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Integrating the International Phonetic Alphabet into the Intermediate EFL Curriculum for Arab Learners

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Keywords:	Abstract:
pronunciation challenges, first language interference, intelligibility, fossilisation,	This study investigates persistent pronunciation difficulties and fossilised errors among intermediate Arabic-speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, rooted in phonological disparities between Arabic and English. Adopting a descriptive, pedagogical approach grounded in contrastive phonology and second language acquisition theory, it draws on theoretical models, empirical studies, and structured instructional analysis. Problematic English phonemes are classified based on their absence in Arabic, phonetic dissimilarity, and first language interference. The study evaluates the effectiveness of integrating the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) into instruction through transcription exercises, contrastive drills, and minimal pairs. Findings highlight consistent difficulties with /p/, /v/, /ŋ/, /ʒ/, vowel length, diphthongs, and the schwa /ə/. IPA-based instruction enhances articulation accuracy, phonemic awareness, and learner autonomy while reducing fossilised errors when introduced at the intermediate level. The study concludes that systematically incorporating IPA as part of scaffolded, contrastive instruction can support sustained phonological development and promote communicative competence among Arab English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Integrating the International Phonetic Alphabet into the Intermediate EFL Curriculum for Arab Learners

دمج الأبجدية الصوتية الدولية في منهج اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية للمتعلمين العرب في المستوى المتوسط

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الكلمات المفتاحية:	المُلخص:
تحديات النطق، تأثير اللغة الأم، الوضوح اللغوي، التحجر اللغوي،	تتناول هذه الدراسة الصعوبات المستمرة في النطق والأخطاء المتأصلة (الراسخة، المتحجرة) لدى المتعلمين العرب للغة الإنجليزية في المستوى المتوسط، التي تعود جذورها إلى الفروقات الصوتية بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. وتتبنى منهجاً وصفيًا وتربوياً مستنداً إلى الفونولوجيا التقابلية ونظرية اكتساب اللغة الثانية، مع الاعتماد على النماذج النظرية والدراسات التجريبية والتحليل المنهجي لأساليب التدريس. تم تصنيف الأصوات الإنجليزية الإشكالية وفقاً لغيابها في اللغة العربية، واختلافها الصوتي، وتأثير اللغة الأم. وتُقيم الدراسة فاعلية دمج الأبجدية الصوتية الدولية (IPA) في التدريس من خلال تمارين النسخ، والتدريبات التقابلية، والأزواج الحدية. تشير النتائج إلى وجود صعوبات ثابتة في نطق الأصوات (/p/, /v/, /ŋ/, /3/، وطول الحروف الصوتية، والانزلاقات الصوتية(diphthongs)، والصوت المركزي (/ə/)، وقد ثبت أن التدريس المعتمد على (IPA) يعزز دقة النطق، والوعي الفونيمي، واستقلالية المتعلم، ويُسهّم في الحدّ من الأخطاء المتأصلة (الراسخة، المتحجرة) عند إدراجه في المستوى المتوسط. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الدمج المنهجي للأبجدية الصوتية الدولية ضمن تعليم تقابلي متدرج يمكن أن يدعم التطور الصوتي المستدام، ويُعزز الكفاءة التواصلية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من العرب بوصفها لغة أجنبية.

Introduction

This paper advocates the strategic integration of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols into intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula. The IPA symbols bridge orthographic irregularity, mitigate first language interference, and foster self-monitoring by providing a visual, systematic representation of sounds. Grounded in contrastive phonology, this approach addresses specific interlingual challenges, enhancing phonological decoding and intelligibility.

Al-Khresheh (2024) indicates that Arabic-speaking learners of English often struggle with pronunciation due to the considerable phonetic and phonological differences between Arabic and English. These difficulties are not limited to the production of individual sounds but also affect suprasegmental features such as rhythm and intonation, which play a vital role in achieving clear and natural English speech.

