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Toward a Ghana-Responsive Pronunciation Pedagogy: Intelligibility, Ghanaian English and Instructional Priorities

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation teaching in Ghana sits at the intersection of two legitimate educational demands: learners need speech that functions effectively across local and international settings, while Ghanaian English has developed systematic phonological characteristics that should not be treated automatically as defective approximations to British or North American norms. This article develops a Ghana-responsive framework for pronunciation pedagogy through a critical narrative synthesis of recent research on L2 pronunciation, intelligibility and phonetic training, combined with Ghana-specific work on English phonology, rhythm, vowel quality, learner difficulties and culturally responsive speech assessment. The article argues that the central pedagogical question is not whether a pronunciation feature differs from an external native-speaker norm, but whether it imposes a recurrent communicative cost, how stable it is within Ghanaian English, how widely it travels across interlocutor groups, and how amenable it is to instruction. On this basis, a four-criterion pronunciation priority framework is proposed, distinguishing features that can be retained and legitimised, features that require repertoire expansion, and features that warrant focused intervention. The framework is translated into a six-stage classroom cycle linking diagnosis, noticing, perception, guided production, communicative transfer and reflective recycling. The discussion further recommends balanced treatment of segmentals and suprasegmentals, explicit phonetic awareness, multi-accent listening, carefully targeted feedback, learner self-recording and cautious use of automatic speech technologies. The paper concludes that a defensible pronunciation pedagogy for Ghana should pursue intelligibility and communicative adaptability without equating intelligible Ghanaian accent features with error.

KEYWORDS: Ghanaian English; pronunciation teaching; intelligibility; comprehensibility; phonetics; multilingualism; World Englishes; L2 speech.

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1. Introduction

Pronunciation is simultaneously linguistic, communicative and social. It is linguistic because the production and perception of consonants, vowels, stress, rhythm, prominence and intonation are organised by language-specific phonological systems. It is communicative because these features contribute to lexical recognition, information structure and listener processing. It is social because accent indexes speakers' histories, affiliations and identities and can attract evaluations that extend far beyond actual comprehensibility. Pronunciation teaching therefore cannot be reduced to the correction of isolated sounds. It requires decisions about which forms matter, which model or range of models is pedagogically defensible, and what counts as successful spoken performance.

These questions are particularly consequential in Ghana. English occupies a central institutional role in education, administration and professional communication, but it is used in an intensely multilingual environment. Ghanaian users of English bring phonological experience from Akan, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Dagaare and many other languages, and English itself has developed locally recognisable phonological tendencies. Recent synthesis work explicitly treats Ghanaian English as an established Outer Circle variety shaped by Ghanaian linguistic and cultural resources rather than simply as unsuccessful British English (Anderson, 2025). At the same time, acoustic and classroom-based research continues to show considerable internal variation and areas in which local pronunciation differs from external reference varieties (Akpanglo-Nartey, 2020a, 2020b; Ankomah, 2025; Lomotey & Osei-Bonsu, 2022).

This creates a pedagogical tension. A curriculum organised around Received Pronunciation or General American may over-correct legitimate local variation and reinforce the mistaken assumption that competence requires the erasure of Ghanaian identity. The opposite position is also unsatisfactory: describing Ghanaian English as legitimate does not imply that every pronunciation produced by every Ghanaian learner is equally stable, equally intelligible or equally useful across communicative settings. Ghanaian English is variable, multilingual learners differ in their L1 backgrounds, and the needs of a student speaking mainly with Ghanaian peers are not identical to those of a graduate presenting at an international conference or working in a multinational organisation.

The contemporary intelligibility orientation in L2 pronunciation research offers an important way through this tension. It rejects native-likeness as the default pedagogical objective and foregrounds whether speech is understood and how much effort listeners require to process it (Crowther, 2026; Levis, 2020; Paschke & Newbold, 2025). Yet recent scholarship also cautions that even intelligibility-based research may reproduce native-speaker assumptions if the listener, benchmark and definition of 'difficulty' remain narrowly constructed (Jeong & Lindemann, 2025). For Ghana, therefore, intelligibility must be combined with local sociolinguistic legitimacy, listener diversity and communicative adaptability.

The present article makes three contributions. First, it synthesises recent L2 pronunciation research with empirical descriptions of Ghanaian English rather than importing pedagogical recommendations without local phonological evidence. Second, it distinguishes stable or socially meaningful Ghanaian variation from pronunciation features that impose recurrent communicative costs. Third, it proposes a Ghana-responsive pronunciation priority framework that turns this distinction into a practical decision process for teachers, curriculum designers and assessors. The framework is intended as a conceptual contribution rather than a claim that Ghana already possesses a fully codified pronunciation standard.

The article addresses four questions: (1) What should count as a defensible pronunciation target in multilingual Ghana? (2) What does current evidence suggest about Ghanaian English pronunciation and its pedagogical implications? (3) Which factors should determine whether a feature is retained, expanded or targeted for intervention? and (4) How can these principles be translated into classroom teaching and assessment?

