RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pronunciation Errors Committed by EFL Learners in the English Department in Faculty of Education - Sana'a University

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Abstract

This study aimed to, first, investigate the common pronunciation errors committed by EFL fourth level learners in the Department of English, Faculty of Education-Sana'a, Sana'a University, in the academic year 2019-2020; second to find out the reasons of producing mispronounced segments among University students when speaking; third to offer possible solutions that may help Yemeni students overcome pronunciation difficulties. The sample was 30 students selected randomly. Also, ten teachers were part of the sample in which they were given a close-ended questionnaire. A descriptive method was used to carry out the study. For gathering data, a close-ended questionnaire and a test were used. Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). The study concluded that EFL learners mispronounce certain phonemes that are in a mismatch with word orthography and consonant cluster. Moreover, vowels were mispronounced by students. The strongest factors that contribute to this problem, according to this study, were due to learners' mother tongue interference, and other causative factors such as limited language exposure. The study recommends that teaching should focus more on pronunciation along with preparing suitable material.

Keywords: pronunciation errors, learners, EFL

1. Introduction

A big challenge of foreign language teaching is getting those learners ready to use the target language. Yet, that is not a simple task to be done. Speaking is one of the crucial skills that language learning involves which is necessary for interaction. Oral use of language demands acquiring the whole system of the language.

Learning to speak a language involves many aspects: it involves learning how the sound system is organized, how units of meaning are organized in words, the principles by which these words are put together to form sentences, and principles by which interaction with other speakers is regulated, (Jorda, 2002). Speaking usually occurs in a spontaneous condition with little time for thinking and correction. Jorda argues that the speaking skill is important to our language learning that when we refer to speaking

a language, we often mean knowing a language. The relationship between speaking and pronunciation is undeniable. One cannot speak without pronouncing the language (Al Yaqoobi, Ali & Sulan, 2016).

One of the essential language learning skills is pronunciation because it makes communication possible. Derwing and Rossiter (2002) stated that the majority of English second language learners' main difficulty is learning how to pronounce; generally, learners consider pronunciation as the main cause for their communication problems (Ababneh, 2018).

So, pronunciation is an important element in achieving success in any oral discourse. Much attention is to be paid to pronunciation, as it contributes to conveying the right message in oral discourse. If the message is not properly articulated, pronunciation might sometimes hinder communication or lead to vital misunderstanding. It is believed that pronunciation is crucially important as it is usually the first thing people notice about any language speaker or learner. Though pronunciation is an important sub-skill of any language, its teaching is partially neglected in the whole language teaching process to a great extent. That is to say, to enhance EFL ability in English articulation, teachers should develop a view of pronunciation as a crucial and integral part of communication that should be incorporated into classroom activities.

Learners should receive emphasized pronunciation proficiency input so as to improve and avoid errors while speaking. Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005) sees that no matter how good someone's general command of foreign language is. If their pronunciation is poor, it might negatively influence the perception of such a person. That does not mean that a native-like pronunciation is sought in the process, rather, it is fluency and appropriateness of speech to reach reasonable intelligibility. The better the person's pronunciation is, the more confident s/he will be. It affects one's self-esteem as it shows a side of identity. Therefore, teaching pronunciation is indispensable in language classrooms for effective language learning.

1.1 Statement of the Study:

The difficulties in English pronunciation arise amongst EFL Arab students from the fact that the sound systems of Arabic and English are different in many aspects. As a common fact, English consonant sounds are different in number, as well as in place and manner of articulation (Hago & Khan, 2015, p. 88). The importance of investigating pronunciation errors results from the fact that pronunciation stands as an obstacle in communication, especially when the meaning of a certain word or an expression is slightly or wholly changed because of the incorrect pronunciation of an item. Observing learners at Sana'a University making certain errors in pronunciation while speaking, it is noticeable that those errors affect their fluency and communication. Based on such observation, it was decided to investigate their pronunciation errors. However, it was necessary to discover the factors that had a role in the acquisition of the phonological system of English as a foreign language and to find out the suitable remedial plans. Moreover, the study provided an explanation with regard to the possible factors or causes of such errors. Finding out some explanations for this problem hopefully will contribute to come up with solutions and provide more insight into this problem.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:

The current study aimed to:

1. Identify the frequent pronunciation errors in spoken English among EFL level-three students in the Department of English, Faculty of Education-Sana'a.

2. Find out the reasons of producing mispronounced segments among University students when speaking.

3. Offer possible solutions that may help Yemeni students overcome pronunciation difficulties.

1.3 Questions of the Study:

The current study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common pronunciation errors committed by EFL level-three learners in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a university?

2. What are the reasons that make fourth level EFL learners in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a university produce mispronounced segments?

3. What are the possible solutions that may help Yemeni students overcome pronunciation difficulties?

1.4 Significance of the Study:

This study is significant in the sense that it:

1. Can help EFL teachers in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Sana'a University to find out ways of how to deal with students' errors systematically and comprehensively.

