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The sound rule: phonological awareness and correct use of the indefinite articles a and an

La regla del sonido: conciencia fonológica y uso correcto de los artículos indefinidos a y an

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the importance of phonological awareness in the correct use of the English indefinite articles A and AN through a qualitative narrative literature review with a descriptive-analytical approach, framed within the 2020–2024 period. The documentary corpus comprised 15 scientific publications issued between 2020 and 2024, selected purposively rather than through an exhaustive systematic search. The publications were examined across three analytical dimensions: English article acquisition and grammatical accuracy; phonological awareness and pronunciation-based learning; and instructional strategies and corrective feedback. The reviewed studies addressed first-language influence, grammatical difficulties, auditory perception, pronunciation instruction, and pedagogical approaches in different educational contexts. The synthesis highlighted the importance of distinguishing written letters from spoken sounds, since the selection between A and AN depends on the initial sound of the following expression rather than its spelling. Furthermore, the literature provided theoretical and pedagogical support for integrating sound recognition, listening activities, explicit grammatical explanations, and corrective feedback into English language instruction. However, most studies did not directly evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies for teaching the A/AN distinction. The conclusions are interpretative and cannot be generalized to all English as a foreign language learning contexts. Future research should evaluate pronunciation-based instructional strategies through classroom interventions and document systematic procedures for selecting scientific literature.

Keywords: indefinite articles; phonological awareness; English grammar; pronunciation instruction; English as a foreign language.

RESUMEN

La investigación analizó la importancia de la conciencia fonológica en el uso correcto de los artículos indefinidos A y AN en inglés mediante una revisión narrativa de literatura científica, con enfoque cualitativo y alcance descriptivo-analítico, enmarcada en el período 2020–2024. El corpus documental estuvo integrado por 15 publicaciones científicas correspondientes a los años 2020–2024, seleccionadas intencionalmente, sin una búsqueda sistemática exhaustiva. Los estudios se analizaron a partir de tres dimensiones: adquisición de artículos ingleses y precisión gramatical; conciencia fonológica y aprendizaje basado en la pronunciación; y estrategias didácticas y retroalimentación correctiva. Las investigaciones abordaron la influencia de la lengua materna, las dificultades gramaticales, la percepción auditiva, la enseñanza de la pronunciación y los enfoques pedagógicos en diferentes contextos educativos. La síntesis destacó la importancia de diferenciar las letras escritas de los sonidos del habla, debido a que la elección entre A y AN depende del sonido inicial de la expresión siguiente y no exclusivamente de su escritura. Asimismo, la literatura aportó fundamentos teóricos y pedagógicos para integrar el reconocimiento de sonidos, las actividades auditivas, las explicaciones gramaticales explícitas y la retroalimentación correctiva en la enseñanza del inglés. Sin embargo, la mayoría de los estudios no evaluaron directamente la eficacia de estas estrategias para enseñar la distinción entre A y AN. Las conclusiones fueron interpretativas y no permiten generalizar los resultados a todos los contextos de aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. Se recomienda desarrollar investigaciones experimentales en el aula y documentar procedimientos sistemáticos de selección bibliográfica.

Palabras clave: artículos indefinidos; conciencia fonológica; gramática inglesa; enseñanza de la pronunciación; inglés como lengua extranjera.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language involves an educational process that integrates grammatical, phonological, and communicative knowledge essential for developing language proficiency. Within this learning process, the correct use of the indefinite articles *A* and *AN* represents an important aspect of English grammar. However, acquiring these grammatical structures can be challenging due to differences between learners' native languages and the linguistic characteristics of English. Kim and Song (2020) examined the influence of the age at which English learning begins on article acquisition, while Balenović (2024) investigated difficulties associated with learners' first language and age. Both studies suggest that the acquisition of English articles involves several linguistic and educational factors that should be considered when developing effective teaching strategies.