2. Ghanaian English and the problem of the pronunciation target

2.1 From external norm to locally grounded target

The pronunciation target is not a technical detail; it determines what teachers correct, what examinations reward and what learners come to regard as legitimate English. Historically, English-language education in former British colonies commonly treated British prestige pronunciation as the reference point. In such a model, divergence from the reference variety was liable to be categorised as error even where it did not interfere with communication.

The descriptive literature makes that position increasingly difficult to sustain for Ghana. Huber (2008) documented a recognisable phonology of Ghanaian English, and more recent work has added acoustic and sociophonetic evidence. Akpanglo-Nartey (2020a) investigated fundamental-frequency effects in Ghanaian English vowels, while Akpanglo-Nartey (2020b) examined the acoustic dynamics of Ghanaian English diphthongs. Lomotey and Osei-Bonsu (2022) found rhythm patterns in university classroom presentations that showed both similarities to and differences from Inner Circle Englishes and argued that Ghanaian English is more syllable-based in important respects. Ankomah (2025), using acoustic measurements from educated Ghanaian speakers, provides further evidence that the vowel system should be described empirically rather than inferred impressionistically from an imported model.

The implication is not that British and American pronunciations should disappear from Ghanaian classrooms. They remain valuable sources of receptive exposure and may be relevant targets for learners with particular personal or professional goals. The more defensible principle is that they should not function as the sole

measure of correctness. A pronunciation curriculum should recognise educated Ghanaian usage while developing learners' ability to understand and, where useful, produce alternative forms.

This position is compatible with the CEFR Companion Volume, which explicitly describes phonological control in terms of intelligibility and effective use of prosody while allowing features of accent from other languages to remain when they do not impede understanding (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 133–134). It is also compatible with the most recent orientation in L2 pronunciation research, where intelligibility rather than native-like accent is increasingly treated as the more realistic general objective (Crowther, 2026; Paschke & Newbold, 2025).

2.2 Ghanaian English is a range, not a single uniform accent

Recognising Ghanaian English creates a second problem: the label can sound more homogeneous than the speech community actually is. Ghanaian English varies according to speakers' linguistic repertoires, education, social network, formality, region and interactional goals. A learner with Akan as a dominant Ghanaian language may encounter different cross-linguistic relationships from a learner whose dominant language is Ewe, Ga, Dagbani or Dagaare. Even within highly educated speech, variation should be expected.

This point matters because a locally grounded pedagogy can become prescriptive in a new way if it simply replaces 'British English' with a rigid, insufficiently codified 'Ghanaian standard'. Anderson (2025) stresses both the distinctiveness of Ghanaian English and its grounding in Ghanaian languages, but the descriptive record does not justify the assumption that every segmental or prosodic feature is categorically shared by all speakers. Huber (2008) likewise presents Ghanaian English in terms of tendencies shaped by multiple social and linguistic factors.

A Ghana-responsive target should therefore be understood as a principled range: locally legitimate and empirically described forms are recognised, while learners are also trained to accommodate unfamiliar listeners and to expand their receptive and productive repertoires. The goal is neither accent eradication nor accent essentialism. It is communicative range. This repertoire-oriented position also extends the international-intelligibility logic associated with the Lingua Franca Core, while avoiding its use as a fixed Ghanaian syllabus (Jenkins, 2000).

3. Conceptual foundations: intelligibility, comprehensibility and speech learning

3.1 Distinguishing intelligibility from accentedness

Pronunciation research commonly distinguishes three related but non-equivalent dimensions. Intelligibility concerns the extent to which a listener actually recovers a speaker's intended words or message. Comprehensibility concerns the listener's experienced ease or difficulty of understanding. Accentedness concerns perceived distance from a reference accent. These dimensions can correlate, but they are not interchangeable (Crowther, 2026; Levis, 2020; Munro & Derwing, 1995). A speaker may be strongly accented yet highly intelligible, and a reduction in accentedness is not a necessary condition for improved comprehensibility. This listener-centred distinction has long underpinned evidence-based pronunciation pedagogy (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

This distinction is crucial for Ghanaian pedagogy because an external-norm approach often mistakes accentedness for communicative failure. If an identifiable Ghanaian feature does not impair understanding, correcting it solely because it sounds non-British would spend scarce instructional time on social conformity rather than communication. Conversely, an intelligibility orientation still permits strong intervention where a recurrent feature leads to lexical confusion, processing difficulty or breakdown across relevant listener groups.

Jeong and Lindemann (2025) add an important qualification. They argue that research invoking intelligibility can still remain tied to native-speaker ideology when the speech of privileged L1 speakers silently defines the benchmark or when responsibility for understanding is placed entirely on L2 speakers. Their critique is valuable for Ghana because communication is relational. Speakers can clarify, reformulate and accommodate; listeners can also adapt to accent diversity. A Ghana-responsive pedagogy should therefore teach both pronunciation control and interactional repair rather than treating intelligibility as a property located only inside the speaker.

