

## Enhancing English Pronunciation among Indian Students in Malaysia: Exploring the Preference for Imitation vs. Repetition Methods

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### Abstract

English has gained significant importance in Malaysia, serving as a widely used global and acknowledged second language. Thus, it is common for Malaysians to be able to speak in English, at least enough for casual conversation. The Indian community in Malaysia, as part of its multicultural fabric, seeks to improve their English-speaking abilities. However, like other foreign language learners, Indian speakers face difficulty achieving accurate pronunciation due to phonetic differences with their native languages. This study intends to identify the methods applied by the Indian community in speaking English. The study examines the preferences between imitation and repetition methods to enhance English pronunciation. 36 Form Four Indian students in a suburban secondary school in Selangor took part in this study. Through a set of 5-likert scale 10-question questionnaires, participants indicated their preference on which method they practised. The results indicate that the participants preferred for imitation over repetition, which aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. These findings emphasise the importance of incorporating imitation techniques in English pronunciation instruction for Indian speakers and contribute to understanding effective language learning strategies. Educators and curriculum developers can benefit from these practical insights when aiming to enhance English pronunciation skills among Indian students.

**Keywords:** *English pronunciation, Indian speakers, imitation, repetition, ESL*

### Introduction

This world is home to thousands of languages. Language is a fundamental communication tool, allowing individuals to convey and exchange information across diverse cultural boundaries (Ahtif & Gandhi, 2022). The need for a common language has become even more pressing in today's globalised world, characterised by frequent interactions between linguistically diverse communities (Rao, 2019). English has emerged as the lingua franca for international communication and is paramount for various aspects of life, including education and employment (Herbert, 2023; Sing, 2017). Interestingly, English is no longer exclusive to the Western world, specifically to the British and American, as various variants of English are available.

In Malaysia, using different English variants, such as Malaysian English, Singaporean English, and Indian English, necessitates intercomprehension among speakers. The phonology of these new English differs most significantly from existing variations of English in that it preserves many unique characteristics, allowing the users to have better tolerance in a variety of English (Boonsuk et al., 2021). However, these English varieties often diverge considerably from the native languages of Malaysian students, leading to pronunciation difficulties due to phonological transfer from their first language (Darmi et al., 2018). One of

the common thread skills in communication is pronunciation. For an individual to enunciate each word correctly, this can be achieved by changing how they perceive the sounds that create those words. This applies to larger aspects of speech, such as syllables, stress patterns, and individual sounds. Notably, pronunciation is vital to language proficiency, significantly impacting an individual's communication ability (Muroya, 2022). Despite being a medium of education and employment, students encounter numerous challenges concerning English pronunciation (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

Malaysia's various races and ethnicities do not deter its citizens from embracing English as the second official language in the country. However, navigating the linguistic landscape in Malaysia can be particularly challenging for students, especially those of Indian descent, when it comes to mastering English pronunciation. This challenge arises primarily due to the multilingual environment that characterises Malaysia, where various languages and dialects are spoken (Hays, 2013, as cited in Duka and Abdul Aziz, 2019). The majority of Indians worldwide speak an English dialect known as Indian English (henceforth, IE). According to Wiltshire (2020), the contrast realisation of /v/ and /w/ issue existed across Indian communities due to the absentees from their native tongue. The coexistence of these languages introduces a complex interplay of phonological systems that significantly impact the pronunciation acquisition process. For non-native speakers, such as Malaysian Indian students, the journey to acquire a second language, like English, is often fraught with difficulties and obstacles (Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021; Purnama et al., 2023). These linguistic hurdles hinder their academic progress and affect their social integration within the multicultural Malaysian society (Nguyen, 2022). Pronunciation, a fundamental aspect of language acquisition, plays a pivotal role in effective communication. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings (Megariani et al., 2020) and communication breakdowns, ultimately impeding language learning.

Furthermore, the significance of pronunciation is amplified by the widespread use of English in official capacities within Malaysia. Tasks such as sending emails or participating in job interviews often demand proficiency in English pronunciation. However, Cameron (2012) claimed that non-native speakers frequently grapple with discrepancies between English word spelling and pronunciation, resulting in actual pronunciation problems as they pronounce the words based on their native tongue (as cited in Purnama et al., 2023). Compounding this issue is the unfortunate fact that pronunciation instruction is often overlooked during students' formative years in school, leaving them to navigate these complexities independently. The root causes of these challenges can be traced back to the inherent differences between learners' native languages and the target language, in this case, English (Priya & Prasantha Kumar, 2020).