2. Provides learners with a kind of feedback on their pronunciation proficiency weaknesses.

3. Helps curriculum designers to know the most recurring mispronunciation factors.

1.5 Limitations of the Study:

The present study was limited to:

1. EFL Fourth Level Students in the English Department, Faculty of Education Sana'a-Sana'a University in the academic year 2019-2020, first semester.

2. The segmental level in the production of sounds only. Also, the Supra-tegmental features are studied except:

  I. the syllable.

  II. The test was only handled to a limited number of students for the purpose of providing some hints about those errors and did not include a large number of participants.

1.6 Definitions of Terms:

1.6.1 Pronunciation:

Pronunciation refers to the production of sounds that we use to make meaning. It includes attention to the particular sounds of a language(segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm (supra segmental aspects), how the voice is projected (voice quality) and, in its broadest definition, attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language.

1.6.2 Errors:

The use of this term is general in this study in a way that includes all other classification of errors and mistakes. They could be overt or covert ones, error or mistakes.

2. Literature Review:

This part of the study discuses pronunciation, phonetics and phonology. It also exhibits some of mother tongue effects on L2 learning. Besides, it discusses the sound system in English. It, also, sheds light on some of the previous studies conducted to investigate pronunciation errors.

2.1 Pronunciation

For any language learner, pronunciation is considered as an integral part of language learning as it influences both individual's competence as well as performance. The Longman Dictionary defines pronunciation as "the way in which a language or a particular word is pronounced."

Pronunciation has an important role in an individual's overall communication. To be intelligible, one is not apt to only depend on good grammar and vocabulary use; still, one needs to sound understood through clear and intelligible pronunciation. Moreover, learners who have good pronunciation are understood even if they commit errors in some other areas. However, with poor pronunciation, even if one uses correct grammar, one fails to communicate well or sound intelligible. Elder (2004, p. 95) and Khalifa (2020, p. 13) advise that students should be assisted with a model-based approach to gain specific feedback on their errors and how to correct them especially when it is compared with native speakers utterances.

2.1.1 Is Pronunciation Challenging?

It is believed that as one is learning L2 or FL, learners are not strictly expected to achieve ideal native-like pronunciation. Cameron states that "speaking English clearly and naturally may be difficult. You may also have been influenced by your own ESOL teachers' less-than-perfect pronunciation skills" (Cameron, 2012, p. 58). Rather, linguists identify that FLL is sought to reach the level of being intelligible, i.e., the learner is able to be understood, with no confusion or effort. Moreover, the level of exposure affects pronunciation, improvement and level of fluency. It is stated that "students' pronunciation learning is also affected by how much is they have a chance to hear in their daily lives" (Mahon, 2002, p. 42).

Many factors affect learner's pronunciation and errors. Studies found that many learner's errors are systematic. That is to say, there are certain areas of difficulty in pronunciation for learners. Some of these difficulties tend to be caused by first language in a way that leads to mispronunciation. According to one's mother tongue background, certain pronunciation mistakes or mispronunciations are caused by the interference of L1.

English pronunciation errors could be inter-language errors. However, not all errors are, definitely, due to the effect of mother tongue. Obviously, different EFL learners around the world have some pronunciation mistakes regardless of what effect their mother tongue imposes on EFL learning, generally, and pronunciation, specifically. Similar to them is the state of Yemeni learners who have different pronunciation errors. Such errors are due to different factors. Most importantly is the fact that these factors could be inter-lingual ones. Burleigh explains that "If we want to describe the pronunciation of a particular speaker or a speech community, we begin by describing all the individual sounds that occur in the lect of that speaker or speech community" (Burleigh, 2005, p. 76). For that reason, the following section sheds light on the most intra-lingual difficulties.

2.1.2 Phonology

Phonology is a term with various definitions all of which agree on its being the study of patterns of sounds. Different linguists promoted; though different, but still similar in the concept, definitions of phonology. Kenstowicz (2014) defined it as a study of the pattern concerned with both selection and use of sounds in the language. Yule states that phonology is a description of the system and pattern of speech sounds in a language. Yet that is in relation to "abstract and mental aspects of the sounds in language instead of the actual physical articulation of speech sounds" (Yule, 2016, p. 88).

Crystal (2008) and Visonil and Marlina (2020) state that phonology is mainly concerned with those rules which if written can show the types of "phonetic relationship". Moreover, it deals with the occurrence of some sounds, which linguists call "phonological environment". An example of that is the sound /l/ which is dentalized when occurring before the interdental sound /ɵ/ as in the words "wealth and health". Other times, it is realized as a dark /l/ as when it is the initial or final sound like the words [hill, like and skill] when preceded or followed by a vowel. Therefore, phonology demonstrates those different pattering rules and how sounds are put together.

