Importance of Correct Pronunciation in Spoken English: Dimension of Second Language Learners' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate how learners perceive pronunciation and its importance in spoken English. The motivation for the study is the increasing unpopularity of the aspect of pronunciation in the ESL context which has caused lack of measures in improving learners' pronunciation skill despite being quite a concern among professionals in job environments that demands intelligible spoken English. The study specifically looked into the dimensions of students' perceptions towards accurate English pronunciation. The study employed survey questionnaires as data collection tool and the data were analysed statistically using SPSS and factor analysis. Based on the findings, four dimensions emerged in their perception for the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English: 1) their awareness towards the importance of correct pronunciation; 2) concern on its accuracy; 3) level of achievement on their performance; and 4) the affinity for the effort to improve their English pronunciation in general. Overall, the findings suggested that the respondents have clear understanding of the concern for correct pronunciation in spoken English.

Keywords: Pronunciation skill, perception, awareness, accuracy, achievement, affinity, L2 learners

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation has a key role in successful communication both productively and receptively. It has been a common concern among L2 learners with regard to their confidence in oral communication (Bang, 1999). Operating at a sub-conscious level, it is often not easily amendable, though it is not impossible for an L2 learner to achieve an impressive performance (Munro & Derwing, 2008). When a pronunciation feature impedes the intelligibility of a word, native listeners can use contextual cues to resolve ambiguity. Non-native listeners, on the other hand, who might rely

more on the acoustic signal are prone to face communication breakdown (Harper, 2004). Nevertheless, considering the fact that L2 learners use English more often among non-native speakers than among the native speakers (Jenkins, 2000), most commonly in the Malaysian educational and professional set up, L2 learners may still need to master the much learnable segmental sounds of English for mutual intelligibility instead of the complex suprasegmental qualities. Such limitations among L2 speakers can be frustrating and may need addressing. More soundly, the teaching of pronunciation is vital for L2 learners in the context of interactions between both non-native speakers and also with native speakers in general. However, training to improve one's pronunciation may be pointless if the learners do not see the importance of such needs. A study carried out by Rajadurai (2001) on the attitude and concern for accurate English pronunciation among a group of Malaysian ESL teacher trainees showed that more than 80% of the trainees agreed that pronunciation is an important element in spoken English. Such finding may naturally be expected since they are to be English teachers. Another study on a non-Malaysian context revealed that learners expressed real concern about the accuracy of segmental aspects of their pronunciation (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 2000). Some experts (Roach, 1991; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwind, 1996; Dalton & Seidlhofer, 2000) claimed that

generally learners would want to improve their pronunciation although it is a skill that has been asserted to be the most difficult to acquire. In general, the awareness on the importance of the language in relation to how words are uttered and pronounced can be considered high.

Since the onset of communicative approach in language teaching, particularly in relation to the teaching and learning of English, teachers have generally placed minimal emphasis on the importance of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwind, 1996). The rising unpopularity of this aspect in the ESL context has caused a lack of measures in terms of exploring ways and techniques to improve learners' pronunciation skill. It would be enlightening to find out what actually the concerns and perceptions of the Malaysian English learners in relation to the importance of accurate English Language pronunciation currently. Bang (1999) conducted a study investigating EFL learners' reactions towards oral error correction. A questionnaire was administered to 100 EFL students in Spoken English classes at a university. In response to methods of error corrections, respondents showed a preference for specific types of oral feedback. The study indicated that the learners had a positive perception towards error correction but were particularly sensitive to the manner in which feedback was given. Relevant to the purpose of this study is the fact

