

## **EFL instructors' views on the use of phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation**

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### **Abstract**

The use of phonetic symbols in language teaching classrooms, as a bottom-up approach to pronunciation instruction, has been debated. This study investigates the perspectives of Turkish instructors of English as a foreign language on their use of phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation at tertiary-level institutions. To explore this issue, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six instructors of English as a foreign language from a higher education institution. The qualitative findings reveal that while most instructors recognize the importance of phonetic symbols, they express various teacher-related and student-related concerns that lead to their avoidance and offer recommendations for improvement. The participants also emphasize the importance of teacher training, student self-monitoring as an assessment tool, and technology integration, as essential components for effective pronunciation instruction using phonetic symbols.

*Keywords:* phonetic alphabet; phonetic notation; phonetic symbols; pronunciation teaching; the IPA chart; teachers' attitudes; self-monitoring

### **INTRODUCTION**

In order for second language (L2) learners to communicate effectively, they should use the language comprehensively, which involves an effective implementation of segmental and suprasegmental features (Baker, 2014). Despite the critical role of individual sounds in increasing intelligibility in L2 speech (Serenio et al., 2016), there has been a shift in recent years toward prioritizing the teaching of suprasegmentals over segments (Burri, 2015). However, this trend should not devalue the teaching time spent on individual sounds in the classroom. As Hancock (1994) states “language learners, unlike native speakers, cannot rely on their suprasegmental [...] pronunciation to provide the support that makes individual sounds redundant” (p. 1). Hence, it is imperative that foreign language teachers consider the needs of the learners because for communicative purposes sounds in a language have a crucial role among the interlocutors (Demirezen, 2023; Hismanoglu, 2006).

Whenever it is necessary to address individual sounds in language classrooms, phonetic symbols are commonly used. Phonetic symbols are found in dictionaries, textbooks, and other English language teachings (ELT) materials such as apps as they are claimed to be beneficial for language learners (Bryła-Cruz, 2022; McMullan, 1988; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2021), especially for their consistency and usefulness “as orthography-independent labels” in representing phones (Fouz-González & Mompean, 2021a, p. 5). Accordingly, utilizing phonetic symbols while teaching L2 pronunciation has been shown to enhance learners’ pronunciation especially because they seem to have a significant effect when teaching sounds that are hard to distinguish (Hancock, 1994; Lintunen, 2005; McMullan, 1988; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2021). Despite the usefulness of phonetic symbols in teaching speech sounds in the language classroom, the discussion on teachers’ views regarding phonetic symbol use is inconclusive especially in pronunciation teaching practices rather than teachers’ cognition alone. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by examining how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers view the use of phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Phonetic symbols: definition, uses, and benefits

There are various terms used when referring to different ways in which phonetic symbols are utilized in language teaching. In the literature, there are several terms such as phonetic transcription, phonemic transcription, and phonetic notation. To begin with, transcription may be described as a procedure of recording speech sounds systematically and consistently (Crystal, 2011). Although the term phonetic transcription is sometimes used as an “umbrella term” (Lintunen, 2005) when referring to various types of transcription, phonetic transcription (narrow transcription) differs from phonemic transcription (broad transcription) in that the former depicts the sound qualities and other differences in phonological features. Nonetheless, while phonetic notation refers to the representation of individual sounds and their features by using phonetic symbols, phonetic transcription involves the process of writing down words and utterances via phonetic notation (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015). All three of these representations require some standard symbols in the form of alphabets to be used, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has so far been employed most commonly in ELT materials (Mompean & Fouz-González, 2021).

Due to the low grapheme-to-phoneme correspondence in English, learners, who come from an L1 with a shallow orthography, find it hard to familiarize themselves with the sound structure of English mainly because of the mismatch between the spelling and the pronunciation. A “metalanguage” that enables learners and teachers to talk about various aspects of the phonological system is crucial (Couper, 2011). For this purpose, several approaches for teaching pronunciation were suggested by Abercrombie (1956), which were giving IPA, giving standard orthography, and giving both or neither. Although providing the students with orthography seems convenient and is still used in various online dictionaries and other ELT materials (Bryła-Cruz, 2022; Thomson, 2011), since

spelling and orthography may differ in English (e.g., the first letter in the words *philosophy* and *fish* is the same sound), it may make the learning process more complicated. Besides, since phonetic symbol use could be considered a part of bottom-up teaching of pronunciation given the focus on segmentals, some may find it incompatible with communicative teaching, and thus may object to its use in certain ways (Pennington, 2021).

