

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES AMONG EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Pronunciation skill is essential to acquire proficiency in English while learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The learners commit errors in pronunciation due to the differences in the sound system of the two languages, English vowel inconsistency, spelling and mother tongue interference while learning the target language. Learning the basics of English pronunciation through phonics will not only help students to speak effectively, but also will improve their listening comprehension and reading ability. Pronunciation and clear understanding of English speech are two skills which complement each other. English is not a phonetic language, as one letter does not correspond to only one sound. Obviously, EFL learners find it extremely challenging to acquire pronunciation of words in English from its spelling. The study investigated the pronunciation errors among EFL students whose first language is Arabic. The sample comprised 50 female undergraduate students of the Department of English, Samtah University College, and Jazan University. Observation, recordings, and a structured questionnaire were used as instruments. The study was both descriptive and prescriptive. The results revealed that EFL students had committed errors in the pronunciation of English vowels that have more than one way of pronunciation, consonant sound contrasts and consonant clusters where two or more consonants occur without a vowel sound in between. Summing up this study, the researcher has recommended that university students should enrich their English pronunciation skills to prepare themselves for future to meet personal, professional, communicative, and global challenges.

Index Terms: English pronunciation, errors, vowels, consonants, consonant clusters.

I. INTRODUCTION

Hornby (1987: 497) states that “Pronunciation is the way in which language is spoken; the way in which a word is pronounced; the way a person speaks the words of language. Dalton (1998:3) defines pronunciation as the production of significant sound into senses. The sound is significant because it is used as a part of a code of particular language. It is also significant because it is used to achieve meaning in context of use. Seidlhofer (2001: 56) defines pronunciation as “the production and perception of the significant sounds of a particular language in order to achieve meaning in contexts of language use”. Harmer (2001: 184) states that “the meaning of a sentence will be understood from the way it is pronounced”. It means that when learners speak in intelligible manner they will understand and convey the desired meaning. The learners are intelligible only when they understand what is heard and to be understood by using simple language tools to convey messages. Gilakjani (2012:119) assumes that “pronunciation is a set of habits of producing sounds”. The habit of producing a sound is acquired by repeating it over and over again by being corrected when it is pronounced wrongly. Yates and Zelinski (2014:31) state that “pronunciation refers to how we produce the sound that

we use to make meaning when we speak”. It includes the particular consonants and vowels of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of individual segments, such as stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, phrasing (suprasegmental aspects) and how the voice quality is estimated.

Pronunciation is vital in spoken communication as an inaccurate use of pronunciation very often leads to the message being misunderstood by the recipient. Changes in pronunciation of the letter sounds in words or in syllable emphasis on parts of words will more often than not change the words meaning and context thereby altering the meaning of the sentence. Correct pronunciation ensures that one sounds clear and easy to understand. If one has knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and uses good pronunciation, it helps others understand more clearly, easily, and quickly what one is trying to say. Clear pronunciation helps one to boost self-confidence in their speaking skills. It also helps to improve social skills and ability to participate in conversations, getting to know classmates and those around much better. Pronunciation training improves clear speaking abilities among learners. Darcy (2018:13) emphasized that clarity of speaking improves intelligibility and minimizes effort for interlocutors.

A. Research Significance

The purpose of this study is to identify the common pronunciation difficulties, scrutinise the reasons for pronunciation errors in English and propose significant strategies to overcome pronunciation errors in English among Saudi EFL students. This study indicated that the students have some common pronunciation problems with vowels, consonants, and consonant clusters which affects their participation in reading aloud, speaking before peers and orals in the courses such as phonology and graduation research projects.

B. Aim of the Study

This study attempts to identify, assess, and analyse pronunciation errors in English among Saudi EFL students. It also suggests noteworthy classroom strategies for teaching English pronunciation to rectify pronunciation errors in English among Saudi EFL students.

C. Research Questions

- i. What are the common pronunciation errors in English committed by Saudi EFL students?
- ii. What is the impact of teacher practices and strategies on students’ success in English pronunciation?
- iii. How do the strategies help Saudi EFL students to overcome pronunciation errors in English?

D. Limitations of the Study

The current study is limited to the phonology EFL female undergraduate students in the Department of English, Samtah University College, and Jazan University during the semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation instruction has often been ignored in ESL (English as a Second Language) / EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. It is in the last decade of the 20th century, pronunciation instruction has gained importance in the communicative-oriented EFL classroom due to the awareness that the most sensible, justifiable, and pressing objective of pronunciation teaching is not to acquire native-like or 'perfect' pronunciation but to produce a comprehensible and an intelligible speech. Gilakjani (2012:107) referred intelligibility to "the extent to which a listener actually understands an utterance" and opined that pronunciation can play a significant role in supporting the learners' overall communicative skill. He focused on identifying the features of pronunciation, explaining factors affecting the learning of pronunciation, elaborating the integration of pronunciation into the curriculum, discussed the strategies for teaching pronunciation that can help EFL learners meet their personal and professional needs.

A. Pronunciation Instruction in Language Teaching

Gilbert (1994, p. 38) described pronunciation instruction as "something of an orphan in English programs around the world" and, sixteen years later, she stated that "pronunciation continues to be the EFL/ESL orphan" (Gilbert, 2010, p. 1). Its prolonged negligence even drove researchers to regard pronunciation instruction as suffering from the "Cinderella Syndrome—kept behind doors and out of sight" (Celce-Murcia et al, 1996, p. 323) because it is the component of the SL/FL mostly excluded from all teaching programs. Darcy, I (2018:13) stated that pronunciation instruction is still underemphasized in many language programs and in teacher-training curricula. She outlined three obstacles emerged and suggested specific solutions to work with the goal of achieving powerful pronunciation practices in the classroom.

