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هيئـــة التحريـر

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Common English Pronunciation Difficulties Encountered by Third Year Students at the Faculty of Education- English Department- Elmergib University

Samah Taleb

English Department - Faculty of Education - Elmergib University

Daggasamah2@gmail.com

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في بعض الصعوبات الشائعة في صوتيات اللغة الإنجليزية التي يواجهها طلبة السنة الثالثة في جامعة المرقب عند نسخ الكلمات الإنجليزية باستخدام رموز صوتية. كما تهدف إلى إلقاء الضوء على الحروف الصحيحة الإنجليزية والحروف الساكنة والطرق المختلفة لنطق الماضي البسيط. كانت الأداة المستخدمة لجمع البيانات هي اختبار النطق بالإضافة الي الملاحظة في الفصل الدراسي ومن خلال الخبرة في مجال تعليم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة غريبة . أظهرت النتائج أن المشاركين واجهوا صعوبات في وصف الكلمات الصوتي بشكل صحيح والتعرف على طرق نطق الماضي البسيط. تظهر النتائج أيضا أن عدًدا كبيرا من المشاركين واجهوا صعوبات في تحديد الأصوات الصحيحة فيما يتعلق بنوع الصوت ومكان النطق وطريقة النطق . تقدم هذه الدراسة بعض التضمينات التربوية المفيدة لمنع ومعالجة مشاكل النطق في اللغة الإنجليزية في المستقبل.

Abstract :This study investigates the common English pronunciation difficulties encountered by third year students at the Faculty of Education-Elmergib University, Libya, when transcribing English words. It also aims to shed light on students' ability in classifying English consonants, recognizing silent letters, and identifying different pronunciations of the past simple tense ending with /ed/. The instrument used for collecting data was a pronunciation test . The results show that the participants have difficulties in transcribing words correctly and recognizing the three different ways of pronouncing the past /ed/. The results also demonstrate that a great number of the participants encountered difficulties in identifying the consonant sounds regarding voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation. This study provides some useful pedagogical implications to prevent and remedy English pronunciation problems in the future.

Key words: Phonetics, phonology, pronunciation, consonant sounds, voicing, place of articulation, manner of articulation, silent letters, pronunciations of regular past tense ending /-ed/.

Introduction

Pronunciation is regarded as the most important part in learning English as a foreign language (Gussenhoven & Jacobs, 1998). Thereby, studying problems of English pronunciation is a valuable source of information about students' pronunciation abilities and may assist teachers to solve the problems and enhance the proficiency of teaching English pronunciation.

Generally speaking, accurate pronunciation is one of the main challenges that Arab students face when learning English which has long been the ultimate goal of many non-native speakers of English. In spite of this fact, it has been noticed that many undergraduate Libyan students commit pronunciation mistakes, which may be due to the effect of their mother tongue. For example, the voiceless /p/ is different from the voiced /b/ as they are two independent phonemes in English, which distinguish the meaning of the word (e.g. pin-bin, pay-bay) (Baker, 2006). However, through the researcher's observations of Libyan speakers learning English, it has been noted that

only /b/ is used in most of the cases to refer to both /p/ and /b/. For example, Libyan speakers would pronounce words like "pin" and "people" as /bɪn/ and /biːbul /. The same situation is for the voiced /v/ and the voiceless /f/. They are pronounced with the same sound. Hence, words like /van, vast, live/ would be pronounced as / /fæn/, /fæst/, /laif /. Libyan students also think that each letter in a word is pronounced, like in Arabic, and gives the same sound which is not the case in the English language. For example, they pronounce the words *half* /haːf/ as /half/ and *lamb* /læm/ as /laːmb/.

The researcher observed that the students pronounce the word *choir* /kwaiər/ as /tʃoir/ which might be due to overgeneralization of the rule that /ch/ is pronounced as/tʃ/ as in the word *chair*//tʃeə/. Therefore, it is likely to say that the errors committed in learning a language are systematic rather than random (Hassan, 2014).

