



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.4.,2016 (Oct.-Dec.)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

A LITTLE DIFFICULT TO MASTER PRONUNCIATION SKILLS: A STUDY FROM THE
PERSPECTIVES OF VARIATIONS IN THEM

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ABSTRACT

At the outset, the meaning of pronunciation skills has been given. Some simple select English words in day-to-day use having same spellings but different pronunciations, meanings, their usage and the parts of speech, they belong to have been explained. The hypothesis and objectives of the present research, and the sources of data collection have been described. Further, the data collected through Pronunciation Proficiency Test (PPT) and Structured Interview (SI) have been analyzed and interpreted. At the end, the findings, conclusion and references have been given.

Key Words: Pronunciation, Phonetic Transcription, PPT, SI, Item, Subjects, Response, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a study about pronunciation skills which means:

“The way a word or a language is spoken, or the manner in which someone utters a word.”(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pronunciation>, 15.09.2016)

It is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills as there are variations in them, i.e., desert-desert, use-use, the-the, convict-convict, separate-separate, etc. These are same spellings of whole words but pronunciations, meanings, their usage and the parts of speech they belong to are different.

When the word ‘desert’ is used as noun then it means:

“A large area of land usually covered with sand that is hot and has very little water and very few plants.” (Dhongde: 2011, 372)

And pronounced as /dezət/; when the same word ‘desert’ is used as verb then it means:

“To leave.” (Ibid: 372)

And is pronounced as /diˈzə:t/. The word ‘the’ is pronounced as /ði/ when used in front of the word began with vowel and the same word pronounced as /ðə/ when used in front of the word began with consonant. When the word ‘use’ is used as noun then it is pronounced as /ju:ˌs/ and when it is used as verb then it’s pronounced as /ju:ˌz/. The word ‘convict’ is pronounced as /ˈkɒnvɪkt/ when it is used as noun and pronounced as /kənˈvɪkt/ when it is used as verb. The words ‘separate and separate’ are same in spelling but different in

pronunciation based on their forms. If it is an adjective then it is pronounced as /'sep(ə)rət/; and if it is verb then it is pronounced as /'sepərət/. Each time, when comes across new word, he / she has to refer dictionary and confirm correct pronunciation of the word.

There are also same spellings of some part of words having different pronunciations, meanings, usage and the parts of speech, they belong, i.e., **abdomen** /'abdəmən/ (noun) and **abdominal** /ab'dɒmɪn(ə)/ (adjective), **academic** /əkə'dɛmɪk(ə)/ (adjective) and **academician** /ə,kədə'mɪ(ə)n/ (noun), **acclaim** /ə'kleɪm/ (verb) and **acclamation** /,əklə'meɪ(ə)n/ (noun), **accusation** /əkju:'zeɪ(ə)n/ (noun) and **accusative** /ə'kju:zətɪv/ (noun), etc. It is a little difficult to keep such variations in mind and remember in further talk / conversation. From that perspective, it is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills.

Hypothesis

It is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills as there are variations in them.

Objectives

- i. To find out variations in pronunciations, i.e., same spellings of whole words and same spellings of some part of words having different pronunciations, meanings, usage and the parts of speech, they belong to.
- ii. To administer PPT to select final year mechanical engineering students to know whether they pronounce simple English words of their day-to-day use, correctly or not and prove hypothesis.
- iii. To conduct SI to concrete the hypothesis.
- iv. To write conclusion based on the findings.

