The Status of English Pronunciation Instruction from the Prospective of Iraqi EFL Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

English has become a global language and teaching it as a second or foreign language for the purpose of international communication has increasingly become a universal demand. With the current trend, teaching and learning pronunciation process is one of the most significant features of language instruction since good pronunciation is a key of effective communication, whereas poor pronunciation can lead to a great hindrance in language learning. Like other ESL/EFL countries, it is a matter of great concern that the performance of Iraqi students in English pronunciation is unsatisfied. That is because teaching pronunciation involves a variety of challenges, namely contextual factors. Knowledge about these problematic factors contributes to understanding of how to manage suitable classroom environment for foreign language learning. To this aim, the main concern of this study is to scrutinize the current status of teaching pronunciation at public secondary schools in Iraq and to determine the possible problems that teachers might face in teaching pronunciation and to outline feasible solutions as well. For the study purpose, questionnaire survey was conducted to elicit views held by a group of sixty Iraqi EFL teachers who work at public secondary schools distributed in Baghdad - Al-Resafa 2 district. Simple percentage was used as a statistical test for analysis of data. Conclusions were drawn in the light of the objectives of the study. Recommendations were given on the basis of the findings in hope to provide insights into the common recurring problems of teaching pronunciation and to raise the awareness of all concerned officials to the need to address these challenges to assist EFL teachers to reduce future problems regarding students’ performance in pronunciation of English language.

1- Introduction

As a matter of fact, English is a language of international communication and it is the only widely spoken language in the world. Accordingly, ability to communicate in English effectively has become a paramount requirement in individuals’ life. Besides, the emergence of Communicative Approach, which is currently dominant in language teaching, emphasizes oral communication as the central
purpose of second and foreign language instruction. In this respect, Harmer (2001) accentuates that the main aim of teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language (SL/FL for short) is accomplished when the learners acquire the ability to communicate in the target language effectively in all situations of contemporary life. All other aims are subordinated to this one. This focus on language as oral communication – to understand and being understood- brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation in all language instructions.

What should be drawn to one’s attention is that good pronunciation skills and communication ability are closely linked. Pronunciation is considered to be “an integral part of oral communication” (Morley, 1991: 496) since good pronunciation facilitates communication and enhances intelligibility (Varasarin, 2007). What is more, according to Pourhosein Gilakjani, (2012a), a person with an unintelligible pronunciation may run the risk of not being understood by others despite accuracy in other language skills. This point supports that of Hinofotis and Baily (1980:124-5) who note that “up to a certain proficiency standard, the fault which most severely impairs the communication process in EFL/ESL learners is pronunciation”, not vocabulary or grammar. Poorly pronounced segments and supra-segments may have the result of disorienting the listener and inhibiting comprehension creating a great hindrance in FL learning.

Pronunciation, as cited in (Dictionary.com)," is the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability". All these different aspects of pronunciation work in combination when we speak, and are therefore usually best learned as an integral part of spoken language. Accordingly, it is not surprising to expect that incorporating pronunciation instruction into other skills benefits not only students’ speaking abilities, but also their vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, grammatical accuracy, and reading proficiency.

However, despite this, FL teachers have lots of problems with pronunciation instruction owing to a wide range of contributory factors which in one way or another result in granting the least attention to teaching pronunciation in many ESL/EFL classrooms. Consequently the learners come up with faulty pronunciation which eventually impedes learning and teaching process. A great number of researchers attempted to find the factors affecting pronunciation instruction. Incontestably, it is not easy to give an intact list for affecting factors in pronunciation teaching. Hence, based on our personal experience as teachers and a number of existing studies in varied EFL settings (Brown 1992; Claire 1993; Kelly 2000; Marks
2006; Yates2001), this research addresses the contextual factors that would affect the process of teaching and learning English in Iraq with a view to knowing teachers’ points of view about the current status of teaching English pronunciation.

2- Aim of the Study

Many research has been carried out on pronunciation teaching, but very few studies take into consideration teachers’ views on pronunciation teaching and learning although there is a need to increase the research orientation of teachers and their opportunities to contribute to serious research because they are in a position to provide essential input for reflection and the improvement of the teaching and learning of English. So, the present study is an attempt to highlight the views of the EL teachers regarding the current status of pronunciation instruction at secondary schools in Baghdad and to find out the possible problems arise in teaching pronunciation. Additionally, this study consists of the presentation of the contextual factors which are believed to be the most influential factors in foreign language learning and teaching process in general and in pronunciation teaching in particular with some suggestions to tackle the shortcomings and hitches result in FL classes.

3- Value of the Study

The value of the study derives from the importance attached to the role of pronunciation in the oral communication as a whole. It is hoped that through this study, EFL teachers will be helped to raise their level of self-awareness of making pronunciation instruction a more regular part of their classroom work. The researchers also hope that the findings will be beneficial for designers of textbooks and other relevant responsible bodies contribute in solving problems related to pronunciation material, guide towards better methods and techniques of teaching pronunciation and, consequently, serve in facilitating TEFL in Iraq.

4- Review of Related Literature

Pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners’ competence and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction, yet pronunciation is an area of neglect in the foreign language classroom compared to other language skills and sub-skills. It is entitled as "an orphan' in English language classrooms around the world (Gilbert: 2010). Many countries in the world where English is taught as a FL or SL have reported to suffer from similar problems.

