

## Afghan EFL Students' Perceptions about English Pronunciation

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### Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of Afghan EFL students about English pronunciation in terms of positivity, importance, students' enthusiasm, and difficulty. Furthermore, it sees if there are any significant statistical differences in their perceptions based on their profile. The survey was conducted using a Likert scale questionnaire which sought to collect data from 100 EFL students of the English Department of Takhar University. Data collected from respondents were analyzed through SPSS version 26 for descriptive statistics. Also, t-test and One-way ANOVA were run on data for comparison and contrast of variables. The results revealed that Afghan EFL students hold a positive perception about English pronunciation and feel enthusiastic towards their pronunciation related activities. They also believe that learning English pronunciation is difficult for them. The survey implications for EFL administrators and teachers in the context of Afghanistan is to incorporate more pronunciation improving activities in English course-books and design learning activities that meet the needs of students.

**Keywords:** Afghan EFL Students, Perception, English Pronunciation, Language, Education

### 1. Introduction

English language learning takes place when multiple domains of language like; listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are acquired (Almaqrn & Alshabeb, 2017). Among them, listening and speaking require proper pronunciation for intelligible communication. Researches reveal that students' good feeling about their pronunciation motivates them towards better learning. As stated by Young (2006), "learners' positive attitudes may lead to increased motivation, which in turn may lead to successful attainment of proficiency due to increased input and interaction." However, if they have bad feelings about their pronunciation they are demotivated in the learning process. According to the report by Tella et al. (2010), there seems to be correlations between negative attitudes towards learning and students' poor performance. As stated by Marza (2014), there is no doubt that appropriate pronunciation of a language is the most important aspect of understanding others and making ourselves understood by others. Communicability is determined not just by correct grammar and large number of vocabulary but also by proper interaction of pronunciation features. It may be claimed that pronunciation classes should deal with pronunciation teaching and learning problems and needs. The author believes that, since the ultimate goal of learning English as a

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foreign language (EFL) is comprehensibility and intelligibility in spoken English, a few hours specified for pronunciation in the curriculum will not result in students' communicative competence. Moreover, Kang (2010) states that "researchers in applied linguistics have paid little attention to learners' perceptions of pronunciation instruction in L2 contexts".

As an instructor of English language, literature and linguistics, the author has taught phonology, phonetics and pronunciation classes repeatedly to Afghan EFL learners throughout his profession. During his sessions, students have provoked different reactions towards English pronunciation. It has been observed that some students were enjoying their pronunciation activities in their groups. However, others would ignore, if possible, and think of pronunciation as a confusing and tough area of language. Although the author believes that it is teachers' responsibility to deal with pronunciation problems of students, there also seem to be some non-linguistic factors, such as; perceptions and attitudes in students affecting their improvement in pronunciation.

Therefore, the main goal of this survey is to provide detailed information on Afghan EFL students' perceptions of English pronunciation in terms of positivity, importance, difficulty, students' enthusiasm and learning strategies. The survey will also yield more literature to support the background of English studies in the context of Afghanistan.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Status of English in Afghanistan**

In the multilingual country of Afghanistan, English is considered a foreign language since the people of this country do not use this language in their immediate social context. Afghanistan is one of the expanding circle countries of the three concentric circles of World Englishes of Kachru (1997). Excluding the branching dialects, about thirty languages are spoken in Afghanistan, the majority of them derived from the Iranian branch of Indo-European family. The other remarkable language family present in this country is Ural-Altaic, particularly Turkic languages of Uzbek and Turkmen (Garland, 1963). In contrast to many other countries, the mother tongue of a citizen of Afghanistan does not necessarily indicate her/his ethnical identity. Many of the residents in this country are bilingual and even multilingual.

Uzbek language is the third official language alongside Dari and Pashto in the areas where the majority of people speak this language. Moreover, the media is free to broadcast in any of the prevalent languages of the country (Afghanistan Constitution, 2004). Fundamentally, the languages of instruction are Dari and Pashto; however, Uzbek has also benefited to some extent from the conditioned freedoms given in the Constitution of Afghanistan since 2004. Teaching in international languages (i.e. English) can also take place in the cases of need and exigencies of the ministry of higher education or as per request of the department and the approval of the faculty council and university academic council at the public universities of Afghanistan (Public Higher Education Law, 2015).

