

## **Pronunciation Problems by Sudanese English Language Learners: A case Study of Students at the Faculty of Education, Al-Zaeim Al-Azhari University**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the pronunciation problems that encounter Sudanese English language learners and tries to shade lights on these problems, register them and suggests some solutions and recommendations. As the English language is widely spreads worldwide, there appears the necessity of the perfect understanding and the correct use of English. By studying both phonetics and phonology of English it is possible to acquire a full understanding of the use of English sounds in English speech. A relevant literature pertained to the study has been reviewed to sustain the required knowledge needed for the study, part of which is the framework for the study. This paper follows the descriptive analytical research methods and questionnaire supported oral tests were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics were used for presenting, analyzing, discussing and interpreting the collected data. The findings of the study showed that there are some problems of English language pronunciation encountered by Sudanese English language learners and these problems were caused by various reasons, for example, the differences in sound with regards to English and Arabic languages in general and between the sounds of the Sudanese colloquial Arabic sound system; the result of which is negative interference. In addition, the methods of teaching the English sounds do not seem to help Sudanese language learners due to different background accents. Moreover, there is lack of authentic teaching materials that required for teaching English pronunciation. The paper suggests that researchers can study the acoustic phonetics that studies the reception of sounds and other areas of language in respect to sound differences.

**Key words:** pronunciation problems, Sudanese English language learners

### **INTRODUCTION**

English is considered as an international language and language of science and business (Yano, 2001). It is also known as very significant and compulsory subject. Therefore, teaching English is significant for students at all study levels. Nation (2009, p.75) remarked that “When some teachers and students complain about difficulties in speaking, they are frequently speaking about pronunciation”. Pronunciation plays an integral part in learning a language. Derwing & Munro (2005) discussed that, “having

good pronunciation of the language can help in normal communication, mainly intelligibility.” Similarly, Saylor (2009) categories two types of pronunciation, proper and improper. He describes the first type as “articulating the words sound in a smooth way that any fluent speaker would understand the message easily”, whereas improper pronunciation causes confusion.

According to Moosa (1972) and Homidan (1984) Arab students face difficulties in the pronunciation of sounds that unfamiliar with them such as /v/, /p/, /ŋ/. This may cause due to the reason that English consonants like /p/, /ŋ/ and /v/ do not exist in the Arabic sound system and even these consonants seem similar to Arabic consonants like /t/ or /k/. However, they are unlike in the way of pronunciation and place of articulation. English sound /t/ is alveolar and it is usually followed by a vowel such as tea /ti:/ while, the Arabic sound /t/ is dental and it pronounced in different word position such as /ti:n/. (Abdulwahab, 2015).

According to these observations and examples, this paper tries to discuss the pronunciation problems that face Sudanese English language learners in term of sort and reasons and of these problems. The teaching of English sounds requires sensitive aware to overcome the difficulties pronunciation for learners. Jones (1975) stated that spoken language consists of succession of sounds emitted by the organs of speech, together with certain attributes. Teaching of pronunciation is not an optional task to alter because it is linked to main core of acquiring a language and the fact that every language has certain unfolded categories. This paper deals with, the received pronunciation, the accent that is used as a measurement for the pronunciation problems. Many factors are believed to affect the proficiency of pronunciation and these factors are different in accordance to different educational levels. Therefore, researchers should take into account the different approaches in teaching the languages sound in general and the English language as second language in the context of Sudanese colloquial Arabic language in particular.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted in different countries to examine the pronunciation difficulties encountered by EFL learners. For instance, Adila and Refnaldi (2019) determined students' pronunciation errors in pronouncing consonant sounds in speaking performance. They utilized research is descriptive quantitative research with number of 352 population. Cluster random sampling technique was used to select the sample of this study. Sixty-four students were the sample of this study and data were collected via three instruments: pronunciation test, a questionnaire, and interview. The pronunciation test and the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively, while the interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. The results showed that there are six categories in consonant sounds made by respondents of this study during speaking performance, specifically Alveolar registered (38.18%), Interdental registered (34.65%), Alveo-palatal registered (12.20%), Labiodental registered (11.81%), Velar registered (1.79%), and Bilabial registered (1.38%). In addition, the results indicated that there are factors that cause pronunciation errors in speaking performance by respondents. These are; first language registered (81.25%), less using English in their daily life registered (66.67%),

unchallenging lessons registered (56.25%), being passive learners registered (59.37%) and, less of confidence while performing registered (62.50%).

Ahmed (2017) investigated the problems encountered by higher secondary school students when they learning English pronunciation in Sudan. Ahmed (2017) noticed that most of the higher secondary school students in Sudan produced incorrect pronunciation for many English words. For this reason, this study attempted to deal with the pronunciation difficulties to find the most suitable solutions. Sudanese students of higher secondary schools were the sample of this study at Shikan locality in Northern Kordofan State. The descriptive analytical approach was conducted to analyze data collected through recording test and questionnaire. The findings revealed that the pronunciation problems are caused by many teaching difficulties, and the pronunciation strategies are helpful in teaching students correct speech pronunciation.

In Saudi context, Hago and Khan (2015) examined the difficulties of English pronunciation encountered by Saudi secondary school learners when pronouncing English consonants. This study was also attempted to inspect the area of English consonant clusters system. Questionnaires, classroom observations and document collections were utilized to collect data of this study. The results indicated that the respondents encountered difficulties to pronounce eleven consonant sounds. It also demonstrated that most of the respondents accidentally insert a vowel sound in English syllable to break up consonant clusters.

