

ISSN 2071 - 1964

**Revue interafricaine de littérature,
linguistique et philosophie**

Particip'Action

**Revue semestrielle. Volume 18 N°2 – Juillet 2026
Lomé – Togo**

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Indexation SJIF 2026 : 5.095

ISSN 2071–1964

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Titre,

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Résumé en français. Mots-clés, Abstract, Keywords,

Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

Par exemple : Les articles conformes aux normes de présentation, doivent contenir les rubriques suivantes : introduction, problématique de l'étude, méthodologie adoptée, résultats de la recherche, perspectives pour recherche, conclusions, références bibliographiques.

Tout l'article ne doit dépasser 17 pages,

Police Times new roman, taille 12 et interligne 1,5 (maximum 30 000 mots). La revue *Particip'Action* permet l'usage de notes de bas de page pour ajouter des précisions au texte. Mais afin de ne pas alourdir la lecture et d'aller à l'essentiel, il est recommandé de **faire le moins possible usage des notes (10 notes de bas de page au maximum par article).**

- A l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, les articulations d'un article doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres (**exemples : 1. ; 1.1.; 1.2; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.).**

Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point. Insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page.

Les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir chacun(e) un titre.

Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.

Les références de citations sont intégrées au texte citant, selon les cas, de la façon suivante :

- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées). Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par **M. Ascher (1998, p. 223)**, est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Pour les articles de deux ou trois auteurs, noter les initiales des prénoms, les noms et suivis de l'année (J. Batee et D. Maate, 2004 ou K. Moote, A. Pooul et E. Polim, 2000). Pour les articles ou ouvrages collectifs de plus de trois auteurs noter les initiales des prénoms, le nom du premier auteur et la mention "et al" (F. Loom et al, 2003). Lorsque plusieurs références sont utilisées pour la même information, celles-ci doivent être mises en ordre chronologique (R. Gool, 1998 et M. Goti, 2006).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique sont présentés comme suit : NOM et Prénom (s) de l'auteur, Année de publication, Zone titre, Lieu de publication, Zone Editeur, pages (p.) occupées par l'article dans la revue ou l'ouvrage collectif.

Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Editeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2^{de} éd.).

Ne sont présentées dans les références bibliographiques que les références des documents cités. Les références bibliographiques sont présentées par ordre alphabétique des noms d'auteur. Il convient de prêter une attention particulière à la qualité de l'expression. Le Comité scientifique de la revue se réserve le droit de réviser les textes, de demander des modifications (mineures ou majeures) ou de rejeter l'article de manière définitive ou provisoire (si des corrections majeures doivent préalablement y être apportées). L'auteur est consulté préalablement à la diffusion de son article lorsque le Comité scientifique apporte des modifications. Si les corrections ne sont pas prises en compte par l'auteur, la direction de la revue *Particip'Action* se donne le droit de ne pas publier l'article.

AMIN Samir, 1996, *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

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BERGER Gaston, 1967, *L'homme moderne et son éducation*, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », *Diogenes*, 202, p. 145-151.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, *Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

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NB2 : La quête philosophique centrale de la revue *Particip'Action* reste : **Fluidité identitaire et construction du changement : approches pluri-et/ou transdisciplinaires.**

Les auteurs qui souhaitent se faire publier dans nos colonnes sont priés d'avoir cette philosophie comme fil directeur de leur réflexion.

La Rédaction

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY IN GABONESE UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES, PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND PROSPECTS FOR REFORM

Lié Patrick MOUVOGNY*

Abstract

The teaching of English phonetics and phonology occupies a fundamental position in the development of effective oral communication, pronunciation competence and linguistic awareness among university students learning English as a foreign or additional language. This article examines the teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities, with particular attention to the relationship between phonetic knowledge, pronunciation instruction and communicative competence. It recommends greater integration of articulatory phonetics, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription, auditory discrimination, pronunciation practice, suprasegmental features, digital technologies, corpus-based materials and Gabonese linguistic realities. The study concludes that a renewed approach to phonetics and phonology teaching could contribute significantly to improving English proficiency and preparing Gabonese graduates for participation in an increasingly multilingual and internationally connected environment.

