

# Investigating the English Pronunciation Problems for Non-Native Speakers of the Language: A Study on Charmo University Students

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**Abstract**—There are plenty of articles and papers focusing on second language learning and its methods; however, very few studies can be found to investigate the pronunciation problems of undergraduate students. In addition, understanding pronunciation is an important part of communicative competence. It is widely approved that students should master pronunciation to be able to grasp the language adequately; moreover, many solutions have been carried out. Yet, students should find out the problems to be able to fix the issues. The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems non-native speakers of English have, especially undergraduate students. Students with better and acceptable pronunciation can easily improve their other language skills than those with weak pronunciation. Throughout the study, university students were used as the tool to investigate the problems and later suggestions, recommendations, and solutions were given based on the data the researcher found. In this research two methods of data collection were used; qualitative (Interview) and quantitative (Questionnaire) were used on Charmo University / English Department Students.

**Keywords**—Accents, Classroom Instructions, Pronunciation, University Students, Utterances.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the problems that non-native English speakers encounter when it comes to proper pronunciation, especially for undergraduate students. Every English learner wishes to master pronunciation. On the other hand, they have issues speaking due to improper pronunciation. One of the obstacles that students should address is the sound discrepancies between their mother tongue and the English language. Moreover, one of the factors that cause students to have incorrect pronunciation is a lack of understanding of different accents. The primary goal of this research is to clarify pronunciation problems among non-natives.

The paper aims to answer the current research questions:

1. What are the challenges undergraduates face in mastering English pronunciation?
2. Whether pronunciation subjects at university help them to improve the language or even make it more difficult?
3. How fear can affect the quality of pronunciation?

Based on the following questions some hypotheses are indicated as followed. Some English department students suffer from misinterpretation and mispronunciation of the English language due to a lack of pronunciation knowledge. Several students struggle to comprehend and use English accents correctly. There are differences between English and Kurdish sounds and this caused the problem. Students have an issue with stress placement, which is one of their central concerns. Many learners are anxious about pronouncing words correctly hence they avoid speaking. Phonetics and Phonology did not help them to master the pronunciation to a great extent since the students do not know how to practice the language practically and without the sound lab. Students' fear caused stress and this brought the problem. Additionally, students face problems in mastering English pronunciation since the written and spoken language is different from the Kurdish one.

This research is particularly significant for both students and teachers in the field. Furthermore, pronunciation is a crucial skill, when learned correctly, allows students to understand concepts more clearly and communicate without hesitation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Sounds and Letters of English

The English language (EL) letters are different from the sounds. EL learners must be aware of the differences between sounds and letters. Having information about spelling and pronunciation can be a useful tool to tackle problems that students face while they are using EL.

### 2.1.1 Spelling and Pronunciation

David Crystal (2003) stated that the link between reading and spelling abilities is not straightforward. Since writing requires 26 letters and uttering requires 44 sounds (265-272). In English, a sound can be represented by various letters. For example, the sound /i:/ is shown by different letters in these words [sea, see, and seize]. Moreover, it is better to learn English pronunciation in terms of phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet (Burleigh and Skandera, 2005: 7) and (Roach, 2009: 2).

There are some differences between spelling and pronunciation. In that case, these differences may cause difficulty for Foreign Learners (FL) of EL. A homophone is a type of relationship between two or more expressions that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and spelling. For instance, pray and prey are pronounced in the same way /preɪ/ while they give different meanings. Although, when a silent letter comes in a word, it is hard to have the correct spelling. A silent letter refers to a letter that occurs in a word but is not uttered, letters such as 'w' in write and 'k' in 'knife' (Bussmann, 1996: 520) and (Trask, 1996: 322).

### 2.1.2 English Sounds' Production

It has been mentioned in the previous paragraph that 44 sounds are used to utter words/phrases. The EL is divided into vowel and consonant sounds. Lack of knowledge about them will cause problems for FL for EL. It is not easy to judge which letter/s make(s) vowel sounds. These words [hat, hate and heart] are distinguished because of the vowel sound that has been produced because of the letter "a". The number of vowel sounds of EL is between 16 and 20. Consonant sounds make different sounds for example, in some English words when the consonant /h/ comes after consonant /c/ it produces a /tʃ/ sound as in "church" /tʃɜ:tʃ/. Moreover, in these two examples, measure /meɪʒə/ and usual /'ju:ʒʊəl/, sound /ʒ/ is produced due to different sound(s) (Davenport and Hannahs, 2010: 1) and (Roach, 2009: 42).

## 2.2 Utterance Issues

Any issue in utterance may change the meaning/form of the words. The speaker should be aware of how to utter words and how to speak. For example, different pronunciations of the word "present" change the form and the meaning of the word (Roach, 2009: 87). While some points show how stress placement and intonation can be the reason for changing the meaning/form too.

### 2.2.1 Stress Placement Issues

The English language is considered to be a free-stress language which means the learners cannot predict the place/position of the stress under very few circumstances. For instance, in most cases, there is a general tendency for the stress placement of verbs to be closer to the end of words such as (apply) /ə'plai/. However, if the final syllable is weak, the stress will be at the initial syllable such as /'əʊ.pən/. The same rule is applied to

two-syllable words, simple adjectives such as /'lʌvli/ and /kə'rekt/. However, the roles are different for nouns, the stress is on the first syllable. On the other hand, if the first syllable is weak, the stress will be on the second syllables for example /'mʌni/ and /di'væn/. Looking at words in isolation to select stress placement and stress level is helpful to know their stress placement in connected speech (Ashby, 2011: 161-162) and (Roach, 2009: 75-78).