2.1.3 Phonetics

Phonetics is believed to study sounds. Mahon (2002, p. 27) mentioned that it provides objective ways of describing and analyzing the range of sounds humans use in their languages. To set it forth, phonetics is classified as acoustic. It is a branch of linguistics that studies the production of speech sounds. There are three main types of phonetics. They are:

A.   Articulatory Phonetics: studies the production of sounds.

B.   Auditory Phonetics: studies the perception of sound and receiving them.

C.   Acoustic Phonetics: studies the waves of sounds. It uses spectrographs to study sounds and differentiate between them. Linguists know sounds through frequency of waves.

According to articulatory phonetics sounds are classified as a.) consonants b.) vowels and c.) semi-vowels or semi-consonants.

2.1.3.1 Consonants

In describing consonants, there are three main points according to which consonants are classified. They are: 1) the state of the glottis, 2) place of articulation and 3) Manner of articulation. Glottis is the space between the vocal cords. It is the end of the pipe. The vocal cords are flexible flesh that closes and opens. When they are open, the air passes through them. The state of glottis is either: a.) opening or b.) vibrating. When the glottis vibrates, it produces voiced sounds; when it is open, it produces voiceless sounds. Voiced sounds are the sounds produced when the vocal cords are vibrating while voiceless sounds are sounds produced when the glottis is open. Different sounds are produced from different places. There are eight places for producing English sounds which are bilabial, interdental, alveolar, alveo-palatal, palatal, velar, and glottis.

2.1.3.2 Vowels

A vowel is a voiced sound in producing of which the air comes out in a continuous stream through the pharynx and the mouth; there is no obstruction or narrowing which could cause audible friction. There are short and long vowels. Also, English has diphthongs.

2.1.3.3 Diphthongs

Diphthongs are a combination of a pure vowel and a glide, e.g., /au/, /ea/.

2.1.3.4 Difficulty with Vowels

Researchers connect pronunciation problems with the complexity of the vowels sound system. Also, such inconsistency of pronunciation proved confusing for EFL. An example of that is having one vowel sound presenting different letters as spelt with "a" (attend), "ar" (particular). It is remarkable that the /ə/ is the realization for different letter/ letters.

2.1.4 Phoneme

It is known as the smallest meaning distinguishing abstract unit. Kwnaroqiaa defines it as "distinctive or contrastive sound in a language." (Kwnaroqiaa, 1979, p. 52). That means a sound has a kind of communicative value as it results in different meanings. Such meaning differentiating sounds are usually distinguished by "Minimal Pairs". Minimal pairs are usually different words that are identical in all sounds and differ in one which differentiates one word from another such as (can, man, and fan), (Shut, cut, and but).

Actually, it is essential for the correct pronunciation of a phoneme is believed to play a role in forming the integral part of a person's oral proficiency.

2.1.5 Grapheme

Since a morpheme is an abstract unit, a concrete representation of it is required. That is what differentiates grapheme from morpheme. A grapheme is the used symbol to identify a phoneme. Plainly, it is the written symbol of a phoneme. An example, the word light is in a grapheme level while /laɪt/ is in a phonemic level. Mahon (2002, p. 55) and Alqunayeer (2016, p. 105) explain that it is better to use a form that looks like one of the actual realizations.

2.1.6 Allophones

They are different realizations of the same phone. In other words, they change the sound quality and they usually do not affect meaning. They are known by complementary distribution. That is to say, each allophone occurs in those environments where the other allophones of the same phoneme cannot occur. For example, the allophones /z/, /s/ and /ɪz/ are for the plural (s). Each of them occurs within conditions that do not allow for the other allophones to occur. The sound /z/ will be after voiced sounds except (ʃ, tʃ, dʒ, ʒ) as in fans, cars, pens, skills, kids. While /s/ is realized after the voiceless sounds like in the words, books, shrimps and parts.

2.1.7 Diagraph

There are many words in English in which a word consists of two letters constituting only one sound as in the word "this"; "th" are realized as only one single sound which is /ð /. Diagraph is the case in which a pair of letters come together to make one sound, for example, *sh, th, ee and ai* in the words *[Short thumb, flee, chain]* respectively.

2.1.8 Mother Tongue Effect

MT interference causes an undeniable impact on L2 learning. Differences between L1 and L2 could lead to committing errors either unconsciously or involuntarily. However, not all errors could be interpreted as being caused by L1. Rod Ellis (1997) and Hojati (2012) signal that mistakes could either reflect "gaps in learner's knowledge" they are kind of occasional lapses in their performance. Linguists differentiate between two types of transfer of L1 to L2. One of which is the positive transfer in which L1 and L2 shared similarities are acquired smoothly. In other words, L1 will have a positive role in acquiring that language aspect if it is similar to that equivalent aspect in L2. The second type is called negative transfer on interference in which the differences between L1 and L2 are apt to cause difficulties in the process of learning L2. Binturki (2008) stated that Arab learners who find some difficulties with sounds which are unfamiliar as /ŋ/ , /v/) tend to substitute these sounds with sounds of their own language. According to Michael Swan (2001), /p/, /b/ sounds are two different sounds distinguished by a native speaker. Yet, Arabic language has only the phoneme /b/ and is usually mispronounced. An example of that is /p/ in the words [park] and [pray] that is realized as /bark/ and /brey/ which are totally different words.

