# Intonation and Learning English Language during Corona Virus Pandemic

Dina Mohammed Salman

Assistant Lecturer, Al-Turath University College, Baghdad, Iraq.
dina.mohammed@turath.edu.iq

*Abstract*— *The current paper attempts to shed light on the feasibility of teaching the undergraduate students intonation and its pragmatic meaning as a means of communication and learning especially during Covid-19 which has been one of the greatest crises in different sides of life including education. Students in Iraq especially those who study at universities just like their peers in all over the world have faced the difficulty of distance learning which abused them to cope with the online classrooms. Pre and post tests have been conducted about intonation and stress to a sample of (20) students who have studied English language in the department of English language at Al-Turath University College were divided into experimental and control groups EG and CG to check out their comprehension of intonation before and after instructions. The data was collected from questionnaire and then computed in a statistical analysis. Many diagrams and tables were submitted to point out the percentages of passed and failed students of both groups before and after treatment. The findings were so obvious that there has been improvement of the experimental group after treatment. However, the present research investigates the effectiveness of teaching intonation to English second learners to improve their pronunciation and ultimately help the students' online grasp learning. The whole attempts are for the sake of conducting a successful distance learning.*

*Keywords*— *intonation, stress, on line lectures, EG, CG.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

No one can deny the critical and dreadful situation of Covid 19 faced by all the global sectors, particularly the education and teaching processes in a sense to split lectures between distance and classroom. In distance learning, the pedagogical mission is in need for more influential means than delivering the abstract scientific information to SL by technological means like Google Zoom or Google Meet and the teachers be just like parrot. Honestly, this mission has a superior goal concerning how to motivate the humans' senses and energies. The way of teachers' explanations with the pitch of their voice varies over utterances plays a remarkable role in the instructional process in general whether the lectures are in the class or on line. It attracts the students and makes them pay their attentions to the lecture in general and to the important points of the scientific details in particular. One of these magic means will happen by changing the teachers' tones one rising and another falling and even stabling. These changeable movements of the tones are called 'intonation'. Intonation may therefore; be defined as pitch differences that extend over phonetic units larger than the syllable. It is indeed what welds strings of syllables or groups of phrases together.

Since learning English has its necessity and opens a lot of chances of careers for those who are learned. Those learners face many problems with both intonation and stress. One of these problems is how to be accurate and well pronounced as native speakers. Also they face the problem of how to understand and use the intended intonation and stress in the sentences. However, to those

who learn another language, intonation and stress are still a problem which is in need to care more about.

Both intonation and stress serve to discriminate meanings in English and are closely connected. Stress refers to the degree of prominence a syllable has. In the verb permit, for example, /-mít/ is more prominent than the first syllable /per-/, whereas in the noun *pérmit*, the first syllable is more prominent. In intonation, the voice goes up and down over utterances until it reaches the stressed syllable where it rises and then it may remain at that level, fade away or fall depending on the message to be conveyed. Accordingly, the most prominent syllable is associated with the highest pitch.

The correct representation of intonation is a crucial point that causes confusion to many foreign learners. In fact, it is not an easy task to teach students speaking foreign language with correct use of pitch and stress which lead to correct syntactic boundaries (Cooper, W. E. and J. M. Sorensen 1981).

The significant role of pronunciation lies in facilitating the understanding through communication and in its influence on the recipients to catch the intended meaning of the uttered speech. Thus, learners should spend extra time to go further and deeper with intonation and its features "English pronunciation is one of the most difficult but significant sub-skills to acquire, and learners should spend lot of time to improve their pronunciation" (Pourhosein 2016).

However, in communication people are still in need of something else; something more influential than the verbal ones. Tone is the appropriate solution for all what we have mentioned above. It refers to differences in the pitch over a single word. Imagine the possibilities if we answer with "NO" but with different tones. Sometimes tone can make others feel offense, impoliteness and ingratitude. Another instance "thank you" has many different possible meanings according to the changing in tones. If we begin with high tune and ends with low, this will show real gratitude. On the contrary, if we do the opposite, it shows offense and impoliteness. The word "right" also has two meanings according to rising and falling of our tone. If we rise our tone this will give the hearer the impression of invitation, while the impression of agreement if the speaker uses the high tone (Roach 2000).

Nevertheless, the perspective discourse of intonation can hold two kinds of relations: intonation and grammar from one side and intonation and expressions of attitudinal meaning on the other side. Jenkins (2004) clarifies that discourse intonation can be in its core the communicative function of intonation beyond the traditional ways which goes back to grammatical and attitudinal functions of

pitch, stress, … This issue has been raised during recent decades especially in the UK and it becomes as a technique for increasing the solidarity or harmony between the speakers and their interlocutors in order to encourage them to involve in the communication.