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The country's education system now starts teaching English from grade 4 of elementary school and continues up to grade 12. A proportional amount of teaching English language also takes place in the first and second years of undergraduate even if the subject field is not English. Apart from this, the country has an incredible number of English language learning academies and centers where people tend to learn English outside the governmental educational system. According to Orfan (2020a), even though the quality of teaching English at Afghan public universities is really low, students hold strong positive attitudes towards learning this language. He also found that learning English was a dreamed goal of many Afghans.

According to the International Assistance Mission (IAM, 2020), Afghans understand that they need to learn English as a foreign language for several reasons. They believe it helps them in rebuilding their country, in releasing their country from international isolation and reaching the aid agencies to get the help they need. Due to the several decades of conflict, the country's economy is highly dependent on foreign aids and its nation suffers from shortage of jobs (CIA, 2020; Noori et al. 2020). Citizens of Afghanistan know that English is important to communicate with other governments and nongovernmental organizations in order to benefit from their opportunities, i.e., getting jobs, higher education and funding projects. The new generation in this country feels that their progress might be negatively affected if they do not learn English.

According to Orfan (2020a), using English increased slowly when the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in the year 1989. English language learning has now become a highly desired ambition for Afghans mostly influenced by the chances of getting a job with international INGOs within the country and higher education opportunities available outside the country's borders. English language learning in the past years has increased employment opportunities throughout the world and it has been rewarding in Afghanistan (Alimyar, 2015). It is evident that Afghans who have worked with INGOs in the past two decades have made a fortune. The government has established many English departments at public universities of the country since 2001. The private sector has also facilitated centers for learning English primarily for the purposes of business and the development of their country. Furthermore, the universities in Afghanistan are now changing over to using English as the language of instruction in faculties such as; medicine, dentistry, engineering and computer sciences (AIM, 2020; Alimyar, 2015). These factors have led numerous Afghans towards learning English language for a brighter future and a better horizon for their country.

## **2.2. Perception and Attitude**

Findings from earlier studies about pronunciation verify that only few learners can attain native-like pronunciation in a foreign language (FL), specifically those who have not learned to speak it in their early life (Lenneberg, 1967). Also, Kenworthy (1987), found that both linguistic and non-linguistic factors are involved in the acquisition of proficiency and fluency in pronunciation. His findings showed that the speakers' attitude along with their innate phonetic capacity, exposure to the target language (TL) age and native language were

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considered important. Moreover, different studies have confirmed that most EFL students feel that their pronunciation is not satisfactory and wish to speak English more fluently and similar to native speakers (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). Therefore, it is rational to claim that English language learning, particularly attaining proficiency and fluency in pronunciation is influenced by students' perceptions and attitudes.

Perception is the way we perceive things based on our beliefs or personal preferences. A perception is an opinion that you have about someone or something. It is also said that a person who has perception realizes or notices things that are not obvious. The Chambers dictionary of synonyms and antonyms gives a series of words such as; discernment, feeling, idea, insight, observation, recognition and understanding as synonyms to the term perception (Manser, 2005). According to Longman online dictionary of contemporary English, "perception" is "the way we think about something and our idea of what it is like" (Longman, 2020). From a psychological point of view, perception is a single unified awareness that is derived from sensory processes. Perception is about how we see things (Agata, 2015). In the context of this study, "students' perception" means students understandings or views of English pronunciation. In other words, it is the personal opinion of students about English pronunciation and how they perceive it.

Literally, an attitude is a position in which you hold your body. However, one's attitude to something is the way he/she thinks and feels about it and his/her attitude to someone is the way one behave when he/she is dealing with that person. The mentality of a person is also referred to as her/his attitude. According to Norland (1995), an attitude is formed in three ways: "through direct contact with the object of the attitude, through contact with a similar attitude object, or through the social learning process". Language learning can be affected by both attitudes and motivation, because learners with a negative attitude may not be willing to perform satisfactorily (Almaqarn & Alshabeb, 2017). They also believe that personal characteristics of students can contribute to their progress in learning a foreign language. They state that there have been specific links between remarkably positive attitudes towards the target language (TL) and students' achievements of pronunciation. Zulkefly & Razali (2019) state that it is extremely vital for learners to hold positive attitudes to be better learners of a target language.

