


Investigating self-concept in EFL pronunciation among Chinese Non-English major learners at a public university in China




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ABSTRACT

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Very limited research has explored the English pronunciation and self-concept among EFL non-English major learners in China. Therefore, this study investigated the level of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' self-concept about their level of English pronunciation, how they self-evaluated their English pronunciation, and the pronunciation problems they encountered. A convergent mixed-method approach was utilized to collect data. A sample of 392 Chinese EFL learners from different universities responded to an English pronunciation questionnaire about self-concept, where results showed that Chinese EFL non-English major learners had a very low self-concept of English pronunciation. Meanwhile, another sample of 100 students took an English pronunciation test and responded to the English pronunciation self-evaluation form. Results demonstrated that 82% of the participants scored 59/100 and below in the English pronunciation test. As for the self-evaluation of English, also 82% self-evaluated their English as either average or poor. Moreover, a focused group discussion with five EFL teachers showed that among the pronunciation problems faced by Chinese EFL learners included: a) adding or omitting extra sounds, b) problems with phonemes, c) confusion of vowels and consonants, and d) problems with suprasegmental phonemes. It is hoped that this study would provide some implications for putting forward countermeasures to improve the EFL pronunciation among EFL Chinese learners.

Contribution/ Originality: This study fills the gap in research on English pronunciation and self-concept among Chinese non-English major EFL learners, an area that has been overlooked in comparison to studies on English majors. Furthermore, it brings attention to the specific challenges and current state of English pronunciation and self-concept among this population.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing trend of world economic integration, cultivating talents with an international vision is an important characteristic and trend of education in today's world. In China, the Outline of the National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) clearly states that it is very important to improve China's international education level and train a majority of international talents who are familiar with relevant international practices and rules. This will develop an international vision and awareness so that they can communicate and express themselves across cultures. Learning English can not only improve college students'

language skills but also cultivate their sentiments, expand their horizons, improve their logical thinking skills, develop their personalities, and help them grow harmoniously in an all-around way. As a tool of communication, English provides the possibility and foundation for the internationalization of education, which cannot be replaced by other subjects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. English Language Teaching in China

In 2001, The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued "The Guidance on Actively Promoting the Offering of English (Curriculum) Courses in Primary Schools", and "The Basic Requirements of English Curriculum Teaching in Primary Schools" (Huang, 2018). Since 2001, English courses have been gradually offered in primary schools in cities and counties in China.

In China, English learning is divided into four stages. The first stage is *primary school*. Currently, pupils in China start learning English from the third grade (9 years old) to the sixth grade (12 years old) (Qu, 2020). At present, there are 14 versions of English textbooks at primary schools in China (e.g., Cambridge Primary School English which is used in Hubei Province, and Oxford English in Shanghai City (Gu, 2020). Since the level of English teaching in different parts of China is different, the education reform across the country is not carried out uniformly. However, it is carried out successfully in different regions because there are many versions of English textbooks. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has therefore stipulated that the use of teaching materials should be determined by the local government.

The second stage is *a junior middle school* which covers a span of three years. At present, there are 10 versions of junior middle school English textbooks used in China, for example, The People's Education Edition, The Beijing Normal University Edition, Foreign Research Edition, and like (Zhu, 2016). All children in China must join primary and junior schools, since education during these two stages is free for all children. However, starting from stage three (which is explained below) the students have to pay for their education, and they need not join schools.

The third stage is *a senior middle school* which covers a period of three years. At present, 9 kinds of English textbooks are widely used in senior middle schools in China, such as The New Curriculum Standard Education Edition, The People's Education Edition, Chongqing University Edition, and like (Zhang, 2016). To carry out the National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan in 2010, the Ministry of Education of China has successively promulgated the English Curriculum Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education (2011 edition) and the English Curriculum Standards for Senior Middle School (2017 edition) (Wang & Luo, 2019). This has played a great role in promoting English teaching in middle and senior schools.