Sources of Data Collection

To test hypothesis and fulfill objectives of the present research, the primary sources used, are PPT and SI, and secondary sources used, are libraries, books, dictionaries, magazines, research journals, conference proceedings, newspapers and internet.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Using simple random sampling method, thirty (20% of the existing students) final year mechanical engineering students (hereafter referred as subjects) from one of the engineering colleges are selected and administered a PPT to check whether they pronounce the simple English words of their day-to-day use correctly or not. Four multiple choice responses, means four different pronunciations in subject's local/regional language, have been given and the one among them is correct, and the subjects are instructed to tick mark the correct one. The list of words (hereafter referred as items) included in PPT, their phonetic transcriptions, item wise number of students for correct response and their percentage has been tabulated as follows:

Sr. No.	Item	Phonetic Transcription	Number of Students for Correct Response (Out of 30)	Percentage of Students for Correct Response
01	Academy	/ə'kadəmi/	18	60%
02	Arrangement	/ə'reɪn(d)ʒm(ə)nt/	03	10%
03	Assume	/ə'sju:m/	19	63.33%
04	Auxiliary	/ɔ:g'zɪlɪəri,ɒg-/	06	20%
05	Breath	/brɛθ/	05	16.67%
06	Compilation	/kɒmpɪ'leɪ(ə)n/	13	43.33%
07	Conviction	/kən'vɪk(ə)n/	16	53.33%
08	Corporate	/'kɔ:p(ə)rət/	00	00%
09	Declaration	/,dɛkləreɪ(ə)n/	06	20%
10	Dessert	/dɪ'zə:t/	02	6.67%
11	Determine	/dɪ'tə:mɪn/	04	13.33%
12	Develop	/dɪ'veləp/	03	10%
13	Elocution	/,elə'kju:ʃ(ə)n/	03	10%

14	Favourite	/ˈfeɪv(ə)rɪt/	11	36.67%
15	Gesture	/ˈdʒɛstʃə/	02	6.67%
16	Grammar	/ˈɡrɑmə/	02	6.67%
17	Immediate	/ɪˈmiːdiət/	19	63.33%
18	Imperative	/ɪmˈpɛrətɪv/	05	16.67%
19	Innumerable	/ɪˈnju:m(ə)rəb(ə)l/	03	10%
20	Interrogative	/,ɪntəˈrɒɡətɪv/	05	16.67%
21	Introduction	/,ɪntrəˈdʌkʃ(ə)n/	07	23.33%
22	Loose	/lu:s/	01	3.33%
23	Manage	/ˈmɑnɪdʒ/	01	3.33%
24	Police	/pəˈli:s/	05	16.67%
25	Power	/ˈpaʊə/	01	3.33%
26	Posture	/ˈpɒstʃə/	07	23.33%
27	Purpose	/ˈpʊr.pəs/	04	13.33%
28	Questionnaire	/,kwɛstʃəˈneɪ/	05	16.67%
29	Sentence	/ˈsɛnt(ə)ns/	06	20%
30	Separable	/ˈsɛp(ə)rəb(ə)l/	08	26.67%
31	Society	/səˈsaɪti/	07	23.33%
32	Symbolism	/ˈsɪmbəlɪz(ə)m/	07	23.33%
33	Technology	/tɛkˈnɒlədʒi/	13	43.33%
34	Victorious	/vɪkˈtɔ:riəs/	01	3.33%
35	Village	/ˈvɪlɪdʒ/	22	73.33%
36	Violence	/ˈvaɪələ(ə)ns/	06	20%