Similarly, Abugohar and Yunus (2018) conducted a study to deal with the pronunciation difficulties that high school students encountered while they pronouncing English vocabulary and simple sentences. This research is carried out also to assess the English course outcomes that were reflected in learners incapacities of correct and fluent English pronunciation. The data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A questionnaire was utilized to 100 Saudi male students selected from 4 secondary schools, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with 5 students from the total of the sample. Interviews were used to provide deeper analysis with regard to problems of English pronunciation. In order to provide further details about the subject studied, analyses of the syllabi are presented. The results revealed that respondents do lack the skill of pronouncing English correctly around (75%).

However, few studies have been conducted to detect pronunciation difficulties encountered by Sudanese EFL learners. Therefore, the outcomes which relate to previous research works showed that students utilized different types of pronunciation difficulties and there are factors that cause pronunciation errors in speaking performance by students.

This study seeks to answer the following research question:

- What are the pronunciation problems that Sudanese English language learners encounter?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The subjects of the study were ten undergraduate students taking the English language as major course at the faculty of education at Al-Zaeim Al-Azhari University and they are randomly chosen. They share same environment situations; besides, the same syllabus they study.

### **Instrument**

This study used a questionnaire and an oral test as tools for data collection procedure. It adopted a questionnaire proposed by (Ahmed, 2010), which consisted of three sections for the target research. The questionnaire has been justified by number of expert in language and research. The other tool used in this study was the oral pronunciation test which was also revised by experts in language and research. The used test included consonants, consonants clusters, short vowels, long vowels and diphthongs. Descriptive statistics were used for presenting, analyzing, discussing and interpreting the collected data.

### **Procedure**

The researcher explained the objectives and requests the samples to tick their best alternatives. The SPSS is used for tabulating, categorizing and analyzing the obtained results. The researcher tested respondents' pronunciation against the perfect pronunciation criteria. While this study concentrates on the problems encounter by Sudanese English language learners which mainly deals with sounds production, therefore, pronunciation tests are designed to measure the degree of accuracy in learners' performance using groups of words including consonants and vowels in English language. In addition, recorded oral tests are contributing the major tool in this respect. The participants are directed to pronounce the words in the test by reading them, this step is followed by recording the sample's data, transcribed this data in order to be tabulated and interpreted. Thereafter, the errors committed by students were discussed and traced-back to the reasons by this language phenomenon.

Descriptive statistics were used for presenting; analyzing, discussing and interpreting the collected data. The results from the questionnaire data and the oral pronunciation task where discussed separately and eventually they were compared together to serve the target research question about the problems that Sudanese English language learners encounter when they attempt to acquire the English sounds. The researcher used the adopted framework to attribute such errors to their factors to suit the target of the study. Thereafter, the results were revised with three professors in the English language and commented on.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings are discussed in order to answer the research question of this study. The research question addressed, what are the pronunciation problems that Sudanese English language learners encounter? In order to answer this question, the study yielded

some findings which show that there are some problems in the pronunciation of the English language faced by Sudanese English language learners at all different education level as like the sample of these study (undergraduate) students. The following table shows the data of the questionnaire.

**Table 1.** The result of the questionnaire

Problem	Agree	Disagree
In reading	100%	00%
In speaking	100%	00%
With teachers	60%	40%
syllabus	80%	20%

Table 1 shows and summarizes the pronunciation problems that encounter Sudanese English language learners. It displays that (100%) of respondents agree that they face pronunciation problems in reading. (100%) of respondents agree that they face pronunciation problems in speaking. While, 80% of respondents remarked that they are not satisfied with syllabus with regard to learning pronunciation. In addition, 60% of respondents behave those teachers not very helpful in learning pronunciation.

In addition, the result of the oral test indicated that, these problems are believed to be caused by unique reasons, for example, the differences between the English language and the Sudanese colloquial Arabic sound systems that may have resulted into negative first language interferences. Another reason is linked to the inconvenienced methods and techniques that are used for teaching pronunciation and the problems they trigger for Sudanese English language learners. Finally, there are lack of authentic teaching materials that are needed to help in teaching pronunciation foe those learners.

## CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the pronunciation problems that encounter Sudanese English language learners and followed the descriptive analytical research methods and a questionnaire supported oral test for data collection. The findings of the study showed that there are some problems of English language pronunciation encountered by Sudanese English language learners and these problems were caused by various reasons, for example, the differences in sound with regards to English and Arabic languages in general and between the sounds of the Sudanese colloquial Arabic sound system; the result of which is negative interference. Therefore, training courses teachers at different education levels are recommended and teachers are required to enrich their English language sounds.

The study highlights some recommendation to improve the pronunciation of the English language for Sudanese English language learners, for example, intensive training should be taken by teachers about the English language alongside with the features of the English sounds; as major recommendation issue. Enrich knowledge about the English language and sounds should prove the capability of teacher to trace the pronunciation problems encountered by students at different education levels. Finally, equipped and advanced

language laboratories are extremely needed to teach the English sounds, supplied by different materials to enhance the process of learning pronunciations.

This paper offers some suggestions for further studies in term of expanding this current study and continues to investigate the problems of English pronunciation faced by Sudanese learners. The paper suggests that researchers can study the acoustic phonetics that studies the reception of sounds and other areas of language in respect to sound differences. It dealt with articulatory phonetics that deals with production of sounds, so it is possible for other researcher/s to investigate the acoustic phonetics which deals with sound waves and auditory phonetics that studies the reception of sounds. Other studies may clarify the relationship between phonetics and phonology and the other aspects of language.

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