AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 13 Number 1
March, 2026

Phonetic Variation in Nigerian Spoken English: A Corpus-Informed Framework for Teaching Pronunciation

Chinelo Ukamaka Okpala
Department of English Language and Literary Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Nigeria
maknelo@gmail.com

Ephraim Azoluwaehu Chukwu
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
ea.chukwu@unizik.edu.ng

&

Victoria Chinwe Udoh
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
vc.udoh@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

English pronunciation teaching in Nigeria tends towards external norms such as Received Pronunciation (RP), overlooking the systematic phonology of Nigerian English NE (Nigerian English) and reinforcing linguistic insecurity among learners. Research, including corpus-based work on the International Corpus of English–Nigeria (ICE–Nigeria), shows that NE has developed stable segmental and suprasegmental features shaped by multilingual contact and social factors. This paper integrates sociophonetic, World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca perspectives to examine phonetic variation in NE and its implications for pedagogy. It highlights recurrent features - vowel neutralisation, diphthong monophthongisation, consonant substitution, cluster simplification and syllable-timed rhythm - as systematic patterns rather than random "errors". On this basis, the paper proposes a four-step corpus-informed framework for pronunciation teaching: identifying common NE features,

distinguishing those that affect intelligibility, using corpus evidence to set instructional priorities and reshaping teacher attitudes towards endonormative models. The study argues that aligning classroom practice with corpus evidence can promote intelligibility, affirm identity and support the codification of NE as a legitimate variety within global English.
Keywords: Nigerian English, phonetic variation, sociophonetics, corpus linguistics, pronunciation pedagogy, intelligibility

Introduction

English, a global lingua franca, occupies a central role in Nigeria as the official language and the principal medium for education, governance and commerce (Ojochegbe et al. 2024). Nigeria, an Outer Circle in Kachru's model (1986), is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Africa, with over 500 indigenous languages that exist alongside English and other non-indigenous languages (Eberhard et al., 2026; Falola, 2026). The number of "living indigenous languages" in Nigeria is placed at over five hundred and twenty (520) among which are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (the major languages), while the "established" non-indigenous languages in the country are ten (10), among which is English, the official language of the country (Eberhard et al., 2026).

This linguistic diversity has reshaped the phonological system of English, producing a nativised variety widely recognised as Nigerian English NE (Oluranti, 2025; Udofot, 2003). As Oluranti (2025) shows, NE is characterised by systematic features such as syllable-timed rhythm, vowel shifts, consonant substitutions and cluster simplification, many of which reflect the influence of indigenous phonologies.

Even though NE is increasingly accepted as a legitimate variety, pronunciation teaching in Nigeria, as Oladipupo and Akinola (2022) note, remains dominated by exonormative standards, especially RP. Continued reliance on external models can marginalise local speech patterns and reinforce linguistic insecurity

among learners and teachers (Ojochegbe et al., 2024). Curriculum design and teacher training are implicated in sustaining these hierarchies. Historically, "native-speaker" norms have often been regarded as artificial or elitist (Idowu, 2019; Jenkins, 2000). When NE features are framed as "deviations", the systematicity of local phonology is downplayed (Amoniyan, 2025b), and a persistent gap is created between phonetic theory and culturally responsive pedagogy.

In earlier work, Okpala (2025) responded to these challenges by arguing that intelligibility, rather than native-like imitation, should be the central goal of pronunciation instruction in Nigerian ESL classrooms. Drawing on sociophonetic evidence and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) scholarship, that study proposed an Intelligibility-First Model and illustrated it with sample lesson designs focusing on vowel length, consonant clusters and suprasegmental features. However, while the emphasis there was on classroom practice and the intelligibility principle, the discussion of corpus-based description and the codification of NE phonology remained relatively brief.

The present paper offers a complementary, conceptual, corpus-informed contribution. It draws on published analyses of spoken corpora - particularly the International Corpus of English–Nigeria (ICE–Nigeria) - and on existing corpus-based descriptions of NE to argue that phonetic variation in NE should be described and taught empirically (Wunder et al., 2010). Corpus-based studies provide systematic data on authentic speech, enabling researchers and teachers to identify recurrent variants and to distinguish those that affect intelligibility from those that do not (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022). On this basis, educators can move beyond impressionistic judgements and establish endonormative reference points for pronunciation teaching and assessment (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025).

Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Describe recurrent phonetic features of Nigerian English using corpus-based evidence.
2. Examine how social factors such as ethnicity, education and speech style shape these features.
3. Propose a corpus-informed, intelligibility-focused framework to guide pronunciation teaching and assessment in Nigerian classrooms.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it challenges the continued reliance on Received Pronunciation in Nigerian classrooms and argues that Nigerian English should be treated as a systematic, legitimate variety rather than a defective accent. By drawing on corpus-based findings from existing studies, it offers teachers concrete tools for deciding which recurring features of NE ought to be treated as intelligibility-critical and which can be accepted as local accent. In practical terms, this makes it easier to help learners speak clearly without asking them to abandon their linguistic identity.

At a wider level, the argument also strengthens the case for the codification of NE within World Englishes. By linking published corpus evidence on Nigerian speech to a clear four-step teaching framework, the paper provides a locally relevant yet internationally intelligible basis for pronunciation pedagogy and for future reference works. The proposed four-step teaching framework are as follows: 1. Identify Common Nigerian English Features, 2. Distinguish intelligibility-critical features, 3. Adapt teaching strategies, 4. Reframe teacher beliefs.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by complementary theoretical perspectives. Drawing on Labov's (1966) theory of language variation, sociophonetics explains how phonetic patterns in Nigerian English emerge from multilingual contact and social conditioning, and shows that vowel shifts, consonant substitutions and prosodic

tendencies are systematic. In addition, World Englishes (Kachru, 1986; Schneider, 2007) and English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011) provide lenses for evaluating these patterns in terms of legitimacy and communicative value, with an emphasis on intelligibility rather than imitation of exonormative norms. Taken together, these frameworks help to account for the variation observed in Nigerian English and support an endonormative orientation to pronunciation teaching.

Conceptual Framework

Corpus Linguistics

Biber et al. (2010) describe corpus linguistics as a methodology for studying language, rather than a separate subfield or theory. Its main aim is to uncover authentic patterns of usage through systematic analysis of naturally occurring data. A corpus, in this sense, is an electronic and criterion-based collection of written or spoken texts that reflect real-life language use (Friginal, 2018). By basing analysis on real usage, corpus studies give a clearer picture of how language actually works and reduce reliance on intuition (Teubert, 2005).

At its core, corpus linguistics is empirical. It is typically computer-assisted, combining automatic and interactive techniques to process large datasets. Researchers rely on tools such as concordancers to highlight collocations and lexical bundles, enabling them to identify recurrent features across multiple contexts (Friginal, 2018). In this way, patterns of vocabulary, grammar and phraseology emerge that traditional approaches might overlook (Römer, 2009).

Corpus methodology is also central to World Englishes research. Greenbaum (1996) launched the International Corpus of English (ICE) project to document educated usage across global varieties. In the Nigerian context, Gut (2012) shows how ICE–Nigeria provides a foundation for codifying Nigerian English, while

Unuabonah et al. (2022) introduce the Historical Corpus of English in Nigeria (HiCE-Nig) to trace diachronic shifts. These corpora have been used to investigate issues such as cluster simplification (Amoniyan, 2025a) and pronunciation preferences (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022), demonstrating the empirical strength of corpus approaches. Overall, this work illustrates how corpus linguistics connects language description with classroom practice, which makes it particularly relevant for pronunciation teaching.

Corpus Linguistics for Pronunciation Pedagogy

Corpus methods have become central to pronunciation research and teaching because they provide authentic evidence of segmental and suprasegmental features. Andersen (2010) notes that specialised spoken corpora capture reductions, omissions and learner-specific realisations, while Brand and Ernestus (2018) show how listeners' processing of reduced variants reflects their exposure to those forms. Resources such as the Learning Prosody in a Foreign Language (LeaP) corpus (Gut, 2007) and the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Inter-language (LINDSEI) (Gilquin et al., 2010; Mukherjee & Rohrbach, 2006) have been used to examine rhythm, intonation and stress in learner's speech.

The pedagogical orientation of this work aligns with data-driven learning (DDL), as developed by Sinclair (2004), which emphasises learner engagement with authentic linguistic data. In pronunciation contexts, DDL allows learners to compare their productions with corpus models and develop awareness of prosody and connected-speech processes (Qian & Deris, 2023). Such approaches promote learner autonomy and highlight features often overlooked in traditional textbooks. From a broader pedagogical perspective, Lee and Swales (2006) argue that corpus-based approaches can bridge the gap between research and classroom practice by helping learners to notice recurrent patterns in authentic data. Tools like PRAAT, a software for acoustic analysis,