The production of stress requires using more muscular energy than unstressed. There are three levels of stress: primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed. The strongest type of stress is the primary stress. However, secondary stress is weaker than primary stress; in addition, they are placed in different positions. It is shown in transcription with a low mark (ˌ) such as /ˌæθərə'pɒlədʒi/. The third level is called unstressed. The English language uses word stress to make changes in meaning. This role is sometimes called lexical stress. For example, billow and below are distinguished by changing the position of the stressed syllable. Billow /'bɪləʊ/ is initial stress while below /bɪ'ləʊ/ is final stress. Additionally, stress placement is used to know the form of the words. For instance, the word 'import' is both a noun and verb, but in spoken language to know whether it is a noun or a verb, stress placement will help the listener. If the stress is on the first syllable /'ɪmpɔ:t/ it means that it is a noun. However, if the stress is on the final syllable /ɪm'pɔ:t/, it is considered a verb (Ashby, 2011: 165).

There is a tendency to stress compound nouns in English as compound nouns usually have initial stress. Furthermore, if two words are collected together to make a compound noun, the second word loses its stress. For example, 'water' and 'bottle', when becoming compound nouns /'water-bottle/, the second noun (bottle) loses its stress. On the other hand, without stress sometimes problems happen; for instance, the word [bluebell] without stress, is not clear whether it is a compound noun or a noun phrase. In this case, if the stress is on the first position 'bluebell, it is the compound noun. While the noun phrase is like that 'blue 'bell. Although, FL should be aware that sometimes the difference in stress placement has no rule to change the meaning. For example, both pronunciations of the word ice cream are correct and acceptable /'aɪs.kri:m/ and /aɪs.kri:m/. Thus, knowing the stress placement will help know the form of words, meaning, noun phrases, and compound nouns (Ashby, 2011: 155-166; Roach, 2009: 87).

### 2.2.2 Intonation Issues

Intonation is a way of using variation pitch to convey a message. It has an essential role to show types of meaning (Zsiga, 2013: 392). Intonation can be used for expressing the speaker's feelings and attitude (Ashby, 2011: 179). In the following examples, if the listeners are not able to know the intonation position, they cannot understand the speaker's purpose. For example, "[A] 'John is 'taking the train to \London. [B] 'John is 'taking the \train to 'London. [C] \John is 'taking the 'train to 'London. [D] 'John is going to 'London on \Saturday." For example, the place is important, and the intonation placement tells the listener. However, in example

[B], the main focus is on the train. It emphasizes that John is going by train and no other transport. In the next example, the subject is focused, which means that it is John who is taking the train, not another person. The final example shows that John is taking the train on Saturday, not other days of the week. Thus, if you cannot select the intonation of the utterance, you may not understand the main purpose of the speaker (Carr, 2013: 240-244).

### 2.2.3 Linking Issues

Another technique that makes FL of EL to be confused is linking which is a way of joining/linking words together. In connected speech, while two words are coming, if the second word starts with a vowel sound, the /r/ sound is added/uttered at the end of the first word. For example, there is no /r/ in the word “media” but, in connected speech, you should add it. The media event is uttered as [mi:diə r ivent] (Roach, 2009: 115).

### 2.2.4 Assimilation Issues

In EL, which is a stressed-timed language, some techniques/processes are used to have easier pronunciation. One of these techniques that are used is assimilation. In that process, the articulation of a sound is affected by the articulation of neighbouring sounds. It is a phonetic process in which one sound, usually a consonant, changes to be similar to another sound in the same word/phrase (Burleigh and Skandera, 2005: 89). Although it is felt more in rapid speech, not in slow speech. In that case, the sound /t/ will become /p/ such as “that person” will become /ðæp ‘pɜ:sn/. Moreover, before a velar consonant, [t] becomes [k], such as “that case” to /ðæk keɪs/. However, [d] becomes [b], [d] and [g], and [n] would become [m], [ŋ] and [ŋ]. For example, good boy and green paper will become /gʊb bɔɪ/ and /gri:m peɪpə/ (Roach, 2009: 111; and Trask, 1996: 36).

### 2.3 Tongue Influence

Learners’ first language sound pattern gets transmitted to the FL and shifting accents are probable to occur. Non-native speakers’ mispronunciations are influenced by their native languages’ sounds, rules, emphasis, and intonation. Several researchers have looked into how non-native speakers produce English rhythm. The researchers determined that learners’ ability to produce English-like stress alternation across a phrase was influenced by the transfer from their native language. The learners’ pronunciation of a target language can be influenced in at least three ways by the sound system of the native language: First, learners may be unable to make or even hear a sound in the target language that is not present in their native sound inventory, or vice versa(s). Second, when the rules for combining sounds into words (i.e., phonotactic constraints/rules) in the learners’ mother tongue differ from those in the target language, learners have difficulties because these rules are language-specific and differ from one language to the next. Finally, because a language’s rhythm and melody influence its stress and intonation patterns, learners can transmit these patterns to the target language.

In addition, there are a variety of elements that influence a learner’s acquisition of L2 pronunciation. It means that differentiation assists ESL/EFL teachers in considering what learners from various backgrounds may encounter when studying English as an FL. These variables would enable teachers to recognize non-native speakers’ difficulty in pronouncing the target language to assist them in overcoming their foreign accents and improving their pronunciation (Gilakjani, 2011: 3-4).

