

Analysis of Phonetic and Phonological Constraints of Saudi EFL Learners

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Received: November 18, 2019

Accepted: December 9, 2019

Online Published: December 11, 2019

doi: 10.5539/elt.v13n1p62

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n1p62>

Abstract

This study explores the pronunciation difficulties experienced by Saudi EFL learners at Jouf University (JU) in the north of Saudi Arabia. To achieve this purpose, two main instruments were implemented: an experiment of pronunciation sensitivity response and two interview formats. The sample of this study was selected randomly and consisted of (n=20) students studying English major in their sixth level at JU, and (n=10) English language instructors from the same institution. A mixed-method approach was employed to find out the phonetic and phonological difficulties that participants encountered during the implementation of the experiment of pronunciation sensitivity response, and to interpret participant's responses to the interview formats. The findings revealed that EFL learners experienced six phonetic and phonological problematic patterns related to mispronunciation of: initial consonant cluster, final consonant cluster, multi-syllabic words, unfamiliar sounds, vowels, and voiced or voiceless phonemes. It was also found that EFL learners and instructors had different views regarding these phonetic and phonological issues. The limited time for practice, the lack of authentic materials and tasks, and the need for immersion classes, and effective instruction and learning were all found to be responsible about the phonetic and phonological problems EFL learners encountered and at the same time they were found to be the motives for overcoming these issues. It is believed that the implications and recommendations included in this study would improve the performance of Saudi EFL speaking abilities once they are incorporated effectively in their English learning settings.

Keywords: pronunciation difficulties, phonetic and phonological constraints, pronunciation difficulties, Saudi EFL learners, phonological awareness

1. Introduction

Many educational systems around the world have been implementing the teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language (EFL) since the mid of the twentieth century. In spite of this long history of practice that has been accompanied with the evolution of many distinctive theoretical instructional approaches, the process of learning a second language still encounters a number of phonetic and phonological challenges that could be basically attributed to the lack of effective communicative EFL classrooms. In-class EFL speaking activities, for instance, are mostly dominated by both the teachers who occupy around 75% of class time and the good learners who dominate the action zone of those classes. That is why most EFL learners still cannot convey their messages properly and accurately, especially when it comes to speaking skills or pronunciation abilities (Gussenhoven, Jacobs, 1998).

The lack of immersed EFL/ESL activities, where speaking practices and pronunciation acquisition are focused can also be considered as another factor affecting EFL learners' communicative competence negatively. However, (Bell, 1995) believes that most adult ESL/EFL learners find it difficult to improve their phonetic and phonological productions due to the effect of their first language. These three factors: the lack of communicative EFL classes, the lack of immersed authentic activities and the impact of L1 can all be responsible about the poor phonetic and phonological production of the second or foreign language among EFL learners.

In the same vein, Saudi EFL learners encounter similar challenges in their way to acquire speaking skills and pronunciation abilities. It is believed that the English speaking competency of EFL Saudi learners is poor due to their insufficient practice of English inside and outside classrooms and the limited time of EFL classes. The

speaking abilities and communicative skills including the appropriate acquisition of correct pronunciation of the target language appear to be far away from achievement of most EFL Saudi learners as long as these learners face same learning challenges. These learning issues may not only hinder EFL learners from learning important speaking and pronunciation skills but also leave a heavy learning burden over their shoulder along their years of studying EFL. It is also believed that the Saudi EFL instruction ignores learners' need for solid phonetic and phonological perception, knowledge and experiences without which their speaking abilities and pronunciation would remain unfree of errors.

Most previous related research has, to some extent, highlighted some pronunciation issues, where rare efforts focused on measuring the perceptual responses of the English learners. Therefore, this study addressed the phonetic and phonological challenges as one of the most common foreign language learning issues faced by Saudi EFL learners. In this context, the English learners in Saudi Arabia are described with a less efficient speaking competency at the university level. However, through direct contact with the EFL learners in the Saudi learning settings, it is believed that the effect of the EFL learners' perceptions regarding the phonetic and phonological aspects of English on their acquisition of appropriate speaking and pronunciation skills has not investigated adequately.

