ESL and EFL learners improve differently in pronunciation: The case of Lebanon

Hanadi S. Mirzaa*

*Lebanese University, Faculty of Pedagogy, Beirut, Lebanon

Abstract

Many ESL/EFL students in Lebanon reach the university level with poor English in general and underdeveloped phonetic competence in particular. Phonetic competence is one of the abilities to communicate regarding pronunciation skills (Saz, Rodriguez, Lleida, Rodriguez, & Vaquero, 2011). Students in Lebanon acquire Arabic as their mother tongue. Some learn English as their second language (ESL) in schools where English is the medium of instruction. However, in French schools, students learn English as their foreign language (EFL) and study the content subject matters in French, the medium of instruction. It’s commonly known among many educators in Lebanon that French educated students develop their English language skills and proper pronunciation more perfectly than do their English educated fellows in middle/low class schools. This phenomenon is widely observed; however, it is not based on research findings. This study aims to investigate whether there is a difference among French and English educated students in terms of English pronunciation after intervention of pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) such as using phonetic symbols and transcriptions, repeating after the teacher/others, and minimal pair drilling. 22 EFL and ESL university students took part in this study. A checklist of frequent common pronunciation mistakes was used to collect data. Ten sounds (segments) were identified in the pretest as common mistakes. The post-test took place five weeks later. Findings showed that PLS improved the pronunciation of both EFL and ESL learners. However, there was no statistical difference in the improvements between these two groups. Limitations and recommendations are provided in this study.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +961-1-785618; fax: +961-1-798305
E-mail address: hanadym@hotmail.com
1. Introduction

Many university students have poor English pronunciation that might affect their communication with others and even prevent them from being hired by reputable organizations. There are 2 kinds of English speakers in Lebanon: EFL and ESL groups. EFL students whose L1 is Arabic and L2 is French learn English as their foreign language. As for the ESL group, they acquire Arabic as their mother tongue and learn English as their second language. Since the English language is spoken nowadays worldwide and is highly used in many workplaces, both EFL and ESL learners need to become proficient in English in general and improve their pronunciation in particular.

Pronunciation includes the segmental and suprasegmental features of the language. Segments are the sounds of the vowels and consonants known as phonemes. The suprasegmental aspects focus on intonation, stress, and timing. How much time is allotted in class for pronunciation activities is left to the concern of the language teachers who are rather focusing on teaching the skills and subskills of English, the target language.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effects of pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) on two groups of learners: ESL and EFL groups. It also aims at studying whether these two groups improve differently in pronunciation after using PLS in the classroom.

1.2. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the three questions below:
1. Do pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) improve EFL learners’ pronunciation?
2. Do PLS improve the pronunciation of ESL learners?
3. Do ESL and EFL learners improve differently in pronunciation after using pronunciation strategies?

2. Brief overview of literature

2.1. Pronunciation Features & Issues

Several non-native English speakers have poor pronunciation which prevents them from communicating efficiently with others. Hence, acquiring the pronunciation is crucial to the development of L2 spoken language competence (Ali & Segaran, 2013; Galaczi, Post, Li & Graham, 2011).

Pronunciation includes the segmental and suprasegmental features of the language. The segmental aspects of pronunciation have been focused on in traditional methods mainly because they are the easiest to notice and pronounced related to the written letters (sounds of vowels and consonants). Recently, however, some speakers see that the suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation, including intonation, rhythm, and stress might highly affect intelligibility and can convey better impression of the speaker (Yates, 2002).

Although the suprasegmental features are essential in spoken English, they are neglected by both EFL/ESL teachers and learners (Suwartono, 2014). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001), for example, does not include pronunciation in the spoken language use scales (p. 28-29) and little is known about the phonological features of the spoken language (as cited in Galaczi, Post, Li & Graham, 2011).

2.2. Pronunciation learning strategies (PLS)

Many adult learners consider the English pronunciation very difficult to acquire; therefore, they highly need the help of the teacher as well as pronunciation practices in L2 classes (Fang, 2012).

