



Challenges in Teaching Pronunciation to Saudi Female Learners at Taif University

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Prince Muhammad Bin Salman's 2030 vision has amplified the importance of the English language in Saudi Arabia and efforts to increase its use in the Kingdom. This need is illustrated by the increasing trend of Saudi universities and certain corporations requiring prospective students to take regional standardized English examinations. The goal of this study is to identify female Saudi EFL learners' pronunciation issues, assess needed help, and suggest teaching strategies to EFL instructors. Learners will be examined through a series of pronunciation exams intended to enhance their listening and pronunciation skills. This research is relevant because young people are a key element of HRH Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030 as they represent the kingdom, internationally. The questions in this study address the challenges instructors confront in dealing with the most common pronunciation issues faced by adult female Saudi students in the EFL classroom. The obstacles faced by ESL instructors teaching pronunciation in schools included self-confidence, professional development knowledge, and instructional methodologies. Fear of making mistakes while pronouncing words was commonly stated as an obstacle to confidence when teaching pronunciation to students. Moreover, several teachers admitted to having difficulty pronouncing some phrases, indicating a lack of familiarity with English pronunciation. According to respondents, the time given to cover the required courses in the program proved insufficient for pronunciation teaching. The most successful method was to include pronunciation tasks in English classrooms. Due to the unique qualities and needs of each student, there are a limited number of instructional materials and other resources accessible on pronunciation.

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Challenges in Teaching Pronunciation to Saudi Female Learners at Taif University

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A Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Master's Degree of TESOL

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Abstract:

Prince Muhammad Bin Salman's 2030 vision has amplified the importance of the English language in Saudi Arabia and efforts to increase its use in the Kingdom. This need is illustrated by the increasing trend of Saudi universities and certain corporations requiring prospective students to take regional standardized English examinations. The goal of this study is to identify female Saudi EFL learners' pronunciation issues, assess needed help, and suggest teaching strategies to EFL instructors. Learners will be examined through a series of pronunciation exams intended to enhance their listening and pronunciation skills. This research is relevant because young people are a key element of HRH Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030 as they represent the kingdom, internationally. The questions in this study address the challenges instructors confront in dealing with the most common pronunciation issues faced by adult female Saudi students in the EFL classroom.

The obstacles faced by ESL instructors teaching pronunciation in schools included self-confidence, professional development knowledge, and instructional methodologies. Fear of making mistakes while pronouncing words was commonly stated as an obstacle to confidence when teaching pronunciation to students. Moreover, several teachers admitted to having difficulty pronouncing some phrases, indicating a lack of familiarity with English pronunciation. According to respondents, the time given to cover the required courses in the program proved insufficient for pronunciation teaching. The most successful method was to include pronunciation tasks in English classrooms. Due to the unique qualities and needs of each student, there are a limited number of instructional materials and other resources accessible on pronunciation.

Keywords: Challenges- Teaching Pronunciation- English as a Foreign Language- Taif University- Strategies- ESL- EFL- Skills- Speaking

Chapter 1: Introduction

The 2030 vision, as posited by HRH Prince Muhammad Bin Salman has brought out the essence of the English language and multiplied the efforts of its usage in Saudi Arabia. As previously stated, this need is illustrated by the increasing trend of Saudi universities and certain corporations requiring prospective students to take regional standardized English examinations. (Rahman & Qattan, 2021).

Although English is generally acknowledged as the main vehicle of communication in the Kingdom, it is nevertheless thought of as English as a foreign language in high schools, colleges, and universities. It is necessary for female Arab learners in Saudi Arabia to acquire English to not only participate in the job market but also to use for basic life needs. This necessity acknowledges that many Arabs have difficulty learning a foreign language, with pronunciation as one of the most difficult issues to overcome (Hameed & Aslam, 2015). Many English as a foreign language students are likely to discover that pronunciation hinders their ability to communicate effectively (Alfallaj, 2013). It is also crucial to note that proper pronunciation is an essential aspect of effective spoken communication (Berry, 2021).

As a result, this lack of proper pronunciation on behalf of teachers has severely hindered pronunciation instruction in recent years. (Jalal, 2011). Many research studies on pronunciation within the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) have been undertaken (Abdul-Abbas et al., 2021). Nevertheless, more study into this area is essential, particularly in EFL classes throughout the Arab world. According to Roach (2009), teachers have struggled teaching pronunciation to ESL/EFL learners. Therefore, there has been a resurgence of interest in phonological perception and production from different perspectives that are not limited to linguistic, cognitive, and social aspects, as well as a resurgence of attention to the pronunciation of second language words (Troike et al., 2006).