Similarly, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ are usually treated as two allophones while are in reality two different morphemes. It is believed that as mother tongue system is established, the need to change

habits emerges. Thus, to establish new habits, effort and practice are all essential to avoid sounds confusion.

2.1.9 Sound System of Arabic and English Spelling and Pronunciation:

In Arabic, there is a strong relationship between the phoneme and the grapheme, but in English, there is only a poor relationship between the morpheme and the grapheme. While each sound in Arabic is presented in one single morpheme. It occurs in English, that a grapheme is silent and not pronounced such as the /ᵏ/ in [kint], /gh/ in [light] and /b/ in [comb].

Some researchers connect pronunciation problems with the complexity of the spelling system that has no fixed rules as it does not always match pronunciation. Such complexities, due to spelling system errors, contribute to the frequency of committing errors by learners. For instance, there are cases in which one single sound represents different letters like the sound /ᶠ/ that represents /ᶠ/ in [fan], / ᵗ⁄ in [physics] and /gfi/ in [enough]. Other times, the case is just the opposite, i.e., a letter is presented in different sounds. For example, the plural /s/ could be realized as /s/ as in [forts], /z/ as in [pens] or /ɪz/ as in [watches]. Furthermore, some sounds have different realizations according to the context. Such phonological environments do change a sound quality as it is affected by a preceding or a following sound. For example, the /l/ sound could be clear /l/ as in [clear] or dentalized as in [wealth] or dark as in [like]. The realization of /x/ also is either voiced /ɪg/ as in [exam] or voiceless /ks/ as in [exercise] respectively. It is affected by voicing what follows it. Therefore, a specific target sound spies some features of its surrounding sounds that change its quality and result in a difficultly for L2 learner. Effort is needed in order to facilitate the process of formulating concepts about such differences and reflecting them in speech of learner's performance. Moreover, there are words which are spelt differently but do have similar pronunciation such as the words, *rain, rein* and *reign* or *plain* and *plane*. Such words are expected to be areas of difficulty and confusion.

2.1.10 Clusters

This is discussed in a separate section for it is an area of both difficulties and differences between Arabic and English. Consonant clusters are a sequence of two or more consonants either at the beginning of a syllable (initial), or at the end of a syllable (final). English allows up to three consonants clusters in an initial position as in [spray], [splash] and up to four consonants in the final position as in the words [texts], [fifths]. However, Arabic allows only two consonants in the initial position and maximum two consonants in the final position. The difference between the two-syllable systems results in what is known as *epenthesis.*

2.1.10.1 Epenthesis

Linguists distinguish two types of epenthesis in "clusters". One is the internal "epenthesis" such as adding vowel /ɪ/ in the cluster /ksts/ in /tekɪsts/. The second is the external epenthesis that occurs at the beginning of a cluster of consonants as in the word [straight] /ɪstreɪt/.

Mann (2007, p. 67) and Dost (2017, p. 78) introduced the idea of default epenthesis. Default epenthesis is argued to occur across languages, schwa is inserted into clusters. Furthermore, Arab learners are prone to insert a sound in a sequence of consonants which helps ease pronunciation. Besides, such insertion facilitates the transition from one sound to the next which is similar to the use of "helping vowels" in Arabic. According to Ryding (2014) the commonly used vowels as to separate such sequence are (u, i, or a). Colontoni (2015. P. 32) and Miqawati (2020, p. 48) indicate that there is a strong evidence for cross—linguistic influence appeared because of the learners' production of consonant clusters Thus, the sound system of mother tongue is carried over in the production of the sequence of consonants. These examples illustrate how some clusters are produced in RP and how Arab learners produce them: (word: text, actual pronunciation tekst, and mistaken utterances is /tekest/, another example: (word: street, actual pronunciation/stri:t/, and mistaken utterances is /estri:t/.

2.1.11 Teaching Pronunciation

In many EFL settings, pronunciation is neglected and ignored to a great extent. That is to say, it is overlooked in the curriculum and usually is given little, if not, any considerable place in language teaching process.

Idris (2016) stated that teaching pronunciation is overwhelmed by consideration of time and little given attention. As language teaching is exclusively targeting other areas like grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation is avoided. Idris (2016) and Farrah and Halahlah (2020) also emphasized that even if the teaching of pronunciation is done, it still requires reaching the level of intelligibility. As to what areas should be taught, trends and approaches do differ. However, most argue that the quality of vowels and their length distinctions are worth teaching. In addition, as consonant clusters are problematic, it would be good to make learners aware of syllable structure. To sum up, pronunciation is considered vital in teaching language and should be integrated with other skills in teaching foreign language communication. Gilbert (2008) suggested that vowel distinctions may be more easily learned by listening tasks, while consonants may be mastered more efficiently through speaking task. Also, Siegel (2018); and Ahmed & Nazim (2014) said that many teachers suggested a mixture of instructional procedures as reading aloud, repetition, shadowing and teacher corrections to make learners overcome their pronunciation problems.

