure 1 shows that the vowel schwa is in the centre of this chart. It is symbolized as ∂ (RenatUK, 2022, p.1). It is referred to as a neutral vowel, where the vocal tract is in its neutral state and has a neutral mouth position (Huckvale, 2017, p.4). The tongue does not have to go up or down, forward or back. It stays right in the middle, flat, and does not tense, just keeps relaxed in the middle of the mouth. The speaker needs to open his/her mouth a little bit and make a sound like uh (Hodge, 2019, p.2; Elias, 2020, p.1) (See



also Dankpods, 2021, p.1), where the lips are relaxed, not rounded, and the jaw is roughly half-way open (Hudson, 2018, p.1).

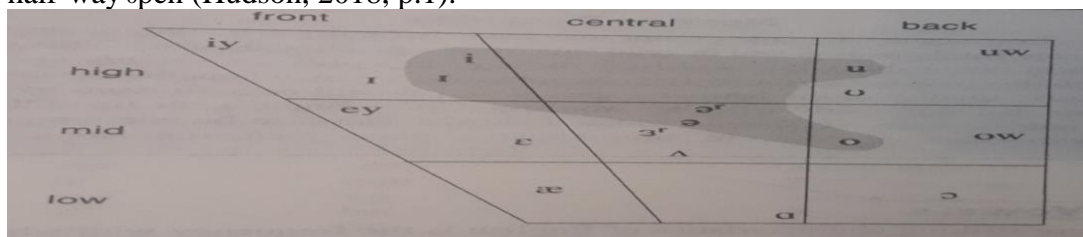


Figure1: Position of the unreduced versus reduced vowels (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p.132) Thus, phonetically, the vowel schwa is described as central, half-open and lax. It is articulated in the centre of the tongue, mid in the mouth and with no energy (see Roach, 2009, pp.14, 65; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p.115). And in order to articulate any vowel, the tongue, jaw and lips are placed to create a tube between the larynx and lips.

To summarize, in producing any sound the air that is inside the speakers' chest escapes from the lung, through the larynx and the mouth to go out the open air. Figure 2 below is adopted from Roach (2009, p.8), which shows the use of our articulators in modifying the flow of air to produce the sound.

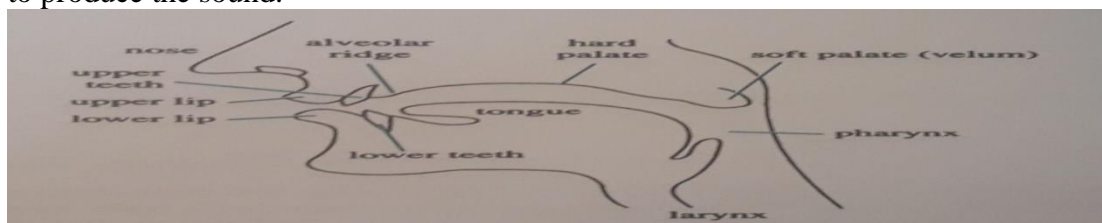


Figure2: The articulators (Roach, 2009, p.8)

2.3 Previous Studies

Number of studies are reviewed in this section. They are viewed in comparison and contrast with the present study:

2.3.1 Gomez and Garcia (2007: 1-2)

Gomez and Garcia in their study entitled "Perception of the Contrast Full vowel/ Schwa in English by Trained Spanish Learners" showed that English allows important weakening processes in function words in which peripheral vowels are often centralized to schwa. Speakers of Spanish found difficulties in perceiving and producing vowel reduction. Training learners of 41 Spanish teenagers (24 females, 17 males, mean age 15.8) in a formal context has the effect on the acquisition of the English centralized unstressed vowel schwa, where analyzing the perception of the contrast full vowel/schwa achieved by learners of English as a foreign language after perceptual and productive training was done. Perceptual training was based on discriminatory exercises, where fifty five English words were selected for analysis as minimal syllable pairs (e.g. bypass-compass). Production training provided students with articulatory cues and was based on production of the items on the part of the students and individual feedback provided by the trainer. The stimuli were presented and recorded by a custom-designed Matlab program beside the use of orthographic input in the perception test.

2.3.2 Ryu and Hong (2013: 313)

Ryu and Hong in their study entitled "Schwa deletion in the Conversational Speech of English: the Role of Linguistic Factors" investigate schwa deletion in the conversational speech of English which is strongly influenced by stress environment (pre-stress position vs. post-stress position), sonority, distance between two consonants surrounding an unstressed vowel /ə/, and lexical frequency of the word containing the schwa. The writer conducts a logistic regression analysis to find out how influential these factors are. It shows that stress



environment is the most pervasive, sonority the next, and lexical frequency the least influential factor that affects schwa deletion.

