

# Investigating Problematic Consonants and Vowels for Sudanese University Students Majoring in English: A Case Study of Third Year Students at Khartoum University, Faculty of Arts, English Department

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**Abstract:** *This study intended to investigate which of the English consonants and vowels are difficult to pronounce for Sudanese university students majoring in English. The researcher hypothesized that some of the English consonants and vowels that do not have equivalents in Arabic are considered problematic for the respective learners. The study adopted descriptive analytical method. The participants of the study were third year students of Khartoum University, Faculty of Arts, English department in addition to 20 teachers of the field. Two tools were used for collecting the required data. The first tool was an oral test introduced to 50 of the students. The second instrument was a questionnaire presented to the teachers. The validity and reliability of the research tools were confirmed. The analysis of the collected data revealed that the students have a problem with certain English consonants and vowels that have no counterparts in Arabic.*

**Keywords:** Problematic consonants, problematic Vowels, Khartoum University

## 1. Introduction

English pronunciation is affected with different factors. In general, the differences between the sound systems of the first language and the target language play a significant role in second language pronunciation. The study aimed at investigating which of the English consonants and vowels are considered problematic for Sudanese university students majoring in English. To achieve the goals of the study, a contrastive analysis between English and Arabic sound systems has been made by the researcher. It revealed that there are six consonants and fifteen vowels in English that do not exist in Arabic. These sounds are identified as follows respectively; /ʒ/, /g/, /ŋ/, /ʃ/, /P/, /v/; /ɜ:/, /æ/, /e/, /ei/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /ɔ:/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ɔɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɪə/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /ʊə/. Source: (The researcher from applied study, 2016). Students were expected to mispronounce some of these sounds due to their absence in their mother tongue (Arabic). The tools used for collecting the data of the study were oral test including the targeted sounds introduced to the students and questionnaire presented to the teachers.

### 1.1 Study Problem and hypotheses:

It has been observed in previous studies, (Alkhier, M. 2007), (Ali, S. (2012), that Sudanese University students have problems with English pronunciation related to certain sounds. This study intended to investigate which of the English consonants and vowels are problematic for the students. To achieve the goals of the study, the researcher put the following hypotheses:

- 1) Some of the English consonants which have no counterparts in Arabic are problematic for the students.

- 2) Sudanese university students encounter difficulty in pronouncing some of the English vowels which are extremely different from Arabic vowels.

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to identify the problematic English consonants and vowels. Hence, suggests suitable solutions that may help students overcome these difficulties and improve their pronunciation.

## 2. Review of the Related Literature

Contrastive analysis Hypothesis states that elements of a target language that do not exist in the first language will be difficult to acquire and problematic sounds could be predicted accordingly. Learners of a second language are likely to have problems with pronunciation of vowels and consonants that have no equivalents in their native language. Lado (1957:1-2) argued that in the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to the ease or difficulty in the foreign language learning.... Those elements that are similar to the learners' native language will be simple for him/her, and those elements that are different will be difficult. Previous studies revealed that the differences between sound systems of a first language and English impact English pronunciation. A study revealed that Japanese and Russian both lack the English consonant /θ/. This led to mispronunciation of it as /s/ by Japanese learners, while Russians utter it as /t/. Studies also showed that Japanese speakers may have difficulty acquiring English approximants /l/ and /r/ because they do not have them in their language Fledge (1995). English and Arabic Emerge

from different languages families and their sound systems differ greatly which leads to mispronunciation of consonants and vowels of English which have no Arabic counterparts .Some previous studies showed that Arab learners of English have difficulty with certain English consonants and vowels. Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) investigated pronunciation problems faced by Arab learners of English. Their findings showed that certain pairs of consonant sounds are confused by Arab learners some of them were sounds which do not exist in Arabic such as /p/, /v/, / . Alkhier (2007) carried out a study which prospected the factors behind English pronunciation problems for Sudanese students . The findings of this study explored that the students mispronounce some consonants as /p/ , / v/ and confused certain vowels eg. /i:/and/o:/. Some of the mispronounced sounds in the study were also non Arabic equivalents sounds..