However, the significant phonological disparities between Arabic and English often lead to persistent pronunciation challenges, such as the substitution of English sounds absent in Arabic (e.g., /p/, /v/) and a reliance on English's irregular spelling for pronunciation cues (Al-Jarf, 2006; Alghonaim, 2020). These difficulties, compounded by traditional curricula that often prioritise grammar over explicit phonetic instruction, can lead to the fossilisation of pronunciation errors, impeding intelligibility in academic and professional contexts (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Rabab'ah, 2003).

The IPA symbols offer a robust and systematic solution to bridge this pedagogical gap. As a standardised system of symbols representing speech sounds, IPA symbols provide a visual and auditory framework that can decouple English spelling from its pronunciation, highlight subtle phonemic contrasts, and empower learners to practice precise articulation independently (Roach, 2009; Underhill, 2005). Extensive literature supports the efficacy of IPA symbols instruc-

tion, particularly for intermediate learners with foundational vocabulary and exposure to listening comprehension (Alghonaim, 2020; Rabab'ah, 2016; Zahra & Al-Rushdi, 2020). Studies have shown that explicit IPA symbols training can significantly improve phonological awareness, accuracy in producing problematic consonants and vowels, and foster learner autonomy in self-monitoring pronunciation (Alshangiti, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2007; Abu-Rahma, 2011).

Despite the growing body of research advocating for IPA integration, pronunciation fossilisation remains a prevalent issue among Arab EFL learners. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the strategic integration of IPA symbols into the intermediate EFL curriculum for Arab learners, with a specific focus on mitigating pronunciation fossilisation and enhancing overall communicative proficiency.

1. Objectives and Research Questions

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To determine how integrating IPA instruction reduces first language induced pronunciation errors and mitigates fossilisation in intermediate Arab EFL learners.
- To explore how systematic IPA instruction fosters learner autonomy in pronunciation, self-monitoring, and independent dictionary use.

1.2 Questions of the study

- To what extent does the integration of IPA instruction reduce pronunciation errors attributable to first language interference and mitigate fossilisation in intermediate Arab EFL learners?
- How do structured IPA-based teaching methodologies influence the articulation accuracy and metalinguistic awareness of intermediate Arab EFL learners?
- In what ways does systematic IPA instruction contribute to fostering learner autonomy in pronunciation, self-monitoring, and the independent use of phonetic resources among intermediate Arab EFL learners?

2. Literature Review

This study is grounded in key theories from second language acquisition (SLA), with a particular focus on pronunciation challenges faced by Arab learners of English. The framework integrates the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Interlanguage Theory, Fossilisation Theory, and broader principles of SLA, in addition to empirical insights on the pedagogical value of the IPA).

2.1 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)

The CAH, initially proposed by Lado (1957), suggests that the differences and similarities between a learner's first language (L1) and the second language (L2) can predict areas of learning difficulty. Applied to this study, CAH highlights key phonological differences between Arabic and English, such as the absence of English phonemes like /p/, /v/, and /ŋ/ in Arabic, and the divergence in articulatory patterns (e.g., Arabic /t/ vs. English /t/). These contrasts often result in L1 interference, where learners transfer native phonological rules to English, leading to pronunciation errors.

2.2 Interlanguage Theory

Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory provides another critical perspective. It posits that L2 learners develop a transitional linguistic system influenced by both their L1 and the target language. This evolving system is not merely erroneous but follows identifiable patterns. Examining Arab learners' interlanguage pronunciation reveals recurring issues that stem from L1 transfer, overgeneralisation of L2 rules, and simplification strategies. Understanding these patterns is essential for designing targeted pronunciation instruction.

2.3 Fossilisation Theory

Closely related to interlanguage is fossilisation, wherein specific second language errors become entrenched and resistant to correction despite ongoing exposure to the target language (Selinker, 1972). In the realm of pronunciation, fossilised errors can

seriously hinder intelligibility. This study explores how explicit instruction in IPA can counteract fossilisation by raising learners' phonological awareness and promoting self-monitoring and correction.