help to make this analysis interactive, offering teachers and learners clearer instructional baselines (Friginal, 2018; O'Keeffe & Farr, 2003; Qian & Deris, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, corpora such as ICE–Nigeria have proved especially valuable for documenting recurrent pronunciation variants and distinguishing systematic from idiosyncratic realisations (Wunder et al., 2010; Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022). According to Jowitt and Ugwuanyi (2025), these insights support the codification of endonormative standards and the development of teaching materials, reference resources and classroom norms. Yet, as Flowerdew (2015) and Friginal (2018) point out, teachers often face limited corpus literacy, time constraints and lack of resources. Research further highlights underdeveloped acoustic descriptions of Nigerian English vowels (Amoniyan, 2025) and insufficient integration of social variables such as ethnicity and region in accounts of consonant and prosodic variation (Oluranti, 2025). Moreover, Received Pronunciation (RP) continues to dominate as the default model, creating a weak link between corpus description and classroom application (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025).

Overall, corpus linguistics offers both descriptive and pedagogical strength. When pronunciation teaching is aligned with authentic Nigerian usage, it becomes possible to balance intelligibility with identity while simultaneously addressing the gaps that still hinder effective classroom integration.

Phonetic Variation

Phonetic variation is a central concern in sociophonetics, which investigates how sound production and perception shift across speakers and contexts. Research consistently shows that factors such as age, gender, class and style condition variation, revealing that these differences are socially patterned rather than random (Baranowski, 2013). Labov's (1966, 1972b) classic work on the social stratification of English in New York City set the

methodological foundations for this line of inquiry, demonstrating how phonetic forms reflect both structural constraints and social meanings. Variationist sociolinguistics - the study of language variation in relation social factors - as outlined by Milroy and Gordon (2003), offers methodological tools for linking these patterns of phonetic realisation to social structure, interaction and community norms. Building on this, Eckert and Labov (2017) argue that variation functions as a resource for identity construction and group belonging.

Seen from this perspective, phonetic variation is not an accident but part of how languages evolve. Differences in usage across speakers and generations provide the raw material for sound change (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog, 1968). Boberg (2023) and Celata and Calamai (2014) further note that listeners actively interpret these features, attaching social significance to even subtle shifts in pronunciation. In a similar vein, Pratt (2020) shows how differences in articulatory setting and phonetic detail can come to index social meanings associated with particular personae or stances. Variation is therefore both linguistic and social: it reflects tendencies within the phonological system and at the same time signals identity.

Phonetic Variation in Nigerian English

In Nigeria, where English exists in constant contact with over 500 indigenous languages, phonetic variation is especially salient. This contact has reshaped the phonological system of English, producing a localised variety with systematic segmental and suprasegmental features (Olaniyi, 2016; Amoniyan, 2025; Oluranti, 2025). One of the most consistent findings is the reduction of the vowel inventory, which leads to neutralisation of tense-lax distinctions and the simplification of diphthongs. For instance, Ejikeme and Onugha (2022) observe that Yoruba speakers often realise /i/ closer to [ɪ], while Hausa speakers tend to lower /e/ to [ɛ]. Igbo speakers, according to Oluranti (2025),

frequently neutralise /o/ to [ɔ] and struggle with central vowels that are absent in their L1. Acoustic analyses confirm these tendencies, and Amoniyan (2025b) argues that trajectory-based formant analysis is needed to capture their full complexity

Consonantal variation is also systematic. Dental fricatives are frequently substituted, with /θ/ realised as [t] or [s] and /ð/ as [d] or [z] (Olaniyi, 2016; Usman, 2022). Cluster simplification through deletion or vowel insertion reflects the predominance of CV syllable structures in Nigerian languages (Amoniyan, 2025a). In addition, Oladipupo (2014) documents connected-speech processes such as devoicing, assimilation and elision, which occur widely in educated Nigerian English. At the suprasegmental level, studies report frequent syllable stress and a rhythm closer to syllable-timed than stress-timed English, patterns linked to indigenous language influence (Udofot, 2003; Akinjobi & Akindele, 2018; Pereira et al., 2025). As Oluranti (2025) notes, education often moderates these features, underscoring their adaptive rather than erroneous nature.
In all, the evidence indicates that Nigerian English phonology follows systematic patterns shaped by both L1 transfer and social conditioning. Rather than random deviations, these features confirm the legitimacy of the variety and the need for endonormative standards that balance intelligibility with identity.