**Method and Instruments for Data Collection:**

A descriptive analytical method is adopted in this study. The tools for obtaining the data were oral test for the students and questionnaire oriented to the teachers. The subjects of study were 50 students majoring in English at the third year, Faculty of Arts , Khartoum University and 20 of the English teachers of the respective university. The participants of the study were selected randomly. The test included the targeted consonants and vowels which are the English sounds that do not exist in Arabic. The teachers' questionnaire was composed of different types of questions that were used to explicit teachers' opinion on the problem.

**Validity and reliability of the tools**

The tools were validated by three professionals of the field and then computed statistically .The measurement was calculated using (split-half) method.

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{\text{Reliability}}$$

The overall reliability and validity coefficient were (.86 and 0.930) respectively . We note from the results that the overall reliability and validity are greater than (50%), and one of them are nearest to one. This confirm the validity and reliability of tools.

**3. Results and Discussion**

The table and figures below show the results and discussion of the obtained data;

**Students' Oral Test**

The test aimed at identifying which of the English consonants and vowels are problematic for the students. The students were expected to mispronounce some of the English consonants and vowels due to their absence in their mother tongue (Arabic).

**Percentage of mispronounced Target consonants**

**Table 1**

No	Consonant	Number of Students	Percentage %
1	P	43	86
2	v	36	76
3	ʒ	25	50
4	ʃ	1	2
5	ŋ	0	0
6	g	0	0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

Table No(1 ) shows that the consonants /P/,/v/ and have been mispronounce with high percentage. The sound/ p/ was mispronounced by (43 )of the students with 86%while the sound /v/ was uttered incorrectly by (36 ) of the students with 76% and (25) of the subjects uttered the consonant /ʒ/ inaccurately with 50%.On the other hand ,the sounds /ʃ / was mispronounced with insignificant percentage and no student mispronounce the consonants /ŋ/and /g/.

**Table 2: Percentage of Incorrect Pronunciation of the Target Vowels**

No	Target vowels	Number of Students	Percentage of incorrect pronunciation %
1	eɪ	0	0
2	ʌ	0	0
3	ə	0	0
4	ʊ	1	2
5	ɔɪ	1	2
6	e	2	4
7	aʊ	12	24
8	ɒ	27	54
9	æ	30	60
10	ɜ:	33	66
11	ʊə	29	58
12	ɔ:	36	72
13	ɛə	42	84
14	ɪə	45	90
15	əʊ	46	92

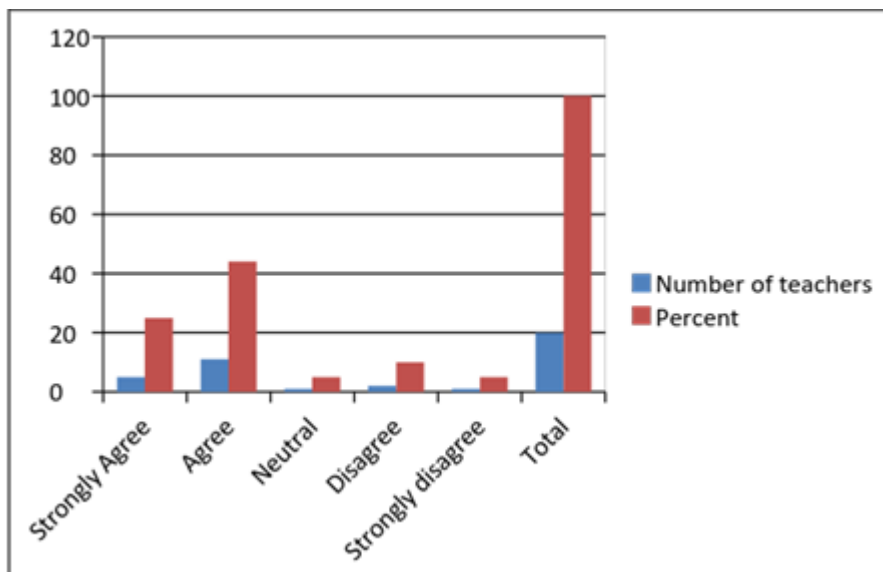
Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