B. Challenges in English Pronunciation Instruction

In Arabic language there are three pairs of short and long vowels and twenty-eight consonants. Each phoneme is orthographically represented by only one letter individually which means that Arabic speakers pronounce the words as they are written. Tushyeh (1996:109) explained that Arabic has more of a one-to-one correspondence sound system where Arabic letters correspond closely to phonemes than English which has about 85% of its words in regular spelling. But English uses twenty-six letters to represent all the 44 phonemes. English is not a phonetic language. There is no one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and letters and there are many ways to represent each phoneme. Often, a letter does not correspond to only one sound and has different sounds. Smith (2007:196) states that "English has 22 vowels and diphthongs to 24 consonants", while "Arabic has only eight vowels and diphthongs to 32 consonants". English and Arabic, genetically two different languages, share some common features and exhibit a lot of differences. The differences are the main source of difficulty in the learning of English as a foreign language and vice-versa. It is observed that one of the major problems in the learning of pronunciation of a foreign language is the mother tongue interference caused by the differences between the native language and the target language.

C. Research Studies

Shedding light on the contribution of some previous research is fundamental since it will help to suggest and propose solutions concerning the research problem.

i) Studies on English Pronunciation errors

An investigation by Nesreen Saud Alahmadi (2014) in speaking errors of Saudi learners found that mother tongue interference was the reason and has a great impact on the process of second language learning. Edo Marza (2014) found computer-assisted instruction and audio-visual aids are highly useful in learning pronunciation and aimed at putting forward students' perceptions, proposals for enhancing, improving, and implementing pronunciation and comprehension skills in EFL pronunciation class. Hameed and Aslam (2015) attempted at exploring the pronunciation problems faced by the Saudi students of English. Most of students did not know where the sentence stops, and a new sentence begins. Consonant clusters were problematic too when pronouncing words like next, clothes, asked. They tried to insert a vowel between the last consonants. In addition to all these, a number of English consonant sounds (like, /p/, /d/, /v/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, and /ŋ/) seemed to be difficult for them to pronounce. Abugohar and Yunus (2018), investigated the difficulties that hamper high school students from pronouncing English vocabulary and simple sentences correctly and fluently. It recommended remedial pronunciation activities, practice of confusing words, and phonics practices. Mohammed, A, Idris, S (2020), investigated the challenges that EFL learners encounter in acquiring correct pronunciation in spoken English. The study aimed at casting the light on the significance of pronunciation in teaching as well as learning to any educational institution which adopts English as a course in the curriculum, particularly at the tertiary level. Fadhillah et al., (2020) used qualitative approach and identified the significant sources of errors in pronouncing English short vowel sounds among EFL students. The results showed that the most frequent error in pronouncing English short vowel sounds was the /æ/ sound with the percentage 36.15% and the significant source of error in pronouncing English short vowel sounds was inter-lingual transfer with the percentage of 62.65%. They recommended that English teachers should analyse the pronunciation errors of students to identify the weaknesses of students and help them to overcome and improve their English pronunciation. Saadah and Ardi (2020) aimed to determine students' pronunciation error in pronouncing English diphthong sounds among students of English language. Jahara, S. F., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2021) focused on pronunciation problems encountered by Arab undergraduate EFL learners. The study aimed to train the students with pronunciation tests and phonemic inventory by repetition and imitation to overcome pronunciation miscues and fossilized miscues to enhance their pronunciation. It proposed feasible pedagogical techniques to impart sounds of English and initiate the learners to produce and acquire sounds more accurately.

ii) Studies using media to improve English pronunciation

Sihombing, B (2018) investigated on using related media such as English songs and English movies improves students' pronunciation. It was a classroom-based action research. It showed that the improvement of students' score based on the range of the pre-test (55.3) to the post test

in Cycle II (85.4). Thus, the use of related media such as English Songs and English Movies improved students' pronunciation. Pardede, P (2018) conducted a three-cycled action research. The participants were provided special practice on pronunciation, watching video, or listening to English expressions of native speakers. The results revealed that the explicit teaching approach enhanced the participants' English pronunciation skills. The participants expressed that the approach was interesting, helped pronunciation development, and increased self-confidence in English speaking. Lutfiani, D & Astutik, I (2017) used tongue twisters to teach English pronunciation and improve students' pronunciation. The results of the classroom action research which was done in two cycles showed 77.14% students got score ≥ 75 and 77.13% of the students were active in teaching learning process. Albiladi, WS (2019) explored some of the teaching and learning strategies that can be used by foreign language teachers to improve their students' pronunciation skills. Novarita and Sanjaya (2019) described how the student's ability was in understanding 11 minimal pairs and what were the factors that influenced the students' ability in understanding minimal pairs among English Department students.

D. Literature Gap:

All in all, the Saudi Arabian and international studies have shed light on the ways how pronunciation errors influence the performance of the EFL learners. Even though significant work has been done on challenges in English pronunciation, still there is more scope to conduct research. Therefore, the present study is an ardent effort to fill the gap of literature by concentrating on the pronunciation errors in EFL learners' pronunciation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive and prescriptive methods of quantitative research was used to identify, assess, and analyze pronunciation errors in English among Saudi EFL students, as described in Table 1 and in the paragraphs to follow. It assessed the kinds of common pronunciation errors committed by that the EFL students.