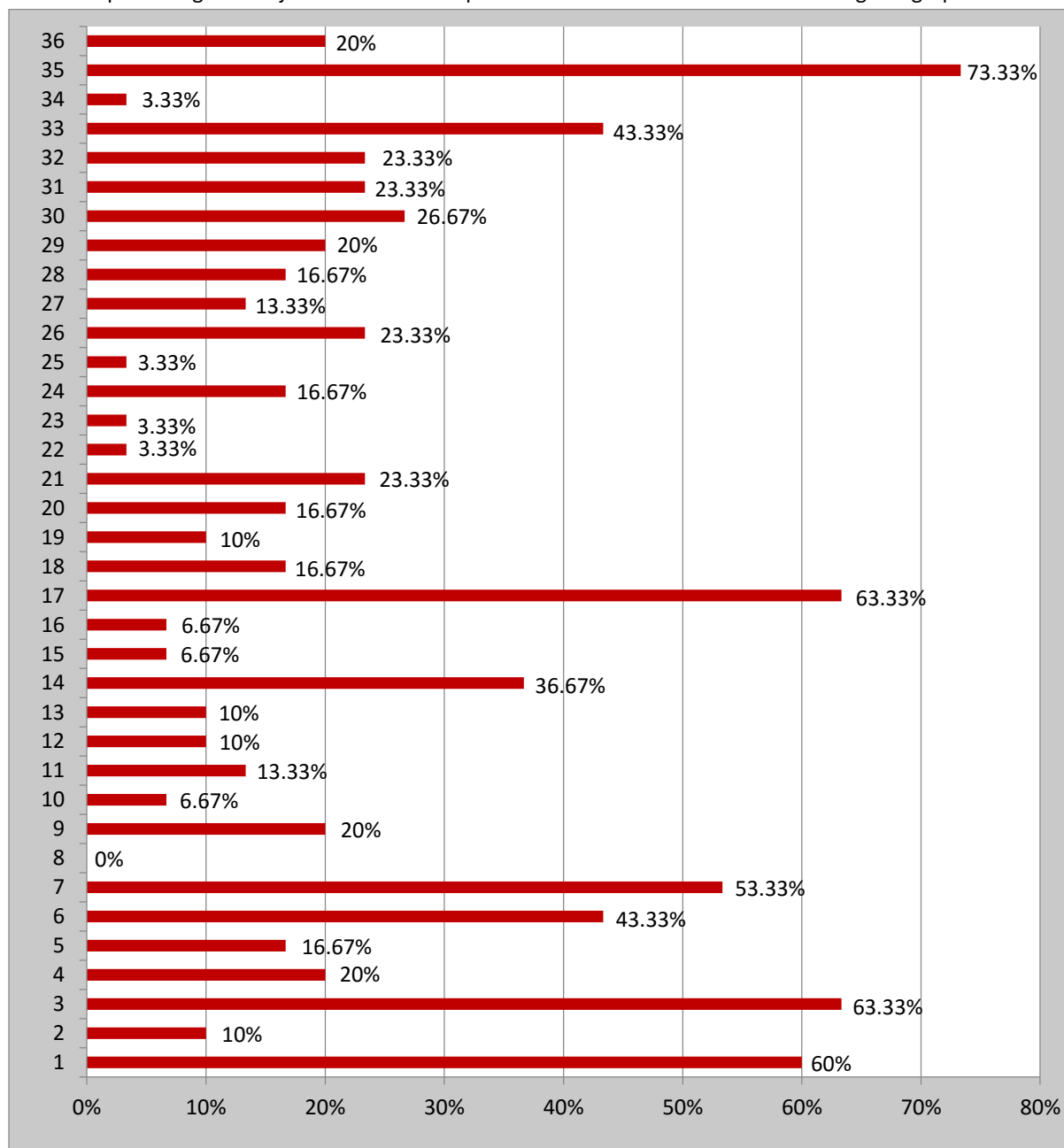
For the item ‘Village’ /ˈvɪlɪdʒ/, maximum number of subjects (out of 30 subjects) have given correct response, the figure of which is 22 and the percentage of which goes to 73.33%; and conversely not a single subject has given correct response to the item ‘Corporate’ /ˈkɔ:p(ə)rət/. For 28 items (77.78%) out of 36, not more than 10 subject’s (33.33%) response is correct; for 07 items (19.44%), the number of subjects for correct response falls between 11 (36.67%) and 20 (66.67%); and for only 01 item (2.78%), the number of subjects for correct response falls between 21 (70%) and 30 (100%). Average number of subjects for correct response of each item is 6.83 and the percentage of the same is 22.77%. The overall performance (proficiency) of subjects in PPT seems very poor.

