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Factors Hindering English Pronunciation Accuracy among Cihan University Students

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Abstract in English

The primary aim of this paper is to explore the barriers that hinder pronunciation proficiency among English foreign learners at Cihan University due to the fact that pronunciation accuracy is a significant challenge for many English language learners as it often affects their oral communication skills and academic performance. This research, therefore, is conducted to help university learners of English pronounce English better than they do now. Many foreign students want to be able to speak English well with a pronunciation which can be easily understood both by their fellow-students and by English people, and it is for those students that this article is specially intended. In order to achieve the aims of the study, the most common pronunciation barriers faced by learners are highlighted and then the writer suggests effective ways to solve them taking into consideration the reasons underlying them. The writer believes that most of the errors made by the students are attributable to interlingual or intralingua factors. In order to find out whether the researcher's assumptions align with the students' performance, an oral test was given to level one and level 4. The goal behind involving the two levels is to find out the progress level 4 students have achieved after three years of study at the university. After a thorough analysis of the results of test, the researcher concludes that pronunciation remains a significant

Paper Info

Keywords

pronunciation barriers, significant challenge, interlingual, intralingual, oral proficiency, communicative competence

challenge for many English language learners at the university level, often affecting their oral communication skills and academic performance. Hence, some recommendations are suggested to improve students' oral proficiency and communicative competence.

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1 Introduction

As a teacher of English at Cihan University-Erbil for three years, I discovered that phonetics is the most challenging course for most students. This opinion was reinforced by Abugohar and Yunus (2018) who stated that the precise articulation of English sounds is a real obstacle for English learners. However, effective pronunciation does not necessarily mean that a non-native speaker has to match native speakers' fluency and accuracy. This perspective was supported by Yates and Zielinski (2009) who clearly stated that effective pronunciation is not merely achieving native-like fluency and accuracy, but ensuring intelligibility and fostering communicative confidence.

Although pronunciation plays a crucial role in oral communication and overall language proficiency, it often receives limited attention in formal classroom instruction, especially at the university level. Hence, you can find students who have developed strong skills in grammar and vocabulary, yet they struggle with producing intelligible spoken English. Challenges in pronunciation definitely cause a lack of communication not only on academic performance but also on social and professional interaction, both locally and internationally. As Yates and Zielinski (2009) argue, effective pronunciation is not merely about achieving native-like fluency but ensuring intelligibility and fostering communicative confidence.

Pronunciation errors among English Language learners often stem from two principal factors; interlingual and intralingual. The former is also known as errors of transfer from the mother tongue. They refer to those instances of deviation from the norm of the target language which occur as a result of familiarity with the native language. The latter refers to the errors that do not reflect features of the leaners' mother tongue, but

result from various factors, such as poor teaching, poor material, false analogy, overgeneralization, and inadequate mastery of the target language. (O' Conner, J.D. 1990)

The present writer's long experience in teaching English pronunciation at the university level helps him to conclude that pronunciation is a real challenge for foreign language learners in all its aspects. Commonly problematic areas include segmental features such as individual vowel and consonant sounds, as well as suprasegmental features like word stress, sentence stress, intonation, and connected speech. Though the degree of difficulty varies among students depending on their different levels; yet pronunciation poses a real challenge for all students.

To the best knowledge of the writer, this study is different from all other studies in two aspects. First, it aims at investigating pronunciation challenges faced by university students on the word level only. This means that it focuses on the difficulties facing Cihan university students at the Department of English, i.e. when they pronounce single words. Therefore, the pronunciation of consonants and vowels, consonant clusters and stress will be focused on only. Moreover, this study aims at exploring pronunciation challenges faced by university students across two academic levels: first-year (Level 1) and fourth-year (Level 4) students. The purpose is to determine whether the latter group has made significant progress in pronunciation after four years of university-level English instruction. By comparing the responses from both groups, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of existing instructional approaches and to identify persistent areas of difficulty. The findings aim to inform improvements in pronunciation teaching strategies to ensure that graduates of Cihan University have excellent spoken English skills.