### 2.4 Accent Distribution

Most languages have different accents. Accent refers to different pronunciations of a language. Varieties of accents may tell the audience about differences in geographical place, social class, age, and educational background of the speaker. There are two common types of accents in English, British English and American English (Roach, 2009: 3).

#### 2.4.1 American Accent

The majority of American speakers of English use an accent that refers to General American (GA). Although, because the audiences mostly hear this accent on international radio and television networks, it is also called Network English. The majority of Canadian speakers of English have very similar accents that are hard to make a difference between the Canadian and American accents. The majority of American speakers use a GA accent to speak (Roach, 2009: 163). Phonetic books that are published in the United States use the GA accent. (Ashby, 2011: 11).

#### 2.4.2 British Accent

British English accent that has been identified as Received Pronunciation (RP). However, nowadays the name BBC pronunciation replaces the name RP. Crystal mentions that the RP form was established over 400 years ago as an accent of the court and the upper classes. The nowadays educated accent is the best description for RP (2003: 365).

The difference between RP and GA may cause difficulty for the foreign learner of the English Language. For example, on BBC, there is no /r/ sound after a vowel sound. The word [lever] in GA is pronounced as /levər/ but in RP it is pronounced as /li:və/. On the other hand, GA is rhotic (the r sound is pronounced in all positions such as, before consonants and at the end of utterances). For instance, the word [cart] is uttered as /kɑ:rt/ and the [car] is pronounced as /kɑ:r/. Another difference between GA and RP is the difference between vowels. In GA, they change the vowel /ɒ/ to /ɑ:/ and /ɔ:/. For example, the word [dog] is pronounced as /dɒg/ in BBC, while in GA, it can be uttered as /dɔ:g/ and /dɑ:g/ (Crystal, 2003: 365-367; and Roach, 2009: 163-164).

### 2.5 Classroom Environment Influences

The way students perceive their immediate educational environment may influence foreign language learners during

studying the English language. More specifically, if a language learner is exposed to elements such as a sufficient language model and clear instructions, and these aspects are congruent with the individual's expectations, learning processes may be accelerated (Szyszka, 2018: 121-122).

### 2.5.1 EFL Classrooms

The goal of English pronunciation instruction is to help students learn to pronounce words correctly. The fundamental goal of teaching and learning English in today's classes is to enable students to communicate effectively in English. Unfortunately, not every teacher understands the importance of proper pronunciation (Quoc et al. 2021: 160). Many EFL classrooms continue to overlook English pronunciation. It is because pronunciation is often treated as an afterthought in some university courses, it is impossible to offer a class that is solely focused on pronunciation practices. Another issue is that particular sounds are given greater significance (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016: 195). Moreover, many teachers believe that learning pronunciation is excessively difficult and boring for students. That could be one of the reasons why teachers are hesitant to teach English pronunciation to their students (Quoc et al. 2021: 160).

### 2.5.2 Instructions

The four basic areas of development for FL are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While Pronunciation is emphasized in FL courses during the first year of study as the target language's alphabet and sound system are introduced, this attention rarely extends beyond the introductory level. The lack of emphasis on pronunciation improvement may be attributable to a general lack of enthusiasm on the side for FL learning (Gilakjani, 2011: 3-4). Teachers often regard pronunciation as the least helpful of the basic language abilities, and as a result, they often skip teaching pronunciation to devote more class time to other subjects. Or perhaps teachers feel justified in ignoring pronunciation because they believe it is more difficult for adult FL learning to master target language pronunciation than other aspects of FLL.

### 2.5.3 The Role of the Teacher

English pronunciation is ignored in EFL classes for two main reasons. The first reason is that many EFL teachers do not have enough time in their pronunciation lessons, and if they have, more time is spent on exercises, which frustrates both students and teachers who want to learn and teach English pronunciation. The second reason has to do with psychological issues that play a big role in pronunciation learning since learners are not as confident in their English pronunciation as they are in their grammar and lexis understanding. These psychological roadblocks are unseen and prevent learners from enhancing their comprehension. To avoid these issues, EFL teachers should persuade their students that the goal of pronunciation is to enable them to pronounce correctly enough to be easily and comfortably understood by other speakers, not to gain a native accent (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016: 195-196).

### 2.5.4 The Teacher Curriculum Applied

Unfortunately, English pronunciation does not have a strong presence in many university curricula. It does not simply mean that pronunciation in English is unimportant. The essential thing here is that the curriculum designers have ignored its importance in English language instruction. The importance of English pronunciation becomes clearer when scholars consider the relationship between pronunciation and listening comprehension. While listeners expect certain patterns of rhythm and intonation in spoken English, speakers should make use of these patterns to communicate effectively. Although listeners cannot understand what is being said if the rhythm and intonation are not the same. Furthermore, listeners must understand the structure of speech as well as intonation patterns to accurately comprehend speech. In addition, it has been found that mastering pronunciation aids learners in improving their ability to understand spoken English (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016: 200).