At this point, several advantages to using phonetic symbols for learners should be noted. First, since each symbol corresponds to a specific sound or a group of sounds, they provide L2 learners and teachers with a “consistent” and “convenient” system for representing the overlap between the sound and letters (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015). Additionally, phonetic symbols assist learners in recognizing pronunciation features that they may otherwise overlook (Harmer, 2001; Koet, 1990). Improving learners’ awareness of phonetic symbols has been claimed to aid in improving their skills not only in pronunciation (Wells, 1996) but also in listening (Susanto & Nanda, 2024), reading and writing (Dufva & Vauras, 2002). Third, phonetic symbol use contributes to the autonomy of the learners. As Hismanoglu (2006) states when learners are guided on how to utilize phonetic symbols in dictionaries, they learn to be autonomous to some extent. Since misperception of sounds may lead to problems in communication, the use of symbols and transcription will function as a good means of recognizing and correcting any potential errors in learners’ pronunciation of individual sounds. Such awareness may not yield immediate results in learners’ performance, but they enable learners to focus on the target segments through noticing, which becomes easy with the “visualness” phonetic symbols offer (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015).

### **Phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation in the EFL classroom**

Phonetic symbols have the potential to serve as an essential tool for teaching pronunciation through phonetic transcription; however, as Jurida (2014) asserts “they are often neglected in teaching” (p. 117). According to Derwing and Munro (2005) several resources, including books and manuals prepared for teachers, as well as research on pronunciation instruction provide teachers with examples of how to teach pronunciation. It deserves noting that for such resources to be effective, teachers should find them meaningful; therefore, teachers’ perceptions, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes need to be investigated since “researchers and teacher educators require some understanding of teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, how they have developed and how they are translated into classroom practices” (Couper, 2016, p. 30). This is mainly because teachers’ cognition has a tremendous impact on the way teachers approach their teaching, and thus, it guides teachers in the course of the practices they have in the classroom (Hampton, 1994). However, language teachers’ cognition and how it can be fostered (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015) specifically in L2 pronunciation is “a growing field” (Couper, 2022; also see Baker, 2014; Couper, 2017).

Numerous studies were conducted reflecting the efficacy of phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation. Mompean and Lintunen (2015) have looked at the perceptions of 177 advanced Finnish learners regarding phonetic notation use in their tertiary-level compulsory English pronunciation course. The findings revealed that phonetic notation

was mostly found useful by EFL learners specifically because besides encouraging autonomous learning, visual representation of English sounds helped increase awareness of some pronunciation features. As an implication, the authors encourage teachers to use phonetic notation, especially at the tertiary level and call for further research to be conducted using learners coming from different L1s using different writing systems.

In their experimental study, Fouz-González and Mompean (2021a) looked at learners' views of using keywords as opposed to phonetic symbols in high-variability phonetic training (HVPT). Among 71 EFL learners who underwent HVPT, the attitudes of the group which used phonetic symbols were generally more positive. In another experimental study by Lintunen (2005), thirty tertiary-level Finnish EFL learners, who were enrolled in an English pronunciation class, took three types of tests on pronunciation and transcription over eight months. Following the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of students' errors in the tests, findings revealed that students who excelled in transcription also improved their pronunciation the most. Finally, Fouz-González and Mompean (2021b) investigated how perceptual training affected learners' perception of vowels through either keywords or phonetic symbols, and the findings demonstrated that both phonetic training approaches were equally effective. One of the implications of the study was that when learners focus on certain phonetic forms their abilities to transfer this to create novel categories increase, which was also evidenced in previous research (Thomson, 2011).

Apart from the studies summarized so far which take learners as the primary subjects of investigation, there are a few other studies that look at the issue from teachers' perspectives. Some of these studies aimed at investigating teachers' overall attitudes and practices in teaching pronunciation rather than using phonetic symbols. One such study was by Tergujeff (2012) who investigated pronunciation teaching tendencies in Finland. The findings indicated that 92 of 103 teachers participating in the study reported teaching learners how to read some phonetic symbols because they regarded these symbols as useful for improving learners' pronunciation and necessary for covering textbook content. However, some teachers also stated that they were hesitant to use these symbols in class as they may interfere with learners' spelling.