Therefore, the Saudi EFL learners are likely to continue suffering from the current poor addressing of their pronouncing difficulties that resulted from their phonetic and phonological misperception and shallow relevant awareness. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in their production of sounds that are not attested in Arabic inventory. Needless to say, that correct pronunciation is highly appreciated as a language proficiency component. For this end, the main purpose of this research was to find out the most problematic phonetic and phonological patterns that the Saudi EFL learners faced and the reasons beyond these difficulties. It was hoped that understanding these learning core issues would help suggesting implications for improvement. In order to achieve this purpose, this study addressed the following questions:

- a. What are the most problematic phonetic and phonological patterns that the Saudi EFL learners encounter?
- b. What are the perceptions of Saudi EFL learners regarding the most problematic phonetic and phonological patterns they experience?
- c. What are the perceptions of English university instructors regarding the most problematic phonetic and phonological patterns of Saudi EFL learners?
- d. How well could Saudi EFL learners improve their speaking and pronunciation performance in light of deeper understanding of the most problematic phonetic and phonological patterns they experience?

2. Literature Review

Pronunciation errors committed by EFL Arab learners were investigated in terms of learning difficulties of the English phonology (Abdul Haq, 1982); (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989;); (Wahba, 2008; & Al-Shuaibi, 2009). (Al-Shuaibi, 2009), for instance, found that EFL learners experienced difficulties in pronouncing the initial three consonant clusters and the final three or four members in English correctly. He concluded that learners used reduction, substitution and/or deletion as alternative processes for their incorrect pronunciation of these clusters. In a similar context, (Ababneh, 2018) compared pronunciation errors of two Saudi groups: one was studying English major and the second was studying Arabic major in order to find out the effect of the first language sound system on participants' pronunciation of English sounds. While it was found that there were no significant errors between the two groups, there was a strong correlation between the period of study and the number of pronunciation errors committed while learning EFL i.e., EFL learners who studied language for more spans of time showed less pronunciation problems than those studied this major for shorter period of time. However, (Wahba, 1998) observed difficulties encountered some EFL Egyptian learners and found that the participants' phonological errors when using English were attributed to stress and intonation issues acquired in their L1. This indicated that EFL learners' phonological production was affected by the sound systems of their first language.

This is supported by (Al-Saidat, 2010, pp.128-129) who analysed the types of pronunciation problems that EFL Arab learners faced including declusterization processes found in their interlanguage and the sources of such processes. It was revealed that the EFL Arab learners unintentionally inserted an 'anaptyctic' vowel in the onset and the coda of certain English syllables. The study concluded that the major reason beyond declusterization processes was the interference of the mother tongue. (Hago and Khan 2015) also examined the pronunciation difficulties of high school Saudi EFL learners employing survey, classroom observations, and document

collection. They found that that participants inserted vowels in onset positions, in addition to facing difficulties in pronouncing eleven consonant sounds.

These findings are currently observed in the real-life learning situations, in general, and in the Saudi learning English settings at Jouf University, in particular. However, upon the initial observations of the phenomena under investigation, it is believed that further investigation should be conducted in order to include other factors that were ignored, on the one hand, and so that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be obtained, on the other hand. For example, further investigations can cover factors such as: the EFL study duration, the learners' and instructor's linguistic capabilities, the EFL course type, the EFL learning environment, EFL learners' motivational and attitudinal factors towards learning the foreign language, the social constraints toward pronouncing accurate native-like accent and the psychological factors students already encounter in the Saudi context such as that of shyness and hesitation. However, studying all these factors could be beyond the scope of this research or capabilities. Therefore, the focus here is on two categories of factors: and the phonemic and phonological awareness of EFL learners and the related capabilities and perceptions of EFL instructors,

3. Method

This study adopted a mixed-methodology that involved collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative data was obtained from the transcription and analysis of the audio recordings collected from both the verbal interactions of the control and experimental groups. The quantitative part represented in obtaining descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages of participants' responses to the items of the semi-structured interviews. Two samples participated in achieving the purpose of this research: ten English instructors who were selected non-randomly from those actively working at Jouf University, English Department for at least five years due to their little number in the same population and due to their expertise in the field, and (20) English major learners with an average age of 21 years old in their sixth level of study who were selected randomly from the same institution.

