

## Examining the Trends of Second Language Pronunciation Articles: A Two-Decade Content Analysis

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the research trends in the field of second language (L2) pronunciation teaching and learning using content analysis. The articles were selected from four research journals including English Language Teaching, CATESOL Journal, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes between 2001 and 2020. The total of 39 scholarly articles were reviewed to determine 1) number of publications, 2) countries, 3) topics, 4) samples, 5) methods, and 6) dependent variables. The results showed that the number of L2 pronunciation research was increasing in 2005, most publications were published in China, the topics that were most emphasized were the development of phonetic awareness through technology, qualitative research methods were most frequently used, students were preferred as research participants, and the most important language features were English consonants and stress. The results show the general tendency of second language pronunciation research in a global context.

**Keywords:** Second Language Pronunciation, Content Analysis, English As A Foreign Language

## การวิเคราะห์บทความวิชาการด้านการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษ ในช่วงสองทศวรรษ ด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์แนวโน้มของงานวิจัยด้านการเรียนการสอนการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศด้วยวิธีวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา โดยบทความวิจัยที่นำวิเคราะห์มาจากรวบรวมวารสารวิชาการ จำนวน 4 วารสาร ได้แก่ English Language Teaching, CATESOL Journal, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes ซึ่งตีพิมพ์ในช่วงปี 2544 ถึง ปี 2564 งานวิจัยจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 39 เรื่อง โดยนำมาวิเคราะห์เกี่ยวกับ 1) จำนวนบทความที่ตีพิมพ์ 2) ประเทศที่ทำการวิจัย 3) หัวเรื่องของงานวิจัย 4) กลุ่มตัวอย่าง 5) วิธีวิจัย และ 6) ตัวแปรตามที่ใช้ในงานวิจัย ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่างานวิจัยด้านการเรียนการสอนการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศมีจำนวนเพิ่มขึ้นตั้งแต่ปี 2548 โดยประเทศจีนเป็นประเทศที่มีการทำวิจัยด้านนี้มากที่สุด หัวข้อที่มีการศึกษามากที่สุดคือ การใช้เทคโนโลยีในการพัฒนาการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษ วิธีวิจัยที่ใช้ส่วนใหญ่คือ งานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในงานวิจัยส่วนใหญ่คือนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี และตัวแปรตามที่ใช้ในงานวิจัยส่วนใหญ่คือเสียงพยัญชนะและการเน้นคำ ในภาษาอังกฤษ ผลการวิจัยนี้แสดงให้เห็นถึงแนวโน้มโดยทั่วไปของการศึกษาวิจัยด้านการเรียนการสอนการพัฒนาการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในระดับนานาชาติ

**คำสำคัญ:** การออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษ, การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา, ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

## Introduction

English pronunciation is considered one of the most critical areas in the teaching and learning of English (Fraser, 2000; Hu, 2017; Moedjito, 2016). Fraser (2000, p.8) pointed out that an intelligible pronunciation of English is more likely to be understood despite errors in other areas (e.g., grammar, vocabulary), while unintelligible pronunciation may not be understood by the listener despite speaking with grammatically correct. Moreover, English pronunciation is very challenging for learners who speak English as a foreign language (EFL) or whose who speak English as a second language (ESL) to improve. Researchers have identified several factors that cause EFL/ESL learners to have difficulty with English pronunciation, such as age (Georgiou, 2019, p.541) and neglect of pronunciation instruction and training (Ruengwatthakee, 2021, p.154). Most importantly, the number of research papers on English pronunciation is likely to be less published than other English skills in the EFL and ESL contexts (Hişmanoğlu, 2019, p.635). To fill this gap, the present study aims to present the trends in research on second language pronunciation by systematically analyzing the countries, subjects, samples, methods, and dependent variables from four research journals over the past 20 years through the content analysis method. Consequently, finding a solution to help English teachers and scholars teach and learn pronunciation is crucial because oral fluency can help in developing listening, reading, and writing skills (Oradee, 2012, p.533). Moreover, we hope that the findings of this study would have an impact on improving the curriculum and teaching of second language pronunciation.