Most schools suffer from a shortage of primary school English teachers or have low professional quality of English teachers, where some teachers' pronunciation is below standard (Liu, 2017). Although English is learned in primary school, the basics of English need to be learned again during the second stage (junior middle school). The English pronunciation teaching in junior middle school usually focuses on phonemes, sentences, intonation, and other exercises in the textbook. Learners' Target Language (TL) pronunciation learning is only done by imitating and following the teacher, which forms a fixed model of classroom English pronunciation teaching: students read after the teacher—the teacher gives feedback (Cao, 2016). However, under the influence or pressure of the College Entrance Examination, teachers often do not attach importance to pronunciation teaching during senior middle school because they focus on preparing the students for the College Entrance Examination that is taken by the students in the last year of senior middle school (Bi, 2019).

The fourth stage is the college level learning of the English pronunciation. At the college level, non-English majors need to take English courses in Year 1 and Year 2 (for two semesters per year). After this, they need to take a College English Test Band 4 (CET - 4), any time after the first semester in Year 1, which is prepared by the government in June and December every year. Students in some universities cannot graduate if they fail to reach

CET Band 4 (Wang, 2017). Likewise, the English majors must take a Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM - 4) any time after Year 2, which is prepared by the government in April every year. The students in some universities cannot graduate if they fail to reach TEM Band 4. The next section deals with the role of proficient pronunciation in language learning.

2.2. Target Language Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the outer shell of language, and it is a necessary part of language together with vocabulary and grammar. Modern foreign language teaching method emphasizes the cultivation of learners' communicative competence and regards it as the final objective of language teaching. Language capacity includes lexical capacity and grammatical capacity, both of which take pronunciation as the carrier (Canale & Swain, 1980). Therefore, pronunciation is vital in language communication as learners' mistakes in the segment or supra-segment can lead to misunderstanding or communication barriers. Some domestic and foreign scholars have emphasized that attention should be paid to pronunciation teaching (Kelly, 1969; Mora & Levkina, 2017; Saito & Plonsky, 2019).

There are many reasons for Chinese students to have inaccurate pronunciation, such as the influence of the mother tongue, and inadequate exposure to English, etc. (Tang, 2020). Among other reasons, emotional factors play an important role. In the late 1970s as well as the early 1980s, Krashen (1982) pointed out in his famous Affective Filter that emotion is one of the critical aspects affecting L2 (second language) acquisition. Emotional factors include motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, empathy, self-concept, etc. The next section sheds light on self-concept as one of the affective filters in language learning.

2.3. Self-Concept of English Pronunciation

Self-concept is defined as individuals' self-perception and self-cognition (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985) and as a collection of their knowledge about themselves (Dörnyei & Ema, 2009). This perception comes from the personal experience in the environment and the interpretation of these experiences. In other words, it is one's attitude, feelings and knowledge towards their own ability, skill, appearance, social interaction and like (Byrne, 1984). For the purpose of this study, self-concept was used to refer to the self-concept of EFL non-English major Chinese learners at public universities. Some previous studies indicate that a positive English self-concept helps to enhance learning motivation and develop a good learning attitude (Rao, 2019; Umarji, McPartlan, & Eccles, 2018). Furthermore, many studies in the field of psychology argue that an active and healthy self-concept is vital to individual behavior choice, environmental adaptation, and self-confidence (Roelle, Bochum, & Renkl, 2020; Wolff, Helm, Junge, & Möller, 2020). Individuals can induce the self-concept of specific subjects from the behavioral awareness in specific situations, and then push it to the global self-concept. Specific subjects' self-concept may be applied to the individuals' overall self-concept and personal development (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2020). Therefore, exploring English pronunciation self-concept is of great practical significance for us to improve foreign language teaching.

As mentioned previously, the English language in China is taught in primary education. The focus on pronunciation teaching is almost over in junior middle school, and this period contains nearly all of the pronunciation knowledge points of English (Lu, 2019) because the focus is on listening, writing, and reading in senior middle school to prepare students for College Entrance Test (CET). By the time Chinese students get to the university, except for undergraduates majoring in English, most students no longer focus on English pronunciation and their pronunciation is inaccurate (Kang & Wu, 2020). Therefore, to put forward better countermeasures, it is necessary to investigate the pronunciation problems faced by EFL non-English major learners at a public university in China and the current situation of their English pronunciation self-concept.