Two main instruments were used to collect the data of this research: an observation scale and a semi-structured interview where both were developed in light of related literature. The observation scale consisted of (10) items aimed at measuring learners' perceptual responses to the English sounds. Their responses were audio-taped, transcribed, coded, classified and qualitatively analysed in terms of correctness. The semi-structure interviewees' responses were also recorded, transcribed and quantitatively analysed. Results were identified in light of analysing data of both instruments. Therefore, this research was of two phases as follows:

Phase one: EFL learners were asked to distinguish two versions of one English item with a variety of pronunciations by identifying them whether they were similar or different. This research procedure which can be best described as a semi-experimental aimed at finding out how sensitive an EFL learner is regarding the correct pronunciation of English sounds. Each pair of English words were repeated only once for participants. The participants' correct and incorrect responses to the offered sample of words were observed and measured using the observation scale mentioned above.

Phase two: EFL learners and instructors were asked to answer a semi-structure interview items in order to find out the level of their awareness regarding their perception of English phonetic and phonological sound system related to the findings of phase one.

4. Results

This section addresses the findings of this research in four subheadings as same order of research questions as follows:

4.1 EFL Learners' Problematic Speech Patterns

The analysis of the observation data revealed that the participants faced serious phonetic problems regarding their perceptions of English sounds with (83) pronunciation errors out of (200) words repeated for them representing a grand average of (41.5%) of the total words. Table 1 below shows the frequencies and percentages of EFL learners' correct and incorrect responses to the semi-experiment as indicated in the observation scale.

Table 1. Participants' responses to the semi-experiment of speaking sensitivity

	Frequency	Average	Frequency	Average
Scream	10	50%	10	50%
Bird	8	40%	12	60%
University	18	90%	2	10%
School	11	55%	9	45%
Street	20	100%	0	0%
Claim	13	65%	7	35%
Scream	14	70%	6	30%
Bird	15	75%	5	25%
Department	6	30%	14	70%
Interpretation	2	10%	18	80%
Total /Average	117	58.5%	83	41.5%

Figure 1 shows the percentages of participants' correct responses to the phonetic semi-experiment.

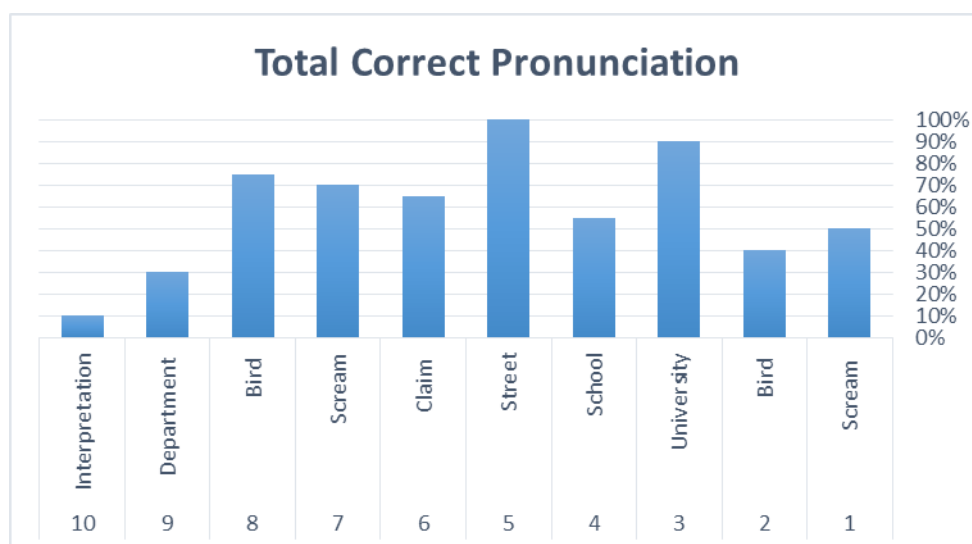


Figure 2. Participants' correct responses to the pronunciation items of the experiment.