For the last three decades, learning language strategies (LLS) have been widely used to improve the learners’ English skills and subskills in ESL classrooms; however, LLS were not largely used to enhance learners’ pronunciation of the target language (Eckstein, 2007). In contrast, little research was done to study the pronunciation of speakers of English as a foreign language (Martínez, 1995).
Oxford (1990) developed taxonomy for pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) aiming at helping learners develop proper pronunciation of L2. This taxonomy was well known for categorizing PLS into 2 groups: the direct and the indirect strategies. The direct strategies involve memory PLS (Representing sounds in memory such as remembering words by making auditory rather than visual representations of sounds), cognitive PLS (including actions that are directly involved in studying and practicing the target language pronunciation such as repeating after the teacher), and compensation strategies (helping facial muscles to become accustomed to moving in new ways to accommodate the target language pronunciation by producing approximate sounds). The indirect strategies, on the other hand, include the affective PLS (evaluating one’s own pronunciation by praising oneself for correct pronunciation, metacognitive PLS (searching for practice and trying new sounds), and social strategies (practicing with others and correcting others’ pronunciation mistakes). According to Oxford (1990), the two most frequently used strategies are the cognitive from the direct group and the metacognitive strategies pertaining to the indirect category. Several studies conducted recently have used Oxford’s taxonomy of PLS to examine pronunciation in L2 classes (Pawlak, 2010; Eckstein, 2007).

2.3. Existing research

An increase in the use of technology in teaching and learning has been witnessed in the last few decades. A considerable number of studies conducted recently have used computer technologies to teach pronunciation in ESL classes (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2014; Demenko, Wagner, & Cylwik, 2010; Bueno Alastuey, 2010).

Although there was an increasing interest in the study of pronunciation lately (Peterson, 2002; Suwartono, 2014), the existing research is still insufficient about teaching English pronunciation. According to Pawlak (2010), there is a need for more investigation in the effectiveness of PLS namely because the existing body of research focused solely on the identification and description of the strategies that learners use to learn the segmental and suprasegmental features. There are no enough research findings that shed light on the factors influencing PLS choice and use in L2 classes.

3. Methodology

This research opted for the mixed model approach whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. This study is an action research which aims to improve the teacher’s own instructional practices. Action research helps classroom practitioners learn and improve their own teaching activities (Gay and Airasian, 2000).

3.1. Setting and participants

Twenty two (22) participants took part in this research. 11 students were enrolled in a private university where French is the language of instruction. They formed the EFL convenient sample which included 3 females and 11 males. These learners were majoring in engineering and their age ranged between 20 and 26 years old. This group was studying most of their courses in French, and hence, both Arabic (L1) and French (L2) interfered in learning English. The second group included 11 ESL learners who were pursuing their studies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the public university where Arabic is the language of instruction. These participants were selected from a whole class of 25 females between 18 and 23 years old in such a way they matched in pronunciation level the EFL learners’ sample. These ESL learners were subject to their Arabic (L1) interference in their English learning. It’s noteworthy mentioning that none of the studies on pronunciation considered gender a factor in pronunciation learning (eg. Suwartono, 2014; Ali & Segaram, 2013).

Both groups were taking their first English language course at university with the researcher. These English courses were given 3 times a week. The period between the pre and post-test was 12 sessions which were extended over 5 weeks including holidays as well as weekends.
3.2. Methods of data collection and analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were used in this study. The statistical program SPSS version 20 was used along with coding and analyzing the quantitative data.

Two tools were used to collect data: common pronunciation mistakes checklist and interviews.

3.2.1. Common Pronunciation Mistakes Checklist

The common pronunciation mistakes checklist is a 3 point Likert scale where 1 means always making the mistake, 2 means the mistake is sometimes made, and 3 means that the mistake is never made i.e. 100% accuracy is reached.