The table No (2 ) reveals that no students mispronounced the vowels /eɪ/ ,/ʌ/,/ə/ (0% ) of mispronunciation .The vowels /ʊ/and/ɔɪ/ /e/ were uttered incorrectly with low percentage. The vowels /ʊ/and/ɔɪ/ were mispronounced by one student each with the same percentage 2% while /e/ was uttered incorrectly by two students with 4% . The sound /aʊ/ was mispronounced by( 12) of the subjects with 24%. The table also revealed that the vowels/ ɒ / was mispronounce by 27 of the respondents with 54%while the sound/æ/ was mispronounced by (30) of the students with 60% .There are(33) of the learners who uttered the sound/ɜ:/ inaccurately with 66% while the vowels /ʊə/ was mispronounce by 29 with 58%. The vowels /ɔ:/ ,/ɛə/,/ɪə/ , / əʊ/ were mispronounce with 72.% 84% 90% and 92%respectively.

**Results from the teachers' Questionnaire**

Question No (1) “Sudanese University students majoring in English mispronounce some of the English consonants which have no counterparts in Arabic”. The figure below shows the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about question No.(1)

The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about question No.(1)



**Figure 3**

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

It is clear from the figure No.(3) that there were (5) of the teachers in the study's sample with percentage (25.0%) have strongly agreed on "Sudanese University majoring in English mispronounce some of the English consonants which have no counterparts in Arabic". While (11) of the subjects with percentage (55.0%) have agreed on that. Only one person with percentage (5.0%) was not sure about the answer, and (2) of the respondents with percentage (10.0%) have disagree about that. Whereas just one teacher with percentage (5.0%) have strongly disagree about that.

Question No.(2): Sudanese students mispronounce some of the English vowels which have no counterparts in Arabic. Table No.(4) presents the frequency distribution of the study's respondents answers about question No.(2).

**Table 4:** The frequency distribution of the respondents' answers about Question No (2)

Answer	Number of teachers	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6	30.0
Agree	7	34.0
Neutral	1	5.0
Disagree	5	25.0
Strongly disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

The table No.(4) revealed that there were (6) of the teachers in the study's sample with percentage (30.0%) have strongly agreed that "Sudanese students mispronounce some of the English vowels ". There are (7) of the respondents with percentage (35.0%) have agreed on that. While only one person with percentage (5.0%) was not sure about that, and (5) of the subjects, with percentage (25.0%) have disagree about that, and only one teacher with percentage (5.0%) have strongly disagree about that.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

It appears from the results above of the students test and the teachers' questionnaire that some of the consonants and vowels which have no counterparts in Arabic cause pronunciation difficulty for the students. The findings demonstrate that three out of the six targeted consonants were mispronounced with high percentage. That means half of the English consonants which do not exist in Arabic are considered problematic for the prospective learners .These consonants are identified/as p/ and/ v/ and /z/ with percentages of mispronunciation as 86%, 76%, 50 % respectively . In addition the findings from tables No(3,4) and figures No(2,3)revealed that (8) of the targeted vowels were pronounced incorrectly with different significant averages which identified them as problematic vowels for the students. These vowels are .  
 ʒ:/,æ/.,/ɔ:/,/ɒ/./,εə/./,ɪə/./əʊ/./ʊə/.

On the light of the findings ,the researcher recommends the followings:

- Incorporating contrastive analysis of English and Arabic in English syllabus at university to identify problematic areas and raise students' awareness of the problem.
- Encouraging students do more practise the on the vowels and consonants that do not have Arabic counterparts.
- Using language labs and multimedia to enhance pronunciation learning.

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