Keywords: English phonetics and phonology, pronunciation, English language teaching, Gabon universities,

Résumé

L'enseignement de la phonétique et de la phonologie anglaises occupe une place fondamentale dans le développement d'une communication orale efficace, de la maîtrise de la prononciation et de la conscience linguistique chez les étudiants universitaires apprenant l'anglais comme langue étrangère ou additionnelle. Le présent article examine l'enseignement de la phonétique et de la phonologie anglaises dans les universités gabonaises, en accordant une attention particulière à la relation entre les connaissances phonétiques, l'enseignement de la prononciation et la compétence communicative. Il recommande une intégration accrue de la phonétique articulatoire, de la transcription en alphabet phonétique international (API), de la discrimination auditive, de la pratique de la prononciation, des caractéristiques suprasegmentales, des technologies numériques, des corpus linguistiques et des réalités linguistiques gabonaises. L'étude conclut qu'une approche renouvelée de l'enseignement de la phonétique et de la phonologie pourrait contribuer de manière significative à l'amélioration de la maîtrise de l'anglais et à la préparation

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des diplômés gabonais à participer à un environnement de plus en plus multilingue et interconnecté à l'échelle internationale.

Mots-clés: Phonétique et phonologie, prononciation, l'enseignement de l'anglais, les Universités Gabonaises.

Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly important in the contemporary world. English serves as a major language of international diplomacy, science, technology, aviation, tourism, higher education, commerce and intercultural communication. (Crystal,D (2003). English as a global language (2nd ed.) Cambridge University Press

For countries such as Gabon, the acquisition of effective English communication skills is therefore not simply an academic objective but also a strategic national priority. Gabon has historically operated within a predominantly Francophone linguistic and educational environment. French occupies a central position in administration, education, the media, and public communication, while numerous indigenous languages contribute to the country's multilingual ecology (Frey & Reutner, 2024). Gabonese students have traditionally been educated through the medium of French while learning English as a foreign language (Mbodouma, 1999). In recent decades, however, the role of English has acquired increasing relevance in the context of globalisation and international communication, particularly as Gabon has expanded its engagement with international organisations and partnerships. Gabon's accession to the Commonwealth in June 2022 represents a particularly significant development in this regard, connecting the country more closely with an international organisation that brings together Francophone and Anglophone member states (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022; Jenkins, 2015; seidlhofer,2011)

Within this context, universities have an essential role to play in developing students' capacity to communicate effectively in English. However, communication in a foreign language involves more than grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition. Pronunciation is a central component of intelligibility and oral communication. A student may possess considerable grammatical and

lexical knowledge but still experience communication difficulties if their pronunciation prevents listeners from understanding them.

Phonetics and phonology are widely recognised as fundamental sub disciplines of linguistics and as essential components of the study and teaching of spoken language. Phonetics is concerned with the physical and physiological properties of speech sounds, including their articulation by the speech organs, their acoustic characteristics, and their perception by listeners (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2015; Ashby, 2011). Phonology, by contrast, investigates the systematic organisation and functional patterning of speech sounds within particular languages, including the ways in which sounds contrast, combine, and interact in linguistic structures (Odden, 2005; Gussenhoven & Jacobs, 2017). International university curricula illustrate the importance of combining theoretical and practical dimensions. For example, university-level phonetics courses commonly include the description of English consonants and vowels, IPA transcription, syllable structure, stress and intonation. Some programmes explicitly connect phonetic knowledge with pronunciation teaching and communicative competence.

The situation in Gabon, however, requires a context-sensitive approach. The pronunciation difficulties experienced by Gabonese students cannot simply be understood through models developed for learners in other linguistic environments. Students may be influenced by French phonology, by their first or heritage languages, by the varieties of English to which they are exposed, and by the pronunciation models used by their teachers and educational institutions. The central argument of this article is that the teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities should move beyond an exclusively or predominantly theoretical orientation towards a more integrated model that combines explicit phonological knowledge with communicative pronunciation practice and technology-enhanced learning. Such an approach is consistent with contemporary pronunciation pedagogy, which increasingly emphasises intelligibility and comprehensibility rather than the attainment of a native-speaker accent as the primary objective of pronunciation instruction (Derwing & Munro,

2015; Levis, 2005; Walker & Zoghbor, 2015). It should also take into account the linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds of Gabonese learners, whose English learning takes place within a multilingual environment and a predominantly Francophone educational context. Earlier research on English learning in Gabon has specifically highlighted the importance of considering learners' linguistic, cultural and educational contexts when designing English-language teaching materials and pedagogical approaches (Victor, 1999). In this regard, a context-sensitive approach to pronunciation instruction should recognise the potential influence of learners' first-language phonological systems while providing systematic opportunities to develop intelligible English pronunciation for effective communication in both local and international contexts. The integration of digital and technology-mediated tools may further support this objective by providing learners with opportunities for repeated practice, auditory modelling, speech analysis and feedback.