that only a very small number of the respondents felt that phonological error correction of pronunciation was a great concern. In contrast, Rajadurai (2001) surveyed a group of students in a TESL programme in Malaysia, investigating the effectiveness of teaching pronunciation. Findings showed that more than 85% of the subjects agreed that pronunciation training was essential, particularly on the segmental aspect of pronunciation. Derwing and Rossiter (2002) also used the survey approach in the study on learners' perception of their pronunciation needs and strategies. The results disclosed segmental superiority over suprasegmental importance as perceived by their respondents. Considering the mixed results in these studies of which the survey approach was adopted to investigate learners' concern for improvement in English pronunciation, the present aim is to explore learners' attitude and perceptions towards accurate English pronunciation. To date, no study on the attitudes and perceptions of English pronunciation for Malaysian English learners has been conducted even though this aspect of the language has been quite a concern among the professionals to some extent. It has become a common concern among fresh college and university graduates who are expected to function well in job environments that demand intelligible spoken English. Teaching needs to be adjusted to the perception of the learners.

Thus, it is the aim of this study to find out how learners perceive pronunciation and its importance in spoken English. It is also the interest of this study to explore the level of awareness and concerns for improvements among the learners. This is achieved by proposing the dimension and variables involved in understanding language learners' perception on the importance of correct pronunciation in Spoken English.

Objectives of the Study

In the interest of achieving these aims, the study seeks to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To determine secondary L2 learners' perceptions towards the importance of accurate English pronunciation.
2. To ascertain the variables influencing L2 learners' perception towards the importance of accurate English pronunciation.
3. To develop the dimension of L2 learners' perspective towards the importance of accurate English pronunciation.

In order to achieve the above objectives, this study attempts to answer the research questions below:

1. What are the variables of learners' perception in the importance of Correct Pronunciation in Spoken English?
2. What does the dimension of L2 learners' perception in the importance of Correct Pronunciation in Spoken English consist of?

METHODOLOGY

A set of survey questionnaire was employed to tap on learners' perceptions towards accurate English pronunciation. Hence, to further support the data collected through the survey, some of the respondents were interviewed to elicit details on the reasons and justifications of their standpoints. It is hoped that the findings could, to some extent, illuminate some considerations in providing conducive environment and training approach in improving Malaysian English learners. Approximately 300 secondary level students (n=300) of a randomly selected school in the states of Johor, Kelantan and Selangor (one from urban area school and one from rural area school of each state, n~50) participated in the study. All the participating students were given a set of survey questionnaire comprising 33 items.

Data gathered from the survey questionnaire was analysed statistically using SPSS to verify significance of perceptions between the students on the importance of pronunciation in spoken English. The researcher used different statistical tests such as frequency, mean, standard deviation and factor analysis to fulfil the objectives of the study. First, frequency is used to examine the respondents' demographic characteristics. Secondly, responses to the 33 items for the perception on importance of pronunciation were calculated for their means based on the respondents' expectations. Third, in order to identify the underlying dimensions of the students' perceptions towards the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English, factor analysis was employed. Each variable for every factor derived was calculated to test their reliability using Cronbach's alpha. In this study, the variables that have eigenvalue of equal or greater than one and a factor loading of 0.4 were retained (Hair *et al*., 1998). In the analysis, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett Test of Sphericity were applied to determine the appropriateness to apply the factor analysis.

Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was applied in the analysis to simplify the factor matrix by maximising variance to produce conceptual pure factors. The factors were extracted through the use of Principal Component Analysis of factor analysis. The number of the factors to be extracted was determined by the eigenvalue percentage of variance. A factor loading of .40 was applied in the analysis of the data for this study (Henson & Roberts, 2006). In determining the factor loading for factor analysis, Hair *et al*. (1998) advised that a small factor loading would be considered as significant if the sample size or the number of variables was larger. However, a larger factor loading

is needed if the number of factors is large. They added in detail that if the sample size is larger than 100, the factor loadings should be greater than ± .30 to meet the minimum level. However, factor loadings of ± .40 are taken as more important, while factor loadings of ± .50 or greater are considered as practically significant. If the sample number is 350 or more, the factor loading of ± .30 is therefore considered as significant. Only factors with eigenvalue equal to 1 or greater were found significant to be extracted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general aim of this study is to investigate how learners perceive pronunciation and its importance in spoken English. It is also aimed at establishing the items that govern the