The current study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the level of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' self-concept about their English

pronunciation?

2. How do Chinese EFL non-English major learners self-evaluate their English pronunciation?
3. What are the levels of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' English pronunciation?
4. What pronunciation problems are faced by EFL non-English major learners at a public university in China?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study utilizes a convergent mixed-method approach to collect and analyze data. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The researchers' two classes with similar English pronunciation levels participated in the study. The current study distributed the English Pronunciation Self-Evaluation Form, Test on English Pronunciation, and English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire to the participants and interviewed some college English teachers to understand the student's situation.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire

To answer Research Question One (RQ1), an English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire developed by Du (2016) was used as shown in Table 1. This questionnaire included 16 items and was divided into two parts. Part 1 dealt with the demographic background of the participants (i.e., gender, age, department, and years of learning English), while Part 2 was concerned with the English pronunciation self-concept scale. Table 1 presents the English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire.

Table 1. English pronunciation self-concept questionnaire.

No.	Questionnaire item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	My English pronunciation is very good.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am good at learning English pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
3	My English pronunciation is terrible.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Others think my English pronunciation is good.	1	2	3	4	5
5	My English pronunciation is not good, so I am afraid to speak English in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6	My English pronunciation is not worse than that of the other students.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I am not as good as most of my classmates at learning English pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
8	My English pronunciation will not improve.	1	2	3	4	5
9	It is easy for me to pronounce English words correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I always look stupid in English pronunciation learning.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I am a quick learner of English pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
12	It is always difficult for me to pronounce English words correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I often need help with English pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
14	As long as I work hard, my English pronunciation can be very good.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I like to make English pronunciation heard.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I try to avoid being heard speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Du (2016).

3.2.2. English Pronunciation Self-Evaluation Form

The second research question (RQ2) aimed at understanding the participants' self-evaluation of their English pronunciation. In this study, students evaluated their English pronunciation using Du (2016) English

Pronunciation Self-Evaluation Form as presented in Table 2. This form included two parts: the first part was for the instructions to fill out the form, and the second part included five scoring indexes of English pronunciation evaluation. Each scoring index carried a full score of 20 points. The respondents were required to judge which score was most suitable for their actual situation according to their personal experience: 1-4 means “very poor”; 5-8 means “poor”; 9-12 means “fair”; 13-16 means “good”; 17-20 means “excellent”. Table 2 presents the English Pronunciation Self-Evaluation Form.

Table 2. English pronunciation self-evaluation form.

Scoring standard	Scoring index	Standard	Score to be provided by the respondent
Accuracy (40)	Pronunciation is accurate.	20	0
	The tone is appropriate.	20	0
Fluency (60)	Read articles fluently.	20	0
	Linking, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation are appropriate.	20	0
	Rhythm is moderate.	20	0
Final score		100	0

Source: Du (2016).

3.2.3. Test on English Pronunciation

The third research question (RQ3) was answered by analyzing the Test on English Pronunciation. The students were asked to read the words, sentences, and paragraphs on the test.

3.2.4. Interview

To answer the fourth research question (RQ4), that is, to understand the pronunciation problems faced by EFL non-English major learners at a public university, the researcher conducted interviews with five college English teachers. The content of the interview questions dealt with aspects such as the time allocated for teaching English pronunciation and the factors leading to the problems in the student's English pronunciation.

3.3. Participants

3.3.1. EFL Learners

The study investigated the pronunciation learning experience of non-English majors at a public university in Guizhou Province, China. For RQ1, a simple random sampling was adopted where the questionnaire was distributed online to the EFL non-English major students at the above-mentioned public university, specifically to freshmen and sophomores at Kaili University in China, who were not English majors (there were no college English courses in their junior and senior years, so no juniors and seniors were invited to fill in the questionnaire). As far as RQ2 and RQ3 were concerned, a purposive sampling method was used where 100 students participated in this study. These participants had been taught by the first researcher for the first two semesters since they joined the university in 2021. The researcher took two classes, one with 49 students and the other with 51 students. Most of the students in these two classes began to learn English in the third grade of primary school, which meant that they had been learning English for 11 years. Only a small number of students learned English from the first year of junior high school, so they had been learning English for at least 7 years. Table 3 describes the details of the sample (EFL learners).