1.1Pronunciation of the English word

One salient feature of English is that written English and spoken English are obviously very different. The written forms are sometimes misleading due to the fact that there is no one to one relationship between letters and sounds, i.e. there isn't any consistency between letters and sounds. The same letter does not always give the same sound. For example, the letter 'a' is pronounced /æ/ as in cat, fat, back. It is also pronounced /eɪ/

in came, game, ape and /ɔ:/ as in call, fall and mall. In the words city, busy, woman, pretty, village, the letters (i, y, u, o, e and a) all stand for /ɪ/. Furthermore, in banana, say, man, and many the letter (a) stands for five different vowel sounds, i.e. /ə/, /a:/, /eɪ/, /æ/ and /e/. Similarly, the same consonant /k/ can be represented by the letter 'c' as in come, fact, phonetic and the letters 'ch' as in chemistry, character, chaos. The other feature that may cause problems for nonnative speakers of English is homophony which means a type of relationship between two or more expressions that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and spelling. Some common examples of homophones are bear-bare, sea-sea, right-write, night-knight, etc.

It is commonly known that there are 24 consonant sounds in English (15 voiced and 9 voiceless). Teaching phonetics to Arab and Kurdish students, the writer finds that while the students find no difficulty in producing nineteen consonant sounds properly (/f/, /t/, /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /k/, /h/, /b/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /z/, /n/, /l/, /, /dʒ/, /j/, /g/, and /ŋ/) ; yet, they find /p/, /v/, /ə/, /ʒ/ and /r/ are difficult for them to produce. According to Roach, P (2002), this is normal due to the fact in the heads of these students there are no boxes for the first four consonants, so they replace them by other sounds which exist in their mother tongue. These four consonants are replaced by /b/, /f/, /s/ and /dʒ/ respectively. Though the /r/ sound exists in the learners' mother tongue, it is difficult for our students to properly produce it because the English /r/ is different from the /r/ in Arabic and Kurdish languages. While the English /r/ is formed with the tongue tip raised and curled back behind the alveolar ridge, the Arabic and Kurdish /r/ is a trill /r/ where the tongue strikes or vibrates against the alveolar ridge.

Regarding vowels, there are twenty vowels: 12 single vowels which are /i:/, /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /a:/, /ɔ/, /ɔ:/, /u/, /u:/, / Λ /, /∂/ and /3:/ and 8 diphthongs which are /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /au/, /əu/, /ɔɪ/, /uə/, /eə/ and /ɪə/ in English. Of the twelve single vowels, the vowel /e/ is a real challenge for our students because they change the sound into /ɪ/, thus, instead of saying /wel/, /betə/ and /entə/, they say /wɪl/, /bɪtə/ and /ɪntə/. This error does not attribute to the students' mother tongue, but it emanates from poor instruction at secondary schools. The writer reaches this fact after asking many students who assert that their teachers usually pronounce the vowel /e/ as /ɪ/. The schwa /ə/ is another challenging sound for our students, especially when it comes initially and medially. The words obey, observe,

oblige, object, and obstruct start with the letter 'o', but it is pronounced schwa. In all these cases and the like, the students change the /ə/ into /ɔ/. The medial schwa is still too difficult for our students to recognize and produce. If you consider the following examples, you can conclude how the medial schwa is confusing: perhaps, collapse, collide, combine, compare, conceal, confirm, conclude, entertain, confuse, consult and many others like. Of the eight diphthongs mentioned above, /əu/ and /ıə/ are difficult for our students to recognize and produce. The two reasons underlying this difficulty are the students' mother tongue since they do not exist in their language as well as their articulation is not easy. Hence, instead of saying /həul/, /bəut /and /nəu/, they say /hɔl/, /bɔt/ and /nɔ/. The diphthong /ıə/ is always changed into /eə/ since the latter is easy to produce. Hence, the words here, steer, ear, dear and fear are changed into hair, stare, air, dare and fare subsequently.

1.2 Plural ending s/es

This phonological aspect also causes some problems for our learners because they sometimes don't know whether the pronunciation of the plural form is /s/, /z/ or /ız/. If the students follow the following rules, they will find it very easy to properly pronounce the plural ending.

1If the word ends with /p, t, k, f, θ/, the plural ending will be pronounced /s/, e.g.
shops, cats, books, roofs, and paths

2 If the word ends with /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/, the plural ending will be pronounced /ız/, e.g.
buses, nose, bushes, garages, watches, and bridges.