At this stage, it is necessary to review some studies done depending on FL teachers' views about teaching pronunciation and the reasons behind either totally overlooking pronunciation or treating it dubiously in many language settings. As far as teachers' views are concerned,
Fraser (2000b: 5) notes that there is “a need to increase the research orientation of teachers and their opportunities to contribute to serious research because teachers are in a position to provide essential information to linguistics”. Among these studies, Macdonald (2002) notes that some teachers in Australian ESL contexts report that they find pronunciation a problematic area to teach, and they tend to avoid teaching it. Their reasons include the absence of pronunciation in curricula, which discourage these teachers to expand their skills and knowledge about pronunciation through experiment, practice, or formal training. There is also a lack of suitable teaching and learning materials of a high quality, and an absence of an assessment framework with which to map student ability and progress in this area. Similarly, most of Iranian EFL teachers do not prioritize pronunciation instruction in their classes. That is because teaching pronunciation involves a variety of challenges. Among which, as Gilbert (2008) argues, is that teachers often find that they do not have enough time in class to give proper attention to this aspect of English instruction. Another reason is that Iranian EFL teachers are not provided with suitable course books and materials that help them improve their pronunciation teaching. Hayati (2010) affirms that the English textbooks used in Iranian High Schools suffer from shortcomings in the sequence of presentation of materials, text selection, pronunciation exercises, etc. Pronunciation instruction at any level in Bangladesh is no exception. Maniruzzaman (2008) states that the primary, secondary and tertiary EFL settings in Bangladesh hardly have any room for pronunciation teaching. Khan (2007) mentions that the EFL teachers of Bangladesh tend to be unwilling to teach pronunciation because most of them do not know what strategies are appropriate to teach pronunciation as a result they simply avoid teaching pronunciation. Apart from lack of high quality and suitable teaching and learning materials, they also complain about the lack of time to practise pronunciation. As in Bangladesh, some teachers in Taiwan argue that English pronunciation is not important at all inasmuch as very few tests would require students to show abilities related to pronunciation or speaking and it is simply left to chance or given no room (Lin et al., 1995). Likewise, in Mexico, pronunciation is described as "the Cinderella of language teaching"; that means an often low level of emphasis is placed on this very important language skill (Dalton, 2002). It is then apparent that teaching EFL pronunciation has little room in the syllabus, material and classroom. In this regard, Fareh (2012) displays that "inadequate preparation of teachers, lack of motivation on the part of the learners, teacher-centered methods and inadequate assessment techniques are among the major problems that render EFL programs unable to deliver as
expected in the third world countries". She further elaborates that education systems are still traditional. They focus on memorization and rote learning. By the same token, Goss (1999) concluded that Japanese learners of English face a number of challenges including inadequate preparation of teachers, lack of students' motivation and large class sizes. Another study was conducted by Cheng (2004) about the challenges of teaching English as second language in China. The researcher examined these challenges at the level of English language teachers and the teaching contexts. The findings of his investigation revealed that teachers were less prepared in terms of their subject matter and less qualified than their counterparts in other places of the world in terms of methodology. Furthermore, it was reported that teaching takes place in large classes where students are not provided with adequate teaching opportunities.

In the same way, the problems of pronunciation instruction have been demonstrated in studies done by Brown (1992), Claire (1993), Fraser (2000), and Yates (2001) who stress that teachers in adult ESL programs encounter some difficulties meeting the pronunciation learning needs of their students, and have displayed that many language teachers are inclined to avoid dealing with pronunciation in that they lack confidence, skills, and knowledge. Beside this, these studies revealed that curricula, methodology and the lack of appropriate materials, all gave rise to inadequacies of the teaching and learning in this field. Gilbert (2008) justifies that the limited time of the classroom does not allow teachers to devote appropriate attention to pronunciation. Whereas, Couper (2006) finds that researchers and educationalists have failed to guide teachers on how to teach pronunciation or even to teach it at all. By the same token, Silveira (2013) states that the pronunciation component has been greatly overlooked in the language classroom and materials. Even when this component is available in course books, it tends to be piecemeal, isolated from other language skills. In support of the notion that English pronunciation instruction is difficult for some reasons, Harmer (2001) points that the lack of high quality, suitable teaching and learning materials and the lack of time to practice pronunciation are the major reasons that cause teachers not to pay enough attention to English pronunciation. Likewise, Celce-Murcia (1987) states pronunciation is neglected in the syllabus, materials and classroom activities in English L2 classrooms. Moreover, teachers are left without clear guidelines and are faced with contradictory practices for pronunciation instruction. There is no well-established systematic method of deciding what to teach, when, and how to do it. As a result of these problems, pronunciation instruction is ignored and teachers are not very comfortable in teaching pronunciation in their classes.
Reviewing these studies, one can recognize that each study contains some important explanations about what factors contribute to language teaching and learning. The results of studies indicate that contextual variables are found to have a larger effect on degree of language pronunciation in FL classes. If we pay closer attention to these factors, we would be able to reduce future problems regarding pronunciation. Therefore, in order to make pronunciation teaching and learning effective, it would be worthwhile to take these affecting factors into account. Recognizing these factors contributes to understanding of how to manage suitable classroom environment for second or foreign language learning. In addition, they would also enable teachers to provide efficient pronunciation instruction and design their teaching methodology according to students’ needs.