Table 3. Sample of the study (EFL learners).

Male	Female	Students' age	Years of English language learning (7 Years)	Years of English language learning (11 Years)
43	57	18-20	10	90
43%	57%		10%	90%

3.3.2. EFL Teachers

Regarding RQ4 which aimed to understand the pronunciation difficulties faced by EFL non-English major learners, this study collected feedback from five college English teachers in the same university. A convenience purposive sampling method was also employed to select the EFL teachers. As far as the typical purposive sampling method was concerned, they were selected because they had at least five years of college English teaching experience and were currently teaching college English to non-English majors. Moreover, the convenience purposive sampling method was used because the five teachers were accessible, as some teachers may not agree to be part of the study.

3.4. Pilot Study

The first research question (What is the level of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' self-concept about their English pronunciation?) was answered to understand the participants' English pronunciation self-concept. A pilot study employing English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire was conducted to measure the participants' English pronunciation self-concept. The objective of the pilot test was to determine the level of the self-concept: the higher the score, the more positive was the self-concept.

3.4.1. Validity of English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire

A panel of three PhD-holder experts verified the content validity of the English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire with 16 items. After the content validation, and the face validity of the questionnaire was verified (Gay, Airasian, & Mills, 2012) the researcher sent the questionnaire to the 5 students to improve the clarity of the items and the rationality of the layout of the questionnaire (Jumal, 2022; Ke & AlSaqqaf, 2022).

According to the feedback of the experts and students, the researchers revised the questionnaire. Finally, the questionnaire was piloted with 30 EFL learners who did not participate in the actual study later. The 30 responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 to analyze the data statistically.

3.4.2. Reliability of English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire

One of the most used indicators to measure the internal consistency of the scale is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the internal reliability of the English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire was 0.79. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) a value higher than 0.7 is reliable. Table 4 shows the alpha coefficient value for the reliability of the English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire.

Table 4. Reliability of English pronunciation self-concept questionnaire.

Overall	Cronbach alpha	Conclusion
	0.79	Reliable

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results of RQ1

To examine the first research question (i.e., What is the level of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' self-concept about their English pronunciation?) an English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire was sent online to freshmen and sophomores at Kaili University in China, who were not English majors (there were no college English courses in their junior and senior years, so no juniors and seniors were invited to fill in the questionnaire). The next section provides further background information about the participants.

4.1.1. Demographic Variables Statistics of the Respondents to RQ1

In the questionnaire issued, demographic variables were statistically related to the student's age, gender, province, university, the number of years of learning English, faculty, and department, its statistics are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Statistical results of demography (N=392).

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	161	41.07%
	Female	231	58.93%
Age	Under the age of 18	54	13.85%
	18—25	338	86.15%
Faculty	Faculty of science	52	13.27%
	Faculty of architectural engineering	100	25.51
	Faculty of tourism	77	19.64
	Faculty of economics and management	54	13.78
	Faculty of fine arts	59	15.05
	Faculty of humanities	50	12.76
The number of years of learning English	7-8	135	34.44%
	11-12	257	65.56%

Demographic statistics show that among the 392 respondents, 41.07% are male while 58.93% are female students, 13.85% are students under 18 years old, and 86.15% students are between 18 and 25 years old. The respondents are all students from Kaili University in Guizhou Province, China. Among them, 13.27% are from the Faculty of Science, 25.51% from the Faculty of Architectural Engineering, 19.64% from the Faculty of Tourism, 13.78% from the Faculty of Economics and Management, 15.05% from the Faculty of Fine Arts and 12.76% from the Faculty of Humanities. Learning English accounted for 34.44% of 7-8 years and 65.56% of 11-12 years.

