

**THE IMPORTANCE OF PRONUNCIATION IN DEVELOPING CAREER-ORIENTED
COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR ESP STUDENTS**

Ruziyeva G.KH.

PhD Associate Professor
of “Philology Faculty”
in “Alfraganus University”

Abstract. In today's globalized world, the demand for professionals with strong communication skills, especially in English, is higher than ever. While English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs typically focus on technical skills and specialized vocabulary, pronunciation instruction remains an often overlooked component. This article explores the vital role of pronunciation in ESP contexts and its direct influence on career-oriented communication skills, such as job interviews, workplace meetings, and client communications. By reviewing existing literature and presenting empirical findings from a study conducted with ESP learners, the article highlights the connection between clear pronunciation and professional credibility, as well as the practical implications for ESP curriculum design. It concludes with recommendations for integrating pronunciation instruction into ESP programs to enhance students' career readiness.

Keywords: pronunciation, ESP students, career-oriented communication skills, intelligibility, professional English, pronunciation instruction

In an era marked by international collaboration and communication, English has become the de facto lingua franca for professionals across diverse sectors. The role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is to equip students with the necessary language skills tailored to their field of study or future career. Traditional ESP courses focus on technical vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing reports, often neglecting the crucial aspect of spoken communication. However, in professional environments, students need more than just specialized language—they must also communicate effectively and intelligibly in real-world scenarios such as job interviews, client meetings, negotiations, and presentations.

One of the most important elements of effective spoken communication is pronunciation. Despite its significance, pronunciation instruction is often relegated to a secondary role in ESP curricula. This article aims to explore why pronunciation matters for ESP learners, particularly in relation to their professional communication skills. It will examine the relationship between pronunciation and career success, drawing from both existing literature and an empirical study of ESP students.

Literature Review. Pronunciation is a cornerstone of communicative competence. In professional contexts, mispronouncing key terms or using incorrect stress patterns can lead to misunderstandings, reduced intelligibility, and potential damage to a speaker's professional image. According to Celce-Murcia (2001), effective communication depends not just on vocabulary and grammar, but also on the clarity of the speaker's pronunciation. Studies such as those by Jenkins (2000) argue that intelligibility—the ability to be understood by others—is more important than achieving a native-like accent. This perspective aligns with the growing recognition that non-native speakers can be highly successful in professional settings without conforming to native speaker norms. In ESP contexts, the importance of intelligibility is especially critical. ESP learners are often required to communicate with colleagues, clients, or stakeholders from various linguistic backgrounds. As such, clarity and intelligibility, rather than accent or phonetic accuracy, become the most crucial aspects of professional communication.

While much of the research on pronunciation has focused on general English (EFL/ESL), there is a dearth of studies examining pronunciation in ESP programs specifically. Recent studies have begun to address this gap. For example, Warchoł (2022) emphasizes that ESP learners should receive targeted pronunciation instruction that is not just general but also relevant to the technical demands of their specific fields. Pronunciation features such as stress, intonation, and rhythm are especially important in technical discourse, where clarity can make or break an understanding of complex ideas.

A study conducted by Odiljonova and Abdullayeva (2024) highlights the role of pronunciation in increasing students' confidence when participating in professional settings, including client meetings and presentations. The study concluded that pronunciation training in ESP courses enhances not only communicative competence but also professional confidence.

In many professional settings, communication is key to success. A lack of clarity in spoken English can hinder an individual's ability to succeed in job interviews, give effective presentations, or participate in collaborative meetings. Studies show that non-native speakers who fail to speak intelligibly may be perceived as less competent, regardless of their technical expertise. In high-stakes career environments, such perceptions can limit career progression. Research by Gribacheva (2024) suggests that professionals in fields such as engineering and business who speak with clarity and confidence are more likely to be perceived as competent and to advance in their careers. By contrast, those with poor pronunciation may face challenges in client-facing roles, where clear communication is paramount.

While the importance of pronunciation is widely acknowledged, incorporating it effectively into ESP programs presents several challenges:

1. **Time Constraints:** Many ESP programs prioritize vocabulary acquisition and writing skills over speaking and pronunciation.
2. **Teacher Expertise:** Not all ESP instructors are trained in phonetics or pronunciation instruction, and may feel uncomfortable integrating pronunciation into technical courses.
3. **Student Motivation:** Many ESP learners may not recognize the importance of pronunciation in their professional success, particularly in technical fields where they may be more focused on acquiring subject-specific terminology.