Vowel Shifts in Nigerian English

As earlier mentioned, NE phonology is unique in its own way and follows systematic patterns conditioned by certain linguistic and social factors. This uniqueness also shows itself in vowel shift, where NE often reduces the RP vowel inventory to roughly nine categories, aligning with L1 systems and yielding tense-lax neutralisation and diphthong monophthongisation (Ejikeme & Onugha, 2022; Oluranti, 2025). Common shifts include /iː/≈/ɪ/ → [i], /æ/≈/ɑː/ → [a], /ʊ/≈/uː/ → [u], and /ɒ/≈/ɔː/ → [ɔ]. As Oladipupo and Akinola (2022) report, long vowels may surface with short-vowel quality.

L1-specific tendencies are also documented for particular groups. For instance, Igbo speakers often encounter problems with RP central vowels and diphthongs, and this is largely because these features do not exist in Igbo language (Okpala, 2014). Similarly, Yoruba speakers frequently realise English /i/ nearer [ɪ] while Hausa speakers may realise /e/ as [ɛ], and Fulani speakers have been observed to back /a/ (Ejikeme & Onugha, 2022; Oluranti, 2025). In terms of the role played by social factors like education, acoustic studies confirm these patterns, with educated speakers approximating "standard" targets more closely than uneducated or less-educated ones (Olaniyi, 2016; Oluranti, 2025). Limited vowel reduction in unstressed syllables is another established feature of NE (Udofot, 2003).

Consonant Substitution and Cluster Simplification

Consonantal patterns in NE largely reflect L1 phonotactics. Usman (2022) shows that dental fricatives vary considerably, with /θ/ realised as [t] or [s] and /ð/ as [d] or [z], and notes that some of these patterns are associated with particular ethnic groups. Other substitutions have also been reported, including /ʒ/ → [ʃ] or [dʒ] and occasional /t͡ʃ/ → [ʃ], alongside reduced aspiration on voiceless plosives (Olaniyi, 2016; Usman, 2022). Given the prevalence of CV syllable templates in Nigerian languages, cluster resolution often involves epenthesis or deletion, although Amoniyan (2025a) points out that education can mitigate this influence.

Stress and Rhythm in Nigerian English

Limited vowel reduction contributes to frequent syllable stress and more even inter-syllabic durations than in stress-timed English (Udofot, 2003). In a more detailed account, Amoniyan (2023) identifies duration, F0 and intensity as key correlates of stress in Educated NE and reports regional and gender effects. Rhythm in Nigerian English remains a matter of debate: descriptions range from syllable-timed to full-vowel-timed (Akinjobi & Atolagbe, 2018; Udofot, 2003).

Pronunciation Pedagogy in Nigerian ESL Classrooms

Despite extensive descriptive research, classroom practice in Nigeria still leans heavily on RP English, often leaving learners uncertain about their own speech patterns. Ojochegbe et al. (2024) and Oladipupo and Akinola (2022) show that persistent challenges include limited focus on phonetics, scarce International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA)-based training and inadequate resources. Instruction tends to prioritise grammar and vocabulary over explicit pronunciation work, and where pronunciation is taught in Nigerian classrooms, it tends to imitate the RP norms, thereby disregarding the sociophonetics patterns of Nigerian English and the role this plays in the pronunciation teaching and learning (Ojochegbe et al, 2024). In response, scholars argue for context-sensitive instruction that recognises NE features while supporting communicative clarity (Oluranti, 2025).

Global Approaches Emphasising Intelligibility

World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) scholarship reposition instructional goals from nativeness to mutual intelligibility, distinguishing accentedness, comprehensibility and intelligibility (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Jenkins, 2000; Levis, 2005). For Nigerian speakers, Idowu (2019) highlights the importance of features such as vowel length and central vowel realisation for international intelligibility. Earlier work by Tiffen (1974) also flagged suprasegmentals as a source of intelligibility breakdown. From a pedagogical perspective, RP can be presented as one model among others, alongside codified NE, so that instruction aligns with intelligibility-based outcomes and identity affirmation (Ojochegbe et al., 2024; Walker, 2010).

Identified Gaps

Although existing scholarship has described many features of Nigerian English, several gaps remain in both empirical coverage and pedagogical application:

1. **Limited Acoustic-Phonetic Descriptions** Current analyses of NE vowels and consonants are often impressionistic or static. As Amoniyan (2025) notes, dynamic, trajectory-based acoustic studies remain underdeveloped, leaving incomplete mappings of segmental and suprasegmental systems.
2. **Insufficient Integration of Social Variables** Research has tended to describe phonetic features in aggregate, with less attention to how ethnicity, region, gender and age condition consonant variation, cluster simplification or prosodic tendencies (Oluranti, 2025).
3. **Weak Pipelines from Description to Pedagogy** While corpora such as ICE–Nigeria provide authentic evidence of usage, their findings are not consistently integrated into classroom priorities, assessment rubrics or teaching materials. Instead, Received Pronunciation often remains the default benchmark, reinforcing an exonormative bias (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025; Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022).