4.1.2. Analysis of EFL Non-English Major Learners' Self-Concept about Their English Pronunciation

In this study, the English Pronunciation Self-Concept Questionnaire was used to measure the participants' English pronunciation self-concept. The full score of this questionnaire was 80, the higher the score, the more positive was the students' self-concept.

Table 6. Mean of English pronunciation self-concept among 392 non-English majors

N	Mean	Std. deviation
392	2.6	6.13

As can be seen from the Table 6, the mean of English pronunciation self-concept of 392 non-English majors is 2.6. This means that Chinese EFL non-English major learners have a very low self-concept of English pronunciation.

4.2. Discussion of RQ1

According to the result of RQ1, the English pronunciation self-concept of the students was extremely low. This is in line with Zhang (2018) study who pointed out that 90% of the randomly selected 155 students were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their pronunciation level. Likewise, Xie (2017) confirms that many non-English majors still have big pronunciation problems in college. The result of RQ1 also coincides with Zheng (2017); Bi (2014) and Sun (2015) who find that Chinese college students' English pronunciation self-concept is significantly poor.

One justification for this extremely low self-concept of English pronunciation among Chinese EFL non-English major learners could be attributed to the lack of confidence in their pronunciation as they feel that their pronunciation is inaccurate (Xie, 2017; Zhang, 2018). On the other hand, the expectation of students' pronunciation

learning ability and the evaluation of students' pronunciation learning ability affects students' English pronunciation self-concept and pronunciation learning attitude to a certain extent (Bi, 2014; Sun, 2015).

4.3. Results of RQ2

The second research question, (i.e., how do the Chinese EFL non-English major learners self-evaluate their English pronunciation?), was answered by analyzing the English Pronunciation Self-Evaluation Form developed by Du (2016). The two classes of 100 students involved in the current study completed the self-evaluation of pronunciation that consisted of five scoring indexes, each with a full score of 20. The final score was obtained by adding up the scores of the five scoring indexes, and the full score of this form was 100. The number of students in the five score categories is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of English pronunciation self-evaluation form.

Aspect of measure	100-90 Excellent	89-75 Very good	74-65 Good	<64-55 Average	54-0 Poor
Frequency	0	1	17	29	53

As can be seen from Table 7, the students did not highly self-evaluate their EFL pronunciation. Surprisingly, there were no students who self-evaluated their EFL pronunciation as excellent, and a total of 82% fell between average and poor self-evaluation of English.

4.4. Discussion of RQ2

The results of RQ2 show that the student's evaluation of their English pronunciation is worrying. The results of the present study are consistent with those of Shi (2010) findings and Li (2019) who argue that the general situation in Chinese universities is that only a small number of students have a good foundation in English pronunciation, while most students have a poor evaluation of their English pronunciation. The result of RQ2 is also in line with Zhou (2019) who states that English pronunciation is always a difficulty for students to learn English, students, who often dare not speak English and think that their English pronunciation is not good.

Du (2016) confirms that many students think that their English pronunciation is inaccurate and that they cannot read sentences fluently. Qiu (2018) also points out that one of the reasons why some students dare not answer questions in English class is caused by their perceptions of their pronunciation as bad, as well as their fear that their English pronunciation is different from that of others, and that the others would laugh at them.

Among the justifications why students have a low opinion of their English pronunciation, it was found that some students' English pronunciation was influenced by local dialects, and they lacked self-confidence and did not dare to speak English (Lin, 2017). Other reasons included a significantly poor EFL non-English major learners' pronunciation, which has been confirmed by many scholars (Yang, 2020; Zhang, 2018).

4.5. Results of RQ3

The third research question (i.e., What are the levels of Chinese EFL non-English major learners' English pronunciation?) was answered by analyzing the Test on English Pronunciation. The researcher's two classes of 100 students took part in the pronunciation test. To make the judgment consistent, the researcher tested the students in both classes. The full score of the Test on English Pronunciation is 100.

Table 8. Results of test on English pronunciation.

