

An Analysis of Errors Caused by Omani EFL Learners in Pronouncing Certain Consonant Sounds

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Abstract

Omani EFL learners face various problems in learning different skills such as reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In particular, it is very difficult for Omani EFL learners to pronounce certain consonant sounds correctly. For instance, the sound /p/ of the English language do not have similar sound in the phonemic system of the Arabic language, so it is not easily recognised by Omani students. This sound is always replaced by /b/, a sound in the Arabic phonemic system. Similar case is observed with the sound /tʃ/, /v/ and /g/, which do not have similar sounds in the Arabic consonantal system. Consequently, these are often replaced by the sound /ʃ/, /f/ and /dʒ/ respectively. The absence of one sound of a language phonemic system from another phonemic system of another language creates problem to learners. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine the difficulties experienced by Omani EFL learners in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds. The study also provides a theoretical description of first language interference which affects Omani ESL learners' pronunciation of /p/ and /tʃ/ consonant sounds in words in isolation for three positions – initial, middle and final. Quantitative research methodology was employed, with the use of a diagnostic test to assess students' pronunciation on certain consonant sounds. A questionnaire was also utilized to gather information from the teachers pertaining to students' difficulties in pronouncing certain consonant sounds. The study is significant as it offers a practical outcome where teachers will be able to use suitable pedagogical approaches in handling this problem in Omani EFL classes.

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Keywords: Consonant sounds; First language interference; Pronunciation error; Pronunciation

INTRODUCTION

Having a good pronunciation of a language is essential for effective communication, particularly intelligibility. However, this is not the only reason for enhancing an effective pronunciation of a new language because incorrect pronunciation can also hinder knowledge construction. In the working memory, there is a very important mechanism called the phonological loop, which repeatedly says words and phrases before transmitting them into the long-term memory. A good example of this is when we attempt to memorise a telephone number by saying it over and over to ourselves while trying to dial the numbers. If learners' pronunciation of a word is not stable, the word cannot easily enter long-term memory because the unstable pronunciation makes it difficult for the word to be held in the phonological loop (Nation & Newtown, 2008).

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In Oman, English is a foreign language which is acquired through formal education in which the learners are supposed to be taught all aspects of the language skills. However, English language teaching and learning in Oman schools and universities focuses on the written component at the expense of the spoken component. As English becomes an international communication language in the world, Omani university students are obligated to acquire a good level of English. The Ministry of Education requires a result of band six in IELTS in order for potential employees to work in government sector. It is therefore extremely important that students who search for the best job must be equipped with English language skills.

Furthermore, Omani EFL learner starts learning English years after they have acquired Arabic, their first language, formally or informally. Naturally, this has its bearing on the overall learning of English language including pronunciation. Al-Mahrooqi (2012) stated that Omani EFL learners tend to mispronounce certain consonant sound. For example, the sound /p/ has no counterpart in the phonetic system of Arabic language, and it is always replaced by /b/, which has a phonemic value in the Arabic phonemic system. The same case happens with the sound /tʃ/. The sound /tʃ/ is not found in the Arabic consonantal system and is not normally realized by Omani students. Consequently, this is often replaced by the sound /ʃ/, for example, the sound /tʃ/ as in cheap is replaced by sound /ʃ/ as in sheep. The main aim of the study is to examine the difficulties experienced by Omani EFL learners in pronouncing English consonant sounds particularly /p/ and /b/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, /v/ and /f/ and /dʒ/ and /g/. Apart from that, the study also aims at recommending suitable pedagogical approaches in the teaching and learning of English pronunciation to be employed in EFL classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Pronunciation

There are a number of factors that might affect EFL learners' pronunciation which some researchers, for example Gillette (1994) and Pennington (1994) believed could promote pronunciation mastery. Both agreed that first language (L1) influence is a major impact on the English pronunciation of the public school graduates. According to Omani studies, first language interference, teachers, curriculum, students and lack of practice outside the classroom are factors affecting Omani EFL learners' pronunciation and good level in English. Each factor is discussed to illustrate the reasons that students regard as the cause of their pronunciation problem.