### **2.3. The Importance of Pronunciation**

Pronunciation is the audible aspect of speech (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). According to Martin (2015), teaching pronunciation requires recognition of phonological elements that all listeners may not have. Also, Kang (2010) states that pronunciation classes don't have to stress on sounding British or American, but rather learning to become more comprehensible and intelligible. He also asserts that further investigation on listener and speaker's perception is needed to bring changes in the current policies and practices of teaching pronunciation.

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Consciously or unconsciously, EFL speakers' level of competence are frequently judged in terms of fluency and accuracy based on how pleasant or unpleasant their pronunciation is (Almaqrn & Alshabeb, 2017). They also assert that in such cases, a first impression may be ineffective particularly in work environment. Jiménez (2019) state that not understanding what someone else is saying due to accent differences may lead to embarrassment, rejection, or misunderstanding. Moreover, according to Anderson et al. (1992) the role of correct pronunciation is said to be crucial in the intelligibility and comprehensibility of communication.

Since the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), it has been repeatedly claimed that teaching pronunciation is generally neglected, both in local and international contexts (Tergujeff, 2013). Although the methods of teaching pronunciation might change from time to time, it is still viewed as a significant part of language education. As of Gilakjani (2011), students will face challenges in the area of job seeking if they do not learn proper pronunciation. Therefore, English pronunciation skills hold vital importance in the performance, effectiveness and functionality of EFL learners in various contexts.

#### **2.4. Statement of Problem**

English pronunciation practices have not been studied particularly in the context of Afghanistan. Orfan (2020a) studied the attitude of Afghan EFL learners towards English education in general. He also studied the Afghan EFL students' challenges and strategies in acquiring and comprehending English idioms (Orfan, 2020b). Alimyar (2015), has studied the teaching of English as a foreign language in Afghanistan. He has also explored the attitude and motivation of Afghans towards learning English (Alimyar, 2020). Miri (2019) has investigated the impact of English language in Afghanistan. The Afghan students' attitudes and motivations in English for specific purpose (ESP) and English for general purpose (EGP) courses have been investigated by Siddiq (2019). Akramiy (2020) has case studied the speaking anxiety in an Afghan EFL setting. However, to the knowledge of the author and the extent of available literature in the context of Afghanistan, a practical aspect of teaching English, such as; pronunciation has not been yet studied. Therefore, the topic is update in its context and deserves thorough investigation to report upon the Afghan EFL students' perceptions about English pronunciation. The main goal of this survey is to provide detailed information on Afghan EFL students' perceptions of English pronunciation in terms of positivity, importance, difficulty, students' enthusiasm and learning strategies.

#### **2.5. Research Questions**

1. What is the overall perception of Afghan EFL students about their English pronunciation practices?
2. To what extent, do Afghan EFL students think of pronunciation as an important, difficult and enthusiastic part of their language learning?

3. Is there any significant statistical difference among Afghan EFL students' perceptions based on their gender, age, class, native language, experience of an earlier pronunciation class and habit of listening to podcasts?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

The current research uses a quantitative approach. It is a survey of students' perceptions about English pronunciation. The data were collected through a questionnaire with 20 items. The questionnaire items sought students' perceptions towards different aspects of English pronunciation.

#### 3.2. The Participants

Participants of the present research were 100 Afghan EFL students who were pursuing undergraduate education in the English Department of Takhar University. These participants were selected randomly from the English Department. The participants were from three classes: freshman (2<sup>nd</sup> semester), sophomore (4<sup>th</sup> semester) and junior (6<sup>th</sup> semester) of English language and literature. There were 60 male and 40 female students ranging from 16 to 25 years of age. The participants' native languages comprise of Dari/Persian (61%), Uzbek (30%), Pashto (6%) and Shughni (3%). Forty-five respondents said that they had taken an English pronunciation course/class before and fifty-five respondents said that they hadn't. Seventy students said that they listened to English podcasts/audios on a regular basis, while thirty of them said that they did not (**Table1**).