## Literature Review

Content analysis can be used as an effective method to uncover the authentic meaning of a written or oral text in a particular context, including literacy research (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011, p.28). Researchers can use the scientific method of content analysis to gain insight into the meaning of a text or message across disciplines. In addition, content analysis can be used for literature analysis. Systematically developing codes and themes from multiple journals allows researchers to discover different themes, theoretical lenses, research designs, and data sources that have been used in research studies (Parsons, Gallagher, & George Mason University Content Analysis Team, 2016, pp. 476-502).

In recent years, a number of researchers have attempted to use content analysis to determine the general trends in English language teaching. Nawaila, Kanbul, and Alhamroni (2020, pp.16-23) employed a quantitative content analysis to examine the trends in the use of technology in English language teaching. The researchers

analyzed 50 research articles published in the EBSCO and ScienceDirect Databases between 2000 and 2018. The results showed that not much attention was paid to the integration of technology in English teaching and learning until 2012. Turkey is the country with the highest number of publications. In term of methods, quantitative and qualitative studies were the most common. Moreover, questionnaires appeared to be the most commonly used instrument for data collection. The results of this study clearly show that the trends and changes towards the use of technology in English language teaching are increasing all over the world.

In addition, the trends of publications in foreign language teaching in Turkey were identified through content analysis. Solak (2014, pp.117-134) examined 189 academic papers published between 2009 and 2013 in journals indexed in SSCI and ULAKBIM database in Turkey. The selected papers were analyzed in terms of journal year, authors, language, paper topic, research design, data collection instruments, sample, sample size, and data analysis method. The results indicated that most of the research articles were published in 2013. Content analysis and teaching and learning were the most studied topics, most authors were Turkish, most articles were written in English, quantitative method was predominant, students were preferred, and the number of sample size was 32-100

Similarly, in the Turkish context, Yağız, Aydın, and Akdemir (2016, pp.117-134) systematically reviewed 274 research articles on English language teaching published between the years 2005 and 2015. The focus of this study is to determine the topics, research design, data collection tools, sampling, and data analysis. The results of content analysis revealed that language learning, language teaching, and teacher education were the most studied topics, and quantitative research designs were predominantly used. Questionnaires were used, undergraduate students with a sample size of 101-300 were preferred, and the researchers most frequently used descriptive statistics as a data analysis tool.

In the context of English language teaching and learning in Thailand, Chaiyasook and Jaroongkhongdach (2014, pp.64 –74) analyzed 194 master's theses from seven Thai universities on English language teaching using content analysis. The theses were analyzed in terms of the research focus, the educational level of the research context, the type of research design, the data source, the type of research instrument, and the type of analysis method. The results show that the most commonly studied topic was student achievement. The majority of the papers use quantitative research design, a combination of questionnaire and test is prevalent,

and the most commonly used methods of analysis are descriptive and inferential statistics.

Regarding English pronunciation teaching and learning, the content analysis of articles in this discipline is rare in the last decade. In 2019, Hismanoglu analyzed over one hundred articles on teaching English pronunciation published between the years 2012 and 2017 in fourteen international journals, including SSCI, ERIC, EBSCO, and MLA databases. The results show that quantitative research design was most frequently used by researchers, the most common research topic was the effects of teaching on L2 pronunciation. Undergraduates were most frequently used as the target population, multiple data collection instruments (e.g., picture story, picture difference task) were frequently used, articles were published in English by one or two authors, most articles had 31-60 references, multiple keywords (e.g., pronunciation, foreign accent, pronunciation teaching) were most frequently found. The results of the above studies show the general trends in the field of English language teaching including pronunciation teaching at the international level.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the research trends in the field of second language pronunciation teaching and learning using content analysis to analyze the research articles selected from four scholarly research journals including English Language Teaching, CATESOL Journal, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes between 2001 and 2020. The selected articles were analyzed in terms of 1) number of publications, 2) countries, 3) topics, 4) samples, 5) methods, and 6) dependent variables