Table 1. Common pronunciation mistakes checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mistake</th>
<th>Always - 1</th>
<th>Sometimes - 2</th>
<th>Never -3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s / o - (Think)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z / ð- (THat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j / dj</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh / tsh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>é / è</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the + v / c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed / -t, -d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-on, -om</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h-, in-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stressed v instead of œ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher focused only on ten segments (sounds) rather than on the suprasegmental features of pronunciation which are mainly neglected as mentioned by Yates (2002) and Suwartono (2014). Her aim was to help her students articulate properly these 10 segments to sound more-like English.

The checklist in Table 1 above includes 10 common mistakes that both ESL and EFL learners made while reading aloud. These mistakes are briefly described below.

**s / o - (Think):** saying [s] instead of the interdental voiceless sound [o ] which is [ـ] in Arabic as in “thank” and “month”

**z / ð- (THat):** saying [z] instead of the interdental voiced sound [ð] or [ـ] in Arabic as in “although” and “this”

**j / dj:** saying [j] instead of [dj] as in “job” and “major”

**sh / tsh:** saying [sh] instead of [tsh] as in “change” and “branch”

**é / è:** saying [é] instead of [è] as in “chair” and “their”

**the + v/c:** saying [ði] instead of [ða] as in “the table” and saying [ða] instead of [ði] as in “the apple”

**-ed / -t, -d:** saying the (-ed) as [-Id] instead of [-t] as in ask[Id] rather than ask[t] or saying [-Id] instead of [-d] as in “play[Id] rather than play[d]

**-on, -om:** saying the (-on or -om) as one segment instead of 2 ; that is, without clearly pronouncing the nasal sounds (n) and (m)

**h-, in-:** saying [h] when it is silent or vice versa and saying (in) as one sound without clearly pronouncing [n]

**Stressed vowel instead of [a]:** saying a stressed vowel instead of the schwa; for example, w[ðr]k instead of w[ðr]k and music[a] instead of music[ə]l

3.2.2. Pronunciation learning strategies (PLS)

Using PLS with non-native English speakers can be effective in developing their phonetic competence. The results of recent studies revealed that training students to use various strategies could be helpful in learning and practicing
different aspects of pronunciation (e.g. Pawlak, 2010). Additional findings showed that students with strong pronunciation used pronunciation learning strategies more often than poor learners (Eckstein, 2007).

Among the various direct and indirect PLS strategies, the cognitive strategies were mainly used in L2 classes including teacher’s demonstrations and corrections (Martinez, 1995; Fang, 2012). In this study, the researcher focused on the a) cognitive and b) social strategies in both EFL and ESL classes namely because students did not practice outside the class. These strategies were implemented during a period of 12 sessions (90 minutes each session) aiming at fixing the pronunciation of the 10 common mistakes described earlier in Table 1.

3.2.2.1. Cognitive strategies

Repetition after teacher/others: The teacher/researcher models various sounds such as “woman” and “women”. Students have to repeat after the teacher to ensure proper pronunciation. When a student pronounces a word correctly, the student who made a pronunciation mistake can repeat after his/her classmate.

Simplified phonetic transcription: The researcher used simplified phonetics because her students are non-English major students. Both groups do not take any phonology course at university. Therefore, the researcher relied on the EFL group’s knowledge of French and transcribed the words person and major as [peursen] and [méydjer] respectively. However, the same words were transcribed as [parson] and [méydjær] in the ESL class where students learn only the schwa sound [ə] and use it along with the phonemes of the English alphabet. Phonetic transcription of wrongly pronounced words by the students aims at helping them practice saying the word aloud in class and at home. Transcribing words such as “hotel, chair” as [hotèll] and [t shèr] will help students learn that here h is not silent and that they need to produce the sound [e] to articulate “chair” correctly. The students’ L1 (Arabic) is used in transcribing the interdental sounds of the English language such as although [ol Ýo] and thank [İènk].