3.2 Cross-linguistic interaction and the SLM-r

The Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) offers a complementary psycholinguistic account of why pronunciation learning is difficult but possible. Flege and Bohn (2021) propose that L1 and L2 phonetic categories interact dynamically across the lifespan. Learners do not approach English sounds with empty

perceptual systems; new input is interpreted through previously established phonetic categories, and the formation or refinement of L2 categories depends on perceived similarity, experience and input.

For multilingual Ghanaian learners, this perspective discourages the vague diagnosis of 'mother-tongue interference'. A useful diagnosis specifies the relationship between the target sound or prosodic cue and the learner's existing languages. Is a contrast absent from a learner's prior system? Is an English sound assimilated to a nearby category? Is the difficulty perceptual, articulatory or orthographically induced? Does it occur in all positions or only in particular phonological environments? Such questions lead to teachable hypotheses rather than deficit labels.

Recent quantitative evidence supports continued optimism about instruction. Yao et al. (2025), in a meta-analysis of 65 primary studies involving 2,793 L2 learners, report an overall positive effect of phonetic training and find particularly strong effects for perceptual training. Crowther and Loewen (2025) similarly review a growing instructed-SLA literature showing that pronunciation can respond to systematic teaching, although outcomes vary with target, treatment and measurement. The pedagogical conclusion is therefore not that every feature is equally teachable, but that focused instruction can produce meaningful development when targets and methods are well chosen.

4. Approach to the literature synthesis

This article uses a critical narrative synthesis rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. Its purpose is interpretive integration: it connects empirical descriptions of Ghanaian English pronunciation with research on L2 pronunciation teaching, intelligibility, speech learning and assessment. The search covered publications available up to 31 August 2026. Searches were conducted across Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus-indexed publisher records, Crossref/DOI records, journal websites and Ghanaian institutional repositories. The search was rerun during August 2026 to identify newly available records and to verify bibliographic details.

Search strings combined Ghana-related terms ("Ghanaian English", Ghana, pronunciation, phonology, vowels, diphthongs, rhythm, prosody and speech assessment) with pedagogy-related terms (pronunciation teaching, intelligibility, comprehensibility, L2 phonetic training, perception-production training, suprasegmentals, assessment and automatic speech recognition). Searches were limited to English-language sources because the article concerns English pronunciation and the relevant Ghana-focused scholarship retrieved was published in English. Reference lists of eligible publications were checked to identify foundational or otherwise relevant studies missed by the database searches.

Studies were included when they (a) reported empirical or theoretically substantive evidence on Ghanaian English phonetics or phonology, Ghanaian learners' pronunciation, intelligibility, pronunciation instruction or culturally responsive speech assessment; (b) were peer reviewed or issued by a recognised institutional publisher; and (c) had sufficiently verifiable publication details. International studies were retained when their design or findings addressed a pedagogical mechanism relevant to Ghana, including listener-based intelligibility, perception-production training, suprasegmental instruction, multi-accent exposure or technology-supported practice. Items were excluded when they lacked traceable publication details, dealt only with grammar or lexis, offered unsupported prescriptive advice, or duplicated evidence already represented by a fuller report.

Source quality was assessed pragmatically rather than by a formal risk-of-bias instrument. Greater evidential weight was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies with transparent samples and procedures, acoustic or listener-based measures, meta-analyses, established theoretical works and publications with DOI or stable publisher records. Ghana-specific descriptive studies were prioritised for claims about local forms; intervention and listener studies were prioritised for claims about teachability or communicative effect. Evidence from adjacent fields or non-Ghanaian settings is identified as indirect and is used to generate pedagogical propositions rather than to claim locally demonstrated effects.

The synthesis was purposive and non-exhaustive. No claim is made that it represents every publication in the field, and the proposed framework is not an empirically normed national syllabus. It is a transparent, research-informed conceptual framework whose specific instructional decisions require validation with Ghanaian learners and diverse listener groups.

Ethics statement

This article is based exclusively on analysis of published literature. It involved no human participants, patient data, intervention, or collection of identifiable personal information; therefore, institutional ethics approval and informed consent were not required.

5 What the Ghanaian evidence currently supports

The available evidence is sufficient to reject a simple deficit model of Ghanaian pronunciation, but it is not yet sufficient to support a single fully codified national pronunciation norm. Table 1 summarises the types of evidence most directly relevant to pedagogy.