**Table 1: Participants' demographic profile**

<b>Gender of Participants</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent Valid</b>	<b>Percent Cumulative</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Valid	Male	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Female	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
<b>Participants' age range</b>					
Valid	16-20 years	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	21-25 years	61	61.0	61.0	100.0
<b>Participants' native languages</b>					
Valid	Dari/Persian	61	61.0	61.0	61.0
	Uzbek	30	30.0	30.0	91.0
	Pashto	6	6.0	6.0	97.0
	Shughni	3	3.0	3.0	100.0
<b>Participants' class-wise list</b>					
Valid	Freshman	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	Sophomore	34	34.0	34.0	73.0
	Junior	27	27.0	27.0	100.0
<b>Have you taken an English pronunciation course/class before?</b>					
Valid	Yes	45	45.0	45.0	45.0



	No	55	55.0	55.0	100.0
<b>Do you listen to English podcasts/audios on a regular basis?</b>					
Valid	Yes	70	70.0	70.0	70.0
	No	30	30.0	30.0	100.0

### 3.3. Data Collection Instrument

In order to derive students' perceptions, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed. The first part of the questionnaire collected the participants' demographic details. The second part of the questionnaire contained 20 statements with discrete points of Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Not Sure (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). Most of the statements in the questionnaire were developed by the author in the shadow of literature review and some were produced during a discussion group with peer teachers. Statements 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18 and 20 intended to check the students' perceptions of various aspects of English pronunciation. Statements 6, 7, 9 and 19 were added to see the students' opinion about the difficulty of English pronunciation practices. Statements 4, 13, 14 and 17 looked for students' strategies being used in acquiring English pronunciation (see **Table3**).

### 3.4. Validity and Reliability

The final draft of the questionnaire was handed out to two colleagues in English Department for items validity and error checking. It was edited and improved based on their comments. An SPSS validity assessment was applied on the input data to see if there were any missing values. There was no missing values in the input data to affect the assessment results. In addition, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy factor (0.690) was seen to be greater than (0.6) which validates the adequacy of the samples. Moreover, the reliability statistics analysis showed that Cronbach's Alpha was (0.757) which is considered acceptable.

### 3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected by means of a questionnaire from 100 students of the English Department at Takhar University in three different sessions. Each session was held at different times in three different classes of freshman, sophomore and junior. The respondents were given a brief introductory instruction on the purpose of the research and how to answer the survey questions. Moreover, they were made aware of the confidentiality of their responses and that their participation in the research was optional. They were also allowed to have enough time to read the questionnaire carefully. They were told to respond to each item in the questionnaire thoughtfully and to the best of their knowledge. They were informed that there was no right or wrong answer and that they had to choose their best preference for each statement. Each data collection session lasted up to 15 minutes.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

The data collected from respondents were entered into an Excel sheet of Office program. They were then imported into SPSS Statistics, Version 26 software. The negatively worded statements were recoded into reverse order to justify the appropriateness of the assessments. Descriptive statistics, i.e., the means and frequencies were conducted. Also, *t*-test was run to

explore the differences between two groups and One-way ANOVA was applied to observe the differences between more than two groups.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The Overall Perception of Afghan EFL Students about English Pronunciation

To find the overall perception of Afghan EFL students about English pronunciation, the statements 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18 and 20 were computed. The descriptive statistics from the responses of the respondents through SPSS analysis show an average mean score of 3.77 ( $SD=0.45$ ). This shows that Afghan EFL students have a positive perception about English pronunciation (**Table2**).

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of respondents' overall perception**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean	100	2.42	4.75	3.7692	.44537
Valid N (listwise)	100				

### 4.2. The Extent of Importance, Difficulty and Students' Enthusiasm of English Pronunciation

More than 75% of the participants have agreed and strongly agreed with the seven positive statements which derived information about the importance and necessity of good English pronunciation, feeling comfortable when sounding correct, pronunciation activities being fun and interesting, learning pronunciation through repetition of words and knowing about the relationships between sounds, meanings, and forms. Above 55 percent of the participant have disagreed and strongly disagreed with the four negatively worded statements that collected information regarding lack of attention and enthusiasm towards English pronunciation, disliking English pronunciation activities and unnecessariness of native-like English pronunciation. Over 40% of the participants have agreed and strongly agreed with the four positive statements that checked information about the difficulty and complexity of good English pronunciation (**Table3**). Therefore, it can be concluded that English pronunciation is perceived important, enthusiastic at the same time difficult by Afghan EFL students.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the respondents' responses to statements (%)**