### **Methodology**

This study employs a directed content analysis to create a lens for coding texts and determine emerging themes. This method can help the researcher determine initial codes and find the emerge themes directly from previous research findings (Hsieh, &Shannon, 2005, pp. 1277-1288). The directed or deductive method can be used as a lens to determine the codes and emerging themes based on the existing theory or previous research findings. Hsieh, &Shannon (2005 pp. 1277-1288) state that this structural approach can help the researcher target the research questions that lead to the specification of the codes and their relationships. The coding process begin with determining keywords as the initial codes in the spreadsheet. Then start using

the question to create codes and subcategories from the predetermined codes. After that, the codes and categories are reduced.

**1. Sample** The total of 39 articles from four well-known peer-review articles in the field of EFL and ESL were selected for data analysis including English Language Teaching (23 hits), CATESOL Journal (n = 6), Educational Technology & Society (n =5), and World Englishes (n =5). The details of the four selected peer-reviewed international journals are as follows:

*English Language Teaching* (ELT) is an international journal founded by the Canadian Center of Science and Education. The first issue was published in 2008. The journal is published monthly in a variety of academic areas, including education. The areas of ELT include the theory and practice of teaching and learning English, teaching English as a second or foreign language, and the education and training of teachers of English. More information about this journal can be found on <https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/about>.

*CATESOL Journal* is an academic journal published twice a year in Canada. Its focus is on theory, research, pedagogy, and educational policy related to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages at all levels of education. The first issue was published in 1988. More detail of this journal can be found in the journal website at <https://www.catesol.org/>.

*Educational Technology & Society* is an open access academic journal published quarterly at National Taiwan Normal College, Taiwan since October 1998. The journal addresses the context of learning, education, and training, particularly topics that focus on the development of educational systems and the implementation of technology in the classroom to enhance and support educators' understanding of their teaching and learning. Further information about this journal can be found on the journal website at [https://www.j-ets.net/journal\\_info](https://www.j-ets.net/journal_info).

*World Englishes* was first published in the United States of America in 1980. It is an international journal that focuses on the theoretical research and empirical study of English in global, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. The journal is published regularly four times a year. Additional information about this journal can be found at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/1467971x>.

**2. Research Instruments** The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) was selected as the database to search for articles related to EFL/ESL learners. ERIC is considered the world's largest educational database, established in 1966 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. Specifically, the countries, subject, sample, methods, and dependent

variables that are the targets of this research were systematically categorized in an Excel spreadsheet.

**3. Data collection procedure** Four journals were systematically selected from the EBSCOhost search platform. In the initial search, English pronunciation EFL and ESL were used as keywords along with the Boolean operator. In addition, the year of publication was limited to 2001-2020. Additionally, the search was narrowed down to the full text, peer-reviewed, and academic journals to find only articles dealing with English language learners' English pronunciation. The results showed a total of 191 hits from 50 publications from all over the world. Finally, 39 articles with the third highest number of hits were selected for data analysis, including English Language Teaching (26 hits), CATESOL Journal (6 hits), Educational Technology & Society (5 hits), and World Englishes (5 hits).

**4. Data analysis procedures** All articles from four journals including English Language Teaching, CATESOL Journal, Educational Technology & Society and World Englishes from 2001-2020 were analyzed. The procedure of data analysis consists of three cycles as follows. In the first cycle, the two keywords. English pronunciation, EFL, and ESL were used for the initial search. In addition, the year of publication was limited to 2001-2020. In addition, the search was narrowed down to full-text, peer-reviewed and academic journals to find only articles dealing with English pronunciation of English language learners' English pronunciation. The results showed a total of 186 hits from 50 publications from all over the world. In the end, 39 articles with the third highest number of hits were selected for data analysis, including English Language Teaching (23 hits), CATESOL Journal (6 hits), Educational Technology & Society (5 hits), and World Englishes (5 hits). However, three articles were deselected because two of them were duplicated by the same authors and another was not closely related to second language pronunciation in the context of EFL or ESL.