2.1.1 First Language Interference

English has twenty-four consonants while Arabic has twenty-eight as illustrated in Table 1. Arabic EFL learners have difficulty in pronouncing certain English language sounds especially the sounds that are absent in standard or colloquial Arabic. There are some consonant sounds which are found in both languages but some are found in one language and not the other. Most Arabic EFL learners start learning English between the ages of seven and ten, that is, after years of learning Arabic at home and at school. As shown in Table 1, it is likely that learners will impose some Arabic pronunciation on the sounds of English (Nayef & Hajjaj, 1997).

A number of studies have been conducted to examine the impact of L1 on English language pronunciation learning, which reported that /p/ and /b/ sounds are different phonemes and each one can be distinguished by native speaker (Brown, 2000; Nunan & Carter, 2001). Omani EFL learners face the problem of mispronouncing /p/ sound because Arabic language has only the phoneme /b/. Omani EFL learners confuse between /p/ and /b/ sounds' pronunciation, for example, words like 'park' /pa:k/ is replaced by 'bark' /ba:k/. Many other sounds are influenced by learners' L1 pronunciation.

Table 1. Comparison between English and Arabic consonant sounds.

Same Consonant Sounds in Both Languages	Different Consonant Sounds between Languages	
	English	Arabic
/b/ , /d/		ح /ħ/
/ð/ , /f/		خ /k/
/h/ , /j/	/dʒ/	ص /s/
/k/ , /l/	/g/	ض /d/
/m/ , /n/	/tʃ/	ط /t/
/r/ , /s/	/ŋ/	ظ /z/
/ʃ/ , /t/	/v/	ع /ʕ/
/ə/ , /w/	/p/	غ /ġ/
/z/ , /ʒ/		ق /q/
		ء /ʔ/

Brown (2000) found that second language learners face some difficulties because their L1 affects their L2 learning especially in adulthood, and this effect is caused by L1 transfer, which can be a significant source of errors for L2 learners. Nunan and Carter (2001) also stated that L1 has its influence on L2 pronunciation. In the case where L1 and L2 rules are dissimilar or in conflict, errors are expected to be committed by L2 learners. All these exemplify the transfer between L1 and L2 in language learning. So, many Omani EFL learners tend to use /p/ as /b/, others use /f/ for /v/ (fine/vine), /ʃ/ for /tʃ/ (sheep/cheap) and /dʒ/ for /g/ (jaraj/garage). In different Arab countries, there are different studies of pronunciation problems and the influence of L1. The results of these studies indicated that consonant sounds such as /p/ and /b/, /s/ and /θ/, /z/ and /ð/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ are confusing to pronounce for many Arabic EFL learners (Altaha, 1995; Binturki, 2008, Hameed & Aslam, 2015). Learners are confused with such sounds, and they have the tendency to replace each of them with other sounds that are similar to their L1 (O'Connor, 2003). Table 2 shows some examples of such replacements:

Table 2. Replacement of the sounds.

The Sound	Replaced Pronunciation
/p/ and /b/	pull /pul/, bull /bul/
/tʃ/ and /ʃ/	which /wiʃ/, wish /wiʃ/
/v/ and /f/	have /hæv/, half /ha:f/
/g/ and /dʒ/	language /læŋgwidʒ/, language /lændʒwidʒ/

It is evident that because Omani EFL learners learn from the habits of using their L1, they strongly develop the phonological features of Arabic, which makes it difficult for them to distinguish the sound system between the first language and the second language. As a result, L1 is the main cause for the confusion of some pairs of consonant sounds among Omani students.

2.1.2 Teachers' Pedagogical Preference and Curriculum Inflexibility

Teachers' pedagogic and linguistic inadequacy are often attributed as the factor affecting Omani EFL learners' pronunciation. Many Omani English language teachers show lack of interest on how to improve or maintain their own proficiency level. Moreover, recent research revealed that Omani EFL teachers' language proficiency is generally deteriorating due to factors such as the environment where English is spoken as the first language or the second language (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

Apart from that, the Omani education system discourages flexibility. Teachers are given a pre-set curriculum, teaching materials and teaching methods, and they are expected to follow them, which can be uninteresting to students (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Due to this, teacher motivation decreases, and they become nonchalant in their care for students who are weak. The inflexibility of the curriculum and uneven coverage of the language skills are also considered to heighten the problem of learning pronunciation. Language skills such as reading and speaking are ignored in schools, despite their crucial role for students' competency, and pronunciation has little attention in language classes (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