5- Contextual Factors

The classroom is the most important factor when it comes to student learning and teacher instructing. It is a place where students should feel safe and learning should be promoted by handling whatever relates to contextual factors. These factors involve teachers, teaching methods, time spent in the learning, class climate, exposure to the target language, learning opportunity, input, materials, feedback, diver learners domination in the class, mother tongue usage, resources, amount and type of prior pronunciation instruction, the role of formal instruction, learning styles and strategies, and assessment methods all go hand in hand and together add up to important factors that result in good pronunciation teaching and learning.

5-1 Instructional Factors

It is a matter of fact that contact with speakers of the target language is important to acquire a foreign language. Krashen (Littlewood 1984: 60) argues the formal instruction is also a crucial factor and it can have an effect on the rate of learning if it is the learner's sole or major source of language experience. In this regard, Krashen and Seliger (1975) suggest that the classroom is at its most efficient when it functions as an informal, linguistic environment as close as possible to a natural environment (Rockhill 1985: 4488). However, importance of formal instruction cannot be denied as it can help learning by controlling the learner's exposure to language, making the learner aware of significant features or patterns, and devoting some class time specifically to pronunciation practice and exercises. For instance, targeting certain phonemes, word pairs or verb endings, and then providing feedback on their performance. It must be borne in mind that students' mistakes should always be corrected positively and with encouragement (Baker & Westrup, 2003). Furthermore, instead of correcting the mistakes, the teacher can go for peer correction which
would encourage them to come out of inhibition to build their confidence.

Pronunciation is one of the significant aspects of foreign language teaching and a very serious task since good pronunciation facilitates communication and enhances intelligibility (Varasarin, 2007). Similarly, Derwing and Munro (2009) explain that pronunciation is crucial for intelligible communication and argue that pronunciation is learnable and that students want to learn. Beyond dispute, if FL classroom involves special training in the perception and the production of FL pronunciation, it will have a larger effect on FL production accuracy. Besides, it is entirely reasonable to not underestimate the students’ prior instruction taught by teachers whose own pronunciation deviated from the norm. Here, teachers are supposed to take this point into account and deal with any possible fixed or systematic pronunciation errors (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

There is another related issue that deserves to be referred to here is the size of the class. Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989: 31) stress that the size of the class should be normal in order to ensure more active students participation in learning, especially when the main objective of English instruction is the mastery of oral fluency. This matter becomes more complicated in a mixed ability class where we have both intelligent and weak learners. Teacher can tackle this problem by starting with simple and easy tasks. This will encourage the slow learners to participate in the activity and boost their morale. Gradually increasing the difficulty level will sharpen their knowledge, thereby improving the learners and building their confidence.

According to frequency of the mother tongue usage in foreign language teaching is still debatable matter. Some teachers reject the use of first language (L1 for short) or fail to recognize any significant potential in it and others overuse it. Both are abusing a resource of great importance. A rational and judicious use of L1 in EFL classes can only be advantageous. It is better to switch to the mother tongue when it is really necessary. In this respect, Butzkamm (2003) summarizes the principles and advantages of using L1 as follows:
- first language use gives a sense of security and helps learners to be stress-free;
- a foreign language friendly atmosphere is best achieved through selective use of the L1; and
- the use of the L1 saves learners from a feeling of frustration they might have within their FL learning.

For the most part, the difficulty that the learners experience with the language itself and with the textbooks is the pretext for much use of their mother tongue during lessons. The learners often tend to make use of their mother-tongue when it comes to the activities in
productive skill, namely speaking which results in losing the motive of learning the language and lack of practice. So teachers must always be careful to what extent should mother tongue in English lessons be used. Moreover, the acrimonious fact is that many EFL learners have major difficulties with English pronunciation even after years of learning the language. One of basic reasons for this is: learning the subjects from the examination point of view. What worse is the speaking and listening skills and sub-skills are usually neglected not only in teaching but in testing as well. This may explain the poor quality of the students' oral and aural skills. So, school assessment methods may account for the failure of the EFL programs as it causes a negative effect on pronunciation learning which tends to be neglected by many students as long as they know they will not be tested in it, compared with other aspects of English. Instead, it is better to view testing pronunciation as a teaching and learning device rather than being merely a testing device, also as a means to motivate students to appreciate this aspect of English.

5-2 Teacher
The teacher is one of the major pillars of success in the teaching-learning context and any deficiency in his role may negatively affect the accomplishment of the anticipated learning outcomes. While many things can be done to create a context for good teaching, it is teachers themselves who ultimately determine the success of the teaching-learning context for the wide range of roles they undertake to attain required learning outcome. Fareh (2010) sums up the roles of teachers briefly as follows: They
- are the main decision makers at the classroom level,
- decide and modify the curriculum in accordance with the classroom reality,
- help students to generate intrinsic motivation for awakening interest and arousing the will to learn,
- provide better chances for learning and opportunities for practice,
- create interaction in the classroom,
- attract learners to language learning by establishing good rapport with them,
- can diagnose problems and the reasons for these problems, then offer suggestions to remedy them to help the students overcome whatever difficulties they might encounter in the process of learning and thus make learning easier for them.
- can promote students' positive attitude toward the English language as a subject as well as toward the people who speak the language as a beneficial step for attaining the learning goal.
- can make learners aware of significant features or patterns
- ensure the learner receives feedback about performance
- help the learner with learning strategies
- introduce such tasks that are assumed to be interesting and enjoyable to energize the students’ will to learn.
- can plan lessons and manage the classroom time.
- can compensate for deficiencies in the curriculum or the resources they use in their teaching.
- ensure getting proper teaching aids. This would create a proper learning ambiance for the learner making their learning process be effective and speedy.