The next step, or cycle 2 was the beginning of the coding process. The codes and subcategories were created according to the purpose of the study, namely countries, topic, sample, methods, and dependent variables. The researcher read the abstracts and articles thoroughly to determine the codes and all the codes were recorded in the Excel spreadsheet.

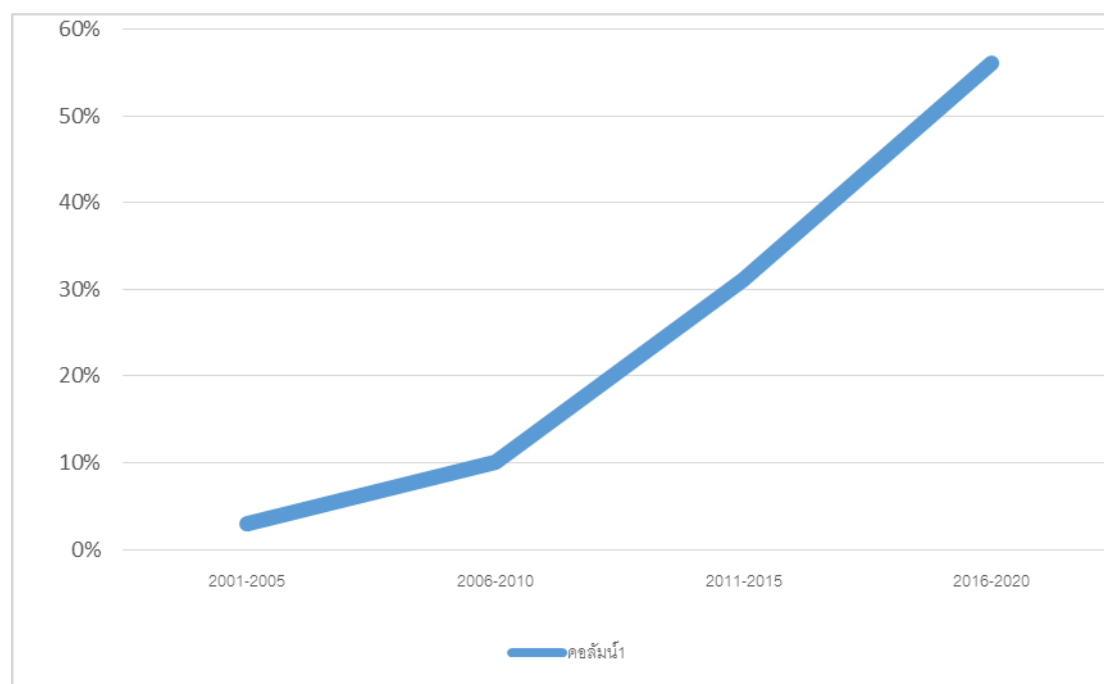
The last step is cycle 3 or reduction of subcodes/categories. Some of the subcodes were categorized and reduced to the message of the text as described in the next section. In order to increase reliability, member checking was also carried out by asking an English lecturer from the English program to confirm the coding

path. In addition, the results were presented systematically and logically to increase trustworthiness (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014, pp. 1-10; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007, pp.233-249).