2.3.3 Medfouni (2017: 4)

Medfouni in her study entitled "Error Analysis of Students' Pronunciation of the Vowel Schwa. The Case of Second Year Students at Larbi ben mhidi University, Department of English" concerned with identifying, analyzing and classifying pronunciation errors of the vowel schwa made by second year students of English at Larbi Ben M'hidi University. These errors are due to the interference of specific L1 vowel sound. The fieldwork is conducted following a descriptive analytical method with a voice recording technique to collect oral data. She found that the pre-determined source influenced learners' pronunciation to a considerable extent. Thus, she conducted this research to raise awareness of those errors in order for teachers to try to prevent or remediate them.

2.3.4 Abdalkarim (2019: 1)

Abdalkarim in his study entitled "Improper Pronunciation of the vowel /ə/ in Trisyllabic words by Kurdish EFL Learners" investigates the improper pronunciation of /ə/ in trisyllabic words read and transcribed by 30 university learners majoring English as a foreign language, where the learners improperly excessively replace this vowel with other vowels simple or diphthongs. This is due to the fact that there are no explicit phonetic or phonological manifestations determine where to exactly pronounce the vowel schwa and the improper estimation of the qualities of the vowels within the syllables of the trisyllabic words and the improper reliance on the spelling and other related attributes.

2.3.5 Lee (2020: 1)

Lee in her study entitled "The Effectiveness of Explicit Form-Focused Instruction in Teaching the Schwa /ə/" investigates the effect of form-focused instruction (FFI) in teaching the vowel schwa to 13 female high school students in a classroom setting. Then a paired-sample-t-test and non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used for analysis. Though the experimental group in the post-test were found to reduce the duration of the schwa by around 40 percent, the findings suggest that explicit FFI with multiple repetitions and corrective feedback is partly effective in teaching pronunciation.

2.3.6 Maulia and Siti (2020: 961-962)

In the study of Maulia and Siti entitled "A Case Study of English Schwa Realization by Muna Language Speaker" the participant read 27 familiar isolated words contain the schwa sound in different positions which were recorded. Then acoustic-phonetic analysis was carried out by Praat software. Each word recorded was transcribed to analyze the realization of schwa sound in terms of phonological processes undergone the circumstance such as stress environment (pre-test syllable vs. post-test syllable) and consonants surrounding the schwa sound. The research employed descriptive qualitative research method since it places stress and describes in detail of what goes on in particular events or situations rather than comparing the effects of a particular treatment. The findings had shown that some words containing English schwa are interpreted to contain close vowel in Muna Language while others are eliminated to avoid mispronouncing schwa.

2.3.7 Tetteh (2020: 1)

Tetteh in his study entitled "Variations and Insertions of Schwa: Early Teenage L2 Learners of English" examined the variation and insertion of the vowel schwa in the speech of 200 third-year students of a junior high school located in an urban setting in Ghana who read aloud sections of familiar texts they themselves chose. The reading sessions and subsequent oral interaction sessions were taped, transcribed, and analyzed. The respondents' articulation



of schwa, as captured in the recordings, was compared with corresponding forms in the Ghanaian school variety of English. The findings indicate that all the unpredictable variants of schwa observed in their speech are traceable to their mother tongue. This has implications for second language theory, second language research, and second language pedagogy.

2.3.8 Sedita (2021: 1-2)

Sedita in her study entitled "Teaching the Schwa Sound in Unaccented Syllables" examines how a schwa vowel can really confuse a student in being a cause of spelling mistakes which replaces a vowel sound in the unaccented syllables of multi-syllable words. The correct spelling for a schwa sound is hard to remember because the sound cannot be related to the letter. She taught students a schwa vowel by letting them read a specific text and had them to find the schwa and circle it in words or create a schwa wall with words grouped by vowel representation.

3. Activities Promote the Use of the Vowel Schwa

The English language has the tendency to use reduced vowels in the stream of speech in an unstressed position. For learners whose L1 does not contain the reduced vowel schwa, it is difficult to hear and produce full versus reduced vowels. The first step is consciousness raising about this tendency. Presenting it with examples may be helpful. Then appealing to a variety of learning activities, since many learners benefit from auditory, visual, or kinesthetic reinforcement of patterns (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, pp.131, 132).