It is a matter of fact that teachers are the major models and source of input for their students in EFL settings, especially those where students have little opportunity to surround themselves with native input in the target language. Hence their language is the central element in the formal context since they can lay a solid foundation for oral fluency and accuracy. Beyond dispute, teachers should have good pronunciation as well as phonetic knowledge so as to be models; otherwise, they mislead their students.

To keep abreast with the recent trends, it is important for existing EFL teachers to attend sessions or workshops for teaching English as a foreign language to upgrade themselves with professional development in pronunciation teaching.

5-3 Time
Carroll (1982) thinks that the time spent in language learning is a good indicator for better achievements. Every learner requires a certain minimum amount of time in which to understand a learning task, which should be comprehensible, relevant to the learner and challenging but not beyond his coping level. Bloom's theory of the mastery of learning (Lindgren 1976: 201) maintains that given suitable methods of instruction and sufficient time, 90% of students can master the material in the curriculum.

Foreign language learners learn with different pace and different results and strict adherence to school time table allocations may mean some learners have insufficient time to understand a learning task or take role in practising the language, as Cann (1992) states, especially in a large and mixed ability class where we have both intelligent and weak learners. The weak learners don't get opportunity in the presence of the intelligent ones resulting in the shrinking of the weak learners.

By no means, there is a wide consensus that pronunciation is the aspect upon which least time is spent in English lessons. Although the time devoted to foreign language teaching and learning is of great importance to the success of attaining the ultimate objective of the process, yet the maximum time allocated to English lessons in our country is only about 4 hours per week. This limited amount of time could not help all students, even intelligent ones, take role in
practising the language.

5-4 Input

Input factors play an important role in success in language learning. According to Krashen's language learning theory (1982), learners acquire language primarily from the input they receive, and they must receive large amounts of comprehensible input before they are required to speak. He further elaborates that the input is the primary causative variable in second language acquisitions, and the affective variable facilitates the delivery of input to the language acquisition derive. To recover such deficiencies, Krashen (1985), argues that language can be taught in the classroom if comprehensible input is available and if the teacher is able to create meaningful situations in which this language can live and breathe, besides reducing the 'affective filter' of students to allow the input in. The importance of input for language assimilation, according instructed learners, puts additional attention to the need for a wide range of input stimuli (qualified teacher, authentic materials, learning activities, teaching aids, time spent in language learning, the type of instruction, source of instruction, etc).

5-5 Exposure to Target Language

Let us now consider one of the most important factors in language acquisition, which has been found to interact crucially with other factors especially age and the amount of time available: exposure. Most authors agree that the combination of high quality and extensive exposure together with early starting age is a good predictor of native or near-native FL acquisition (Asher&Garcia, 1969; Thompson, 1991) and an approach to reduce the first language interference.

Prior studies have established that children acquire the phonetic system of a foreign language relatively easily compared to adult language learners (e.g. Piske et al.; 2001, Flege 1991). The Critical Period Hypothesis proposed by Lennenberg (1967) states that “complete mastery of a second language is no longer possible if learning begins after the end of the putative critical period” (Piske et al. 2001: 195). This is where the difference between late and early learning lies because when another language is learned or acquired after puberty, the phonetic system of L1 interferes with the new sound system of a second language resulting in a “foreign” accent (Flege 1991, Piske et al. 2001). This belief is further elaborated by Leather and James (1991) who claim that since adults have already consciously formed and developed their L1 sound system, they tend to use the established sound patterns and categories of their L1 which makes it difficult for them to perceive and reproduce the different sounds in L2. Contrarily, younger learners are less attuned to their phonetic system of the first language and therefore are able to
establish new phonetic categories more easily (Flege: 1991). To lessen the interference of learner’s first language with the target language, it has been suggested that continuous practice in L2 is necessary (Piske et al. 2001, Muñoz & Llanes 2014).

With the term ‘exposure’, we are referring to all the very diverse types of contact that learners have with the target language, including listening to the media, real interactions, classroom instruction, reading, videos, films, CDs, TV programs, computer assisted language teaching programs, etc.

There are two main kinds of exposure commonly referred to in foreign language learning literature. Although they are distinct in many aspects, they both provide opportunities for the language learner to carry out the various tasks involved in learning a foreign language. The "natural language learning" is a situation where the language learner picks up a foreign language in the environment in which it is spoken from others speaking with the purpose of using it to communicate. As the goal for natural language learning is communication, the learner is under pressure to make use of his entire language potential in order to communicate effectively. This constant exposure provides a necessary form of practice and effect pronunciation skills. The "formal or classroom learning" is the learning of language in a situation where only the teacher has command of it and controls the exposure so it will lead to learning. The goal is learning so the tasks presented to the learner is smaller segments making it easier for the learner to analyze, synthesize, and match thus giving time for memory and opportunity for sufficient practice (Spolsky, 1989).