1 Conceptualising Phonetics and Phonology

1.1. Phonetics

Phonetics is the scientific study of speech sounds, including their physical production, acoustic transmission and auditory perception. The field is conventionally divided into three interrelated branches: articulatory phonetics, which investigates the physiological mechanisms involved in speech production; acoustic phonetics, which examines the physical properties of speech signals; and auditory or perceptual phonetics, which is concerned with how speech sounds are received and interpreted by listeners (Ashby & Maidment, 2005; Ladefoged & Johnson, 2015; Wayland, 2018).

Articulatory phonetics examines the processes by which the human vocal tract produces speech sounds. It considers the role of the respiratory system, the larynx and vocal folds, and the articulatory organs, including the tongue, lips, teeth, alveolar ridge, hard palate and soft palate (Ashby & Maidment, 2005; Ladefoged & Johnson, 2015). Such knowledge is

particularly relevant to the systematic description of consonants and vowels according to parameters such as place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing. The International Phonetic Association's International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) provides a standardized framework for representing speech sounds and is widely used in phonetic description and transcription (International Phonetic Association, 1999). (internationalphoneticassociation.org)

The teaching of English in Gabon must be understood within the country's multilingual environment. French functions as the official language and is the dominant language of formal education and administration. At the same time, Gabon is home to a considerable number of indigenous languages and linguistic varieties. This multilingual environment can be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because students may transfer phonological patterns from French or their first languages into English. Such transfer may affect vowel production, consonant contrasts, syllable structures, stress patterns and intonation. It is also an opportunity because multilingual students often possess considerable linguistic awareness. If appropriately guided, they can compare the sound systems of French, English and Gabonese languages and develop a deeper understanding of language structure.

The teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities should therefore avoid presenting English pronunciation as an isolated system. Instead, students should be encouraged to undertake comparative linguistic analysis.

For example, students can examine: English and French vowel systems, English and French consonantal contrasts, syllable structures, word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, intonation, consonant clusters, weak forms, connected speech.

Such comparisons can help students identify areas of potential positive or negative transfer.

2. The Importance of Phonetics and Phonology in English Language Education

The importance of phonetics and phonology extends beyond the pronunciation of individual sounds.

2.1. Pronunciation and Intelligibility

The primary objective of pronunciation teaching should be intelligibility rather than the imitation of a single native-speaker accent. In international communication, English is spoken by people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, university students should be trained to produce speech that is understandable to a wide range of listeners.

This principle is particularly relevant to Gabonese students who may use English in international diplomacy, business, aviation, tourism, education and regional cooperation.

2.2. Listening Comprehension

Phonological awareness also supports listening comprehension. Students who understand connected speech, weak forms, assimilation and reductions are better prepared to understand naturally spoken English.

A learner who has only studied carefully articulated textbook English may struggle when confronted with authentic speech.

Consequently, phonetics and phonology instruction should incorporate recordings of natural conversations, interviews, speeches and other authentic materials.

2.3. Oral Confidence

Pronunciation competence can contribute to students' confidence. Learners who believe that their speech is understandable may be more willing to participate in discussions, presentations and professional interactions.

This is especially important in university environments where students are expected to make presentations, defend research projects and participate in seminars.

2.4. Professional Communication

For Gabonese graduates, pronunciation competence has relevance in professional fields.

- Diplomats need to communicate clearly during international meetings.
- Civil servants may participate in regional and international conferences.
- Aviation professionals require highly intelligible communication.
- Tourism professionals interact with international visitors.
- Academics participate in international conferences and research networks.

Consequently, phonetics and phonology should be regarded as part of professional communication training.

3. Major Challenges in Teaching English Phonetics and Phonology in Gabonese Universities

3.1. Influence of French

One of the major challenges is the influence of French on English pronunciation. French and English differ in several important phonological respects. English has a complex system of word stress and extensive use of reduced vowels in unstressed syllables. French, by contrast, organizes rhythm and prominence differently. French-speaking learners may therefore experience difficulties with:

- English word stress.
- vowel reduction.
- schwa.
- sentence stress.
- rhythm.
- intonation.
- consonant clusters.
- certain English consonants.
- long and short vowel contrasts.