3 If the word ends with all other consonants and vowels, the plural ending will be pronounced /z/, e.g.
walls, pens, computers, boys, girls, cows, and shoulders

The prominent error our students usually make is adding the short vowel /ı/ before /s/ or /z/ to make them /ız/ in order to avoid the final consonant cluster, e.g. marks /ma:ks/ will be **/ma:kız/*, types /taıps/ will be pronounced **/taıpıs/*, and syntax/sıntaks/ is pronounced /sıntakıs/. In contrast, there are words which end in – es and is pronounced /ız/ like the word 'languages' and 'churches'. Instead of pronouncing the former as /læŋgwıdʒız/, and the latter as / tʃ3:tʃız /, they pronounce them as / læŋgwıdʒz/ and /tʃ3:tʃz/.

1.3 Past form ending d/ed

Likewise the past form ending, there are rules that help studnts to decide whether the /d/ or /ed/ is pronounced /t/, /ɪd/, or /d/. Consider the following:

1 If the verb ends with /p/, /k/, /f/, /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /θ/, the past form ending will be pronounced /t/ e.g. stopped, walked, laughed, kissed, pushed, watched, earthed

2 If the verb ends with /d/ or/t/, the past ending will be pronounced /ɪd/, e.g. ended, hated

3 If the verb ends with all other consonants and vowels, it will be pronounced /d/, e.g. moved, played, cried, robbed,

The common error our students commit is the addition of the vowel /ɪ/ after the final consonant to avoid a final consonant cluster, e.g. asked /a:skt/ will be **/a:skɪd/*, based /peɪst/ is pronounced /beɪsɪd/.

1.4 Stress

Stress is basically defined as the relative emphasis or prominence given to a certain syllable in a word or to a certain word in a phrase or sentence. Though stress is one of the phonological aspect in language, it follows certain rules, thus, our students should not commit any mistakes when they come across it. The common rules that determine where the stress is in a word are as follows:

1 Many two-syllable words come from a one-syllable word. In such words, the stress remains on the syllable of the original word, e.g. artist (Oo), friendly (Oo), remove (oO), and become (oO).

2 Most two-syllable nouns and adjectives have stress on the first syllable, e.g. famous (Oo), picture (Oo), purple (Oo) and forest (Oo). However, there are a number of exceptions to this general rule, e.g. asleep oO), mistake, machine and alone which have stress on the second syllable.

3 Most two-syllable verbs have stress on the second syllable, e.g. repeat (oO), escape (oO), forget (oO), and relax (oO). However, there are some exceptions to this rule, e.g. cancel (Oo), copy (Oo), answer (Oo), enter (Oo), offer (Oo), listen (Oo), happen (Oo) and open (Oo).

4 Some prefixes and suffixes are added to the original word and they do not change the position of the stress, e.g. drink+able (Ooo), in+accurate (oOoo), im+possible (oOoo), happi+ness (Ooo), music+al (Ooo), civil+ize (Ooo), friend+ship (Oo), play+er (Oo), un+happy (oOo) and help+ful (Oo).

5 Other prefixes and suffixes can change the place of stress, e.g.

educate (Ooo) -- edu'cation (ooOo), electric (oOo) --- electrician (ooOo)

decorate (Ooo) --- decoration (ooOo), music (Oo) ---- musician (oOo)

When –ion or –ian are added to certain words, the stress always moves to the syllable before these endings, e.g. el**ec**tric (oOo) -- elec'trician (ooOo), de**c**orate (Ooo)-- decoration (ooOo)

music (Oo) --- musician (oOo)

6 Some words have the stress on the first syllable if they are nouns, but the stress moves to the second syllable if they are verbs, e.g.

noun (Oo)	verb (oO)
desert	desert
rebel	rebel
contract	contract
present	present
contract	contract
object	object

1.5 **Consonant Clusters**

Another serious challenge that our students face is consonant clusters, especially when the word starts with. Clusters in English occur initially, medially and finally. Initial clusters of more than three consonants are rare in English. Medial and final clusters of

more than three can occur in English. The following are some examples of initial, medial and final consonant clusters.

two initial consonant clusters: stop, black

two final consonant clusters: task, milk

three initial consonant clusters: street, spring

4 four final consonant clusters: glimpsed, twelfths

5 five final consonant clusters: angsts

Through observing the students, the writer discovered that the most challenging cluster for them is the initial three consonant cluster. The main reason underlying this error is their mother tongue since this case doesn't exist; hence, they often add the vowel /ɪ/ between the first and the second consonant.