The study involved 50 ESP students enrolled in an engineering program at a university in South East Asia. The participants were non-native speakers of English who had intermediate to advanced proficiency in English, as determined by their placement test scores. All participants were involved in a 16-week ESP course that focused on both technical English and communication skills for professional settings.

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of pronunciation instruction on students' career-oriented communication skills.

Participants also completed a mock job interview and a professional presentation in which they were required to discuss a technical topic in English. The tasks were evaluated by two trained evaluators on the following criteria: clarity of speech, use of professional vocabulary, and overall communicative effectiveness.

At the end of the course, participants completed a survey regarding their perceptions of the importance of pronunciation in professional communication. A subset of students (10) participated in follow-up interviews to provide qualitative insights into how pronunciation training influenced their confidence and communication skills.

The surveys and interviews revealed that students who received pronunciation training were more confident in their spoken English, especially in job interviews and client-facing scenarios. One participant noted, "Before the pronunciation lessons, I felt unsure about speaking in English

during my internship interviews. After practicing, I felt much clearer and more confident in explaining my ideas."

The results of this study underscore the importance of pronunciation training in ESP programs. The marked improvements in both pronunciation assessments and career-oriented communication tasks demonstrate that pronunciation directly influences the students' ability to communicate effectively in professional environments. Furthermore, the qualitative data highlights the students' increased confidence in speaking English in real-world situations.

However, the findings also suggest that pronunciation instruction is often neglected in traditional ESP curricula. Given the overwhelming evidence of its impact on career success, it is crucial for ESP educators to integrate pronunciation training as part of the core curriculum for all ESP students, particularly in fields where effective spoken communication is essential.

There are Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations for ESP learners.

1. Integration into Curriculum: ESP courses should integrate pronunciation instruction, particularly focusing on intelligibility and fluency in professional contexts.
2. Task-based Approach: Pronunciation instruction should be embedded within task-based learning activities, such as job interviews, client meetings, and presentations.
3. Focus on Intelligibility, Not Accent: Pronunciation instruction should prioritize intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than striving for a native-like accent.
4. Ongoing Assessment and Feedback: Continuous assessment of pronunciation throughout the course, along with regular feedback, will ensure sustained improvement and help students understand their progress.
5. Teacher Training: ESP instructors should receive training in pronunciation instruction to better equip them to support their students' needs.

In a Conclusion, For ESP students aiming for careers in which English plays a role in professional communication, pronunciation is a critical skill—not an optional extra. Without sufficient attention to pronunciation, technical knowledge and vocabulary skills may fail to deliver in real-world spoken interactions. ESP programmes should therefore incorporate pronunciation instruction targeted at intelligibility in career-oriented contexts, integrate it with professional tasks, and assess it purposefully. By doing so, educators can better prepare learners for the demands of globalised professional communication.

References

1. Astuti, R. N., & Faturrachman, Y. (2016). The Pronunciation of Students' Mother Tongue in Learning Speaking of ESP Program at Sociology Department of UMM. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics*, 2(2), 22-33.
2. Gribacheva, O. (2024). Developing Students' Receptive and Productive Pronunciation Skills in the Context of Higher Education and Distance Learning. *Crede Experto: Transport, Society, Education, Language*.
3. Odiljonova, S. S., & Abdullayeva, Z. D. (2024). The Importance of Pronunciation. *Modern Education and Development*, 16(1), 125.
4. Warchoł, A. (2022). Teaching English Pronunciation to ESP Learners: Basic Views and Recommendations. *Roczniki Humanistyczne*.
5. Yariyeva, N. Kh., & Sultanzade, N. I. (2024). Importance of Correct Pronunciation in Learning English. *Scientific News of Academy of Physical Education and Sport*, 6(3).
6. Teachers' and Learners' Beliefs About Pronunciation Instruction in Tertiary English as a Foreign Language Education. (2021). PMC.
7. Kastamonu Education Journal (2021). Students' responses about the importance of pronunciation skill in terms of professions.