Table 1: Research Design

Phases	Sample, Sample size and Instruments	Data analysis
Phase 1. Online Survey	Sample: Dept. of English students, Samtah University College, Jazan University.	
	Sampling: Quota sampling.	
	Sample size: 50 students.	
	Instrument: Students' Questionnaire. EFL Teachers' Classroom Practices and Strategies	Chi square & 'p' value were calculated
Phase 2. Interactive Teaching Materials	Interactive Teaching Materials 1. Phonemic Chart 2. Poster-Vowels 3. Poster – Consonants 4. Minimal Pairs 5. Consonant Clusters 6. Tongue Twisters	
Phase 3. Experimentation	Instrument: Pretest and Posttest design	Percentages, Chi square & 'p' value were calculated

A. Phase 1: Online Survey

1. Sample

The sample of the study comprised 50 female undergraduate students of the Department of English, Samtah University College, Jazan University. The researcher made use of quota sampling which required the representative individuals who were ranging between the ages of 25 and 30. Davis (2005) quotes that quota sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which participants are chosen on the basis of predetermined characteristics so that the total sample will have the same distribution of characteristics as the wider population.

2. Instrument

The data gathering instrument was an online survey questionnaire. It was designed to discover the EFL teachers' classroom practices and classroom strategies and to identify potential reasons why students may commit pronunciation errors in English. It consisted of 11 question items related to EFL Teachers' classroom practices and strategies on a 5-point scale as shown in the Results section. The final form revealed that the tool possesses construct validity. Middleton, F. (2022) states that construct validity evaluates whether a measurement tool really represents the thing we are interested in measuring. It's central to establishing the overall validity of a method. The online survey questionnaire was administered and the responses of the students in the questionnaire have been reported in Table 2 & 3 and Figures 1 – 6 below. The data was analysed based on the responses of the students. Chi square and 'p' value were calculated.

B. Phase 2: Interactive Teaching Materials

The findings based on the students' responses in the questionnaire ELT teachers' classroom practices indicated that EFL teachers should focus their attention on pronunciation instruction to improve pronunciation skills among EFL students. The findings based on the students' responses in the questionnaire ELT teachers' classroom strategies suggested EFL teachers the classroom strategies that could be used to improve pronunciation among the students. Hence, the investigator being an EFL teacher planned for modeling pronunciation skills in English among the students with the help of interactive teaching material during the invention program. The interactive teaching material has been designed to help the EFL students to overcome the difficulties and improve their pronunciation in English. The interactive teaching material was selected from the internet, planned, and implemented in the experimentation / intervention program. The link of the interactive material (<https://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/phonemic-chart-ia.htm>) was shared with the students so that they would be able to practice at home. The investigator used a few classroom strategies for teaching English pronunciation.

Classroom Strategies for Teaching English Pronunciation

- Phonics exercises
- Phonemic charts (vowels-long and short, consonants and consonant clusters)

- demonstrating the different mouth positions
- demonstrating syllable stress and intonation
- pronouncing words by cross-referencing minimal pairs
- practicing tongue twisters.

C. Phase 3: Experimentation

A two-month remedial program was designed. The investigator being the course teacher handled and ensured that all content aspects were taught with the same zeal and commitment. The students were informed that they were a part of the action research program. Practice worksheets were given to the students. A post-test has been administered at the end of the remedial program to measure whether the EFL students could overcome errors and improve their English pronunciation or not.

1. Design of the Experiment

The Pretest Posttest design has been used to conduct the experiment. The wrong and right responses were obtained from the students in English pronunciation test and were converted into numerical scores in both the pretest and posttest. Shuttleworth, M (2009) states that for many true experimental designs, pretest-posttest designs are the preferred method to compare participant groups and measure the degree of change occurring as a result of treatments or interventions. Lutfiani, D & Astutik, I (2017) and Sihombing, B (2018) used the pretest-posttest designs in their studies.

2. Analysis

The data collected using the pretest and posttest design was statistically analyzed using the percentages, chi square and p value. The difference between pretest and post test scores of the students has been analyzed. The analysis revealed that there has been improvement between the pretest scores and post test scores.

IV. RESULTS

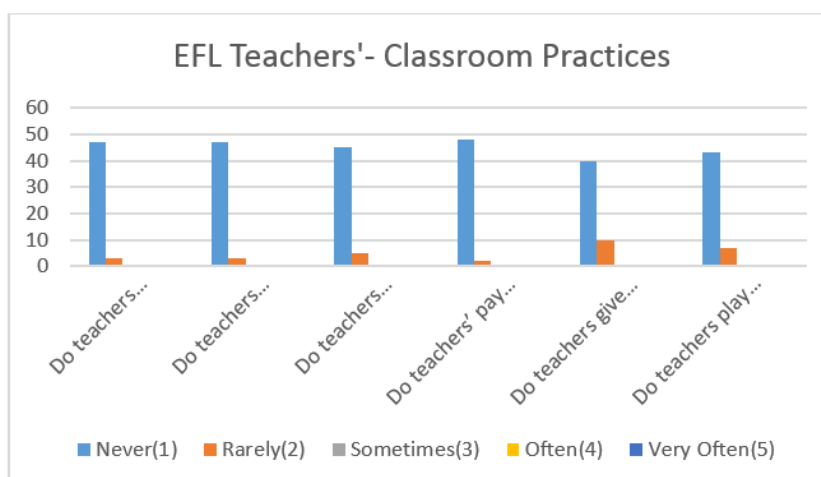
The responses of the students in the questionnaire have been reported in Tables 2 & 3 and Figures 1 – 6 below.