2 Literature Review

As it was previously mentioned, this paper is different from most other studies in two-fold. First, it focuses on the segmental and supersegmental features of the word only. Second, it compares the proficiency of level 4 students with first-year students to find out to what extent the former have benefitted from their four year study at the Department of English. Regarding the first point, the writer believes that delving in many aspects of pronunciation leads to a lack of focus in scientific research. Regarding the second point, the writer seeks to fill the gap in previous research since it doesn't follow up the change in the challenges facing any group of students over time within the same English department. This has been elucidated in this study by comparing the performance of two distinct student cohorts; first and fourth year students.

Although there is no dearth of studies on pronunciation problems facing learners of English as a Foreign Language, research on pronunciation problems facing Cihan learners of English is scarce. There are many Arab and foreign researchers who have addressed the problems faced by students studying English as a foreign language in pronunciation. Examples of Arab research are Ali, E. (2013); Hassan, E. (2014); Shaheen, F. and Baig, S. (2020); Utami, V. (2020); Baker, A. and Burri, M. (2016); Al-

Mafalees, F. (2020); Al-Shaibani, A. (2023); Al-Hamzi, A et al (2021); Al-Muslimi, F. (2020); Al-Rubaat, A. and Al-Shammari, H. (2019) ; Huda, H. and Dewanti, R. (2022); Khudhair, H. (2023); Mohammed, M. and Idris, S. (2020). Examples of foreign research are Komaria, A. (2018); Adeline, F. (2020); Maiza, M. (2020); Plaiek, T. (2021); Pratiwi, D. and Indrayani, L. (2021); Saniha, K., Raza, E. and Behzad, A. (2023); Anjani, R. et al (2023); Gharamals, F. et al (2024). Despite all the research that has been conducted by so many writers on the problems faced by English foreign learners; yet, it remains one of the most challenging areas for both learners and instructors due to the fact that pronunciation is a critical component of language competence. In spite of this, pronunciation is often underemphasized at schools as well as universities instruction (Gilakjani, 2012). Due to such lack of attention at schools, we get students whose errors in pronunciation are both numerous and deeply entrenched.

Derwing and Munro (2005) stated that the primary goal of pronunciation instruction should be intelligibility, rather than native-like accuracy, especially for adult learners. Many studies have examined the challenges facing English learners in pronunciation in different countries. Al-Zubeiry (2019) explored Yemeni university students' problems in word pronunciation, stress and intonation patterns. In order to achieve the goals of his study, the writer using a combination of recorded speech samples and perception-based questionnaires. The writer concluded that both segmental and suprasegmental issues contributed to pronunciation intelligibility. He finally recommended more pronunciation practice in university curricula. Gilakjani (2016) investigated Iranian EFL learners' views on pronunciation instruction. The study revealed that many learners lacked confidence in their pronunciation due to fact that university curriculum does not give special attention to pronunciation. Likewise, the traditional teaching approaches followed by English teachers at the university level do not give particular attention to teaching this subject. The researcher used Likert-scale questionnaire to find out the learners' needs to be competent in pronunciation.

Ketabi and Saeb (2015) analysed the errors committed by students in an Iranian university. The writers concluded that errors in pronunciation are persistent even after years of instruction. Therefore, they recommended that developing teaching pronunciation by teachers at the university level is urgent. Pathan, et al. (2025) wrote a

paper investigating the challenges facing Pakistani English language learners at the university level in pronunciation. They concluded that all the errors committed by the learners are attributed to mother tongue interference, insufficient feedback and poor instruction. They recommended that teachers at schools are not qualified enough to teach pronunciation. In another study, Zalla and Lefiandi (2025) investigated Acehnese English foreign learner's errors in producing consonant sounds and the causes underlying them. It is obvious that this study only focuses on consonant sound production. Du (2025) also explored the challenges facing Chinese foreign English learners. The writer attributed all the challenges to the learners' mother tongue. From native Tongues to English Sounds is the title of a study conducted by Ben Abdallah and Letaief (2025) who examined the challenges of Tunisian English learners in pronunciation. The study focused on Tunisian problems in consonant clusters and vowels production.