In this study, indefinite articles are understood as the grammatical forms *A* and *AN*, primarily used before singular countable nouns when the referent is not presented as uniquely identifiable to the listener or reader. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognize and distinguish the sound structures of spoken language, while pronunciation involves the production of speech sounds according to the phonetic characteristics of a language. Although these concepts are interconnected, they perform different functions in language learning. The selection between *A* and *AN* depends on the initial sound of the following expression rather than exclusively on its written representation. This phonological distinction should be differentiated from other grammatical and semantic difficulties associated with the English article system (Kwame & Westergaard, 2020; Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024).

The relationship between pronunciation and spelling is particularly relevant to understanding this grammatical rule. The indefinite article *A* is used before consonant sounds, as illustrated by *a book*, *a university*, and *a European country*. Conversely, *AN* precedes vowel sounds, as demonstrated by *an apple*, *an hour*, and *an MP3 player*. These examples indicate that the initial letter of a word does not always correspond to its initial sound. Almalki and Algethami (2022) investigated the potential contributions of extensive listening and orthographic information to English pronunciation development. Their research provides a useful foundation for examining the relationship between auditory perception and written language, although it does not specifically investigate the alternation between *A* and *AN*.

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Research on English article acquisition has identified difficulties associated with differences between learners' first languages and English. Kwame and Westergaard (2020) examined the acquisition of English articles among native speakers of Dagbani, while Alzamil (2023) explored the influence of Arabic linguistic characteristics on the acquisition of English indefinite articles. Similarly, Bakri (2023) investigated errors involving definite and indefinite articles among Saudi learners of English. These investigations contribute to understanding the complexity of the English article system. Nevertheless, their findings must be interpreted according to the linguistic backgrounds and educational characteristics of the populations studied.

The incorrect use of English articles also represents a significant challenge in learners' written production. Nasser (2022) examined difficulties related to article usage among university students learning English as a foreign language, while Park (2023) investigated patterns of article usage through a corpus-based analysis of Korean learners' written production. These studies highlight the relevance of error analysis in identifying grammatical difficulties and improving instructional approaches. However, errors resulting from the phonological selection of *A* and *AN* must be distinguished from those associated with definiteness, specificity, and article omission, since these phenomena involve different linguistic mechanisms.

Pronunciation plays an important role in developing English communicative competence because it enables learners to recognize and produce sound distinctions necessary for effective communication. Galante and Piccardo (2022) discussed pronunciation teaching in relation to speech intelligibility and comprehensibility, while Gordon and Darcy (2022) investigated the effects of explicit instruction in segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features. These contributions support the integration of pronunciation activities into language instruction. Nevertheless, they do not independently demonstrate that a particular pronunciation-teaching strategy improves learners' accuracy in selecting the indefinite articles *A* and *AN*.

From a pedagogical perspective, pronunciation instruction can incorporate auditory discrimination, repetition, word comparison, and contextualized oral production. Alghazo et al. (2023) examined instructional approaches based on sound perception and production, while Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) explored task-based pronunciation teaching in

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English as a foreign language. These studies provide theoretical and pedagogical foundations for designing activities in which learners identify initial vowel and consonant sounds and select the corresponding indefinite article. However, the instructional interventions examined in these studies should not be interpreted as direct evaluations of the *A* versus *AN* rule.

Corrective feedback constitutes another important component of grammatical learning. Lee and Yoon (2020) investigated the effects of written corrective feedback on learners' use of the English indefinite article, while Sarandi and Nassaji (2024) examined the frequency of corrective recasts during article-learning activities in a computer-mediated environment. These studies provide perspectives on the potential contributions of error correction and metalinguistic explanation to grammatical development. Nevertheless, their findings cannot automatically be generalized to learners from different educational levels, linguistic backgrounds, or instructional contexts.

The present study synthesizes a purposively selected corpus of 15 publications dated 2020–2024. It connects research on article acquisition, phonological awareness, and language instruction while differentiating direct findings from pedagogical implications.