Language is conceptualized and expressed on a regular basis in a variety of systems (Reed & Levis, 2019). Two of these are called sound systems and meaning systems. Berry (2021) states that a sound system is a collection of speech components where learners must be able to practice clear pronunciation with accuracy. Vocabulary is a generic term used to describe these components of speech. When speaking, students should make appropriate use of the terminology they have learned.

However, a meaning system centers on grammar, and it refers to the way learners utilize words to communicate meaning. Arab EFL students must be able to comprehend and understand both systems and how they can be used interchangeably to effectively communicate. Fortunately, most English language courses in the EFL environment prioritize teaching these components of language in a systematic manner and they should not be overlooked. The most effective method of comprehending people is to simultaneously work on listening and speaking (pronunciation) skills during conversation. While communicating in English, many EFL students experience hesitancy and nervousness. During these episodes, they lack the courage to pronounce words correctly when necessary (Nakazawa, 2012). Hence, the environment where language is taught must be student-friendly and free of tension and anxiety, so that students feel less pressured. As a result, they can participate more actively in dialogues during classroom interaction (Krashen, 1982). Another factor contributing to the significance of pronunciation is that the English language has surpassed all others as the dominant language of oral communication throughout the world (Crystal, 2003).

1.1: Statement of the Problem: There are obviously great differences between many aspects of English and Arabic. Hence, students who live in remote areas with little access to modern culture (and therefore less exposure to English) are much more reluctant to speak than those who live in metropolitan cities like Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam This broader learning gap in rural areas makes trying to instill attitudes such as confidence and motivation even more challenging.

Therefore, this study will address the challenges faced by adult female Saudi learners from remote areas of the kingdom, in order to facilitate teaching and learning techniques of teachers for these particular demographic of students.

1.2: The significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify the pronunciation difficulties of female Saudi EFL learners, determine what type of assistance is needed, and execute corresponding training strategies for these learners. Learners will be assessed through a series of pronunciation tests designed to improve participants' listening and pronunciation abilities. This study is important as young adults are a significant part of the Vision 2030 led by HRH Mohammed Bin Salman, wherein they represent the country in the international spectrum (Rahman & Qattan, 2021).

To summarize, teaching pronunciation in an English language program for female Saudi EFL learners is mandatory because of the nature of the subject matter. When it comes to pronunciation instruction and assessment, there are approaches that have provided concrete results (Roach, 2009). Female students, due to the nature of the culture, are reluctant to speak due to societal pressure and a lack of confidence to participate, as most just try to blend into their own environment. Hence, teaching speaking and pronunciation to female students is particularly challenging, especially in a city like Taif where the people are still conservative (Alsofyani & Algethami, 2017).

As stated by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), logical pronunciation is speaking in a way that most listeners understand, which is a more feasible objective that instructors that scholars are increasingly supporting. Both native and non-native speakers are able to comprehend without too much difficulty or complication. Understanding the significance of pronunciation will aid in the development of efficient instructional and academic methods for teaching pronunciation in the most innovative way by understanding the difficulties these learners face in pronunciation.

Therefore, based on the notions posited by several researchers on this topic already, this study is crucial to understanding the “why’s” behind the challenges related to teaching pronunciation to adult female EFL learners. This study will contribute to a better understanding of training females in spoken skills, as the current workforce of Saudi Arabia is mainly constituted of female workers, as per the Vision 2030 set by HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al Saud.

1.3: Objectives and Questions of the Study:

Research Objective

The major goal of this study is to address the challenges faced by teachers in teaching pronunciation to adult female Saudi students from rural areas of Saudi Arabia and how EFL teachers can address these challenges in their teaching practice. This study further expands acknowledgement of their pronunciation challenges by suggesting viable pedagogical strategies for imparting English sounds and helping learners become more confident with their pronunciation skills which will lead to enhanced spoken skills.

Research Questions: The questions raised by this study are:

1. What are some of the most prevalent difficulties that adult female Saudi EFL students have with respect to pronunciation in a classroom with EFL teachers?
- 2: What are the difficulties faced by EFL teachers in a Female Saudi EFL classroom with respect to teaching pronunciation?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1: EFL Education System in Saudi Arabia

In 1926, Saudi Arabia's education system began with boys as its first students. According to Alharbi (2019), a directive issued by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education in 1942 established the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in the Kingdom's elementary schools. In 1952, the Ministry of Education was formed under the reign of King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. Following the implementation of a new education strategy, the Ministry of Education included English as a foreign language (EFL) as one of the required choices available to students starting in elementary school and continuing through university (Bani Younes et al., 2016). Currently throughout the globe, English language teaching (ELT) is becoming more widespread in both public and private institutions. Zazulak (2015) stated that English is one of the world's most significant information carriers. It is the most common language used on the internet, as well as being the dominant language of international commerce. According to the Harvard Business Review, nations with higher levels of English proficiency have stronger economies