Table 1 above indicated that most participants' errors appear in most pair of words repeated for them. However, their ability to distinguish English sounds differed from one word to another. For, example the majority of participants' errors appeared in words with three syllables or more like: *'department'* and *'interpretation'* with an error ratio of (70% and 80% respectively). Participants showed less errors in identifying the correct pronunciations of words with initial consonant cluster of three sounds like: *'scream'* and *'school'* with an error ratio of (50% and 45% respectively). This finding indicated that most problematic pronunciation patterns EFL learners face in their speech was related to multi-syllabic words with three or more sounds per each and/or to unfamiliar sounds acquired in their first language such as those of initial three consonant cluster. Other patterns remained problematic either. For example, (60%) of participants could not distinguish the correct sound of the word 'bird' perhaps because it ended in a cluster of two consonants.

In their responses to the semi-structured interview question " *Do you experience challenges in English pronunciation? Explain?*", almost all respondents (EFL learners) reported that they have difficulties in English pronunciation, while only two students claimed that they have proficient pronunciation (participants 5 & 6). The vast majority of students (participants 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 13, 19, & 20) argued that they were used to mispronounce English words due to the effect of their first language i.e., no initial clusters allowed in Arabic; pointing out to onset position.

Participants' responses to the question "*What are the most problematic English sounds/ or combination of sounds, you find when communicating with native English speakers?*" indicated that their most problematic sounds/phonemes were the English vowels. Participants no. 1-8, 10-16, 18 and 20 reported that native English speakers were very sensitive regarding the pronunciation of vowels. Participant 3 literally said "*When I say the word 'coffee, the native speakers of English usually asked me to repeat it*". Participant 3 attributed their request to his pronunciation of the word as /kæfi/ while native speakers expected him to pronounce it as /'ka:.fi/ instead. The rest of the participants almost copied what participant 3 reported but in different words. However, very few participants (3 & 17) claimed that the most problematic English sounds/ phonemes they usually encountered were consonants in words with more than three syllables.

When asking the EFL instructors about the most problematic English sounds/ or combination of sounds for their students, they reported two main themes: the first was related to mispronouncing the consonants clusters regardless if they were at initial or final positions of words. They also indicated that students had problem in pronouncing voiced and voiceless sounds which are mostly substituted by each other such as: /p/ is pronounced as /b/ in words as "park" /pɑ:rk/ and "bark"/ba:rk/. Their second theme was related to the quality of the vowel pronunciation which was apparently affected by students' first language (Arabic) counterpart sound. More specifically, instructors believed that their students mispronounce different vowels especially when they appear in minimal pairs such as in /i/ and /e/ in words as "hell" /hel/ which was pronounced as "heel" /hi:l/ instead. Instructor 2 said that his students more frequently pronounce coffee /'ka:.fi/ wrongly as /'kæfi/. Instructor 2 continued reporting, "after a while I stop correcting them".

To sum up, EFL learners have serious problematic phonetic and phonological patterns represented in:

1. mispronouncing words with initial consonant cluster of three sounds or more,
2. mispronouncing words end with consonant cluster of two sounds or more,
3. mispronouncing multi-syllabic words with three or more sounds,
4. mispronouncing unfamiliar sounds for their mother tongue,
5. mispronouncing English vowels and minimal pairs, and
6. mispronouncing voiced and voiceless phonemes.

4.2 EFL Learners' Perceptions

The analysis of the EFL learners' responses to the semi-structured interview questions regarding the reasons beyond their alternating (substituting) vowel quality or inserting schwa unconsciously revealed that they were almost similar. For example, participant 3 said that he "even didn't understand why native speakers of English used to ask him to repeat his words at a time he thought that his pronunciation of those English words and phrases was correct". That participant reported:

"I don't know why Arabic teachers understand me well when I speak English, but Americans keep asking me to repeat my English utterances". (participant 3)

However, participants 3, 9, 10, 12, said that the primary reason beyond their pronunciation problems in English was due to the limited time they had to practice pronouncing English sounds inside and outside classrooms.

When asking participants about the best way to improve their English pronunciation, they responded differently in two themes: 1) they needed more time to practice English, and 2) they needed to get use of authentic modern technology i.e. English pronunciation apps. Despite what has already been revealed, there was one participant (P. 6) who strongly believed that he would not improve his pronunciation unless he travelled to an English speaking community and live there for a longer time. Participants 4, and 18 assured that English instructors should conduct the whole class in English only.