The research problem addressed in this review concerns the need to connect three dimensions of English language learning that are frequently examined from different perspectives: grammatical knowledge of indefinite articles, recognition of initial speech sounds, and pedagogical strategies supporting accurate article selection. Integrating these dimensions helps explain why memorizing rules based exclusively on written letters may be insufficient for correctly choosing between *A* and *AN*. The relevance of this study lies in providing a critical synthesis that clarifies the phonological basis of article selection and supports the development of contextualized instructional activities.

In this context, the objective of this article is to analyze the importance of phonological awareness in the correct use of the English indefinite articles A and AN through a narrative review of scientific literature published between 2020 and 2024, with the purpose of identifying learning difficulties and instructional strategies that may contribute to the development of grammatical accuracy and communicative competence. The analysis focuses on the relationship between pronunciation and spelling, the identification of initial vowel and consonant sounds, first-language influence, common grammatical errors, explicit instruction, listening practice, and corrective feedback. Based on this objective, the following

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research question is proposed: How does phonological awareness contribute to the correct use of the indefinite articles A and AN in English as a foreign language learning?

2. METHODOLOGY

a) Research Design

This qualitative, descriptive-analytical study adopts a narrative literature review design. It compares published research on English article acquisition, pronunciation, phonological awareness, and corrective feedback. Its conclusions are derived from documentary synthesis rather than a new classroom intervention.

The documentary corpus comprises 15 identified scientific publications dated 2020–2024. This is the effective publication window represented in the analysis; publications issued in 2025–2026 were not part of the selected corpus, and their absence must not be interpreted as evidence that no relevant research exists in those years.

The analytical framework considers each publication's research objectives, educational context, methodology, principal findings, and limitations. Particular attention is given to distinguishing studies directly addressing indefinite articles from investigations examining pronunciation or language instruction more broadly.

The narrative review synthesizes relevant scientific contributions, identifies conceptual relationships, and formulates research-informed pedagogical considerations rather than estimating pooled intervention effects.

b) Documentary Corpus

The corpus consists of 15 publications issued between 2020 and 2024 and selected intentionally for their relevance to English articles, phonological awareness, pronunciation, or corrective feedback. The review is not an exhaustive inventory of studies published within those years.

The publications represent different educational and linguistic contexts, including studies involving learners whose first languages differ from English. Their contributions are examined comparatively, considering differences in research populations, learning environments, methodological approaches, and investigated linguistic structures.

The literature is organized into five thematic categories to facilitate the interpretation of its contributions to the research objective.

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Table 1

Characterization of the 15 Scientific Publications and Their Main Thematic Categories

No.	Author(s) and Year	Study type / context	Main focus / documented finding	Main Category
1	Alghazo et al. (2023)	Instructional comparison	Perception/production approaches; pronunciation acquisition; sample size not specified in the information reviewed.	III. Pronunciation
2	Almalki and Algethami (2022)	Experimental intervention	University EFL learners; small, statistically non-significant pronunciation gains.	III. Pronunciation
3	Alzamil (2023)	L2 acquisition study	Najdi and Hijazi Arabic speakers; nunation and contrast a versus Ø, not a/an alternation.	II. Linguistic difficulties
4	Bakri (2023)	Error analysis	Saudi English learners; misuse of definite and indefinite articles.	II. Linguistic difficulties
5	Balenović (2024)	L2 acquisition study	Croatian young EFL learners; first-language and age factors.	I. Article acquisition
6	Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024)	Multifactorial analysis	Learner English article accuracy; grammatical and semantic factors.	I. Article acquisition
7	Galante and Piccardo (2022)	Pedagogical discussion	Pronunciation intelligibility and comprehensibility.	III. Pronunciation
8	Gordon and Darcy (2022)	Pronunciation intervention	Segmental and suprasegmental instruction; pronunciation-related outcomes.	III. Pronunciation