## Results

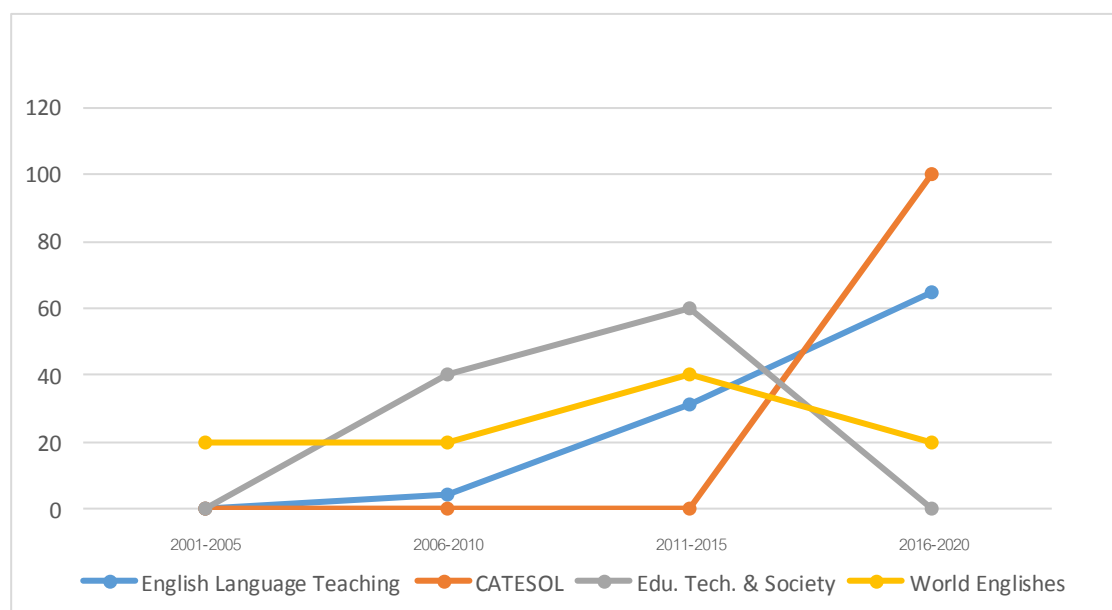
### 1. The analysis of second language pronunciation articles by publication year

Overall, the number of published articles related to second language pronunciation in has increased in the last two decades after 2015 and have increased significantly each year, as shown in Figure 1. More specifically, although the average number of articles on second labgauge pronunciation increased from 2001 to 2015, the number of publications in the four journals varied from 2016, as shown in Figure 2. In other words, English Language Teaching and CATESOL published more articles on second language pronunciation after 2015. In contrast, the numbers of articles published by Education Technology and Society and World Englishes Journals have decreased since 2015.



**Figure 1.** Number of second language pronunciation articles from all four journals from 2001 to 2020





**Figure 2.** Number of second language pronunciation articles from four journals from 2001 to 2020

## 2. The analysis of second language pronunciation articles by contributing country

Most of the articles on second language pronunciation published in English Language Teaching, CATESOL, Educational Technology & Society and World Englishes journals were conducted in China (20.5%), followed by Malaysia (10.25%), the USA (10.25%), Taiwan (8%) and Iran (8%) as illustrated in Table 1. Most of the articles were conducted in the countries where English is spoken as a foreign or a second language, especially in Asia and the Middle East (e.g., Taiwan, Malaysia, China, Iran). However, there were also some articles conducted in English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, the USA).

**Table 1** Articles in second language pronunciation conducted by country published from 2001-2020

Country	English Language Teaching	CATESOL	Educational Technology & Society	World Englishes	All
Australia	1	1			2 (5%)
Brunei Darussalam		1			1 (2.5 %)
Cameroon	1			1	2 (5%)
China	7			1	8 (20.5%)
Congo	1				1 (2.5 %)
Ecuador	1				1 (2.5 %)
Hongkong	1				1 (2.5 %)
Indonesia	2				2 (5%)
Iran	3				3 (8%)
Japan				1	1 (2.5 %)
Malaysia	3		1		4 (10.25%)
Nigeria				1	1 (2.5 %)
Norway				1	1(2 %)
Saudi Arabia	1				1 (2.5 %)
South Korea			1		1 (5%)
Spain	1				1 (2.5 %)
Taiwan			3		3 (8 %)
Thailand	1				1 (2.5 %)
The USA		4			4 (10.25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 (59 %)</b>	<b>6 (15 %)</b>	<b>5 (13 %)</b>	<b>5 (13 %)</b>	<b>39 100%</b>

### 3. The analysis of second language pronunciation articles by topic

From 2001 to 2020, most of the research topics from four articles published in English Language Teaching, CATESOL, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes were related to the teaching and learning of pronunciation strategies, as demonstrated in Table 2. The most common themes focused on comprehensible pronunciation (23%), followed by developing phonetic awareness through technology (18%), and pronunciation instructional strategies and perceptions on teaching pronunciation (13%).