Despite Malaysia's extensive promotion of English language proficiency in schools, there tends to be an inclination towards emphasising a native pronunciation model, inadvertently side-lining the nuances of local English pronunciation characteristics (Abu Bakar et al., 2021). The resulting neglect of pronunciation strategies and techniques in the English as a Second Language (ESL) environment underscores the need for

a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives held by Malaysian English learners concerning the acquisition of accurate English pronunciation. Thus, within this context, it becomes imperative to embark on an in-depth examination of the strategies and techniques employed by Indian students in Malaysia to enhance their English pronunciation skills. This study, therefore, endeavours to shed light on these strategies and techniques while upholding the rigorous standards of academic research. By doing so, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the broader realm of language learning and teaching, potentially revolutionising language education practices in multilingual societies like Malaysia.

Literature Review

Suryanto and Eka Sari (2021) highlighted that despite English being a global language, students encounter numerous challenges in studying it, with speaking proficiency being a common problem. Researchers and linguists have identified several linguistic aspects contributing to these challenges, including disparities between the first language (L1) and English (L2) sound systems, irregularities in English sounds, mother tongue interference, and spelling's impact on pronunciation (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Consequently, previous research has recommended pronunciation training as a solution. This chapter delves into these issues, drawing from prior studies and reviews that have served as the foundation for this research.

Indian Speakers' First Language in Malaysia

The Indian population in Malaysia is renowned for its diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, and linguistic origin. Malaysia's Indian population, known as Malaysian Indians, is culturally diverse and comprises various linguistic groups, including Malayalee, Sindhi, Gujarati, Bengali, and Punjabi communities. Tamil, spoken predominantly in Peninsular Malaysia, is the most common language among Malaysian Indians (Hoh et al., 2022). This paper focused on the most spoken Indian language in Malaysia, as explained in Table 1.

Table 1: Indian languages in Malaysia

Language	Description
Tamil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tamil, a South Dravidian language with historical significance, exhibits diglossia with distinct spoken and written forms, differing pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Ramasamy, 2010).</li><li>Tamil vowel length and compared it to English vowels, revealing phonological and phonetic differences between the two languages</li><li>Tamil also lacks a consonant analogous to English /v/ or /w/, leading to difficulties for Indian English speakers in distinguishing between /v/ and /w/ sounds (Maskara, 2013; Ruzkina et al., 2016).</li></ul>

Punjabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Punjabi, an Indo-Aryan language, is widely spoken in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh (Singh &amp; Kaur, 2021).</li><li>● It holds cultural significance for Sikhs and has many native speakers worldwide.</li><li>● Pronunciation challenges arise from Punjabi speakers' stress patterns and vowel and consonant substitutions when speaking English.</li></ul>
Gujarati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Gujarati, an Indo-Aryan language, has its origins dating back to the 12th century AD (Maher, 2016; Mukhopadhyay, 2021).</li><li>● Gujarati speakers in Malaysia primarily originate from the Indian ports of Cambay, Kutch, and Surat (Sivanantham &amp; Suberamaniam, 2014)</li><li>● Differences between English and Gujarati phonologies, including vowel and consonant counts and articulation modes, pose challenges for pronunciation.</li></ul>

English as a Second Language in Malaysia

English, as the preeminent global language for communication, holds immense significance in today's world. Consequently, English as a Second Language (ESL) has become an integral part of the curriculum for students worldwide, particularly in nations with historical ties to British or American colonialism, such as Malaysia, India, the Philippines, and Nigeria (Dascomb, 2019). In Malaysia, where a multilingual education system has been implemented, the challenge lies in striking a delicate balance between national and international linguistic demands, as outlined in the linguistic educational policy (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Within the Malaysian educational framework, English is formally recognised as the second language (L2), mandated by education policy as a compulsory subject across all educational levels (Farah Hussan & Mahani Stapa, 2021). This emphasis on English proficiency stems from the conviction that fluency in this global language catalyses language acquisition and proficiency among learners.