2.2 Previous Studies:-

Farrah and Halahlah (2020) in their study aimed to identify a few common pronunciation mistakes among Palestinian English major students at Hebron University and the factors that cause these problems. The paper discusses selected phonetic and phonological problems related to specific consonants and vowels besides problems related to the pronunciation of consonant sequences. The participants of this study were 120 English major students from Hebron University. The researchers used a questionnaire and a recorded pronunciation test to collect the data. In addition to the previous instruments, interviews were conducted with eight students and two instructors. The findings of the study revealed that Hebron University English major students have difficulties in pronouncing English consonants that are not part of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) such as [ŋ], [p],[ɫ], [ɹ],[ʒ],[tʃ] (though

some consider [ŋ], [ɫ], [ʒ], [tʃ] as allophonic variants and are used in the different dialects of Arabic). They also have problems in pronouncing consonant clusters(epenthesis), silent letters, and vowels that have more than one pronunciation. During the interviews, the interviewees pointed various reasons for their errors and suggested some solutions to some of these pronunciation problems. Among the reasons of mispronunciation mentioned are interference from Arabic and the lack of correct models, exposure to native speakers, and practice. The researchers concluded that learners' errors are caused by several linguistic factors, such as the disparity between Arabic and English sound systems, the effect of spelling on pronunciation, the influence of the first language (L1) on the second language (L2), and English vowel inconsistency.

Visoni1 and Marlina's (2020) study aimed to examine commonly mispronounced vowel sounds. This study investigated the pronunciation error of speech performance to get more naturalistic pronunciation as its data. The source of data of this study was six speech recordings delivered by students' English activities in speaking classes in the English Department (Universitas Negeri Padang). The recordings were analyzed to obtain pronunciation errors from the speeches. After it was done, the errors were measured and interpreted. The result of this study revealed [æ], [iː], [ə], [əʊ], and [eɪ] were frequently made errors. These sounds were substituted by several sounds. Therefore, it is suggested that these specific errors should be taken into consideration when teaching English to L1 Indonesian EFL students.

Ababneh (2018) deals with English pronunciation errors made by two groups of native Saudi Arabian speakers. The students in the first group were English majors while the students in the second group were Arabic majors. Generally, Arabic speakers use direct transfer and interference from Arabic in addition to stress shifts in their pronunciation that are not recognized stress patterns in English. Also, there are some sounds in English that have no equivalence in Arabic, which lead to vowel and consonant errors. This study identifies the pronunciation errors made by Saudi students in pronouncing words of a problematic nature to Arabs in general. The students in both groups made vowel insertion, confusion, orthography, stress, and intonation errors, but more trained students in group 1 made less errors than the students in group 2.

Idris (2016) in his study investigated the mispronunciation of cluster consonants, the ending of words by linking or inserting unnecessary sounds and prosodic features such as intonation and stress. The researcher concluded that those errors occur due to mother tongue interference and little amount of exposure to English practice. She suggested that the best way to help learners to overcome mispronunciation of certain words was giving them sufficient exposure to language.

Altamimi (2015) investigated whether the factor of using minimal pairs in English classes helps Saudi learners to achieve best results on pronunciation or not. The researcher used three tests as an instrument of collecting the data: pre-test, post-test and oral assessment (based on observation) to determine if there was a statistical significance of using minimal pairs or not. The results showed improvement that indicates that the use of minimal pairs is an effective strategy.

The study of Zarka (2013) aimed to investigate the impact of Arabic interference for Arab learners who learn English as a second language. The researcher stated that Arabic language influences negatively so that, the learners encounter errors with pronunciation. Therefore, this study attempted to shed light on those errors in order to analyze them and then give solutions for helping the learners to produce a correct pronunciation.

The study of Akyol (2012) was an experimental one. The researcher elicited some strategies that help Turkish learners who learn English as a foreign language to speak fluently. According to the study, it is assumed that a learner who speaks with an acceptable pronunciation gains confidence and high motivation that facilitate the process of learning and encourage the learner to produce correct pronunciation. On the contrary, a person who speaks with poor pronunciation fails to communicate well. The researcher suggested that it works best to integrate the social and cooperative sides of learning.

Sugiarto (2013) aimed to investigate the types of pronunciation errors that are made by fourth level students. A video was used as an instrument for collecting the data of the study. The researcher recorded the class and then transcribed it to find out that they say wrong utterances. The steps of collecting pronunciation errors were presenting, identifying, describing and discussing, and concluding. He found out that there are seven types of slips of the tongue namely anticipation, perseveration, exchange, blend, substitution, addition, and deletion. According to this study, the seven types of slips of the tongue occur because the learners were in a hurry that led them to substitute some words for others.