The list of subjects appeared in PPT, number and percentage of items with correct response have been tabulated as follows:

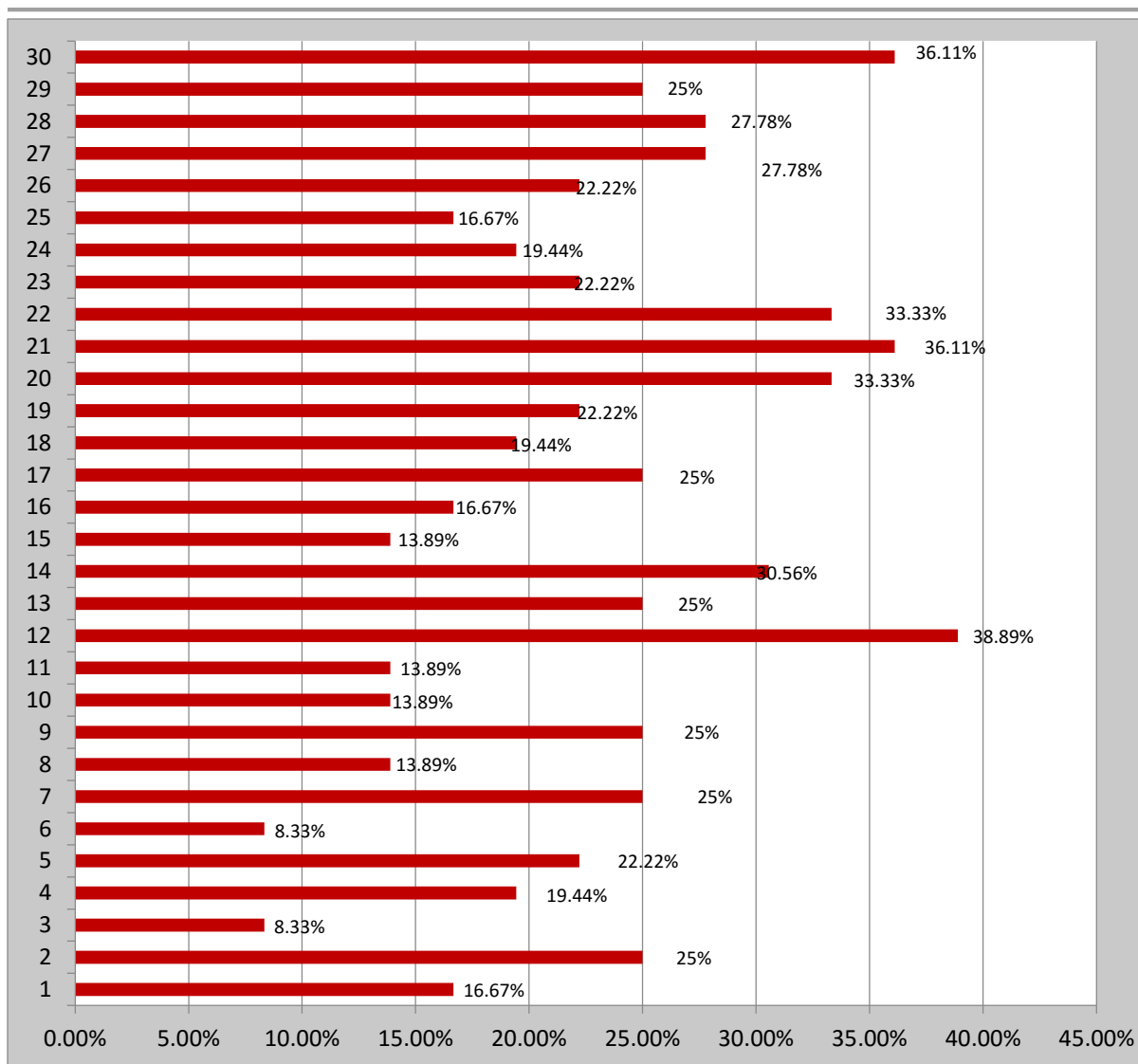
Subjects	Number of Items with Correct Response (Out of 36)	Percentage of Items with Correct Response	Subjects	Number of Items with Correct Response (Out of 36)	Percentage of Items with Correct Response
Subject No. 01	06	16.67%	Subject No. 16	06	16.67%
Subject No. 02	09	25%	Subject No. 17	09	25%
Subject No. 03	03	8.33%	Subject No. 18	07	19.44%
Subject No. 04	07	19.44%	Subject No. 19	08	22.22%
Subject No. 05	08	22.22%	Subject No. 20	12	33.33%
Subject No. 06	03	8.33%	Subject No. 21	13	36.11%
Subject No. 07	09	25%	Subject No. 22	12	33.33%
Subject No. 08	05	13.89%	Subject No. 23	08	22.22%
Subject No. 09	09	25%	Subject No. 24	07	19.44%