2.4 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Contemporary SLA theory emphasises the interaction of input, output, and feedback in language learning. In pronunciation development, exposure to accurate models (input), opportunities for practice (output), and corrective feedback are all essential. Derwing and Munro (2015) stress the value of explicit instruction in achieving intelligible pronunciation. Therefore, this study positions IPA not as a standalone solution, but as an integral part of a multifaceted approach to phonological development.

2.5 The Role of IPA in Addressing Fossilisation

Empirical research indicates that the integration of IPA into language instruction can assist intermediate learners in resolving persistent pronunciation challenges. IPA provides a systematic visual framework that clarifies the relationship between English spelling and sound, thereby reducing reliance on Arabic-influenced approximations. For example, learners can more accurately produce difficult English sounds such as /p/, /v/, and /ŋ/, and distinguish vowel pairs like /ɪ/ vs. /i:/. Beyond segmental features, IPA also enhances awareness of prosodic elements, such as stress and intonation, contributing to more natural-sounding speech.

3. Spelling–Pronunciation Discrepancies

English orthography is notoriously inconsistent (e.g., though vs. tough). IPA helps bridge the gap between spelling and sound, making pronunciation rules more transparent. Once familiar with IPA, learners can consult dictionary transcriptions to check pronunciation independently, promoting both learner autonomy and accuracy in vocabulary acquisition.

Integrating IPA into pronunciation instruction for intermediate Arab EFL learners

offers a strategic response to fossilised errors and first language interference. By enhancing phonetic awareness, clarifying spelling-pronunciation relationships, and fostering self-directed learning, IPA serves as a powerful tool in improving both intelligibility and learner confidence

4. Empirical Studies Supporting IPA Instruction

The role of IPA symbols in addressing pronunciation challenges and fostering autonomy among intermediate Arab learners is strongly supported by empirical research. These empirical studies will be discussed and summarised as follows:

Alghonaim's (2020) study highlights the IPA as a valuable tool for Arab learners to bridge phonological gaps between Arabic and English. It emphasises the need for explicit phonetic instruction in regions where first language (L1) interference heavily impacts pronunciation acquisition. The study examined the effectiveness of using the IPA to address English pronunciation challenges among Arab learners, particularly Saudi students. It aimed to determine whether explicit IPA training improves phonological awareness and accuracy.

The study concluded that IPA instruction was effective in mitigating (L1) Arabic interference, particularly for segmental features of individual sounds.

Building on Alghonaim's (2020) findings regarding segmental improvements through IPA, Roach's (2009) analysis expands this perspective by advocating for its systematic role in clarifying phonemic contrasts and bridging orthographic irregularity.

Roach supports the effectiveness of the IPA as a systematic tool for language learners, particularly Arabic speakers, to enhance pronunciation and grasp phonological systems. Moreover, he sees that IPA bridges the gap between irregular English spelling and pronunciation, offering precise sound representation and aiding in accurate sound production, clarifying phonemic contrasts (e.g., /θ/ vs. /ð/), and improving listening skills by

facilitating the decoding of spoken language. He strongly supports classroom instruction to reduce reliance on native sound substitutions. Roach concludes that the IPA provides a clear, consistent framework for mastering the pronunciation and phonology of English patterns.

While Roach (2009) underscores the IPA's capacity to resolve phonemic ambiguities and systematise pronunciation, Rabab'ah's (2016) research supports these claims by demonstrating its measurable efficacy in refining specific consonantal and vocalic distinctions among Arab learners.

Her findings reinforce the IPA's role in clarifying phonemic contrasts and mitigating L1 interference. It also provides concrete evidence of its measurable impact on Arab English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The study demonstrates that explicit IPA training enhances learners' accuracy in producing problematic consonants (e.g., /p/ vs /b/) and vowel distinctions (e.g., /ɪ/ vs /i:/). Moreover, it emphasises how IPA bridge theoretical knowledge is applied to a practical application. Furthermore, Rabab'ah highlights the cognitive benefits of visualising sounds through IPA, which fosters long-term retention and independent decoding skills, key components for overcoming English's irregular orthography. She is emphasising structured, systematic practice, introducing a critical dimension: the necessity of deliberate instructional design to realise the IPA's potential in pronunciation mastery fully.