**Table 2** Topics addressed in second language pronunciation articles published from 2001-2020

Topic	English Language Teaching	CA TESOL	Educational Technology & Society	World Englishes	All
Pronunciation teaching strategies	5				5 (13 %)
Pronunciation learning strategies	1				1 (2.5%)
Second language teachers' cognitions	1				1 (2.5%)
Developing phonetic awareness through technology	2		5		7 (18 %)
Sound perceptions	1				1 (2.5%)
Perceptions on teaching pronunciation	2	1		2	5 (13 %)
English pronunciation self-concept	1				1 (2.5%)
Improving students' English pronunciation and perceptions on teaching pronunciation by native speakers and non-native speakers	1				1 (2.5%)
International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols	1				1 (2.5%)
English phonological structure				1	1 (2.5%)
Problems and needs in teaching learning English pronunciation	3				3 (8%)
English Language Curriculum		1			1 (2.5%)
Intelligible pronunciation	5	4			9 (23%)
Sound variation				2	2 (5 %)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b> <b>(59%)</b>	<b>6</b> <b>(15%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(13%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(13%)</b>	<b>39</b> <b>(100%)</b>

#### 4. The analysis of second language pronunciation articles by research method

Table 3 shows the research methods used in relation to English pronunciation in the articles published from 2001-2020 in English Language Teaching, CATESOL, Educational Technology & Society and World Englishes. Three types of methods were found: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. It was found that qualitative research method was the most frequently found with more than 40%, followed by quantitative research with about 32% and mixed method with more than 20%.

**Table 3** Research methods utilized in second language pronunciation articles published from 2001-2020

Method	English Language Teaching	CATESOL	Educational Technology & Society	World Englishes	All
Quantitative	5	1	3	3	12 (31%)
Qualitative	13	4		1	18 (46%)
Mixed Methods	5	1	2	1	9 (23%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 (59 %)</b>	<b>6 (15%)</b>	<b>5 (13%)</b>	<b>5 (13%)</b>	<b>39 (100%)</b>

#### 5. Second language pronunciation articles by samples

Table 4 lists the research participants recruited in the context of second language pronunciation. The articles were published in English Language Teaching, CATESOL, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes between 2001 and 2020. Specifically, undergraduate students were found to be the most common across all articles at 27%, followed by teachers or professors and secondary sources at about 22%. Native English speakers and graduate students were the least represented with only 2%. However, it is important to note that the total number of the articles as shown in table 4 was increased from 39 to 45 because in some articles, more than one type of sample was used.

**Table 4** Samples used in second language pronunciation articles published from 2001-2020

Samples	English Language Teaching	CATESOL	Educational Technology & Society	World Englishes	All
Native speakers of English	1				1 (2 %)
Non-native speakers of English	2				2 (4.5%)
Adult learners		1	1		2 (4.5%)
Graduate Students	3				3 (7 %)
Undergraduate Students	7	1	2	2	12 (27%)
School Students	1		2	2	5 (11 %)
Teachers/professors	8	1		1	10 (22%)
Secondary source	6	2		2	10 (22%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>28 (62%)</b>	<b>6 (13.5%)</b>	<b>5 (11%)</b>	<b>6 (13.5%)</b>	<b>45 (100%)</b>

#### 6. The analysis of second language pronunciation articles by dependent variables.

The dependent variables analyzed in second language pronunciation articles published from 2001-2020 in English Language Teaching, CATESOL, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes are shown in Table 5. It was found that both segmental level (i.e., consonants, vowels) 52% and suprasegmental level (i.e., stress, syllable, intonation, rhythm, accent) 44% were the language features most frequently analyzed in the articles. In particular, consonants and stress were found most frequently with 52% and 30%, respectively. In addition, teaching quality was also examined with 4% (see Table 5). However, it is important to note that the total number of the articles as shown in table 5 was increased from 39 to 50 since there was more than one aspect of pronunciation was analyzed in some articles.