2.1.3 Negative Perception and Attitude towards English Language Learning

Negative attitudes towards English language are common among Omani learners (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Due the negative perceptions towards the language as well as the Westerners, most Omani EFL learners do not show interest nor motivation to learn English. They perceive the language as difficult and is not important as other subjects. In fact, they do not possess the sufficient autonomy to study English language. Moreover, most students learn the language for exam purposes, and tend to cheat to pass. Most students also do not have the appropriate skills to learn the language. They mostly depend on memorization, a learning strategy deeply rooted in their culture and is a common learning method in the Arab countries.

In addition, there is little opportunities for the students to use and practice English outside the classroom. In fact, students are not given the appropriate exposure nor opportunity to practice the language with their teachers outside the classroom, and due to this, most of them also prefer to use Arabic after the English period. To make things worse, students who attempt to practice the language with other students are mocked, and as a consequence, the discouraging environment reduces the English output from students to a very minimal level. This becomes a problem for many Omani English teachers who are keen to utilise English in activities beyond the classroom (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

Parental attitudes are also a factor. Parents demonstrate little awareness nor understanding on the importance of English for their children's future success in academic and professional areas (Bartram, 2006), and this actually mirror students' own attitudes. Obtaining a passing grade in English is simply satisfying for most parents. In fact, some even discourage their children from learning and excelling in English language subject. Parents identify English language as foreign and potentially harmful, which indicates the potential for lack of supervision on English language use, practice and academic progress at home.

Another major concern occurs when the educational system, policy makers and even the school environment also demonstrate lack of appreciation, awareness and effort for English language education. Although not much is expected from the students, school administrations are unhelpful in creating an atmosphere that fosters English language learning and acquisition (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Classrooms are not equipped with appropriate facilities, and are often cramped and crowded, comprising of students with mixed levels of language proficiency. Furthermore, in-class opportunity for pair or group work with such diverse peers creates an uncooperative atmosphere which is not conducive for language learning. All these factors are the cause to Omani learners' low proficiency in English language and pronunciation specifically.

2.2 Previous Studies on Pronunciation of EFL Learners in the Middle Eastern Context

Many studies have been conducted examining the errors made by Arab learners when learning English as a second or foreign language such as Ahmad (2011) and Hassan and Hago (2012). In his study, Ahmad (2011) probed into the difficulties faced by Saudi students when pronouncing specific English consonant sounds. All of the participants were students at the Preparatory Year Program at Najran University. They have never been to any English-speaking countries, and hence, they do not have any exposure to a native English environment. The results showed that the participants faced difficulties in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds, namely /p/, /d/, /v/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ and /ŋ/.

In addition, Hassan's (2014) study examined 1) the relationship between pronunciation errors and the factors affecting the errors such as L1 interference and 2) the differences in sound system between L1 and L2, namely Arabic and English. The participants consisted of 50 students from Sudan University of Science and Technology (SUST), who were required to record their pronunciation, and 20 English language teachers who were asked about the exact sounds which students mispronounced and the reasons for the pronunciation problems. From the study, it was discovered that there are several English consonant sounds which are not present in Sudanese spoken Arabic. This causes problems for Sudanese learners of English to pronounce the consonants, which are /p/, /b/, /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /θ/, /ð/. Hassan (2014) also stated that English language learners at SUST claimed that they were confused with the pronunciation of some set of words which do not exist in Sudanese spoken Arabic such as /p/ as in 'experience', /θ/ as in 'thank' and /ð/ as in 'this'. The students also could not differentiate some of the English vowel sounds. Spellings of the words are almost similar with different pronunciation, for example, vowel as in 'mat' /mæt/ and 'mate' /meɪt/, which make it difficult for students to distinguish.