Study	Evidence base	Main relevance to Ghanaian pronunciation pedagogy
Akpanglo-Nartey (2020a)	Acoustic analysis of Ghanaian English vowels	Shows that Ghanaian vowel production has measurable phonetic properties; supports acoustic description rather than impressionistic correction.
Akpanglo-Nartey (2020b)	Acoustic analysis of nine Ghanaian English diphthongs	Provides locally grounded evidence on vowel trajectories and duration; useful for identifying which differences are systematic rather than random.
Afrifa-Yamoah et al. (2021)	Pronunciation challenges in a Ghanaian senior high school	Highlights learner, teacher and resource constraints; supports stronger teacher preparation and context-sensitive classroom practice.
Lomotey and Osei-Bonsu (2022)	Rhythm in classroom presentations by 24 Ghanaian university lecturers	Shows systematic prosodic tendencies and supports attention to Ghanaian rhythm rather than assuming an imported stress-timed norm.
Asare and Orfson-Offei (2023)	English substitution patterns among multilingual Ghanaian preschool children	Demonstrates that learners' other languages and developmental stage shape English sound production; cautions against one Ghanaian learner profile.
Anderson (2025)	Synthesis of Ghanaian English as a World English	Supports the legitimacy of Ghanaian English and links local features to Ghanaian linguistic and cultural identity.
Ankomah (2025)	Acoustic study of monophthong quality in educated Ghanaian English	Updates empirical description of the Ghanaian English vowel system and illustrates continuing need for phonetic codification.
Bampoe et al. (2025a, 2025b)	Culturally and linguistically responsive speech/language assessment in Ghana	Indirect but important evidence that assessment developed elsewhere can misrepresent multilingual Ghanaian performance; supports local norm awareness in pronunciation assessment.

Table 1. Selected Ghana-specific evidence and its pedagogical relevance.

5.1 Segmental evidence: vowels, diphthongs and substitution patterns

The strongest recent Ghana-specific evidence concerns segmental description. Akpanglo-Nartey's acoustic studies (2020a, 2020b) and Ankomah's (2025) study of monophthong quality are important because they replace intuition with measurable phonetic evidence. This matters pedagogically: a teacher cannot decide responsibly that a local vowel is 'wrong' merely because it differs from a remembered British model. The first question is whether the form is stable among competent Ghanaian users and whether it compromises lexical distinction for relevant listeners.

At the learner end of the continuum, Asare and Orfson-Offei (2023) show that multilingual Ghanaian children display substitution patterns shaped by developmental stage and their broader linguistic repertoires. Their study concerns preschool children and therefore cannot simply be generalised to university students, but it reinforces a core principle: pronunciation difficulties should be diagnosed relationally, with attention to the learner's existing sound systems.

The Ghanaian studies establish patterns of production, not the comparative effectiveness of particular classroom treatments. As a pedagogical inference, segmental teaching may therefore prioritise contrasts that diagnostic listening or listener evidence shows to have clear functional consequences. Minimal-pair work can be useful for perception and early controlled production, but it should not be the endpoint. Learners need to use target contrasts in phrases, explanations, presentations and interaction where successful lexical recognition matters.

5.2 Suprasegmental evidence: rhythm, prominence and information structure

Ghanaian pronunciation pedagogy has often devoted more visible attention to individual sounds than to prosody. Yet listeners process speech in larger units, and prominence, pausing, rhythm and intonation contribute to information structure and ease of processing. Lomotey and Osei-Bonsu (2022) provide especially relevant local evidence by analysing academic classroom speech rather than isolated laboratory words. Their findings indicate that Ghanaian English rhythm has systematic characteristics and should not be evaluated solely through a stress-timed British template.

International instructional evidence also supports greater attention to suprasegmentals. Gordon and Darcy (2022) found that learners receiving explicit suprasegmental instruction improved in comprehensibility and fluency, whereas no group showed corresponding improvement in accentedness. Their later pedagogical account explains the design choices behind segmental, suprasegmental and mixed treatments (Gordon & Darcy, 2024). These findings are highly relevant to Ghana because they demonstrate precisely why reducing accent is a poor proxy for communicative improvement.

Because the instructional studies cited here were conducted outside Ghana, their application is extrapolative. A reasonable proposition for local testing is selective prosodic teaching. Learners need not reproduce every timing feature of an external prestige variety. They should, however, gain sufficient control over word stress, prominence, pausing, speech rate and intonation to signal meaning clearly and to process the prosodic diversity they will encounter.

5.3 Orthography and the risk of spelling-led pronunciation

The relationship between spelling and speech deserves explicit treatment in Ghanaian classrooms because formal education gives learners sustained exposure to written English. Ngula (2011) documented spelling pronunciation in Ghanaian English, showing that orthography can shape spoken forms in systematic ways. This should not be framed simply as carelessness: English spelling is historically deep and often provides unreliable cues to vowel quality, stress and connected-speech realisation.

The Ghanaian evidence demonstrates spelling-related patterns but does not directly test a classroom remedy. A plausible pedagogical response is not to memorise long lists of 'correct' pronunciations but to develop dictionary literacy, phonemic awareness and prediction-checking habits. Learners can compare orthographic expectations with audio dictionaries, identify recurring spelling-to-sound patterns, and record words in context. Where a locally widespread spelling pronunciation remains intelligible, teachers can explain variation rather than automatically stigmatise it; where it predictably creates misunderstanding, it becomes a legitimate instructional priority.

6. Factors shaping pronunciation teachability in Ghana

6.1 Multilingual phonological experience

Ghanaian classrooms contain multiple phonological histories. The same English contrast can be easy for one learner and difficult for another because their prior sound categories differ. SLM-r predicts such variability and treats L1–L2 interaction as dynamic rather than as a one-directional transfer of 'interference' (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Teachers should therefore build short diagnostic tasks around the specific learner population instead of assuming a fixed national error list.