Aspect of measure	100-90%	89-75%	74-60%	<59-50%	Mean
Frequency	0	3	15	82	48.56/100

As can be seen from Table 8, no student managed to score within the range of 100-90. Three students fall in the range of 89-75, whereas 15 students scored between 74-60. Regrettably, 82% of the students scored between 59 and below.

4.6. Discussion of RQ3

The analysis of the results of RQ3 showed that the EFL non-English major learners' English pronunciation is sadly below the average level. This result is in line with those obtained by Qiu (2018); Zhang (2018); Miao (2016); Lei (2016); Song (2016); Du (2016) and Chen (2018). Qiu (2018) shows that no matter how good the Chinese students' English is, their pronunciation usually has a distinct Chinese accent. Although there are many similarities between the English alphabet and pinyin, it is difficult for Chinese EFL learners to produce some English pronunciations accurately. Zhang (2018) confirms that the problem with many EFL non-English major learners' English pronunciations is that they cannot pronounce some sounds correctly, so sometimes the other person does not know what he or she wants to say. Miao (2016) reveals that Chinese students in Guiyang City will choose similar syllables in the Guiyang dialect if they do not know the correct phonemes when speaking English.

The teaching of pronunciation has long been overlooked in college English instruction, leading to a weakness in non-English majors. This is due to a lack of formal pronunciation training during middle school, coupled with heavy workload and limited class hours in college, as well as the absence of English pronunciation courses at most universities (Chen, 2018; Du, 2016). These factors contribute to the poor pronunciation skills of non-English major students learning English as a foreign language.

4.7. Results of RQ4

The fourth research question, (i.e., what pronunciation problems are faced by EFL non-English major learners at a public university in China?), was answered by analyzing the interview with college English teachers. Through a focused group discussion with five EFL teachers, the original recording data of the study was obtained. Then the recordings were transcribed, checked, and sorted out, and teachers' views on "The pronunciation problems faced by EFL non-English major learners in China" were obtained.

Table 9. Demographic information of the college English teachers

Demographic variable	Category
Gender	Male: 1
	Female: 4
Years of teaching experience	11—15 years: 2
	16—20 years: 3

A purposive sampling method was adopted to interview five college English teachers, whose demographic information is shown in Table 9. In the view of teachers, the pronunciation problem faced by students is adding or omitting extra sounds, and there are also problems in phonemes and suprasegmental phonemes. All five teachers interviewed thought that most students committed mistakes in pronunciation.

4.7.1. Adding or Omitting Extra Sounds

Teacher D said, "Some of my students always like to add a vowel at the end of a word that ends with a consonant, such as pronouncing bag / bæɡ / as / bæɡə / and cat/kæt / as / kætə /. In addition, students either omitted the previous consonants or added a vowel between the two consonants as a transition, such as a picture/'pɪktʃə / may be pronounced as / 'pɪtʃə / or /'pɪkətʃə/."

4.7.2. Problems with Phonemes

As far as phonemes were concerned, students got confused with some sounds, including the confusion of vowels and consonants.

4.8. Confusion of Vowels

Teacher C emphasized, "Students have a higher frequency of confusion between /e/ and /æ/ when reading words. For example, words like *pet-pat*, and *mass-mess* were easy to be confused students. There were also /əʊ/ and /ɒ/ /ɔ:/ in words like *cloak-clock*, and *shop-soap* that are wrongly pronounced by students. The vowels /ʌ/ and /æ / that were found in words like *cut-cat* were also problematic for Chinese EFL learners. Similarly, the vowels /æ/ and /a:/ in words like *pat-part* and *park-pack*; as well as /ei/ and /e/ in words like *age-edge*, were another source of difficulty in the EFL pronunciation among Chinese learners.

4.9. Problems with Consonants

Teacher B said, "Many students have problems with consonant pronunciation. For example, they confuse the pronunciation of / θ / and / s /, and some students would pronounce the sound of / h / into /f/."

"The confusion of /t and /d/ is also common, students would pronounce *feed* as *fit*; and the confusion of /n/ and /m/, the confusion of /θ/ and /ð/."