Practicing of concepts helps students deepen their understanding and make maximum progress (Hodge, 2019, p.3). Thus, the researcher conducts a number of activities that are arranged to be evolved from simple level of acquiring the vowel schwa (which are words) to the complex one (which are sentences and situational speech), as:

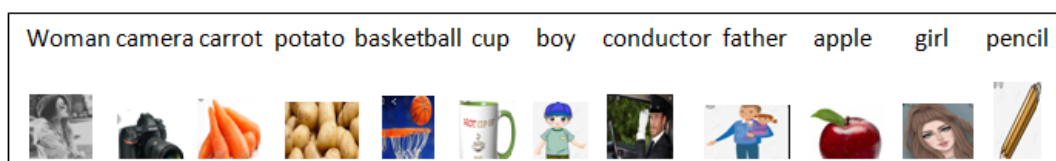
3.1 Activities Inside Classroom

3.1.1 In a Word Level

1. Listening Discrimination Activity

a. Vowels are more easily distinguished in relation to one another (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, p.138). Number of words are given at the same time to be uttered to check which words contain the targeted the vowel schwa. For examples: sofa, about, reach, contain, support, Oxford, man, book, Saturday, forward, cup, comma, ago, amaze, afterwards. These words are uttered by the teacher and the students repeat, then transcription for the uttered words is done on the board. Some words have schwa vowel word-finally (as in forward), others word-medially (as in Saturday) and others word-initial (as in about), while other words do not have schwa vowel (see O'Connor, 1998, p.83; Crystal, 2008, p.424; Brink Siem, 2020, pp.3,4).

b. The teacher can use another listening discrimination activity by having students to circle the picture of the word they hear, using picture cue cards (see the worksheet 1 below). S(he) randomly selects one of the words to read aloud, and has students to circle the word they hear. The students can check their answers with a partner, or the teacher can go over the answers with the class as a whole.



worksheet 1: Vowel discrimination

After that the teacher asks students to decide which of the words contain the vowel schwa. For



example, s(he) gives four choices, three of which contain the targeted vowel schwa, and the students have to circle the word with the different vowel sound, making their choices based on what they hear, and not on the spelling of the words. The teacher then asks students to do transcription exercises on the board for the words chosen, and another student can come up to the board to write the words as they have transcribed. This type of transcription exercise provides immediate feedback to learners (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, pp.133-134, 138-140).

2. Content and Function Words

Another point to distinguish is that words in English language may be content or function. Content words are more prominent and are stressed, such as nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs, as in the words ground, buy, wet and fast (Roach, 2001, p.113). Content words that have two syllables or more, one is stressed (strong), represented by ('), while the other is not stressed (weak), as the words: banana /bə'nana/, chocolate /'tʃɒklət/, soldier /'sɒldɜː/, quarrel /'kwɒrəl/, trousers /'traʊzəz/, equal /'iːkwəl/, qualification /kwɒlɪfɪ'keɪʃən/, allow /ə'laʊ/, focus /'fɒkəs/, sofa /'sɒfə/ and rhythm /'rɪðəm/ (Houston, 2022, p.1). According to Roach (2009, p.87), if the two syllable content words are nouns or adjectives, the stress goes on the first syllable, whereas if they are verbs or adverbs, the stress goes on the second syllable. Function words, such as articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs, are given stress when they are spoken alone out of context, given special emphasis to convey a particular meaning, cited, or signaling a contrast. But they are not usually stressed when occur in natural connected speech (Hudson, 2018, pp.2,3), as in:

1. John has washed the car./ He was coming to see us./ It's time for lunch.

The tricky thing is for students to determine which of the syllables or words contain the vowel schwa after uttering number of words by the teacher.

3. The Vowel Recognition

The teacher, for more recognition, can bring together words that have the same representation for the vowel schwa. S(he) gives a number of words that have the same representation for the vowel schwa and asks students to provide other examples, as in:

'a': announce, attend, character, about, alone, amaze, around, ahead, amount, thousand.

'ain': captain, certain, fountain, bargain.

'e': prophet, taken, item, carpet, event, settlement, violet, postmen.

'i': promise, pencil, cousin, easily.

'o': offend, potato, carrot, bottom, dinosaur, ribbon, phantom, oppose, tomorrow.

'u': rhombus, upon, supply, medium, autumn, support.

'ar': popular, monarch, particular.

'ate': the adjective ending: accurate, intimate, desolate (except private pravit)

'or': opportunity, forget, ambassador.

'er': teacher, perhaps, superman.

'ough': thorough, borough.

'ou': strong pronunciation might have av: gracious, callous, colour (see Roach, 2009, pp.65-66).

3.1.2 In a Sentence Level

The important thing is to teach students explicitly. The students who have difficulty in acquiring features of English sound, in speaking and spelling, can be introduced once they are speaking, reading or writing (Houston, 2022, p.1).

1. Listening Discrimination Activity

Listening discrimination exercise for vowel can also be adapted to the sentence level. It serves as a diagnostic issue to assure whether students are perceiving a specific vowel. In this



activity, students are given a worksheet (see the worksheet 2 below). They have to listen to two words embedded in a sentence context and have to circle the word they hear uttered by the teacher (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, pp.140,141). This type of listening discrimination practice is followed by oral production practice.

Which underlined word does the teacher pronounce? Circle the word you hear.

He has a dollar/doll on the table.

He can do /conduct the trip.

She finds them sofa / so far .