### 2.6 Psychological Problems, Anxiety

Psychological issues also have an impact on FL learners in terms of pronunciation. Anxiety is just one of those disorders. Anxiety can lead to a loss of self-esteem and confidence, both of which have an impact on foreign learners' pronunciation. Anxiety is defined as a state of emotion characterized by uncertainty, worry, distress, restlessness, loss of control, and fear when something unpleasant happens. When anxiety becomes regular or persistent, it starts to interfere with daily activities like work, school, and relationships; it can become a pathological issue or a disorder (Ofiaz, 2019: 1000). When a learner is expected to perform in an FL, s/he experiences worry or uncertainty. Language anxiety hurts students' self-esteem, confidence, conversational ability, and academic performance. They are so frightened in front of the teacher and other students that they avoid answering questions, or the answer is short and vague, and they even may not open their mouths during class communication (Ali and Anwar, 2021: 234-238). Anxiety in pronouncing an FL appears to be linked to the learners' willingness to communicate. It is because one of the most direct factors is speaking, hearing, and pronunciation are all intertwined. Since pronunciation is the most important feature of the linguistic ego and the most difficult aspect to learn a new language; it is intimately linked to human identity and self-confidence. As a result, the fear of losing one's ego in front of others can be a powerful source of FLA disorder (Kralova, 2016:110-113).

## III. RESEARCH METHODS

Many different methods can be used for collecting data. The researcher has used different methods to select the main issues to tackle. In this paper, two methods were used: the questionnaire (quantitative) and the interview (qualitative) method.

### 3.1.1 Questionnaire

In the questionnaire method, the researcher prepared fifteen statements to give to the students of Charmo University. Students were in different stages of the English department. Forty participants participated in this data collection. Ten students each stage, for the sake of gender balance, five boys and five girls participated in each stage. The Likert Scale (rating scales) method was used to that required the participants to tick one of the options among four options. It is a useful method to select the number of agreeing and disagreeing participants with the questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2007: 325). The questionnaires were divided into two parts. In the first part, the students should give demographic information about gender, age, and stage. In the second part, fifteen statements were provided to tick by the participants. Four options were available for ticking; they were {agree, strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree}. This method was used to select the issues behind pronunciation problems and investigate the issues behind the fear of speaking. Although, some of the statements can be used as a solution to the problems.

### 3.1.2 Interview

The interview (qualitative) method was another way that has been used to fill the gaps that the questionnaire might have left empty. It is one of the superb tools for data collection. Through this method, the interviewees could use verbal and non-verbal ways to clarify their messages (Cohen et al., 2007: 349). The researcher interviewed four students face-to-face, in the English department at Charmo University. Two students are in the second stage; the others are in the fourth stage considering gender balance. The interview of students took 20 minutes minimum while the interview of teachers took 15 minutes minimum. Four questions regarding pronunciation and speaking were asked. In the second stage, students could talk about the main issues and different situations that they experienced. Although, the fourth stage's participants due to their experience as FL of the EL, could share different ways to tackle problems in pronunciation and speaking. The second interview had done with two teachers in the English department at Charmo University. Four questions were prepared for them by the researcher. They provided a beneficial solution for tackling problems in pronunciation and speaking.

### 3.2 Settings

Setting refers to time and place in general. This project was done at Charmo University. The questionnaire and interview were done on forty participants in all First, second, third, and fourth-stage students. Although, two teachers were interviewed by the researcher to give more clarification about the problems and recommend proper solutions for them.

## IV. SYSTEMATIC PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This section presents the information acquired about the issues of pronunciation faced by non-native English speakers. The results of the questionnaire and the interview are presented in

this part. The researcher goes over the questionnaire and the interview in depth.

### 4.1 Demographic Background

As previously stated, the questionnaire and interview were applied at Charmo University/English Department. The questionnaires are divided into two sections. The first part is the participant's background information. The second half of the questionnaire required participants to complete fifteen questions about pronunciation issues in learning languages as foreign languages.

#### 4.1.1 Age

Participants were of various ages. They were all over seventeen years of age and adults. They are between 17 and 24. All of them are students of Charmo University.

#### 4.1.2 Gender

In the questionnaires, there are 40 students. It contains 20 males and 20 females. There are five females and five males for each stage. It indicates that the study's participants were evenly split between males and females.

#### 4.1.3 Levels

There were different levels. First, second, third, and fourth are the numbers. They were all students of Charmo University/English department. All stages participated in the questionnaire.

### 4.2 Questionnaire Analysis

In regards to the first statement, differences between spelling and pronunciation of English words, in certain cases, will make it difficult for foreign learners. In terms of the female gender, their responses were rated as (%27.5) agreed, (%20) strongly agreed, (%2.5) disagreed and no response to strongly disagreed. However, males responded (%27.5) agreed, (%22.5) strongly agreed and no respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Regarding the second statement, which posed varieties among different English accents make confusion for foreign learner's pronunciation; most female and male participants gave similar answers which were (%35) agreed, and one male and one female disagreed. While (%7.5) of male participants strongly agreed and (%2.5) strongly disagreed. Hence (%10) of females strongly agreed and (%5) strongly disagreed.

The third statement addressed the lack of some English sounds in the Kurdish language that makes the students produce incorrect pronunciation; (%27.5) males agreed, (%5) strongly agreed, and (%12.5) disagreed. The females' answers were rated as (%25) agreed, (%20) strongly agreed, (%5) disagreed; and both males and females answered (%5) strongly disagreed.

For the fourth statement, which stated a lack of understanding of phonetics and phonology is one of the reasons for foreign learners' wrong pronunciation; the males responded (%25) agreed, (%12.5) strongly agreed, (%10) disagreed, and (%2.5) strongly disagreed. Despite that, the female answered (%22.5) agreed, (%22.5) strongly agreed, (%5) disagreed, and there were no female answers that disagreed about this statement.