Similarly, Alshangiti's (2015) study examines the specific challenges that Arab EFL learners encounter. His study reaffirms the value of IPA training in addressing persistent segmental error, such as mastering consonants absent in Arabic (e.g., /p/ and /v/) and distinguishing vowel pairs like /ɪ/ vs /i:/. His study demonstrates that learners trained in IPA significantly outperformed their peers in both reading and spontaneous speech tasks. Echoing Alshangiti's evidence, Al-Jarf's (2007) empirical study reinforces and extends these findings. She addresses

pronunciation challenges unique to Arabic-speaking learners, demonstrating that explicit IPA instruction can increase learners' accuracy in producing problematic consonants (e.g., /p/ vs /b/) and vowels (e.g., /ɪ/ vs /i:/). Furthermore, she highlights IPA's utility in empowering learners to independently decode unfamiliar words and self-correct, reducing reliance on external feedback.

Together, these studies affirm IPA's transformative potential in Arab EFL settings, emphasising the importance of embedding phonetic training within holistic, practice-driven frameworks to ensure durable phonological competence. This progression in scholarship sets the stage for examining how such theoretical and empirical foundations can be translated into classroom strategies. While Al-Jarf's work solidifies IPA's role in addressing persistent phonological challenges and fostering learner autonomy, Zahra and Al-Rushaidi's (2020) study offers a critical pivot, advancing the discourse by empirically mapping how IPA training can be operationalised to dismantle fossilised errors and foster autonomy. Their findings claim IPA's efficacy in differentiating high-conflict vowels (e.g., /ɪ/ vs /i:/) and consonants (e.g., /p/ vs /b/). Crucially, their comparison of IPA-based pedagogy with traditional methods reveals its superiority in sustaining phonological retention and autonomy. By highlighting the effectiveness of strategies such as minimal pair drills and IPA charts, Zahra and Al-Rushaidi bridge the gap between theoretical validation and classroom pragmatism. They conclude that systematic IPA instruction can provide a framework for Arab EFL contexts.

Expanding the empirical focus on IPA's classroom applicability, Alghamdi's (2014) study deepens this discourse by foregrounding the temporal dimension of IPA's efficacy. It demonstrates how prolonged, scaffolded exposure, particularly for Arabic-absent sounds, solidifies self-monitoring skills and curricular coherence. His emphasis on systemic factors, such as teacher training and

program design, aligns with Zahra and Al-Rushaidi's pragmatism, reinforcing the interdependence of pedagogical innovation and institutional support in Arab EFL contexts.

Alghamdi substantiates the viability of IPA as a corrective mechanism for fossilized phonological errors in Arab EFL learners, fostering autonomy and vowel differentiation through minimal pair drills and IPA chart engagement. Finally, Abu-Rahma's (2011) study on "Pronunciation and IPA for Arab EFL Learners" indicates that IPA reduces first language interference. His study demonstrates that IPA training significantly improves pronunciation accuracy for Arab learners by addressing first language interference and vowel/stress challenges. However, success depends on structured, long-term exposure. He suggested a temporal framework that highlights the necessity of 10–12 weeks of consistent practice of minimal pairs.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and pedagogical approach grounded in contrastive phonology and second language acquisition theory. Rather than collecting new empirical data, it analyses phonological challenges faced by intermediate Arab EFL learners based on established literature and documented instructional practices. The focus is on how integrating the IPA can be systematised within classroom instruction to address fossilised pronunciation errors.

The analysis draws upon:

- a review of relevant theoretical models, including the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, Interlanguage Theory, and Fossilisation Theory;
- existing empirical studies on Arab learners' pronunciation difficulties and IPA effectiveness;
- and a structured breakdown of problematic English consonants and vowels organised into pedagogical categories and subcategories.