These differences should be explicitly addressed in university instruction.

3.2. Insufficient practical work

A second challenge is the possibility of excessive emphasis on theoretical knowledge.

Students may learn definitions such as “phoneme,” “allophone,” “voicing” and “place of articulation” without having sufficient opportunities to apply these concepts in actual speech.

A successful course should combine:

Theory → Observation → Listening → Production → Feedback →
Assessment

3.3. The Communicative Approach

Pronunciation should be integrated into meaningful communication.

Instead of practising isolated sounds indefinitely, students should progressively use them in:

- dialogues.
- role plays.
- presentations.
- debates.
- interviews.
- simulations.
- professional scenarios.

Students should learn to distinguish:

- short vowels.
- long vowels.
- diphthongs.
- triphthongs where relevant.

However, teachers should avoid presenting vowel length as the only distinction. Vowel quality and tongue position are also essential.

4. Teaching Suprasegmental Features

One of the weaknesses of traditional pronunciation teaching is excessive attention to individual sounds.

Effective communication depends heavily on suprasegmental features. These include:

- syllable structure.
- word stress.

- sentence stress.
- rhythm.
- intonation.
- connected speech.

4.1. Word stress

Students should learn that English stress is not always predictable from spelling.

Teachers can introduce:

- stressed and unstressed syllables.
- primary and secondary stress.
- stress patterns.
- stress-shifting.
- word-class contrasts.

For example:

PREsent (noun)

preSENT (verb)

Such examples demonstrate the relationship between stress and meaning.

4.2. Sentence stress

Sentence stress helps speakers signal information structure.

Students should learn to distinguish between:

- content words.
- function words.
- new information.
- given information.

5. Technology and Digital Innovation

Technology offers significant opportunities for reforming phonetics teaching in Gabonese universities.

5.1. Mobile Learning

Many students have access to smartphones. Mobile devices can therefore become tools for:

- recording speech.
- listening to models.
- practising pronunciation.
- accessing online dictionaries.
- comparing recordings.
- completing pronunciation assignments.

5.2. Speech Visualization

Software that displays waveforms, spectrograms or pitch contours can introduce students to acoustic phonetics.

Even introductory demonstrations can help learners understand that speech is a physical signal rather than simply a sequence of written letters.

5.3. Online Pronunciation Resources

Universities can encourage students to use reputable pronunciation dictionaries and digital learning platforms.

The key issue is not simply providing technology but integrating it into a structured pedagogical framework.

5.4. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is increasingly capable of providing automated speech recognition and pronunciation feedback.

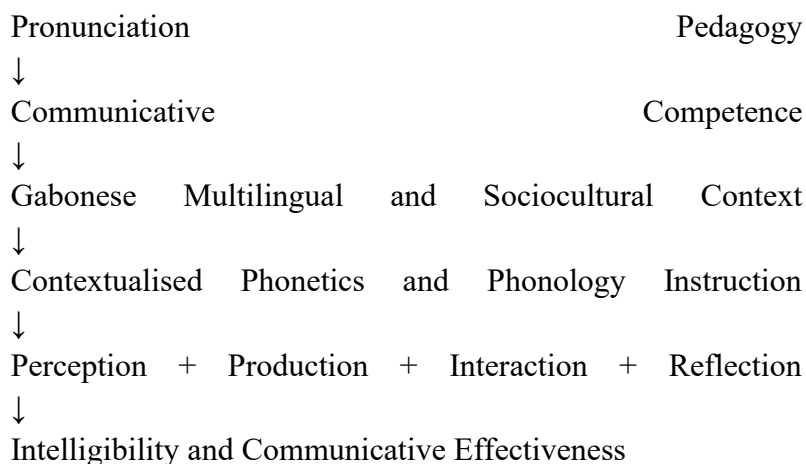
In the Gabonese university context, AI-supported tools could potentially help students practise outside classroom hours.

However, AI should supplement rather than replace teachers. Human teachers remain essential for interpreting pronunciation difficulties, providing contextualised feedback and addressing sociolinguistic issues.

6. Theory underpinning the Proposed Model for the Teaching of English Phonetics and Phonology in Gabonese Universities

The proposed model for the teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities is theoretically grounded in the convergence of three complementary perspectives: contemporary pronunciation pedagogy, communicative competence theory, and a Gabonese sociocultural and multilingual perspective on language learning. The model is based on the premise that effective university-level pronunciation education should move beyond the transmission of abstract phonetic and phonological knowledge towards an integrated approach that connects knowledge, perception, production, interaction, intelligibility, technology and sociocultural context.