The study of Abdalla (n.d.) investigated the pronunciation errors of English diphthong sounds that are made by Sudanese EFL learners. The researcher stated that the most difficult ones are /uː/, /ɔː/, /ei/, /i/. The results of the study showed that Sudanese EFL learners pronounce diphthong sounds poorly and hesitatingly. The study suggested that teachers should be good and enough competent because the learners imitate what they hear.

3. Design of the Study:

3.1 Type and Method of the Study:

This present study is a quantitative descriptive one in which numbers and statistics were used in analyzing the collected data.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study:

The **population** of the study addresses:

1. Level-three students in the Department of English- Faculty of Education-Sana'a, Sana'a University- academic year 2019- 2020.

2. Teachers at Sana'a University-English Department-Faculty of Education – 2019-2020- Second Semester.

The **sample** of the study was:

1. 30 students out of the total number of the population were selected using systematic random sampling for the close ended questionnaire in the year (2019-2020).

2. 10 students for oral production test in the year (2019-2020).

3. 10 ten teachers from the Department for the teacher's questionnaire. Teachers who participated are teachers of linguistics in general and teachers of phonetics and phonology who are sufficiently familiar with their student's pronunciation errors in the year (2019-2020).

3.4 Data Collection Instruments:

For the purpose of answering the research question, two data collection tools were used:

1. The Close-Ended Questionnaires:

The Two close ended questionnaires were one for the students and the other one was for teachers. It was prepared by the researcher himself. They intended to highlight the reasons and the possible solutions for these problems.

The students' questionnaire consisted of fifteen items each of which is either to detect the type of errors or the recurrent factors resulting in such pronunciation errors. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of fourteen items that try to diagnose the problem and its perception from the point of view of instructors and teaching experts.

The data collected through the close-ended questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation).

2. The Oral Pronunciation Test:

The oral test also was prepared by the researcher himself. It was purposed to check those pronunciation errors within the limits of the study in their production level. It was designed for getting an insight into the production of certain words that reflect certain oral competencies. The criteria for designing the test was according to those common errors committed regularly by EFL learners while speaking. These are identified in terms of either sound identification or group identification, clusters. The words selected were easy ones. Most of them were either mono or disyllabic, so that the length of a word does not affect the utterance and level of error. Moreover, the words were to measure those that were not reflecting spelling. In other words, the spelling does not reflect pronunciation. Also, words were chosen to consist of clusters to get data on the effect of mother tongue syllable structure on the EFL performance. Three categories were tested. First, words that include many sections including supra-segmental features. The first one is to test sound recognition in general; it consists of seven words. The second was purposed for testing the production of the inflectional morphemes past "e-d" and plural "s"; it has six words to articulate. The last section concentrated on words both initial and final clusters. The last part had four words.

To get better result, the care was taken to ensure that there is no noise such could affect realizing the utterances, clear instructions were afforded. The participants were given the words and asked to pronounce them, and their utterances were recorded.

The scoring of the test is according to the correct utterance. If a word is properly uttered, then it is a point. Yet, wrong pronunciation is assigned no mark at all. And the collected data by the close ended questionnaire was analyzed descriptively by using (SPSS) program.

4. Findings of the Study:

Answering Question One of the Study:

The first question was **"What are the common pronunciation errors committed by EFL third level students in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a University?"** For the purpose of answering this question, a pronunciation test was given to students to check their pronunciation errors. The following results show how many errors were committed.

4.2.1The Results of the Oral Pronunciation Test:

Table (1) below presents total and percentages of participants who answered the three questions. Their answers are to be briefly discussed below.

Table 1: Total and Percentage of Correct Answers in Part One of Oral Test (Sound Recognition)

	Feather		Measure		Stomach		Sort		Thought		Part		Pat	
	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False
Frequency	4	6	4	6	3	7	4	6	3	7	6	4	7	3
Percentage	40%	60%	40%	60%	30%	70%	40%	60%	30%	70%	60%	40%	70%	30%
Mean of True	44%													
Mean of False	56%													

According to the table, the recognition of both consonant and vowel sounds in simple words with less grapheme to phoneme agreement (feather, measure, stomach, sort, and thought) were pronounced incorrectly by more than half of the participants while only the words part and parts that were correctly pronounced as they show kind of match between spelling and pronunciation.

Table 2: Total and Percentage of Correct Answers in Part Two of Oral Test (Final (e)d and(e)s)

	Stopped		Moved		Rested		Bags		Asks		Bushes	
	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False
Frequency	4	6	3	7	7	3	8	2	7	3	7	3
Percentage	40%	60%	30%	70%	70%	30%	80%	20%	70%	30%	70%	30%
Mean of True	60%											
Mean of False	40%											

According to table (2) above, words with final "ed" and "es" were almost pronounced correctly by more than the half of the participants while only a percentage of 40% that were incorrectly uttered. This goes in alliance with THE findings of Idris (2016) that the lack of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation lead learners to mispronounce such word endings.