(McCormick, 2013). As a result, learning the English language is not only beneficial for personal development, but it is also necessary for economic survival in our increasingly interconnected world. With Vision 2030, the most important component of the plan is education, which among other things is anticipated to decrease unemployment, enhance women's place in the workforce, grow the retail and technological industries, and finally, elevate Saudi Arabia into the top international rankings (Al-Riyadh, 2016). Among the most essential institutions that will help to put the new vision into action are grade schools, colleges, and universities. Interestingly, English language teaching has been deemed essential in increasing students' access to information in the sciences and technology. The majority of Saudi Arabia's governmental and private colleges now offer medical, engineering, and scientific courses with English as the medium of teaching, as opposed to Arabic in the past. Indeed, in many Saudi universities, English has become the sole language of teaching. This makes English language learning the primary focus for the Kingdom's development plan (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Hence, based on the Vision 2030 and the highlighted development of women in the country, English language institutes are mainly targeting females, both in the education and corporate sector, as most female Saudis are in demand for employment, especially for positions related to administration. The considerable increase in the rate of participation of Saudi females in the labor force from 17.7 percent in Q2, 2016 to 33.2 percent in Q4, 2020 has been the subject of a number of stories in the Saudi press. The unemployment rate among female citizens fell to its lowest level in four years in the fourth quarter of 2020, when it was at 24.4 percent (Alkhowaiter, 2021).

2.2: Difficulties faced by Students in Speaking & Pronunciation

In accordance with Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), logical pronunciation, which is defined as speaking in a manner that most listeners understand, is a more achievable component of language that teachers and academics are increasingly supporting. It is not too complicated for both native and non-native speakers to grasp what is being said. Learning about the importance of pronunciation can assist in the creation of effective instructional and academic techniques for teaching pronunciation in the most inventive manner possible by gaining an awareness of the issues that these learners have in their oral communication. Language is expressed and conceived on a regular basis in a variety of ways, and this is true across all cultures (Reed & Levis, 2019). Berry (2021) describes a sound system as a collection of speech components in which learners must be able to

practice clear pronunciation with precision to succeed. The term "vocabulary" refers to the collection of words and phrases that make up a speech. When communicating, students should make proper use of the vocabulary that they have acquired so that they are understood. Grammatical structure is the term used to describe the way in which learners use words to convey meaning to one another. The ability to perceive and understand in both directions is essential for Arab EFL students since they may be utilized interchangeably. Students of English as a foreign language who want to communicate successfully must master both systems at the same time. In the EFL context, the great majority of English language courses place a high priority on teaching these components of language in a systematic way, and they should not be disregarded. It has been shown that the most efficient approach to understanding people is to pay close attention to them while simultaneously focusing on their own pronunciation while speaking. Jahara and Abdelrady (2021), in their research revealed that EFL students had trouble appropriately pronouncing the initial three consonant clusters and the last three consonant clusters in English. They concluded that learners were making a mistake. The majority of EFL students experience reluctance and uneasiness when it comes to speaking in English. Because these students are reluctant and hesitant, they lack the confidence to pronounce things properly when the situation calls for it (Nakazawa, 2012).

Language attitudes are essential in the Arab community because Arabic is the language of the Gulf States. Although English is the language of education, science, and technology in Saudi Arabia, Arab students are reared in a non-Western setting. With regard to English study, their religious and political convictions may place people on a continuum between disaffection with Western society and target language and strong motivation. Arab-Western cultural differences may impact language learning motivation (Akram, 2015). Lori & Al Ansari (2001) propose using a culturally sensitive approach while teaching Arabic in EFL classes. The environment in which language is taught must be conducive to learning, with students free of stress and anxiety, allowing them to feel less pressurized throughout their studies. Consequently, they engage more actively in discussions during interaction with classmates in the classroom (Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, the fact that the English language has exceeded all other languages as the most widely used language for oral communication around the globe is a significant element in the importance of pronunciation (Crystal, 2003).

2.3: Difficulties faced by EFL teachers in the classroom with respect to teaching pronunciation

Teaching pronunciation has been a primary concern for all EFL teachers worldwide irrespective of the non-native country where it is being taught. Although pronunciation is one of the most difficult aspects of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia, there has been very little attention paid to speech instruction. Furthermore, establishing an overly ambitious goal to attain native-like pronunciation in an Arabian context further exacerbates the problem. Even though one may have an excellent command of English vocabulary and grammar, people who speak with bad pronunciation will nevertheless be unclear to other listeners (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2011). It is evident that although pronunciation is one of the most difficult components of English to master, it often receives the least amount of attention in many schools. When ESL instructors defend the poor pronunciation abilities of their students, their arguments might be characterized as either a cop-out due to their inability to teach their students accurate pronunciation or as a valid defense of the students' poor pronunciation skills.