4.3 EFL Instructors' Perceptions

Most interviewees reported that their students suffered seriously from difficulties in pronouncing English sounds. They stated that their students more often encountered speaking challenges. Instructors 1, 3, 4, and 9 reported that they observed a variety of pronunciation mistakes during their direct contact with EFL learners as well as due to the insufficient practice they had outside classroom. Instructor 4 literally said "*I am very patient with my students' speaking mistakes ... I know they are not able to practice English outside classrooms*". Another instructor 9 said that he believed that the poor phonetic and phonological issues of his students was due to "limited vocabulary" they acquire in EFL classes which prevented them from communicating properly.

Although the former instructors mentioned some poor speaking performance of their students caused by insufficient vocabulary, other respondents argued that English learners' weak motivation level to learn English could be one reason beyond their poor phonetic and pronunciation issues. Instructors 2, 5, 8 believed that their students had poor speaking ability due to lack of jobs as an external motive to learn English phonetics and pronunciation appropriately. Instructor 2 clearly said that one of his students reflected his lack of motivation by stating "*why should I pay more attention to English pronunciation while there are no available jobs*". However, the rest of the interviewees (instructors) indicated that the main reason behind their students' poor pronunciation of their students was due to instructors' deficiencies in providing both appropriate training and correct models of L2 phonetics. Instructor 7 strongly and frankly reported that "*some English teachers are unprofessional*".

In summary, responses of both sample types, EFL learners and instructors, indicated that both parties were equally responsible about the problematic phonetic and phonological challenges the learners encountered, even in different ways. The EFL learners believed that the limited time they were given to practice English pronunciation, the lack of authentic tasks and materials, their need for EFL/ESL immersion classes, and the need for their instructors to offer appropriate models of English phonetics were all the reasons beyond their phonetic and phonological problems. Instructors, however, had different views indicating that learners' poor acquisition of L2 vocabulary, poor level of internal and external motivation and instructors' teaching ineffectiveness were all responsible about learners' problems related to their mispronunciation of L2 utterances.

4.4 Improving Speaking and Pronunciation performance

In their responses to the question about the best way to improve learners' English pronunciation and overcome related challenges mentioned above, three main themes were revealed by EFL instructors. The first indicated that students needed to be exposed to more English pronunciation activities inside and outside classrooms. The second remarked that English instructors should provide their students with the necessary pronunciation practice that could increase tier sensitivity to English sounds. The final theme suggested that students should get use for the modern technology.

Instructor 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, has reported that all of their students have modern devices with internet connections but they lacked how to use it to improve their English speaking ability. At the same vein, instructor 3 argued that students need to enrich their vocabulary before improving their pronunciation. However, instructor 10 emphasized that pronunciation was not a very important element in language learning, indicating that it was related more to identity issues. He continued "*I think native-like pronunciation is not very important as long as a speaker can convey his message*". However, EFL learners believed that the best way to overcome these issues was through getting more time to practice the target language, more effective instruction, modelling and authentic tasks and materials, and most importantly for them was to be immersed in classes within the native speaking countries.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that there were six main mispronunciation patterns EFL learners committed while speaking English. These patterns have revolved round mispronouncing consonant clusters whether they were initial or final sounds of a word. Participants also had problems in pronouncing multi-syllabic words, and unfamiliar sounds and vowels. One other pattern is related to EFL learners' mispronunciation of voiced and voiceless sounds. Therefore, ways for improving EFL learners' speaking and pronunciation performance were viewed differently. In the first phase of this research, the main phonetic and phonological constraints EFL learners encountered were highlighted so that their sources can be well-understood as perceived by the participants in the second phase. This section discusses these issues, their perceived causes and suggestions for improvement.

In this discussion it should be noted that EFL Saudi learners committed linguistic pronunciation errors rather than just mistakes. The difference is that the first is systematic, continuous and spontaneous, while the latter can happen due to tiredness, for instance, and can be self-corrected or repaired. According to (Gass & Selinker 2008) "A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are "systematic," i.e. likely to occur repeatedly and not recognized by the learner. The participants in this research showed several examples of committing errors in pronouncing English words and sounds. The sources of these errors can be traced back to the strong influence of the participants' first language. "English and Arabic are two languages that differ greatly in the range of syllable structure patterns they make use of", (Odisho, 1979, p. 205). For example, "... consonant clusters are not permitted in syllable initial position" (Hamdi, Ghazali & Barkat, 2005, p. 2246).