The theoretical rationale for the model can be represented as follows:



The model therefore conceptualises phonetics and phonology not as purely descriptive linguistic disciplines but as resources for developing students' ability to communicate effectively in English in academic, professional and international contexts.

6.1. Foundation One: Contemporary Pronunciation Pedagogy

The first theoretical foundation derives from developments in second-language pronunciation pedagogy. Earlier approaches to

pronunciation teaching often emphasised imitation, repetition and the attainment of a native-speaker accent. Contemporary scholarship, however, has increasingly questioned the pedagogical appropriateness of treating native-like pronunciation as the universal objective of second-language instruction. Research on pronunciation has distinguished among accents, comprehensibility and intelligibility, demonstrating that the presence of a foreign accent does not necessarily prevent successful communication (Munro & Derwing, 1999; Derwing & Munro, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 2011). ([Wiley Online Library](#))

This perspective provides an important justification for the proposed Gabonese model. The objective of university pronunciation instruction should not be to erase students' linguistic identities or to impose an unquestioned native-speaker norm. Instead, the primary objective should be to develop intelligible, comprehensible and contextually appropriate English pronunciation.

The model consequently adopts an intelligibility-oriented approach. Students are expected to develop control over those segmental and suprasegmental features that have the greatest potential impact on communication. These include consonant and vowel contrasts, word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, intonation, weak forms and connected speech.

This theoretical orientation is supported by pronunciation research advocating a broad framework of instruction in which pronunciation is integrated with meaningful language use rather than taught exclusively through decontextualised drills (Derwing et al., 1998; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). The proposed model therefore combines explicit phonetic and phonological instruction with perception, controlled production, guided practice, communicative activities and continuous feedback.

The resulting pedagogical sequence may be expressed as:

Explicit Knowledge → Perception → Controlled Production → Guided Practice → Communicative Use → Feedback → Self-reflection

This sequence recognises that students need both declarative knowledge about the sound system and procedural knowledge that enables them to use that system effectively in real-time communication.

The pronunciation-pedagogy foundation therefore justifies four central principles of the model:

- pronunciation should be taught explicitly;
- pronunciation should be connected to listening as well as speaking;
- segmental and suprasegmental features should be integrated;
- intelligibility and communicative effectiveness should take priority over an unrealistic requirement of native-like accent.

This approach is particularly appropriate for Gabonese universities because it provides a framework for developing internationally intelligible English while respecting the linguistic identities and multilingual repertoires of students.

6.2. Foundation Two: Communicative Competence Theory

The second theoretical foundation derives from the concept of communicative competence, initially associated with Hymes (1972) and subsequently developed for second-language teaching by scholars such as Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983). This perspective challenges the idea that successful language learning consists simply of mastering grammatical rules. Instead, effective communication requires learners to know not only what is linguistically possible but also how language is appropriately used in particular social and communicative contexts.

Applied to phonetics and phonology, communicative competence implies that pronunciation knowledge should not remain at the level of

isolated sound production. Students must be able to mobilise phonetic and phonological resources appropriately when participating in actual communicative events.

The proposed model therefore distinguishes between phonetic knowledge and communicative phonological competence. A student may know how /θ/ is articulated, for example, but this knowledge becomes communicatively meaningful only when the student can recognise and produce the sound in words, phrases and connected speech. Similarly, knowledge of word stress becomes functional when students can use stress appropriately in presentations, discussions, interviews or professional interactions.

The model consequently incorporates pronunciation into communicative tasks such as:

- academic presentations;
- debates;
- interviews;
- diplomatic simulations;
- professional meetings;
- aviation communication scenarios;
- tourism interactions;
- conference presentations;
- role plays;
- oral examinations.

These activities provide opportunities for students to transfer phonetic and phonological knowledge from controlled classroom practice into meaningful communication.

7. A Proposed Model for Gabonese Universities

Dimension 1: Linguistic Awareness

Students develop knowledge of English phonetics and phonology.

Dimension 2: Comparative Analysis

Students compare English with French and relevant Gabonese linguistic systems.

Dimension 3: Auditory Training

Students develop the ability to perceive phonetic and phonological contrasts.

Dimension 4: Production Practice

Students practise individual sounds, words and connected speech.

Dimension 5: Communicative Application

Students use pronunciation features in authentic communication.