learners' perception. The main instrument used to illicit their perceptions was a set of survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two major sections: 1) Demographic details of the students; and 2) Students' perceptions on the importance of correct pronunciation in Spoken English. A pilot study was conducted on 30 students from the same population using the instrument to improve the questionnaire items. The instrument consists of a five-point Likert scale for section 2 to determine the students' perceptions. However, the same students were not included in the actual study. The Cronbach alpha of the 33-item questionnaire is 0.810, which fulfils the standard of the reliability test, as shown in Table 1. The Cronbach alpha test was carried out, taking into account all the reverse-coded items in the questionnaire.

TABLE 1
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.810	.825	33

Findings of Section 1

Demographically, in terms of the sample of the study, the data were elicited from 308 respondents from three states, namely, Johor, Selangor and Kelantan, with approximately equal numbers (n~50) of respondents from the respective districts (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
District

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Skudai	55	17.9	17.9	17.9
	Segamat	51	16.6	16.6	34.4
	Shah Alam	50	16.2	16.2	50.6
	Kuala Langat	50	16.2	16.2	66.9
	Kota Bharu	50	16.2	16.2	83.1
	Machang	52	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	100.0	

The sample of this study consisted of 119 male students (38.4%) and 189 female students (61.4%), as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	119	38.3	38.4	38.4
	female	189	61.4	61.6	100.0
	Total	307	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.3		
Total		308	100.0		

Findings of Section 2

The following section of the findings reports on the perception of the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English Language. Data from the learners' response for the survey questionnaire were analysed using descriptive analysis to identify the means and standard deviations and investigate their perceptions based on individual items (questionnaires). Factor analysis was conducted on the responses to each item so as to determine the dimensions attributing to the students' perceptions on the correct pronunciation in English Language. The dimensions would aid in discussion of learners' perceptions.

Dimension of Students' Perceptions

The aim of the study was to determine the items and dimensions that would aid in describing students' perception of the correct pronunciations in spoken English Language. This was achieved by involving the respondents to rate the 33 items on a five-point Likert scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree. The results of the expectations are shown in Table 4. The table indicates the mean scores for each of the 33 items. A mean score of higher than 3.00 indicates a positive level of agreement on the statement that represents the students' perception, while a mean score lower than 3.00 is considered as not meeting the students' positive agreement.

TABLE 4
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1) Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication	306	4.43	.744
2) I am satisfied with my English pronunciation	308	2.89	.997
3) It is important to learn how to pronounce English words	305	4.61	.625
4) I admire a person who speaks English fluently	306	4.62	.720
5) I have more confidence to speak English if I can pronounce well	306	4.32	.918
6) I like to practice my pronunciation with my close friends	306	3.58	1.047
7) I think people evaluate my English based on my pronunciation.	306	3.72	.930
8) I would love to sound like a native speaker	307	3.87	1.093
9) I think those with good pronunciation can get good jobs in the future	307	4.26	.941
10) An ability to pronounce English words correctly is a significant achievement	308	4.20	.890
11) Pronunciation training can help me improve my pronunciation.	306	4.54	.814
12) English lesson should also focus on the teaching of pronunciation	306	4.24	.789
13) One's proficiency of English may be perceived as 'good' if he or she can pronounce well.	306	4.13	.799
14) Correction is vital in learning pronunciation.	306	4.41	.691
15) I like listening to English programmes on the radio.	308	3.47	1.187
16) Good pronunciation reflects high proficiency of language use.	307	4.13	.928
17) Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication	306	4.43	.744
18) I will improve my pronunciation. (reverse-coded)	306	4.2614	1.00341
19) The ability to speak good English does affect one's professional image (reversed)	308	3.7727	1.19184
20) It is worth spending time working on pronunciation. (reversed)	307	4.3388	.93719
21) I feel easy speaking English to someone who I think has good command of spoken English. (reversed)	308	2.4318	1.18290
22) I think practicing to pronounce new vocabulary is sensible. (reversed)	306	3.9739	1.16758
23) I will not use certain words in my speech when I am not sure of the right pronunciation. (reversed)	308	3.1006	1.04909
24) One has to speak with the native accent. (reversed)	307	2.3094	1.03470
25) I do mind speaking with inaccurate pronunciation though I can be understood. (reversed)	308	2.7110	1.09972
26) Accurate pronunciation in spoken English contributes to clear communication. (reversed)	307	3.8534	1.07619
27) Pronunciation skills can be improved through training. (reversed)	306	4.0948	1.06855
28) I think that pronunciation is as important as grammar and writing. (reversed)	293	3.6348	1.09783
29) I think it makes a difference if one cannot pronounce well in English. (reversed)	294	3.5714	1.07722
30) I do really care about my English pronunciation. (reversed)	294	4.2177	1.02539
31) Pronunciation skills need to be emphasized in English proficiency class. (reversed)	294	3.8741	1.09036
32) I do pay attention on a person's pronunciation when he or she speaks. (reversed)	202	3.7673	1.12869
33) I feel that pronunciation skill is important skill for one to be good in English	306	4.4300	.74400