Addressing these gaps requires corpus-informed approaches that link detailed phonetic description with endonormative pedagogical frameworks.

Methodological Orientation: A Corpus-Informed Approach

This study adopts a conceptual, corpus-informed orientation. It draws on published research based on spoken corpora of Nigerian English, particularly studies using the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-Nigeria) - and on related sociophonetic descriptions of segmental and suprasegmental features. These secondary sources identify recurrent patterns such as vowel shifts, consonant substitutions, cluster simplification and rhythm, as well as their social conditioning and pedagogical implications (e.g. Wunder et al., 2010; Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022; Oluranti, 2025).

By integrating findings from these corpus-based and sociophonetic studies, the paper develops a four-step, corpus-informed

framework that links documented patterns in NE phonology to priorities in pronunciation teaching and assessment. This literature-based approach keeps the argument closely tied to empirical descriptions of Nigerian usage, while offering guidance that teachers and curriculum designers can adapt without needing direct access to corpora or specialised software.

Discussion

Corpus linguistics provides an empirical foundation for pronunciation teaching by offering descriptive baselines that can be adapted to local contexts. In Nigerian English, the ICE–Nigeria corpus has become a central resource for mapping pronunciation variants, distinguishing primary, secondary and idiosyncratic realisations, and informing dictionary entries, reference materials and classroom norms (Wunder et al., 2010; Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022). Through data-driven learning and digital tools such as Praat, learners can engage directly with authentic speech data, enhancing their awareness of segmental and suprasegmental patterns while enabling teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions. Classroom-based research further indicates that integrating corpora into instruction supports improved outcomes and learner autonomy (Friginal, 2018; O'Keeffe & Farr, 2003; Qian & Deris, 2023).

At the same time, the gaps identified earlier remain significant. The acoustic analysis of NE vowels has not yet fully embraced dynamic approaches, leaving incomplete maps of the segmental and suprasegmental system (Amoniyan, 2025; Udofot, 2003). Social variables - such as ethnicity, gender and regional background - are not consistently integrated into explanations of consonant and cluster variation, including the realisation of dental fricatives beyond word-initial contexts (Oluranti, 2025; Amoniyan, 2025). Another gap lies in the limited translation of corpus-based description into classroom priorities, assessment rubrics and codified teaching norms, with a tendency to fall back on RP as a default model (Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025; Oladipupo & Akinola,

2022). The Framework proposed in the next section responds directly to these gaps by using corpus evidence to prioritise intelligibility, recognise systematic NE features and support endonormative teacher beliefs and practices.

A Corpus-Informed Teaching Framework

Based on World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca and corpus evidence, this framework prioritises intelligibility over imitation of external norms (Idowu, 2019; Levis, 2005). It is interpreted in four steps.

Step 1: Identify Common Nigerian English Features

Teachers should be familiar with typical vowel shifts, consonant substitutions and suprasegmental traits (Oluranti, 2025; Udofot, 2003; Usman, 2022). Corpus data helps to distinguish primary, secondary and idiosyncratic forms (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022). For this reason, teacher education should include explicit training in NE phonology, supported by corpus-based examples and audio materials.

Step 2: Distinguish Intelligibility-Critical Features

Instruction ought to prioritise contrasts that affect comprehensibility, such as vowel length, central vowels and cluster simplification (Idowu, 2019). It should also de-emphasise features that mainly signal accent without impairing understanding (Henderson, 2023; Oluranti, 2025). This approach aligns with the Intelligibility Principle and helps teachers to avoid penalising learners for identity-bearing but intelligible pronunciations.

Step 3: Adapt Teaching Strategies

Classroom practice should integrate targeted phonetic training (including IPA work and contrastive drills), exposure to multiple accents - including NE - and perception training (Henderson, 2023; Oluranti, 2025). High-variability phonetic training is one evidence-based option for this purpose (Thomson, 2018). Corpus-informed materials, including concordance lines and audio excerpts from ICE–Nigeria, can support discovery learning about stress, rhythm and connected-speech processes.

Step 4: Reframe Teacher Beliefs

Finally, teachers' beliefs need to be reframed so that Received Pronunciation is no longer treated as the sole acceptable model for spoken English instruction. Levis (2005) argues that assessment should be aligned with clarity and communicative success rather than native-like pronunciation, a position that resonates with calls by Ojochegbe et al. (2024). This requires addressing linguistic insecurity, validating local accents as legitimate identities and anchoring evaluation criteria in intelligibility, comprehensibility and listener needs (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Henderson, 2023).