Many studies have been dedicated to investigate the pronunciation errors committed by Arab speakers of different dialects like Saudi, Egyptian, Iraqi, and Sudanese. This research is significant as it will contribute to the growing body of work on the pronunciation difficulties experienced by Arab speakers of English.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In an English language classroom, it is thought that pronunciation does not receive much attention. The concentration may be placed more on learning vocabulary and grammar than on pronunciation. As a result, students graduate from faculties and even universities with many errors in pronunciation in general and consonant pronunciation, in specific. 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. They differ in the number of consonants, their place of articulation, and manner of articulation. Some English consonants do not exist in the Arabic sound system like /p/, /ŋ/ and /v/. Accordingly, this study attempts to find out the difficulties that third year students encounter in transcribing and classifying English consonant sounds.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the problems encountered by third year students in pronouncing and transcribing English consonant sounds.
2. To identify the problems encountered by third year students in classifying English consonant sounds.
3. To Provide some suggestions to students and teachers of English to overcome the potential future problems in consonant pronunciation.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Can Libyan third year students classify English consonant sounds according to voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation?
2. Can Libyan third year students pronounce past tense with /ed/ correctly?
3. Do Libyan third year students have difficulty in recognizing silent letters in their phonetic transcription?

1.4 Assumptions of the study

- It can be hypothesized that third year students' knowledge about English pronunciation rules is inadequate and limited due to the fact that they might not have checked the rules articulatory of phonetics regularly.
- Libyan third year students encounter difficulties in pronouncing and transcribing some English words properly.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is thought to be significant because it not only highlights the importance of pronunciation in second language learning but also provides the profound insight of the difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in the classification of consonant sounds. The findings of this study will provide valuable insight into the challenges faced by EFL students in acquiring correct pronunciation, and will help inform language teachers and curriculum designers in developing effective strategies for teaching pronunciation. Furthermore ,the results of this study could be used to inform future research on English pronunciation and language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Phonetics and phonology

Phonetics deals with the production of speech sounds by humans, often without prior knowledge of the language being spoken. **Phonology** is about patterns of sounds, especially different patterns of sounds in different languages, or within each language, different patterns of sounds in different positions in words etc.

2.2 Pronunciation

Cook (1996) as cited in Gilakjani (2012) defined pronunciation as the production of English sounds. Pronunciation is learnt by repeating sounds and correcting them when produced inaccurately. When learners start learning pronunciation, they make new habits and overcome the difficulties resulting from the first language. According to **Yates (2002)** as cited in Gilakjani (2012) pronunciation is the production of sounds that is used for making meaning. Another scholar, Otlowski (1998) defined pronunciation as the production of a sound system which does not interfere with communication either from the speakers' or the listeners' viewpoint. Furthermore, Richard and Schmidt (2002) defined pronunciation as the method of producing certain sounds. For example, one can pronounce a word carefully, slowly, quickly, etc..

2.2.1 Importance of Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays an important role in expressing ideas. From our own experience as EFL instructors, the English pronunciation of Libyan learners is different from that of the native speakers. Some Libyan speakers of English have a good pronunciation that leaves a good impact on listeners. It is an essential part of every learner to speak with the right pronunciation. There exist some problems with the pronunciation of English among Libyan learners of English.

Many learners learning and speaking the English language often do not pay any attention to their pronunciation. Some of them underestimate it and ignore it. They think that pronunciation is not as important as speaking, grammar and vocabulary. In spite of the fact that many cases of misunderstanding in communication were caused by the mispronouncing of words or the improper intonation. On the contrary, good pronunciation can give a competitive advantage to those who master it and enhance self-confidence when speaking in front of many people. So, it has become more and more obvious that pronunciation cannot be underestimated. It must become one's priority while he/she is learning English.

It is often difficult for a student to reach the exact pronunciation by spelling because English phonemes are not much in that order in which the spelling is in practice. Accordingly, only the teacher can move students from spelling to phonemic script to learn the pronunciation. Teaching pronunciation is therefore highly required

because learning the phonemic script involves not just getting to know the symbols, but also making sure one can say the right sound for each word.

2.3 Consonants

Consonants can be classified according to three dimensions: voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation.

.   **Voicing refers** to the activity of the vocal folds. When the vocal folds are wide apart, consonants are said to be voiceless, when they are closely together and vibrating, consonants are said to be voiced.

a.   The place of articulation is the description of the place where the obstruction in the vocal tract takes place.

b.   The manner of articulation refers to the way articulators are set so that resonance i.e. echo effect is possible.

2.3.1 Plosives (Stops)

Plosives are defined as the consonant sounds which involve, first, a stricture of the mouth that allows no air to escape from the vocal tract and, second, the compression and release of the air. So, there are four phases in the production of plosives: closure, hold, release and post-release.

English has six plosive consonants: /p, t, k, b, d, g/.

/p/ and /b/ are bilabials, that is, the lips are pressed together.

/t/ and /d/ are alveolars, so the tongue is pressed against the alveolar ridge.