Subject No. 10	05	13.89%	Subject No. 25	06	16.67%
Subject No. 11	05	13.89%	Subject No. 26	08	22.22%
Subject No. 12	14	38.89%	Subject No. 27	10	27.78%
Subject No. 13	09	25%	Subject No. 28	10	27.78%
Subject No. 14	11	30.56%	Subject No. 29	09	25%
Subject No. 15	05	13.89%	Subject No. 30	13	36.11%

Item wise percentage of subjects for correct response in PPT has been shown in following bar-graph:



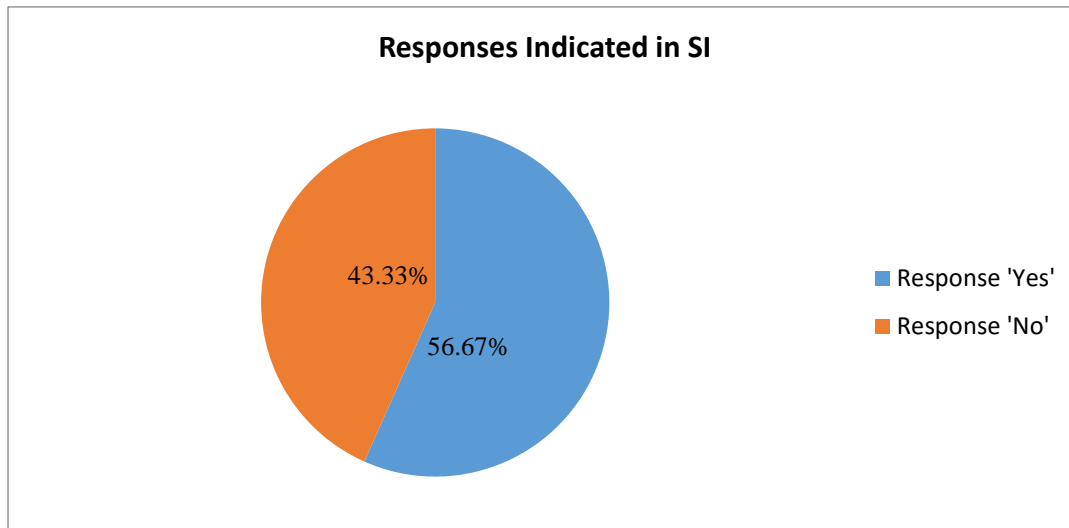
The maximum number of correct response of the subject in PPT is 14, the percentage of which goes to 38.89%; and the minimum number of correct response of the subject in PPT is 03, the percentage of which goes to 8.33%. All subject's correct responses are below than 50% means not a single subject has more than 50% correct responses. Average number of correct responses of each subject is 8.2 and the percentage of which goes to 22.78%. Subject wise percentage of items with correct response in PPT has been shown in following bar-graph:



SI is conducted to these select subjects to know their opinion about really it is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills. In SI, single item is given with two responses like 'Yes' and 'No'. The subjects are asked to tick mark single one which is in their opinion. The responses, indicated by the subjects in SI, are tabulated as follows:

Subjects	Response Indicated in SI for an Item	Subjects	Response Indicated in SI for an Item	Subjects	Response Indicated in SI for an Item
Subject No. 01	No	Subject No. 11	Yes	Subject No. 21	Yes
Subject No. 02	No	Subject No. 12	No	Subject No. 22	No
Subject No. 03	Yes	Subject No. 13	No	Subject No. 23	No
Subject No. 04	Yes	Subject No. 14	Yes	Subject No. 24	No
Subject No. 05	Yes	Subject No. 15	Yes	Subject No. 25	No
Subject No. 06	Yes	Subject No. 16	Yes	Subject No. 26	Yes
Subject No. 07	Yes	Subject No. 17	No	Subject No. 27	Yes
Subject No. 08	No	Subject No. 18	No	Subject No. 28	No
Subject No. 09	Yes	Subject No. 19	Yes	Subject No. 29	Yes
Subject No. 10	Yes	Subject No. 20	Yes	Subject No. 30	No

The total number of subjects for response 'Yes' are 17 and for response 'No' are 13, the percentage of which goes to 56.67% and 43.33% respectively which has been shown in following pie-chart.



Findings

In PPT, not a single subject (out of 30) knows the correct pronunciation of the word 'Corporate' /'kɔ:p(ə)rət/. Only one-one subjects knows the correct pronunciation of the words 'Loose' /lu:s/, 'Manage' /'manɪdʒ/, 'Power' /'paʊə/ and 'Victorious' /vɪk'tɔ:riəs/. Maximum 14 responses (out of 36 responses) of only one subject (out of 30 subjects) are correct and the percentage of which goes to 38.89%. In PPT, for 31 items including, item numbers 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 36, below than 50% subject's responses are correct; and only for 05 items including item numbers 1, 3, 7, 17 and 35, more than 50% subject's response are correct and the average percentage of which is 86.11% and 13.89% respectively. An average 22.77 % of the subjects mark correct response and rest are incorrect in their response. It finds that the numbers of subjects for incorrect responses are more compared to correct responses. The coincidence in PPT result is that the average percentage of subjects for correct response of each item is 22.77% and average percentage of correct responses of each subject is 22.78% which are, to some extent, same. In SI, 56.67% of the subjects directly opine that it is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills and their average percentage of response for correct answer / pronunciation is 21.42%. The 43.33% of the subjects opine in SI that it is not a little difficult to master pronunciation skills but it is surprising that their performance in PPT is not satisfactory, i.e., average percentage of response for correct answer / pronunciation is 24.58%.

Conclusion

There are variations in pronunciations, i.e., same spellings of whole words and same spellings of some part of words having different pronunciations, meanings, usage and the parts of speech, they belong to, which makes a little difficult to master pronunciation skills. PPT result states that the majority of subjects (average 77.23%) are unable to pronounce the simple English words of their day-to-day use, correctly, let alone the variations in them. The words/items used in PPT are very common, simple and are the parts of daily use even in the beginners of English learners. It is obvious that the subjects are learning English language from 1st / 5th standard means for last 16 years / 12 years, they are learning and using English language in their oral as well as written communication. They use these words in their oral communication constantly but a little variably they pronounce these words. By looking towards these four responses / pronunciations in PPT, the subjects confuse themselves about the correct response means they are not certain about exact pronunciation. If they are certain about correct pronunciation, they can tick mark correct pronunciation suddenly but they think and take time to find out correct one. First time, they realize whether they use correct or incorrect pronunciation of the word. Considering the subject's poor performance in PPT, it can be said that it is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills. In SI, they themselves (majority of subjects, i.e., 56.67%) opine that it is a little difficult to

master pronunciation skills. Therefore, considering the PPT and SI outcomes, it can be concluded with the view that it is a little difficult to master pronunciation skills as there are variations in them.

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