Dimension 6: Digital Reinforcement

Students use technological tools for independent practice and self-assessment.

This model may be represented as:

Knowledge → Perception → Production → Interaction → Reflection → Improvement

The model should be implemented progressively throughout undergraduate programmes.

8. Theory underpinning the Proposed curriculum Framework For Gabon Universities

Theoretical Justification for the Structure, Number and Sequence of Units in the Proposed Curriculum Framework for Teaching English Phonetics and Phonology in Gabonese Universities

8.1. Rationale for the Proposed Curriculum Framework

The proposed curriculum framework for the teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities is based on the assumption that university-level pronunciation education should integrate theoretical linguistic knowledge with practical pronunciation development and communicative competence. The framework is designed specifically for learners whose English is acquired within a multilingual and predominantly Francophone educational environment. This contextual dimension is essential because Gabonese learners do not approach English pronunciation as monolingual learners: their developing English phonological system

interacts with French and, in many cases, with one or more Gabonese languages. Research on English learning in Gabon has highlighted the importance of the linguistic, cognitive, cultural and sociolinguistic context in which English is taught and learned (Victor, 1999). In particular, Victor argues that English-learning materials designed for learners in France may not necessarily correspond to the linguistic and educational needs of Gabonese learners. ([ERIC](#))

The proposed curriculum therefore adopts a context-sensitive, communicative, intelligibility-oriented and multilingual approach. It does not consider the teaching of phonetics and phonology to be an exclusively theoretical exercise involving the memorisation of phonetic definitions, articulatory descriptions or International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. Rather, the framework conceptualises phonetics and phonology as resources for developing learners' ability to perceive, analyse and produce intelligible spoken English.

This orientation is consistent with contemporary pronunciation research. Derwing, Munro and Wiebe (1998) provide evidence supporting a broad framework for pronunciation instruction, while Munro and Derwing (2011) emphasise the importance of intelligibility and the empirical foundations of contemporary pronunciation research. ([Wiley Online Library](#)) The proposed curriculum consequently prioritises intelligibility and comprehensibility rather than making the elimination of a Gabonese or Francophone accent the principal objective. This distinction is theoretically important because the objective of pronunciation teaching is increasingly understood as enabling learners to communicate effectively rather than requiring them to reproduce an idealised native-speaker accent. ([DOI](#))

The number fifteen can therefore be justified according to five pedagogical principles.

8.2. Fifteen Units Provide Sufficient Coverage of the Phonetics–Phonology Continuum

The first justification concerns content coverage. A university curriculum in phonetics and phonology should not reduce the discipline to the description of English consonants and vowels. A comprehensive curriculum must progressively address:

- the nature and scope of phonetics and phonology;
- the speech production mechanism;
- articulatory phonetics;
- acoustic and auditory dimensions of speech;
- the IPA and phonetic transcription;
- English consonants;
- English vowels;
- phonemes, allophones and phonological contrast;
- syllable structure and phonotactics;
- word stress and lexical prominence;
- sentence stress, rhythm and weak forms;
- intonation and prosody;
- connected speech processes;
- pronunciation, intelligibility and variation; and
- technology, communicative application and professional pronunciation.

The fifteen-unit structure therefore reflects the internal organisation of the discipline itself. It allows the curriculum to move from speech as a physical phenomenon, through sound as a linguistic system, towards pronunciation as communicative behaviour.

This broad approach is supported by pronunciation scholarship that argues for an integrated treatment of segmental and suprasegmental features rather than an excessively narrow focus on isolated sounds. Derwing, Munro and Wiebe's (1998) research is particularly relevant because it provides empirical support for a broad framework of pronunciation instruction. ([Wiley Online Library](#))

8.3. Fifteen Units Permit a Progression from Knowledge to Performance

The second justification is derived from curriculum progression. The proposed framework follows the principle that students should first acquire conceptual knowledge, then develop perceptual awareness, subsequently practise controlled production, and finally apply pronunciation knowledge in communicative situations.

The fifteen units are therefore organised according to the following developmental sequence:

Knowledge → Awareness → Perception → Analysis → Controlled Production → Communicative Production → Autonomy

This progression is pedagogically significant. Students cannot be expected to analyse English phonological patterns effectively if they do not first understand basic phonetic concepts. Similarly, students cannot be expected to modify pronunciation effectively without first developing the ability to perceive relevant contrasts.