Another study by Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) examined the pronunciation techniques employed by teachers in North Cyprus. EFL teachers do not typically use phonetic symbols when teaching EFL. Almost 3% of the teachers reported using phonetic transcription in class. However, the survey did not include an open-ended section in which teachers could have explained other ways they utilized phonetic symbols and their reasons for their choices. Therefore, more studies looking specifically at teachers' perspectives on phonetic symbol use in the EFL classroom are very much needed. In their recent study, Kodirova and Henrichsen (2022) investigated experienced ESL teachers' perspectives as regards using phonetic symbols when teaching pronunciation. There were 120 participants in the questionnaire, a majority of whom were highly experienced in pronunciation instruction. The findings revealed a discrepancy between the teachers' views regarding pronunciation and their actual performances in the classroom. Although the majority of teachers agreed that phonetic symbol use was a valuable teaching technique, one third of them did not use the symbols in pronunciation teaching. In part, this discrepancy was thought to be caused by teachers' lack of experience with phonetics.

## The current study and research questions

Taking stock of the previous studies, phonetic symbols have proven to be important tools in teaching pronunciation despite the asserted drawbacks. Studies examining pronunciation teaching with phonetic symbols have previously focused on its direct effects on learning or students' perspectives of their use. However, research on teachers' views regarding the usefulness and utilization of symbols is relatively limited (Fouz-González & Mompean, 2021a), especially in the EFL context. Given the fact that it is a neglected area in teaching English, the current study focuses on Turkish EFL teachers' perspectives on employing phonetic symbols in their language classrooms with an aim to shed more light on the issue. To this end, the present study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How important do EFL instructors consider phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation?
2. How do EFL instructors perceive the benefits and challenges of using phonetic symbols when teaching pronunciation?
3. What factors do EFL instructors perceive as important when using phonetic symbols to teach pronunciation?

## METHODS

### Research Design

The objective of this study is to investigate EFL instructors' perceptions as regards the use of phonetic symbols in the classroom through a qualitative inquiry and qualitative data which allows for an examination of what individuals think (Creswell & Poth, 2017). We adopted an experiential qualitative approach because as Braun and Clarke (2013) indicated such research "allows us to retain a focus on people's own framing around issues, and their own terms of reference, rather than having it pre-framed by the researcher (e.g. items in a questionnaire)" (p. 24). Since the participants involve a certain group of EFL instructors working at the school of foreign languages at a single state university, a case study design was adopted which aims to provide "an in-depth description and analysis of a 'bounded system' – one individual, institution, or educational context...[through] a single (or few) case(s)" (Croker, 2009, p. 14). For data collection, the most commonly used method, oral interviews, was used following the prepared protocols (Mackey & Gass, 2012, p. 110). Data collection took place during the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, and Human Scientific Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institutions granted ethical approval.

### Context and Participants

This study was conducted with a total of 6 EFL instructors at the school of foreign languages of a state university located in the Inner Western Anatolia region of Turkey. For participant selection, we adopted a combination of convenience and criterion

purposeful sampling, in which “all cases...meet some criterion [which is] useful for quality assurance” (Creswell, 1994, p. 127). In this vein, participants were selected based on their current assignment as a lecturer teaching two-semester intensive English classes at a university. All teachers were expected to utilize phonetic symbols while teaching pronunciation mainly because the coursebooks used by teachers employed phonetic symbols for various purposes. Therefore, they were assumed to have experienced the phenomenon being investigated. For demographic and other background variables, all 6 lecturers teaching intensive English school classes were female with varying teaching t and degrees of post-graduate education as summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Overview of participants

Participant	Education background	Teaching Experience (in years)	Proficiency level taught*			Frequency of teaching pronunciation**		
			E	I	UI	Always	Sometimes	Seldom
Teacher 1	Ph.D.	5	✓					✓
Teacher 2	M.A.	7		✓	✓		✓	
Teacher 3	Ph.D.	10	✓	✓		✓		
Teacher 4	B.A.	6	✓				✓	
Teacher 5	M.A.	8		✓				✓
Teacher 6	M.A.	8	✓				✓	

\*Proficiency levels taught: E (up to Elementary level), I (up to Intermediate level), UI (up to Upper Intermediate) \*\*Amount of pronunciation being taught in their EFL classes

Although all the participants teach pronunciation in the EFL context, two reported not having received any courses on pronunciation pedagogy. Four of the participants were graduates of the education faculty while two majored in American Culture and Literature. None of the participants had experience teaching English abroad, yet one of them studied abroad for a semester through an exchange program, and another one completed her master’s degree in the USA. To provide confidentiality, participants were numbered (Table 1).