Concerning the fifth statement, most teachers' strategies do not help assist foreign students to improve their pronunciation; the males' answers were (%15) agreed, (%20) strongly agreed, (%15) disagreed, and (%2.5) strongly disagreed. While the females' answers were (%17.5) agreed, (%15) strongly agreed, (%10) disagreed, and (%5) strongly disagreed.

The sixth statement asked whether, through phonetic and phonology courses, students learn how to pronounce words correctly or not; the male answers were (%30) agreed, (%17.5) strongly agreed, and (%5) disagreed. While the female participants answered (%27.5) agreed, (%2.5) strongly agreed, and (%2.5) strongly disagreed.

In the seventh statement, the researcher asked whether students benefit from learning the fundamentals of the production of speech sounds, such as vowels and consonants, to have a better pronunciation; so, the males' answers to this question were like this; (%10) agreed, (%17.5) strongly agreed, (%15) disagreed, and (%5) strongly disagreed. While the females answered the question (%32.5), and (%15) for each agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Also, there were (%5) responses for each who disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Regarding statement eight about whether students will be able to correct their pronunciation errors by learning the transcription of words or not; the males answered (%25) agreed, (%10) strongly agreed, (%10) disagreed, and (%2.5) strongly disagreed. Besides, (%20) of the female participants agreed, (%30) strongly agreed, (%5) disagreed, and (%2.5) strongly disagreed.

The ninth statement was about through learning intonation, you can understand better the speaker's purpose/main focus; as the majority, (%32.5) of female participants agreed with the idea; however, only (%15) strongly agreed, and (%2.5) disagreed. In addition, the male participants agreed in the range of (%27.5) and strongly agreed by the percentage of (%17.5). However, only (%2.5) of males disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Regarding statement ten, the researcher is interested in knowing to listening to lectures is an effective way to deal with pronunciation concerns among foreign students of the English language; the males' responses rated (%20) agreed, (%10) strongly agreed, (%12.5) disagreed, and (%5) males disagreed. On the other hand, the majority of the female participants agreed with the idea, and the answers were rated as (%30). While the other females rated as (%5) strongly agreed, (%10) strongly disagreed, and (%2.5) strongly agreed.

According to the result of the eleventh statement, once you realize you are mispronouncing some words, you feel embarrassed; the male results range as (%17.5) agreed, (%16) strongly agreed, (%10) disagreed, and (%5) strongly disagreed. Furthermore, (%17.5) of the female participants agreed, (%12.5) strongly agreed, (%15) disagreed, and (%7.5) strongly disagreed.

For the twelfth statement, asked about when you make pronunciation mistakes, you will be concerned because of your poor English pronunciation; (%32.5) of male and female participants agreed, (%7.5) strongly agreed, and (%7.5) of males disagreed. While the females answered the question as (%10) and (%2.5), for each disagree and strongly disagree respectively.

Statement thirteen is about asking if recording your voice and listening to it several times might help you to find out what you are uttering incorrectly and how to solve it or not; the result for male participants were (%25) agreed, (%17.5) strongly agreed, and (%5) disagreed. On the other hand, the females' results were (%30) agreed, (%15) strongly agreed, and (%2.5) disagreed. However, (%2.5) of male and female participants disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement.

The fourteenth statement concerns whether imitation is an effective way of improving your pronunciation and speaking skills or not; (%20) of male participants agreed, (%17.5) strongly agreed, (%7.5) disagreed, and (%5) male participants disagreed. Furthermore, (%15) of the female participants agreed, (%32.5) strongly agreed, (%2.5) disagreed, and there was no response for strongly disagree.

In the final statement, the researcher asked about the daily practice that helps you to improve your speaking skills; the result of male participants (%22.5) agreed, and (%27.5) strongly agreed. While the majority of female participants (%47.5) strongly agreed, and (%2.5) agreed. Whilst there was no response for disagree and strongly disagree for both genders.

#### *4.3 Interview Analysis*

The researcher conducted six interviews with students and teachers. The first interview was conducted with two second-year students. The second one involved two fourth-grade students. The interviewees explained the most essential challenges of speaking and pronunciation that they face as an FL of EL in these interviews. The fifth and sixth interviews, on the other hand, were conducted with two English department teachers to address students' concerns with speaking and pronunciation as an FL of EL. The answers of the first and second interviewees refer to the responses of the two second-stage students. However, the replies of the third and fourth interviewees refer to the responses of the fourth-stage students. The answers of the teachers are also displayed by the first and second teachers.

Four questions were provided for the students and the teachers to answer. In this section, the questions and their different answers are discussed.

#### 4.3.1. *The Students' Interview*

1. What are the most effective issues that prevent you from having good pronunciation?

First interviewee: The most effective reason for students' remaining mute is shyness. Students are less likely to participate in class as a result of this. They are, nevertheless, unaware of their mistakes. As a consequence, individuals are unable to fix their pronunciation errors. Second interviewee: Being ashamed causes students to be afraid of others from correcting their mistakes. Third interviewee: The biggest reason for learners' bad pronunciation is a lack of knowledge in pronunciation. Yet, there is no specific lecture or course on pronunciation. In certain lectures, students learn basic facts regarding pronunciation, such as phonetics and phonology. Although these lectures assist students in comprehending the fundamental concepts, they are not practical. Moreover, in school, the students focused on the spelling of words, not on pronunciation. They used to memorize English words. Thus, they did not emphasize the pronunciation of words. Fourth interviewee: Most teachers are unconcerned about their students' pronunciation. They do not focus on learners' pronunciation to inform them what they are doing is wrong or to correct their mistakes. Teachers focus on students' ideas and thoughts rather than their pronunciation while they talk.