Diagnosis should separate perception from production. If learners cannot reliably hear a contrast, repeated articulatory correction may produce limited gains. Yao et al. (2025) found that perceptual training yielded particularly strong effects in their meta-analysis, strengthening the case for identification and discrimination work before or alongside production.

6.2 Input quality, diversity and receptive flexibility

Input quality is not equivalent to exposure to a single prestige accent. Learners benefit from clear, meaningful and sufficiently varied phonetic input. Barros and Madureira (2025) show how teacher-mediated input can support young learners' sound perception, while Mora (2025) reviews a wider range of pronunciation training techniques and highlights the continuing challenge of integrating pronunciation into communicative instruction.

No retrieved Ghanaian intervention study directly tests a multi-accent input policy. Drawing on international evidence and Ghana's likely communication needs, such a policy is nevertheless a defensible proposal. Materials should include intelligible Ghanaian English, other West African Englishes and selected international English accents. The goal is receptive flexibility: the ability to understand variation without requiring every speaker to converge on one external model. Nowacka and Nowacki (2025), working in a multicultural East African school, found that immersion in accent diversity was associated with familiarity and accommodation practices, even though some learners still aspired to native accents.

6.3 Attitudes, identity and learner agency

Pronunciation learning is unusually exposed to social evaluation. Learners can fear ridicule when attempting unfamiliar sounds, or they can internalise the belief that sounding British or American indexes superior education. Conversely, they may resist a target they experience as socially inauthentic. Such reactions are not peripheral to pedagogy because they affect willingness to practise and the goals learners choose.

Kopečková et al. (2025) demonstrate that language attitudes and metaphonological awareness can be associated with aspects of pronunciation development. For Ghana, critical accent awareness should therefore form part of advanced pronunciation education. Students can compare multiple competent speakers, distinguish communicative difficulty from social stigma, and discuss the contexts in which adaptation is strategically useful. Learners should be allowed to set ambitious personal accent goals, but those goals should not be imposed as the only legitimate outcome.

6.4 Teacher knowledge and institutional conditions

A Ghana-responsive approach depends on teachers who can hear and explain pronunciation differences without overcorrecting them. Afrifa-Yamoah et al. (2021) identify teaching approach, teacher preparation and resources among the challenges in their senior-high-school context. This concern aligns with broader pronunciation literature: teachers often report uncertainty about what to teach, how to prioritise targets and how to integrate pronunciation into communicative lessons (Crowther & Loewen, 2025; Mora, 2025).

This recommendation is inferred from the reported local challenges and wider L2 pedagogy rather than established by a Ghanaian teacher-education trial. Teacher education could therefore include basic articulatory and acoustic phonetics, local English phonology, diagnostic listening, word stress and prosody, perception-production sequencing, and intelligibility-based assessment. Competence should not be equated with possessing a British or North American accent. A Ghanaian teacher who is intelligible, phonetically informed and able to source diverse models may be better equipped for pronunciation pedagogy than a speaker who approximates an external accent but lacks diagnostic skill.

6.5 Technology: opportunity with a bias caveat

Digital tools can expand pronunciation practice through self-recording, audiovisual input, captioned video, acoustic visualisation and automatic speech recognition. Mora and Fouz-González (2024) show that contrastively enhanced captions can direct learners' attention to difficult sound distinctions, while Fouz-González and Mora (2024) demonstrate the attention-directing potential of textually enhanced captioned video.

The cited studies establish attention-directing affordances, not the validity of automated scoring for Ghanaian English. Accordingly, these tools should not become automated judges of linguistic legitimacy. Commercial speech recognisers and pronunciation apps are trained on particular datasets and may reward closeness to high-resource accents. A low machine score may therefore reflect model bias as well as genuine unintelligibility. Technology is most useful when it creates practice, feedback and noticing opportunities that are interpreted by teachers and learners rather than treated as an unquestionable standard.

7. A Ghana-responsive pronunciation priority framework

The central weakness of many pronunciation programmes is not the absence of techniques but the absence of a defensible rule for deciding what deserves instructional time. The framework proposed here evaluates a candidate pronunciation feature against four criteria: communicative impact, local stability, cross-context reach and teachability. The first two protect learners from unnecessary accent correction; the latter two

protect them from a purely local pedagogy that may not prepare them for wider communication.
The framework is deliberately a decision framework rather than a fixed list of Ghanaian 'errors'. A target such as a vowel contrast, final consonant, word-stress pattern or prominence cue can be evaluated differently for different learner groups and communicative purposes.