The classification of consonants and vowels was based on:

- their presence or absence in Arabic,
- their phonetic dissimilarity to English counterparts,
- and documented tendencies of mother-tongue interference in Arab learners' speech.

Instructional recommendations, including the use of minimal pairs, phonetic transcription, and contrastive drills, are presented as part of a conceptual instructional framework rather than the result of experimental intervention. The intention is to offer a practical roadmap for EFL educators seeking to integrate IPA as a corrective and preventative tool in their intermediate-level teaching practices.

6. An Overview of Problematic English Consonants for Arab Learners

While Arabic and English share several phonetically similar consonants, notable differences in voicing contrasts, place of articulation, and phoneme inventory lead to persistent pronunciation challenges for Arab learners of English; these differences necessitate targeted instructional strategies.

7. Categories of Problematic Consonants

7.1 Category I: English Consonants with No Direct Arabic Equivalent

These sounds are absent in Arabic and frequently lead to substitution errors.

7.1.1 Voiceless Bilabial Plosive /p/

Contrast: /p/ vs /b/

Standard Error: /p/ → /b/

Instructional Strategy: Aspiration drills, minimal pairs (e.g., *pat* vs *bat*), positional practice.

/p/	/b/
pay /peɪ/	bay /beɪ/
pie /paɪ/	buy /baɪ/
rip /rɪp/	rib /rɪb/
pin /pɪn/	bin /bɪn/
cap /kæp/	cab /kæb/

Practice in different positions:

Initial: pen /pen/, park /pɑ:k/, pig /pɪg/, pot /pɒt/.

Medial: apple /æpəl/, happy /'hæpi/, open /'əʊpən/.

Final: cup /kʌp/, stop /stɒp/, lip /lɪp/.

7.1.2 Voiced Labiodental Fricative /v/

Contrast: /v/ vs /f/

Standard Error: /v/ → /f/

Instructional Strategy: Voicing awareness, articulatory demonstration, minimal pairs.

Minimal pairs (/f/ and /v/)

/v/	/f/
van /væn/	fan /fæn/
veil /veɪl/	face /feɪs/
save /seɪv/	safe /seɪf/
vine /vaɪn/	fine /faɪn/

Practice in different positions:

Initial Position: very /'veri/, vat /væt/, valley /'væli/, vote /vəʊt/, van /væn/.

Medial Position: never /nevə/, over /əʊvə/, heavy /'hevi/, river /rɪvə/.

Final Position: love /lʌv/, leave /li:v/, wave /weɪv/, drive /draɪv/

7.1.3 Velar Nasal /ŋ/

Contrast: /ŋ/ vs /n/

Standard Error: Substituting with /n/ or adding /g/

Instructional Strategy: Minimal pairs (sing vs sin), listening discrimination tasks.

1. sinner /'sɪnər/ vs singer /'sɪŋər/
2. banner /'bænər/ (flag) vs banger /'bæŋər/
3. winning /'wɪnɪŋ/ vs winging /'wɪŋɪŋ/
4. tinning /'tɪnɪŋ/ vs tinging /'tɪŋɪŋ/
5. panning /'pænɪŋ/ vs panging /'pæŋɪŋ/

7.1.4 Voiced Postalveolar Fricative /ʒ/

Contrast: /ʒ/ vs /ʃ/

Standard Error: /ʒ/ → /ʃ/

Instructional Strategy: Articulatory training, sorting exercises (vision vs mission).

Minimal Pairs: words that differ in /ʒ/ vs /ʃ/.

/ʒ/	/ʃ/
pleasure /'pleʒər/	pressure /'preʃər/
vision /'vɪʒən/	fission /'fɪʃən/
beige /beɪʒ/	bash /bæʃ/
rouge /ru:ʒ/	rush /rʌʃ/
garage /gə'reɪʒ/	garnish /'gɑ:rnɪʃ/

7.2 Category II: English Consonants Subject to Negative Transfer from Arabic.

These sounds exist in Arabic but differ phonetically or allophonically, leading to inaccurate approximations.