Minimal pair drills: students practice the different pairs of sounds such as [s /z] and [t /ð]. It is noteworthy mentioning that these interdental sounds are found in the Arabic alphabet. Students know how to produce them in the standard Arabic language; however, they don’t use them in the spoken Lebanese Arabic. For example the voiced interdental sound [ð- Ý] is reduced to [z] or [d] in words such as wolf and a fly respectively. Also, the interdental voiceless sound [o- Ý] is reduced in the spoken Lebanese Arabic to [s] as in revolution or to [t] as in one second. These interdental sounds might be produced differently in some regions in Lebanon.

Sound codes/associations: to help students remember various sounds, the researcher encouraged her students to say for example “in - out” before saying words such as “internet, information”. Other sound codes are used for (on, -om). Students need to say “on-off” in order to pronounce correctly words such as conference. Students also need to say aloud “.com” which is part of some electronic addresses in order to say properly words such as complete. To produce properly the schwa sound [ə], the researcher asked her students to pretend they are kissing in order to draw their lips together and say the unstressed vowel properly.

Reading aloud: this technique was mainly used in class to help learners fix their pronunciation of a variety of English sounds. Students were highly encouraged to read aloud outside class and apply all the cognitive strategies to articulate accurately. They were also requested to record themselves while reading aloud to be able to correct their own mistakes.

Pronunciation rules: Several pronunciation rules were explained and practiced in class. The researcher explained clearly to her students that (j/g) are pronounced as [dʒ] and that there is no [j] in English. She also reminded them that (ch) is always pronounced as [ʃ]. According to the rule of (the + v/c), the definite article the is pronounced as [ði] before words starting with a vowel (v) such as “the apple” whereas the is pronounced as [ðə] before words starting with a consonant (c) such as “the table”. There is one exception when the is followed by a word starting with the sound [jou] such as European and university, in this case the the pronunciation as [ðə].

There is also a pronunciation rule for the (-ed) added to the regular verbs in the simple past tense. (-ed) is pronounced as [-t] if the verb ends with a voiceless sound such as promis[t] and as [-d] if the verb ends with a voiced sound such as email[d]. There is an exception when the verb ends with the sound [t] or [d]. In this case, the (-ed) is pronounced [-Id] as in wanted and decided.
3.2.2.2. Social strategies

The following social strategies were practiced in both EFL and ESL classrooms.

Peer correction: ESL/EFL students were encouraged to identify and correct pronunciation mistakes when their classmates were reading aloud.

Read aloud together: one of the activities done in both classes was to pair students up and ask the listener to correct the pronunciation mistakes of the reader. Then, they switch roles.

3.3. Interviews

Both EFL and ESL learners were interviewed informally in order to determine their phonetic competence. They were asked the following questions:

4. Which type of school did you go to? Private or public school?
5. How many English sessions did you have in your secondary classes?
6. (As an EFL learner), in which grade did you start learning English?
7. How often do you listen to English songs?
8. How often do you watch movies in English?
9. Do you speak English outside class?
10. How often do you practice reading aloud at home?
11. How often do you record yourself while reading aloud?

4. Results and discussions

The quantitative and qualitative data were reported and analyzed in this section.

4.1. Pronunciation Checklist

The SPSS version 20 was used to analyze the quantitative data collected using the common pronunciation mistakes checklist (see Table 1). Paired T-tests were computed for each of the EFL and ESL groups.

EFL Group Statistics

The statistical results in Table 2 show that the total mean scores of the pretest computed for the 11 EFL students is 11.63 while the total mean score of the post test is 18.9. The standard deviation was 1.1 in the pretest and increased to 2.1 in the post test which means that students improved differently in their pronunciation after 12 sessions of PLS implementation. The difference between total pre and post mean scores for EFL learners is 7.27 with a standard deviation of 2.7. The t value was 10.17 with a .00 significance knowing that the confidence interval is 95%.