A. Students' Responses on EFL teachers' classroom practices

Table 2: Students’ Responses on Efl Teachers’ Classroom Practices

S.No	Statements	Never 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very Often 5
EFL Teachers’ – i) Classroom Practices						
1.	Do teachers devote time for English pronunciation?	47	03	-	-	-
2.	Do teachers monitor students’ pronunciation?	47	03	-	-	-
3.	Do teachers correct students’ errors?	45	05	-	-	-
4.	Do teachers’ pay attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation?	48	02	-	-	-
5.	Do teachers give practice in oral reading of textbooks?	40	10	-	-	-
6.	Do teachers play videos to improve students’ pronunciation?	43	07	-	-	-
Chi square = 10.222 : p value 0.069						
Null Hypothesis: “There is no significant association between English pronunciation difficulties and EFL teachers’ classroom practices” has been rejected.						

Figure 1: Students’ Responses on EFL Teachers’ Classroom Practices



From the above Table 2 and Figure 1 - it can be deduced that EFL teachers seldom have good practices in teaching English pronunciation.

1. Do teachers devote time for English pronunciation?

47 students expressed that teachers never devote time for English pronunciation and 3 students expressed that teachers rarely devote time for English pronunciation. Usually, pronunciation is overlooked by English teachers, syllabuses, and course books.

2. Do teachers monitor students’ pronunciation?

47 students expressed that teachers never monitor students’ pronunciation, and 3 students expressed that teachers rarely monitor students’ pronunciation. The most common way to

monitor student speech is during pair or group work and correct it either there and then or in a follow-up stage.

3. Do teachers correct students' errors?

45 students expressed that teachers never correct students' errors and 5 students expressed that they rarely correct students' errors. The teachers should accept that there is a role for correcting student speech in the language classroom. It therefore follows that in language production students need and their teachers to correct them.

4. Do teachers' pay attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation?

48 students expressed that teachers never pay attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation while 2 students expressed that they rarely pay attention to stress, rhythm, and intonation.

5. Do teachers give practice in oral reading of textbooks?

40 students expressed that teachers never give practice in oral reading of textbooks while 10 students expressed that teachers rarely give practice in oral reading of textbooks.

6. Do teachers play videos to improve students' pronunciation?

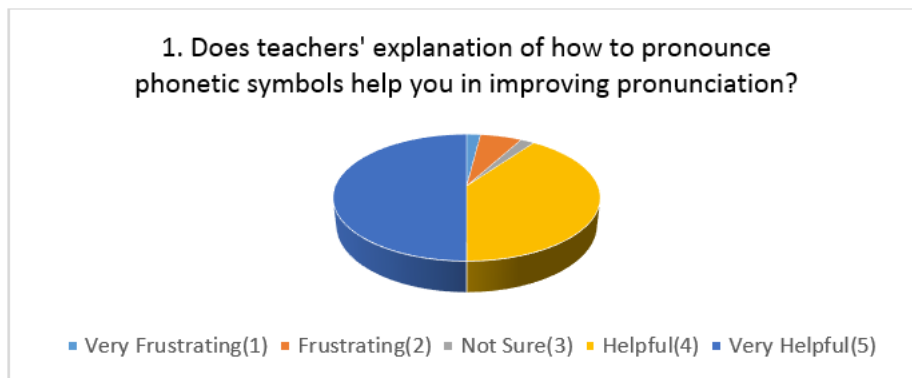
43 students expressed that teachers never play videos to improve students' English pronunciation and 7 students expressed that teachers rarely play videos to improve English pronunciation among the students.

B. Students' Responses on EFL teachers' classroom strategies

Table 3: Students' Responses on Efl Teachers' Classroom Strategies

S.No	Statements	Very Frustrating 1	Frustrating 2	Not sure	Helpful 4	Very Helpful 5
	EFL Teachers' – ii) Classroom Strategies					
1.	Does teachers' explanation of how to pronounce phonemic symbols help you in improving pronunciation?	1	3	1	20	25
		Very Hostile	Hostile	Not sure	Supportive	Very Supportive
2.	Does reading aloud with the teacher's support help you in improving pronunciation?	1	3	1	15	30
		Not at all Enthusiastic	Unenthusiastic	Not sure	Enthusiastic	Very Enthusiastic
3.	Do situational dialogues in the classroom help you in improving pronunciation?	2	2	1	18	27
		Very Boring	Boring	Not sure	Interesting	Very Interesting
4.	Do tongue twisters help you in improving pronunciation?	1	1	1	17	30
		Very Boring	Boring	Not sure	Interesting	Very Interesting
5.	Does listening to English News (BBC) and watching English movies/ English programs help you in improving pronunciation?	3	1	1	19	26
	Chi square = 5.566 : p value = 0.9918					
	Null Hypothesis: "There is no significant association between English pronunciation difficulties and EFL teachers' classroom strategies" has been rejected.					