Karwan J. Raheem (2025) addressed the challenges facing Kurdish English foreign learners in pronouncing English loan words. The writer attributed such challenges to the learners' mother tongue since phonemes in the two languages are different. Another paper written by Ghafar (2025) who addressed the problems facing Kurdish learners in the same region. The writer focused on the errors emanated from consonants and vowels. He found out that the reasons underlying the learners' problems are limited teaching training, inadequate classroom time and learners' lack of motivation. Another study was also conducted in Kurdistan region by Sabah S. Haji (2019). The writer investigated the errors committed by Kurdish English university foreign learners in producing the twelve single English vowels. The errors are ascribed to lack of exposure, insufficient practice, and the learners' mother tongue. Alkhaldi and Alruwaily (2025) addressed the degree of accuracy in consonant pronunciation among Arab learners of English in Saudi Arabia schools. The two writers confirmed that age and the type of education are the factors that determine the degree of accuracy in pronunciation. They added that the early age of the learner and good education increase the accuracy of pronunciation.

Altakhaineh, Al-Junaid and Younes (2024) explored the challenges facing Arab learners in initial and final consonant clusters. To them, the main reason of learners' mispronunciation is due to phonotactics internalization. Albahal and Hameed (2025)

explored the challenges facing Saudi English Majors in recognizing and transcribing the Schwa sound only. Topal (2024) carried out a study examining fossilized pronunciation errors among both Teachers and learners in segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English phonology. The writer attributed most of the fossilized pronunciation errors among the learners to the teachers who taught them at early stages, i.e. at primary and secondary schools. To overcome such problems, the writer recommended instructional interventions that can eradicate such errors. Another study was conducted by Jahara and Abdelrady (2021) exploring the problems facing Arab English graduate English foreign language learners. The conclusion the writer reached was that the learners confront difficulties in segmental features that do not exist in the mother tongue of the learners. The learners also face difficulties in suprasegmental features, namely stress, rhythm and intonation. The writer attributed such errors to lack of exposure and practice. AlMouseli (2024) conducted an analytic study of errors made by Iraqi students in consonant pronunciation and clusters. The writer also examined to what extent proficiency affects. The conclusion arrived at was two-fold. First, the learners struggle with the correct production of consonants that do not exist in their mother tongue. Second, proficiency has a positive minimal impact, but it does not remove all errors.

Yahyoyeva (2024) conducted a study at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages exploring the common mistakes (vowels, stress patterns and consonant clusters) made by the students in English pronunciation and suggested several strategies to overcome them. Hameed, R. (2014) carried out a study at the university level addressing the pronunciation difficulties learners usually encounter in producing English phonemes. To overcome or lessen such difficulties, the writer recommended that new developing techniques should be adopted by English foreign teachers. Another study was written by Jahara, S.F. and Abdelradi, A.H., (2021) investigating the problems facing Arab learners of English in the correct pronunciation of sounds (consonants and vowels). The writers attributed all these difficulties to lack of exposure to English as a foreign language, hence the researchers proposed several pedagogical techniques for teaching English sounds in order to help learners produce and acquire sounds accurately. ‘Investigating the Pronunciation Challenges Hindering EFL Students’ Speaking Skills Enhancement’ was the title of a research carried out by

Ghedira, M.B. and Soukou, O. (2024) who tried to find out the challenges faced by Algerian learners of English in speaking the language. The main aim of the paper, as the writers declared, was to minimize the difficulties encountered by the learners, thereby improving their performance. The recommendation presented by the writers is two-fold. First, in order to overcome their difficulties, the learners have to spend more time and efforts to work on their weaknesses and they should utilize pronunciation apps or websites and chat with native speakers of English to enhance their pronunciation. Second, teachers should create a positive environment in classroom to encourage their students to communicate among themselves using the target language to overcome or minimize barriers. All the articles stated above have addressed the challenges facing the foreign learners of English; however, there is research that has explored the challenges faced by the teachers who teach pronunciation. One of these articles was carried out by Akilbekova (2025) at Karakalpak State University. The paper was devoted to teaching problems such as limited training, inadequate classroom time, lack of resources and incentive to teach the course. Another article written by Yenkimaleki, Van Heuven, Afshar (2023) who compared three instructional approached to teaching pronunciation to Iranian English foreign learners at the university level, namely segmental, suprasegmental and holistic. While the first leads to improvement in intelligibility, the second achieves comprehensibility; the third proves to be not effective.