Table 3: Total and Percentage of Correct Answers in Part Three of Oral Test (Consonant Clusters)

	Play		split		Picked		texts	
	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False
Frequency	7	3	6	4	6	4	7	3
Percentage	70%	30%	60%	40%	60%	40%	70%	30%
Mean of True	65%							
Mean of False	35%							

Table (3) above shows that both initial and final word clusters were pronounced correctly at a percentage of 65% which is low to some extent. The level of those mispronounced clusters was 35%. This shows they are not a major source of trouble, but they still are a secondary source for committing errors. However, they are still problematic to some extent. This also is supported by what Na'ama (2011) found about clusters as they cause a kind of inter-lingual errors for Arab speakers who learn English.

Table 4: The Students' Test Analysis – (Mean Ranking of the Three Parts of the Test*)*

	True	False
Part 1	44%	56%
Part 2	60%	40%
Part 3	65%	35%

The comparison of mean shows that most troublesome area of pronunciation is at the sound level. In other words, the learners are unable to identify the correct pronunciation of sounds. Moreover, the differences between word spelling and its corresponding pronunciation is problematic. Next, the word inflections seem to be another sources of trouble as they do not follow the same pronunciation rule; they are realized according to what precedes them. Furthermore, clusters, even if not to a great extent, still prove to cause a problem of epenthesis for some learners.

4.2.2 The Student's Questionnaire

In order to find more about the research questions, the questionnaire sought to identify the learners' perception of the problem, both factors and the common errors. What are the common pronunciation errors?

Table 5 below presents the total percentage of the participants who answered the 15 items of the questionnaire as to reflect the difficulties in English pronunciation the learners face. (Learners' questionnaire).

`Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
14- I use a dictionary to identify the phonemic transcription	30	3.8	1.324
12- There is a lack of exposure to English language.	30	3.57	0.858
15- I imitate teacher pronunciation.	30	3.57	1.104
2- I have difficulties with the division of syllables.	30	3.53	1.106
3- I have major problems with phonetic transcription.	30	3.5	0.974
11- Lack of English spelling and pronunciation correspondence causes the main difficulties.	30	3.33	1.213
1- I mispronounce certain sounds in English.	30	3.3	1.236
9- Insufficient time is devoted to pronunciation practice.	30	3.27	1.172
6- I find silent sounds confusing.	30	3.13	1.383
5- I mix between vowels.	30	3.1	1.423
13- Most of my pronunciation errors are made due to the Arabic sound system interference.	30	2.97	1.402
8- I know pronunciation rules, but I don't practice them.	30	2.93	1.337
7- I have difficulties with consonantal cluster.	30	2.53	1.196
4- I mispronounce the-e d and -es words endings.	30	2.43	1.251
10- I do not know about the pronunciation rules.	30	2.37	1.351
Valid N (listwise)	30		

Based on table 5, more than half of the participants agreed that they do have certain problems in pronunciation. They also agreed that they lack exposure to language. Also, most of them found that the lack of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation causes many pronunciation mistakes. Also, it is believed that the focus on pronunciation in classroom is insufficient. However, only some considered the source of errors being mother tongue interference. Based on student's questionnaire analysis, the participants, more than the half, agreed that vowel sounds and the difference between spelling and pronunciation of words are two major causes of errors. Also, they admitted they have problems with syllabification. Less than half of the participants' believed that mother tongue is a major cause of errors.

Answering questions based on the test: most of students have problems in pronouncing sounds, specifically with words of mismatch between spelling and pronunciation. In addition, clusters are problematic.

4.2.3 Teachers' Questionnaire

The following table presents the reached descriptive statistics concerning teachers' views about pronunciation errors and the causing factors. Below is a brief comment.

Table 6: Teachers' Questionnaire Statistics

No.	Item (reasons)	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
13	Time is insufficient to cover all the pronunciation aspects.	10	4.40	.699
4	My students have a problem with vowel length contrast.	10	4.20	1.033
6	My students encounter difficulties with the initial and final consonantal cluster.	10	4.10	.994
14	Teachers take much time to introduce the pronunciation basics since the students have no idea about them.	10	3.90	1.197
12	It is hard to keep students motivated.	10	3.80	1.398
8	My students add unnecessary sound at word boundaries	10	3.80	1.476
5	Students mispronounce -e d verbs and -e s verbs and plurals endings.	10	3.70	1.337
1	My students mispronounce certain sounds in English.	10	3.70	1.337
10	Mother-tongue interference leads to pronunciation errors.	10	3.60	1.265
7	There are not clear and specified curricular objectives with regard to pronunciation.	10	3.60	1.506

9	Lack of knowledge contributes to pronunciation errors.	10	3.50	1.509
3	The majority of students have major problems with phonetic transcription.	10	3.50	1.650
2	My students encounter difficulties with the syllabification.	10	3.30	1.703
11	Students make pronunciation errors because of lack practice of rules.	10	3.20	1.476

Most of the participants agree that students have problems in pronunciation either with sounds or transcription and syllabification. Besides, the majority of them consider that time is much spent on introducing pronunciation for it is still unfamiliar to EFL learners at the university. They also find that mother tongue interference affects learners' realization of sounds and words. Within a limited time, teachers find it hard to pay great attention to pronunciation aspects. In fact, this same idea was supported by Al-Harahsheh's study (2020, p. 36).