2. What are the reasons behind your fear of speaking English?

First interviewee: Students are terrified of making mistakes; thus, they are hesitant to speak. While speaking, they are embarrassed. Second interviewee: Nervousness is the same fear. That is why students, do not use English as a second language in their everyday conversations. They did not speak to others in English. Third interviewee: In Kurdish society, mistakes are not tolerated. Learners may indeed be mocked by others. Therefore, students struggle to overcome their fear of speaking in public. Learners are discouraged from speaking due to a lack of assistance, according to the fourth interviewee.

3. Do the lectures help you to overcome your fear of speaking and to be better at pronunciation?

For this question, the first interviewee said yes. S/He said that speaking lectures, in particular, are very helpful in overcoming speaking nervousness and rectifying incorrect pronunciation. When students listen, they have more possibilities to communicate about a variety of topics. On the other side, the teacher provides a variety of topics for students to express their thoughts and opinions on. Then, it is one of the most lectures for students who wish to improve their speaking and pronunciation abilities. Second interviewee: S/He had the same response as the first. Simply, speaking can assist students in overcoming their challenges with speaking and pronunciation. For this question, the third interviewee said no. S/He stated that

lectures could not assist students in overcoming their dread of speaking. It is determined by the students. S/He should encourage themselves to speak up. Although the teacher's role is active in most lectures, the student's position is passive. Even though some teachers allow students to voice their views, they do not pay attention to the students' pronunciation. Thus, the lecturers were unable to assist students in improving their pronunciation or correcting their errors. Fourth interviewee: In some ways, lectures might help students overcome their fear of speaking by requiring them to provide a presentation. Teachers do, however, occasionally advise students to form groups to share diverse perspectives and to encourage students to speak. Students, on the other hand, should not rely on lectures to modify their pronunciation. They must rely on themselves and pay attention to native speakers.

4. Could you please recommend some techniques/ways to others to make their speaking and pronunciation skills better according to your experience as a foreign learner of the English language?

First Interviewee: When it comes to speaking, students must rely on themselves and strive to conquer their anxiety about talking by speaking in front of a mirror. Furthermore, to correct their pronunciation, learners might record their voices and listen to them several times. Second interviewee: Students are required to watch a lot of English videos on various topics because they will enhance their speaking and pronunciation if they listen to English every day. Therefore, the students can watch movies and listen to music. They entertain you while also teaching you proper pronunciation. They assisted students in speaking in the manner of a native speaker. In addition, talking to friends is a great way for them to improve their speaking skills. Furthermore, researching before a lecture can assist in motivating/encouraging students to speak up in class. Third interviewee: The most important aspect of success is daily practice. Students must create a calendar for themselves to improve their desired talent. For example, they can talk with each other, or read books aloud, otherwise, they can record their voice each day and compare them to their previous recordings to see how far they have progressed. Interviewee number four: Students must be aware of their dialect. They can listen to native speakers for each accent once they have decided on one. Although audiobooks can be quite useful. It mostly aids in the understanding of the proper word and sentence pronunciation.

#### 4.3.2. *The Teachers' Interview*

1. According to your experience what makes the students have a fear of speaking?

The first teacher says that students who lack confidence are afraid to talk. This occurs as a result of their lack of English before university. In elementary and secondary school, they spoke Kurdish. Thus, individuals were unable to apply EL in everyday situations. Another issue is a lack of understanding of lectures or subjects. Second teacher: The learners were not allowed to use English as a foreign language. They did not

interact with the public. Another reason they do not speak is that they are timid.

## 2. How can you help your students to be better at speaking?

First teacher: Encouraging students to speak and present a variety of topics is a good method to get them to speak up. Teachers prefer students who speak up, even if their ideas are incorrect, over students who remain silent. Good teachers do everything they can to encourage students to participate. Although teachers should explain/provide information to students regarding various accents. As a result, students will be able to communicate more effectively. Second teacher: The best method to improve one's speaking skills is to encourage them and remind them not to be afraid of making mistakes. Students should be taught not to be afraid of making errors and instead to learn from them. Motivating students to create an English-only atmosphere is a good strategy to help them enhance their speaking abilities. In an English-speaking context, this means that s/he will speak English instead of Kurdish in everyday situations. Sending messages in English, conversing in English, and watching movies and videos in English are just a few examples. While imitating native speakers' speech is the best way to improve not just speaking, but also pronunciation and intonation.

## 3. What are the reasons for having incorrect pronunciation?

First teacher: There are a variety of reasons behind this. One of them is short on supplies. For example, at Charmo University, a suitable lab for presenting videos on pronunciation is not available. Even though the educational system encourages/forces students to memorize rather than learn. Second teacher: If you do not use your language, it will die. Students do not use EL very often, and when they do, it is usually only in class. It is for this reason that students refuse to acquire proper pronunciation. Although, because the teachers are not native speakers, students rely heavily on them. Students will avoid speaking out of fear of being judged or making blunders. As a result, s/he is unable to strengthen their speaking/pronunciation skills. Moreover, they might be confused when they hear the English language from a native speaker. The native speakers talk rapidly and link words together. For example, in a rapid speech this phrase, bright colour will be utter like that /'braik kʌlə/. Thus, students should be good listeners to understand better.