### Data collection procedure

As a source of data, the present study used semi-structured interviews which aid the interviewer in identifying distinct topics that need to be addressed, allowing him to uncover important topics not anticipated (Mackey & Gass, 2012). In this study, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually, which was reported to be quite convenient for the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants were interviewed in a friendly atmosphere for exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge and experiences which allowed for the generation of themes relevant to individuals. During the interviews, participants were asked questions aimed at prompting reflection on practice. Following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2013), interviewees were first asked questions that were structured to resemble “an inverted triangle moving from the general to the specific” (p. 84). In addition to the questions, relevant “prompts and probes” were also included although all participants were asked the same questions. As an opener,

instructors were questioned about their overall attitudes toward pronunciation teaching. A list of the interview questions is included in the Appendix.

### **Data analysis**

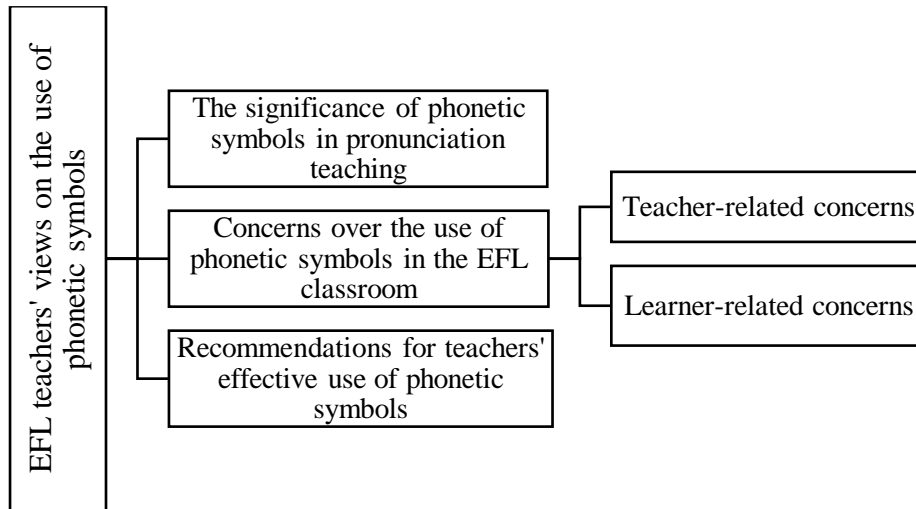
Interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were examined and analyzed using an approach that follows an inductive two-cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014) allowing several common themes to emerge in order to represent views on the topics, issues, and understanding of experienced lecturers' using phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation. An emergent data coding approach was applied, which means concepts, actions, or themes were generated from the data itself (Stuckey, 2015). In the preliminary coding, transcripts were hand-coded to determine the initial codes to strings of texts and the content, and in the second round of coding, the derived codes were categorized into themes.

As a method of data analysis, content analysis was adopted, which is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). Furthermore, content analysis further processes “the raw data from verbatim transcribed interviews to form categories or themes” in a way to allow the “abstraction of data at each step of the analysis; from the manifest and literal content to latent meanings” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Another distinctive feature of content analysis is that it is initiated with pre-determined research questions in mind for “efficiency and empirical grounding” (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 39). Therefore, a four-step deductive analysis involving creating a framework, coding and categorizing the data, developing the themes, and interpreting the findings was adopted (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). For content validity, the questions were prepared in the light of relevant research on the topic as well as an initial, exploratory open-ended questionnaire to see how much information the questions were likely to elicit from the participants. To ensure dependability, researchers provided a detailed description of the phenomena with direct quotations (Merriam, 2009), and similarly, for credibility, besides careful sampling, the authenticity of the interviewer was established, which required that “researchers be honest (both to readers and themselves) regarding their value systems, possible biases, and stances” (Mackey & Gass, 2012, p. 194).

### **FINDINGS**

Findings are structured around identified themes to represent the full range of views of lecturers who participated in the research.

**Figure 1.** An overview of themes and sub-themes



As a result, the following themes emerged: (1) the significance of phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching, (2) concerns over using phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom, and (3) recommendations for teachers' effective use of phonetic symbols. Summary tables illustrate the overview of the number of participants who identified their opinions on particular issues, and Figure 1 above provides an overview of the themes generated.