Ibrahim (2024) investigated the challenges facing Kurdish learners of English in pronunciation attributing these challenges to factors like demotivation and lack of emphasis in the curriculum. In order to overcome such difficulties, the writer recommended that teachers and learners should show a positive attitude towards the subject and there should be more focus on pronunciation in the curriculum to enhance learners' phonetic skills. Ezz and Iten (2024) also carried out a study addressing the difficulties confronting Arab learners of English in pronunciation. In order to eliminate or mitigate such problems, the writers suggested the minimal pairs approach for enhancing pronunciation accuracy. Alghamdi (2024) highlighted the challenges facing Arab learners of English in producing phonetic features properly. The writer attributed these difficulties to the nonexistence of these sounds in the learners' first language, hence recommending a different

approach to teaching pronunciation for Arabic learners. Al-Asi (2024) also addressed the challenges facing English foreign learners and suggested several teaching strategies to eliminate such problems in pronunciation. The writer recommended explicit instruction, visual and auditory aids, and communicative activities.

It is quite obvious to any reader that all the studies above including the current study have addressed the challenges facing foreign learners of English at the university level and the reasons underlying them accompanied with recommendations for improvement. However, this study, the writer believes, offers a novel contribution that complements and extends existing scholarship on university-level pronunciation difficulties. First, it offers a detailed analysis of segmental and suprasegmental features at the word level only. Second, it examines examine how such challenges differ across proficiency levels within the same institutional setting. Third, it provides the first investigation of its kind at Cihan University.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive–comparative design was employed in this study aiming at identifying and comparing pronunciation challenges among Level 1 and Level 4 university students. The focus was limited to segmental and suprasegmental features at the word level.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of 40 participants. They are undergraduate students enrolled in the English program, with 20 from Level 1 and 20 from Level 4. All participants were native speakers of Kurdish and Arabic. None of the students at the two levels had been enrolled in any pronunciation training courses prior to the study.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected using six researcher-developed word lists containing the words that the writer predicted to be produced erroneously by the students. Each of the six

lists contains ten items: 1) words that are alien to the students, 2) words that are usually used by the students, 3) regular past verbs with ‘d /ed’, 4) regular nouns with ‘s /es’, 5) disyllabic nouns and verbs with stress shift, and 6) words containing initial consonant clusters . Students were recorded reading the lists aloud for careful and thorough analysis. Recordings were conducted individually in a quiet room. Participants were instructed to read each word naturally and at a normal pace. All recordings were anonymous.

4 Data Analysis

Recordings were carefully reviewed through auditory analysis in order to find out all deviations from Standard English pronunciation. These errors were categorized according to segmental (vowels, consonants) and suprasegmental (stress) features. Level 4 performance was compared with Level 1 to identify patterns of development. Second, selected words were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to confirm and categorize errors. Errors due to segmental features are classified into vowel mispronunciations, consonant substitutions, additions, deletions, or cluster simplification. The other types of errors are suprasegmental which appear to be mostly incorrect word stress placement.

The first list, which contains words that the students have not come across, posed a serious and an exceptional challenge for them. The words in the list are thyme, colonel, thorough, tomb, hyperbole, albeit, choir, epitome, mischievous, quay, extraordinary, rhetoric, awry, yacht, gauge, paradigm, almond, cupboard, leopard, ewe, genre, occurrence, phoenix and whistle. Only four students can pronounce some of the words correctly. Those students stated that they heard them from native speakers through watching movies and videos. It is very clear that the students cannot pronounce these words correctly because first there are no rules to follow and second analogy does not apply to English pronunciation.