Table 4 indicates students' positive agreement for all the items given to them except for item 2 (I am satisfied with my English pronunciation), item 21 (I feel easy speaking English to someone whom I think has good command of spoken English), item 24 (One has to speak with the native accent) and item 25 (I do mind speaking with inaccurate pronunciation though I can be understood) which register the mean below 3.00. The negative responses to all these group of items showed that the students perceived discomfort and lack in confidence to speak English with lack of correct pronunciation. In other words, the students regard highly on the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English. However, the students do not perceive that it is important to have a native accent, as indicated by a low mean of 2.3094 for item 24 (One has to speak with the native accent). Tokumoto and Shibata (2011), in their study on university EFL learners in Japan, indicated similar findings among Malaysian students who highly valued their accented English as opposed to native spoken English. However, their study showed that the Japanese and the Korean students did not prefer their accented English to native English.

In general, the means of the items displayed in Table 4 above reflect the respondents' general perceptions of the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English. The consistency in their perceptions can be seen from their responses to the items, both in response to the direct statements and reversed-coded ones.

For example, in response to a statement perceiving pronunciation as an important skill for English communication (item 1), a mean of 4.43 was registered, showing a positive agreement on the matter. The same goes to the items concerning the need and importance to learn how to pronounce well (item 3) with a mean of 4.61. Registering a mean of 4.62, the respondents agreed that they admire those who can converse with good pronunciation (item 4). This is very coherent with their responses to the reversed-coded statements. In relation to their concern for their pronunciation, with a mean of 4.21, the respondents showed that they care about it (item 30).

Naturally, many second language learners feel uneasy when conversing with people whom they perceive possessing good pronunciation of the target language. This is exemplified in the respondents' responses to the statement with regard to feeling easy when speaking to one, with which a mean of 2.43 was recorded, a value that reflects much of disagreement (item 21). The awareness and consistency on the whole idea with regard to the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English is obvious as the mean for speaking with inaccurate pronunciation though they can be understood is only 2.71, a value below 3.00 on the Likert scale (item 25). Equally surprising is that the respondents are aware of the practicality and appropriateness of not emulating native English speaker's accent (item 24).

In short, the findings of this study indicate students' positive attitude towards

the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English. This is consistent with findings of past research. For example, Steed and Delicado Cantero (2014), in their study on Spanish students learning English in Australia, indicated similar result where the Spanish students showed a positive attitude towards the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English. However, they argued that further steps need to be taken to increase the students' awareness of the importance of correct pronunciation and that appropriate pedagogical method need to be considered to effectively teach pronunciation.