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No.	Author(s) and Year	Study type / context	Main focus / documented finding	Main Category
9	Kim and Song (2020)	Acquisition study	EFL learners; learning onset and English article acquisition.	I. Article acquisition
10	Kwame and Westergaard (2020)	L2 acquisition study	L1 Dagbani learners; English article acquisition.	I. Article acquisition
11	Lee and Yoon (2020)	Feedback study	EFL writing; written corrective feedback on indefinite article usage.	IV. Instructional strategies
12	Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023)	Pedagogical research	EFL task-based pronunciation teaching; pedagogical implications.	V. Communicative learning
13	Nasser (2022)	Reported experimental study	EFL university students; difficulties in article usage.	II. Linguistic difficulties
14	Park (2023)	Corpus analysis	Korean L2 English writing corpus; noun phrase “part-time jobs”.	II. Linguistic difficulties
15	Sarandi and Nassaji (2024)	Computer-mediated experiment	61 Turkish university learners; recast frequency, immediate/delayed outcomes.	IV. Instructional strategies

Note. Each publication is assigned to one primary thematic category according to its predominant research contribution. However, individual studies may address more than one dimension of English language learning. The classifications are intended to support the narrative analysis and do not imply methodological equivalence among the publications.

The documentary corpus includes studies directly related to English indefinite articles and broader investigations concerning pronunciation and instructional practices. This distinction

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is important because research on general pronunciation development does not necessarily demonstrate improvement in the specific selection between *A* and *AN*.

The inclusion of international research provides comparative perspectives on English language learning. Nevertheless, findings obtained from specific linguistic populations cannot automatically be generalized to all EFL learners.

c) Documentary Inclusion Criteria

The corpus was organized by thematic relevance to the objective, the educational contribution of each publication, identifiable bibliographic data, and the availability of methodological or conceptual findings suitable for narrative comparison.

The following characteristics describe the criteria used to organize the selected publications:

1. Thematic relevance. Publications addressing English indefinite articles, grammatical accuracy, phonological awareness, pronunciation instruction, or linguistic difficulties associated with English language acquisition.

2. Educational contribution. Studies examining learning difficulties, instructional strategies, corrective feedback, auditory discrimination, grammatical development, or pedagogical approaches applicable to EFL teaching.

3. Publication period. Publications dated from 2020 through 2024, corresponding to the observed corpus.

4. Scientific identification. Publications containing sufficient bibliographic information to identify their authors, publication year, title, academic journal, and DOI when available.

5. Methodological relevance. Research presenting identifiable objectives, methodological approaches, educational contexts, and findings relevant to the topic under investigation.

6. Contribution to the research objective. Publications providing empirical evidence, theoretical explanations, or pedagogical perspectives that contribute to understanding the relationship between phonological awareness and English article usage.

These criteria describe the purposive inclusion of the 15 publications presented in Tables 1 and 2. A reproducible record of the bibliographic searches and screening process is unavailable, including database identification, search strings, screening counts, and individual exclusions. This limits the reproducibility of the selection process.

The narrative synthesis groups the selected studies into five thematic categories according to their relevance to the research question.

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The evidence is interpreted according to the methodological characteristics of each publication, distinguishing empirical findings from theoretical explanations and pedagogical recommendations.

d) Documentary Analysis Procedure

The 15 scientific publications are classified into five main thematic categories according to their predominant contributions.

1. Acquisition of English articles (4 publications).

This category includes studies examining the acquisition and grammatical accuracy of English articles, considering factors such as age, first-language characteristics, and second-language development.

The selected publications are Balenović (2024), Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024), Kim and Song (2020), and Kwame and Westergaard (2020).

2. Linguistic difficulties and grammatical errors (4 publications).

This category addresses errors associated with the use of English definite and indefinite articles, including first-language influence, grammatical confusion, and recurring patterns of incorrect usage.