Worksheet 2: Vowel discrimination worksheet

2. Suggested Sequence for Teaching Schwa

a. The teacher has to inform students what stress is in a sentence level first. It is the one that is uttered with more muscular energy. In transcription, it is marked by putting a small vertical line (ˈ) high up just before the syllable it relates to, as in: 2. "Can you help?"/ 3. "Send me some roses." (Roach, 2009, p.73). The syllables with stress are more prominent than unstressed ones. After having knowledge about stress, the activity is to ask students to say a sentence, and tap the legs as the stressed words are uttered.

b. The teacher has students write the symbol of schwa over the vowel of unstressed words that they may identify. S(he) informs students that schwa is the sound that is uttered as /Uh/ with no feeling of stress as in the first syllable of the words 'again' and 'away'.

c. The teacher then teaches students what is schwa in a syllable level. As they are uttering a word, the teacher asks students to tap their leg with greater strength while uttering stressed syllable than unstressed one.

d. In reading a sentence, for example 'I'm having a sal_ad', the teacher asks students to try a schwa sound for a word with a long or short vowel that doesn't sound right. They can put stress on a syllable like ('sal) and then pronounce the other with a schwa vowel (ə). If it is not sound right, the stress can be shifted to the next syllable (Hodge, 2019, p.2; Houston, 2022, p.1; Adam, 2022, p.1).

3. Word Completion Exercise

The teacher can also propose word completion exercise with space for schwa representation to be filled by the students after the teacher's reading. For example: 4. workers must support the rules and encourage to do the conditions.

4. A Pair-practice Activity

A pair-practice activity is done by using worksheets (see the worksheet 3 below) with two words or expressions are nearly similar in pronunciation in a sentence. For example, Student A starts reading his or her sentences aloud, while Student B marks he words that are correct. After being read three sentences students can change their roles, in order for all students to practice the roles of a speaker and a listener.



<p>Student A</p> <p>1. Read the sentences a-c to your colleague.</p> <p>a. She is a sister for three brothers.</p> <p>b. That is alike.</p> <p>c. She can form the letter.</p> <p>2. Circle the word that is read by your colleague.</p> <p>d. She gives (Merry a gold/marigold) Wednesdays</p> <p>e. He is (in counter/ encounter) with others.</p> <p>f. He (can trust/ contrast) the managers.</p>	<p>Student B</p> <p>1. Circle the word that is read by your colleague.</p> <p>a. She is for three brothers. (assister/ a sister)</p> <p>b. That is (I like/ alike)</p> <p>c. She the letter. (can form/ confirm)</p> <p>2. Read the sentences d-f to your colleague.</p> <p>d. She gives Merry a gold Wednesdays.</p> <p>E He is in counter with others.</p> <p>f. He contrast the managers.</p>
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Worksheet 3: listening discrimination worksheet

3.1.3 In a Situational Speech

1. Controlled Practice and Feedback

a. Choosing a Context

Finding contexts in which the targeted vowel naturally occurs is a key step in teaching pronunciation communicatively. The controlled practice phase is done by choosing a subject category and providing or eliciting sample words containing the targeted vowel sound. The teacher may opt to set the context (e.g. a text from students' textbook) and provide the example words or it may suffice to establish the context and then elicit the individual examples from the students.

b. Dialogues

Another controlled-practice phase involves the use of dialogues. The use of dialogues can help students focus on the targeted vowel sound. They contain many words with the vowel being practiced. The teacher can put the dialogue on a poster board, or create a computer slide show. In the dialogue, students begin by trying to search the words that contain the targeted vowel. Once they have identified it, they work in pairs to practice and perform the dialogue (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, pp.141-142, 144).

Another way is to hear them a dialogue (making sure it contains words with the targeted vowel), then give them questions, related to the dialogue, involve choices with the targeted vowel, e.g. circle the correct words in parenthesis. Then the students will listen again to the dialogue and check their answers.

2. Bingo Card

		BINGO		

Worksheet 4: Pronunciation Bingo Card for Practicing Schwa Vowel

"Pronunciation Bingo" is an activity suggested to practice vowels. Each student receives a bingo card containing the word "BINGO" in the middle (see the worksheet 4 above). The



game begins with the teacher reading aloud a passage, in order for students to complete the boxes with words they hear must contain the targeted vowel, for example schwa. Once it is completely marked, they call out "Bingo!" If a student calls out "Bingo" before all words with schwa vowel are read or does not have bingo at the end of the passage reading means the student has misunderstood at least one of the words. As a check, students can compare bingo cards, or the teacher can verify by writing the list on the board (Ibid, p.146).