However, language acquisition entails more than merely comprehending linguistic structures and concepts. Some students exhibit competence in English and excel in written communication but grapple with verbal communication (Romero & Manjarres, 2017). Schools play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes toward the value of English and their approach to language acquisition with teachers the main role of owning a great knowledge themselves (Purnama et al., 2023) and planning great activities (Megariani et al., 2020). The enduring legacy of British colonisation in Malaysia has left an indelible imprint on the nation's education system. The British established English as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools and evolved into the primary language for corporate communication (Ng & Cavallaro, 2019).

### ***The Importance of Speaking English***

Speaking proficiency assumes paramount importance in daily life (Clampitt, 2017). Confidence demands extensive verbal interaction, a necessity for individuals who communicate extensively, such as politicians, auctioneers, and negotiators. Hence, people endeavour to acquire effective and engaging communication skills, encompassing linguistic competence and maturity (Youngblood, 2010). This quest becomes even more complex when individuals must navigate this challenging terrain in a new language, replete with social and cultural nuances (Light & McNaughton, 2014). Consequently, mastering speaking skills in a new language, such as English, becomes indispensable, significantly enhancing overall language proficiency as well as elevate one's social status (Carrie, 2017; Choi, 2020).

Nonetheless, proficiency in professional and effective communication often necessitates structured instruction. Accordingly, Copland et al. (2020) underscore the role of English language teachers in guiding their most capable students toward achieving speaking proficiency. Paradoxically, despite the boost in self-assurance that accompanies effective self-expression, students often grapple with speaking skills (Maher, 2016). Proficiency in speaking empowers students to converse fluently in compelling English, underpinned by consistent practice (Suroso et al., 2021). To utilise English as a means of communication, especially in academic and professional contexts, students and the general populace must cultivate specific foreign language competencies to attain high levels of verbal proficiency (Nur Faizah, 2021).

### **English Pronunciation**

#### ***British English Pronunciation***

Given Malaysia's history as a former British colony, there is a predilection for embracing British pronunciation models. Some even contend that Malaysian English's acrolectal variety is similar to Received Pronunciation (RP) (Chiew, 2021). Consequently, Standard British English has been adopted as a pedagogical model within the Malaysian English language curriculum to acquaint students with the proper pronunciation of English words spoken by native speakers (Jayapalan & Pillai, 2011). Nevertheless, this choice is subject to scrutiny, considering the many accents that characterise spoken English globally (Trudgill, 1999). A fixed standard for spoken English is scarcely tenable in global English usage (Chiew, 2021).

Excessive reliance on models for pronunciation may lead to an inaccurate understanding and representation of the language, failing to address learners' communicative needs. It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of such models and supplement them with other resources to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced approach to language learning. Graddol (2006) further elucidates this point, contending that the notion of students needing to speak English like a native speaker is antiquated. With English emerging as a global lingua franca, speakers increasingly employ it to express their nationality and identity. Consequently, the absence of a native-speaker accent no longer serves as an indicator of incompetence. Contemporary trends in

pronunciation instruction advocate exposure to various English dialects, emphasising intelligibility over the imitation of native models (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In Malaysia, however, the trend appears to be inclined toward a British-centric paradigm rather than an endonormative one.

### ***Malaysian English Pronunciation***

Malaysian English encompasses numerous dialects derives from the many languages exist in Malaysia (David et al., 2017). Educated Malaysian English, in particular, exhibits a spectrum with three distinctive levels: highly educated Malaysian English, moderately educated Malaysian English, and lowly educated Malaysian English. Highly educated Malaysian English pertains to individuals who have typically received a university education in English. Moderately educated Malaysian English is prevalent among individuals pursuing their initial university degrees, with English as the primary medium of instruction. In contrast, lowly educated Malaysian English is associated with individuals who have completed secondary school, with Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tamil, or other local languages serving as their primary medium of instruction. For this group, English is usually studied as a subject in school, and its utilisation outside the classroom is varies (Jassem, 2014).