In learning foreign language, Krashen (1982) confirms that greater exposure to the target language makes it easier to acquire good pronunciation. On the other hand, if a learner is aware of the necessity of being exposed to the target language, s/he maximizes using of its opportunities. If the learner does that, s/he will be more successful in case of improving his/her pronunciation.

5-6 Methods and materials development

The methodology applied by teachers in the classroom is another crucial factor in FL learning because it may underpin or undermine it. Language fluency is the outcome of effective teaching methodology. To attain the desired objectives, one must always bear in mind that just as no two students are exactly alike; no two students learn in exactly the same way. Each learner in the class has a different preferred learning way in which s/he learns best, and which can make it difficult for the teacher to be the most effective one. Teacher’s goal is to help all of these students learn regardless of their preferred learning style. In order to effectively teach these diverse groups,
teachers need to understand the different learning styles and tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs and styles of all of their students. Some people learn best from reading, while others need to see a demonstration or touch something. Still others may learn best when they hear the information. It must be an interesting method which would keep the learners involved and motivated so that they use in their real-life situations. Moreover, teachers should provide an assortment of instructional techniques to meet the learning needs of all students. This would create a proper learning ambiance for the learner. When the learners get proper learning facilities and ambiance, their learning process will be effective and speedy. Fraser (2000a: 2) posits that ESL teachers “need to be provided with courses and materials to help them improve their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation.” She adds that there is also a need for “high quality, effective materials, especially computer-based materials with audio demonstrations, for learners of ESL pronunciation, both for self-access and for use in classes where the teacher needs support of this kind.”

Materials developers need to address pronunciation skills in a more integrated way result from a careful analysis and description of the learners’ needs (Jordan, 1992; Morley, 1998), in order to give teachers the support they need. To determine the level of emphasis to be placed on pronunciation within the curriculum, one should consider the following particular variables:

1. The learners (ages, educational backgrounds, experiences with pronunciation instruction, motivations, general English proficiency levels)
2. Institutional variables (teachers’ instructional and educational experiences, focus of curriculum, availability of pronunciation materials, class size, availability of equipment)
3. Linguistic variables (diversity or lack of diversity of learners' native language compared with the target language)
4. Methodological variables (method or approach included by the program).
5. Strategies for English Pronunciation Instruction that can help learners meet their personal and professional needs. They are as follows:
   • Identify specific pronunciation features that cause problems for learners
   • Make learners aware of the prosodic features of language (stress, intonation, rhythm)
   • Focus on developing learners’ communicative competence.

At any rate, although there are more areas of concern than the ones discussed here, these are believed to be the most critical to the success of English pronunciation teaching and learning process in formal
classes. Therefore, in order to make pronunciation teaching and learning effective, it would be worthwhile to identify and take in account what teachers are likely to face when teaching English pronunciation owing to a range of these factors in order to help them improve their students' pronunciation.

6- The Study Method

Population
English language teachers of secondary schools in Baghdad, Al–Risafa 2 constituted population of the study. At time, the total number of female English teachers distributed in 49 public secondary schools for girls in Al- Risafa 2 district was 239.

The Sample
From 30 public secondary schools in Baghdad, 2 female English teachers have been randomly selected from each school. Altogether 60 English language teachers at secondary schools have been selected as a sample of the study. All hold BA degree in Education/English language with eight to twenty-five years of teaching experience. The participants of the study aged between 31-50.

7- Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study included a questionnaire to collect the data. To describe the teachers' profile, sixty participants were asked to fill out a background information sheet consisting of some items, such as age, education background, years of teaching experience, and so on.

A questionnaire has been adapted from that of Nusrat Jahan's (2008) because it was well-designed and employed for a similar purpose. To better suit the FL settings in Iraq, some of the questions have been deleted and some are added by the help of language and research experts. All in all, it is composed of eight items consisting of multiple choice questions, questions on a Likert scale of 1-5. There was also an open item in which the participants had to write complete answers. The questionnaire was applied to a random group of 20 EFL secondary school teachers before gathering data. The finding has indicated that the items of the questionnaire are clear and stated in an adequate way as well as they save time and effort when the main performance is run.

8- Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researchers personally visited the randomly chosen schools and administered the questionnaire to the subjects who were requested to fill the questionnaire. The data has been collected in June 2016 in a quite frank way to facilitate the participants. Filling out the questionnaire took them approximately 15 minutes. All the participants have been told that the study was designed to know the teachers’ views regarding the current state of English pronunciation.
instruction and the possible challenges they face (Questionnaire is available in the appendix -1-). After collecting the data, it has been analyzed carefully and scored by hand to display the percentage of the results.

9- Survey Analysis and Results:
This section discusses the results corresponding to each questionnaire statement in the order in which they appeared in the survey.
At first, the respondents were asked to take a stance on the problem expressed in the following statement “Are you satisfied with the students’ pronunciation level while they start English language class.” Their task was to gauge students' pronunciation level on a 5-point scale, i.e. 'Strongly Satisfied - Satisfied - Neutral - Dissatisfied - Strongly Dissatisfied' Most of respondents have negative beliefs regarding the students’ pronunciation level while they start their language course as presented in the Table (1). To be more precise, 60% were dissatisfied with this statement; 15% teachers said they were 'satisfied' with the students’ pronunciation level, the rest 6.66% chose a more moderate option by ticking the answer ‘Neutral’, while the remaining 18.33% chose the option ‘strongly dissatisfied’ and no one ticked the option ‘Strongly Satisfied’.