3. Pictures

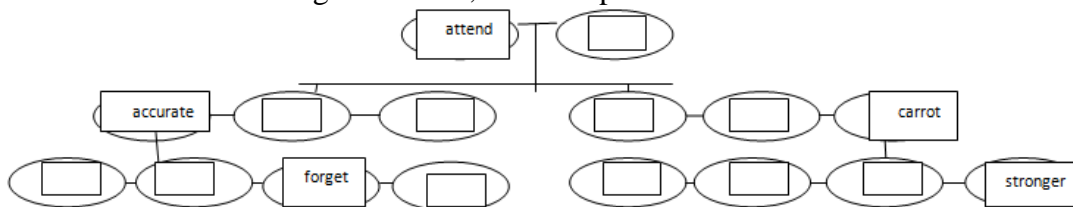
Another activity to teach pronunciation communicatively is by using pictures. According to (Lane, 2010, p.255), the use of pictures can make a broad evaluation of pronunciation. For example, to practice the use of the targeted vowel in meaning, students are asked to describe a picture (as an example see the picture 1 below). Then students are asked to check if the words they have used contain the targeted vowel or not.



The picture 1

4. Guided Practice with Feedback

Students, by time, will focus with more responsibility for producing language (the targeted sound) creatively, usually within a sentence-length utterance. Students, for example, receive the worksheet of solving puzzle (see the worksheet 5 below) contains some suggested words and others are blanked in the same branch that are linked with the same line. They work in pairs or small groups to fill in the blanks by interacting. As a cue for solving the puzzle, the teacher tells students that each branch contains the same letter or sequence of letters that sound the same for the targeted vowel, for example schwa.



Worksheet 5: solving the puzzle

5. Information-gap Activities

Information-gap activities, that give a chance for students to practice listening discrimination and spoken production, present another ideal format for providing students with guided practice. Because attention is focused primarily at interaction, the potential for the student to carefully monitor output is great. Furthermore, a chance for peer feedback is present into the activity (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010, pp.149-150). The activity in the worksheet 6 below shows that both students have a box with four columns and four classes and only eight words are provided differently for both students, while the others are blanked. Each student has to ask the other about the missing word.



Student A

Instructions: A chart below of 16 boxes contains eight words, while the other eight are empty. Your task is to fill the empty boxes by asking your colleague about the missing words. In turn, your colleague will ask you questions about your eight words. You can ask questions like:

What a word do you have in box C2?

Which word is in box A4?

	1	2	3	4
A		monitor(n)	emperor(n)	
B		conduct(v)		permit(v)
C			beautiful(adj)	second(adj)
D		actually(adv)	awkwardly(adv)	

Follow-up: After you and your partner have finished filling in the missing information, compare your answers to see if you have understood each other correctly. Practice pronouncing any difficult words together.

Student B

Instructions: A chart below of 16 boxes contains eight words, while the other eight are empty. Your task is to fill the empty boxes by asking your colleague about the missing words. In turn, your colleague will ask you questions about your eight words. You can ask questions like:

What a word do you have in box C3?

Which word is in box D2?

	1	2	3	4
A	desert(n)			Apple(n)
B	object(v)		produce(v)	
C	opportune(adj)	insolent(adj)		
D	secondly(adv)			certainly(adv)

Follow-up: After you and your partner have finished filling in the missing information, compare your answers to see if you have understood each other correctly. Practice pronouncing any difficult words together.

Worksheet 6: Information-gap exercise to discriminate the vowel schwa

After finishing, the teacher then describes and gives feedback about the students' answers. The teacher tells them that each branch contains words related to the same part of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). Each has its special pronunciation that the pair pronounce all of them.

3.2 Activities Outside Classroom

English vowel schwa forms a problematic area for English learners, as it is unusual sound. So, beside learning inside classrooms, learners need to do some practice for that unusual sound. The researcher suggests a number of tips to be depended by English learners to practice pronouncing the vowel schwa effectively and help in improving their skills (see Wil, 2016, p.1):

1. Listen to yourself (record your speech and make some notes about the areas that need improvement.)
2. Slow down (when you speak slowly you will give yourself a time to breathe and to think about what to say next.)
3. Picture it (close your eyes and think of how the sound is made before saying it. Visualizing the position of the mouth and face is done by remembering the phonemic chart as how it is related to other English phonemes, or by remembering the diagrams of the tongue and mouth to think of the shape needed.)
4. Get physical (A new way to move your mouth is needed with the use of different muscles.)
5. Watch yourself (When you make a sound, stand in front of a mirror to watch the shape of your mouth, the lips and the placement of your tongue. Compare it with a video of a native-speaker who says the same thing.)
6. Copy experts (listen to or watch English programs on radio or TV and imitate what is said, even if you are not sure about it.)
7. Practice English alone (problems in pronunciation will continue if you afraid to make a mistake. You can create a scenario to act it out as a dialogue yourself)



8. Looking for a language buddy (Find a friend has a same interest to improve his/her English. You can exchange record messages to listen carefully to each other's pronunciation.)
9. Words may be stressed or unstressed (pay attention to the stressed and unstressed words in reading a poem, a speech or a song aloud.)
10. Sing an English song (learn the words of popular English songs and sing. This can help in relaxing as just getting the words out, and no need for constructing sentences. The concern is to make your pronunciation sound better.)