The selected publications are Alzamil (2023), Bakri (2023), Nasser (2022), and Park (2023).

3. Phonological awareness and pronunciation instruction (4 publications).

This category examines the importance of pronunciation learning, auditory perception, and explicit instruction in developing English language proficiency.

Although these publications do not necessarily investigate the *A* versus *AN* distinction directly, they provide relevant foundations for understanding the role of sound recognition in language instruction.

The selected publications are Alghazo et al. (2023), Almalki and Algethami (2022), Galante and Piccardo (2022), and Gordon and Darcy (2022).

4. Corrective feedback and instructional strategies (2 publications).

This category examines instructional approaches involving corrective feedback, grammatical explanation, and digital learning environments.

The selected publications are Lee and Yoon (2020) and Sarandi and Nassaji (2024).

5. Task-based pronunciation and communicative learning (1 publication).

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This category addresses the relationship between pronunciation instruction and communicative tasks, emphasizing the pedagogical application of pronunciation research. The selected publication is Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023).

The five thematic categories are subsequently integrated into three analytical dimensions:

Dimension 1: Acquisition and grammatical accuracy of English articles.

This dimension combines four publications on article acquisition and four studies addressing linguistic difficulties and grammatical errors, comprising eight publications.

Dimension 2: Phonological awareness and pronunciation-based learning.

This dimension integrates four studies on pronunciation instruction and one publication addressing task-based pronunciation teaching, comprising five publications.

Dimension 3: Pedagogical strategies and corrective feedback.

This dimension includes two publications examining corrective feedback and instructional approaches to grammatical development.

Together, the three dimensions comprise 8, 5, and 2 publications, respectively, representing the 15 documents without duplication.

The documentary analysis is structured around the identification and comparison of each study's objectives, methodological characteristics, principal contributions, and limitations. The synthesis seeks to identify conceptual relationships between pronunciation, grammatical knowledge, and the correct selection of English indefinite articles.

Particular attention is given to the phonological principle governing the use of *A* and *AN*. The article *A* precedes a consonant sound, whereas *AN* precedes a vowel sound. Therefore, the analysis considers how sound recognition, auditory discrimination, explicit grammatical instruction, and corrective feedback may support learners in understanding this distinction.

The synthesis also informs potential EFL teaching applications involving initial-sound recognition, contextualized article choice, and corrective feedback.

3. RESULTS

The five methodological categories were integrated into three comparative dimensions: (1) English article acquisition and grammatical accuracy (8 publications); (2) phonological awareness and pronunciation-based learning (5 publications); and (3) instructional

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strategies and corrective feedback (2 publications). Table 2 summarizes the contributions and limitations of the 15 studies, while Table 3 presents potential pedagogical applications.

Table 2

Main Research Contributions and Interpretative Limitations of the Selected Publications

Study and Research Focus	Main Contribution	Interpretative Limitation
Alghazo et al. (2023) — Pronunciation instruction	Examines instructional approaches involving the perception and production of English speech sounds.	Does not directly establish improvement in the selection of A and AN.
Almalki and Algethami (2022) — Listening and orthography	Experimental listening/orthography conditions yielded small, statistically non-significant pronunciation gains.	No demonstrated effectiveness for A/AN selection or clear significant advantage of orthography.
Alzamil (2023) — Indefinite article acquisition	Examines English indefinite articles and Arabic nunation, chiefly contrasting a and the zero article (Ø).	Does not specifically test sound-conditioned alternation between a and an.
Bakri (2023) — Grammatical errors	Investigates incorrect usage of definite and indefinite English articles among Saudi learners.	Does not isolate phonological awareness as the only explanation for errors.
Balenović (2024) — Article acquisition	Examines first-language influence and age-related factors in the acquisition of English articles.	Findings depend on the linguistic and educational characteristics of the participants.
Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024) — Grammatical accuracy	Analyzes multiple factors associated with accurate English article usage.	Article accuracy encompasses grammatical and semantic