No.	Statements	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Total
1	I believe, it is necessary to have good English pronunciation.	6	3	5	40	46	100
2	It is important for teachers to have good English pronunciation.	5	1	2	13	79	100
3	I find working on my English pronunciation fun and interesting.	3	6	15	57	19	100
4	I must repeat the words I learn many times to correct my pronunciation.	5	1	11	45	38	100
5	I feel comfortable when my pronunciation sounds correct.	4	1	5	28	62	100
6	I think English pronunciation is difficult to learn.	7	28	24	26	15	100
7	I can hardly pronounce English words correctly.	12	24	24	30	10	100



8 In my view, students who pay more attention to their pronunciation, waste their time.	42	21	13	16	8	100
9 To me, it is too hard to pronounce some English words.	9	23	20	39	9	100
10 I find the English pronunciation and spelling rules crazy and confusing.	19	30	24	16	11	100
11 I don't really like to practice English pronunciation.	42	44	7	4	3	100
12 I don't think I need native-like English pronunciation. I am not a native speaker of English.	36	32	16	13	3	100
13 In my idea, English word's pronunciation cannot be figured out from its spelling.	3	29	35	29	4	100
14 I need to focus on producing sounds that do not exist in my native language.	7	12	23	46	12	100
15 I do not feel enthusiastic to come to class when pronunciation is being taught.	18	37	19	20	6	100
16 Silent letters in English words are more than my native language.	15	10	34	31	10	100
17 I need to repeat the words I learn many times before using them.	4	6	8	56	26	100
18 I wonder why the words that rhyme are not spelt the same.	5	13	41	29	12	100
19 Sometimes even a little change in the pronunciation of a word changes the meaning or form of that word.	5	8	10	35	42	100
20 It comes to me as no surprise that why English pronunciation and spelling aren't compatible.	5	12	30	46	7	100

### 4.3. Respondents' Demographic Profile

#### 4.3.1. Gender

In order to determine the difference in perceptions of female and male students about English pronunciation, inferential statistical analysis was performed. As you can observe in table 4, the overall mean score of male students' perception about English pronunciation is 3.76 (SD=0.46) while it is 3.78 (SD=0.42) for female students. The difference in the mean score is 0.02 which indicates an insignificant difference. Furthermore, the results of independent samples t-test (Table 5) show that the p-value in both Levene's test (0.521) and t-test (0.826) is bigger than the alpha level (0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that there is no statistical significant difference between female and male groups' perceptions regarding English pronunciation.

**Table 4: Group Statistics**

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	60	3.7611	.46346	.05983
Female	40	3.7813	.42226	.06677

**Table 5: Independent Samples Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.415	.521	- .220	98	.826	-.02014	.09135	-.20142	.16114
Equal variances not assumed			- .225	88.896	.823	-.02014	.08965	-.19828	.15800

#### 4.3.2. Age

To discover whether the age of the participants affected their perceptions about English pronunciation, descriptive statistics were run. As it is shown in table 6, the overall mean score for age group (15-20) is 3.74 (SD=0.44) and that of the age group (21-25) is 3.79 (SD=0.46). The difference in mean score is 0.04 which is not assumed to be significant. Additionally, the independent samples t-test were conducted to examine the differences in the perceptions of the two age categories about English pronunciation. Both t-test for equality of means and Levene's test for equality of variances are displayed in table 7. P-value of both Levene's test (0.773) and t-test (0.595) are more than the alpha level (0.05). Thus, it is rational to sum that there is no statistical significant difference between perceptions of two age groups about English pronunciation.

**Table 6: Group Statistics**

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
16-20 years	39	3.7393	.43477	.06962
21-25 years	61	3.7883	.45455	.05820

**Table 7: Independent Samples Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.084	.773	- .534	98	.595	-.04894	.09164	-.23080	.13293

Equal variances not assumed		- .539	83.762	.591	-.04894	.09074	-.22939	.13152
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#### 4.3.3. An Earlier Pronunciation Course Impact

In order to find whether students' earlier experience of a pronunciation class has affected their perceptions about English pronunciation, a descriptive analysis was conducted. As presented in table 8, the mean score for the respondents with an earlier experience of pronunciation class is 3.72 (SD=0.52) while that of the participants with no earlier experience of pronunciation class is 3.81 (SD=0.37). The difference between the two mean scores is 0.09 which is viewed insignificant. Also, Levene's test for equality of variances and t-test for equality of means are illustrated in table 9. The p-value in both t-test (0.272) and Levene's test (0.060) are greater than alpha level (0.05). In this way, it is concluded that an earlier pronunciation class experience has not affected the perceptions of students about English pronunciation.