Similar findings were found in studies in Arab-speaking countries. Egyptian English language learners faced similar pronunciation problems (Wahba, 1998). Egyptian students faced certain problems related to pronunciation such as stress and intonation, which were attributed to the differences in pronunciation between English and Arabic. The confusion of bilabials (b and p) leads to the replacement of both sounds to what the students are familiar with which is the use of /b/ instead of /p/ and rarely /p/ instead of /b/ sound. The instances could be observed in words like (pupil, paper, apple), whereby the students pronounced them as /bju:bl/, /beɪb/ and /ble/. Thus, based on this fact, Hassan and Hago (2012) studied the pronunciation errors and factors that caused them.

The researchers agree that like any other English language skills such as reading, writing, and listening, English pronunciation is very important for second language or foreign language learners. This is due to the fact that the pronunciation is vital in developing their communicative competency, which makes it as one of the required basic language skills for students to learn and master.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the quantitative research methodology with the use of a diagnostic test and questionnaire as instruments to obtain data. The data was determined from the pronunciation testing assumptions utilizing SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and descriptive statistics from the results of the questionnaire.

3.1 Participants

Two groups of participants were involved in the study; the first group comprised of 20 students from an English language course in Ibri College Technology, and the second group included 20 teachers, from English Department of the same college.

For the student participants, 10 male and 10 female students, whose ages were between 18 to 19 years old, were recruited based on specific criteria. These criteria include the student's origin from different regions of Oman because people from different parts of Oman have different pronunciation of certain

consonant sound. Apart from that, they also had not attended or had any exposure to any English language learning of native-like setting. In addition, another criterion included was that the participants had not visited or stayed in any English-speaking countries for any period of time. In the diagnostic test, the pronunciation samples from these 20 students were recorded.

The teacher participants comprised thirteen female and seven male teachers. They all have been teaching English courses in Oman for various ranges of years. Ten had the experience of teaching English between five to eight years while seven have been teaching between nine to twenty years. Only three of the teachers had the experience of teaching between one to four years. The teachers were requested to respond to a questionnaire identifying the sounds which the students mispronounced and the reasons for the students' pronunciation problems.

3.2 Research Instruments

Two types of research instruments were employed to collect data for this study which are diagnostic test and questionnaire. A diagnostic test was used to collect data from the sample of Omani EFL learners. Additionally, a structured researcher-developed questionnaire was used to collect the information from the teachers.

3.2.1 Diagnostic Test

The purpose of conducting the audio recording through the diagnostic test was to examine pronunciation errors on certain consonant sounds made by the Omani students and to investigate which of the consonant sounds was the most mispronounced by the learners. Nine words were selected for each problematic consonant sound in all three positions which are initial, middle and final word position. For the sound /p/, five words were used in which the sound /p/ was in initial position e.g. problem, people, person, pen and pencil, two words in the medial position e.g. spoon and speak and two words for the final position e.g. cup and help. For the sound /v/, three words in initial position e.g. very, vast and verb, three words in the medial position e.g. evil, even and eleven and three words for the final position e.g. give, stove and move were used. For the sound /tʃ/, three words in the initial position e.g. cheese, cheap and check, three words in the medial position e.g. teacher, kitchen and exchange, and three words in the final position e.g. such, rich and lunch were selected. Finally, for the sound /g/, three words in the initial position e.g. give, glue and global, three words in the medial position e.g. again, ignore and single and three words for the final position e.g. dog, egg and big were chosen (refer Appendix A).

3.2.2 Teacher Questionnaire

To support the data obtained from the diagnostic test, a structured researcher-developed questionnaire administered for teachers was also used. The purpose of using the questionnaire was to explore the English teachers' perception of the errors committed by the Omani EFL learners while pronouncing English consonant sounds. The questionnaire comprises two sections, A and B. Section A consists of two items inquiring the participants' demographic information. There are six items in Section B inquiring the opinions and ideas of the teachers about the pronunciation of Omani EFL learners. The items in Section B contains two types of questions. Items 1 and 6 are a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Items 2 to 5 are structured questions with several options are provided for the participants to choose in collecting the essential information.