"The addition of consonants at the end of words is also an important factor affecting students' English pronunciation, e.g., words like *pay-pain*, *sing-sink*."

4.9.1. Problems with Suprasegmental Phonemes

The five teachers thought that the students faced problems with the cohesion between words, sentence rhythm, and the use of intonation and stress. Teacher A said, "Students have great problems with the cohesion between words and the use of intonation.", while Teacher C confirmed that "most of the students were incoherent and had no rhythm when reading sentences"; and that "when Chinese students read sentences, they would take syllables as beats, just like reading Chinese". Teacher C also added that "students' intonation was too gentle when reading sentences, while English intonation had ups and downs."

Teacher E also agreed with the above-mentioned statements emphasizing that "The sentences read by many students lack stress. All the words in their words have stresses, but the speaker has no stress on the keywords of the sentence. "

4.10. Discussion of RQ4

The interview with the teachers showed that the pronunciation problem faced by students was adding or omitting extra sounds, and there were also problems in phonemes and suprasegmental phonemes. Zhang (2018) also found most of the students felt that they lacked knowledge of stress, connection, intonation, etc. The results obtained from interviewing the teachers are consistent with the findings of Kang and Wu (2020) who revealed that non-English majors cannot accurately master stress, connection, rhythm, and intonation. The results also coincide with Yang (2020) who found that non-English majors have some common problems in pronunciation and intonation, such as confusion of phonemes, unproficiency in linking skills, poor mastery of rhythm and intonation, etc. Miao (2016) confirms that when Chinese college students read English, there was the confusion of rising and falling tones or no intonation at all, words and sentences were read smoothly and the position of stress was not accurate, all syllables were pronounced with stress, and the position of stress was not clear. Lei (2016) also points out that Chinese college students replaced vowels with similar sounds in English.

Among the reasons for this problematic pronunciation among Chinese EFL learners is that English and Chinese belong to totally different language families, and there are great differences in pronunciation and intonation

between them, which makes it difficult for Chinese students to learn English pronunciation and makes them speak English with many problems in terms of "accuracy" and "idiomatic" (Yang, 2020). Moreover, students are more or less influenced by their mother tongue, and they are almost absent from exposure to English whether at school or outside since China is a monolingual country (Lei, 2016; Miao, 2016). In addition, lack of teaching and focus on English pronunciation is also another factor leading to the Chinese students' poor pronunciation (Bi, 2019).

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study suggest two categories of implications in terms of theory and practice.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study fills the gap in research on English pronunciation and self-concept among non-English major EFL learners in China, an area that has been overlooked in comparison to studies on English majors (Sun, 2015; Yang, 2020). It aims to bring attention to the specific challenges and current understanding of English pronunciation and self-concept among this population.

5.2. Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, EFL teachers and non-English major learners should pay attention to an effective way of teaching English pronunciation, as effective teaching would expectedly lead to positive learning (Taat, Abdalbaki, & Al-Saqqaf, 2020). English language teachers should be able to identify reasons behind classroom issues and devise appropriate solutions (Ong, Swanto, AlSaqqaf, & Ong, 2021). Although English pronunciation is not the whole embodiment of a person's English ability, if teachers can efficiently guide students to establish a positive English pronunciation self-concept, students will get the best time to improve their positive English pronunciation self-concept. Moreover, students' English pronunciation self-concept is easily affected by pronunciation learning. After understanding the English pronunciation problems faced by students and the current situation of English pronunciation self-concept, hopefully, teachers would consider putting forward countermeasures to effectively improve the teaching effect of English pronunciation.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the pronunciation problems faced by EFL non-English major learners at a public university in China and their English pronunciation self-concept. Overall, the study reported negative self-concept and self-evaluation among Chinese EFL learners whose English pronunciation, as demonstrated by the study, was found to be much less than average. This research could have some insightful findings for both college English teachers and EFL learners. It is hoped that the results of this study would not only make EFL students pay attention to their pronunciation but also help college English teachers understand the pronunciation problems encountered by EFL learners and try to improve their pronunciation.

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