**Table 8: Group Statistics**

Have you taken an English pronunciation course/class before?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Yes	45	3.7148	.52056	.07760
No	55	3.8136	.37197	.05016

**Table 9: Independent Samples Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.630	.060	-1.105	98	.272	-.09882	.08942	-.27628	.07863
Equal variances not assumed			-1.070	77.431	.288	-.09882	.09240	-.28280	.08515

#### 4.3.4. Listening to Podcasts' Effect

Another inferential statistical analysis was applied to see the difference in the perceptions of respondents about English pronunciation concerning their habit of listening to podcast. As readers can see in table 10, the mean score for participants with habit of listening to podcasts is 3.79 (SD=0.48) while that of the participants with no habit of listening to

podcasts is 3.71 (SD=0.36). The difference in means of the two groups is 0.08 which is not assumed significant. Moreover, table 11 presents the results of t-test for equality of means and Levene's test for equality of variances. Both Levene's test (0.327) and t-test (0.396) revealed a p-value far more than alpha level (0.05). Hence, it can be concluded that habit of listening to podcasts does not have a significant influence on students' perceptions of English pronunciation.

**Table 10: Group Statistics**

Do you listen to English podcasts/audios on a regular basis?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Yes	70	3.7940	.47855	.05720
No	30	3.7111	.35674	.06513

**Table 11: Independent Samples Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.970	.327	.852	98	.396	.08294	.09732	-.11020	.27607
Equal variances not assumed			.957	72.783	.342	.08294	.08668	-.08983	.25570

#### 4.3.5. Class Impression

As you can observe in table 12, the mean score for the juniors' class is on the top 3.898 (SD=0.478), followed by sophomores' class with a mean score of 3.841 (SD=0.401). Lastly, the mean score for freshmen is at the bottom 3.618 (SD=0.425). Also, independent samples t-test were conducted to see the difference between these classes. It was seen that the p-values between freshman and sophomore (0.025) as well as freshman and junior (0.015) were less than the alpha level (0.05); however, the p-value between sophomore and junior classes (0.612) was more than the alpha level (0.05). Furthermore, results from One-way ANOVA test in table13 reveals that the p-value (0.020) is lower than (0.05), which indicates a significant difference between class groups. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that there are statistical significant difference in the perceptions of students by their classes.

**Table 12: Groups Statistics**

Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Junior	27	3.8981	.47834	.09206

Sophomore	34	3.8407	.40063	.06871
Freshman	39	3.6175	.42523	.06809

**Table 13: ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.520	2	.760	4.069	.020
Within Groups	18.117	97	.187		
Total	19.637	99			

#### 4.3.5. Native Language Influence

Table 14 presents means of the four linguistic groups. As can be seen, Pashto native speaker respondents have received the highest mean score of 4.08 (SD=0.25) which is followed by Uzbek native speaker respondents with a mean score of 3.78 (SD=0.36). Dari/Persian native speaker respondents hold a mean score of 3.76 (SD=0.46). Shughni native speaker respondents receive the lowest mean score of 3.19 (SD=0.44).

Also, independent samples t-test reports were observed to see the difference between each two linguistic groups. It was found that the p-values between Uzbek and Pashto natives (0.059), between Uzbek and Dari/Persian natives (0.839) and between Pashtu and Dari/Persian natives (0.098) were greater than alpha level (0.05). However, the p-values between Uzbek and Shughni speakers (0.021), between Pashtu and Shughni speakers (0.028) and between Dari/Persian and Shughni speakers (0.048) were less than the alpha level (0.05).

Moreover, One-way ANOVA test was administered for inspecting the differences in the perceptions of respondents based on their native languages. As shown in table 15, the p-value of the four native language groups is 0.043 (F=2.82), that is lower than alpha level (0.05). In the light of these observations, it is logical to conclude that there are statistical significant differences in the perceptions of these learners about English pronunciation in this regard which shows that students' native languages may have had an influence on their perceptions of English pronunciation.