/k/ and /g/ are velars; the back of the tongue is pressed against an intermediate area between the hard and the soft palate.

/p/, /t/ and /k/ are voiceless. /b/, /d/ and /g/ are normally voiced.

Table1. Place of Articulation of Plosives

Place of articulation			
	bilabial	**alveolar**	**Velar**
Voiceless	/p/	/t/	/k/
Voiced	/b/	/d/	/g/

It is worthy to mention that the /p/sound does not exist in the Arabic language. There is only /b/ consonant sound. As a result, Arabic EFL learners are likely to pronounce /p/ as /b/.

2.3.2 Fricatives

Fricatives are characterized by a "hissing" sound which is produced by the air escaping through a small passage in the mouth.

Table 2. Place of Articulation of Fricatives

Place of articulation of fricatives					
	Labio-dental	**dental**	**alveolar**	**Palato-alveolar**	**Glottal**
Voiceless	/f/	/Ɵ/	/s/	/ʃ/	
Voiced	/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ʒ/	/h/

As for fricatives, Arabic speakers find it difficult to pronounce/v/ sound and pronounce it as /f/ instead.

2.3.3 Affricates

Affricates begin as plosives and end as fricatives. These are homorganic sounds, that is, the same articulator produces two sounds, the plosive and the fricative.

Table 3. Place of Articulation of Affricates

Place of articulation of Affricates	
Voiceless	/tʃ/
Voiced	/dʒ/

In Arabic, there are only separate letters, ت, ش ج, د; whereas, / tʃ /and / dʒ/ do not exist in Arabic which may cause problems to Arabic students in learning these two new sounds.

2.3.4 Nasals

The basic feature of the nasals is that the air escapes through the nose. The main difference between the three types of nasals is the point where the air is stopped in the mouth. In this sense, there are three types of nasals: bilabial /m/, alveolar /n/ and velar / ŋ /.

Table 4. Place of Articulation of Nasals

Place of articulation of nasals	
Bilabial	/m/
Alveolar	/n/
Velar	/ ŋ /

Regarding the nasal consonant sounds, in Arabic/n/ and /ŋ/ are both allophones of the same phoneme /n/ (Waengler, 2009). Therefore, the sound /ŋ/ might be problematic to Arabic learners.

2.3.5 Approximants

2.3.5.1 Lateral /l/

A lateral consonant is one in which air escapes from the mouth along the sides of the tongue. The only additional information about the lateral /l/ is the existence of a clear /l/ at initial position and a dark /l/, when it is final or medial preceding a consonant. The dark /l/ is similar to a /u/ vowel. It is thought that it is difficult for Arabic learners of English to differentiate between the light /l/ and dark /l/.

2.3.5.2 Retroflex /r/

The approximant /r/ is produced by the tip of the tongue approaching the alveolar area but it never touches it. Besides, the tongue is slightly curled backwards with the tip raised (this is called to be "**retroflex**).

2.3.5.3.Glides /j/ and /w/

These two sounds are phonetically vowels, but phonologically consonants. That is, phonetically they are pronounced as /i:/ and /u:/, but a little bit shorter. They only occur before the vowel phonemes.

Table 5. Place of Articulation of Approximates

Approximants	
Bilabial	/w/
Post alveolar	/r/
Alveolar	/l/
Palatal	/j/

2.4.The /ed/ Suffix used in past tense regular verbs

Regular past tense verbs in English are formed by adding the suffix –ed to the base form of the verb. Even if all regular verbs are formed the same way, they are not all pronounced in the same way. The /-ed/ suffix can be pronounced in three different ways depending on the syllable that precedes it: /ɪd/, /d/, or /t/, as explained below:

/ɪd/**:** this pronunciation is used when /-ed/ is preceded by /d/ or /t/.

Examples:

need → needed, end → ended, start → started, want → wanted

0.   /t/: regular verbs that end in a voiceless consonant sound receive this pronunciation. Some voiceless consonants include: /f/ /k/ /p/ /s/ /t/ /sh/ /ch/.

Examples:

 /f/ laugh → laughed, /p/ stop → stopped, /sh/ wash →washed, /k/like → liked, /s/ miss → missed, and /ch/ watch → watched.

0.   /d/**:** when regular verbs end in a voiced consonant sound, they have this pronunciation. Some voiced consonants are: /b/ /g/ /v/ /z/ /m/ /n/ /l/ /r/.