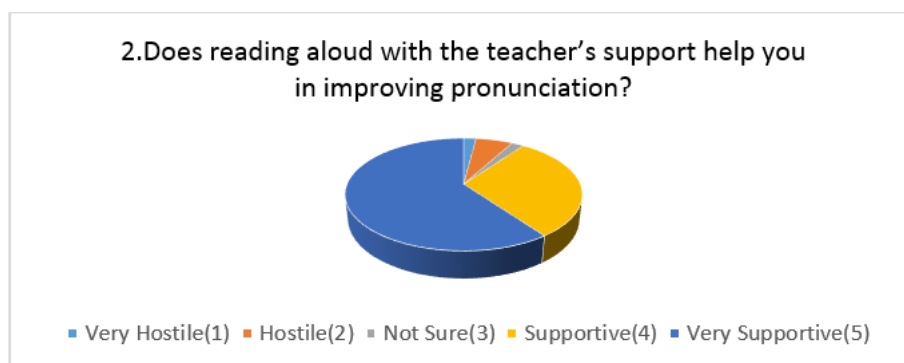
Figure 2: Students' responses on EFL teachers' classroom strategies, Question 1



1. Does teachers' explanation of how to pronounce phonemic symbols help you in improving pronunciation?

25 students expressed that teachers' explanation of how to pronounce phonemic symbols is very helpful for them in improving pronunciation while 20 students expressed that it would be helpful. This showed that overall, 45 students had positive attitude. 3 students were not sure, 3 students expressed that they would have frustrating experience and 1 student said that it would be very frustrating for her.

Figure 3: Students' responses on EFL teachers' classroom strategies, Question 2



2. Does reading aloud with the teacher's support help you in improving pronunciation?

30 students expressed that reading aloud with the teacher's support is very supportive for them to improve pronunciation. 15 students expressed that the teacher's support is supportive while 3 students are not sure, 2 students would feel hostile, and 1 student would feel very hostile.

Figure 4: Students’ responses on EFL teachers’ classroom strategies, Question 3



3. Do situational dialogues in the classroom help you in improving pronunciation?

27 students expressed that situational dialogues in the classroom would make them feel very enthusiastic and helps them in improving pronunciation. 18 students expressed that situational dialogues in the classroom would make them feel enthusiastic while 1 student was not sure, 2 students would feel unenthusiastic, and 2 students would feel not at all enthusiastic.

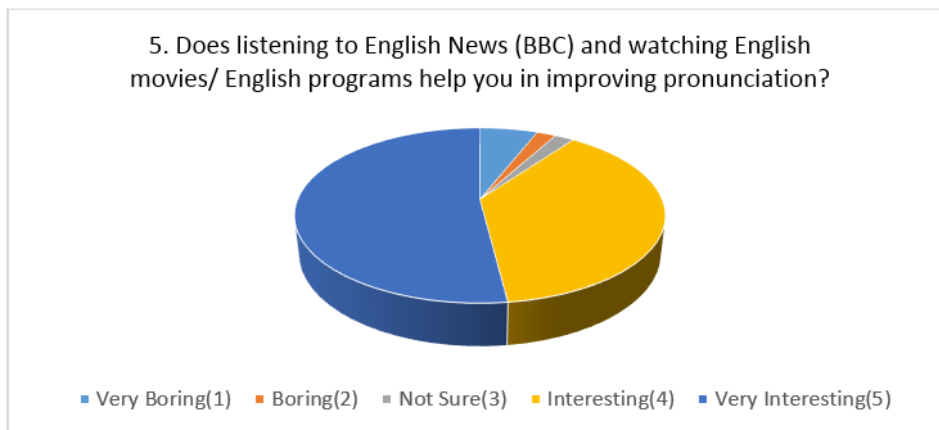
Figure 5: Students’ responses on EFL teachers’ classroom strategies, Question 4



4. Do tongue twisters help you in improving pronunciation?

30 expressed that tongue twisters are helpful to them in improving pronunciation and are very interesting while 17 students expressed that it would be interesting. 1 student was not sure, 1 student felt it was boring and 1 students felt that it was very boring.

Figure 6: Students’ responses on EFL teachers’ classroom strategies, Question 5



5. Does listening to English News (BBC) and watching English movies/ English programs help you in improving pronunciation?

26 students expressed that listening to English News (BBC) and watching English movies/ English programs helps them in improving pronunciation and is very interesting while 19 students expressed that it would be interesting. 1 student was not sure, 1 student felt it was boring and 3 students felt that it was very boring.

C. Difference between Frequency of Errors on Pre-test score and Post test score

3. Problematic Vowel Sounds

Table 4: Students’ Responses – Problematic Vowel Sounds

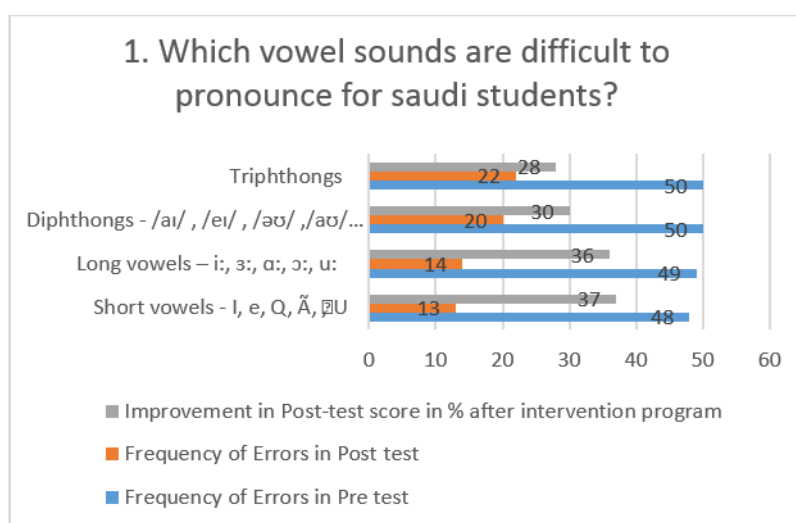
1. Which vowel sounds are difficult to pronounce for Saudi students?