Therefore, EFL learners' misperception of items such as "bird", "school", "scream", and "claim" support the findings of Bell (1995) and (Wahba 1998), who argued that learners of English can be severely affected by the

sound system of their first language. Due to the fact that the Arabic language, which is the mother tongue of participants, doesn't allow onset clusters like English. Almost half of the participants (50%) incorrectly responded to the two versions of the word "school" misperceiving them as similar. According to (Odlin 1993, p.114) "errors involving vowels and consonants" are caused by the sounds that exist in English, but do not in Arabic such as /p/ and /v/ which are a double trouble for the Arabic speaker, because they do not exist in Arabic, but at the same time their Arabic minimal pairs /b/ and /f/ are a good escape for the Arabic speaker. Smith (2007, p. 196) state that "English has 22 vowels and diphthongs to 24 consonants", while "Arabic has only eight vowels and diphthongs ... to 32 consonants."

It was also observed that the Saudi EFL learners faced pronunciation challenges related to stress shifting such as that in the word 'interpretation'. This stress shift showed that participants were not highly sensitive toward supra-segmental of English sounds which received 10% of their correct responses. This could be associated with the number of the syllables of the word "interpretation", where most of the students were less frequently exposed to such longer syllable words. The sources of these issues were perceived differently by EFL learners and their instructors.

Interestingly, participants were more aware when it came to inserting vowels initially as it is shown in item number 1 and 7. There was one English word repeated in deferent settings i.e., once (a) doesn't match with (b) version while the other time was identical. The difference between the correct responses to item 1 and 7 was (20%) for the favour of item 7 due to the fact that the participants could make more pronunciation errors when they were exposed to inserting initial vowels. However, they were more likely to grasp the identical pronunciation versions of (a) and (b) since they tend to hear it similarly. The point is not about the correct responses to identical versions of (a) and (b), rather it is about the incorrect match with the two given version of one English word. The mismatch with the two pronunciations could implicitly indicate an effect of interlanguage (Wahba, 1998; Bell, 1995).

Intuitively, the researchers have repeated similar items (1 & 7, see appendix 1) in this experiment to measure participant's accuracy as well as their phonemic awareness as in the word "scream". Items 2 & 8 "bird" examined the participants' awareness of the devoicing status of the initial voiced bilabial stop. Participant's correct responses to item 2, have increased from (40%) to (75%) which suggested that teaching English in English would much more effective than using the mother tongue to simplify or facilitate learning of the correct pronunciation of the target language.

As indicated in the findings of this study, responses collected from the twenty students showed the sever demand for increasing the time given to learners to practice speaking inside and outside classrooms. According to Hitiuzi (2005), the percentage of teacher talk is significantly higher than that occupied by EFL learners, which necessitate the need for instructors to pay more attention to using a learner-centered approach if they want their students to acquire English language successfully. At a time, instructors believe that Saudi EFL learners had other resources where they could practice language through and invest in their own time, most of them lacked opportunities to beneficially use the available online resources to develop their English pronunciation. This dispute could not be easily resolved as long as instructors and learners do not collaborate to solve it. Both parties are partially responsible about the effective teaching and learning the target language.

Another major source of the problem as reported by respondents was the effect of the interference of sound systems of the two languages; L1 and target language (Waengler, 2009);(Lado, 1957; Bell, 1995). Needless to say that some of the English sounds do not exist in the Arabic inventory sound system such as the voiceless version of the voiced bilabial stop /b/, /p/, and the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ (Wahba 1998). As for the phonological regulation of the internal construction of the syllable, it was found that Arabic doesn't attest onset clusters in onset position (initially), where English allows such onset clusters with two and even three sounds. Such differences in the phonological regulations of the sound systems among the two languages motivated participants to break down onset clusters and insert short vowels advocating the findings of (Hago & Khan 2015). Additionally, though looking at Arabic vowels, it could be easily noticed that Arabic differs from English ones. Repeatedly, this sheds some light on the arguments presented by Waengler who claimed that second language pronunciation as a linguistic process could be highly affected by the first language of the learners. Here, more than fifty percent of the participants were incorrectly responded to the onset clusters of English words as in "scream", which is not allowed in Arabic. However, it is suggested that through more intensive training of pronunciation, students could be gradually improved. Therefore, the time given to EFL learners to practice the correct sounds of English inside classroom and the effect of the mother tongue on the correct pronunciation of English sounds are interrelated. Both types of constraints sources can be handled through more effective and positive practice of the issues under investigation.