Examples:

 /b/ grab → grabbed, /g/ beg → begged, /n/ listen → listened, /l/ kill → killed

2..5. Silent Letters

In English, there are some consonants that appear in the orthography of words but they are not pronounced. For a non-native speaker, this can be a difficult concept to grasp, since in many languages, all letters are pronounced. For example, there are words in English where the /h/ is not pronounced. The same applies to many other consonants as following:

2.5.1. Silent /h/

It is known that the aspirated /h/ in English is always pronounced.

Here is a list of words that begin with a silent /h/: hour, honour (UK) / honor (USA), honest heir, herbs (USA) hour, ache, stomach, and honesty.

2.5.2. Silent /p/

 Again, there is no exact rule. There is a list of words that begin with /p/ followed by a consonant where the /p/ is not pronounced.

Here are those words: psychology, psychiatrist, pseudo, pneumonia, receipt, pneumatics, and Psalms.

2.5.3. Silent /b/

The combination "mb" is an exception to the way that most consonant clusters with silent letters work. In this case, the second letter, /b/ is not pronounced. This rule only applies, however, when the "mb" occurs at the end of a word, as in comb, climb, bomb, limb, and lamb.

2.6. Previous Studies

There are several studies that have been conducted to investigate the difficulties encountered by Arabic learners in learning English pronunciation in general and consonants in specific.

Firstly, Chouchane (2016) explored the pronunciation difficulties faced by Arab learners of English. The research was a case study which evaluates the speaking performance of two Arab students by investigating the deviations they make from the native speaker's model pronunciation, Received Pronunciation. The study showed that Arab learners face many difficulties in pronouncing some English sounds conveniently and correctly. The analysis of the speakers' performance indicated that

the main reasons behind these difficulties stem from the mother tongue interference either by confusing sounds of both L1 and L2 or by the inexistence of those sounds in either language. Other difficulties are due to the lack of the learner's phonological knowledge.

Secondly, Ruden (2013) claimed that when learning English by a native Arabic speaker, one of the most challenging aspects is learning English pronunciation. Words and sentences in Arabic are approached differently than in English, requiring speakers to learn a new set of pronunciation rules in order to properly communicate using connecting sounds, intonation, and stress. When learning English, it is important to focus on using correct English pronunciation in order to prevent pronouncing words and sentences incorrectly. Annie adds that Arabic speakers have to learn how to differentiate /p/ from /b/ and /f/ from /v/.

On the other hand, Jabali and Abuzaid (2017) conducted an empirical study that aims to identify the mispronounced English consonant sounds by native speakers of Arabic. It also aims to explore the pattern of errors that Arabic speakers follow in speaking English. Two main questions have been explored in the study: 1) what are the most common mispronounced English consonants produced by Arab students? And 2) what patterns do these students follow in doing so? Twenty undergraduate students from the English Department at An-Najah National University participated in the study. They were observed and their English is recorded to identify the problematic consonant sounds. The study results show that the most problematic sounds include /p/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /r/, and /ŋ/. In the light of the findings, the researchers recommend that the best way to learn the pronunciation of a second language is by listening to native speakers of that language and by practicing it regularly.

Furthermore, Stevens, L.,J. (2017) stated that among English pronunciation problems encountered by Arab EFL students are: /b/, /p/, /f/, and /v/ sounds; pronouncing silent letters; adding vowel sounds to words; and appropriate intonation and word stress. For example, Arab EFL students have a habit of inserting vowel sounds before and between consonant clusters resulting in more syllables, and serious pronunciation errors. Perhaps students are trying to break the sounds up and make the spelling and pronunciation adhere to Arabic language rules. Arabic ESL students face many pronunciation problems as they work to improve their English language fluency. According to Louis Stevens, these pronunciation problems are due to linguistic differences between Arabic and English that affect how easily a student can learn to form the English letter sounds. Pronunciation problems can be difficult to correct if the learner relied on their native language rules for guidance. Proper English pronunciation therefore requires learning as well as practising new sounds and new rules.

By contrast, Hago & Khan (2015) investigate the difficulties of English pronunciation encountered by Saudi secondary school learners when pronouncing English consonants. It also aims to shed light on the area of English consonant clusters system. The instruments used for collecting data and information included were questionnaires, classroom observations and document collections. The results show that the participants had difficulties to pronounce eleven consonant sounds. The results also demonstrate that a great number of the participants, unintentionally insert a vowel sound in English syllable to break up consonant clusters. This study provides

some useful pedagogical implications to prevent and cure English pronunciation problems.

