

Rethinking Pronunciation: Insights from 'Addressing Inherent Needs: Teaching Pronunciation in Multicultural Classrooms' by Dino Music at EAQUALS Online

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At the EAQUALS Online conference, Dino Music delivered an insightful presentation titled "Addressing Inherent Student Needs". Derived from his research with adult General and Academic English learners at SEDA College (Dublin and Cork), Music presented an innovative, evidence-based approach to teaching pronunciation in diverse classrooms. Music began by reviewing standard teacher methods for building learner profiles—such as questionnaires, interviews, ranking activities, and group discussions. While all provide useful context, his research highlights that biographical information (specifically L1 background, nationality, age, and occupation) carries the highest relevance when addressing pronunciation.

1. Students' Point of View

Survey data gathered from 178 adult learners revealed two findings:

Key Takeaways

- Ss have identified Speaking as the skill they need to work on the most for their daily lives
- Ss work on pronunciation almost every day
- The vast majority of Ss still believe more pronunciation practice would be beneficial

Speaking as a Priority:

Students overwhelmingly identified speaking as the skill they need most in their daily lives.



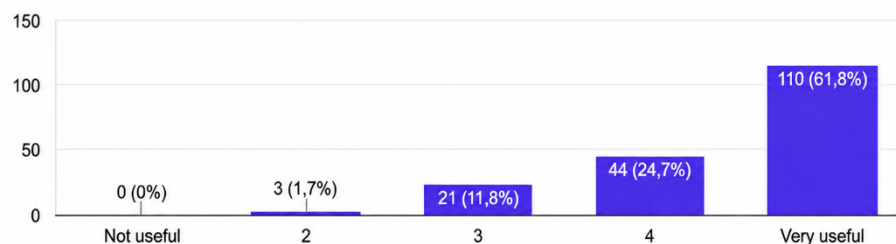
Demand for More Practice:

Although learners report practicing pronunciation almost daily, over **86%** indicated that additional pronunciation practice would be "useful" (24.7%) or "very useful" (61.8%).

Speaking Focus - Pronunciation

How useful would more pronunciation practice be for you?

178 responses



The numbers in the chart reflect the proportion of questionnaire respondents who selected a particular option. All respondents are Adult SEDA College Cork students.



2. Pedagogical Reflection: The Teachers' Point of View

A particularly resonant segment of Music's session focused on the qualitative perspectives of practicing teachers regarding multilingual pronunciation instruction. Several key takeaways from this discussion offer profound insights for classroom practice:

Inclusivity & L1 Equity:

A crucial principle highlighted was making it explicitly clear to learners that **every L1 has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses when acquiring English pronunciation**. Normalizing phonetic transfer prevents students from viewing their native language as a drawback and fosters an equitable, supportive classroom climate.

Tailored Grouping & Scaffolding:

Effective instruction requires teachers to **tailor explanations based on the specific class profile and group learners with similar phonemic struggles**. This targeted grouping allows for focused micro-lessons without alienating students who do not share the same phonetic hurdles.

Balancing Feedback Modes:

Teachers emphasized the delicate balance needed between **on-the-spot correction and delayed feedback**. Over-correcting in the moment can stifle fluency and intimidate speakers, whereas delayed feedback—paired with peer modelling—preserves spontaneous communication while still ensuring

The Confidence:

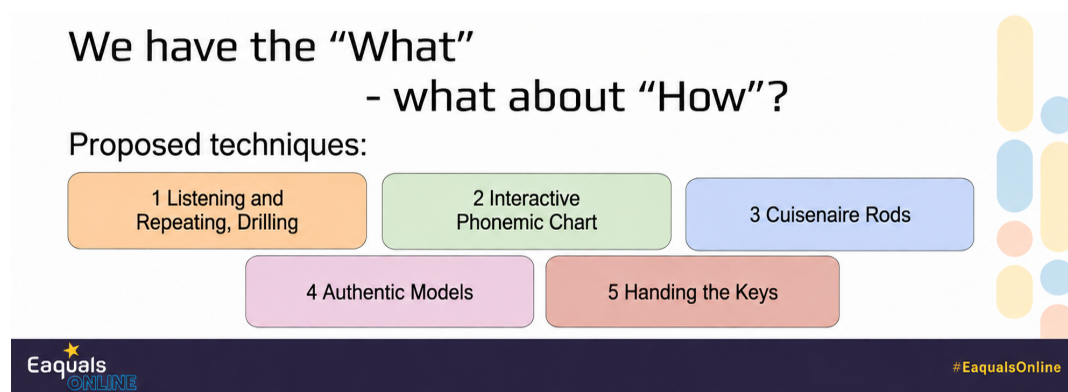
Above all, the focus group highlighted the direct correlation between a student's **linguistic confidence** and their **pronunciation ability**. Pronunciation is deeply tied to identity and affective filter; when instruction protects student confidence, production improves exponentially.