Table 2. Paired t-test for EFL group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Statistics</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total posttest</td>
<td>18.9091</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.16585</td>
<td>0.65303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total pretest</td>
<td>11.6364</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.12006</td>
<td>0.33771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>7.27273</td>
<td>2.37027</td>
<td>10.176</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The figures above helped to answer the first research question which is whether the pronunciation learning strategies have any effect on improving the EFL learners’ pronunciation. The post-test mean score increase by 7.27 with a .00 significance. This means that the PLS improved the EFL learners in their English pronunciation of these 10 sounds with a difference in improvement among learners indicated by a standard deviation of 2.37.

**ESL Group Statistics**

The total mean score of the pretest of ESL learners was 12, and it increased to 19.5 in the post test after 12 sessions of PLS intervention. Moreover, the standard deviation increased from 1.78 to 2.69 indicating a variety in improvement in pronunciation in the posttest. The difference in mean scores is 7.54 with t equals to 8.21 and a standard deviation of 3.04 knowing that the confidence interval is 95%. The significance is .00 which means that there is a considerable difference in statistics between pre and post-tests. The findings In Table 3 reveal that PLS improved the pronunciation of the 10 sounds of ESL learners hence answering the second research question which investigates the effectiveness of PLS on the ESL group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair 1</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total posttest</td>
<td>19.5455</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.69680</td>
<td>.81312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total pretest</td>
<td>12.0000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.78885</td>
<td>.53936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effects of PLS on ESL & EFL Learners**

According to the findings in Table 2 and Table 3, the pronunciation learning strategies did improve the pronunciation of both groups of non-native English speakers as supported by the studies conducted by Pawlak (2010) and Eckstein (2007).

Although PLS did improve both groups of EFL and ESL learners, there is no statistical difference in the improvement in pronunciation between the French and English educated groups of students. The difference between total post-pre mean of the EFL group was 7.27 and that of the ESL group was 7.54. The similarity in scores help answer the third research question: PLS didn’t improve the pronunciation of EFL and ESL learners differently.

This finding might be due to the insufficient research contrasting ESL and EFL learners’ pronunciation and use of PLS. According to the literature, most researchers studied the pronunciation of second language (ESL) learners (Galaczi, Post, Li & Graham, 2011; Saz, Rodriguez, Lleida, Rodriguez & Vaquero, 2011; Ali & Segaran, 2013) with little interest in examining the pronunciation teaching in EFL classes (Martinez, 1995).

### 4.2. Results of interviews with EFL and ESL learners

EFL/EFL learners were also interviewed to elicit data related to their phonetic competence. When asked about the school they went to and the number of English sessions they had, the answers were almost similar. EFL students attended French school where they started learning English in grade 6. They only studied 2 sessions a week. However, since English was their 3rd language, students didn’t take it seriously especially that they present their official exams only in Arabic and French. As for the ESL group, students learned English since KGs and took only 2 sessions in their secondary classes. Some of the students who went to public schools explained that their English teachers used to read in English and translate into Arabic. EFL and ESL learners considered that their underdeveloped English
pronunciation was the result of their imitation of their school teachers who had poor or no phonetic knowledge (Pawlak, 2010). Both groups added that none of their English teachers focused on pronunciation throughout their schooling, which is concurrent with previous research indicating that pronunciation was highly neglected in L2 classes (Galaczi, Post, Li & Graham, 2011; Fang, 2012; Suwartono, 2014).

When requested to elaborate on their use of English outside class, both groups said that they don’t speak in English outside the class. In addition, they don’t listen to English songs claiming they need to enjoy what they hear i.e. they prefer to listen to Arabic songs or to French songs in case of EFL learners. The participants spent most of their time after university watching Turkish or Indian series translated into Arabic besides Lebanese or Syrian series. When these learners watch movies in English, they rely heavily on the Arabic subtitling in order to understand the content. As for practicing at home, students couldn’t see the benefits of constant practice, so they gave up easily or they didn’t even try. Moreover, they claim they are very busy studying the content subject matters. After the Easter holiday which was extended over 11 days, only 3 students admitted they practiced reading aloud once at home.

4.3. Frequency of Pronunciation Mistakes (Pre-Post)

The table below shows the frequency of pronunciation mistakes that all 22 participants made in the pretest and later in the post test after 12 sessions of PLS practice in class.