7.2.1 Palato-Alveolar Affricate /dʒ/

Dialectal Variations: Replaced by /g/ (Egyptian) or /j/ (Gulf)

Standard Error: *jam* → *gam* or *yam*

Instructional Strategy: Contrastive drills, sentence-level practice, dialect-specific correction.

Minimal Pair Practice

Examples: Use words like "jeep" vs "geep" (non-word), "joke" vs "yolk" (for [j] substitution), or "edge" vs "egg." Highlight real contrasts (e.g., "jam" vs "gam")

Positional Drills: Practice /dʒ/ in initial ("jump"), medial ("agent"), and final ("badge") positions.

[g] Egyptian/ Yemeni learners: /dʒ/ vs /g/:

joke vs goat | edge vs egg | badge vs bag

Sentence: The judge dropped his jug of water.

[j] (Gulf/Yemeni learners) /dʒ/ vs /j/:

jam vs yam | joke vs yolk | major vs mayor

Sentence: "He spread jam on the yam."

7.2.2 Alveolar Plosive /t/

Contrast: Arabic ت (dental, unaspirated) vs English /t/ (alveolar, aspirated).

Standard Error: Weak /t/ articulation, unaspirated pronunciation

Instructional Strategy: Tissue test for aspiration, minimal pairs (*tie* vs *die*), stress-based aspiration training.

Place of Articulation: Arabic ت: Dental (tongue touches the back of the upper teeth).

English /t/: Alveolar (tongue touches the alveolar ridge, just behind the teeth).

Aspiration:

Practice in Different Positions

Initial: "table," "time," "tiger."

Medial: "water," "letter," "item."

Final: "cat," "light," "list."

7.2.3 Voiceless Velar Plosive /k/

Issues: Aspiration, place of articulation, and consonant clusters.

Standard Error: orthographical confusion "c", "k" and "qu" "ch" and phonetic environment.

Instructional Strategy: Cluster training (school, clap), aspiration drills.

Initial position aspirated /k/ strong puff of air:

"c" cat, car, cup, cold, call, coffee, camera, candy.

"k" key, king, kite, kiss, kitchen, kind, kick, kid.

"qu" quick, queen, question, quiet, quiz,

"ch" Christmas, chemical, chronic.

7.2.4 Lateral Approximant /l/

Contrast: Light /l/ vs Dark /ɫ/

Standard Error: Only light /l/ produced

Instructional Strategy: Positional contrast drills (light vs milk), tactile and visual feedback on tongue positioning.

Positional Rules:

Light /l/:

At the start of words/syllables: "lamp," "fly," "believe."

Dark /ɫ/:

At the end of words/syllables: "full," bottle," "table."

Before consonants: "help," "milk," killed."

Minimal Pair Drills

Highlight positional differences:

Light vs dark: "light" vs "milk," "leaf" vs "feet."

7.3 Category III: Interdental Fricatives Absent in Arabic

7.3.1 Voiceless /θ/ and Voiced /ð/

Contrast: /θ/ vs /t/; /ð/ vs /d/z/

Standard Errors: Substitutions like think → sink, that → zat

Instructional Strategy: Articulation visuals, minimal pair drills, sentence practice (This is their father's birthday).

Practice in Word Positions

Initial:

/θ/: think, thin, thumb.

/ð/: this, those, they.

Medial:

/θ/: birthday, author.

/ð/: mother, father.

Final:

/θ/: breath, mouth.

/ð/: smooth, bathe.

8. An Overview of Problematic English Vowels for Arab Learners

Arabic and English differ significantly in vowel systems. Arabic typically includes six vowels—three short (/a/, /i/, /u/) and three long (/a:/, /i:/, /u:/)—whereas English has around twelve monophthongs, eight diphthongs, and several central vowels like the schwa /ə/. These discrepancies lead to Standard pronunciation challenges among Arab learners, such as vowel length confusion, diphthong simplification, and schwa omission. This section categorises problematic vowel sounds for Arab EFL learners and provides practical guidance.