One might conjecture whether Malaysian English speakers pattern their accents after British English, American English, Australian English, or even a distinct Malaysian English accent. In line with the preceding definition, personal observations, teaching experience, and academic research suggest that most Malaysian English speakers lean toward British English, specifically English, as their preferred accent model rather than Scottish or Irish English. A minority may draw inspiration from American English, with the most noticeable American feature being the /r/ sound. Importantly, it should be noted that the presence of the /r/ sound is not exclusive to American English; it is also prevalent in several British English accents (Trudgill, 1999).

### **Theories Related to Second Language Acquisition**

Understanding the mechanisms of second language acquisition (SLA) involves exploring various theories and perspectives. This section delves into three significant SLA-related theories, highlighting their fundamental principles and implications.

#### ***L1 Interference***

Language acquisition is an innate process that commences at a tender age with minimal conscious awareness or deliberate effort (Muriel, 2012). It is, therefore, crucial to acknowledge the role of the first language (L1) or mother tongue, acquired during childhood and employed in daily life. This phenomenon, often called L1

interference, occurs when individuals use a second language in grammatical, lexical, or phonological contexts (Krahnke & Krashen, 1983).

In their study, Krahnke and Krashen (1983) highlight the prevalence of L1 interference in English-speaking contexts, especially within classroom presentations and interactions. To address L1 interference issues, the Contrastive Analysis (CA) approach was widely employed in SLA studies during the 1950s and 1960s. CA primarily focused on evaluating the linguistic systems of both L1 and L2, particularly their phonological and grammatical structures, to anticipate errors and potential difficulties in L2 acquisition (Richards & Richard, 2002). However, CA's predictions were not consistently aligned with L2 learner performance, as not all L1-L2 distinctions posed challenges to L2 acquisition. Simultaneously, some challenges in L2 acquisition were unrelated to L1-L2 differences (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This prompted the development of Error Analysis (EA) in the 1960s, an analytical approach aimed at detecting L2 errors rather than predicting them (Corder, 1981, as cited in Saeed Al-Sobhi, 2019).

### ***Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory***

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, as expounded by Santrock (2011), revolves around how individuals learn by observing and imitating others. The desire to acquire knowledge and enhance skills often stems from individuals' motivations for engaging in specific behaviours. Hence, creating a conducive learning environment plays a pivotal role in teaching and learning, as learners exposed to a supportive environment tend to emulate one another's behaviours and actively participate in the learning process.

Bandura et al. (1988) posited that positive outcomes observed during the initial stage of social learning are catalysts for subsequent stages, namely imitation and behaviour modelling. For instance, an instructor who observes and appreciates students' engagement and enjoyment during an in-world course is more likely to be motivated to teach a similar course. This observation allows instructors to replicate and model effective teaching strategies in real-world settings (Bandura, 2005; 2006). Previous research has demonstrated that modelling can facilitate learning various behaviours, such as children observing their parents reading or students witnessing demonstrations of mathematical problem-solving.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Pronunciation Among Indian Students**

Psychological concerns, bad managerial positions, and the impact of teachers' and colleagues' passion on learners' desire can all be addressed, according to Rusreena et al. (2018), when all students recognise their own skills and strive to pick tasks that are better suited to them. Improving pronunciation among Indian students is a multifaceted task that involves addressing psychological factors, effective teaching techniques, and student engagement. This section explores strategies to enhance pronunciation skills among Indian students, shedding light on their significance and practical applications.

### ***Repetition Technique***

The repetition technique strongly emphasises the communicative aspects of speaking and aims to align teaching programs with students' communicative goals (Richards & Richard, 2002). In this approach, students actively participate by listening to their instructor, imitating pronunciation, words, and sentences, and then replicating the model provided by the instructor. Repetition should be context-specific to effectively achieve teaching and learning objectives (Kuliahana & Marzuki, 2020).

Repetition provides a platform for the students to practice and chance to participate in class activity (Mendrofa & Wijaya, 2022). More importantly, it fosters communication for the sake of communication, allowing students to communicate more freely and comfortably. Short-term repetition techniques tolerate minor grammatical errors, understandable pronunciation, and the occasional use of the native language. Variants of repetition drills include choral repetition, individual repetition, and cue-response drills (Kartikasari et al., 2015).