Pedagogical Implications

Implications for Teachers

Corpus methods can deepen instructional decision-making and materials design (Friginal, 2018). Patterns observed in ICE-Nigeria help teachers recognise systematic NE features instead of automatically labelling them "errors" (Amoniyan, 2025; Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025; Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022). Teachers can then design tasks that target intelligibility-critical features while acknowledging acceptable variation.

Implications for Learners

Corpus-based work supports discovery learning and helps to troubleshoot recurring pronunciation issues. By drawing on evidence from speech corpora, learners can build awareness of typical pronunciations, stress patterns and intonation contours (Friginal, 2018). Comparing their own productions with corpus exemplars enables them to improve both perception and production.

Implications for Curriculum

Corpus descriptions support the development of context-relevant syllabi and targeted resources (Friginal, 2018). Critically, corpus findings contribute to the codification and standardisation of NE for teaching and reference (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022) and can

inform the selection of listening materials, assessment criteria and policy documents.

Toward Endonormative Standards

Corpus evidence suggests that NE is in a phase of norm development that merits formal documentation and reference works (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022; Oluranti, 2025). Assessment practices should therefore be inclusive of documented NE variants and incorporate Nigerian-accented audio in testing and classroom materials (Oluranti, 2025; Ojochegbe et al., 2024). In addition, policy reform is needed to acknowledge NE explicitly and to realign objectives towards local relevance and communicative clarity.

Conclusion

Nigerian English phonetic variation reflects predictable outcomes of multilingual contact and social conditioning rather than a random assortment of "errors" (Amoniyan, 2025; Oluranti, 2025). Corpus-based descriptions show that recurrent vowel shifts, such as tense–lax neutralisation, monophthongisation and reduced vowel inventories, closely follow the segmental patterns of speakers' first languages (Ejikeme & Onugha, 2022; Oluranti, 2025; Udofot, 2003). Consonantal features (for example /θ/ → [t]), cluster simplification and regressive devoicing further point to stable divergences from exonormative norms (Amoniyan, 2025; Oladipupo, 2014; Usman, 2022). At the suprasegmental level, syllable-timed rhythm and frequent stress placement similarly reflect deep first-language influence (Akinjobi & Atolagbe, 2018; Udofot, 2003).

Within the wider field of World Englishes, these patterns mean that NE emerges not as a defective approximation of RP but as an autonomous variety with its own identity-bearing features (Oluranti, 2025). Such evidence makes it increasingly difficult to justify continued reliance on external norms and instead points to the need for endonormative codification that makes principled use of corpus-based evidence (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022).

The corpus-informed framework proposed in this paper - recognising common NE features, prioritising intelligibility, incorporating data-driven methods such as high-variability phonetic training and encouraging shifts in teacher beliefs - offers a practical way of aligning classroom practice with the linguistic realities of Nigerian English (Henderson, 2023; Levis, 2005; Oluranti, 2025). Earlier work set out an Intelligibility-First Model for Nigerian ESL classrooms (Okpala, 2025). The present study extends that discussion by adding a corpus-based dimension, showing how evidence from ICE-Nigeria and related resources can be used to prioritise features and support the codification of NE in pronunciation teaching. Future empirical research should test and refine this model so that NE is not only described in scholarly literature but also taught and valued as a fully recognised variety within global English.

Recommendations for Materials

1. Regionally adapted, culturally relevant content that reflects Nigeria's linguistic diversity (Oluranti, 2025; Ojochegbe et al., 2024).
2. Focused IPA-based training with contrastive practice on difficult oppositions and L1-absent phonemes (Usman, 2022).
3. Corpus-informed content and tools (clear handouts, concordance tasks, targeted perception work, and use of Praat for acoustic awareness) (Boersma & Weenink, 2018; Qian & Deris, 2023).
4. Prioritisation of intelligibility-critical features, especially central vowels and vowel length (Idowu, 2019).

Recommendations for Teacher Training

1. Build awareness of NE phonology, both segmental and suprasegmental patterns, including education-conditioned cluster simplification (Amoniyan, 2025).

2. Place the Intelligibility Principle at the centre of instruction and present RP as one model among many (Ojochegbe et al., 2024).
3. Develop corpus literacy and basic speech-technology skills (Friginal, 2018; Qian & Deris, 2023).
4. Address linguistic insecurity and validate local accents as legitimate identities (Henderson, 2023; Ojochegbe et al., 2024).