Many participants believed the correct pronunciation per se could not deliver the message of the speaker, the need to imitating a native-like accent was their main concern. In fact, this issue could be associated with learners' identity construction. Many Saudi English learners strongly believed that it was beyond their capabilities to pronounce English sounds as same as native speakers of English even whatever they tried on the one hand, and they need not to do so since they were strongly tied to their own identity, on the other hand. This internal conflict between acquiring the target language appropriately and the need to preserve own identity can be understood. However, EFL learners should be aware that they need not to pronounce the sounds of the target language as same as native speakers in order to appropriately convey and receive the message. They should perceive the target language instrumentally as a way of communication that can be learned effectively without affecting personality negatively at all. This part of discussion which is mainly related to EFL learners' resistance of the target language as a means of identity shift (Edwards, 2009) is the responsibility of instructors who should provide most effective methods of modelling the target language accent with as much simplification and scaffolding processes as possible. (Selinker & Han 2001) indicated that this is not a matter of identity resistance, rather it is a matter of fossilization where learners psychologically and cognitively passed the possible period of catching up the accent. This indication suggests that effective teaching and learning can deal with speaking and pronunciation issues of the Saudi EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

The poor speaking and pronunciation performance of Saudi EFL learners cannot be attributed to only one reason. Understanding these reasons can help in addressing pronunciation challenges and figuring out ways to turn such challenges into effective leaning aspects. While some learners encounter speaking challenges due to the influence of first language interference, others believe that pronouncing English sounds correctly is beyond their abilities and personal characteristics including their cultural resistance to acquire a second language accent. The Saudi EFL Learners are being given the minimum time to practice English in-class which deepen their pronunciation and speaking challenges. These three different types of challenges: linguistic, cultural and instructional were the focus of this research. Therefore, this study concluded by the need for educators and decision-makers to concentrate more on speaking or pronunciation dilemmas that prevent English learners from conveying their messages appropriately. Those educational parties should also be aware that giving more value to mastering English native-like accent could be a secondary goal in comparison to the need of learners to be successful speakers. this means that various educational parties should provide EFL learners with more opportunities to practice language through offering more developed meaningful curricula in Saudi Arabia. This curriculum should focus on learner-centered approach where speaking English is priority and every day practice. Providing native English instructors would also be very helpful in dealing with pronunciation issues that EFL learner suffer form. Whether instructors were bilinguals or native speakers of English, instruction should be effective and focused on modelling and scaffolding as ways for teaching correct pronunciation of English phonetic and phonological production.

Acknowledgments

We highly appreciate and thank Jouf University for supporting and funding this paper.

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Appendix A

Items presented in the experiment of speaking sensitivity

Scream	/skrim/ /eskrim/	D	Epenthesis
Bird	/bɜrd/ /pɜrd/	D	Devoicing of initial consonant; bilabial stop.
University	/,ju:nə'vɜr:sə:ʃi/ /,ju:nə'vɜr:sə:ʃi/	S	similar
School	/skul/ /eskul/	D	Epenthesis
Street	/strit/ /strit/	S	Similar
Claim	/kleɪm/ /klim/	D	Substitute from diphthong into long high front vowel.
Scream	/skrim/ /skrim/	S	
Bird	/bɜrd/ /bɜrd/	S	
Department	/dɪ'pɑ:t'mənt/ /dɪ'pɜ:t'mənt/	D	Coda/ deletion of the vowel (peak) of the second syllable /ɑ/.
Interpretation	/ɪn,tɜr'pri'teɪ:ʃən/ /ɪn,tɜr'pɜrteɪ:ʃən/	D	Stress shifting

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