Table 4. Frequency of common pronunciation mistakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mistake</th>
<th>Pre Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Post Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/s/ /θ/ /z/ /ð/</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/j/ /dʒ/</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʃ/ /tʃ/</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɛ/ /e/</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the + v/c</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed/-t, -d</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-on, -om</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h-, in-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not /ə/</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English pronunciation is very difficult for many adult learners (Fang, 2012). The results in Table 4 show that most ESL/EFL learners made mistakes in almost all sounds mainly in articulating the interdental sounds [s,θ], saying [j], [ʃ], and [ɛ] instead of [dʃ], [tʃ], and [e] respectively. In addition, they didn’t know how to apply the rule of the definite article (the) when followed by words starting with a vowel or a consonant. Participants also had trouble knowing how (-ed) suffix added to the regular verbs in the simple past tense is pronounced. More mistakes were made with words including the letter combinations (-on, -om, in-). Initial (h) was confusing for many students who were unaware when (h) is silent or not. Finally, the schwa [ə] was not used by both groups of students because it was replaced by stressed vowels.

After practicing the cognitive and social PLS strategies (Oxford, 1990), improvements in students’ pronunciation was evident in Table 4 above.

While most students scored 1 i.e. always making the mistake in the pretest, many learners scored 2 in the post test, i.e. sometimes making the mistake. After 12 session of PLS intervention, the majority of ESL/EFL learners became aware of their mistakes and could correct their own errors or correct to a classmate. A few students could articulate some sounds correctly in a period of 12 sessions and scored 3 i.e. never making the mistake. These improvements in English pronunciation resulting from PLS practices are well documented in the literature (Pawlak, 2010; Eckstein, 2007; Fang, 2012).
Although most students improved after 5 weeks from always making the mistake to sometimes, still many students had difficulty with these 5 following sounds seen the low scores in never making the mistakes. Almost all students were unable to say properly [è], apply appropriately the pronunciation rules for (the) and (-ed), articulate well (-on,-om), and use more frequently the schwa [ə], the unstressed vowel.

4.4. Limitations and recommendations

The following limitations can decrease the effects of PLS on ESL/EFL learners. The small sample size, 22 students in total can affect the statistical results. In addition, the short period of time between the pre & post-tests might be the reason for not finding any difference in pronunciation between the 2 groups of participants. Another influential limitation that can interfere with the results is that students were not practicing outside class. Reading aloud at home while applying the various cognitive strategies they learned in class could have improved more their pronunciation and decreased the frequency of their mistakes. Moreover, students didn’t apply the technique of recording their own loud reading, which could have enhanced their ability to self-correct their mistakes instead of relying on the teacher/peer corrections. An additional problem was the absence of some students who missed the explanation of various pronunciation rules as well as PLS practices.

More research is recommended to study the effects of PLS on a large sample of ESL as well as EFL students in order to generalize results. It is also recommended to investigate the PLS influence on non-English major university students whose L1 is Arabic seen its interference in the pronunciation of the interdental English sounds for instance.

5. Conclusion

Learning proper pronunciation of the global English language is crucial as supported by the literature. Both EFL and ESL speakers need to improve their phonetic competence. The use of pronunciation learning strategies (PLS); namely, the cognitive and social strategies were highly effective in improving the pronunciation of both French and English educated students in Lebanon at the university level. Results showed that PLS helped both groups decrease their mistakes when producing the 10 sounds found in Table 1. It’s noteworthy mentioning that the students pronounce better when reading aloud. Maybe more time is needed for them to articulate correctly all these 10 sounds. Additional research is needed to investigate whether these students can transfer their pronunciation knowledge from reading aloud to spontaneous speech.

It’s definite that more time is needed in class to help students improve their pronunciation knowing that they don’t practice at home. However, it’s questionable how much time the language teacher can allot to extra pronunciation activities in class bearing in mind the other language skills and subskills to be focused on.

References