In addition, Watson (2002) stated that the English consonants /p/-/b/, /f/-/v/, /tʃ/-/dʒ/-/ʃ/, seem to be problematic for Arab speakers learning English. This is due to the absence of these oppositions in Arabic. In addition, /ŋ/ never occurs at the end of a word in Arabic; thus, Arabic speakers have a tendency to add /g/ to the end of words that end in /ŋ/, such as [baɪɪŋg] for 'buying' or [sɪŋg] for 'sing'. The phonotactics of /l/ are quite different in Arabic, and have a tendency to use the light /l/ in all word positions. In Arabic, the /d/ is always unreleased and voiceless in the word-final position whereas it is voiced in English (Waengler, 2009). Although the phoneme /r/ exists in Arabic, it is always pronounced as a trill. The English approximant is unfamiliar to Arabic speakers and they are having a strong tendency to produce this sound the way they know it in Arabic. Egyptian English learners have these difficulties with /dʒ/ and /ð/. In modern spoken varieties of Arabic, /dʒ/ replaces by /ʒ/, such as '*job*' and '*jam*' would respectively sound like /ʒab/ and /ʒæm/. The other problem was the consonant sound /ð/. This sound is replaced by its plosive equivalent /d/. Consequently, words such as '*their*', *'they'*, *'then'*, and *'though'*, would respectively sound like *'dare*,' *'day*,' *'den*,' and *'dough'* (Barros, Val 2003).

3. Research Design

Descriptive quantitative research is used in this study. According to (Schreiber and Asner-self 2011) descriptive studies simply describe some phenomenon using numbers to create a picture of a group or an individual. Besides, quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity (Kothari, 2011). It means that descriptive quantitative research is describing some phenomenon of a group or an individual in numerical form. Therefore, this study utilized descriptive quantitative design in order to describe the students' ability in transcribing words and classifying consonants.

4. Sample of the Study

The sample of this study includes the third year students who study English Language at the Faculty of Education/ Elmergib University, Libya. Fourteen Libyan female students are chosen for this study. They are different in their academic achievement and their level of English fluency. Their levels are detected from achievement tests throughout the academic year.

5. Data Collection Instrument

The test instrument was used to obtain the data about consonant sounds, silent letters, pronunciation of past tense /-ed/ and phonetic transcription. This instrument was chosen because it was the appropriate instrument to examine the students' ability in pronunciation. Arikunto (2013) stated that test is a list of questions or exercises which is used to measure a skill, intelligence, ability, or aptitude of an individual or group.

6. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, it was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Schreiber and Asner-self (2011) stated that descriptive statistics are a set of procedures to summarize numerical data where a number of observed values is reduced to a few numbers. It means that the student's scores are classified into classifications of student's ability such as excellent, good, fair, poor, and very poor. The following formula and criteria were employed:-

Percentage= student's score/total score×100% .

b- Student's Score Category

No	Score Interval	Level of Ability
1	85%-100%	Excellent
2	84%-75%	Very Good
3	74%- 65%	Good
4	64%-50%	Fair
5	49%-35%	Poor
6	34%-0%	Very Poor

The table above presents a scale of score intervals and levels of ability that would be used in evaluating the participants in this study.

7. Results

Based on the results of counting the test, the students' total scores are presented in the table below:

Table 1. The Results of Students' Scores

No	Student's Total Score	Student's Percentage
1	54/92	58.6%
2	51/92	55.4%
3	49/92	53.2%
4	36/92	39.1%
5	36/92	39.1%
6	35/92	38%
7	34/92	36.9%
8	32/92	34.7%
9	27/92	29.3%
10	24/92	26%
11	21/92	22.8%
12	20/92	21.7%
13	19/92	20.6%
14	18/92	19.5%

Table 1 shows the students' total grades and percentages in the pronunciation test which comprises of five questions.

Table 2. Students' Levels of Ability in the Test

Level of Ability	Frequency
Fair	2
Poor	4
Very poor	8
Total	14

Table 2 shows that the students' levels of ability fell in *very poor* category, followed by *poor* and *fair* category. This result confirms that the respondents do actually encounter difficulties in transcribing as well as classifying consonant sounds.