The second list contains words that the students are familiar with as they are frequently used by their instructors. Despite this fact, the students committed many errors when they said them. The words in that list are:

enter, engine, entire, better, envelope, entertain, equal, welcome, breakfast,

says, errand, determine, colleague, escalate, correct, error, endeavour, exercise, umbrella, enemy, extra, quiet, energy, oven, entrepreneur, particular, young, continuous, perhaps, comfortable, amateur, ignorant, contain, pilot, component, embarrass, boat, coal, close, complete, compose, compare, connect, forget, conclude, occur, observe, and obtain. The underlying reason for these errors is the students' teachers at secondary schools who miss pronounce these words and the like. At that age, the students consider their teachers as infallible role models, so whatever they say, they will blindly follow them. These errors have become ingrained in the students' minds, making the very difficult to eradicate despite the efforts made by their instructors at the university.

The third list contains words that have a medial schwa such as perhaps, continue, comfortable, ignorant, permanent, contain, embarrass, glamorous, component, menace, terrible, amateur, courageous and pilot. Most of the students including level 4 cannot recognize that these words contain schwa. The errors made by the students when they say these words are attributed to both intralingual and interlingual factors. According to the former factor, the students do not know that the English /ə/ in the words above represents the letters 'o', 'a', 'ou', 'e', 'i' 'eu', or 'eou' . In such words, the interlingual factor plays its role due to the fact that the students do not have such phenomenon in their mother tongue as well as the teachers do not pay a lot of care to this situation.

The fourth list has words with the sound 'o' which is pronounced 'ə', e.g. collapse forget, collaborate, comfortable, collect, component, collide, conclude, collision, contain, consider, compose, occur, compare, occurrence, continue, obtain, connect, object (V), complete, and observe. Most of the students think that the 'o' letter is pronounced /**D**/ as in stop, shot, dog, etc.

The fifth list presented to the learners includes words that have the letter 'o' which sometimes is pronounced /**D** / in some words and /ə/ in others. Some of the words are

common /kƆ mən/ combine /kəmbaɪn/

competent /kƆmpitənt/ compete /kəmpi:t/

comment /kƆment/	commit /kəmɪt/
concept /kƆnsept/	conception /kənsepʃn/
complicate /kƆmplɪkeɪt/	complete /kəmpli:t/
composition /kƆmpozɪʃn/	compose /kəmpəuz/
commerce /kƆm**3**:s/	commercial /kəm**3**:ʃl/
commune /kƆmju:n/	communicate /kəmju:nikeɪt/
competition /KƆmpetɪʃn/	competitive /kəmpetətɪv/
compliment /kƆmplimənt/	complain /kəmpleɪn/

In English, there are tens of such words which leave the learners of English in complete confusion since they don't know whether the 'o' letter in such words is pronounced /ə/ or /**D**/. This confusion is completely attributed to the English language which keeps the letter 'o' in some words as /**D**/ sound or change it into /ə/ without any clear and convincing reason.

The sixth list has plural ending s/es/ as in:

languages, marks**,** watches, words, cats, grades, bushes , chairs , buses, and legs.

The problem of the learners here is that they don't know whether the plural ending's' or 'es' is pronounced /s/, z/, or / ɪz/. If the learners have been exposed to the rules of pronouncing these endings (See page 3), they will commit no errors. The outstanding error is the insertion of the vowel /ɪ/ whenever the learners see the plural ending 'es', so instead of saying marks /ma:ks/, they say /ma:kiz/, and instead of saying words /w**3**:dz/, they say /w**3**:diz/. The other problem is that learners have no idea whether they pronounce the plural ending /s/ or /z/. What is strange in this aspect is that the learners sometimes change the /ɪz/ into /z/ only which is very difficult to pronounce. So, instead of saying languages /laŋgwɪdʒɪz/ and bridges /brɪdʒɪz/, they say /laŋwɪdʒz/ and /brɪdʒz/.

The seventh list contains regular past forms with ‘d/ed’. The words presented to the sample are: asked, washed, baked, faded, helped, mended, placed, watched, hated, and walked. It is again that learners have no right to make any error in pronouncing the past form ending ’d’ or ‘ed’ if they follow the rules stated above (See page 4). The problem our learners face is that they change the letter /e/ into /ɪ/, so instead of saying asked /a:skt/, they say /askid/, and instead of saying placed /pleɪst/, they say /pleɪsid/.