The second item in the questionnaire sought to obtain the respondents’ opinions as to the following statement: ‘How many students of your class are really poor in pronunciation?’ Here, 26% teachers ticked ‘80% and above’. 35% teachers ticked ‘70% and above’.11.66% ticked the option ‘60% and above’. Besides, 16.66% of teachers chose ‘50% and above’, while 10% teachers ticked the option ‘Less than 50%’. See Table 2.

According to the third item questioning whether the teachers spend a significant amount of time in providing instruction to improve their students' pronunciation, 40% ticked the option ‘yes’, while the remaining 60% responded negatively ascribing that to limited time allocated to practice pronunciation items in the lesson period. They complained that their classes are overcrowded with 50 students, that the teacher had little or no room to move around to give individual attention to students. In addition, they are in need of updating their pronunciation teaching knowledge and to be directed how to address themselves to pronunciation teaching. What is worse is that pronunciation activities and exercise within textbooks are almost marginalized.

Multiple answers were accepted in collecting the data for the problems teachers face in teaching pronunciation. The data shown in Table (4) illustrates the most five prominent reasons for their problems are as follow: first and foremost, 98%, constituting the majority, ticked the point of insufficient pronunciation activities and exercises in
textbooks, 86% ticked the option that teachers are left without clear method guidelines to decide what, when, and how to teach pronunciation skills. Besides, 81% of them attributed the problem to getting students demotivated as their pronunciation skills are not tested. 71% referred to insufficient time devoted to pronunciation teaching as one of the problems they face in language instruction. While 70% ticked the point "Students are fossilized and they are difficult to be recovered". Equally, 70% regarded unavailability of modern and authentic resources and materials for pronunciation teaching as one of the challenges in pronunciation teaching. The remaining percentages were distributed successively among the remaining problems. 60% referred to the difficulty in understanding students' poor pronunciation due to insufficient practice on pronunciation in prior classes. While the influence of the mother tongue on students' pronunciation got penultimate rank, gaining 24% of the participants' ticks. Finally, only 5% ticked the choice "Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation as they are unaware of its importance".

When the teachers were asked about kinds of help they provided for improving their students' pronunciation, 16.66% of them marked the option that they taught their students how to use dictionary especially the digitals. 41% of them, which is considered the majority, ticked that they detected students' wrong pronunciation in class and correct immediately. On the other hand, 28.33% teachers ticked drilling minimal pairs to discriminate sounds as send/sent. Only 10% said that they used audio/video tapes in class. Finally, 3.33% of the teachers said they arranged a group discussion where peers were allowed to detect their partners fault. See Table (5).

In Table (6), respondents' replies to the question "What kinds of materials do you use in teaching pronunciation?" revealed that most of the teachers, constituting 96.33%, were dependent on particular text book whereas a few teachers preferred to provide hand out.

As shown in Table (7), when the teachers were asked about the most common activity that they followed while teaching pronunciation in language class, 75% ticked the option "Imitation of sound and repetition of drills". 3.33% teachers taught their students' pronunciation by rhymes or songs, 18.33% used spelling equivalencies to teach pronunciation. While 3.33% teachers taught pronunciation by practicing tongue twister. But no one ticked Performing dialogues and Self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech options. Lastly, as manifested in Table (8), teachers' responds to the last question revealed that 35% of the teachers ticked the option "Yes" to indicate that students' pronunciation level was improved at the end of the course.
10- Discussion:
From the previous analyses, it seems reasonable to deduce that a negative picture emerges from the first set of responses since approximately two thirds of EFL teachers have negative impression about students' pronunciation level at the onset of their course at secondary school. Wherein 60% were dissatisfied with this statement and 18.33% chose the option ‘Strongly dissatisfied’. This is in agreement with the outcome of the item No. 2 which bears witness to the pronunciation problem among the Iraqi learners. Inasmuch as, 26% of teachers believe that ‘80% and above of their students are really poor in pronunciation’ and 35% of teachers confirmed that ‘70% and above’ of their students were really poor in pronunciation.

When the teachers were required to declare whether they devoted a significant amount of time in providing instruction to improve their students' pronunciation, 60% responded negatively attributing that to some reasons working behind the disregarding of teaching pronunciation. Firstly, they stated apparently that pronunciation activities and exercises are almost pushed aside in textbooks and they are left without clear guidelines to decide what and how to teach it. This often leads to discouraging results, and discouraged students and teachers end up wanting to avoid pronunciation altogether (Gilbert, 2008). Secondly, they complained that the situation is worsened with adhering to the limited time allocated to English lesson which minimizes opportunity to address pronunciation practice. Thirdly, apart from the large class size which is regarded a big obstacle to practice pronunciation; teachers stated they have not attended any in service course or workshop of teaching pronunciation to update their pronunciation teaching knowledge. The parallel between the findings of the present study and those of some earlier researchers in this field is clear and striking as in the studies conducted by Harmer (2001), Macdonald (2002), Cheng (2004), Gilbert (2008), and Hayati (2010). According to the item No. 4, the finding reveals that the most prominent pronunciation problems that teachers face are the following: first of all, as the majority, 98% see that they entirely relay on course textbooks which hardly contain any pronunciation activities and exercises which meet students' needs. This leads to underestimating the importance of pronunciation. Then 86% ticked the option teachers are left without clear method guidelines to decide what, when, and how to teach pronunciation skills. Such deficiency in Iraqi context results in leaving teachers reluctant to address such an important area of oral language. Besides, 81% of them attributed the problem to getting students demotivated as their pronunciation skills are not tested. The evaluation of students' pronunciation is not given the place it deserves in EFL classes in Iraq. This causes a negative
effect on pronunciation learning which tends to be neglected by many students as long as they know they will not be tested in it, compared with other aspects of English. 71% of the respondents referred to inability of devoting enough time to pronunciation teaching as one of the problems they face in language instruction due to the importance given to other areas in textbooks whereas pronunciation skills are marginalized. So, they generally sacrifice teaching pronunciation in order to spend valuable class time on other emphasized areas of language in textbooks although today's overall aim of teaching EFL is to help learners develop their spoken language of which pronunciation is the prominent component. In this case, strict adherence to school time table allocations means students have insufficient time to be exposed to language aspects. Thus, no wonder why Iraqi students' level of English pronunciation is unsatisfied. 70% confirmed having difficulties because of unavailability of tools to support them in classes. By the same token, 70% indicated that" students are fossilized and they are difficult to recover".