### ***Imitation Strategy***

Imitation entails replicating the words, stress patterns, pauses, intonation, facial expressions, and gestures of a native English speaker, facilitating students' ability to listen to English sounds and patterns (McCrocklin, 2012). This strategy harnesses technology, allowing teachers to incorporate engaging English videos into the classroom, providing a multimedia approach to instruction (Hänze & Berger, 2007).

Incorporating multimedia, such as videos with subtitles, allows students to listen, imitate, and replicate conversations and word pronunciations. This approach is particularly effective in helping students understand native speakers' pronunciation and learn syntax, phrase structure, and body language. It promotes active learning and engagement, as students often prefer learning through videos over rote memorisation (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Utilising technology for pronunciation instruction offers advantages that traditional methods cannot match (Neri et al., 2016). In summary, imitation through multimedia enhances students' language acquisition by making learning enjoyable and effective. Although not rigid, intonation patterns are vital in helping learners produce natural utterances and build confidence in communicating with English speakers (McCrocklin, 2012).

### **Previous Studies**

Several previous studies highlight the pressing issue of Malaysian students' communication skills, underscoring the importance of English as a second language (ESL) for Malaysia's progress (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). However, challenges arise as teachers' instructional approaches often diverge from their beliefs. Students are not properly taught to speak, but force to break the silence before they are ready. Their educational ideas and instructional approaches are misaligned, preventing them from putting their convictions into prac-



tice in the language classroom. They have no choice but to prepare pupils for the exam, which entails providing grammar-based, teacher-centred classroom education, due to exam-oriented education nature in Malaysia. Many Malaysian companies believe the graduates' communication skills, including English-speaking inadequacies contribute to unemployment (Kumar Hemanth & Salahudin, 2023). Despite years of English language education, graduates often perform poorly in speaking and communication. This discrepancy underscores the need for ESL students to improve their English proficiency, especially in speaking. Limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom further compound the issue.

Students who are unable to communicate effectively in an international setting will almost certainly lack the requisite social skills. One of the linguistic talents that has provoked much debate among educators and policymakers is speaking ability. Although the majority of students passed the English exam, they are not fully fluent in the language. It is clear that ESL students have few chances to use English outside of the classroom, especially if they speak another language. Saudi English faces similar challenges in improving students' speaking and pronunciation skills as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Al-Rubaat & Alshammari, 2020). The undergraduate EFL curriculum must prioritise listening and speaking instruction to underscore the significance of pronunciation training. Elumalai et al. (2021) support this viewpoint, emphasising that pronunciation is vital in language acquisition. Due to the higher numbers of vowels and consonants in Bangla compared to English, the Bangladeshi speakers have the tendency to experience vowel confusion. For example, /ɑ/, /o/, /ʊɑ/, /u/ sounds were produced instead of /ɔ/ sound.

Kuliahana and Marzuki (2020) believe that students' speaking problems such as mispronunciation, unwilling to make mistakes and ungrammatical sentences can be solved by practicing repetition technique. They applied action-research design, employing collaborative action research, among 25 Indonesian speakers. In Cycle 1, participants were tested to identify their ability to speak and pronounce difficult words. In Cycle 2, participants were allowed to practice as much as they wanted. The result shows a significant improvement, hence validating that repetition can improve students' communication ability. Practicing drilling repetition is helpful in enhancing students' ability to speak (Mendrofa & Wijaya, 2022). Teachers targeted the students' hearing and speaking sense by providing a lesson that highlighted the targeted word through high audio exposure and verbal repetition. Additional supporting materials such as pictures, video and recording were also used. The students' speaking ability showed a great improvement after completing the task with the teacher, thus proving the repetition does improve one's speaking ability.

82 Mandarin speakers took part in an elicit imitation task (EIT) to improve English proficiency (Wu et al., 2022). The participants were allowed to repeat the target sentences as much as they can before the test started. Surprisingly, High and Advance groups choose imitation to be more challenging than comprehending the sentence. The other groups, Low and Mid claimed that inability to comprehend caused them to be unable to imitate the sentence properly. Another research done by Llompart and Reinisch (2019) identify the

relationship between imitation and the ability to perceive and produce English sounds. The participants were 42 female German speakers, and underwent three tasks; perceptual categorisation task, phonetic imitation task and word reading. Focusing on the imitation task, participants listened to ‘sheep’-‘ship’ and ‘bet’-‘bat’ sequence, and were told to imitate the sound as closely as possible. The result showed that imitation strongly influences the perception ability, especially on the difficult L2 contrast. However, the relationship between imitation and production ability is more complex, due to other factors.