Unfortunately, many foreign learners are not willing to imitate the accents of native speakers, but there are a lot who are wishing to do so by realizing the phonetic environment alongside with the suprasegmental qualities for the second language (Jenkins 2004).

There have been so many linguists who make their suggestions to improve the learners' acquisition of intonation correctly. One of those is Roach (2009) who proposed that the most successful way to acquire well intonation is to talk to native speakers of English. Otherwise, they cannot learn right intonation though they may have good pronunciation.

## II.    THE GOAL OF THE RESEARCH

Intonation has not gained its deserved attention in the pedagogical process and the learners still find it a controversial phenomenon when they communicate with native speakers. This research attempts to shed the light on the importance of the intensive instruction of intonation in order to make students aware of the pitch movements and its effect on the meanings in both learning and communication after treatment.

## III.    THE FORMS AND PATTERNS OF INTONATION

As utterances vary in stress, they also vary in pitch. Four levels of pitch   usually used in English to make distinctions of meaning:

4. extra-high

3. high

2. normal

1. low

**Level 2** is the normal pitch of the speaking voice, i.e. the pitch a speaker employs for most of his utterances. For example,

2        3     1

He is at  hóme

We begin on level 2, the normal level, and remain there until we reach the primary stress, where the voice rises to level 3 and then falls to level one.

The pattern 231 is commonly used at the ends of statements, in wh-questions, i.e. questions beginning with

a question word: who, where, what, etc., and in commands as in

2          3 1

Eat your fóod

**Level 4**, the extra-high usually indicates surprise, emphasis, contradiction, excitement, e.g.

2        3   4

He is at hóme

**Level 3**. As usual, we begin on level 2, and when the voice reaches level 3, it remains there, e.g.

2        3   3

He is at home

The pattern 2-3-3 is commonly used at the end of yes-no questions and also to signal a question in a statement form, that is to say,

2        3   3

He is at  home      = Is he at home?

## IV.    INTONATION AND CONTEXT

Phoneticians adopt the idea that the production of intonation mainly depends on the perception of intonation.(Kees de Bot and Kate Mailfert 1982). Consequently, both pronunciation trainers and learners are indeed in need for more learning about intonation and its usage with reference to context. Many analysts advocated their effort to improve the learners productive skills by using correct intonation during communication. For instance, Clennell (1997) concentrates on learning discourse intonation in EAP in order to make the international students ready to converse efficiently with students of native speaking universities.

Another experience in the same vein was done by Pickering (2001) who proposed a section focuses on discourse intonation for the sake of improving pitch range.

Also we can find recent study about the significance of studying the different effects on the foreign learners' accents perspective according to communication context rather than on mimicking the surasegmental features of pronunciation (Derwing and Rossiter 2002a, b). Shockey (2003) emphasizes on the important role of listening on assisting learners to handle the daily problems of connected speech (Clennell, 1997)

## V.    FUNCTIONS OF INTONATION

Intonation has different functions: attitudinal, accentual, grammatical and discoursed functions. The attitudinal function one cannot imagine the impression of our speech if it is with no hint to attitude or feeling like anger, happiness, surprise or whatever. (Roach, 2009). With fall tone, the impression of end the conversation always happens. While rise tone gives the meaning of unfinished speech, just like when we ask question or talk and stop in the middle without complement for example:

Could you ↑ help me?

I called them right a ↑ way

It shan't ↑ harmful

(Roach, 2009)

Meanwhile, fall-rise gives the impression of uncertainty, request. like:

You v might be wrong

Could I v take it?

Rise-fall gives the impression of suspicion like:

She was ^ last

The second function of intonation is the accentual function comes from the term "accent". It concentrates on the tonic stress of the word. The stressed word has the focused importance.

The third function of intonation is the grammatical one which is considered to be crucial for it cuts the road against ambiguity of many uttered sentences if there is no reference to the intended intonation (Roach 2009). So many people of different sectors, particularly those who discuss all the time like philosophers and politicians tend to make some notes to those who are listening to their controversial hints. Those notes are like pauses on the intended words, prepositions, auxiliaries….. are called tone-unit boundary. For instance: if we compare two possible explanations for the same sentences according to the placement of stress and pitch as follows:

a)       Con'versations which resemble composition are so interesting

b)       Conv versations which resemble composition are so interesting.

The first sentence has limited meaning while the second one has generally a clear and accurate meaning.