Regarding the kinds of help that teachers provided for improving their students' pronunciation, 41.66% of them which is considered the majority ticked that they detected students' wrong pronunciation in class and correct immediately, whereas 28.33% teachers ticked 'Drilling minimal pairs. Whereas 16.66% acknowledged that they taught their students how to use dictionary, especially the digital. Most audible dictionaries contain International Phonetic Alphabet symbols with primary and secondary stress. If teachers help them to know these symbols in the dictionary, students will learn how to pronounce new words without teachers’ help. The finding shows that techniques used in EFL classes are still traditional, nevertheless, are somehow beneficial to bring some sort of improvement on the part of students' level as the outcome of the final point of the questionnaire shows.

During teaching pronunciation in language classes, the most common activity that teachers adopted were imitation of sound, repetition of drills, and spelling equivalencies respectively. But repetition and imitation of sounds again and again discourage students and lead to boredom and eventually to pronunciation avoidance (Gilbert, 2008). Audio or video tapes in class were also a favorite activity among some teachers, but constituting only 13.33%. Anderson-Hsich (1994) stated that suprasegmentals like stress, rhythm and intonation can be taught effectively by visual and auditory feedback. Teachers' reports emphasize that modern techniques of teaching pronunciation are not employed by language teachers in foreign language classes. The outcome of this study also reveals that the amount of time and effort devoted to pronunciation teaching seems to rely, to a large degree, on
the individual language teacher. In other word, some language teachers are more willing than others to provide appropriate and effective teaching techniques for the students in their classrooms. By some means, good teachers can often compensate for deficiencies in the curriculum or the resources they use in their teaching. So, 35% of the teachers indicated that students’ pronunciation level was improved at the end of the course.

11- Conclusion
To conclude the finding, it is really challenging for FL teachers to focus on pronunciation in English classes in Iraqi for a number of reasons. In fact, there are few appropriate tools available to support teachers in classes and no defined standards of what pronunciation practice should be included due to deficiency in clear gaudiness methods to teaching pronunciation provided to support FL teachers. Another challenging is unavailability of in-service training in the field of teaching pronunciation to expand teachers' skills and knowledge about pronunciation that support their effectiveness in the field. This situation is worsened by the fact that pronunciation activities and exercises hardly given any room in textbooks. Apart from fossilization on the part of the students, there is a dearth of pronunciation assessment. Also, the limited time allocated to English lesson does not allow teachers to devote appropriate attention to pronunciation. Moreover, teaching takes place in large classes where students are not provided with adequate teaching and learning opportunities and being involved in oral interaction. All these hinder teachers to devote appropriate attention to pronunciation and render EFL programs unable to deliver as expected.

Needless to say, these variables, among other variables that fall within the brief of external variables, play a significant role in securing successful atmosphere for teaching and learning pronunciation in formal settings if all possible scientific and practical means are taken in consideration to overwhelm these common recurring problems to get the Iraqi secondary school students to fulfill the aim of managing the standard English pronunciation level.

12- Recommendation:
Depending on the conclusion drawn from this study, the following recommendations are suggested for creating better teaching-learning circumstances:
- Pronunciation should be viewed in the same light as the other skills and sub-skill of the English language, such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and so on, since it is a crucial part of communication.
- Pronunciation components have to be incorporated in the materials, classroom activities and testing tools because different
aspects of pronunciation can be worked on any time during the instruction.
- There is an urgent need for in-service training for teachers to keep them abreast of the recent teaching-learning trends in skill knowledge and effective teaching techniques and methods.
- There is a need for high quality, effective visual-aural materials, especially computer–based materials with audio demonstrations for learners of EFL pronunciation, both for self access and for use in classes where the teacher needs support of this kind.
- Encouraging the regular and consistent use of dictionaries to get students be aware of phonemic symbols of sounds and stress placement.
- More attention has to be paid to evaluating students’ pronunciation abilities both during and at the end of a course using various activities since test is a real reflection of student’s ability to produce or perceive English pronunciation correctly.
- Teachers have to employ some funny methods and various techniques during teaching pronunciation so that learners enjoy every moment while learning and participating in class activities.
- Teachers should focus on individual students, especially those with bad pronunciation, while group activities are performed in the class.
- Teachers ought to allocate period of time of their lessons on teaching how to pronounce a new and difficult vocabulary and raise students awareness of stress, rhythm, and intonation pattern of English
- Teachers should speak clearly and slowly in pronunciation class and they have to make sure that their language is standard, understandable, and appropriate for their students’ level. Thus, students can improve their pronunciation by listening to their teachers carefully.
- Providing the EFL teachers with course books and materials that support their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation.
- Pronunciation should be given increased prominence within formal curricula, offering detailed guidance for teachers on teaching and learning goals and assessment.