Criterion	Diagnostic question	Interpretation	Likely pedagogical response
1. Communicative impact	Does the feature recurrently cause lexical confusion, listener effort or breakdown?	High impact raises instructional priority.	Focused perception and production work; communicative repair practice.
2. Local stability	Is the feature systematic among competent Ghanaian English users, or mainly an unstable learner form?	Stable low-cost local features should not be treated automatically as errors.	Legitimise and explain variation; teach alternatives where useful.
3. Cross-context reach	Is the feature readily understood by unfamiliar Ghanaian and international listeners relevant to the learner's goals?	Features that travel poorly may require repertoire expansion even if locally accepted.	Add alternative forms and multi-accent listening rather than demand accent replacement.
4. Teachability and learner value	Can the feature be improved through realistic instruction, and does the learner need it for meaningful goals?	High learnability and high learner relevance justify time investment.	Use targeted, measurable practice and learner-selected goals.

Table 2. Ghana-responsive pronunciation priority framework.

7.1 Three instructional decisions: retain, expand or intervene

Applying the four criteria leads to three broad instructional decisions. The first is retain and legitimise. A feature belongs here when it is stable in competent Ghanaian English, imposes little communicative cost and has no compelling reason to be eliminated. Teaching focuses on awareness rather than correction.

The second is expand the repertoire. This applies when a feature is locally legitimate but may be less transparent to unfamiliar listeners, or when learners need receptive control of multiple variants. Teachers present alternative pronunciations, compare contexts and practise accommodation. The learner keeps a Ghanaian identity while gaining strategic flexibility.
The third is prioritise intervention. This category is reserved for features that repeatedly interfere with understanding, collapse important lexical contrasts, disrupt information structure or create substantial listener effort in contexts that matter to the learner. Instruction then combines perception, explanation, controlled production and communicative use. The key difference from traditional correction is evidential: intervention is justified by communicative consequence, not merely by distance from a prestige accent.

8. Translating the framework into classroom practice

8.1 A six-stage instructional cycle

A practical lesson sequence can be organised as Diagnosis → Noticing → Perception → Guided Production → Communicative Transfer → Reflection and Recycling. This cycle is compatible with research showing that pronunciation benefits from explicit attention while still needing integration with communicative activity (Crowther & Loewen, 2025; Gordon & Darcy, 2022, 2024).
Diagnosis begins with a short sample of speech relevant to the learner's actual needs: spontaneous conversation, reading, oral presentation or professional explanation. The teacher identifies a small number of features using the priority framework rather than compiling every difference from a reference accent. Noticing makes the feature perceptually and conceptually visible. Learners compare their recording with several models, observe articulatory or acoustic cues, and learn the communicative function of the target. The International Phonetic Alphabet can be used selectively where it clarifies spelling-sound relationships or category differences; it should not become an abstract transcription exercise detached from speech.

Perception develops the learner's ability to identify the target in multiple words, speakers and contexts. This stage is particularly important when L1–L2 category relationships make a contrast difficult to hear (Flege & Bohn, 2021; Yao et al., 2025). Guided production moves from articulatory exploration and controlled phrases to increasingly natural utterances. Feedback is concentrated on the selected target. Excessive interruption is avoided because successful pronunciation learning also requires fluency, confidence and message-level attention.

Communicative transfer places the feature inside an information gap, interview, explanation, presentation or repair task where successful understanding has a real consequence. If contrastive prominence is the target, for example, learners should use it to correct or distinguish information, not only repeat decontextualised sentences.

Reflection and recycling involve self-recording, peer or teacher listener feedback, and a later return to the feature. Learners compare earlier and later recordings and decide whether the target remains a priority. This supports autonomy and prevents pronunciation from becoming a one-off lesson.

8.2 Segmentals and suprasegmentals should be prioritised by function

The framework rejects the common choice between 'teach sounds' and 'teach prosody'. Both levels can matter, but their instructional priority depends on function. Segmentals deserve concentrated attention where lexical contrasts are lost or a consonant/vowel pattern repeatedly blocks word recognition. Suprasegmentals deserve attention where stress, prominence, pausing or speech rate makes discourse difficult to process.

Gordon and Darcy's (2022) results are useful here because suprasegmental instruction improved comprehensibility and fluency without reducing accentedness. In other words, a learner can become easier to understand while remaining recognisably non-native. This is precisely the outcome a Ghana-responsive approach should be willing to value.

8.3 Multi-accent listening and accommodation

Receptive pronunciation competence is as important as production. Ghanaian graduates will often interact with speakers whose English carries Nigerian, Kenyan, Indian, Chinese, European, North American or other accents. A curriculum that exposes learners only to one British model may therefore produce accurate imitation but poor real-world flexibility.

As an instructional proposal requiring local evaluation, multi-accent listening can involve purposeful tasks: identifying key information, comparing how stress is realised, noticing alternative vowels, and practising clarification strategies. Learners should also be taught short repair moves such as repetition, paraphrase, strategic slowing, lexical substitution and confirmation checks. These practices distribute responsibility for intelligibility across speakers and listeners, consistent with the relational account advocated by Jeong and Lindemann (2025).

8.4 Feedback and assessment

Assessment should reflect the goal the pedagogy claims to value. If classroom teaching promotes intelligibility but examinations reward resemblance to Received Pronunciation, the assessment will pull instruction back toward accent imitation. Pending validation with Ghanaian raters and listeners, a Ghana-responsive rubric should therefore separate communicative performance from accentedness.