Music's session emphasized a preparation of a clear class profile that focuses on students' first languages (L1s)—such as Portuguese, Spanish, or Mandarin. By identifying these specific linguistic backgrounds, we can systematically research the exact phonological struggles speakers of each language encounter when learning English pronunciation. To optimize instruction across multilingual cohorts—such as Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, and Mandarin learners/speakers—Music also mapped out shared phonemic difficulties. Instead of isolated practice, instruction focuses on high-frequency trouble spots:

- **Individual Phonemes:** /θ/, /eth/, and /ð/
- **Phoneme Contrasts:** Vowel length and voicing distinctions such as /i:/ vs. /I/, /u:/ vs. /v/, and /z/ vs. /s/.

3. Implementing Multilingual Peer Teaching

Building on Gerald Kelly's *How to Teach Pronunciation* (2000), Music argued for **multilingual peer teaching**, where the teacher "coaches up" individual students or small groups who then act as peer models and instructors. He outlined five core classroom strategies evaluated by teachers:



- a. **Listening, Repeating, and Drilling (with Group Captains):** Assigning student captains to lead drilling within small multilingual teams unlike the usual pattern where the teacher is the model.
- b. **Interactive Phonemic Charts:** Utilizing visual and audio tools for independent or paired exploration of mouth positioning and sound contrasts, which highlights correct usage so that the learners then follow their peers' lead.

3 Cuisenaire Rods

- especially useful for long and short vowel contrasts
- Ss are given a list of words featuring the contrasted phonemes, e.g. /i:/ vs /ɪ/
- Ss work in pairs or small groups and take turns pulling the rods randomly
- Long one: a word with /i:/, e.g. peak
- Shorter one: a word with /ɪ/, e.g. pick

- c. **Cuisenaire Rods:** Using tactile objects to physically represent vowel lengths and contrastive stress.

- d. **Authentic Models:** Leveraging pop-culture clips (e.g., *Modern Family*) to help students spot pronunciation errors causing real-world miscommunication.

4 "Authentic" Models

- Use pop culture or other relevant materials as models
- Ss access these videos/audios in groups
- Notice → Practice → Create → Produce
- The final product would be their own roleplay where they showcase how the phoneme contrast in question can lead to a misunderstanding



YouGlish

Great resource for finding relevant materials!

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5 Handing the Keys

- Works well with Delayed Error Correction
- Write up a list of pronunciation errors you've noticed while monitoring a freer practice activity
- Based on class profile and Ss' strengths, nominate Ss who will take your position in front of the board and the class and will lead the modelling and drilling

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- e. **"Handing Over the Keys":** Allowing confident students to take the board to model and drill sounds based on delayed error feedback.

The focus group identified confidence as the primary barrier adult learners face in pronunciation. Because students generally respond well to peer-assisted learning, shifting control of the learning process to the learners themselves can significantly boost both language acquisition and self-assurance. When learning in an English-speaking

environment, students are surrounded by real-world language input. Music's focus group findings suggest that learners should actively engage with native speakers, shadow authentic speech patterns, and accept mistakes as an integral step in language acquisition. Instructors should therefore encourage learners to consistently immerse themselves in English-language content. To help learners improve their pronunciation, teachers can introduce practical self-study techniques. For Music, students can practice shadowing by speaking alongside captioned media to copy natural rhythm and intonation or record themselves to compare their output against native speaker models.

Teachers' Take

Practicality

- 1 Listening and Repeating, Drilling
- 2 Interactive Phonemic Chart
- 3 Handing the Keys
- 4 Authentic Models
- 5 Cuisenaire Rods

Usefulness

- 1 Authentic Models
- 2 Interactive Phonemic Chart
- 3 Cuisenaire Rods
- 1 Listening and Repeating, Drilling
- 2 Handing the Keys

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Personal Reflection

Reflecting on these insights, we find these strategies particularly relevant and applicable to our students. While living in a non-English speaking environment can limit spontaneous real-world immersion, techniques like shadowing captioned media, self-recording, and utilizing AI phonemic tools offer accessible ways to simulate authentic language exposure. Furthermore, addressing the pervasive confidence barrier through peer collaboration and reframing mistakes

as vital learning steps creates a supportive classroom atmosphere where Turkish learners feel empowered to take risks with their pronunciation.

Moreover, we find these student-centred techniques highly practical for my context in Türkiye. Shifting the teacher away from being the sole model—by using group captains for drilling and letting confident students lead board work—directly builds learner autonomy and confidence. Additionally, integrating pop-culture clips provides relatable, authentic context for identifying pronunciation errors that impact real-world communication.

Finally, incorporating these targeted pronunciation activities will be particularly valuable for our lower-level students and can be integrated into our coursebook. Introducing student-led drilling, authentic media clips, and self-recording tools right from the lower levels will establish pronunciation habits early on, giving students the structured support and confidence they need from the start.