According to Mohd, Asikin & Ibrahim (2020), the difficulties encountered in teaching pronunciation that were discovered in their research are split into two categories: internal difficulties and external difficulties. In this context, internal obstacles refer to variables that arise from inside the teacher trainees themselves that have the potential to impact pronunciation instruction in the classroom. While this study was in the Malaysian context, the background is very similar to Saudi Arabia, where ESL teachers struggle mostly with internal challenges. This is especially true of female students who because of Saudi society are effected more by internal factors. The L1 interference is one of the main challenges faced by the ESL teachers as students tend to translate every word of the lesson and focus on output (i.e., spoken skills are minimal).

Another study by Nair et al. (2006) states that teachers struggle with teaching pronunciation due to a lack of awareness of student needs. The study elaborates that pronunciation, in terms of accuracy and fluency, is achieved by being in the native environment. Sometimes, the mother tongue does not have the English sounds that would be needed by the student. Further to this, Nair et al. (2006) also claims that most students do not want to speak in the first place, which makes it difficult for teachers to properly assess pronunciation along with the appropriate feedback and categories correction. Teachers also stated that they don't know how to teach and have inadequate

resources. Understandably, teachers are not aware of how much time should be allotted to teach pronunciation in the first place (Nair et al., 2006).

These problems are the result of insufficient training given to teachers that would guarantee their capability of delivering successful lessons to their students (Breitkreutz et al., 2001). This is true particularly in the areas of Phonetics and Phonology. The following point is addressed: At the very least, by completing these two courses, teacher trainees will be able to offer the appropriate input to students throughout the process of teaching and learning in the classroom setting (Shahzada, 2012).

Another study by Ghouanane (2018) has reiterated many of these same deficiencies that were found to affect the teaching of pronunciation, such as a lack of training, classroom time allocated to pronunciation, confidence in teaching it and authentic materials. All these factors add up to the many challenges ESL teachers encounter when teaching pronunciation, whether in a native or non-native country. Due to the internal issues inside the classroom listed above, there are additional pedagogical issues, such as using the Grammar Translation method when the Communicative Language teaching approach should be employed, as well as other interactive speaking strategies (Tanveer et al., 2021).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1: Research Design

Method: A quantitative survey was chosen to focus on this research question. The goal of quantitative research is to achieve a realistic perspective of the social world and to improve knowledge and understanding. It records the actual reactions of the people to circumstances. Quantitative approaches collect data in the form of statistics and figures that express objective information. The results are focused and consistent with the data collection (Nielson, 2011). In the social sciences, the quantitative approach is the predominant research framework. It refers to a collection of tactics, methodologies, and assumptions used to examine psychological, social, and economic processes via the examination of numerical patterns. Quantitative research collects an assortment of numerical data. In certain circumstances, the numeric format is enforced (e.g., “On a scale of 1 to 5, how sad did you feel last week?”). The collecting of quantitative data enables

researchers to undertake basic to very complex statistical analysis of aggregated data. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research uses techniques such as surveys, systematic observations, and experiments (Bryman, 2006).

Sample and sample size: The sample for this study consisted of teachers who are currently teaching the first year Preparatory Program at Taif University. They completed an online questionnaire related to their strategies when teaching pronunciation. The survey listed questions based on a Likert Scale rating of 1-5, with 1 as highly disagreeing and 5 as highly agreeing. Their responses were then evaluated for the results. The roughly 44 teachers who participated in the study have at least five years of teaching experience, hence, the non-probability sampling technique was used.

Instrument: A survey created on Google Forms was used for collecting responses. The questionnaire focused on some of the key aspects of teaching pronunciation in the classroom and how it impacts the development of students' spoken skills. The questionnaire also listed how likely the teachers are to address the issues at their workplace with respect to teaching pronunciation for spoken skills. In addition to this, the questionnaire also covered points on the challenges faced by the student when it comes to pronunciation. The following table shows the research survey questions for the teachers (See Appendix: Table 1).

3.2: Data Collection: The data is a combination of information collected from different peer-reviewed research articles and the teachers' responses to the questionnaires. Predominantly female participants were chosen from Taif University because of their accessibility resulting from their exclusive importance during employment through the Vision2030 development. The questionnaire was based on the five-point Likert scale and sent as a link to the participants via e-mail and WhatsApp groups. To ensure that there were no biases in data collection, the survey allowed the participants to complete the form only once, after which the responses were recorded. Therefore, based on the above, there was no bias in the selection of qualitative or quantitative data. The collection of the data was preferred through existing data models to utilize their efforts and focus more on creating information.