## 4. Which techniques/ways do you recommend for foreign students of the English language to correct their pronunciation?

First teacher: Students should converse in English with their peers to enhance their pronunciation and identify their errors. Listening to native speakers and imitating their speech is a good way to start. Meanwhile, students can record their voices and compare them to that of native speakers until they achieve the correct pronunciation. Second teacher: Students who listen a lot improve their speaking skills. As a result, if they talk frequently, they are aware of their pronunciation. Learners should be

patient because effective pronunciation takes time to master, and students should practice constantly.

## V. DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

The study questions are explained in this section based on the responses to the questionnaires, interviews, and previous research papers.

### *First Research Question's Discussion*

What are the challenges undergraduates face in mastering English pronunciation?

#### *5.1.1 Questionnaire Discussion*

Differences in spelling and pronunciation of English words, according to the respondent, are one of the obstacles that non-native language speakers face. They ranked as agreed with the statement were (%55) and (%42.5). Furthermore, according to Crystal (2009), the link between reading and spelling abilities is complex. Because there are 26 letters in writing and 44 sounds in speaking. Although variances in English dialects may make pronunciation difficult for overseas students, the participants were assessed as (%70) agreed and (%17.5) strongly agreed. The distinction between RP and GA, as Crystal (2003) points out, might be perplexing for a foreign learner of the English language. Furthermore, according to participants' responses, another issue that non-native students have is the absence of numerous English consonants in the Kurdish language, which causes them to pronounce words improperly; they were evaluated as (%52.5) and (%25) for each agreed and strongly agreed. This challenge was also corroborated by Roach (2009), who noted that the learner's first language's sound pattern is communicated to the FL, resulting in faltering accents. Additionally, the majority of teachers' strategies for assisting foreign learners in improving their pronunciation are ineffectual. According to participant responses, (%32.5) agreed and (%25) strongly agreed on this topic. This issue is also discussed by Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), who believe that English pronunciation is disregarded by EFL teachers.

#### *5.1.2 Interview Discussion*

According to the answers of one of the participants in the interviews, fear of making mistakes and mocking by the other students will make the students face many problems in pronunciation. They are afraid of mistakes in their pronunciation. Thus they prefer not to speak. It will be difficult for them to know about their mistakes. Although, Ali (2021) mentions that one of the issues that make FL lose their confidence is anxiety. It is anxiety that has made the students afraid of making mistakes. In that case, the students might not even utter one sentence during the lectures. On the other hand, according to the response of the second-stage student, shyness is another problem that makes the students silent. Thus, these students could not improve their pronunciation because they do not know about their problems in uttering. Moreover, the differences between spelling and pronunciation are another

challenge for students. While they want to speak/utter words and phrases they should focus on the correct pronunciation. However, they used to focus on spelling more than pronunciation. Burleight and Skandera (2005) explain that one sound can be produced through different letters. Thus these differences will cause difficulty for the learners. Although another problem is that students listen to a native speaker, they could not understand because of a lack of knowledge in linking, assimilation, and stress placement. Roach (2009) has shown that linking is a way to utter sentences/phrases easily. Thus, the native speakers join the words together in rapid speech. Thus, the learners face difficulty to understand the exact pronunciation and meaning.

### *Second Research Question's Discussion*

Whether pronunciation subjects at university help them to improve the language or even make it more difficult?

#### *5.2.1 Questionnaire Discussion*

According to the responses of the participants, students learn how to pronounce words correctly by taking phonetic and phonology classes, with (%67.5) agreed and (%25) strongly agreed. As Carr (2013) points out that the intonation placement tells the listener about what the speaker emphasized like the place, time, or person. Fundamentals of speech sound production, such as vowels and consonants, may benefit students in enhancing their pronunciation, as shown in the responses of the participants; as (%42.5) agreed and (%32.5) strongly agreed with this idea. Both Burleight and Skandera (2005) believe that a sound in English can be expressed by a variety of letters. For example, the sound /i:/ is represented by various letters in the words [sea, see, and seize]. Furthermore, learning English pronunciation in terms of phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet is preferable. In addition, students will be able to repair their pronunciation faults by learning the transcription of words, which is one of the most crucial aspects of phonetics.

#### *5.2.2 Interview Discussion*

According to the answers of the fourth stage's students the lectures cannot be considered a helpful way to assist students to overcome their pronunciation difficulties. In most lectures, the teachers focus on the student's ideas. They do not tell students what is wrong with their pronunciation. Although students study phonetics and phonology, they are more theoretical. On the other hand, in the first stage, students have another idea. They said that the Speaking module helped them to better their pronunciation and speaking skills. Not only have the students mentioned that lectures are not useful enough to help them but also, the teachers have said that the curriculum will encourage the students to memorize not to learn. Hence, students do not focus on their pronunciation. They have memorized the rules that they had studied in phonetics and phonology but they did not apply the rules. However, Gilakjani (2011) says that teachers often skip teaching pronunciation to devote more class time to other subjects. Moreover, the lack of practical lectures

will affect badly on students' pronunciation. On the other hand, Quoc (2021) has mentioned that some teachers thought that teaching pronunciation is difficult and the students do not have enough time to learn. Thus, pronunciation skill is ignored in lectures.

### *Third Research Question's Discussion*

How fear can affect the quality of pronunciation?