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. **Comprehensive Acoustic and Sociolinguistic Analyses** Future research should expand acoustic-phonetic studies of Nigerian English, particularly using dynamic formant analysis for vowels and consonants, while also accounting for sociolinguistic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and urban–rural residence (Amoniyan, 2023; Udofot, 2003; Jowitt & Ugwuanyi, 2025).
2. **Pronunciation Pedagogy and Corpus-Informed Interventions** Empirical classroom trials are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of corpus-based phonetic modules for improving intelligibility, production accuracy and learner confidence. Such work should also consider codification of lexical and pronunciation variation to inform dictionaries, teaching norms and reference resources (Oladipupo & Akinola, 2022; Oluranti, 2025).
3. **Perception, Technology and Longitudinal Impact** Further studies should investigate how different listener groups perceive and evaluate Nigerian English, assess the role of emerging speech-technology tools in pronunciation training and track long-term outcomes of instructional interventions on intelligibility and communicative success (Henderson, 2023; Qian & Deris, 2023).

References

Akinjobi, A. A. & Atolagbe, A. A. (2018) English Phonology in a non-native Theory Analysis and Practice. Pumark: Lagos, in collaborating with Lagos State University Press. ISBN: 978-978-55344-3-6.

Amoniyan, O. M. (2025a). A sociolinguistic study of cluster simplification in Nigerian English. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies,* 1–19.

Amoniyan, O. (2025b). Variation in the formant of ethno-regional varieties in Nigerian English vowels. *Open Linguistics, 11.*

Amoniyan, O. (2023). Acoustic Correlates of Stress Patterns in Phrases and Compounds in the Sub-varieties of Educated Nigerian English. *International Journal of Linguistics Studies*. DOI:10.32996/ijls

Andersen, G. (2010). How to use corpus linguistics in sociolinguistics. In *The Routledge handbook of corpus linguistics* (pp. 547-562). Routledge.

Brand, S., & Ernestus, M. (2018). Listeners' processing of a given reduced word pronunciation variant directly reflects their exposure to this variant: Evidence from native listeners and learners of French. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *71*(5), 1240-1259.

Baranowski, M. (2013). Sociophonetics. In R. Bayley, R. Cameron, & C. Lucas (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics* (pp. 403-424). Oxford University Press.

Biber, D., Reppen, R., & Friginal, E. (2010). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use.* Cambridge University Press.

Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2018). *Praat: Doing phonetics by computer* (Version 6.0.37).

Boberg, C. (2023). Sociophonetics and sound change. In C. Strelluf (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of sociophonetics* (pp. 285-306). Routledge.

Celata, C., & Calamai, S. (2014). Introduction: Sociophonetic perspectives on language variation. In C. Celata & S.

Calamai (Eds.), *Advances in sociophonetics* (pp. 1-14). John Benjamins.

Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research.* John Benjamins.

Eckert, P., & Labov, W. (2017). Phonetics, phonology, and social meaning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 21*(4), 467-496.

Ejikeme, C. E. & Onugha C. (2022). Sociophonetic Analysis of Selected Vowel Phonemes in the Usages of Igbo Speakers of English.

Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Robinson, A. J. (Eds.). (2026). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world* (29th ed.). SIL Global. https://www.ethnologue.com/country/NG/

Flowerdew, L. (2015). Using corpus-based research and online academic corpora to inform writing of the discussion section of a thesis. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *20*, 58-68.

Falola, T. O. (2026, March 22). Nigeria. In Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria'

Friginal, E. (2018). *Corpus linguistics for English teachers: An introduction.* First Edition, Routledge.

Gilquin, G., De Cock, S., & Granger, S. (2010). Louvain international database of spoken English interlanguage (LINDSEI). *Presses universitaires de Louvain*.

Greenbaum, S. (Ed.). (1996). *Comparing English Worldwide: The International Corpus of English worldwide*. Clarendon Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198235828.001.0001

Gut, U. (2012). The LeaP corpus: A multilingual corpus of spoken learner German and learner English. In *Multilingual corpora and multilingual corpus analysis* (pp. 3-23). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gut, U. (2007). Learner corpora in second language prosody research and teaching. In J. Trouvain & U. Gut (Ed.), *Non-Native Prosody: Phonetic Description and Teaching*

Practice (pp. 145-170). Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198751.1.145

Henderson, A. (2023). Reframing intelligibility in global English pedagogy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics, 44*(1), 77-95.

Idowu, F. (2019). Pronunciation intelligibility of Nigerian speakers of English. *European Scientific Journal, 15*(20), 101–119.

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language.* Oxford University Press.