3.3: Methods of Analysis: The data was presented using various visual representations that addressed the research questions. Furthermore, qualitative conclusions were drawn through the

exercise of professional skepticism (where required) to develop an in-depth understanding of what the data states along with the literature already reviewed by the other experts in the field. It was found that many experts utilized similar contexts and questionnaires in their research. One of the questionnaires (referenced) was used for survey purposes, after which conclusions was drawn from the results of the data collected. This ensured that the measured items taken for the study can be individually assessed for a better understanding of their relevance to the course of the study. For this study, no pilot test was conducted as the study mainly focused on quantitative analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion

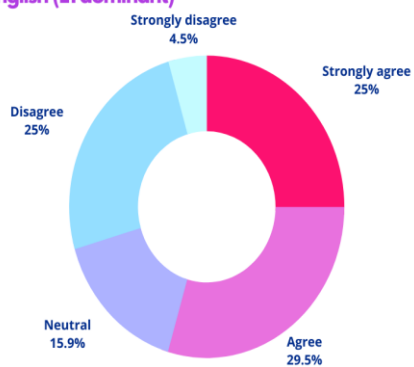
The following results of the study were based on the five-point Likert scale as follows:

- 1: Strongly disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Neutral
- 4: Agree
- 5: Strongly agree

Each of the survey questions were answered by the participating teachers who taught PYP from Taif University. In all, 44 responses were collected and the result for each question is as follows:

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information on the difficulties instructors confront while instructing pronunciation. A five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was utilized. Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements.

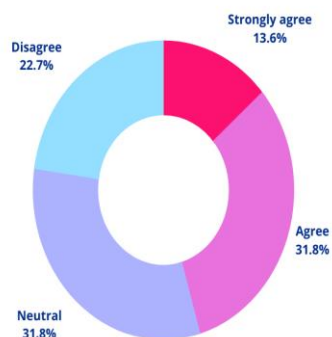
1. My students use Arabic more in the classroom compared to English (L1 dominant)



Likert Scale: 1-5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

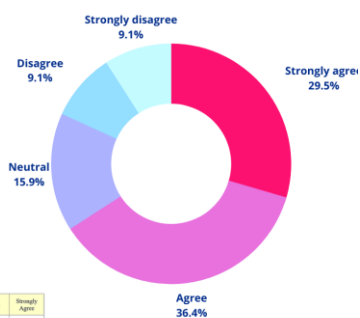
2. My students do not have the vocabulary to speak



Likert Scale: 1-5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

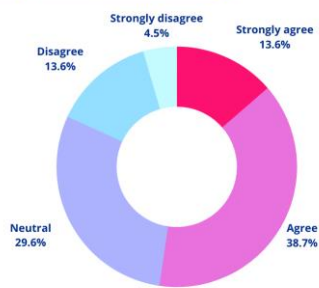
3. My students lack the self-confidence when pronouncing words



Likert Scale: 1-5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

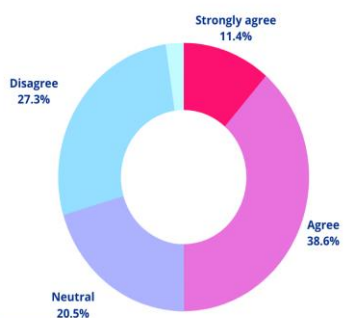
4. Time allotted for pronunciation is not enough



Likert Scale: 1-5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

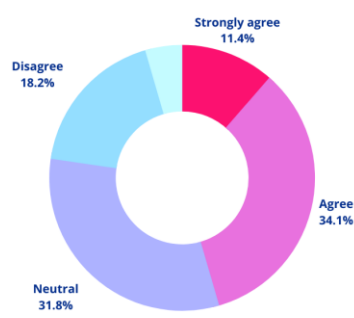
5. There are fewer practice activities for students to practice pronunciation



Likert Scale: 1-5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

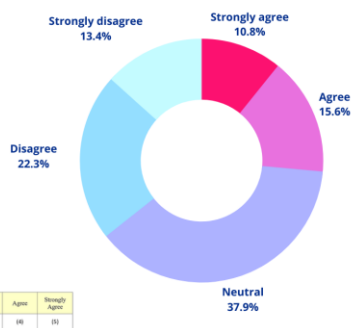
6. There are no slots for independent pronunciation practice in class