The participants agreed that learners add unnecessary sounds and have problems with phonetic transcription. Majority of them also find that mother tongue plays a role in learners' mispronunciation. It seems that there is a lack of concentration in classroom on pronunciation. The practice is kept minimum and little emphasis exists on the production of words or sounds.

5.1 Summary of the Study:

The current study was conducted to investigate two major questions: i) What are the common pronunciation errors committed by fourth level EFL learners in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a university? ii) What affects, or what lingual factors affect language pronunciation of fourth level EFL learners in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a university?

Two instruments of data collection were utilized: a short oral test of sounds production and two questionnaires, one is students' questionnaire while the other is for teachers. The researchers modified ready-made questionnaires for the purpose of this study. After having the questionnaires validated, they were administered to a group of fourth year students at the English Department. The study took place in the second term of the academic year 2018-2019. Thirty Yemeni fourth year EFL students were selected randomly as the sample of this study.

After that, the obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The percentage and the mean were calculated. The findings will be revealed in the following part.

5.2 Findings Yielded From Data Analysis

The overall analysis of the data obtained from the student's questionnaire shows that the Yemeni fourth Year EFL learners are still making pronunciation errors. The results of the questionnaire reveal that the most students make mistakes in producing certain sounds both consonants and vowels. Also, they have problems with word ending letters like the past tense inflection "ed" or plural "s". Final word

and initial clusters are also an area of common errors. Students show a bit of awareness towards their errors and feel that more emphasis is to be paid when teaching for better progress. The overall analysis of teacher's questionnaire shows that there is only limited attention paid to pronunciation. Factors like time prove to limit the focus on teaching and the emphasis on pronunciation. Teachers admit that mother tongue effect is noticeable in learners' errors.

This study seeks to add to the present studies in the area of pronunciation of EFL learner. It tries to verify a belief about the difficulties in English pronunciation EFL learners find. The findings of this study highlight the common pronunciation errors and their causes. As to have more attention to this language area, the findings try to reflect that on the teaching and learning process.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The present study provides evidence that there are common errors that Yemeni EFL learners make due to limited attention paid to teaching pronunciation. To reduce those problems. It is recommended that:

1. EFL teachers should be made aware of the importance of pronunciation and how to incorporate that in the syllabus and the classroom.

2. EFL teachers should try to raise learners' awareness of the importance of having intelligible pronunciation and provide enough time for practicing pronunciation in speaking classes specifically.

3. Students should be allowed to listen to English sounds, either isolated or words within texts using different audio-materials such as tapes, recorders and CDs.

4. Learners need an emphasis on being always involved in the target language so as to improve pronunciation. In 1-4 speaking courses, teachers should provide enough background along with ample practical activities for pronunciation.

5. Learners are recommended to record their speeches and analyze their pronunciation; feedback is preferable in how to avoid and improve them.

6. In different language courses, small amount of time can be allocated to pronunciation, mainly, those common ones so as to enhance the effort of Speaking teachers.

7. Since students tend to depend on dictionaries to be familiar with new words they encounter, it is good to advise them to use soft dictionaries that affords audible transcription and even different ways of pronouncing one single word.

8. As we are living in the age of technology, teachers can depend on more electronic assignments than the traditional pen and paper ones.

9. Listen to a stretch of speech and analyze errors. They can play some pronunciation games. Any assignment that involves deep contact with pronunciation yields some benefits for learners.

10. Teachers should encourage leaners to listen to native speakers in different media.

By doing this, the learner will actively acquire more accurate pronunciation than that provided inside the teaching environment.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Researches

As the current study has investigated the common pronunciation errors by EFL learners in the Faculty of Education, Sana'a University several suggestions for further studies are made:

1. The study has only investigated limited pronunciation errors. Further studies could investigate a wider range of errors both in terms of sounds and words.

2. The study has not investigated supra-segmental errors like stress and intonation; therefore, it is suggested that further studies investigate these features both in terms of recognition and production.

3. Other studies can apply it to a wider and different levels so as to reach wider understanding of the problem and some plausible solutions.

4. This study used only simple production test, other studies can enlarge the scope of test and test more items.

5. For finding some shortcomings of the speaking syllabus, it is recommended to analyze the material assigned for EFL at the department of English, Sana'a University for further development.

6. Another area of study could be that of explicit teaching pronunciation and affording some contrastive analysis between Arabic and English pronunciation.

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