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Study and Research Focus	Main Contribution	Interpretative Limitation
		dimensions beyond the A/AN distinction.
Galante and Piccardo (2022) — Pronunciation pedagogy	Discusses pronunciation teaching in relation to intelligibility and comprehensibility.	Provides broader pronunciation perspectives rather than direct evidence about A and AN.
Gordon and Darcy (2022) — Explicit pronunciation instruction	Examines the effects of teaching segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features.	The findings cannot be directly interpreted as improvements in indefinite article selection.
Kim and Song (2020) — English article acquisition	Investigates the relationship between learning onset and the acquisition of English articles.	Does not establish a universal relationship between learning age and correct A/AN selection.
Kwame and Westergaard (2020) — Article acquisition	Examines English article acquisition among learners whose first language is Dagbani.	Findings should be interpreted within the participants' linguistic context.
Lee and Yoon (2020) — Written corrective feedback	Addresses the relationship between corrective feedback and indefinite article usage in EFL writing.	Findings concerning written accuracy do not necessarily transfer to oral pronunciation.
Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) — Task-based pronunciation	Examines task-based approaches to pronunciation instruction in EFL learning.	Does not directly evaluate the A/AN grammatical rule.

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Study and Research Focus	Main Contribution	Interpretative Limitation
Nasser (2022) — Article usage difficulties	Investigates difficulties associated with English article usage among EFL university students.	Identified difficulties may involve several grammatical mechanisms.
Park (2023) — Corpus-based grammatical analysis	Corpus analysis of Korean L2 English writing, particularly the noun phrase "part-time jobs".	Lexically restricted patterns cannot be extrapolated to all A/AN difficulties.
Sarandi and Nassaji (2024) — Corrective feedback	Computer-mediated experiment with 61 Turkish university learners; recast frequency favored some picture-description outcomes.	Error-correction advantage weakened at delayed testing; targets included English articles, not A/AN alone.

Note. The table presents a thematic synthesis of the publications included in the review. The contributions are not equivalent measurements of instructional effectiveness. Studies differ in research design and outcome measures; their findings cannot be treated as equivalent estimates of effectiveness.

English Article Acquisition and Grammatical Accuracy

The first analytical dimension comprised eight publications examining English article acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and language-related difficulties. Kim and Song (2020) investigated the influence of the age at which English learning begins, while Balenović (2024) examined the relationship between first-language characteristics, age, and article acquisition. Both contributions highlight the importance of learner-related variables in grammatical development, although they do not establish that these factors determine the correct selection between *A* and *AN* in all learning contexts.

Kwame and Westergaard (2020) investigated article acquisition among Dagbani-speaking learners. Alzamil (2023) examined English indefinite articles in relation to Arabic nunation, with a primary comparison between a and the zero article (Ø), rather than a specific test of

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the phonological alternation a/an. The results illuminate broader article acquisition but do not measure learning of the sound-based distinction.

Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024), Bakri (2023), and Nasser (2022) addressed grammatical accuracy and learner difficulties in distinct contexts. Park (2023) used an L2 writing corpus to examine article use particularly with the noun phrase “part-time jobs”; this constrained lexical focus should not be generalized to all possible A/AN errors.

The comparative analysis suggests that teaching the *A/AN* distinction requires more than presenting a general explanation of indefinite articles. Learners must understand both the grammatical contexts in which indefinite articles are appropriate and the phonological conditions governing their forms. Nevertheless, the reviewed evidence does not support attributing all article errors to insufficient phonological awareness.

Phonological Awareness and Pronunciation-Based Learning

The pronunciation-related dimension comprised five publications. Almalki and Algethami (2022) compared listening-based conditions with orthographic support among EFL learners; experimental groups showed small pronunciation gains that were not statistically significant. Their results do not establish an effective method for teaching the A/AN rule. Alghazo et al. (2023) addressed pronunciation instruction through perception- and production-oriented approaches.