Findings of Factor Analysis

Taking into consideration of the Cronbach alpha value, which is 0.810, and the consistency in the perceptions of most items from both, the direct statements and the reverse-coded ones, descriptively, the items in the questionnaire are more than valid to be run through the factor analysis to identify the relevant dimensions that govern the respondents' perceptions on the importance of correct pronunciation of spoken English.

Technically, in order to be appropriate for the analysis, the items (variables to assess learners' perceptions) need to be tested for inter-correlation and grouping among the items. The researchers applied Bartlett's test of sphericity (via chi-square test) to ensure that items were not inter-correlated. Meanwhile, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkins (KMO) was used to determine whether the sampling was adequate for analysis and also to ensure that the items were grouped in order. The data of the study would be appropriate to be analyse using factor analysis if the Bartlett's test showed significant result ($p \leq 0.001$) and the KMO value is greater than .50.

TABLE 5
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.801
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	667.371
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Table 5 shows that the data of the study are not inter-correlated as the result of the Bartlett's Test is significant with the correlation matrix value of .000 ($p \leq 0.001$), with the sphericity value of 667.371. The KMO value is .801, which is higher than .50 (Kaiser, 1974). Both results indicated that the data are appropriate for factor analysis. Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalisation was applied in the analysis to simplify the factor matrix by maximising variance to produce conceptual pure factors. The factors were extracted through the use of Principal Component Analysis of factor analysis. The number of the factors to be extracted was determined by the eigenvalue percentage of variance. A factor loading of .40 was applied in the

analysis of the data for this study (Kline, 1994). In determining the factor loading for factor analysis, Hair *et al.* (1998) advised that a small factor loading would be considered as significant if the sample size or the number of variables was larger. However, a larger factor loading is needed if the numbers of factors are larger. They added in detail that if the sample size is larger than 100, the factor loadings should be greater than ± .30 to meet the minimum level. However, factor loadings of ± .40 are taken as more important and factor loadings of ± .50 or greater are considered as practically significant. If the sample number is 350 or more, the factor loading of ± .30 is therefore considered significant.

According to Kline, however, variables with a factor loading of .60 or greater is closer to the meaning of the factor; thus, it is useful for searching a name for the factor that captures the joint meaning. Only factors with eigenvalue equal to 1 or greater were found significant to be extracted. In this study, as a result of the application of analysis method with Varimax rotation, 16 out of 33 items were retained and grouped into four (4) factors, as shown in Table 6. The four variables were reduced from 16 variables as only the variables with factor loadings equal or greater than .40 were accepted for factor analysis (Kline, 1994; Hair *et al.*, 1998) (refer to Table 6). Moreover, the 'Scree plot' (Fig.1) reveals that plot begins to level out after the third factor. Table 6 shows the rotated component matrix as the result of the factor analysis, which indicates the groupings of the variables into four factors.

The researchers proposed to label the first factor as 'Awareness' as it involves five (5) variables (Preference for 'Native-speaker' like pronunciation, I think those with good pronunciation can get good jobs in the future, an ability to pronounce English words correctly is a significant achievement, English lesson should also focus on the teaching of pronunciation, and correction is vital in learning pronunciation), as highlighted in bold (refer to Table 6 and Table 7). This factor explains 23.3% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 3.72. The second factor explains 8% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.28. This factor consists of the variables 'Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication', 'It is important to learn how to pronounce English words', 'I admire a person who speaks English fluently', and 'I have more confidence to speak English if I can pronounce well'. Thus, based on the variables, the second factor was labelled as 'Accuracy". For the third factor, based on the minimum factor loading of 0.40, this factor finally consists of 'I think people evaluate my English based on my pronunciation', Pronunciation training can help me improve my pronunciation', 'One's proficiency of English may be perceived as 'good' if he or she can pronounce well' and 'Good pronunciation reflects high proficiency of language use'. This factor is labelled as 'Achievement'. The forth factor which is labelled as 'Affinity' as a result of the minimum factor loading value consists of variables 'I am satisfied with my English pronunciation', 'I like to practice my

pronunciation with my close friends' and 'I like listening to English programmes on the radio'. This factor explains 6.77% of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.083. The researchers named these four factors

Secondary Level Language Learners Perception dimensions. The factors with their respective categorised variables are shown in Table 9.