3.3 Research Procedures

The diagnostic test was administered first. Eight pairs of consonant sounds that Omani EFL learners had problems on pronouncing which are /p/ and /b/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, /v/ and /f/ and /dʒ/ and /g/ were selected. Then, 20 students were then randomly selected and they were asked to record their pronunciation of nine words for the following sounds /p/, /v/, /tʃ/ and /g/. Then, the recordings of the pronunciation were analyzed

by calculating the number of mispronunciation of these consonants which later were transformed into percentages to identify the most mispronounced consonant sounds made by the participants. For the structured questionnaire, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to 20 English teachers from Department of English at Ibri College of Technology. The teachers were informed the purpose of the research prior to the recording sessions of the students. They provided good support from the initial stage in the process of collecting data.

Data obtained were analysed using SPSS, and the statistical technique used was the t-test. Data were also validated using preliminary data analysis such as chi-square test. In short, the procedures have assisted in ensuring the accuracy of the findings and the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The data findings were later presented using tables and figures for easy understanding and interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Diagnostic Test

Four pairs of consonant sounds in which Omani EFL learners usually face problems pronouncing are /p/ and /b/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, /v/ and /f/ and /g/ and /dʒ/. These eight consonants were selected because Omani English language learners whose L1 were Arabic tend to replace the first consonant sound in the pair with the later. The students were asked to record their pronunciation of nine words for each sound, /p/, /v/, /tʃ/ and /g/ to identify their mispronunciation. Figure 1 shows that Omani EFL learners faced problem in pronouncing /p/ and /tʃ/ more than /v/ and /dʒ/. The results prove that Omani English language learners experienced mispronunciation of certain consonant sounds.

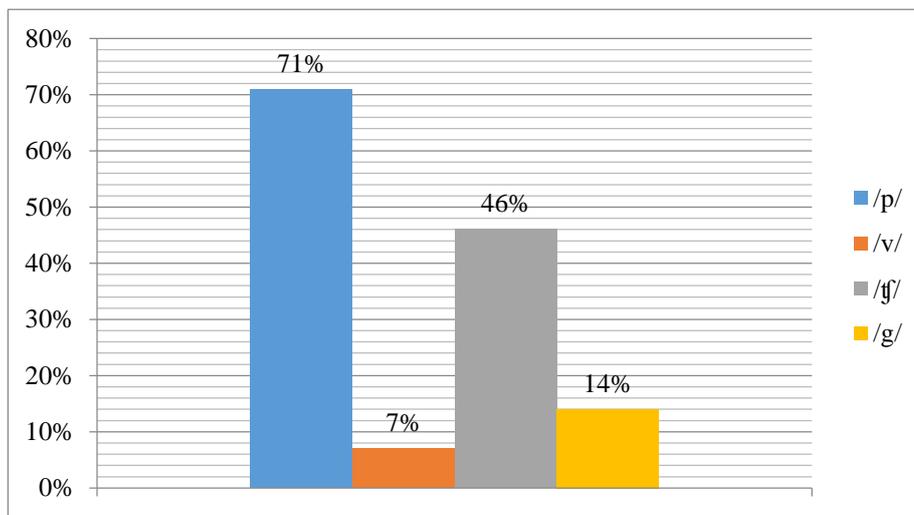


Figure 1. Problematic pronunciation of consonant sounds.

Student mispronunciation of /p/, /v/, /tʃ/ and /g/ sounds is further analysed according to the sounds' initial, middle and final positions in the words. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students' mispronunciation according to the sound position. For /p/ sound, the participants are hardly able to pronounce /p/ consonant sound when it is in the final position more than when it is in the initial and middle positions. The participants pronounced /p/ sound in the final position with 100% of mispronunciation, 72% mispronunciation for initial position and 35% for middle position. For /v/ sound, percentage of mispronunciation is rather low where mispronunciation of /v/ sound in final position is at 12%, and the same for initial position and middle position which is with 5% of mispronunciation. For /tʃ/ sound, participants wrong pronunciation of the sound when it is in the middle position is at 50%, then in initial position with 45% of mispronunciation, then in final position with 42% of mispronunciation. For /g/ sound, percentage of mispronunciation is low the /g/ sound in final position shows 18% of mispronunciation, 13% for middle

position and 12% for initial position. Based on the figures, the participants mispronounce /p/, /v/ and /g/ sounds more when it is in the final position while for /ʃ/ sound, it tends to mispronounce more when it is in the middle position.