These contributions are relevant to the *A/AN* distinction because accurate article selection requires recognizing the initial sound of the following expression. For example, *a university* begins with the consonant sound /j/, whereas *an hour* begins with a vowel sound because the initial letter *h* is silent. Such examples demonstrate why teaching article selection exclusively through written vowels and consonants may produce inaccurate generalizations.

Galante and Piccardo (2022) addressed the importance of intelligibility and comprehensibility in pronunciation instruction, while Gordon and Darcy (2022) examined explicit teaching of pronunciation features. Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) contributed perspectives on task-based pronunciation teaching.

The five publications support considering pronunciation instruction as an important component of EFL education. However, their research objectives and measured outcomes differ. Consequently, they provide indirect pedagogical support for sound-based article

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instruction rather than direct evidence that a particular intervention improves learners' ability to select *A* and *AN*.

Instructional Strategies and Corrective Feedback

Lee and Yoon (2020) studied written corrective feedback related to indefinite articles. Sarandi and Nassaji (2024) examined the frequency of oral recasts during computer-mediated tasks with 61 university learners in Turkey. Higher recast frequency favored performance in some picture-description outcomes, whereas the advantage in error correction weakened on delayed assessment. These tasks and measures cannot be reduced to a direct test of A/AN phonological selection.

These contributions provide a foundation for considering how feedback may help learners recognize grammatical inaccuracies. Within the teaching of *A* and *AN*, corrective activities could involve identifying an incorrect article, explaining the initial sound of the following expression, and asking learners to produce a corrected sentence.

For example, a learner might incorrectly write *an university*. The teacher could explain that *university* begins with the consonant sound /j/, making *a university* the appropriate form. Similarly, the expression *a hour* could be corrected to *an hour* because the initial consonant letter is not pronounced.

Table 3

Synthesis of Research Contributions and Potential Pedagogical Applications

Analytical Dimension	Synthesis of Contributions	Potential Application to A and AN Instruction
English article acquisition and grammatical accuracy	Article acquisition is associated with linguistic background, grammatical knowledge, and learner-related factors.	Explain the grammatical function of indefinite articles and distinguish errors involving article choice from errors involving article omission or definiteness. Relevant studies include Kim and Song (2020), Kwame and Westergaard (2020), Alzamil (2023), Balenović (2024), Derkach and

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Analytical Dimension	Synthesis of Contributions	Potential Application to A and AN Instruction
		Alexopoulou (2024), Bakri (2023), Nasser (2022), and Park (2023).
Phonological awareness and pronunciation-based learning	Auditory perception, pronunciation instruction, and communicative tasks provide foundations for sound-focused language learning.	Introduce listening discrimination, identification of initial sounds, and comparisons such as *a university/an umbrella* and *a house/an hour*. Relevant studies include Almalki and Algethami (2022), Alghazo et al. (2023), Galante and Piccardo (2022), Gordon and Darcy (2022), and Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023).
Instructional strategies and corrective feedback	Corrective feedback provides opportunities to identify and address grammatical inaccuracies.	Use guided correction, explanation of pronunciation-based article selection, and contextualized sentence practice. Relevant studies include Lee and Yoon (2020) and Sarandi and Nassaji (2024).

Note. The suggested classroom applications are pedagogical recommendations derived from the literature, not direct empirical findings of this review.

4. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of the 15 publications highlights the importance of distinguishing two interconnected dimensions of English article learning: acquiring the grammatical functions of indefinite articles and recognizing the phonological conditions determining the selection of *A* and *AN*. Although both dimensions contribute to accurate language use, they involve different linguistic processes. Understanding when an indefinite article is required does not necessarily guarantee that learners will choose its appropriate phonological form. Kim and Song (2020) and Balenović (2024) examined age and first-language factors in English article acquisition. Kwame and Westergaard (2020) focused on Dagbani-speaking

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learners, whereas Alzamil (2023) addressed Arabic nunation and the contrast between a and Ø. Taken together, these studies indicate that grammatical development must be interpreted in relation to learners' language backgrounds and the linguistic feature under examination.

Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024), Bakri (2023), and Nasser (2022) examined broader aspects of article accuracy and misuse. Park (2023) offered corpus evidence focused particularly on “part-time jobs” in Korean learners’ writing. Its findings concern article choices in a restricted noun-phrase context, not the full range of phonological A/AN difficulties.

Almalki and Algethami (2022) reported small, statistically non-significant pronunciation improvements after listening-related instruction, including an orthography condition. Alghazo et al. (2023) examined perception- and production-oriented pronunciation instruction. Together, these studies draw attention to the roles of auditory input and orthographic information in pronunciation learning.

Galante and Piccardo (2022) and Gordon and Darcy (2022) examined pronunciation instruction from perspectives emphasizing intelligibility, comprehensibility, and explicit attention to speech features. These perspectives suggest connecting initial-sound perception to grammatical decisions, particularly when a word's spelling and pronunciation differ.

Mora and Mora-Plaza (2023) explored task-based pronunciation teaching, offering a rationale for linking sound recognition to meaningful communication. Descriptions, short conversations, and listening tasks could prompt learners to select A or AN while attending to the first sound of the following expression. Such activities would also make it possible to observe how learners apply phonological knowledge during grammatical choice.

Written corrective feedback (Lee & Yoon, 2020) and computer-mediated oral recasts (Sarandi & Nassaji, 2024) address different learning modalities. In the latter study, more frequent recasts benefited certain picture-description outcomes, but the error-correction advantage weakened at delayed testing. This contrast underscores the importance of considering retention as well as immediate task performance in future instructional research.

Across these strands, the pedagogical question is not only whether learners can state the article rule, but also whether they can apply sound-based criteria while communicating. A progression from recognizing an initial sound to choosing the article in context and receiving focused feedback offers a coherent sequence for classroom practice.

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The comparison also reveals an important limitation in the available evidence. Most studies included in the documentary corpus examine broader aspects of English article acquisition, pronunciation development, or grammatical instruction. Therefore, the review cannot establish whether phonological awareness independently predicts *A/AN* accuracy or whether one specific teaching strategy is superior to another.

This narrative review is limited to 15 purposively selected publications from 2020–2024. The absence of a reproducible search history and screening log limits methodological transparency and replicability. Differences in study design, learner population, linguistic target, and outcome measures further restrict the synthesis to interpretative conclusions.

Future research should investigate the relationship between phonological awareness and indefinite article accuracy through empirical studies involving EFL learners. Classroom-based research could compare explicit sound-based instruction, traditional grammar explanations, auditory discrimination exercises, and corrective feedback strategies. Such investigations should establish clear indicators of learning, including the accuracy of article selection, recognition of initial sounds, and retention of grammatical knowledge.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The narrative review synthesized 15 publications addressing English article acquisition, learner-related factors, pronunciation instruction, and corrective feedback. Their combined contribution is to clarify the distinction between general knowledge of English articles and the sound-based choice between A and AN. Difficulties in article use cannot be attributed to phonological awareness alone.

The central teaching implication is to direct learners' attention to the initial sound of the expression following the article, especially when pronunciation and spelling diverge. This focus can be incorporated into contextualized language practice without relying on letter-based cues as a sufficient guide.

The pronunciation-related publications offer a pedagogical rationale for auditory discrimination, sound recognition, and explicit explanation in EFL instruction.

Teachers may combine sound-discrimination tasks, contextualized sentence production, and corrective feedback to help students apply this distinction. Future classroom studies should evaluate learning and retention, while subsequent literature reviews should document

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reproducible search and selection procedures and consider relevant publications from 2025 and 2026.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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