Likert Scale: 1-5

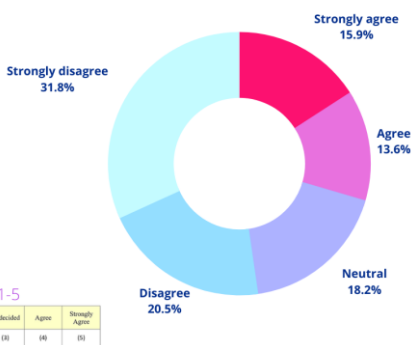
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

7. As a teacher, I did not get enough PD training for teaching pronunciation



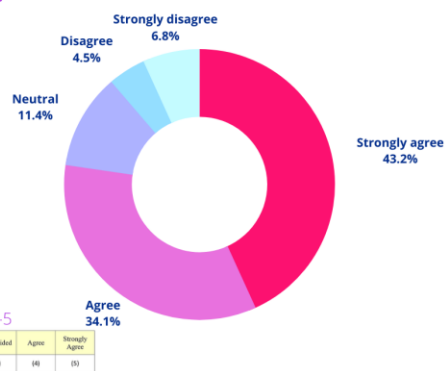
Likert Scale: 1-5

8. As a teacher, I am not confident in teaching pronunciation to my students



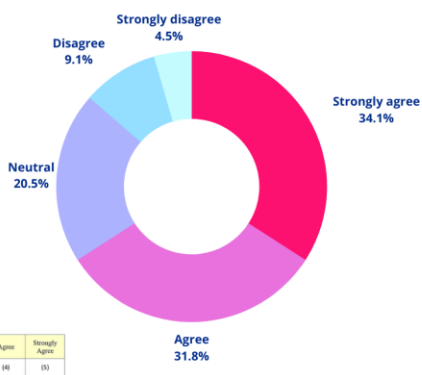
Likert Scale: 1-5

9. My students have pronunciation problems with /p/ and /b/ sounds



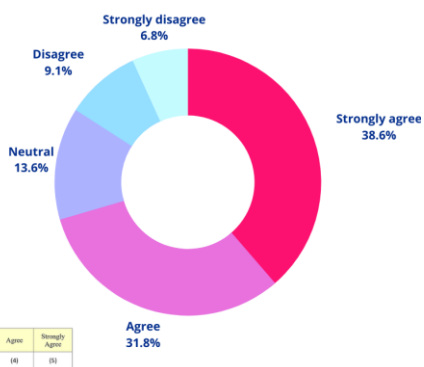
Likert Scale: 1-5

10. My students have pronunciation problems with /i/ and /e/ sounds



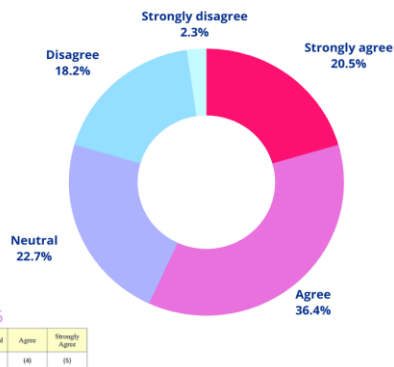
Likert Scale: 1-5

11. My students struggle with short vowel and long vowel sounds



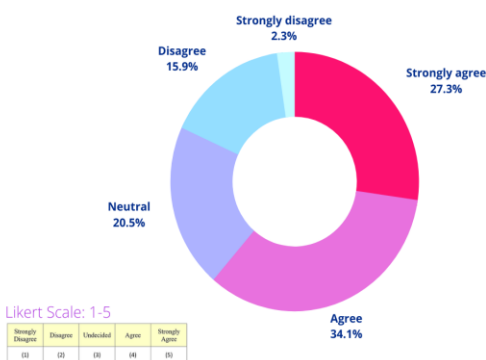
Likert Scale: 1-5

12. My students have a hard time pronouncing minimal pairs

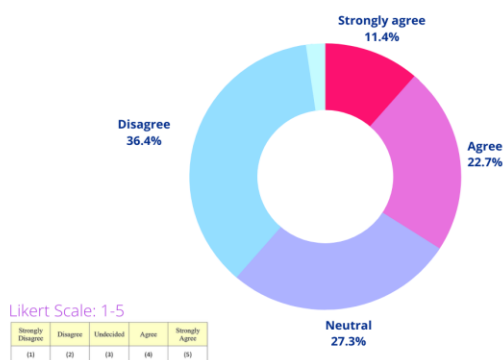


Likert Scale: 1-5

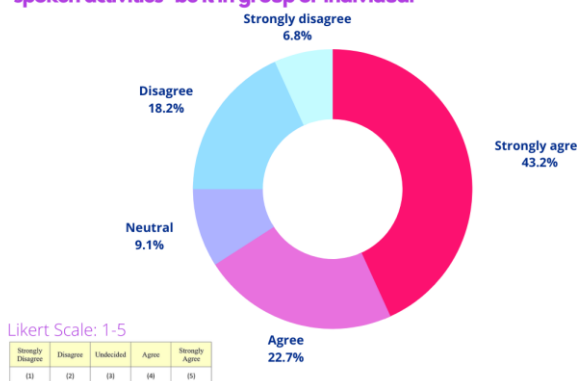
13. My students struggle with diphthongs