### The significance of phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching

One of the key themes that emerged was the importance of using phonetic symbols as a part of pronunciation teaching. All participants believed that pronunciation teaching is a must for the language teaching process in the EFL context. Various themes and categories were generated as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Significance of Phonetic Symbols

Theme	Category	<i>F</i>
Significance of phonetic symbols pronunciation learning and teaching	Useful for pronunciation of vocabulary items	6
	Necessary for speaking and listening skills	4
	Used for pointing out intricacies in pronunciation	2
	Convenient for correcting pronunciation	2

EFL teachers found phonetic symbols useful, necessary, and convenient for teaching vocabulary, speaking, and listening. Symbols were considered particularly helpful while teaching learners how to distinguish similar sounds and correcting pronunciation mistakes as long as the symbols were familiar to the students. The following selected quotations are representative of the views expressed:



*I think phonetic symbols are useful for pronunciation teaching. Once students are completely competent in the symbols, they can easily pronounce new vocabulary items. (Teacher 6)*

*I believe that as a non-native instructor, I find phonetic symbols useful to highlight the nuances of pronunciation. (Teacher 2)*

*Pronunciation teaching is the most complex, yet important component of EFL teaching, and phonetic symbols, which form an essential component in pronunciation teaching, are important and useful in terms of showing students the differences between different sounds in English. (Teacher 3)*

*I think pronunciation is as important as other language skills, and using phonetic symbols helps the correct pronunciation for students and the instructor. (Teacher 5)*

*If this system is explained well, students can use the phonetic symbols. (Teacher 4)*

Almost all EFL instructors agree that phonetic symbols are useful as they help learners realize differences between similar words and lead to correct pronunciation. Phonetic symbols likely contribute to overall pronunciation, vocabulary learning, listening, and speaking skills; as a result, most instructors believe they are effective. Nevertheless, almost half of the instructors, as discussed in the following section, have indicated that despite the potential usefulness of symbols, they find these symbols difficult to use unless students are trained on them and show strong interest and motivation in learning them. Therefore, regardless of the value attached to phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching, there are a variety of factors that may affect its perceived effectiveness in the classroom.

### Concerns over using phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom

The next main theme emerging from the interviews was teachers' concerns about using phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom. The analysis revealed two sub-themes under this title: teacher-related and student-related factors. Table 3 below summarizes the frequency of mentions in each of the topics as revealed by the content analysis.

**Table 3.** Concerns over the use of phonetic symbols

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories	F
Concerns over the use of phonetic symbols	Teacher-related concerns	Lack of self-confidence in pronunciation	6
		Time constraints	5
		Lack of methodology	4
		Not being tested or assessed	4
	Learner-related concerns	Not having received phonetics pedagogy classes	2
		Lack of motivation and interest	5
		Low proficiency	2

### *Teacher-related concerns*

The most common teacher-related concern related to teachers' use of phonetic symbols while teaching pronunciation is a lack of self-confidence in their knowledge of the subject. All the participants stated that they do not feel comfortable teaching pronunciation let alone phonetic symbols. Besides, the following participants mentioned that they tend to disregard pronunciation teaching due to not feeling competent.

*Honestly, I spent very little time on pronunciation because I don't think I'm not a good role model for my students. (Teacher 2)*

*I sometimes don't allow students to do the pronunciation exercises using phonetic alphabet because I don't feel sufficient. (Teacher 4)*

Most participants admitted that although they think pronunciation is a vital component in language teaching, they need training on how to teach pronunciation in general, specifically through phonetic symbols. Since the participants in this study follow a fixed program in their two-semester intensive English classes, they teach pronunciation based on the coursebook, and thus may not be knowledgeable enough to add more to the textbook content.

*During my education at ELT, I took two or three courses on phonology and phonetics. However, I can say that I remember nothing about the methodology of teaching pronunciation, and not very much about teaching it through symbols in the class. (Teacher 2)*

*I don't want to prevent students from learning by employing the wrong method. (Teacher 5)*

Two participants are not familiar with the pedagogy of teaching pronunciation or phonetic symbols due to the department they graduated from. Since two teachers did not hold a degree in teaching English, they did not take any courses on pronunciation pedagogy, which resulted in anxiety and avoidance when it came to teaching pronunciation.