TABLE 6
Variance of Factors

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings			
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.723	23.271	23.271	3.723	23.271	23.271	2.063	12.895	12.895
2	1.282	8.015	31.286	1.282	8.015	31.286	2.012	12.574	25.469
3	1.233	7.705	38.991	1.233	7.705	38.991	1.748	10.927	36.395
4	1.083	6.768	45.759	1.083	6.768	45.759	1.498	9.364	45.759
5	.986	6.161	51.920						
6	.937	5.855	57.774						
7	.883	5.517	63.291						
8	.854	5.337	68.627						
9	.772	4.826	73.453						
10	.751	4.693	78.146						
11	.714	4.463	82.609						
12	.666	4.165	86.774						
13	.603	3.772	90.546						
14	.568	3.552	94.098						
15	.531	3.321	97.419						
16	.413	2.581	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
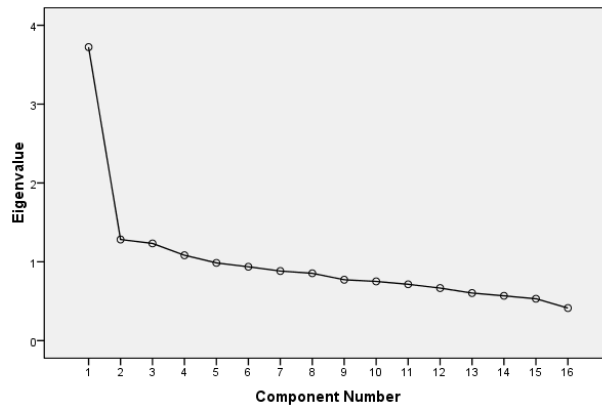
Fig.1: Scree Plot

TABLE 7
Rotated Component Matrix[a]

Variables / Items	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication.	.042	**.601**	.170	.232
I am satisfied with my English pronunciation.	-.018	-.007	.105	**.806**
It is important to learn how to pronounce English words.	.252	**.634**	.129	.001
I admire a person who speaks English fluently.	.049	**.741**	.068	-.106
I have more confidence to speak English if I can pronounce well.	.376	**.569**	-.017	.188
I like to practice my pronunciation with many close friends.	**.471**	.010	-.063	**.527**
I think people evaluate my English based on my pronunciation.	-.063	.003	**.708**	.247
I would love to sound like a native speaker.	**.452**	.187	.001	.204
I think those with good pronunciation can get good jobs in the future.	**.456**	.093	.178	-.040
Pronunciation training can help me improve my pronunciation.	.261	.212	**.627**	-.164
An ability to pronounce English words correctly is a significant achievement.	**.706**	-.015	.179	-.052
English lesson should also focus on the teaching of pronunciation.	**.498**	.200	.132	.303
One's proficiency of English may be perceived as 'good' if he or she can pronounce well.	.337	-.032	**.572**	.138
I like listening to English programmes on the radio.	.106	.357	.194	**.474**
Correction is vital in learning pronunciation.	**.513**	.231	.084	.030
Good pronunciation reflects high proficiency of language use.	.115	.258	**.578**	.030