**Table 14: Group Statistics**

Language	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Dari/Persian	61	3.7609	.46235	.05920
Uzbek	30	3.7806	.36058	.06583
Pashto	6	4.0833	.24721	.10092
Shughni	3	3.1944	.75615	.43656

**Table 15: ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.591	3	.530	2.822	.043

Within Groups	18.046	96	.188		
Total	19.637	99			

## 5. Discussion

The results of this survey provide significant information about Afghan EFL students' perceptions of English pronunciation. One of the informed aspects in this research is that Afghan EFL students hold an overall positive perception about English pronunciation. This finding supports the results of studies conducted by (Orfan, 2020a; Alimyar, 2020) who found that Afghan EFL learners had an overall positive attitude towards learning English. It is also in line with findings of another study by Orfan (2020b) who found that Afghan undergraduate learners have had an extremely powerful positive attitude towards the significance of acquiring English idioms.

The current study found that Afghan EFL students perceive English pronunciation important and enthusiastic which is in line with the findings of (Almaqarn & Alshabeb, 2017) who studied the attitudinal aspects of Saudi students towards English pronunciation. They found that Saudi EFL students valued the importance of proper pronunciation and believed that they could improve their pronunciation skills. He also found that Saudi EFL students have a positive attitude towards acquiring the proper pronunciation of English which is also in line with the results of this study.

The survey results reported that participants were interested in a native-like pronunciation which yields an opposite result to that of Tergujeff (2013), who studied learners' perspective on English pronunciation teaching in an EFL context in Finland. However it supports the findings of Martin (2015) who studied the teachers and students' perceptions of the role of pronunciation in the EFL classroom on a group of foreign students learning English in the United Kingdom. He found that the students in his research viewed English pronunciation important and that they wanted to have an accent like native speakers.

Moreover, this research revealed that a majority of (82%) of the participants used word-repetition as a strategy for learning and practicing English pronunciation which is similar to a finding from Derwing & Rossiter (2001) who studied ESL learner's perceptions of their pronunciation needs and strategies. They found that the use of self-repetition and paraphrase was a far greatly preferred strategy for Japanese ESL learners in practicing English pronunciation.

Furthermore, inferential analysis of data results showed that (over 40%) Afghan EFL learners perceive learning English pronunciation difficult. Since many Afghan EFL learners intend to go abroad for higher education and that many universities require a certain proficiency level in English language as a medium of their instruction, they need to pass either IELTS or TOEFL. These tests include listening and speaking sections and one must improve her/his pronunciation to score higher. Since this research reveals that Afghan EFL students feel



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enthusiastic towards English pronunciation activities, English instructors at Afghanistan universities must pay more attention to the students' difficulties and needs to improve their pronunciation.

Last but not the least, the findings show that there were no statistically significant differences among students' perceptions by their gender, age, experience of an earlier pronunciation class and habit of listening to podcasts. These findings support the results of the studies conducted by Orfan (2020a; 2020b). Lastly, the investigation determined that there were statistical significant differences in the perceptions of students based on their classes and native languages.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study aimed to disclose more on how students perceive English pronunciation in EFL context and to provide detailed information on Afghan EFL learners' perceptions about English pronunciation in terms of positivity, importance, difficulty, students' enthusiasm and learning strategies. It is concluded that Afghan EFL learners have a positive perception about their English pronunciation practices. In addition, they feel enthusiastic towards English pronunciation activities. However, they agree that acquiring proper English pronunciation is difficult for them. It is worth mentioning that EFL students perceive English pronunciation important for themselves. It was found that there were no statistical significant differences in the perceptions of Afghan EFL learners based on their age, gender, earlier experience of English pronunciation class and habit of listening to podcasts. In contrast, it was found that there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of Afghan EFL learners based on their classes and native languages.

## 7. Implications and Recommendations

The research has a number of implications. EFL instructors should consider the difficulties of students regarding English pronunciation seriously and design learning activities that meet the needs of students. Since almost all EFL teachers in Afghanistan are nonnative speakers, it is recommended that pronunciation classes should be taught by those nonnative instructors who have attained higher level of accuracy and fluency in English. It is also suggested that instructors should employ more authentic pronunciation related practices in listening and speaking subjects. The English departments of Afghanistan universities should recommend the use of podcasts as an instrument of inputs and exposures to English pronunciation for their students more effectively and efficiently through its bodies. In addition, the implication for textbook designers is that they should incorporate more pronunciation improving activities in English course-books. Finally, curriculum developers must allocate more space for pronunciation related subjects, such as; listening, speaking, phonology and phonetics in the curriculums of English departments.

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