The eighth list includes words which have initial, medial and final consonant clusters (See page 5). The analysis of errors shows that the most difficult clusters for our learners are the initial clusters, specially the three consonant ones such as spring, splash, and street. The main reason underlying this problem is the nonexistence of such phenomenon in the learners’ mother tongue.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

One of the most important findings of the research is that pronunciation progress cannot be achieved automatically through general language proficiency. After analysing the errors students made in pronunciation, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that correct pronunciation requires purposeful and continuous teaching. The findings of this study also highlight the persistent pronunciation challenges faced by university students, even at advanced proficiency levels. Although some improvement was observed among level four students, several errors remained evident across both groups. These errors include vowels and consonants that do not exist in the learners’ mother tongue, word stress, consonant clusters as well as past form and plural endings. Focusing on segmental and suprasegmental features at the word level, the study provides a clear picture of the types of difficulties the learners encounter when they pronounce English words. As the first study of its kind, this research has established an empirical baseline for understanding what learners require within this specific educational context. This empirical baseline motivates curriculum design, guide pronunciation-focused interventions, and support teachers in addressing persistent phonological difficulties more effectively. Finally, this study displays the importance

of sustained attention to pronunciation at the university level and demonstrates the value of such studies to shape effective teaching practices.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the learners' pronunciation difficulties, the following recommendations are proposed to help learners overcome the identified pronunciation difficulties. First, instruction should incorporate explicit and regular practice of both segmental and suprasegmental features, with particular emphasis on contrasts that are absent in the learners' first language, hence teachers should make use of contrastive analysis to help students recognize the influence of their L1. Second, teachers should focus on errors attributed to intralingual factors through activities that strengthen phonological awareness. Third, Incorporating focused listening tasks and communicative pronunciation practice can further support accurate perception and production. Moreover, the integration of digital tools that provide immediate feedback may enhance learners' motivation. Finally, professional development for all instructors whether at the university or secondary level is essential to ensure effective pronunciation teaching strategies. The writer believes that adopting these recommendations will absolutely improve students' pronunciation skills and eliminate the types of errors mentioned in this study.

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Abstract in Arabic

يهدف هذا البحث بصورةٍ رئيسة إلى استقصاء العوائق التي تعرقل إتقان النطق لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في جامعة جيهان، وذلك لأن دقة النطق تُعد من أبرز التحديات التي تواجه العديد من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية، إذ غالبًا ما يكون لها تأثير مباشر في مهارات التواصل الشفهي لديهم وفي تحصيلهم الأكاديمي. وعليه، أُجري هذا البحث لمساعدة طلبة الجامعة من دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية على تحسين نطقهم للغة مقارنةً بمستواهم الحالي. ويسعى كثير من الطلبة الأجانب إلى التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بطلاقة وبنطق واضح يسهل فهمه من قِبل زملائهم الطلبة ومن المتحدثين الأصليين للغة الإنجليزية على حدٍّ سواء، ولهؤلاء الطلبة وُجِّه هذا البحث على وجه الخصوص. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم تسليط الضوء على أكثر عوائق النطق شيوعًا التي

يواجهها المتعلمون، ثم يقترح الباحث مجموعة من الطرائق الفعّالة لمعالجتها، مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار الأسباب الكامنة وراء ظهورها. ويرى الباحث أن معظم الأخطاء التي يقع فيها الطلبة تعود إلى عوامل التداخل اللغوي (Interlingual) أو العوامل داخل اللغوية (Intralingual). وللتحقق من مدى توافق افتراضات الباحث مع الأداء الفعلي للطلبة، أُجري اختبار شفهي لطلبة المرحلتين الأولى والرابعة. ويكمن الهدف من إشراك هاتين المرحلتين في الوقوف على مستوى التقدم الذي حققه طلبة المرحلة الرابعة بعد ثلاث سنوات من الدراسة الجامعية. وبعد إجراء تحليلٍ معمّقٍ لنتائج الاختبار، يخلص الباحث إلى أن النطق لا يزال يمثل تحديًا بارزًا للعديد من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الجامعية، وغالبًا ما يؤثر سلبًا في مهاراتهم في التواصل الشفهي وأدائهم الأكاديمي. وبناءً على ذلك، يقترح البحث مجموعة من التوصيات التي من شأنها الإسهام في تحسين الكفاءة الشفهية للطلبة وتعزيز كفاءتهم التواصلية.