At the end, learners also need, in their learning for pronouncing the vowel schwa, to depend on the dictionary and internet to check transcription and get the correct use for the English vowel schwa.

4. Methodology

Procedure is a particular way of accomplishing something. It is a series of steps followed in a regular definite order, where a set of instructions can be called into action (Merriam-Webster, 2022, p.1). This research is applied on 50 number of students of second year, English department, College of Education for Humanities, Mosul University. They are divided equally by age, gender and number, into two groups, control and experimental. Before starting the lessons, the researcher gives the two groups a pre-test (see Appendix 1) to check their knowledge and faults concerning the English vowel schwa. The test consists of three questions, 20 marks for each. It is conducted to test students' production and recognition concerning the vowel schwa. The first two questions are testing production and are given 40 marks, whereas the third one is testing recognition and is given 20 marks.

After that intensive instructions concerning the English vowel schwa are conducted by the researcher through a month, two days a week, an hour a day in the first semester. The control group is given instructions according to the use of traditional method by the researcher uttering words or sentences and students have to repeat after her, beside the transcription, while the experimental group is taught English vowel schwa with the use of practical activities, mentioned during the research, that are intended to be arranged from simple level of acquiring the vowel schwa (which is words) to the complex one (which are sentences and situational speech). This is so to activate students' minds and become conscious aware to the use of the vowel schwa properly. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010, p.129), learning pronunciation can be facilitated through activities. Learning activities can help in enhancing students' knowledge about the use of any targeted sound.

After finishing the lessons, the researcher asks students to practice their knowledge outside classrooms, to be still activating their mind to the use of the targeted vowel schwa and not to neglect or forget it. She recommends them through a number of tips. All these tips can help the students reach their goals as part of regular practice. Students can give each of these tips a try to find out which of them works best. After that the test is repeated to check whether any progress has been achieved by the students of both groups regarding production and recognition of the vowel schwa. The items of the production test are chosen creatively that are not selected directly from their textbook, while the recognition test is representing one of the activities that the students engaged in during the study.

5. Results and Discussion

The students in this research are divided into two groups, control and experimental. They are equivalent in gender and number, beside the age after getting the information. Thus, no statistical procedures are needed concerning these elements. Both groups are given a pre-test before giving any instructions by the researcher. In the pre-test, students of both groups are



found to be lacking in the correct use of the vowel schwa whether in isolated words, sentences or situational speech. As shown in table (1) below:

Table (1): The Unpaired T-test of Pre-test Mean Scores in the Pronunciation Achievement Test

Group	N	Mean	SD	T_cal.	T_tab.
Experimental	25	29.88	4.94402	1.050	2.012
Control	25	31.16	3.56698		

(0.05)(48)

After giving the instructions by the researcher, with the use of traditional method with the control group but a number of activities with the experimental group for a month, two days a week, an hour a day in the first semester, students are tested again using the same sample of questions. The results show that there is a difference in performance between the two groups. Students of experimental group are found to get progress. They have good use for the vowel schwa whether in producing transcription for isolated words or pronunciation for sentences and in recognizing the words inquiry of the suggested picture in situational speech. To the contrary, students of control group are found to achieve little or no progress. A T-test is conducted, as shown in table (2) below:

Table (2): The Unpaired T-test of Post-test Mean Scores in the Production, Recognition and Total Pronunciation Achievement Test

Sort test	Group	N	Mean	SD	T_cal.	T_tab.
Production	experimental	25	32.08	5.05734	5.954	2.012
	Control	25	22.84	5.88558		
Recognition	experimental	25	14.12	1.33292	5.222	2.012
	Control	25	10.24	3.46747		
Total	experimental	25	46.20	5.56776	6.849	2.012
	Control	25	33.08	7.79380		

(0.05)(48)

To further check the impact of the use of the activities on the development of the English vowel schwa for the experimental group over the control group, the only independent variable in the experiment, an unpaired T-test is made to compare the mean scores of the two groups in each variable, namely production and recognition, and in the total test collectively. The following results have been obtained, as shown in table (3) below:

Table (3): The Unpaired T-test of the Difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Production, Recognition and Total Pronunciation Achievement Test

Sort test	Group	N	Mean	SD	T_cal.	T_tab.
production	experimental	25	11.52	6.87459	6.203	2.012
	Control	25	1.12	4.79861		
recognition	experimental	25	4.80	2.30940	4.444	2.012
	Control	25	0.80	3.86221		
total	experimental	25	16.32	7.61971	7.165	2.012
	Control	25	1.92	6.55057		

(0.05)(48)

After that a paired T-test is made to check the statistical significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group to show their progress in each variable, namely production and recognition, and in the total test collectively. This is due to the role of activities that are conducted by the researcher and the researcher's feedback after each finishing activity. See the table (4) below:



Table (4): The Paired T-test of the Difference between Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of the Experimental Group in the Production, Recognition and Total Pronunciation Achievement Test

Sort test	test	N	Mean	SD	T_cal.	T_tab.
Production	Pre.	25	20.56	3.68646	8.379	2.064
	Post.		32.08	5.05734		
Recognition	Pre.	25	9.32	2.65707	10.392	2.064
	Post.		14.12	1.33292		
Total	Pre.	25	29.88	4.94402	10.709	2.064
	Post.		46.20	5.56776		

(0.05)(24)

Some of the previous studies sought to raise awareness that a problem of mispronouncing the vowel schwa is found by students who lack it in their L1 with the use of analytical method in order to prevent it. Other studies detected the problem of mispronunciation of the vowel schwa and tried to overcome it from one side by focusing on words while others on spontaneous speech or by reading with the use of some instructions, techniques, or tools, then a Praat program or a Matlab one is used to record and analyze students' responses. All of these methods did not help in raising students' awareness to self modulate the mispronouncing of the vowel schwa as it is in the present study; as the researcher tries to treat this problem in words, sentences and speech alike to completely solve the problem with the use of effective activities that has a good impact on students' outcomes as a T-test proves; pronunciation errors for the vowel schwa are reduced. With the use of the suggested activities, students are given a chance to know where the problem is and how to overcome it.

6. Conclusions

The study has concluded that in describing the speaking process in genral and any sound in specific, three events need to be given a look. First of all, in producing sounds parts of the chest, throat, and head are needed to be used. Then the sounds are travelling through the air in a form of vibration. Finally, the sounds are received by the listener's ear. In this research, a complete description is given about the production of the vowel schwa in the vocal tract. The vowel schwa, mainly, forms a problematic issue for most English language learners, because it is an unusual sound. It needs a hard attempt to recognize where to use a short vowel schwa. It needs to be perceptually distinct to the listener. Thus, the English vowel schwa is not easy to acquire. It demands greater effort from the teacher and students. The researcher, besides of giving instructions for the control group with interactive activities for the experimental group, suggests a number of tips to be adopted by the students to try outside classroom for more practicing with English pronunciation vowel schwa.

7. Recommendations

Number of pedagogical implications and recommendations are given to use the present study:

1. The teacher has to motivate students to give greater attention to the use of the vowel schwa in their speech to be better understood by speakers of English language.
2. As it is unfamiliar and complex sound, the teacher has to train students to the use of the vowel schwa with the use of some helping activities that can attract their interest.
3. The activities must fit students' interest and proficiency level.
4. The assessment procedures must be based on students' need of development in the use of the vowel schwa.



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Appendix 1 The Test

A: Production

1. Transcribe the following words to show where does the vowel schwa be occurred?

drill, vitamin, of, encourage, banana, must, condition, support, campus, occur, emphasis, appointment, sofa, celebrate, conduct, aware, danger, polite, agent, can.

2. Pronounce the following sentences:

a. They were talking about putting it latter.

b. Famous people may be clever.

c. Relationships must be conducted confidently.

d. He can do it with more energy.

e. They forget to do their homework.

B: Recognition

3. Listen carefully and check where does the vowel schwa be pronounced in the following descriptive context about the picture below:

In the picture, there are one woman but three men. All the persons are wearing a hat. The three men wear a jacket and trousers, whereas the woman is tried to wear a dress. One of the men bears an umbrella. There is a quarrel between each pair, because of the time-tables. We hope that this unshakable faith will not continue. It gives a bad impression about the office.



Appendix 2

The Samples' Scores in the Pre-test and Post-test

No.	Experimental						Control					
	production		recognition		total		production		recognition		total	
	Pre.	Post.	Pre.	Post.	Pre.	Post.	Pre.	Post.	Pre.	Post.	Pre.	Post.
1	20	33	8	14	28	47	23	18	8	13	31	31
2	21	34	14	15	35	49	28	32	9	11	37	43
3	23	24	7	12	30	36	22	27	13	12	35	39
4	19	36	8	15	27	51	20	22	6	6	26	28
5	23	27	11	16	34	43	23	19	10	14	33	33
6	19	34	9	14	28	48	20	33	6	11	26	44
7	21	38	6	14	27	52	23	30	13	15	36	45
8	21	32	8	13	29	45	22	17	8	7	30	24
9	19	31	12	14	31	45	19	23	14	13	33	36
10	21	34	9	14	30	48	24	17	10	3	34	20
11	21	29	6	12	27	41	26	26	5	14	31	40
12	21	34	11	12	32	46	25	21	6	7	31	28
13	15	29	13	15	28	44	16	20	13	7	29	27
14	18	33	7	14	25	47	21	23	12	4	33	27
15	30	20	12	13	42	33	14	12	10	13	24	25
16	29	33	10	16	39	49	22	20	8	10	30	30
17	20	33	6	13	26	46	22	19	11	13	33	32
18	14	27	5	13	19	40	20	19	8	7	28	26
19	22	39	11	14	33	53	25	30	9	11	34	41
20	17	25	6	15	23	40	26	36	11	14	37	50
21	21	39	13	17	34	56	17	18	8	6	25	24
22	23	27	11	14	34	41	18	17	11	12	29	29
23	21	40	7	13	28	53	23	25	8	13	31	38
24	21	34	11	16	32	50	21	22	9	8	30	30
25	14	37	12	15	26	52	23	25	10	12	33	37