*I think pronunciation is necessary for communication, yet I didn't take any courses on how to teach it, thus I don't feel like I am capable of teaching it. (Teacher 4)*

Lecturers in English preparatory classes follow a fixed program based primarily on the coursebook. Almost all of them reported that other skills are prioritized on the syllabus, so they need to focus on grammar, writing, and exams, and thus, do not have time for learners to internalize vocabulary with phonetic symbols. Time constraints may be viewed as a contextual factor, but it must also be noted that teachers did not prioritize allotting class time for teaching phonetic symbols. Considering the teachers' acknowledgment that they were unable to focus on the phonetic symbols despite the content of the coursebook, the lack of time was considered a factor the teachers are responsible for.

*The time spent on phonetic exercises is limited during the classes. (Teacher 2)*

*I spent so much time teaching grammar that the remaining time was inadequate for the effective use of phonetic symbols. (Teacher 3)*

*I sometimes ignore phonetic symbol exercises to catch up with the syllabus. (Teacher 4)*

Aside from a lack of confidence, training, and time, most of the participant teachers stated that being unable to test learner progress is another reason they were hesitant to use phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation. As instructors follow a fixed program based on the coursebook in which an evaluation of pronunciation is not included, they are usually unable to test students' pronunciation in general or the use of phonetic symbols per se. The following quotations from instructors' narratives below reveal these concerns.

*I don't assess students' pronunciation in a separate exam or test. We sometimes do speaking exams in our division. In these exams, we partly grade the pronunciation in a general way. (Teacher 2)*

*We only assess how students say the words. If they are nearly good, this is enough for us. This is a very overall assessment. (Teacher 5)*

*We follow a fixed program and test for the preparatory program, and pronunciation assessment is not included. (Teacher 4)*

### ***Learner-related concerns***

Besides teacher-related factors, instructors also reported various learner-related concerns about using phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation. One of the most common factors participants mentioned was learners' resistance to learning phonetic symbols. As stated by the participants, EFL learners in their classrooms lacked motivation and self-confidence in pronouncing the words correctly. This resulted in their reluctance to participate in activities related to the phonetic symbols as revealed by the following statements.

*They are not good at using or understanding [phonetic symbols]. They avoid reading aloud or speaking because they don't know how to say some words presented with symbols that they don't understand properly. (Teacher 1)*

*Students have their prejudices against learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols. Students believe that they either cannot read the symbols and pronounce the words, or they just pronounce them wrong. (Teacher 5)*

*Students want to learn pronunciation but only a small number of them participate in activities related to phonetic symbols. As reasons for not participating, they said that they would feel humiliated in case of being unable to read the symbols, which would cause them to mispronounce words. (Teacher 6)*

Another issue that needs to be considered while using phonetic symbols is students' proficiency level. Three participants believe that students who are at the elementary level not willing to learn pronunciation with phonetic symbols. However, students who are at

intermediate and upper levels are more successful in learning and utilizing the phonetic symbols; the more they progress in language and improve their language skills, the more effectively they utilize phonetic symbols. In the same vein, teachers think that learners need to be aware of the functions of these symbols by having additional courses. Furthermore, teachers also report some students expressing disinterest by claiming that the use of symbols is redundant due to the accessibility of online resources for checking pronunciation. Some narratives of the teachers below reveal how these cause concerns about using phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching.

*As far as I observe beginners do not focus on the symbols and pronunciation, and they are not successful on this. However, higher level students are quite eager and successful on this issue. (Teacher 2)*

*Beginner students are not interested in these symbols; they generally prefer online dictionaries which show them how to pronounce words without phonetic transcription. (Teacher 1)*

*At the beginning of the semester, they were not interested in phonetic symbols because they weren't aware of the functions. As they progressed, they started to pay more attention to these symbols and began to utilize them. (Teacher 5)*

*Phonetic symbols are not a good system, especially for beginners. (Teacher 3)*

### **Recommendations for teachers' effective use of phonetic symbols in the EFL classrooms**

Participants realized several gaps in knowledge and practice while utilizing phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation, and the participants discovered areas of improvement in integrating phonetic symbols. Depending on their comments, a couple of themes were generated regarding recommendations (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Recommendations for effective use of phonetic symbols

Theme	Category	<i>f</i>
Recommendations for effective use of phonetic symbols	Integration with technology	6
	Training teachers on phonetic symbols	4
	Student self-assessment of progress	2

One of the recommendations stated by the participants is integrating phonetic symbols with technology. Learners are indeed more interested in the materials that they can reach easily. Thus, some applications providing phonetic symbols could be integrated into lessons as mentioned in the following quotations from instructor narratives.