#### *5.3.1 Questionnaire Discussion*

According to the participants' responses, students are embarrassed when they learn they are mispronouncing certain terms, (%35) of respondents agreed and (%27.5) strongly agreed. As said by Oflaz (2019), psychological issues have an impact on the pronunciation of FL learners. Students would be anxious if they have difficulty pronouncing words due to mastering the English language. According to the majority of participants, (%65) agreed and (%15) strongly agreed. When a student is anticipated to succeed in an FL, as Ali and Anwar (2021) note, s/he feels worried or apprehensive. Student's self-esteem, confidence, and capacity to communicate are all affected by language anxiety. They are so afraid of appearing in front of the teacher and other students that they avoid answering questions or giving brief, vague responses, and they may even refuse to speak throughout the class.

#### *5.3.2 Interview Discussion*

Teachers had mentioned that the lack of opportunity of using EL by the students is a reason. On the other hand, they pointed out that shyness and lack of confidence will make the students afraid of speaking. Although, they do not use EL before university. It makes them afraid of speaking to audiences. Second-stage students said that feeling embarrassed because of making mistakes is another reason that does not encourage students to speak. However, a lack of information about different accents will make students confused. Moreover, Roach (2009) has pointed out that a lack of knowledge about accents causes difficulty for the FL of EL. Thus, while students want to speak, they might not know which pronunciation will be correct. The teachers have mentioned that there is some solution for students to solve their problems regarding the fear of speaking. Providing different topics is a useful way to make all students express their ideas. Encourage students to speak regardless of their mistakes. Although, listening to native speakers and imitating them will assist students to improve their speaking. Although, it makes them have more confidence while they are speaking.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In this section which is the last part of the paper, the researcher shows the results and recommends some ways/techniques for Kurdish students to tackle their problems in pronunciation and speaking after investigation.

6.1 Summary of the Main Findings

In this article, the researcher concluded to select the major problems of Kurdish students in the English department. Although, the solutions will be provided based on the answers of participants. Most Kurdish students will face difficulties because of a lack of knowledge about different accents. Although, a lack of understanding of phonetics and phonology will be the reason for the student’s difficulties. On the other hand, most of the strategies of teachers are not helpful to correct mistakes in pronunciation. Furthermore, every problem should have some solutions. In this research, the selection of the problems will improve the students to be better in pronunciation and speaking skills. According to the responses to both questionnaire and interview, the students should be patient in the process of learning the English language. Because of the differences in spelling and pronunciation of English words, and the lack of some English sounds in the Kurdish language, Kurdish learners may face various issues in pronunciation, because in Kurdish society mistakes are not welcomed. Thus, the learner could not practice and use the English language in daily life. Hence, their psychological state will not let the learners participate in conversations to improve their pronunciation and speaking skills. In conclusion, learners of the English language should be aware of the importance of using the English language in daily conversation. The students must listen a lot to native speakers about different topics to be familiar with the tone, intonation, sound, and stress of English language utterances.

6.2 Recommendations and Suggestions

Listening to native speakers and watching and listening to English movies, series, dramas, songs, and documentaries are the most effective technique to improve your speaking and pronunciation skills. When learners listen to native speakers, they can record their voices and compare them to the native speaker’s voice. It assists students in correcting their errors. However, students should have more confidence in their ability to communicate in English. Their speech and pronunciation will suffer if they do not use their EL. The researcher advises readers of this study and English language learners to continue practising every day, even if it is only for a few minutes. It is far too vital to speak the language daily. Therefore, students should rely on native speakers to master proper English sounds and pronunciation. They should use the lectures as practice for improving their speaking and listening abilities by overcoming their shyness and fear of speaking.

APPENDIX

		Agree		Strongly Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
No.	Questionnaires	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Differences between spelling	11	11	9	8		1		

	and pronunciation of English words, in certain cases, will make it difficult for Foreign learners.								
2	Varieties among different English accents make confusion for foreign learners’ pronunciation.	14	14	3	4	1	1	1	2
3	The lack of some English sounds in the Kurdish language makes the students produce incorrect pronunciation.	11	10	2	8	5	2	1	1
4	A lack of understanding of phonetics and phonology is one of the reasons for foreign learners’ wrong pronunciation.	10	9	5	9	4	2	1	
5	Most teachers’ strategies do not help assist foreign students to improve their pronunciation.	6	7	8	6	6	4	1	2
6	Through phonetic and phonology courses, students learn how to pronounce words correctly.	12	15	7	3	2			1
7	Students benefit from learning the fundamentals of the productio	4	13	7	6	6	1	2	1

	n of speech sounds.								
8	Students will be able to correct their pronunciation errors by learning the transcription of words.	10	8	4	10	4	2	1	1
9	Through learning intonation, you can understand better the speaker's purpose/main focus.	11	13	7	6	1	1	1	
10	Listening to lectures is an effective way to deal with pronunciation concerns among foreign students of the English language.	10	12	4	2	5	4	2	1
11	Once you realize you are mispronouncing some words, you feel embarrassed.	7	7	6	5	4	6	2	3
12	When you make pronunciation mistakes, you will be concerned because of your poor English pronunciation.	13	13	3	3	3	4		1
13	Recording your voice and listening to it several times might help you to find out what you are uttering incorrectly and how	10	12	7	6	2	1	1	1

	to solve it.								
14	Imitation is an effective way for improving your pronunciation and speaking skills.	8	6	7	13	3	1	2	
15	Daily practice helps you to improve your speaking skills.	9	1	11	19				

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