9. Categories of Problematic Vowel Sounds

9.1 Category I: Vowel Length and Tension Contrasts

These issues arise due to Arabic's limited vowel length contrasts and lack of short lax vowels.

/ɪ/ vs /i:/ (ship vs sheep)

Contrast: Short lax /ɪ/ vs long tense /i:/

Standard Error: ship → sheep

Pedagogical Strategy: Minimal pairs, vowel length training

Examples:

/sɪt/ vs /si:t/

/bɪn/ vs /bi:n/

/lɪk/ vs /li:k/

/ʊ/ vs /u:/ (pull vs pool)

Contrast: Short /ʊ/ vs long /u:/

Standard Error: /ʊ/ → /u:/

Examples:

/pʊl/ vs /pu:l/

/lʊk/ vs /lu:k/

/fʊl/ vs /fu:l/

9.2 Category II: Vowel Quality Confusions

These vowels do not exist in Arabic and are often approximated or replaced.

/æ/ vs /ɑ:/ (cat vs cart)

Contrast: Front /æ/ vs back /ɑ:/

Standard Error: cart → cat

Examples:

/bæt/ vs /bɑ:t/

/kæt/ vs /kɑ:t/

/mæt/ vs /mɑ:t/

/ʌ/ (cup)

Issue: No equivalent in Arabic

Standard Substitutes: /ʊ/ or /æ/

Examples:

cup /kʌp/ → /kʊp/ or /kæp/

/ɔ:/ vs /ɒ/ (caught vs cot)

Contrast: Long back /ɔ:/ vs short back

/ɒ/

Examples:

/kɔ:t/ vs /kɒt/

/lɔ:/ vs /lɒt/

/pɔ:t/ vs /pɒt/

9.3 Category III: Diphthong Challenges

Due to the rarity of diphthongs in Arabic, learners often reduce them to monophthongs.

/əʊ/ vs /aʊ/ (go vs now)

Contrast: Mid-central glide /əʊ/ vs open

glide /aʊ/

Standard Error: /əʊ/ replaced by /aʊ/

Minimal Pairs:

/nəʊ/ vs /naʊ/

/təʊn/ vs /taʊn/

/həʊl/ vs /haʊl/

Exercise: Listening, discrimination, and sorting words into columns.

Minimal pairs /əʊ/ and /aʊ/

hoe /həʊ/

how /haʊ/

know /nəʊ/

now /naʊ/

tone /təʊn/

town /taʊn/

load /ləʊd/

loud /laʊd/

moan /məʊn/

mouth /maʊθ/

bow /bəʊ/

bow /baʊ/ (verb)

hole /həʊl/

howl /haʊl/

/eɪ/ vs /aɪ/ (day vs die)

Contrast: /eɪ/ mid-front vs /aɪ/ low-central starting point

Minimal Pairs /eɪ/ and /aɪ/

late /leɪt/

light /laɪt/

sane /seɪn/

sign /saɪn/

mate /meɪt/

might /maɪt/

day /deɪ/

die /daɪ/

wait /weɪt/

white /waɪt/

bake /beɪk/

bike /baɪk/

lane /leɪn/

line /laɪn/

pain /peɪn/

pine /paɪn/

/ɔɪ/ vs /aɪ/ (boy vs buy)

Contrast: Back rounded vs low-central
Minimal Pairs:

/ɔɪ/	/aɪ/
boil /bɔɪl/	bile /baɪl/
coin /kɔɪn/	kine /kaɪn/
toy /tɔɪ/	tie /taɪ/
voice /vɔɪs/	vice /vaɪs/
foil /fɔɪl/	file /faɪl/
toil /tɔɪl/	tile /taɪl/
moil /mɔɪl/	mile /maɪl/

/ɪə/ vs /eə/ (near vs square) – British English Focus

Contrast: /ɪə/ (near, fear) vs /eə/ (fair, hair)

Minimal Pairs:

beer /bɪə/	bear /beə/
fear /fɪə/	fair /feə/
here /hɪə/	hair /heə/
peer /pɪə/	pair /peə/

9.4 Category IV: Schwa /ə/

The schwa does not exist in Arabic, posing unique difficulties related to stress, vowel reduction, and unpredictable spelling.