At minimum, a rubric can include intelligibility, comprehensibility/ease of processing, clarity of key lexical items, use of prominence and pausing, fluency, control of identified high-priority features, and repair/accommodation. Accentedness may be described when relevant to a learner's personal target but should not automatically lower a score where communication remains effective.

The Ghanaian work of Bampoe et al. (2025a, 2025b) comes from speech-language pathology rather than English-language teaching, so it should not be treated as direct evidence for ELT scoring. Its broader relevance is methodological: assessments developed for other linguistic populations can mischaracterise multilingual Ghanaian performance if local language patterns and cultural practices are ignored. Pronunciation assessment in education should take that warning seriously.

9. Implications for teacher education, curriculum and research

9.1 Teacher education

Teacher preparation is the most immediate implementation challenge. A Ghana-responsive curriculum cannot work if teachers are told merely to 'teach correct pronunciation' without a model for distinguishing communicatively costly features from legitimate variation. Pre-service and in-service programmes should therefore combine practical phonetics with Ghanaian English description, listener-based assessment and classroom methods.

A useful minimum repertoire includes articulatory description; perception of major English contrasts; word stress, prominence and intonation; use of audio dictionaries and recording tools; knowledge of common Ghanaian English tendencies; and the ability to conduct brief diagnostic listening. Teachers should also learn how to explain accent variation in socially responsible language.

9.2 Curriculum and examination design

Curriculum documents should define pronunciation outcomes more precisely than 'correctness'. Where a target is required because it preserves a high-value contrast or supports intelligibility, that rationale should be explicit. Where several forms are established and intelligible, assessment should permit variation. This does not lower standards; it replaces an inherited accent standard with a communicative and evidence-based one.

High-stakes examinations are especially important because they shape classroom behaviour. If a national or institutional assessment uses a narrow external model, teachers will have strong incentives to train toward that model even where current research recommends otherwise. Reform therefore requires alignment among teacher education, curriculum wording, textbooks and oral assessment.

9.3 Research priorities

The framework proposed here requires empirical validation. First, Ghana needs listener-based studies that test which Ghanaian English features actually affect intelligibility and comprehensibility for different listener groups. Acoustic description alone cannot establish communicative cost.

Second, intervention studies should compare segmental, suprasegmental and integrated instruction with Ghanaian learners at different educational levels. Existing international evidence is encouraging (Gordon & Darcy, 2022; Yao et al., 2025), but local instructional effects should not be assumed.

Third, research should sample multiple Ghanaian language backgrounds. Studies that treat 'Ghanaian learners' as a single phonological group risk concealing L1-specific relationships and overgeneralising from Akan-dominant populations.

Fourth, corpus development remains a priority. Contemporary recordings from different regions, educational levels, professions and speaking styles would improve the description of educated and conversational Ghanaian English and help distinguish stable features from transient learner forms.

Fifth, accent attitudes deserve systematic investigation. The acceptability of a feature depends partly on social meaning, and learner motivation can be shaped by beliefs about prestige, professionalism and identity. Such research should include both Ghanaian and international listeners.

Finally, technology should be evaluated for accent bias. Automatic speech recognition and AI-supported pronunciation tools can be useful, but their scoring validity for Ghanaian English should be tested against human listener outcomes rather than presumed.

10. Illustrative application of the framework to Ghanaian pronunciation domains

The value of a priority framework becomes clearer when it is applied to domains already represented in Ghanaian research. The examples below are deliberately illustrative rather than prescriptive. They show how the same descriptive fact can lead to different pedagogical responses depending on communicative cost, local stability and learner goals.

10.1 Vowels and diphthongs: describe before prescribing

Recent acoustic work makes vowels an appropriate test case. Akpanglo-Nartey (2020a, 2020b) and Ankomah (2025) demonstrate that educated Ghanaian English vowel production can be described through measurable formant, duration and trajectory information. A traditional pedagogy might compare each value with a British reference and classify the distance as an error. The priority framework requires a further step: does the difference neutralise a contrast or make a word difficult to identify for relevant listeners? If not, the feature may be a stable local realisation that deserves description rather than correction.

Where two lexical categories are frequently confused, however, the instructional response changes. The teacher can first test whether learners perceive the distinction, then use high-variability listening, articulatory explanation and production in communicative contexts. The target is not numerical acoustic convergence on a British vowel space; it is sufficient category separation for reliable word recognition. This distinction is important because phonetic difference and communicative dysfunction are not synonymous.

10.2 Rhythm and prominence: local timing with discourse clarity

Lomotey and Osei-Bonsu (2022) suggest that Ghanaian English classroom speech displays rhythmic

organisation that is in important respects more syllable-based than the stress-timed ideal often associated with British English. The framework does not treat syllable-based timing itself as a defect. Local rhythmic identity can be retained where listeners follow the message without difficulty. At the same time, learners may need explicit control of prominence, pausing and focal stress because these features help listeners locate new information and interpret contrast.