Table 3. Results of Students' answers to the first question about voicing:

Frequency of Students	No of Correct Answers	Percentage %	Level of Ability
1	21/24	87.5%	Excellent
2	20/24	83.3%	Very Good
1	16/24	66.6%	Good
2	14/24	58.3%	Fair
2	13/24	54.1%	Fair
1	12/24	50%	Fair
2	11/24	45.8%	Poor
1	10/24	41.6%	Poor
1	9/24	37.5%	Poor
1	Left- 0/24	0%	Very Poor

Table 3 shows that the third year students' levels of ability in classifying the 24 consonant sounds into voiced and voiceless fluctuate between *excellent* and *very poor*. In question 1, the students were asked to classify the 24 consonant sounds into voiced and voiceless. The results are as following: one student answered 21/24 items correctly (87.5%/ *excellent*) One student classified 20/24 items correctly (83.3%/ *very good*). One student answered 16/24 items correctly and got (66.6%, *good)*. Five students fell in fair category: two students got 58.3%, two got 54.1%, and one student got 50%. Four students fell in *poor* category: two got (45.8%), one got (41.6%), and another one got (37.5%) respectively. One student could not answer this question and fell in *very poor* category and got zero. It is obvious that third year students are unable to classify the 24 consonants correctly according to voicing which indicates that they may not check the pronunciation rules regularly. Consequently third year students are recommended to learn pronunciation rules thoroughly since it had been claimed by Ruden **(2013)** that when learning English by a native Arabic speaker, one of the most challenging aspects is learning English pronunciation.

Table 4 Results of students' answers to the second question about pronouncing past /ed/:

Frequency of Students	No. of correct answers	Percentage%	Level of Ability
3	8/10	80%	Very good
1	6/10	60%	Fair
2	5/10	50%	Fair
2	4/10	40%	Poor
2	3/10	30%	Very poor
3	2/10	20%	Very poor
1	Left-0/10	0%	Very poor

Table 4 shows that third year students' ability in recognizing the three different ways of pronouncing the past tense ending with /ed/ varies between *very good* and *very poor*. In the second question, the students were asked to classify the past /-ed/ ending into /id/, /d/, or /t/. The results were as follows: three students answered 8/10 items correctly (80%/ *very good)*. One student classified 6/10 items correctly (60. %/

fair). Two students answered 5/10 items correctly and got (50%/ *fair)*. Two students fell in a *poor* category since they got 40%. Five students fell in a *very poor* category i.e. two got (30%) and three got 20% respectively. One student could not answer this question and fell in a very *poor* category and got zero.

The second question revealed that the students encounter a difficulty in recognizing the three different ways of pronouncing the regular past-ed . For example, they pronounced *ached* / eikt/ as / eikd/, stopped/ stɒpt/ as / stɒbid/, and begged /begd/ as / begid/. This difficulty can be due to the interference of their mother tongue (Arabic). For instance, inserted the vowel /i/ when pronouncing stopped/ stɒbid/, and begged / begid/ to ease the pronunciation of words. Another reason behind these errors is the respondents' inadequate knowledge of the phonological rules as it had been shown in the studies of Chouchane (2016) and Stevens,L,J. (2017).

Table5 Results of students' answers to the third question about transcription of consonant sounds and recognition of silent letters:

Frequency of Students	No. of correct answers	Percentage %	Level of Ability
1	7/10	70%	Good
1	5/10	50%	Fair
3	4/10	40%	Poor
1	2/10	20%	Very poor
2	1/10	10%	Very poor
6	Left-0/10	0%	Very poor

From Table 5, it can be seen that one student answered 7/10 correctly and got 70%, one student answered 5 items correctly and got 50 %, three students answered 4 items correctly and got 40%, one student got 20%, two students got 10%, and one student left the question and got 0%. It can be noticed that the students' levels of ability range from *good* to *very poor*.

In the third question, it had been revealed that the students faced difficulties in distinguishing silent letters namely, b, h and p in their phonetic transcription. The participants' pronunciation of words was as following:

1. The word *lamb* is mispronounced as / læmb/ instead of / læm/ .
2. The word *receipt* is mispronounced as / resept/ instead of / risi:t/.
3. The word *honest* is mispronounced as /hunist/ instead of / ᵖnᵢst/.
4. The word *debt* is mispronounced as /debt/ instead of / det/.
5. The word *doubt* is mispronounced as /dæbt/ instead of / daut/.
6. The word *limb* is pronounced as /limb/ instead of / lim/.
7. The word *ache* is pronounced as /eiʃ/ instead of / eik/.
8. The word *choir* is pronounced as / tʃu:r/ instead of / kwaᵢər/.
9. The word *comb* is pronounced as / kʌmb/ or / cəm/ instead of /kəum/.
10. Some students pronounced the word *stomach* correctly as / stʌmək/

It can be noticed from the examples mentioned above that the third year students transcribed the words as they are spelled rather than how they are pronounced. The students are unable to recognize the silent letters in their phonetic transcription as stated in the study of **Louis Stevens (2017)**. According to Louis Stevens, these pronunciation problems are due to linguistic differences between Arabic and English

that affect how easily a student can learn to form the English letter sounds. Third year students attempt, therefore, to pronounce English words using the same phonetic methodology of their mother tongue, which results in committing such pronunciation errors.