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

TABLE 8
Dimension of L2 Perception on Correct Pronunciation for Spoken English

Awareness	Accuracy	Achievement	Affinity
Preference for 'Native-speaker' like pronunciation	Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication	I think people evaluate my English based on my pronunciation.	I am satisfied with my English pronunciation
I think those with good pronunciation can get good jobs in the future	It is important to learn how to pronounce English words	Pronunciation training can help me improve my pronunciation.	I like to practice my pronunciation with my close friends
An ability to pronounce English words correctly is a significant achievement I would love to sound like a native speaker	I admire a person who speaks English fluently	One's proficiency of English may be perceived as 'good' if he or she can pronounce well.	I like listening to English programmes on the radio.
English lesson should also focus on the teaching of pronunciation	I have more confidence to speak English if I can pronounce well	Good pronunciation reflects high proficiency of language use.	
Correction is vital in learning pronunciation.			

As a supposition, in the investigation of L2 learners' perception towards correct pronunciation for Spoken English Language, the findings proposed four underlying factors of 'Awareness', 'Accuracy', 'Achievement', and 'Affinity'. These factors are determined as important constructs of the dimensions of L2 Perception on Correct Pronunciation for Spoken English.

The first factor 'Awareness' consists of six (6) variables: "Preference for 'Native-speaker' like pronunciation", "I think those with good pronunciation can get good jobs in the future", "An ability to pronounce English words correctly is a significant achievement", "English lesson should also focus on the teaching of pronunciation" and "Correction is vital in learning pronunciation". These statements reflect the learners' mindfulness on the importance of being able to speak with some level of 'recognition' though not to emulate the native speakers exactly. They seemed to belief that the ability to speak with correct pronunciation would lead an individual to better opportunity in future undertakings to the extent that they see the importance of good training and exposure for one to achieve a targeted level. Accordingly, the term Awareness refers to a state of consciously admitting the needs to hone one's ability in English pronunciation that facilitates smooth communication for successful future.

The second factor, 'Accuracy' consists of the variables "Pronunciation is an important skill for oral English Communication", "It is important to learn how to pronounce English words", "I admire a person who speaks English fluently" and "I have more confidence to speak English if I can pronounce well". Naturally, possessing a mindful understanding on the importance of correct pronunciation in communication alone is not be enough, and effort has to be put in to achieve accuracy and fluency, which in turn will ensure confidence to express oneself. A mispronunciation may lead to miscommunication which may also complicate subject comprehension (Gilakjani, 2012). Thus, it may be deducted that Accuracy denotes a clear conscience on ensuring precision of one's pronunciation to avoid misapprehension.

The third factor, which is 'Achievement', consists of "I think people evaluate my English based on my pronunciation", Pronunciation training can help me improve my pronunciation", "One's proficiency of English may be perceived as 'good' if he or she can pronounce well" and "Good pronunciation reflects high proficiency of language use". A sense of achievement is inevitably a feeling, to some extent, gauges one's attainment into something that he or she has ventured into. The respondents seemed to suggest that if their pronunciation is positively perceived and commented by others, it would be a gratification. This feeling may be experienced upon going through routine of exercises and practices which eventually lead to the improvement of the pronunciation skill in the target

language. Such achievement will gauge Achievement that can be referred as the state of pleasing emotion for a desired capability in English pronunciation.

The fourth factor which is labelled 'Affinity' consists of variables, "I am satisfied with my English pronunciation", "I like to practice my pronunciation with my close friends" and 'I like listening to English programmes on the radio'. These statements which represent the fourth aspect of the emerging factors reflect the relevance of Affinity in perceiving the importance of correct pronunciation for spoken English. One will not venture into something that he or she likes, by force. It takes one's clear conscience to have a desire to improve his or her pronunciation. This may include the fondness for the language. In other words, one will not see the need to improve if the skill is perceived as already adequate or 'good' to the learners' perception. It can, however, be totally the interest of a learner to practise and to get him or her master the natural nuances of the pronunciation skills. Accordingly, Affinity denotes the liking for the language and the persistent aspiration for accurate and standard pronunciation on the target language.