In essence, these studies collectively stress the importance of addressing pronunciation issues among ESL students, not only for educational purposes but also for future employability and global communication. They underscore the need for effective strategies and pedagogical approaches to enhance pronunciation skills in the classroom.

## Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to determine effective strategies for addressing these issues. The target population comprised 370 Form Four students from a suburban secondary school in Selangor. Stratified sampling was utilised to categorise the population based on ethnicity, resulting in a sample of 40 Form Four Indian students. The data collection instrument consisted of a questionnaire on the effectiveness of methods (repetition and imitation) in improving pronunciation. 5-option Likert scales were utilised for responding to the questionnaire items, ensuring efficient data collection. To ease the collection process, Google Form was used to distribute the questionnaire. After data collection, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 18.0) analysed the closed-ended questions, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the collected data. This methodological approach enables a systematic investigation into the identified factors affecting pronunciation problems among students and provides valuable insights into potential solutions.

## Findings

Table 2 displays one of the strategies for improving the pronunciation of English words and phrases: repetition. It is revealed that the repetition strategy was ineffective as item 3, *‘I have a habit of repeating after the words I hear in the media, but it did not help my pronunciation’*, received the highest mean scores ( $M = 0.81$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ). Twenty-nine respondents (80.56%) agreed with this statement, while the other seven respondents (19.44%) disagreed. This is probably because the respondents believed that repetition did not improve the quality of word representations in their memories, as eighteen respondents (50.00%) agreed with the statement.

Table 2: Repetition to improve English pronunciation (standard deviation in parenthesis)

Item	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean (SD)
Repetition does require a lot of effort, therefore I do not prefer to study English pronunciation through it.	17 (47.22)	19 (52.78)	0.53 (0.51)
I have a habit of repeating after the words I hear in the media, but it did not help my pronunciation.	7 (19.44)	29 (80.56)	0.81 (0.40)
Based on my experience, a teacher-led repetition drill pronunciation has slightly improved my pronunciation.	8 (22.22)	28 (77.78)	0.78 (0.42)
Repeating difficult words in conversation did not help my pronunciation.	14 (38.89)	22 (61.11)	0.61 (0.49)
Repetition is an effective way to improve the quality of word representations in my memory.	18 (50.00)	18 (50.00)	0.50 (0.51)
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>180</b>

They also asserted that repeating difficult words in conversation is futile, as most (61.11%) agreed. As a result, numerous of them (52.78%) agreed that repetition does require much effort, therefore, they prefer not to implement this technique in improving their pronunciation. However, it was discovered that repetition only worked in the presence of a guide, as item 3, 'Based on my experience, a teacher-led repetition drill pronunciation, has slightly improved my pronunciation', received the second highest mean scores ( $M = 0.78$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ). Twenty-eight respondents (77.78%) agreed with this statement, while the other eight (22.22%) disagreed.

Table 3 displays the other strategy, imitation, which could be used to improve the pronunciation of English words and phrases. It was revealed that the respondents favoured the imitation strategy for improving their pronunciation, as item 1: 'Imitation does not use much of my time, therefore I choose to study English pronunciation through it', received the highest mean scores ( $M = 0.97$ ,  $SD = 0.17$ ). Thirty-five respondents (97.22%) agreed with this claim, and only one (2.78%) disagreed. This is probably due to their belief that English intonation patterns can be practised by imitating them, as a majority of them (33) (91.67%) agreed with the statement despite the other three respondents (8.33%) disagreeing.

Following that, the respondents found descriptions, charts, facial diagrams, and video recordings were helpful in their imitation process as Item 3: 'Descriptions, charts, facial diagrams, and video recordings were helpful in helping me imitate difficult sounds', obtained the second highest mean score of 0.94 and a standard deviation of 0.23. Thirty-four respondents (94.44%) agreed with the statement, whereas the remaining two (5.56%) disagreed. Furthermore, the findings showed that attentive listening leads imitation to be effective, which enhances their pronunciation, with thirty respondents (83.33%) agreeing to this statement and

six respondents (16.67%) disagreeing. Their pronunciation could be enhanced even more if they imitate the language patterns employed in conversation by native speakers, as thirty respondents (88.89%) agreed with this statement. In comparison, the remaining four respondents (11.11%) disagreed.