This produces a different lesson from accent imitation. Instead of asking students to reproduce a complete British rhythmic pattern, the teacher can select a presentation extract and ask listeners which words sounded informationally central. Learners can then practise shifting prominence to alter meaning, compare several Ghanaian and international speakers, and re-record the passage. The pedagogical unit is communicative signalling, not conformity to a single rhythm label.

10.3 Orthography: from correction to repertoire expansion

Spelling-led pronunciation is another domain where simple right/wrong treatment is inadequate. Ngula (2011) shows that orthography has a noticeable role in Ghanaian English pronunciation. If a spelling-influenced form is widespread and locally transparent, a teacher may reasonably retain it while teaching awareness of another widely encountered variant. This is repertoire expansion: the learner understands that two pronunciations may circulate and can recognise both.

A stronger intervention is justified when orthography produces repeated lexical misunderstanding or when a learner's professional context requires a form that unfamiliar listeners are more likely to recognise. In that case, dictionary audio, phonemic transcription, word families and short contextual recordings are more useful than repeated teacher correction. The learner is given an additional resource rather than told that the local form invalidates their English.

10.4 Developmental substitutions and the danger of overgeneralisation

Asare and Orfson-Offei (2023) document substitution patterns in multilingual Ghanaian preschool speech. These findings are valuable for demonstrating cross-linguistic and developmental influence, but they also illustrate an important methodological caution: child speech patterns should not be converted into a national list of adult Ghanaian English errors. Age, linguistic history and task strongly condition pronunciation behaviour. The framework therefore requires fresh diagnosis at the level of the learner group before an instructional priority is assigned.

The same caution applies across regions and L1 backgrounds. A feature observed in an Akan-dominant sample may be irrelevant to learners whose strongest Ghanaian language has a different phonological inventory. A nationally useful pronunciation pedagogy therefore needs adaptable diagnostics rather than a fixed catalogue inherited from one population.

10.5 International communication: add flexibility, not linguistic insecurity

The strongest argument for teaching beyond locally established forms is not prestige but communicative reach. University students, teachers, health professionals, business graduates and public officials may speak with listeners who have little previous exposure to Ghanaian English. In such settings, a locally stable feature can still generate processing difficulty. The appropriate response is to expand flexibility: learners practise an alternative variant, monitor listener response and use repair strategies when needed.

This approach also changes the emotional message of pronunciation teaching. Learners are not told that their Ghanaian accent must be removed before they can participate internationally. They are shown how to manage a repertoire. The difference is pedagogically important: communicative adaptability becomes an additional competence rather than a correction of identity. It is also consistent with recent critiques that place intelligibility within interaction and shared accommodation rather than treating the L2 speaker as the sole source of communication difficulty (Jeong & Lindemann, 2025).

11. Limitations of the present proposal

This article has three limitations. First, it is a critical narrative synthesis, not a systematic review, and therefore does not claim exhaustive coverage of the pronunciation literature. Second, the Ghana-specific empirical base remains uneven: recent acoustic work is stronger for some segmental domains than for listener-tested intelligibility, classroom intervention and large-scale prosody. Third, the proposed priority framework has not yet been experimentally validated. Its categories are intended to organise pedagogical decision-making and generate testable research questions.

These limitations are also the reason for proposing a decision framework rather than a national pronunciation standard. The framework can accommodate new evidence. As Ghanaian English becomes more fully

described, particular features can be reclassified according to their stability, communicative impact and relevance to different learner goals.

12. Conclusion

Pronunciation teaching in Ghana should no longer be organised around the assumption that distance from British or North American speech is equivalent to deficiency. Ghanaian English has systematic phonological characteristics supported by descriptive and increasingly acoustic research, while contemporary L2 pronunciation scholarship provides strong reasons to distinguish accentedness from intelligibility and comprehensibility.

At the same time, recognition of Ghanaian English does not justify a laissez-faire position. Learners deserve explicit support for pronunciation features that create recurrent communicative difficulty, and they need the receptive and productive flexibility required for interaction beyond familiar local networks. The challenge is therefore one of prioritisation rather than correction in the abstract.

The Ghana-responsive pronunciation priority framework proposed here evaluates features according to communicative impact, local stability, cross-context reach and teachability. It yields three defensible responses: retain and legitimise low-cost stable local features; expand the learner's repertoire where a local form may not travel easily; and intervene intensively where a feature predictably compromises understanding. A six-stage instructional cycle then links these decisions to diagnosis, noticing, perception, production, communication and reflection.

The broader principle is straightforward but consequential: Ghanaian learners should be helped to speak English clearly without being taught that effective English requires them to stop sounding Ghanaian. A rigorous pronunciation pedagogy can preserve local linguistic legitimacy while expanding communicative reach. That combination, rather than accent imitation, offers the strongest basis for pronunciation teaching, assessment and future research in Ghana.

Ethics Statement

This article is based exclusively on published literature. No human participants, patient data, or identifiable personal information were collected or used. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

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