*I think more audio materials should be integrated into language classrooms because they are more interesting for learners rather than simply learning with symbols. It is important for learners to hear new words in different contexts. (Teacher 1)*

*Application named 'Say it' provides learners sounds with phonetic symbols, it is free of charge for the English File users, so we must utilize it in our classes.*  
(Teacher 6)

A theme that emerged from conversations is that teachers need to be trained in order to teach effectively. Lack of training is already a factor discussed under teacher-related concerns and is found to be one of the primary reasons EFL instructors provide for not using phonetic symbols for teaching pronunciation. The recommendations for teachers to be trained on phonetic symbols, therefore, overlap with concerns, and unless there is enough effective training, teachers may not feel self-efficient and confident about teaching pronunciation through symbols.

*They should be taught based on methodology, yet I don't know how to do it.*  
(Teacher 5)

*First of all, the teachers need to be trained on them to teach students before utilizing phonetic symbols.* (Teacher 4)

Another important issue related to the testing of learners' pronunciation arose from the interviews with three participants recommending that students record their voices before and after using the phonetic symbols for pronunciation activities. Students can then listen to the recordings so that they can understand their progress and how phonetic symbols affect their pronunciation.

*I think activities with phonetic symbols should be recorded so that students could find out the progress they have made.* (Teacher 5)

*We don't test students' pronunciation so they can't figure out the benefits of phonetic symbols. As additional activities to exercises in the coursebook, students could pronounce and record themselves. This way, we can both test them and raise their awareness on the effects of phonetic symbols.* (Teacher 2)

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the views and practices of language instructors regarding the use of phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom. The findings demonstrated that phonetic symbols are mostly deemed significant, although a number of problems stemming from the teacher and learner-related aspects were detected as a consequence of the data analysis. Additionally, based on their views, practices, and experiences, EFL instructors made various recommendations for more effective use of phonetic symbols in their language classrooms.

The first theme generated indicated that EFL instructors valued the role of using phonetic symbols while teaching pronunciation. Findings are in line with some of the previous studies which underscore the value of phonetic symbol use for pronunciation instruction. Their use was previously shown to lead to learner autonomy (Hismanoglu, 2006), increased awareness through visual input (Mompean & Lintunen, 2015), and better perception of target sounds (Fouz-González & Mompean, 2021a). Regarding autonomy, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) further indicate that when learners are trained to read the

phonetic symbols and the corresponding transcriptions, they “will be better equipped to check pronunciation autonomously” (p. 54). Since achieving pronunciation is a must for any field of study in a world where people need to master international communication (Lord, 2008), the present study further indicates that the potential of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation deserves more attention.

Contrary to their belief in the significance of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation, EFL instructors reported various concerns about their use in the classroom. These were found to be factors either related to learners or the teachers themselves. Some participants lacked confidence in their own pronunciation or knowledge of phonetic symbols, which led them to avoid teaching pronunciation using phonetic symbols. Even those instructors who reported having taken phonetics and phonology courses as students indicated that they did not feel confident teaching using phonetic symbols. According to Baker (2011), this was often the case for those who had learned phonetics and phonology but hadn't been given any guidance on how to teach pronunciation, and therefore lack of methodology emerges as one of the most common issues. Findings also demonstrated that participants needed to be trained on how to integrate phonetic symbols into their teaching. According to Lintunen (2005), to teach pronunciation with phonetic symbols, teachers must be competent speakers, and they need to know phonetic symbols. Previous research had already indicated that the use of phonetic symbols was not a technique that teachers commonly utilized (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010; Kodirova & Henrichsen, 2022), but the present further indicated that for those teachers who are supposed to use these symbols as a part of their curriculum, the primary reasons for avoidance was lack of confidence and training. As shown by the findings as well as previous research, EFL teachers need more training on pronunciation pedagogy as well the use of phonetic symbols in the form of pre- or in-service training. This plays a key role in increasing teachers' self-efficacies and cognitions in teaching pronunciation, to begin with. Although the primary purpose of the present study was to examine teachers' views on using phonetic symbols in EFL classrooms, the findings revealed that the concerns expressed by EFL instructors were seen to be rooted in their attitude toward teaching pronunciation, something which was not completely unexpected. Besides training, as Murphy (2014) emphasizes especially for language teachers whose primary language is not English, the adoption of non-native English-speaking models may help teachers have greater confidence in their own pronunciation as long as they are intelligible and comprehensible.