Jowitt, D., & Ugwuanyi, K. O. (2025). Nigerian English research: Developments and directions. *World Englishes*. Early View.

Kachru, B. B. (1986). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes.* Pergamon Press.

Labov, W. (1966). *The linguistic variable as a structural unit.*

Labov, W. (1972b). The isolation of contextual styles. In W. Labov (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic patterns* (pp. 70–109). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lee, D., & Swales, J. (2006). *A corpus-based approach to language learning.* University of Michigan Press.

Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*(3), 369-377.

Milroy, L., & Gordon, M. (2003). *Sociolinguistics: Method and interpretation.* Blackwell.

Mukherjee, J., & Rohrbach, J.M. (2006). Rethinking applied corpus linguistics from a language-pedagogical perspective: New departures in learner corpus research. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, 11*(2), 205-232.

Ojochegbe, A. T., Timothy, O. T., & Nicodemus, E. (2024). The politics of pronunciation: An examination of accent and identity in Nigerian English (NigE) teaching. *Journal of World Science*, 3(12), 1710–1716. https://doi.org/10.58344/jws.v3i12.1255

Okpala, C. U. (2025). Prioritising Intelligibility over Imitation: A sociophonetic approach to phonology instruction in Nigerian ESL classrooms. *Tansian University Journal of*

Arts, Management & Social Sciences (TUJAMSS), 9(3), 1–20. https://acjol.org/index.php/tujamss/issue/view/594

Okpala, C. U. (2014). *Phonological discrepancies between English and Uga dialect of Igbo: Problems to second language learners* [Unpublished Master's thesis], Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

O'Keeffe, A., & Farr, F. (2003). Using language corpora in initial teacher education: Pedagogic issues and practical applications. *TESOL Quarterly, 37*(3), 389–418.

Oladipupo, R., & Akinola, A. (2022). Nigerian English pronunciation preferences: A corpus-based survey of pronunciation variants. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 9*(1), 2061104.

Olaniyi, O. (2016). A variationist approach to Nigerian English phonology. *World Journal of English Language, 6*(3), 42-53.

Oluranti, M. O. (2025). Phonological variations in Nigerian English: An exploratory study of vowel shifts. *Abuja Journal of Humanities, 6.*

Pereira, M., Siswandi, S., & Hadi, K. A. (2025). Phonological variation in World Englishes: A comparative analysis. *Journal of World Englishes and Literary Studies, 2*(1), 1-12.

Pratt, T. (2020). Embodying "tech": Articulatory setting, phonetic variation, and social meaning. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 24*(3), 340-355.

Qian, B., & Deris, F. D. (2023). A corpus-based pronunciation teaching model: A conceptual paper. *Arab World English Journal, 14*(1), 71-88.

Römer, U. (2009). The inseparability of lexis and grammar: Corpus linguistic perspectives. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, *7*(1), 140-162.

Schneider, E. W. (2007). *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world.* Cambridge University Press.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca.* Oxford University Press.

Teubert, W. (2005). The use of corpora in language research. *Corpus Linguistics and Lingua Franca English, 2,* 1-25.

Thomson, R. I. (2018). High variability [pronunciation] training (HVPT): A proven technique about which every language teacher and learner ought to know. *Journal of Second Language Pronuciation, 4*(2), 208-231. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.17038.tho

Tiften, B. W. (1974). *The intelligibility of Nigerian English* [Doctoral thesis, University of London]. UCL Discovery. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1349554/

Udofot, I. (2003). Stress and rhythm in the Nigerian accent of English: A preliminary investigation. *English World-Wide, 24*(2), 201-220. http://doi.org/10.1075/eww.24.2.04udo

Unuabonah, F. O., Adebileje, A., Oladipupo, R. O., Fyanka, B., Odim, M., & Kupolati, O. (2022). Introducing the Historical Corpus of English in Nigeria (HiCE-Nig): *English Today*, *38*(3), 178-184. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078422000037

Usman, A. (2022). Phonological analysis of English consonant articulation of Hausa speakers of English: An optimality perspective. *European Journal of English Language Studies, 2*(2), 97-106.

Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca.* Oxford University Press.

Weinreich, U., Labov, W., & Herzog, M. I. (1968). Empirical foundations for a theory of language change. In W. P. Lehmann & Y. Malkiel (Eds.), *Directions for historical linguistics: A symposium* (pp. 97-195). University of Texas Press.

Wunder, E.M., Voormann, H., & Gut, U. (2010). The ICE Nigeria corpus project: Creating an open, rich and accurate corpus. *ICAME Journal, 34,* 78–88.