#	Problematic Vowel sounds	Frequency of Errors in Pretest		Frequency of Errors in Post test		Improvement in Post-test score in % after intervention program	
		No. of students	% of students	No. of students	% of students	No. of students	% of students
1.	Short vowels - I, ε, Θ, ϕ, □, Y	48	96%	13	21%	37	79%
2.	Long vowels – i:, ɜ:, α:, ɔ:, u:	49	98%	14	23%	36	77%
3.	Diphthongs - /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, /ɔɪ/, /ʊə/.	50	100%	18	30%	30	70%
4.	Triphthongs - ε I↔, αI↔, □ I↔, ↔Y↔, αY↔	50	100%	18	30%	28	70%
Chi square = 3.126 : p value = 0.792							
Null Hypothesis: “There is no significant association between English pronunciation difficulties and problematic vowel sounds” has been rejected.							

The findings of the pretest revealed that:

1. The Saudi students had pronunciation problems like vowel confusion, missing the vowel sound and wrong vowel insertion.
2. The students had pronunciation problems related to differentiate the sound of have two vowels, with one or two phonemes vowel sounds such as the /e/ with /i/, /ei/, /æ/; the /i/ sound with /ε, ai, ei, ai/; and the /a/ sound with the /e, ε, æ/).
3. The students are confused with /i/ and /i:/ as in sit / seat, /ɒ/ and /əʊ/ as in not / note, / æ/ and /ei/ as in mat / mate, /e/ and /ei/ as in let / late, /e/ with /i/ in the words ‘set’ and ‘sit’ would be pronounced as /sit/, / æ/ and /a:/ as in hand and hard, /u/ and /u:/ as in book and boot, /a:/ and /ɔ:/ as in car and ball.
4. The students over generalize the /A/ when pronouncing /u/, so books /bʊks/ is same as box /bʌks/.
5. The sounds like /ε/, /φ/ are replaced with a schwa /↔/.

Figure 7: Students’ Responses - Problematic Vowel sounds



1. The frequency of errors in short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs in the pre-test are 96%, 98%, 100% and 100% respectively.
2. There is a positive trend in the post test frequency of errors in short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs as there is a decrease in the percentage of errors when compared to pretest. The frequency of errors in short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs in the post test are 21%, 23%, 30% and 30% respectively.
3. There was a significant improvement in the post test score after the intervention program. 79% of the sample showed improvement in short vowels, 77% of the sample showed improvement in long vowels and 70% of the sample showed improvement in diphthongs and triphthongs.

Table 5: Students’ Responses – Problematic Consonant Sounds

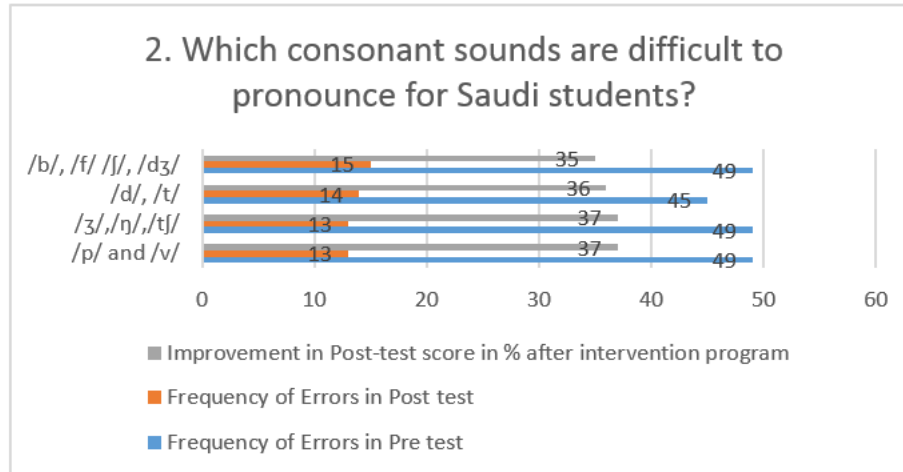
2. Which consonant sounds are difficult to pronounce for Saudi students?

#	Problematic Consonant sounds	Frequency of Errors in Pre-test		Frequency of Errors in Post test		Improvement in Post-test score in % after intervention program	
		No. of students	% of students	No. of students	% of students	No. of students	% of students
1.	/p/ and /v/	49	98%	13	21%	37	79%
2.	/ʒ/, /ŋ/, /tʃ/	49	98%	13	21%	37	79%
3.	/d/, /t/	45	90%	14	23%	36	77%
4.	/b/, /f/ /ʃ/, /dʒ/	49	98%	15	25%	35	75%
Chi square = 0.404 : p value = 0.9988							
Null Hypothesis: “There is no significant association between English pronunciation difficulties and problematic consonant sounds” has been rejected.							