As to the function of intonation in discourse, every sentence can be analyzed according to grammatical rules. But this analysis has a restricted extent with no benefit into communication. Shared knowledge between the speakers

accomplished with the intonation can bring the intended meaning to the listener. In addition, the intonation can pay the listener attention to the focused message. By using correct intonation, we can response and the listener can guess the answer correctly. Although many phoneticians find this function more important than other functions (Roach 2009), but the place of intonation is still ambiguous and mysterious to most learners.

## VI. FACTORS AFFECTED INTONATION'S COMPREHENSION

Acquiring another language is still a controversial issue and many obstacles prohibit the phonological outcomes as they are expected to be. To Nagle (2018), some of these obstacles are learners' age, ear perception, instruction. Acquiring another language is like acquiring the mother tongue. Lenneberg (1967) sees that the earlier it would be, the better it will be; obviously, the acquisition of a foreign language becomes more difficult after the puberty period.

If we come to the second obstacle which is ear perception. It is somehow related to the physical property. Most of teachers don't pay attention and neglect this point; some have good ear to acquire another language easily but others have not.

The most important and complicated factor is the role of the teachers in indoctrination the students the right and accurate ways to acquire good pronunciation and to be native-alike by specifying a period of time for explaining this component at least one hour every week.

## VII. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The design of this study is simple and qualitative one. The subjects of this study are (20) students who are divided into two groups; experimental and control groups. Throughout, it becomes clear that the subjects of this study are with no linguistic background about intonation and stressed syllables and their first results (pretest) are not deserved to be mentioned. Consequently, these two groups have exposed to pre and posttests of (14) sentences centering on *intonation* and *stressed syllables*. Of which 7 sentences have falling, rising and level intonation patterns and 7 others includes words of different stressed syllables. The same sentences were exposed to both the experimental and control groups in the posttest. The first group is to refer to the placement of intonation for each sentence, and the second one to tick on the stressed syllables. Between the pre and posttests, the experimental group have been instructed the patterns and meanings of intonation in different situations. While this will not happen to the control group. The findings of the two groups are so

important to be compared before and after treatment by putting them into statistical diagrams and tables to refer to the percentile changeable results.

## VIII. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of the pretest for both groups are so weak and with no value to mention. Two sessions have been given to the experimental group only after pretest. These two sessions were intensive with detailed explanation of intonation and stressed syllables by utilizing lab and audible videos for native speakers while they are interacting with different kinds of intonation and stress. Within a short period of time about two weeks, the students have been left before the posttest. Then, a post test was conducted to both groups.

The results of both groups are computed statistically. Two tables and seven diagrams were conducted to show the difference between the students' result whether failed or successful in both pre and posttests. Also two diagrams have been conducted to show the outcome of every group in both pre and posttests as a comparison which is called "standard deviation" as clarified below.

The percentages of the passed and failed students in both experimental and control groups in the pretest shows that the students find a serious difficulty in coping with the intonation of the sentences and placing the primary stress over syllables. The improvement in the experimental group's performance was due to instruction and treatment which the students have got after pretest and which proves the significance of focused explanation about intonation and its features.

*Table1. The result of the EG in the pre and posttests*
*According to intonation and stress*

| No | Types | Pass in pretest | Percentage | Pass in Posttest | percentage |
|----|-------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| 1 | Intonation | 1 | 10% | 5 | 50% |
| 2 | Stress | 2 | 20% | 6 | 60% |

*Table2. The result of the CG in the pre and posttests*
*According to intonation and stress*

| No | Types | Pass in pretest | Percentage | Pass in posttest | percentage |
|----|-------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| 1 | Intonation | 2 | 20% | 2 | 20% |
| 2 | Stress | 2 | 20% | 2 | 20% |

Diagram1: The result of the passed and failed students of the CG

in the pre and posttests according to intonation and stress

Diagram2: The results of the passed and failed students of EG in the pretest According to intonation

Diagram3: The results of the passed and failed students of EG in the pretest according to stress