References


Fraser, H. (2000b). Literacy vs oral communication skills for ESL learners. In Literacy Link, Newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.


Jordan, J. 1992, 'Helping ESOL students to improve their pronunciation', Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (EDRS No. ED 359 837).


Appendix -1-

Personal Details:
Name: ……………………
Age: ……………………
Years of Experience: ……………
Province: ……………… District:………………
Qualification: …………… Level You Teach………………

Questionnaire Items
1. Are you satisfied with the students’ pronunciation level while they start English Language Class?

   (Tick the best answer)
   a. Strongly Satisfied
   b. Satisfied
   c. Neutral
   d. Dissatisfied
   e. Strongly Dissatisfied

2. How many students of your class are really poor in pronunciation (if any)?
   a. 80% or above
   b. 70% or above
   c. 60% or above
   d. 50% or above
   e. Less than 50%

3. Do you spend a significant amount of time in providing instruction to improve their pronunciation?
   □ Yes   □ No
4. What are the problems you face in teaching pronunciation? Options: (Multiple answers were allowed)

A- Students are influenced by their mother tongue.
B- They are not concerned about their pronunciation as they are not tested for their pronunciation skills.
C- They didn't get enough practice on pronunciation in prior classes so it is difficult to understand their poor pronunciation.
D- Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation as they are unaware of its importance.
E- Textbooks contain insufficient pronunciation activities and exercises.
F- Students are fossilized; there is no way they will improve.
G- Unavailability of authentic resources and materials for pronunciation teaching such as songs, CDs, computers.
H- Insufficient time is devoted to pronunciation teaching.
I- You are left without clear method guidelines to decide what to teach, when, and how to do it.

5. What kinds of help do you provide for improving your students’ pronunciation? (Tick the best answer)

☐ Teach them how to use dictionary
☐ Detect their wrong pronunciation in class and correct immediately
☐ Use audio/video tapes in class
☐ Arrange a group discussion where peers are allowed to detect their partners' fault
☐ Drilling minimal pairs to discriminate sounds as send/sent

6. What kinds of materials do you use in teaching pronunciation?

☐ Particular text book ☐ Hand out

7. What is the most common activity that you follow while teaching pronunciation in language class?

(Tick the best answer)

☐ Imitation of sound and repetition of drills
☐ Self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech
☐ Performing dialogues
☐ Learning by rhymes or songs
☐ Practicing tongue twister
☐ Using spelling equivalencies

8. Do the students improve their pronunciation at the end of the course?

☐ Yes ☐ No
### Questionnaire Items Answered

#### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied with the students' pronunciation level while they start English Language Class?</td>
<td>Strongly Dissatisfied</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Dissatisfied</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.33%</td>
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#### Table 2

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<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many students of your class are really poor in Pronunciation?</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than 50%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
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#### Table 3

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<th>Question</th>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you spend a significant amount of time in providing instruction to improve their pronunciation?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>60%</td>
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</table>

4- What are the problems you face in teaching pronunciation? Options:

(Multiple answers were allowed)

A- Students are influenced by their mother tongue.
B- They are not concern about their pronunciation as they are not tested for their pronunciation skills.
C- Students didn't get enough practice on pronunciation in prior classes so it is difficult to understand their poor pronunciation.
D- Students are reluctant to improve their pronunciation as they are unaware of its importance.
E- Textbooks contain insufficient pronunciation activities and exercises.
F- Students are fossilized; there is no way they will improve.
G- Unavailability of authentic resources and materials for pronunciation teaching such as songs, CDs, computers.
H- Insufficient time is devoted to pronunciation teaching.
I- You are left without clear method guidelines to decide what to teach, when, and how to do it.

#### Table 4

<table>
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<th>Percentage</th>
<th>EFL Teachers’ Choices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of help do you provide for improving your students’ pronunciation?</td>
<td>Teach them how to use dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detect their wrong pronunciation in class and correct immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use audio/video taps in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange a group discussion where peers are allowed to detect their partners fault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drilling minimal pairs to discriminate sounds as send/sent</td>
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</table>

Table 6

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of materials do you use in teaching pronunciation?</td>
<td>Particular text book</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>96.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hand out</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the most common activity that you follow while teaching pronunciation in language class?</td>
<td>Imitation of sound and repetition of drills</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performing dialogues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching by rhymes or songs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicing tongue twister</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using spelling equivalencies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the students improve their Pronunciation at the end of the Course?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers: Imran Shafei Al-Rashed

The authors studied the improvement of students' pronunciation at the end of the course.

Results:

- Yes: 35%
- No: 65%

Analysis:

The study concluded that the teachers are capable of improving students' pronunciation. However, there is still room for improvement, with 65% of students not showing improvement.

The study recommends further research to understand the factors contributing to this result.