Table 6 Results of students' answers to the fourth question about classification of consonant sounds according to place of articulation:

Frequency of students	No. of correct answers	Percentage %	Level of Ability
1	13/24	54.1%	Fair
2	12/24	50 %	Fair
1	10/24	41.6%	Poor
2	9/24	37.5%	Poor
2	7/24	29.1%	Very Poor
2	4/24	9.6%	Very Poor
1	2/24	4.8%	Very Poor
1	1/24	4.1%	Very Poor
2	Left-0/24	0%	Very Poor

Table 6 presents the ability of the students' in classifying the 24 consonants according to the place of articulation. Third year students' levels of ability fluctuate between fair and *very poor*. In question 4, the students were asked to identify the place of articulation of the 24 consonant sounds. The results were as follows: only one student could answer 13/24 items correctly (54.1%/ *fair*). Two students classified 12/24 items correctly (50 %, *fair)*. One student answered only 10/24 items correctly and got (41.6%/ *poor)*. Two students classified nine consonants correctly and they got 37.5% *(poor)*. Eight students fell in the very *poor* category: two students got 29.1%, two students got 9.6%, one student got 4.8%, and one got 4.1%. Two students couldn't answer this question and got zero.

In the fourth question, students have faced a difficulty in determining the place of articulation of consonant sounds because of their limited phonological competence which proves the first assumption of this study.

Table 7 Results of students' answers to the fifth question about classification of consonant sounds according to manner of articulation:

Frequency of students	No. of Correct Answers	Percentage %	Level of Ability
1	15/24	62.5%	Fair
3	12/24	50 %	Fair
2	11/24	45.8%	Poor
1	10/24	41.6%	Poor
1	8/24	33.3%%	Very Poor
1	2/24	4.8%	Very Poor
1	1/24	4.1%	Very Poor
4	Left-0/24	0%	Very Poor

From Table 7, it can be seen that only one student got 62.5%, three students got 50 %, two students got 45.8%, one student got 41.6%, one student got 33.3%, one

student got 4.8%, one student got 4.1%, and four students got 0%. It can be observed that students' levels of ability range from *fair* to *very poor*. It is evident in question 5 that third year students encountered a difficulty in distinguishing the correct manner of articulation of the 24 consonants. This is also due to the fact that third year students do not revise the phonological rules regularly which affects their performance in the pronunciation test.

13. Conclusion

From the results obtained, it can be concluded that the third year students encounter many difficulties in distinguishing English consonants since most of the students were unable to classify English consonants properly. They also encountered difficulties in transcribing English words as well as distinguishing silent letters and the three different pronunciations of past tense -ed. The errors made by the learners are mostly caused by their inadequate knowledge of English pronunciation rules which is obviously reflected in their achievement in the test and thereby these phonological difficulties should be addressed in the English teaching/ learning process. The analyses of the students' tests indicate that the two main reasons behind these difficulties stem either from the lack of the learner's phonological metacognitive knowledge or from the mother tongue interference either by confusing sounds of both L1 and L2 or by the inexistence of those sounds in either language. The study is important because awareness of those difficulties and their reasons would probably lead to a better way of finding appropriate teaching and learning strategies of tackling them and enhancing the learners' proficiency in pronunciation.

14. Recommendations

In the light of the previous findings, the researcher recommends that:

1. English teachers must give their students the opportunity to speak in front of the class. They should correct the students' pronunciation when necessary only.
2. Some knowledge of articulatory phonetics is needed to show exactly how the problematic sounds and other sounds are physically produced.
3. English teachers can integrate pronunciation activities so that students can have more opportunities to practice pronunciation in some meaningful context.
4. Some drilling exercises related to the most common pronunciation errors can be given to students so that they can be more aware of the movement of their organs of speech.
5. Teachers can also help students to develop strategies that are more independent: such as learning the phonetic alphabets and using computer software in learning pronunciation.
6. Teachers can provide a variety of exercises and activities, such as having situational dialogues, paragraph readings, short presentations, picture descriptions, and interview exercises in or outside the classroom outside classroom. The students should be given systematic exercises and activities from word, phrase, to sentence level.
7. The frequent use of various listening aids is very important in improving the students' standard of pronunciation. Due to the difficulties in English consonants, students have to listen to cassettes more and more to realize and distinguish between English consonant sounds.