Diagram 4: The result of the passed and failed students

of EG in post test according to intonation

Diagram 5: The result of the passed and failed students

of EG in post test according to stress

Diagram 6: The standard deviation of passed students

of both EG and CG in pre and post tests according to intonation

Diagram 7: The standard deviation of passed students

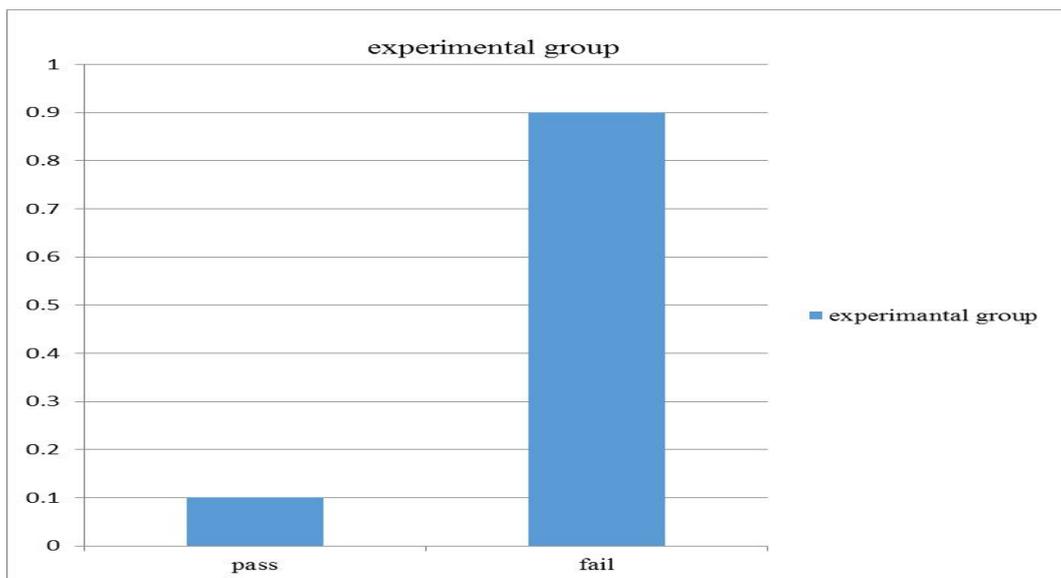of both EG and CG in pre and posttests according to stress
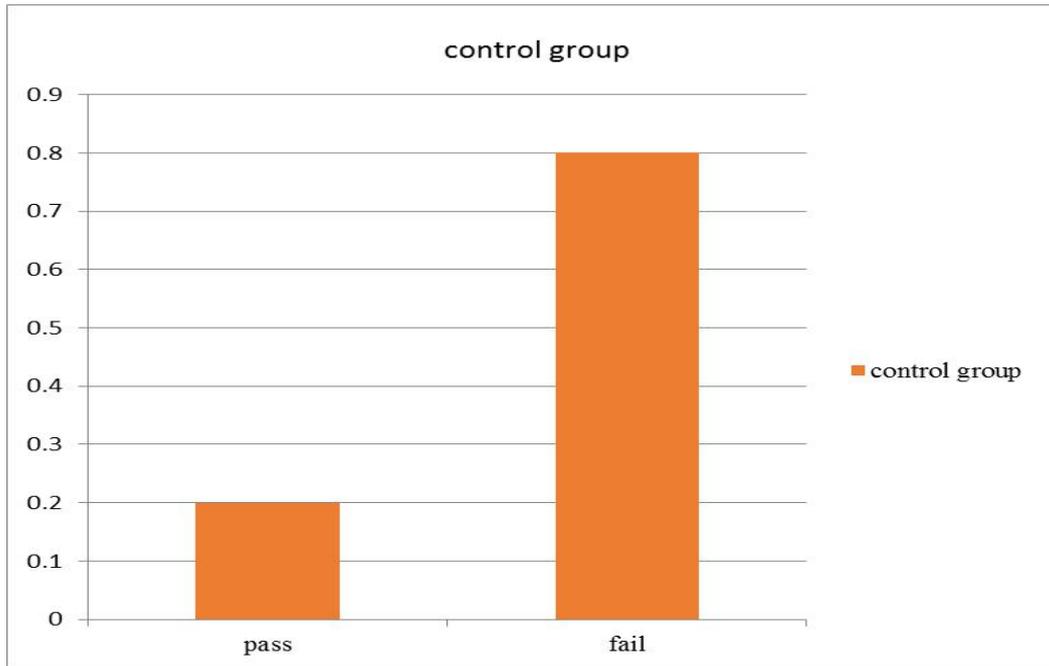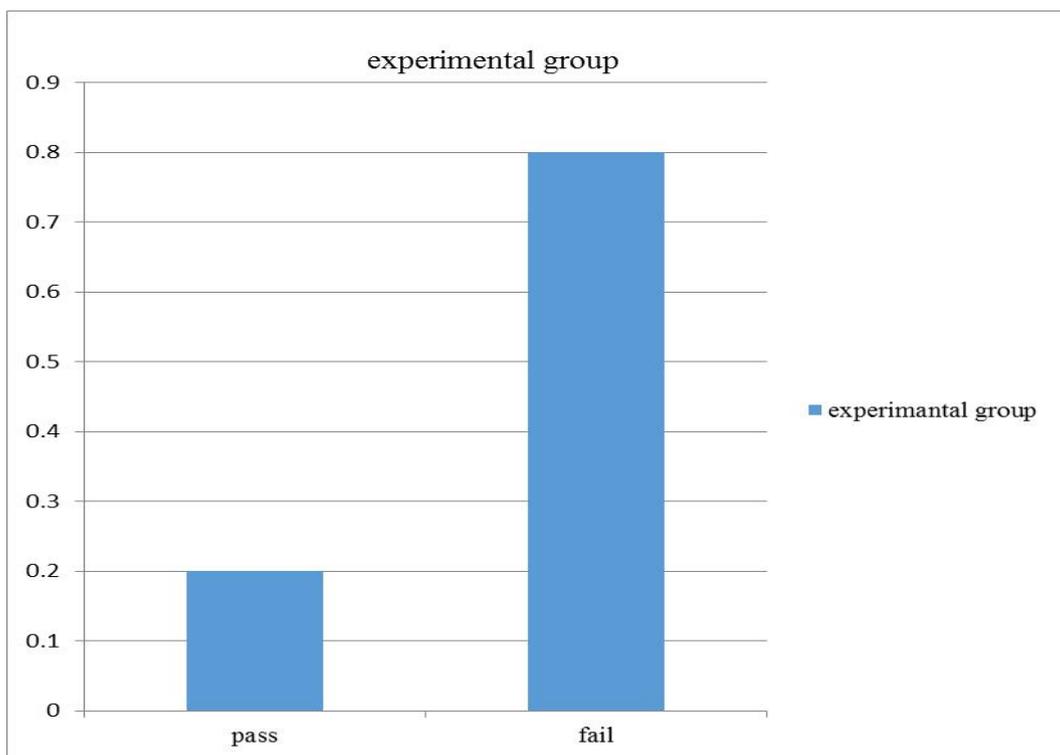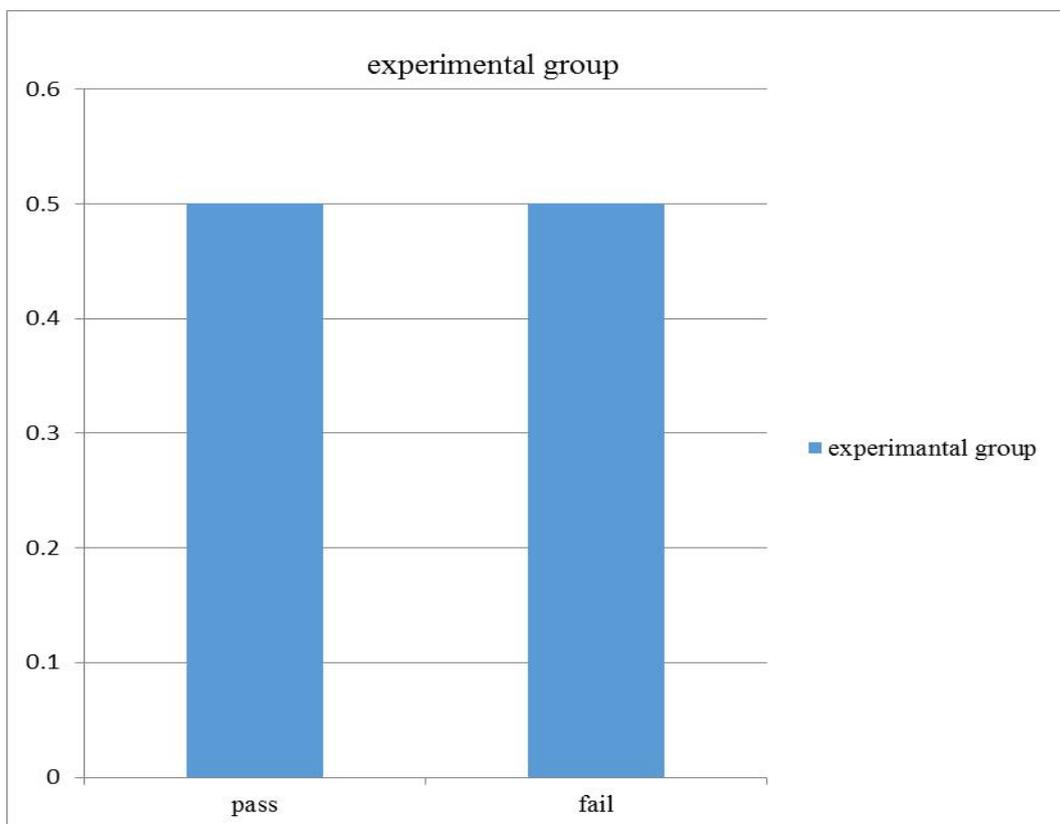