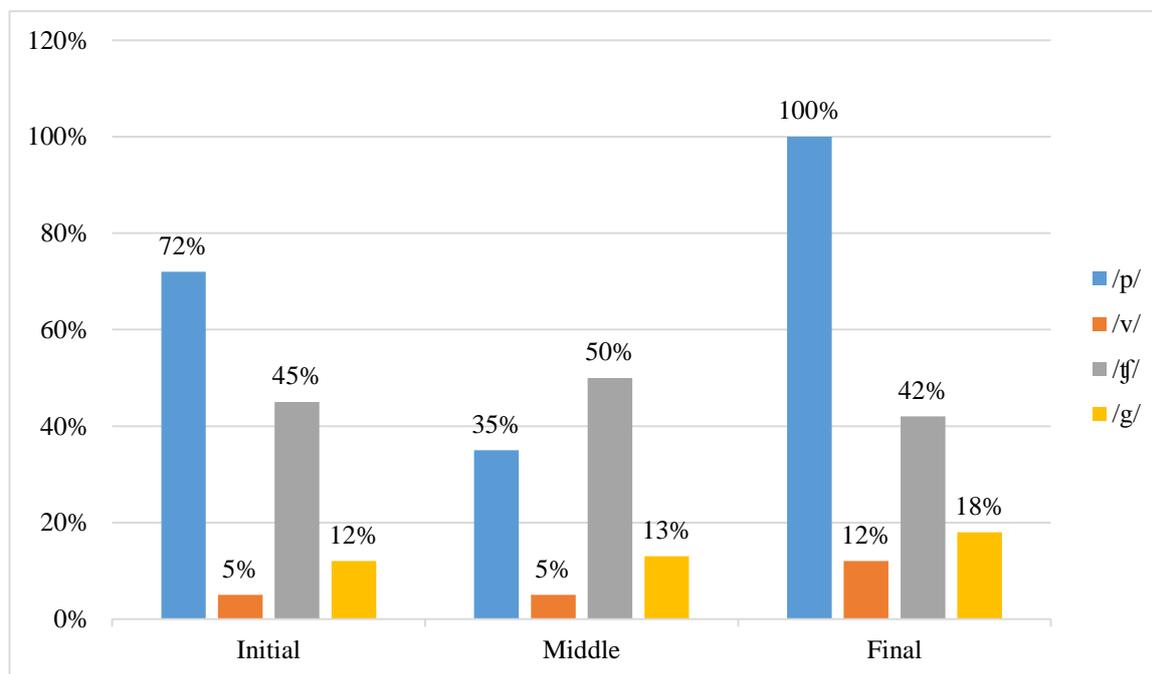


Figure 2. Problematic pronunciation of consonant sounds for three different word positions.

4.2 Teacher Questionnaire

This section presents the findings from the questionnaires, which were distributed to the teachers. This section presents the findings obtained from questions 1 and 6 in Section B which examined the students' difficulties in pronouncing certain consonant sounds as identified by the English teachers. These include the teachers' awareness on the mispronunciation problem that the students experienced, the reasons for the mispronunciation, the most prevalent mispronounced consonant sounds, sufficient instruction and target pronunciation.

4.2.1 Students' Problems in the Pronunciation of Certain Consonants Sounds

Items 1 (Q1) and 6 (Q6-1 – Q6-5) ask the teachers' opinion about students' pronunciation problem of consonant sounds. The sub-items in item 6 ask the teachers to specifically identify the differences of consonant sounds that they found the students have problems with. Table 3 shows that for Q1, almost all the teachers believed that Omani students had problems in pronouncing certain consonant sounds with 60% strongly agreed and 35% agreed. Only 5% of the teachers thought that Omani students had no problems in pronouncing certain consonant sounds. Items in Q6 specifically ask teachers of specific consonant sounds that students might face.