کاربگهري چالاکيه په روره ده بيه کان له بيژه کردنی بزوينی ئینگليزي Schwa له لايه ن خویندکارانی به شی ئینگليزي وه که زمانیکی بيانی

دهلال مونتتهر فهره ج

به شی ئینگليزي کۆليژی په روره ده بۆ زانسته مروڤايه کان زانکۆی موسل - موسل

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پوخته

بيژه کردن پيکهاته به کی گرنگی فيربوونه له زمانى ئینگليزيه. مروڤ ده توائت به باشى له به رانه بر تيبگاته به شاره زابوون له به کارهينانى دروستى دهنگه كانى زمانى ئینگليزي. له م ليکولينه وه بيه دا، تويزه ر جهخت له سه ررۆلى بيژه کردنى بزوينى schwa ده کاته وه به شيوه بيه کی دروست. زۆربه ي فيرخوازانى زمانى ئینگليزي پرووبه پروويئاسته ننگ ده بنه وه له بيژه کردنى بزوينى schwa. له به رنه وه تويزه ر ئامانجى چاره سه رکردنى ئەم کيشه بيه. تويزينه وه که جيبه جى کراوه له سه رخويندکارانى قوناعى دووهم، به شی ئینگليزي، کۆليژی په روره ده بۆ زانسته مروڤايه کان. په نجا خویندکارى تير و م بژداربوون له تويزينه وه که به کارهينانى دروستى بزوينه رى ئینگليزي schwa يان نه بووله وشه ي دبراو، رسته و بارودوخى قسه کردندا. خویندکاره به ژداربووه کان به يه کسانى به سه ر دوو گروپدا دابه شکران ، کۆنترۆل و تاقیکاری. گروپى کۆنترۆل به پيى شتوازی ته قليدي زانياريان وه رگرتبوو يا خود فيرکرا بوون، له کاتيکدا گروپى تاقیکاری زانياريه کان يان وه رگرتبوو يان فيرکرا بوون به به کارهينانى هه نديک چالاکييارمه تيدهر که به پيى مۆديله که ي Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) ده توائنئاره زووى خویندکاران بۆ به کارهينانى دروستى هه ر دهنگيکى ئینگليزي چالاک بکات. تاقیکردنه وه ي به کارهاتوو به بۆ پيوانه کردنى ده سته که وتى خویندکاره کان.

ووشه سه ره کيبه کان: پيى بزوينى ئینگليزي schwa ، فيرکردنى پيى بزوينى schwa ، چالاکى بۆ باشتکردنى پيى بزوينى schwa ، به ره هم هينانى پيى بزوينى schwa ، به کارهينانى پيى schwa.

فاعلية الأنشطة التعليمية في نطق حرف العلة Schwa الإنجليزية من قبل طلاب كلية اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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النطق عنصر مهم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. يمكن للمرء أن يفهم الآخرين من خلال الاستخدام الصحيح للأصوات في اللغة الانجليزية. تؤكد الباحثة في هذا البحث على دور نطق الحروف المتحركة بشكل صحيح. يواجه معظم متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية صعوبات في نطق حرف العلة schwa. لذا تهدف الباحثة إلى معالجة هذه المشكلة. طبق البحث على طلبة المرحلة الثانية قسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية. شارك 50 طالباً وطالبة الذين يفتقرون إلى الاستخدام الصحيح لحرف العلة الإنجليزية schwa في الكلمات المنعزلة والجمل والتحدث.

قسم الطلاب المشاركون بالتساوي إلى مجموعتين، مجموعة ضابطة ومجموعة تجريبية. لقد تم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة وفقاً للطريقة التقليدية، بينما تم إعطاء المجموعة التجريبية المعلومات في باستخدام بعض الأنشطة المساعدة، التي وفقاً لنموذج (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)، يمكنه تعزيز وتفعيل اهتمام الطلاب للاستخدام الصحيح لأي صوت في اللغة الانجليزية. استخدم اختبار T لقياس تحصيل الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حرف العلة الإنجليزية schwa، تدريس حرف العلة schwa، أنشطة لتحسين حرف العلة schwa، إنتاج حرف العلة schwa، استخدام حرف schwa.