*Diagram 1*
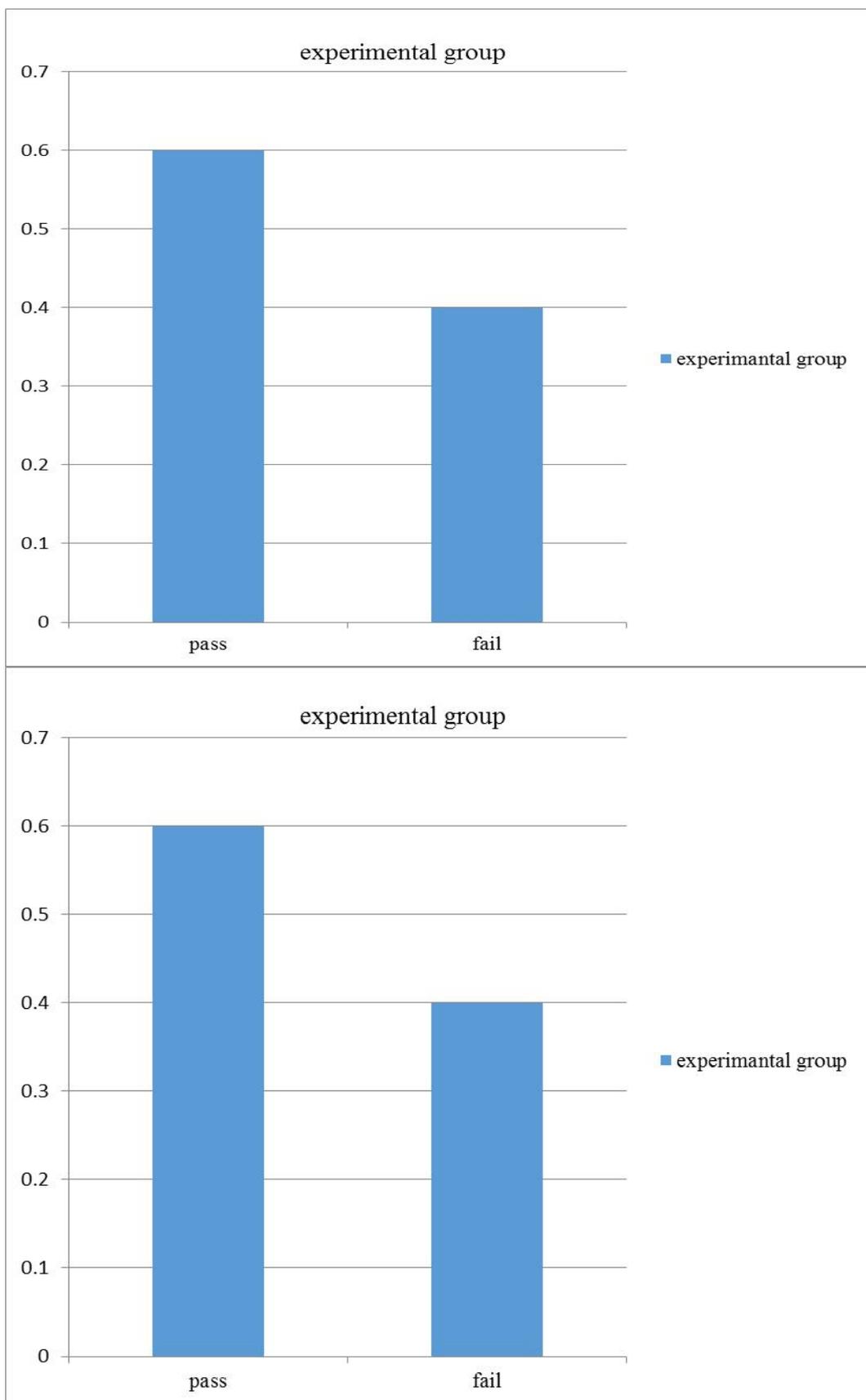


*Diagram 2*

*Diagram 3*

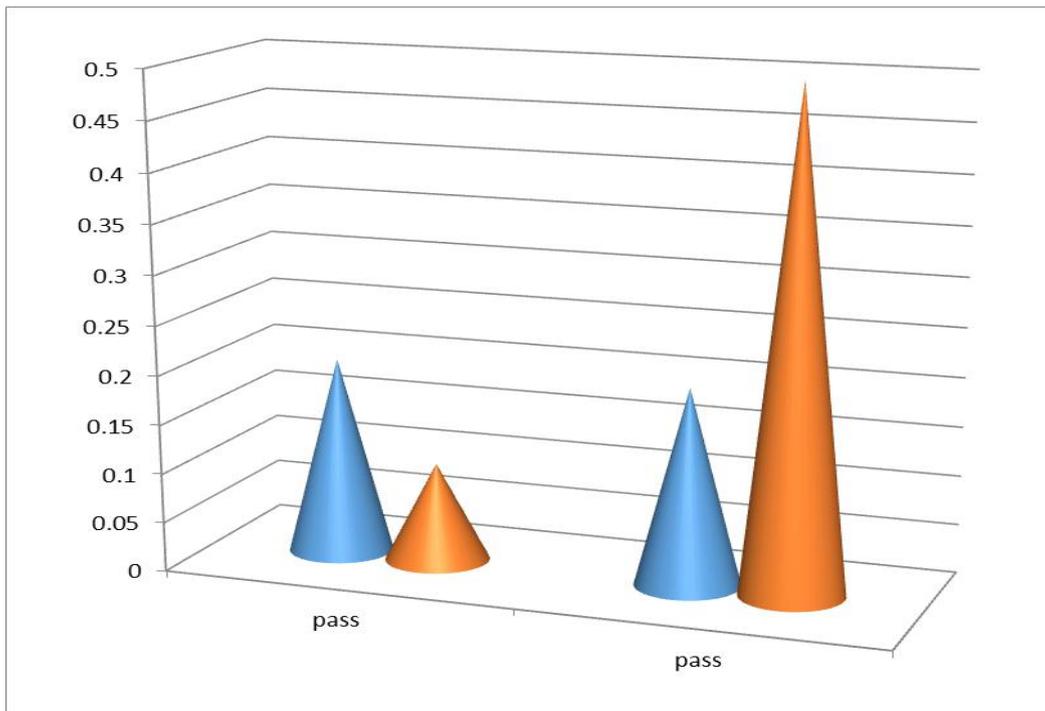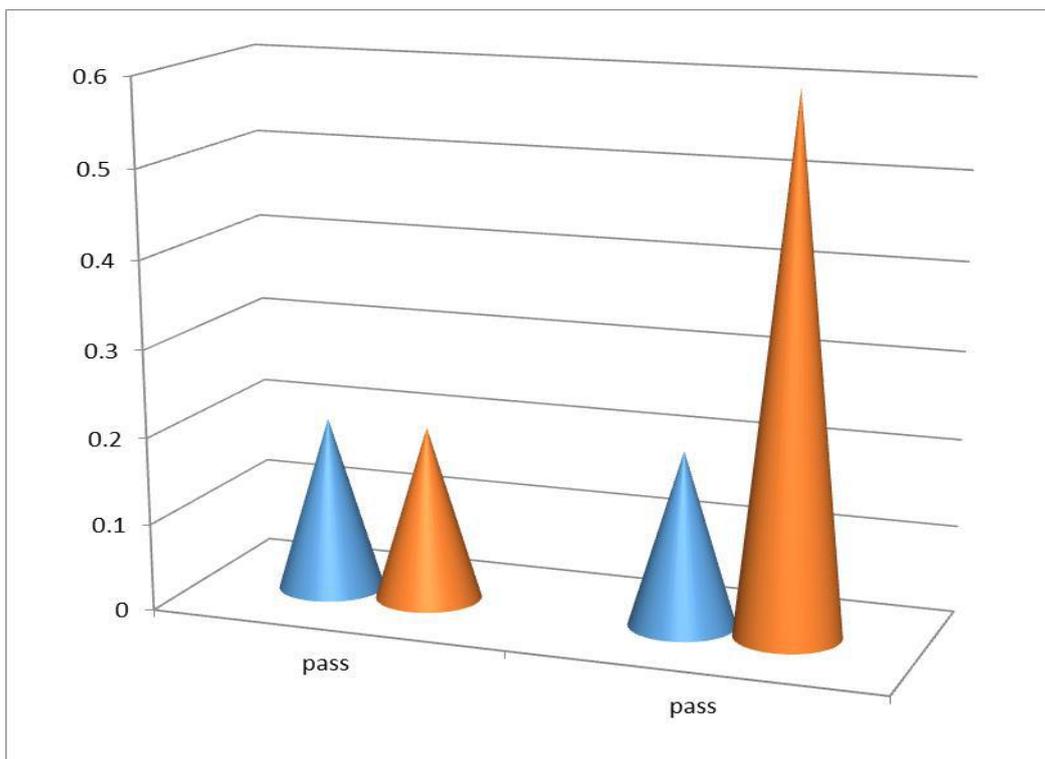

*Diagram 4*

Diagram 5

Diagram 6



*Diagram 7*

## IX.    CONCLUSION, SUGGESTION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research tries to renew the interest in pronunciation just like other skills which play a fair role in teaching English as a second language. It attempts to enable the learners to be more confident in speaking English correctly, bring him fairly close to native speakers and make him speak relevantly to context and other linguistic phenomena.