**Table 5** Dependent variables used in second language pronunciation articles published from 2001-2020

Dependent variables	English Language Teaching	CATESOL	Educational Technology & Society	World Englishes	All
<b>Segmental</b>					
Consonants	10	3	5	1	19 (38%)
Vowels	7			1	7 (14 %)
<b>Suprasegmental</b>					
Stress	8	4	2	1	15 (30 %)
Syllable	1				1 (2 %)
intonation	2				2 (4 %)
Rhythm	1				1 (2 %)
Accent	1			2	3 (6 %)
<b>Teaching quality</b>	1	1			2 (4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 (60%)</b>	<b>8 (16 %)</b>	<b>7 (14 %)</b>	<b>5 (10 %)</b>	<b>50 (100%)</b>

## Discussion

In this study, a content analysis to uncover some features of academic journals on second language pronunciation in order to reveal trends in teaching and learning English pronunciation in the context of EFL and ESL. Specifically, this study aims to determine the countries, subjects, samples, methods, and dependent variables of four research journals, including English Language Teaching, CATESOL Journal, Educational Technology & Society, and World Englishes between 2001-2020. Over a period of 20 years, the results show the trends in research on the teaching and learning of L2 pronunciation in various aspects.

First, the results generally show that the trend of publications on this research topic has been gradually increasing every year since 2005. Since English language teaching in the EFL context has been changed from traditional pedagogy to communicative method in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, research on second language pronunciation development has been received more attention (Fouz-González, 2019; Munro & Derwing, 2015; Pongprairat, 2011) Second, the frequency of publications was highest in China. Similar to other countries whose English is not spoken a first language, Chinese students also have difficulties pronouncing English which can cause miscommunication due to the phonological features in English and Chinese are relatively different (Hu, 2017).

Third, the topics that were most emphasized were the development of phonetic awareness through technology, followed by pronunciation teaching strategies. The result was confirmed by previous research (Hismanoglu, 2019) that technology was brought to L2 pronunciation research in order to help improve EFL and ESL students to be able to pronounce English better or close to native speaker of English. Fourth, the qualitative research method was the most commonly used, while the mixed method was the least found in the articles. However, this result differs from that of Hismanoglu (2019) who stated that most of the researches were conducted using quantitative methods. Fifth most of the undergraduate students were recruited as research participants. Sixth, the highest percentage of English consonants and stresses were found as speech features in most of the articles.

### **Originality and Body of Knowledge**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the research trends in the field of second language pronunciation teaching and learning using content analysis. Seeking for a solution to help English teachers and scholars teach or conduct research on second language pronunciation is significant because oral communication skills can help in developing listening, reading, and writing skills (Oradee, 2012). Moreover, the findings of this current study can be guidelines for EFL and ESL teachers, scholar, and educator to improve the curriculum and teaching of second language pronunciation.

### **Suggestions for Future Studies**

Taken together, these results shed light on uncovering the trends of L2 pronunciation research in the last 20 years. However, the scope of this study was limited in terms of the number of articles. Since the number of articles and journals selected is relatively small, these results may not be generalizable. Future researchers could include more studies from more academic journals and educational databases and expand the year of publication. In addition, it would be interesting to analyze other aspects of the selected articles to determine the clear trend in the field of L2 pronunciation research, such as the number of authors, keywords, and references. Besides, further research should be done to investigate research articles on pronunciation teaching and learning that were conducted in a particular country so that the EFL and ESL teachers and researcher could clearly see the trends of pronunciation instruction across the country. In summary, scholars, educators, and English language teachers are highly encouraged to publish more research on L2 pronunciation in order to seek for the appropriate methods of improving students' English pronunciation.

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