Table 3: Imitation to improve English pronunciation (standard deviation in parenthesis)

Item	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean (SD)
Imitation does not use much of my time, therefore I choose to study English pronunciation through it.	1 (2.78)	35 (97.22)	0.97 (0.17)
I do believe that English intonation patterns can be practised by imitating them.	3 (8.33)	33 (91.67)	0.92 (0.28)
Descriptions, charts, facial diagrams, and video recordings were helpful in helping me imitate difficult sounds.	2 (5.56)	34 (94.44)	0.94 (0.23)
Listen attentively to the productions of native speakers and imitate them did improve my pronunciation.	6 (16.67)	30 (83.33)	0.83 (0.38)
Imitating native speakers' language patterns used in conversation through any possible exposure has improved my pronunciation.	4 (11.11)	32 (88.89)	0.89 (0.32)
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>180</b>

## Discussion

Regular practice is significant in improving pronunciation skills, echoing Comay's (2015) emphasis on this crucial aspect of language learning. However, it notes an interesting phenomenon: learners often fail to fully recognise the positive impact of repetition on pronunciation. Even though they understand its importance, they tend to overlook the need to practice English words and phrases regularly. The role of drilling in language acquisition is discussed in line with Mendrofa and Wijaya's (2022) perspective. Drilling is portrayed as a method that provides learners extensive practice opportunities, allowing them to grasp correct word structures and pronunciation. This practice not only enhances speaking skills but also boosts learners' self-confidence. The study reveals a preference among respondents for teacher-led drill pronunciation, especially when dealing with challenging pronunciation aspects. This aligns with the principles of Mathison and Ross's (2007) learning mastery approach, which focuses on self-improvement and skill development.

The importance of imitation, as outlined by McCrocklin (2012), is highlighted in the discussion. Imitation involves replicating native English speakers' speech patterns, intonation, and gestures, enabling learners to internalise the sounds of the language. Respondents in the study acknowledge the value of imitating English intonation patterns, recognising its role in facilitating natural speech production and boosting confi-

dence in English communication. (Mayer, 2014) endorsement of multimedia instruction, incorporating visuals and sounds, further supports this perspective. Respondents find descriptions, charts, facial diagrams, and video recordings particularly useful in imitation exercises. These findings are consistent with the Social Cognitive Theory, as developed by Albert Bandura, which emphasises the role of observation and imitation in the learning process. This theory underscores the importance of a positive learning environment and the learner's motivation to improve, aligning with (Krahnke & Krashen, 1983) concept of subconscious language acquisition driven by a focus on meaning and motivation.

The phonetic convergence plays a crucial role in developing language proficiency. The idea is that mimicking your conversation partners can lead to better pronunciation skills, as supported by Pardo et al. (2010). Thus, it is imperative to engage in authentic conversations with native speakers to enhance your language acquisition. The findings underscore the importance of consistent practice, imitation, and observation in enhancing the pronunciation abilities of second language learners.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, Form Four Indian students encounter several obstacles when it comes to improving their spoken English. These include interference from their native language, limited exposure to English, concerns about their identity and self-worth, insufficient practice in English pronunciation, lack of motivation, and worries about achieving good pronunciation. It is essential for authorities to address these challenges, as they can lead to a lack of drive to learn and result in inadequate English-speaking skills. To maintain their level of proficiency and prepare for undergraduate studies, students must be academically and mentally ready to face the challenges and expectations. Additionally, they should create a conducive learning environment that fosters confidence, promotes self-learning, encourages discussion, and facilitates collaborative work towards excellence. By meeting the demands and resolving the issues of students, the nation can achieve its goal of producing highly skilled scholars.

## **Author contributions**

Nurul Izzah (N.I.A) - Conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis and writing (original). Raja Rosemawati (R.R.R.A) - data analysis, writing (review and editing), and supervision. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Data availability statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

## Conflicts of interest

None.

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