Q6-1 inquires about pronunciation error for /v/, and Table 3 depicts the calculated value of teachers' answer on the mispronunciation of /v/ consonant sound in words like 'van'. It shows that 45% of the teachers strongly agreed and 20% agreed with statement, which indicates 65% of the teachers noticed their students have problem in uttering the /v/ consonant sound. Q6-2 illustrates the calculated value of teachers' answer on the mispronunciation of the /p/ in words like pen and problem. It is generally known that this consonant sound does not exist in Omani spoken Arabic. Normally, Omani learners encounter problems in pronouncing the consonant /p/ sound and often replace it with /b/ consonant sound. In fact, the result in

Table 3 states that 70% of the teachers strongly agreed and 30% agreed. Thus, all of the teachers (100%) were in agreement that the learners had a problem in pronouncing /p/ consonant sound.

Table 3. Students’ problem in pronunciation of certain consonant sounds.

Item	Response Option (in Frequency and Percentage)									
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Q1	0	0	1	5	0	0	7	35	12	60
Q6-1; /v/	7	35	0	0	0	0	4	20	9	45
Q6-2; /p/	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	30	14	70
Q6-3; /dʒ/	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	25	15	75
Q6-4; /tʃ/	4	20	0	0	0	0	8	40	8	40
Q6-5	0	0	1	5	0	0	5	25	14	70

Omani learners of English pronounced the consonant sound /dʒ/ instead of /g/ in words like language. The reason is that this sound has more than one pronunciation. Table 3 displays that the results for item Q6-3, of which 75% of the teachers strongly agreed and another 25% of the teachers agreed that the students had problem in pronouncing the consonant /g/. Item Q6-4 inquires about the teachers experience in hearing the mispronunciation of the most difficult consonant, post-alveolar affective /tʃ/ among the Omani learners. Some of the students replaced it with /f/ as in the words like cheap and lunch. The results indicate that 80% of the teachers agreed the students face problem in pronouncing the consonant sound /tʃ/ with 40% of the teachers strongly agreed and another 40% agreed. The last item for question 6, Q6-5 asks whether the teachers noticed that students replace /p/ with /b/, /tʃ/ with /ʃ/, /g/ with /dʒ/ and /v/ with /f/. The result indicates that 70% of the teachers strongly agreed and 25% agreed that their students experience the problem of pronouncing the consonant sounds in the study. Nevertheless, the results are not absolute because 5% of the teachers disagree that their students have problems in pronouncing the consonants.

In addition, Table 4 shows the consonant sounds which the teachers thought were mostly mispronounced by their students. 50% agreed that their students usually mispronounce the consonant sounds involving /p/, /v/, /g/ and /tʃ/ (option A). While none of them thought that the students mispronounced the following consonant sounds: /b/, /f/, /ʃ/ and /dʒ/ (option E).

Table 4. Problematic consonants sounds for the Omani students.

Response Option Selected	Frequency	Percentage
A (/p/, /v/, /g/ , /tʃ/)	10	50
B	6	30
C	9	45
D	4	20
E (/b/, /f/, /ʃ/ , /dʒ/)	0	0

4.2.2 Factors for Students Mispronunciation of Certain Consonant Sounds

Table 5 indicates the responses of the teachers pertaining to the reasons for mispronunciation of consonant sounds among Omani students. Majority of them (85%) agreed that the first language interference (option A) is a major factor. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that some of them selected two other reasons for the problem such as lack of an English-speaking environment (option C) with 70% of the teachers and students are not interested in improving their pronunciation (option B) was another 30%. However, the teachers did not believe that lack of systematic practice of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) (option D) is the cause (0%).

Table 5. Factors influencing the mispronunciation of certain consonant sounds.

Response Option Selected	Frequency	Percentage
A	17	85
B	6	30
C	14	70
D	0	0

4.2.2 Suggestions for English Pronunciation Instructions

Table 6 depicts the response rate of the teachers concerning sufficient pronunciation instruction delivered via their present English course. Majority of the teachers (55%) agreed that the students did not receive sufficient and appropriate pronunciation instructions in their current courses while another 45% disagreed with the statement.

Table 6. Is the pronunciation instructions provided sufficient?

Response Option Selected	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	45
No	11	55

As indicated in Table 7, majority of the teachers (50%) agreed that they would suggest their students to target having native-like pronunciation when learning English pronunciation. While 30% suggested students should focus on intelligible pronunciation for communication success, only 20% suggested English pronunciation with an Arabic accent as the objective of teaching pronunciation.