The fifteen units therefore function as interdependent stages rather than isolated topics. Later units revisit and operationalise knowledge introduced in earlier units. This process of recycling is essential in pronunciation learning because pronunciation development requires repeated exposure, practice and feedback rather than one-time presentation.

This is particularly important given Victor's (1999) observation that English learning in Gabon needs to be considered in relation to the country's specific linguistic and sociocultural context. ([ERIC](#))

9. Towards a Gabonese Research Agenda: The Need for Systematic Research on English Pronunciation among Gabonese University Students

There is a pressing need to encourage and develop systematic empirical research on English pronunciation among university students in Gabon. Although the teaching and learning of English pronunciation constitutes an important component of oral language proficiency, there remains a need for more context-specific evidence concerning how Gabonese learners perceive, produce and develop English pronunciation. In a multilingual country such as Gabon, where French is the dominant language of formal education and where numerous indigenous languages coexist, pronunciation learning should be examined in relation to the linguistic repertoires and sociocultural experiences of learners. Research on English learning in Gabon has already emphasised the importance of taking local linguistic and cultural realities into account rather than relying exclusively on pedagogical assumptions developed in other contexts (Victor, 1999).

Future research should therefore investigate the extent to which French influences the acquisition of English pronunciation among Gabonese university students. Such studies could examine potential areas of cross-linguistic influence involving consonants, vowels, syllable structure, stress, rhythm and intonation. This line of inquiry is theoretically supported by second-language acquisition research, which recognises that learners' existing linguistic knowledge can influence the perception and production of sounds in an additional language. However, rather than assuming that all pronunciation difficulties can be predicted solely through contrastive analysis, empirical studies should identify the actual pronunciation patterns produced by Gabonese learners. Research on bilingual and multilingual phonetics and phonology has increasingly highlighted the complexity of cross-linguistic influence and the need to understand pronunciation

development in relation to learners' complete linguistic repertoires (Mayr, Price, & Mennen, 2012; Best & Tyler, 2007).

In addition to the influence of French, research should investigate the possible contribution of Gabonese indigenous languages to English pronunciation. This is particularly important because the linguistic background of Gabonese university students cannot necessarily be reduced to a French-English bilingual relationship. Students may possess knowledge of one or more Gabonese languages, and these languages may influence their perception of English phonological contrasts, syllable structures, consonant clusters, prosodic patterns and rhythm. Research into this area would contribute to a more accurate understanding of the multilingual phonological ecology in which English is acquired in Gabon. It would also help determine whether particular pronunciation patterns traditionally attributed to French influence may, in fact, reflect interactions among several linguistic systems.

The effectiveness of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)-based instruction also deserves systematic investigation in the Gabonese university context. Although phonetic transcription can provide learners with a systematic visual representation of speech sounds, its effectiveness may depend on how it is integrated into broader pronunciation pedagogy. Research could compare traditional IPA-centred instruction with approaches that combine transcription with auditory discrimination, articulatory explanation, visual feedback, communicative practice and digital technologies. Such research would help determine whether and under what conditions explicit phonetic knowledge contributes to measurable improvements in pronunciation and listening skills. The work of Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, and Griner (2010) supports the integration of explicit pronunciation knowledge with communicative and pedagogical practice rather than treating phonetic description as an end in itself.

The growing availability of digital technologies also creates an important area for research. Studies should examine the impact of digital pronunciation tools, including speech-recognition applications, pronunciation software, acoustic analysis programmes, online pronunciation platforms and mobile learning applications. Such research could investigate whether technology improves learners' perception, production, self-monitoring and autonomy, and whether digital feedback is sufficiently accurate and pedagogically meaningful for Gabonese university students. Technology may be particularly valuable in contexts where students have limited opportunities for individual pronunciation practice with teachers. Nevertheless, research should also critically examine the limitations of automated pronunciation assessment and determine how digital feedback can best complement rather than replace teacher guidance

Particular attention should also be devoted to the acquisition of English stress and rhythm among Gabonese learners. Suprasegmental features are an essential component of spoken English, yet they may present significant challenges for learners whose linguistic backgrounds have different prosodic systems. Research could investigate how Gabonese students produce lexical stress, sentence stress, rhythm, weak forms and prominence, and whether these features affect listeners' comprehension of their speech. This would be consistent with the growing recognition in pronunciation research that effective pronunciation instruction should address both segmental and suprasegmental features (Derwing et al., 1998; Levis, 2018).