If the learners aspire to be competent and well co-operative persons with native speakers while they are interacting, they have to acquire the correct features of intonation and try to listen more and more to native speakers outside classroom by using listening audios, chat, ….etc.

From the statistical findings, the students have a confusion about locations of stress in sentences and cannot distinguish where to put rising, falling and flat intonation in different types of sentences. In fact, the limited time of the lectures bans most of the teachers to pay the required attention to intonation inside most of them follow the traditional ways of teaching which focus on grammar and structural patterns as a running way from the complexity of pronunciation and its details.

Lack of visual or listening drill and motivation to teach this subject lead both learners and lectures to be less confidents and more manipulated in the pronunciation of the target language.

One of many suggestions and recommendations to improve the pronunciation is that both the teachers within the learners should pay more attention to this component and give it the importance that it deserves to understand the target language. In addition, the teachers have to take advanced courses in intonation to be familiarized and updated with the new techniques to teach this complicated part of language (intonation) especially the goal language has a fair difference with their mother tongue. Beside, encouraging the students to speak English constantly and breaking the ice of shyness and let them express themselves constantly as the lecture is ongoing and correcting the erroneous pronunciation without giving them the impression that they commit a big mistake because even the teachers are non-native speakers and both are in need of continuous sequence of the pronunciation.

## REFERENCES

[1] Clennell, C. (1997). "Raising the pedagogic status of discourse intonation teaching". Language Teaching Journal 51, 2, 117-134. ELT Journal, Volume 51, Issue 2, April 1997, Pages 117-125, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/51.2.117.

[2] Cooper. WE, Sorensen, JM. (1977). "Fundamental Frequency Contours at Syntactic Boundaries." Journal of the Acoustical Society of America". 62,682-692.

[3] Cooper, W. E. and J. M. Sorensen. (1981). "Modeling the Fundamental Frequency of the Voice". New York: Springer-Verlag. Derwing and Rossiter, 2002a, b

[4] Jenkins, Jennifer. (2004). Jenkins'Research in Teaching Pronunciation and Intonation' ANNUAL REVIEW OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS.. University of Southampton.

[5] Josselyne Adriana, Maria Daleska and Ulises Joher Crus. 2020. Evaluation of the teaching learning process of pronunciation in English as a foreign language with emphasis in intonation in 10th grades at Instituo Nacional Heroesy Martires De La Reforma (INHMARE) Masaya, second semester 2019.

[6] Lenneberg, EH. (1967). "Age and Critical Period hypothesis". https://www. sciencedirect.com.

[7] Roach, Peter. third edition, (2000). "English Phonetics and Phonology". Cambridge University Press.

[8] Roach, Peter. Fourth edition, (2009). "English Phonetics and Phonology". Cambridge University Press.

[9] Pickering, L. (2001). "The Role of Tone Choice in Improving ITA Communication in the Classroom". TESOL Quarterly35, 2, 233-255.

[10] Pourhosein, Abbas.(2016)"How Can Students Improve Their Reading Comprehension Skill?" Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani. Department of English Language Translation. Islamic Azad University, Lahijan Branch, Iran.

[11] Shockey, L. (2003). "Sound Pattern of Spoken English". Oxford: Blackwell.

Pre and post test

Dear colleges, the following test has been designed to explore the        pronunciation

Difficulties you have when using stress and intonation in word and sentences.

Name:        _____     . Grade:_____ . Date:_____ .

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Are you going? | ↑ | ↓ |
| 2. | I live in France. | ↑ | ↓ |
| 3. | Which restaurant do you prefer to eat at? | ↑ | ↓ |
| 4. | She got a dog! | ↑ | ↓ |
| 5. | You have a new house, aren't you? | ↑ | ↓ |
| 6. | How old  are you? | ↑ | ↓ |
| 7. | The weather is nice today, isn't it? | ↑ | ↓ |

II. Underline the stressed syllables of the following words:

1. De—ter---mine

2. Ho---ne----st

3. Att----em----pt

4. Ato ---mes---phere

5. A---bou----t

6. De---ci---de

7. Pro---je---ct