Table 7. Suggestion for English pronunciation.

Response Option Selected	Frequency	Percentage
English pronunciation with an Arabic accent	4	20
Intelligible pronunciation	6	30
Native – like pronunciation	10	50

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that the most common pronunciation errors made by Omani students are the consonant sounds of /p/, /tʃ/, /g/ and /v/, which are usually replaced with /b/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/ and /f/ respectively. While the most difficult pronunciation they experienced is /p/ sound; and the least is /v/ sound. On the other hand, /tʃ/ and /g/ sounds are considered moderately difficult to pronounce compared to the other two. It is also found that the learners mispronounced /p/, /v/ and /g/ consonant sounds more when it is in the final position while for the /tʃ/ sound the learners mispronounced more when it is in the middle position. The possible reasons could attribute to the influence of Arabic phonological features as suggested by Alaha (1995), Binturki (2008) and Hameed and Aslam (2015).

Among the factors contributing to the mispronunciation are first language interference, lack of interest among students to improve their pronunciation and lack of exposure to an English-speaking environment, which findings are supported by the findings by Jdetawy (2011) and Rabab'ah (2003). Overall, the teachers agreed that the students received insufficient pronunciation lessons in the classroom; suggesting that more efforts from the EFL teachers and policy makers should be made in order to improve pronunciation problem among these learners. Further, the teachers agreed that the students did not receive sufficient and appropriate pronunciation instructions in their current courses, which should be the educational implication for developing appropriate courses for these students.

Since the current courses lack emphasis on pronunciation skills, courses on the production of English speech should be given higher priority in the classroom. Such courses should also focus on speech sound production and appropriate standard pronunciation (Abbad, 1988). This approach refers to the process of getting the students to pronounce the sounds correctly at the word level, dealing with the words in isolation instead of at sentence level. Such approach may be able to assist learners to recognize similar sounds which without proper guidance may be difficult to distinguish, for instance, in minimal pairs like /b-p/ as in pack /pæk/ - back /bæk/ which can have a negative impact on intelligibility when not properly distinguished. Like other English language skills or components, such as writing, reading, speaking and grammar, having effective pronunciation is very important to help EFL learners develop their communicative abilities effectively. It is one of the basic skills required for English language learning. Therefore, some suggestions are provided which might help educators, students and language researchers to find ways to reduce students' difficulties in pronouncing problematic consonant sounds.

Awareness of the importance of the language skills and the problem faced is the first step in the learning process. Teachers should ensure that learners are aware of the importance of English pronunciation for the success of their learning process and ultimately for effective communication in the English language (Abbad, 1988; Al-Jadidi, 2009). Students should be exposed to basic knowledge of phonetics and phonology namely the standard pronunciation, and the IPA symbols. Such awareness of the English language pronunciation would guide students towards correct pronunciation of a particular sound or word. In addition, unfamiliar sounds or sounds which do not exist in the learners' first language should be identified and emphasized. Therefore, oral communication classes which include pronunciation should be included in the English language courses and curriculum with more class time allocated for discussion and conversation, and reading aloud activities.

In addition, teachers can provide varied and different activities to improve language skills together with the pronunciation skills, for example, read aloud, picture descriptions, situational dialogues, short narrative presentations and interview exercises. Students should be given continuous guided activities, which can start from word level and progresses to phrase and sentence level. Teachers should also show their concerns for the students and their progress in learning pronunciation, by building their confidence to speak with the appropriate pronunciation. On the other hand, Ministry of Education should provide in-service training and professional development programs for teachers to ensure they maintain their language competence. Finally, it is suggested that students listen to or watch audio and audiovisual English materials, and they should always try to communicate in English with friends, teachers and relatives without any hesitation.

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Appendix A. Recording Form of Problematic Consonant Sounds Pronunciation

The sound	The word
/p/	problem
	people
	person
	pen
	pencil
	spoon
	speak
	cup
	help
/v/	very
	vast
	verb
	evil
	even
	eleven
	give
	stove
	move
/tʃ/	cheese
	cheap
	check
	teacher
	kitchen
	exchange
	such
	rich
	lunch
/g/	give
	glue
	global
	again
	ignore
	single
	dog
	egg
	big