The findings of the study revealed that:

1. The students had problems with missing sounds in Arabic such as the /p/ and / v/ sounds and often replace them with the /b/ and / f/ English sounds.
2. The students pronounced the /k/ sound instead of /ch/ sound and /t/ sound for /th/ sound.
3. The voiced “th” (“these”, “there”), voiceless “th” (“thanks”, “three”), “p” (“pop”, “people”), “v” (“very”, “vine”), the soft “j” sound (“measure”, “fissure”), “ng” (“thing”, “wing”), and three consonant blends do not exist in Arabic.
4. The sounds / tʃ/, /ʒ/ and /v/ don’t have counterparts in the Arabic consonant system and are not normally realised by Saudi students, consequently these are often replaced by the sounds /ʃ/, /dʒ, ʃ or z/ and /f/ respectively—for example, the sound /tʃ/ as in cheap is replaced by the sound /ʃ/ as in sheep; the sound /ʒ/ as in leisure is replaced by the sound /dʒ/ as in ledger or by the sound /z/ as in laser and finally the sound /v/ as in vine is replaced by the sound /f/ as in fine.
5. Most of the students could pronounce /t/ and /d/ but they are pronounced by Saudi students as inter-dental, rather than alveolar plosives.
6. It is observed that the velar nasal /ŋ/, which is a single consonant represented in English writing by two letters (-ng), is also mispronounced by many Saudi students. As a result, they pronounce the word (heating = /hi:tiŋ/) as /hi:ti-n-g/, (visiting = /visitiŋ/) as /visiti-n-g/ etc.
7. The students completely missed the stress or intonations on two or more syllabi words and imitated the Arabic /r/ sound by added an extra stress on the English /r/ sound.

Figure 8: Students' Responses - Problematic Consonant Sounds



1. The frequency of errors in /p/ and /v/, /z/,/ŋ/,/tʃ/, /d/, /t/ and /b/, /f/ /ʃ/, /dʒ/ consonants in the pretest are 98%, 98%, 90% and 98% respectively.
2. There is a positive trend in the post test frequency of errors in /p/ and /v/, /z/,/ŋ/,/tʃ/, /d/, /t/ and /b/, /f/ /ʃ/, /dʒ/ consonants as there is a decrease in the percentage of errors when compared to pretest. The frequency of errors in /p/ and /v/, /z/,/ŋ/,/tʃ/, /d/, /t/ and /b/, /f/ /ʃ/, /dʒ/ consonants in the post test are 21%, 21% 23% and 25% respectively.
3. There was a significant improvement in the post test score after the intervention program. 79% of the sample showed improvement in in /p/ and /v/, /z/,/ŋ/,/tʃ/, 77% of the sample showed improvement in /d/, /t/ and 75% of the sample showed improvement in /b/, /f/ /ʃ/, /dʒ/ consonants.

V. DISCUSSION

As the research questions were stated earlier, the research hypotheses developed to address the feasible nexus between English pronunciation difficulties and classroom practices and strategies, problematic vowel, and consonant sounds were rejected.

Based on the findings of the pre-test, the common pronunciation errors committed by Saudi EFL students were identified and they fall in line with the other research studies. Ahmad (2011) and Ahmad and Nazim (2013) attempted to investigate the difficulties encountered by Saudi students when pronouncing certain English consonant sounds. The results showed that the Arabic speakers in this study had difficulties in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds, such as /p/, /d/, /v/, /tʃ/, /z/, and /ŋ/. The results showed that lack of proper attention towards teaching pronunciation, and lack of motivation among the EFL learners towards learning pronunciation led them to such pronunciation errors. Hago and Khan (2015) investigated the difficulties of English pronunciation encountered by Saudi secondary school learners when pronouncing 11 English consonants. The results demonstrated that a great number of the participants, unintentionally insert a vowel sound in English syllable to break up consonant

clusters. Ababneh (2018) dealt with English pronunciation errors made by two groups of native Saudi Arab speakers. The students in both groups made vowel insertion and confusion, orthography, stress, intonation, errors; but the more trained students in group 1 made less errors than the students in group 2. Alzinaidi and Adel Latif (2019) showed that the participants' highest error percentages were in pronouncing: /ʒ/, /ŋ/, /p/, /ɹ/ and /tʃ/; /t/ and /d/ of the regular past morpheme -ed; and the 4- and 3-consonant clusters. The study indicated that the consonants in the word-initial and -final positions are likely to cause more pronunciation difficulties than the ones in the word-medial position. Khalifa (2020) analysed Arabs' errors in English pronunciation regarding segmental-consonants, consonant clusters, and vowels-and supra segmental-main word stress and also explained the main interlingual reasons behind these errors and presented some teaching suggestions for surmounting them. The subjects found difficulty in pronouncing some English consonants such as /p/, /v/, /ŋ/, dark /h/, syllabic consonants and consonant doubling. They also had trouble with two-element clusters beginning with /p/, /s/, /g/, /θ/, consonant + /j/, /dw/ and all three-element clusters. In addition, they inserted a vowel between the elements of medial and final clusters. Regarding vowels, the subjects got confused with most of the English vowels and diphthongs with each other or substituted Arabic vowels for English ones. Finally, they stressed the last syllable of English words ending in V:, V:C and VCC and the first syllable of words having the syllabic pattern CVCVCV(C).

It is noteworthy that the findings of the present study overlap with what has been examined by earlier researchers. The findings of this study that Saudi students had pronunciation problems like vowel confusion, missing the vowel sound, wrong vowel insertion, /p/ and /v/ sounds being replaced with /b/ and /f/, /k/ sound instead of /ch/ sound and /t/ sound for /th/ sound, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ and /v/ replaced by the sounds /ʃ/, /dʒ, ʒ or z/ and /f/ respectively in English sounds are in line with the research studies of Ahmad (2011), Ahmad and Nazim (2013), Ahmad and Nazim (2014), Hago and Khan (2015), Ababneh (2018), Alzinaidi and Abdel Latif (2019) and Khalifa (2020).