14. My students have problems pronouncing /r/ sounds



15. My students do well in written tests but hesitate in spoken activities- be it in group or individual



The first statement reads, “My students use Arabic more in the classroom compared to English (L1 dominant).” In response to this statement, 54% of the teachers agreed that their students used Arabic more in the classroom, followed by 15.9% who were neutral. Only 4.5% of the teachers disagreed. This result suggests that while there are classrooms where English usage is somewhat balanced, the majority agreed with this statement, showing that students at Taif University are still not accustomed to vocally communicating in class confidently. Unlike the metropolitan cities like Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam, Taif is a fairly conservative, which explains why the students use more of their L1 than L2 inside the classroom. Therefore, the teachers need to use eclectic techniques and speaking activities that are more visible (Hakim, 2019).

The second and third statements express that students do not have the vocabulary to speak and lack self-confidence when producing words. These two statements go hand-in-hand, given the relationship between building vocabulary and confident speaking. 44.6% of the respondents agreed that their students do not have the vocabulary to speak in the classroom, while 22.7% disagreed.

Similar results were reached for confidence and self-esteem where roughly 67% disagreed that students lack self-confidence when speaking. Alrabai (2017) explains in his study that there was a positive correlation between self-esteem and learner achievements (in this case, it would be knowing the vocabulary words) which suggests that self-confidence is instrumental in building the vocabulary that leads to an increase in their speaking skills.

The fourth and the fifth statements of the survey discuss the lack of time allotted for pronunciation in the classroom, followed by fewer practice activities for pronunciation. Based on the data, 20.55% maintained a neutral position, while 38.6% agreed and 11.4% strongly agreed to the notion, for a total of around 50%. This poses a strong challenge to the ESL teachers teaching at the university level, as access to resources are scarce in Saudi Arabia. As previously discussed, Nair et al. (2006) says that teachers reported on not knowing how to train the students and stressed the lack of the necessary teaching materials. Along with this, teachers also struggled with how much time should be allocated to teach pronunciation, which is the sixth statement of the survey. Again, this is one of the core challenges for ESL teachers to be addressed.

The seventh and the eighth statements in the questionnaire focus on professional development (PD) issues, such as training for teaching pronunciation and teacher confidence. Over 25% agreed that there has not been enough professional training for pronunciation teaching, with 15.9% in disagreement. The rest, maintaining a neutral position were aware of the challenges, but had not actively engaged in PD activities. The following statement validates the result with respect to teacher confidence being due to a lack of programs for professional development. A large percentage of ESL teachers, more than 52%, report having low confidence when teaching pronunciation. As per the data, the training that teacher candidates receive is inadequate (Breitkreutz et al., 2001). Appropriate pronunciation instruction for teacher trainees, especially in phonetics and phonology is much needed to improve the classroom teaching and learning process (Shahzada, 2012).

Statements nine through fourteen relate to the challenges faced by students who have pronunciation issues with /p/, /b/, /i/, /e/, vowel sounds, minimal pairs, diphthongs, and the /r/ sound. Most teachers report /p/ and /b/ pronunciation issues with their students. Similar data was reported on /i/ and /e/ pronunciation followed by long vowel and short vowel sounds. A large

percentage of teachers found students having issues with minimal pairs as well. Almost 59% of the students struggled with diphthongs and 33% agreed that their students had issues pronouncing /r/ sounds as well. For second language (L2) learners, diagnosing the pronunciation challenges they may likely face beforehand can be helpful to both teachers and students in implementing appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Since it has not yet been possible to establish a clearer profile of Saudi students' English pronunciation difficulties, this study has attempted to identify which English consonant sounds and clusters are difficult for them. This study has also attempted to investigate whether students' language proficiency levels influence their English consonant pronunciation performance. Based on a study by Alzinaidi & Abdellatif (2019), there are prominent consonant sounds and monophthongs and diphthongs that Saudi students still struggle with today as those letters and sounds do not exist in Arabic. Hence, the above data aligns with this study.