8. Students should train to listen to English spoken by native speakers.

9. Students should do extra work; they can watch videos that teach pronunciation.

10. Students should be motivated to watch some English programs on TV, radio or visual media, such as BBC English channels, CNN, and others. These programs may offer live exposure to English pronunciation learners.

11. Students are advised to write out difficult words by their sounds instead of their spellings. They should write down what they hear and speak as much as possible to improve their pronunciation.

12. The learners of English should give the same proportion of time and attention to pronunciation as they do with grammar and vocabulary. To English Department students, pronunciation should become a compulsory part in their daily language activities. They must practice and train themselves in good pronunciation every day.

13. Due to the varying pronunciation problems that exist when learning English as an Arabic speaker, and the small differences that differentiate letters, working with an online Speech Pathologist is one of the easiest ways to ensure you learn English pronunciation correctly. Participating in an online educational setting, native Arab speakers can work one-on-one with an ASHA i.e. American Speech Language Hearing certified speech pathologist to receive a personalized accent assessment and pinpoint specific pronunciation areas that need improvement.

15. Limitations of the study

   The study was limited to some common problems encountered by third year university students with regard to English consonant phonemes. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Education at Elmergib University in 2021. The sample was randomly selected from third-year students majoring in English. 14 out of 23 students participated in this study. All of the participants were female, ranging in age from 20 to 22, and students were asked to answer a pronunciation test. The researchers faced a difficulty in determining the time of conducting the test because the students were carrying out final-year exams. Therefore, the researchers waited for the students to finish their exams first and then assigned the students the pronunciation test. Time allocated to the pronunciation test was unlimited, that is to say, whenever the respondents finish answering the pronunciation checklists, they submit the papers to the researcher.

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Appendix 1.

<u>**Tentative Test in phonetics for third year students**</u>

Q1- Tick √ the correct answer and classify the following consonants according to voicing.

Sound	Voiced	voiceless
1. /p/		
2. /b/		
3. /t/		
4. /d/		
5. /k/		
6. /g/		
7. /F/		
8. /v/		
9. /ᶿ/		
10. /ᶞ/		
11. /ʃ/		
12. /ʒ/		
13. /tʃ/		
14. / dʒ/		
15. /m/		
16. /n/		
17. /ŋ /		
18. /r /		
19. /l/		
20. /j/		
21. /w/		
22. /s/		
23. /z/		
24. /h/		

Q2- Classify the words into three sets according to the pronunciation of past forming –ed

Word	/t/	/d/	/id/
1. started			
2. ached			
3. begged			
4. doubted			
5. stopped			
6. schemed			
7. grabbed			
8. recorded			
9. laughed			
10. wanted			

Q3- Transcribe the following words.

Words	Transcription
1. comb	
2. lamb	
3. doubt	
4. debt	
5. choir	
6. limb	
7. honest	
8. stomach	
9. receipt	
10. ache	

Q4- Tick √the correct answer and classify the following consonants according to place of articulation.

Sound	Bilabial	Alveolar	Lateral	Velar	Post Alveolar	Palatal	Dental	Labio-Dental	Palato Alveolar	Labial Velar	Glottal
1. /p/											
2. /b/											
3. /t/											
4. /d/											
5. /k/											
6. /g/											
7. /F/											
8. /v/											
9. /ɵ/											
10. /ð/											
11. /ʒ/											
12. /ʃ/											
13. /tʃ/											
14. /dʒ/											
15. /m/											
16. /n/											
17. /ŋ/											
18. /r/											
19. /l/											
20. /j/											
21. /w/											
22. /s/											
23. /z/											
24. /h/											

Q5- Q1- Tick √the correct answer and classify the following consonants according to manner of articulation.

Sound	plosive	fricative	Affricate	lateral	approximant	retroflex	oral	nasal
1. /p/								
2. /b/								
3. /t/								
4. /d/								
5. /k/								
6. /g/								
7. /F/								
8. /v/								
9. /θ/								
10. /ð/								
11. /ʒ/								
12. /ʃ/								
13. /tʃ/								
14. / dʒ/								
15. /m/								
16. /n/								
17. /ŋ/								
18. /r/								
19. /l/								
20. /j/								
21. /w/								
22. /s/								
23. /z/								
24. /h/								

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