10. Challenges

No reduced vowels in Arabic.

Every syllable tends to be pronounced clearly.

Schwa often appears in unstressed syllables and function words.

10.1 Positions and Examples

Initial Position:

/ə'baʊt/, /ə'gri:/, /ə'raʊnd/

Medial Position:

/bə'nænə/, /'fæməli/, /'lemən/

Final Position:

/'sʊfə/, /'zi:brə/, /'kɒmə/

11. Findings

This section synthesises the findings derived from the theoretical framework, literature review, and pedagogical analysis. Based on contrastive phonology, fossilisation theory, and empirical studies, the following key findings emerged:

11.1 Persistent Pronunciation Challenges

Arab EFL learners consistently struggle with specific English phonemes that have no direct equivalents in Arabic, notably /p/, /v/, /ŋ/, /ʒ/.

Learners also face difficulties with vowel length, diphthongs, and the schwa /ə/, often due to first language transfer and the absence of these features in Arabic.

11.2. Impact of IPA-Based Instruction

Explicit instruction using the IPA enhances learners' ability to perceive and produce correct sounds. IPA enhances learners' phonemic awareness, particularly when instruction involves minimal pairs, transcription exercises, and listening discrimination.

11.3. Reduction in Fossilisation

IPA-supported training significantly reduces pronunciation fossilisation, particularly when integrated early at the intermediate level, as learners have the cognitive maturity to benefit from abstract phonological input.

Structured IPA exposure leads to sustained pronunciation improvement and fewer long-term fossilised errors.

11.4. Enhanced Learner Autonomy

Learners who received IPA instruction reported greater confidence in self-monitoring their pronunciation, decoding dictionary transcriptions, and independent learning.

IPA served as a scaffold for learner autonomy, particularly in contexts where immediate teacher feedback was lacking.

11.5. Pedagogical Implications

The integration of IPA into intermediate-level curricula is most effective when:

- Phonemes are categorised based on first language transfer patterns.
- Instruction is systematic and scaffolded.
- Teachers are trained in contrastive phonology and phonetic instruction.

British Received Pronunciation (RP) remains the most suitable reference accent for Yemeni learners due to its alignment with curricular and testing standards.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have seen where EFL Arab students learning English are likely to find difficulties in pronouncing certain sounds, be they consonants or vowels. These learners need to be immersed in authentic classrooms. Although EFL class-

rooms are foreign, we need to create authentic English classrooms via native speakers' videos, movies, etc. Explicit instruction utilising the IPA symbols empowers intermediate Arab EFL learners to surmount persistent phonological challenges rooted in first language interference. It is the responsibility of teachers, specifically those adopting learner-centered and other learner oriented teaching methods, to create such immersion, giving learners more practice, drills, etc. By highlighting the discrepancies between Arabic and English phonology and orthography, the IPA promotes the metalinguistic awareness necessary for accurate decoding, distinguishing critical phonemic contrasts (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/, /v/ vs. /f/), and achieving refined articulation. This learner-centred approach not only disrupts the fossilisation of first language interference but also cultivates independent pronunciation self-monitoring, a vital skill for effective communication across diverse contexts. In this teaching method, teachers are monitors, observing and correcting students' wrong pronunciation, for instance. Integrating IPA into intermediate curricula represents a crucial move towards a comprehensive language acquisition model that prioritises pronunciation as a fundamental aspect of communicative competence, ultimately unlocking greater fluency and confidence for Arab EFL learners. Future endeavours should focus on developing tailored IPA symbol resources, equipping educators with phonetic expertise, and evaluating the long-term effects of this approach on learners' phonological development and overall language proficiency. Consequently, adopting IPA symbols transcends mere pedagogical preference; it represents a crucial step toward equitable and impactful English language pedagogy within Arabic-speaking contexts.

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