Taking everything into account, the findings of the present study reveal that there are several aspects governing students' perceptions on the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English. In other words, how one perceives the relevance and significance of correct pronunciation in English communication depends on the Awareness, Accuracy, Achievement and Affinity, which reflect a learner's stance. Instinctively, a person with a strong awareness will most likely desire for high accuracy in pronunciation. One may have to put extra effort to attain a desired outcome. The achievement in getting to the targeted level in improving one's pronunciation would logically be influenced by the sense of Affinity one has towards the effort to improve and for the love of the target language. Thus, the 4-As dimension; namely, Awareness, Accuracy, Achievement and Affinity, proposes that a positive perception on the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English would yield a fruitful outcome and vice versa.

Based on the findings as discussed here, Fig.2 shows the conceptual framework of the proposed dimension.
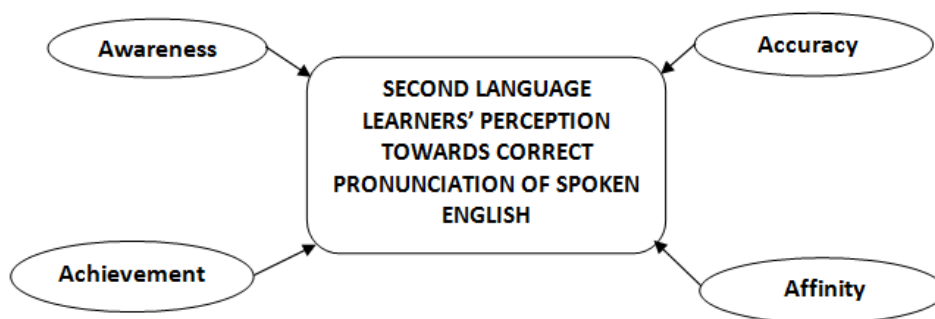

Fig.2: Dimension of Second Language Learners' Perception towards Correct Spoken English

CONCLUSION

The findings from the study aimed at contributing towards recognising essential needs in helping the students towards getting positive attitudes and perception towards correct pronunciation in spoken English. The dimension proposed in this study as a result of the findings could implicate on how instructors could assess and make predictions of their students' perception, specifically in the importance of pronunciation in spoken English. Thus, it is a wise step for English language teachers and trainers to consider the dimensions as a set of booster in ensuring positive results for a given English class or an intensive English programme. It is recommended that teachers or trainers enhance learners' awareness on the importance of acquiring correct pronunciation. At the same time, they also need to instil in the learners the will to strive for accuracy through enough practices and exposures that could lead them to commendable achievements. It may also be equally important that these learners build intrinsic liking and fondness towards English so as to ease the passage to acquire the natural nuances of the target language. This can be considered vital as some experts have claimed that pronunciation is a skill that is difficult to acquire, thus, some level of affinity towards it could a be bonus. The findings also lead the researchers to identify ways to maximise learning and acquisition of pronunciation skills as the perception and concern for improvement are positive. One possible study to be carried out upon positive attitudes and perceptions on the importance of English pronunciation is learners' preferences on how pronunciation training should be implemented. This includes their perceptions on corrective feedback with regard to pronunciation errors. Such study may be extended to find out if there exist specific preferences that learners have on the various types of error feedback mechanisms (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). It may also be relevant to study the feasibility of coming out with a prototype of pronunciation software that employs automatic speech recognition (ASR), which is equipped with interactive meaningful corrective feedback to aid the learners. This may be made possible after assessing the feedback mechanisms deem as preferred by the learners. The findings of the study revealed the perceptions and attitudes of the students towards the importance of accurate English pronunciation. The study contributes to sustainable development through exploration of general interest and concern on the importance of proper and accurate English pronunciation in future undertakings of young Malaysian school leavers for the interest of human capital building. The outcome of the study will have an impact on pedagogical issues, specifically on the approach and implementation in relation to pronunciation trainings with regard to the teaching of English in Malaysia.

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