Another issue raised by the teachers was the limited amount of time for teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols. Teachers expressed that they were not able to allocate enough time for teaching and practicing phonetic symbols as other topics in the course book and curriculum are inevitably prioritized. Gomes de Matos (2002) listed the rights of foreign language learners claiming that learners have the right to be taught how to use transcriptions in dictionaries and they have the right to receive explicit phonetic instruction. In this line, the role of pronunciation and phonetic transcription should not be neglected by the teachers; however, learners' attitudes towards phonetic symbols need to be taken into account, as well. It was also stated that learners were not motivated enough to utilize phonetic symbols with the most important factor being the proficiency level. This is not surprising because according to Mompean and Fouz-González (2021), linguistically more sophisticated or advanced learners benefit more from phonetic

symbols than beginner learners do. Hancock (1994) asserts, however, that advanced-level students find the use of phonetic symbols unnecessary since they have already mastered pronunciation without them. An additional learner-related factor was that they were not tested on pronunciation and phonetic symbols, which resulted in some learners not participating in activities involving phonetic symbols. Therefore, aside from training issues, to encourage learners as well as teachers for making phonetic symbols a part of EFL teaching and learning experiences, a key step could be making phonetic symbols a part of the assessment and evaluation process.

As for the findings with regard to the recommendations by EFL instructors, there was an emphasis on the integration of technology for phonetics teaching followed by the necessity of teacher training. The teachers also maintained that students may record their voices regularly, especially before and after learning about different phonetic symbols to self-monitor their own progress. These findings support previous research because technology has already been shown to be a very powerful tool in teaching and practicing pronunciation as well as phonetic symbols (Levis, 2007; O'Brien & Levis, 2017). Needless to say, for learning and teaching in and outside of the classroom, technology provides an abundance of opportunities for teachers and learners. Moreover, teacher training is seen to play a crucial role in supporting teachers in their pronunciation teaching practices, and as claimed by Lintunen (2005) effective use of phonetic symbols is essential for teaching pronunciation. In the same vein, it is imperative that teachers have access to materials such as coursebooks and teacher's handbooks that provide effective strategies for helping students perceive sounds more accurately through the use of phonetic symbols.

The present study has potential limitations. While qualitative data provides rich information with regard to the views and practices of the participants, the restricted number of participants and the limited context constitute a limitation as the data obtained may not be generalized for the teachers who work in various other contexts with different learner groups. More participants from various institutions are likely to provide more insight into a better understanding of the issue. Although the participants were selected for their experience in teaching pronunciation using phonetic symbols, more participants from other educational levels with no prior experience in using phonetic symbols could also be included in further research for a holistic viewpoint. Since qualitative data in the present study only reports participants' perspectives with regards to using phonetic symbols in the EFL classroom, it may be open to biases and other subjective reporting. Therefore, the triangulation of data with questionnaires and observation of classroom practices may yield interesting findings.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to investigate a group of EFL instructors' views in relation to the practices in the use of phonetic symbols for pronunciation teaching, and the findings revealed varying levels of knowledge, experience, awareness, and concerns among instructors. They recognize the significance of phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching yet have teacher-related and student-related concerns about using phonetic symbols for pronunciation teaching. A number of recommendations were also provided by the instructors for improving the efficacy of the use of phonetic symbols during pronunciation instruction. Further research should focus on teacher training issues in

teaching pronunciation and the use of various other techniques including phonetic symbols and notation. Studies that employ data triangulation, or those with an experimental design will certainly help enhance our understanding of the issue and are very much needed.



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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you briefly mention your educational background and your teaching experiences?
2. How important is pronunciation teaching for you as an EFL instructor?
  - a. What kinds of techniques do you apply for teaching pronunciation?
  - b. Do you assess the pronunciation of the students? If so, how do you assess it?
3. Do you think phonetic symbols are useful for teaching pronunciation? If so, what are the benefits of phonetic symbols?
  - a. Do they help learners with distinctive sounds that are hard to pronounce?
4. What kinds of obstacles do you face while teaching pronunciation with phonetic symbols?
5. Do you recommend using phonetic symbols for pronunciation teaching?
  - a. What are some of the ways you use phonetic symbols while teaching EFL?