The last statement relates to students' good performance in written tests but reluctance in spoken activities. This reluctance could be due to issues with in-class or off-class activities. Overall, several studies have documented that although written assessments are not very different from spoken activities, students seem to be hesitant during speaking activities. Another large percentage of respondents agreed that students face a tough time with spoken assessments more than written assessments (Dinh et al., 2020). Based on the data in this study, about 43% of the respondents agreed that students faced difficulty in speaking compared to writing tests. Receptive skills have always been a priority in schools and colleges due to the long-term practice of the grammar translation method. Today, ESL teachers endorse and work with communicative language teaching concepts (Eissa et al., 2016).

Study Limitations & Future Research Prospects

One limitation of this study is that it is gender specific. This is again due to accessibility issues. Another limitation is that it was conducted in a single geographic area with a specific set of teachers at Taif University who differ in their challenges from those teaching at the tertiary level. Hence, the results of this study may not offer an overall perspective about the core challenges that teachers face with students at different levels. Additionally, this study only addresses PYP students who are at basic elementary level, whereas advanced level students, such as those in Level 3 and

4, face their own set of pronunciation issues. Hence, the many challenges of teaching pronunciation in Saudi Arabia extend far beyond the scope of this study and warrants additional research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The challenges experienced by the ESL teachers participating in this study when teaching pronunciation included issues like self-confidence, knowledge in terms of professional development and teaching strategies. The next set of challenges related to learners' needs and the confidence barrier they experienced when making errors while pronouncing words. In addition, many instructors in this study acknowledged a lack of confidence in pronouncing particular terms, which suggested that they lacked a thorough understanding of the English pronunciation.

Other challenges included lack of time, teaching materials and other resources. The majority of respondents were unsure if pronunciation should be considered a top concern while teaching English to students. Respondents also said that they were struggling with the amount of time allotted to cover the needed subjects in the curriculum, which left them with little time for pronunciation instruction. The incorporation of pronunciation activities into English classes was deemed to be the most effective strategy. It was also discovered that there are a limited number of instructional materials and other resources available on pronunciation due to the characteristics and demands of each learner. These were the difficulties that the ESL teachers encountered when attempting to teach pronunciation to students at their respective schools during their practical teaching experiences.

There were some aspects of learning that are no longer considered challenges, such as student self-confidence and vocabulary. This is primarily due to the fact that due to global outreach; many educational institutions have hosted free classes online during the pandemic where many students were able to learn from the comfort of their own homes with top-instructors. Students are now well-versed with the spoken and written forms of the English language. Therefore, the challenges when teaching pronunciation extend beyond vocabulary and speaking skills. ESL teachers should increase the intrinsic motivation of students to practice by opting for eclectic approaches so that students are given the opportunity to explore and practice the language.

Recommendations & Future Research

Before advocating pedagogical adjustments in EFL classrooms, the research suggests that a thorough inventory of learner requirements and accessible technology to meet those needs should be conducted. Teachers should educate students about the significance of English pronunciation in English language learning programs and in English language communication. The students should be taught the fundamentals of the English sound system, phonetics, phonology, IPA symbols, etc. If students have a phonetic and phonological understanding of English, they will be able to direct themselves to the right pronunciation of a certain sound or word.

One of the suggestions that can be recommended regarding pronunciation for ESL teachers is that they should perform a needs analysis exam with the students. Teachers should be trained on teaching minimal pairs which should be taught in a way to differentiate troublesome or similar sounds in the target language. Using audio-lingual methods in the classroom, spoken skills can be enhanced. As for future recommendations, ESL teachers should be provided with a tool to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the students with respect to spoken skills so they are able to design the curriculums for their students to address their precise needs.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Teachers were forwarded a google form link to their e-mails or via WhatsApp. Teachers teaching Saudi female EFL students at the university level took part in the survey.

The Likert scale will be from 1-5 in wherein:

1: Strongly disagree

2: Disagree

3: Neutral

4: Agree

5: Strongly agree

1. My students use Arabic more in the classroom compared to English (L1 dominant)
2. My students do not have the vocabulary to speak.
3. My students lack self-confidence when pronouncing words
4. Time allotted for pronunciation is not enough
5. There are fewer practice activities for students to practice pronunciation
6. There are no slots for independent pronunciation practice in-class
7. As a teacher, I did not get enough PD training for teaching pronunciation
8. As a teacher, I am not confident in teaching pronunciation to my students
9. My students have pronunciation problems with /p/ and /b/ sounds
10. My students have pronunciation problems with /i/ and /e/ sounds
11. My students struggle with short vowel and long vowel sounds
12. My students have a hard time pronouncing minimal pairs
13. My students struggle with diphthongs
14. My students have problems pronouncing /r/ sounds
15. My students do well in written tests but hesitate in spoken activities- be it group or individual