The intelligibility of Gabonese English in international contexts should constitute another major research priority. Rather than evaluating learners exclusively according to their proximity to British or American native-speaker norms, researchers should investigate how successfully Gabonese speakers are understood by listeners from different linguistic

backgrounds. Such studies could use intelligibility and comprehensibility measures involving both native and non-native English listeners. This would be particularly relevant in view of the growing use of English as an international lingua franca. Munro and Derwing (2011) distinguish between accent, intelligibility and comprehensibility, while Derwing and Munro (2009) argue for moving away from the assumption that a noticeable accent necessarily constitutes a significant barrier to communication. Research on Gabonese English should therefore focus on the features that actually influence successful communication in international settings rather than simply measuring deviation from an idealised native-speaker model.

Finally, students' perceptions of different English accents should be explored. Such research could examine how Gabonese university students perceive British, American, African, Nigerian, South African and other international varieties of English, as well as the extent to which students associate particular accents with prestige, intelligibility, identity or professional opportunity. This line of research is particularly important in the context of English as an international language, where learners increasingly encounter diverse varieties of English. Jenkins (2000) and subsequent research on English as a lingua franca have challenged the assumption that a single native-speaker variety should necessarily constitute the only legitimate target for international English learners. Investigating Gabonese students' attitudes towards English accents could therefore contribute to the development of a more inclusive and contextually appropriate pronunciation curriculum.

Taken together, these research priorities would contribute to the development of a more substantial empirical knowledge base on English pronunciation in Gabonese higher education. They would make it possible to identify the specific pronunciation challenges experienced by Gabonese learners, understand the role of French and indigenous languages in their

phonological development, evaluate the effectiveness of different instructional approaches, and determine which pronunciation features have the greatest impact on intelligibility and communicative success. Such research would also provide evidence for evaluating the proposed fifteen-unit curriculum framework and for adapting its content to the demonstrated needs of learners.

10. Discussion

The teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities must respond to the realities of a changing linguistic and professional environment. The central challenge is not simply whether students know the names of English sounds. The deeper issue is whether they can use phonological knowledge to communicate effectively. This distinction has important consequences for curriculum design. A student who can define “phoneme” but cannot distinguish or produce essential English contrasts has not fully achieved the practical objective of phonetics education. Similarly, a student who can transcribe a word but cannot understand naturally spoken English requires further training in connected speech, rhythm and listening. Consequently, phonetics and phonology should be taught as both academic disciplines and practical communication skills. The Gabonese context also requires sensitivity to linguistic diversity. Students should not be encouraged to perceive their linguistic backgrounds as deficiencies. Rather, multilingualism should be used as a pedagogical resource. The objective is not to eliminate linguistic identity but to develop communicative flexibility. This approach is consistent with the realities of contemporary English. English is no longer used exclusively between native speakers. It is increasingly used as a global lingua franca among speakers with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, Gabonese university students need to develop the ability to communicate intelligibly with interlocutors from different linguistic backgrounds. This requires both accurate pronunciation and adaptability.

Conclusion

The teaching of English phonetics and phonology in Gabonese universities represents an important component of the country's broader efforts to strengthen English language education and international communication. Phonetics and phonology provide students with essential knowledge about the structure and functioning of spoken English. However, their value is greatest when theoretical knowledge relates to practical pronunciation, listening and communication activities. The Gabonese context presents challenges arising from multilingualism, the influence of French, limited exposure to authentic spoken English and, in some contexts, insufficient access to technological resources. Nevertheless, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for pedagogical innovation. A renewed model of phonetics and phonology teaching should combine articulatory knowledge, IPA transcription, auditory discrimination, pronunciation practice, suprasegmental features, communicative activities, comparative linguistics and digital technology. Universities should also promote research specifically focused on Gabonese learners. Such research would make it possible to identify pronunciation patterns and develop pedagogical approaches adapted to local needs. Ultimately, the objective of English phonetics and phonology teaching in Gabon should not be the production of speakers who simply imitate a particular foreign accent. The objective should be to develop confident, intelligible, flexible and internationally competent English users. For Gabon, such competence has implications far beyond the English classroom. It can contribute to the development of professionals capable of participating effectively in diplomacy, international relations, aviation, tourism, business, science and higher education. In this sense, strengthening the teaching of English phonetics and phonology is not merely a linguistic or academic concern. It is part of a broader strategy for developing human capital and enhancing Gabon's participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

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