It is evident from the findings of the pretest that there is mother tongue interference, and it causes difficulty in pronouncing the sounds in the words of the English language as English and Arabic are two different languages. Al-Badawi and Salim (2014) anticipated that the similarities between the two systems would act as a reference point for the learner's perception of the English vowels. Alfahaid (2015) discussed "The Arabic and English phonological system are very different, not only in the range of sounds used, but in the emphasis placed on vowels and consonant in expressing meaning" (Smith, 2001:196). Subandowo, D (2017) examined the language interference that is the mother tongue influence of the learners while speaking English. The mistakes in consonant sounds caused by the mother tongue were highly interfered. The pronunciation in manner of articulation occurred in consonants such as, /p/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/ in plosive and /m/ in nasal. Moreover, for the place of articulation, the mistakes appeared on /θ/ and /d/ in dental and /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ palate alveolar. The finding of this study is also in line with the finding of Al-Badawi and Salim (2014), Nesreen Saud Alahmadi (2014), Alfahaid (2015) and Subandowo (2017). The students' responses in the questionnaire EFL teachers – classroom practices were analyzed to know the reasons for pronunciation errors

among Saudi students. The ELT teachers have seldom good practices, and they should pay attention to improve pronunciation among the students.

According to Foote (2011), teachers avoid or do not devote time to giving pronunciation instruction since they believe that 'listening-speaking, grammar, reading, and writing are more important than pronunciation. Marina Jurišić (2020) suggests the most common way to monitor student speech is during pair or group work and correct it either there and then or in a follow-up stage. Scrivener (2011) suggests that as the students are working, monitor them and collect instances of language. The aim is to try for recurring mistakes, or errors related to the target language. While the students are still doing the task, let them read the sentences and figure out if they are correct or not. They can confirm their answers with a partner, then with the whole class. This way, the teacher does not interrupt the students while they are working but do get to correct some recurring errors. The EFL teachers should focus on word stress patterns as it helps students to improve their pronunciation by focusing on short sentences using standard word stress patterns. Albiladi, WS (2019) says that if teachers teach English rhythm, teachers may see progress in their students' English pronunciation. Novarita and Sanjaya, (2019) and Albiladi, WS (2019) also used minimal pairs in their research studies to improve English pronunciation. Oral reading of textbooks is giving students' practice by rereading short passages aloud which is one of the best ways to promote fluency among the students. The teachers should also engage their students in echo reading in which the teacher reads a line and all the students repeat the line after the teacher. Oakley, G (2003) suggests improving oral reading fluency and comprehension through the creation of talking books. The research findings showed that the implementation of videos could improve students' speaking pronunciation. Riswandi, D (2016) recommended using videos improves students speaking skills. It can be concluded that the implementation of videos in learning process has beneficial effect on students' speaking skill, especially in pronunciation. The students' responses in the questionnaire EFL teachers – classroom strategies were also taken into consideration by the investigator before suggesting the English pronunciation strategies to improve pronunciation among the Saudi students.

Underhill, A (2021) suggests phonemic charts for overcoming common pronunciation challenges. Teachers' explanation of how to pronounce phonemic symbols helps students in improving pronunciation as phonemic symbols represent the sounds of the English language. Using them can be a valuable tool to improve students' pronunciation. Phonemic symbols are a visual aid, arranged in a chart, are part of every student's armoury of learning resources. Just as they have a dictionary for vocabulary and a grammar book for grammar, so they need reference materials for pronunciation: the phonemic symbols and simple, key words that show the sound of each symbol. According to Oakley, G (2003) reading fluency and pronunciation can be improved by applying reading aloud as a tool to help the readers to read the text fluently, pronounce the words correctly and improve vocabulary Thornbury (1999) suggests the use of dialogues in grammar teaching is useful because the use of dialogues generally matches learners' expectations of how language is used in the real world: people use language primarily to talk to each other. Using dialogues helps to practice stress and intonation. Students move beyond focusing on single phonemic pronunciation issues and concentrate instead on bringing

the right intonation and stress to larger structures. Lin (1995), Lutfiani, D & Astutik, I (2017) used tongue twisters to improve pronunciation skills. Tongue twisters are a great way to practice and improve pronunciation and fluency. They can also help to improve accents by using alliteration, which is the repetition of one sound. They are used by actors, politicians, and public speakers who want to sound clear when speaking. They challenge one's capacity to enunciate the individual sounds in each word, so one does not trip up, they force one to pay careful attention to the precise sounds in each word. They strengthen and stretch the muscles involved in speech. This muscle exercise leads to clearer pronunciation, clearer speech patterns, and helps rectify some of the hardest sounds. Riswandi, D (2016) recommends You Tube videos for improving English pronunciation skills. Watching the news can teach one new words and phrases and educate in proper pronunciation. Reading the news will increase vocabulary and improve grammar skills. Watching English movies has positive impact on improving listening skill as well as on speaking skill. The teachers can ask students to watch the movies and make the report of it can improve their listening skill because they are introduced to the real context of spoken language and a wide range of vocabularies.

VI. CONCLUSION

Summing up this study, the researcher has observed that university students should enrich their pronunciation skills and the EFL instructors should be aware of pronunciation instruction to train the students to become effective communicators. The learners commit errors in pronunciation due to linguistic factors, the disparity between mother tongue and English sound systems of the two languages, inconsistency of English vowel sounds, and effect of spelling on pronunciation, mother tongue interference and limited exposure while learning the English language. The present study is an ardent effort and clearly indicated that the university students studying English as a foreign/target language, should give equal importance to all the aspects of English to become effective communicators in English. It is also the responsibility of the English teachers to train Saudi students in strengthening English pronunciation skills to prepare them for future to meet personal, professional, communicative, and global challenges.

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