




## SAUDI ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR OWN PRONUNCIATION AND USE OF TEACHING PRACTICES OF PRONUNCIATION SKILLS



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### ABSTRACT

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This descriptive quantitative analytical study sought to investigate English pronunciation skills of English language teachers themselves, who often neglect to teach this skill owing to lack of availability or awareness about pronunciation teaching practices. This study filled the gap of identifying the right teaching pronunciation practices as well as examining teachers' own pronunciation skills. This study investigated pronunciation practices of 67 EFL school teachers at Az Zulfi, a small city in the Riyadh region of Saudi Arabia. This study investigated how they taught pronunciation, and their priorities regarding pronunciation; what factors affected their teaching of pronunciation; how they perceived pronunciation, and whether they felt confident and skilled enough to teach and develop it. To collect data, we used an online Google form questionnaire, which was subjected to SPSS analysis. The study uncovered the following results: a) the majority of the EFL teachers in the sample considered pronunciation an essential skill in learning English, b) the teachers stated that communicative practice is the best way to teach pronunciation, c) the teachers considered both segments and supra segments in their teaching, d) audio/visual labs may enhance the teaching of pronunciation, and e) and the majority the teachers were certain that they needed to complete more training courses. The study suggests that future researches should consider larger number of teachers. Besides it would better to use more than one research tool for data collection.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature on teaching pronunciation in EFL scenario. It examines the practices of teaching pronunciation in EFL context which is considered an important skill in learning any second or foreign language. Furthermore, it sheds light on the perception of Saudi teachers towards their own pronunciation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is an essential part of learning a second or foreign language. It enables a learner to communicate effectively with others. For many years, teaching English as a SL or FL focused on grammar, reading, writing, and vocabulary at the expense of pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Jennifer Ann Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, & Urzúa, 2016) this may be due to the false belief that pronunciation cannot be easily taught with other skills (MacDonald, 2002).

Along these lines, placement tests have historically been designed to measure students' performance in all skills except pronunciation. As a result, learners may have similar overall L2 skills but vary in terms of pronunciation. Ultimately, this asymmetry may present a challenge for teachers, who often need training in best practices for teaching pronunciation (Jennifer Ann Foote et al., 2016). Notably, it has been suggested that "pronunciation instruction would be ineffective and difficult to teach, and as a result, cause discomfort and anxiety among teachers because of teachers' own inadequate knowledge on how to teach pronunciation, and the lack of teaching resources" (Yagiz, 2018).

To date, little work has been done on teachers' perceptions and practices regarding pronunciation. Some related research however has been done in Turkey (Uztosun, 2013) Brazil (Buss, 2015) Canada (Jennifer Ann Foote et al., 2016) Indonesia (Moedjito, 2016) Saudi Arabia (Alsofyani & Algethami, 2017) and Iran (Pourhosein & Rahimy, 2019) but; most of these studies focused on pronunciation teaching practices and teachers' beliefs regarding teaching pronunciation. Responding to the lack of research on teachers' perceptions of their own pronunciation as well as teaching pronunciation practices, this study sought to illuminate how Saudi English teachers evaluated their own pronunciation and, moreover, how they taught this important skill.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a lack of studies examining teachers' self-perception and practices, especially in terms of pronunciation. A better understanding of teachers' perceptions will inform best practices for English language pedagogies; this study sought to contribute to this project. The body of this paper as follows: in section 2, the researcher is going to explain the tool that was used, the subjects of this study, and the collection and analysis of the data. Then, in section 3, the explanation of this study's results, followed by the discussion of these findings in section 4. Finally, in section 5, the conclusion and recommendations were drawn.

### *1.1. Problem Statement*

The current study sought to identify the state of pronunciation pedagogy in Saudi schools; in particular, we were curious whether teachers gave pronunciation the same amount of attention to as other skills or considered pronunciation as a secondary skill. Meanwhile, this study also sought to shed light on how Saudi English teachers perceived their own skills in English pronunciation, such as whether they felt they needed training on how to teach pronunciation and whether they were satisfied with their pronunciation level. A good deal of research has already been done on teaching pronunciation as SL or FL and how English teachers perceived their pronunciation. However, in the Arabic context, especially the Saudi context where English is a FL, such studies are rare. Much work exists on other skills, such as reading and vocabulary, in the Saudi context, and pronunciation deserves similar attention as it is an essential skill to master the language. This study offers a detailed documentation on EFL teachers' attitudes to pronunciation in Saudi Arabia and their pronunciation teaching practices.

### *1.2. Research Questions and Aims*

The current study addressed the following questions:

1. What pronunciation teaching practices do EFL teachers use?
2. What are the EFL teachers' perception of their own pronunciation?

In line with the questions of the study, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the state of pronunciation pedagogy (teaching practices) in Saudi schools, particularly, at Az Zulfi school.
2. See how Saudi teachers perceived their pronunciation.

### *1.3. Significance of the Research*

The findings of this study contribute to existing studies in similar fields and serve as a reference for researchers interested in conducting studies on teaching English as FL. This paper sheds light on the way Saudi teachers teach

pronunciation, including their priorities in teaching this important skill. In addition, it will help teachers to identify weaknesses in their language and language teaching and, moreover, will encourage them to focus on pronunciation as a crucial skill worth teaching. Ultimately, this paper seeks to offer insights to identify best practices for developing teachers' and students' pronunciation skills.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Teachers' Pronunciation Practices

The widespread use of the term “a teacher's practice” is sometimes used to describe how a teacher adapts to present information to students. Understanding teachers' practices are key to identifying any weaknesses in their own teachings with an objective to improve them. Such insights ultimately impact students' performance—after all, the student is the main axis in the educational process. A good deal of literature has paid particular attention to teachers' pronunciation practices. [Berikrentz, Derwing, and Rossiter \(2001\)](#) examined how teachers taught L2 pronunciation in Canada. This study's findings showed that teachers paid attention to both segmental and supra segmental on their teaching. Moreover, they used computer labs in their teaching. [Foote, Holtby, and Derwing \(2010\)](#) conducted a comparative study, to examine teachers' beliefs, approaches, and resources in teaching pronunciation. The results showed that teaching instruction had not changed substantially. In addition, they also found that more training opportunities were available. However, teachers' beliefs remained the same and teachers continued to focus on segmental and supra segmental approaches. In a larger study conducted in seven European countries, [Henderson et al. \(2012\)](#) explore English pronunciation practices. The main findings showed that most teachers emphasized the importance of pronunciation, like any other English skill, and recognized its importance in the process of English language communication.

Teachers have not historically received official or substantial training on how to teach pronunciation. Notably, [Sarıkaya \(2013\)](#) surveyed 140 EFL teachers in Turkey to examine their perceptions and practices regarding teaching of English pronunciation skills. The main findings showed a relationship between years of experience and confidence in teaching pronunciation skills. Moreover, all teachers paid attention to their pronunciation in their classes. Those who had completed phonological courses during their BA were willing to teach pronunciation more than those who had not. For some respondents, spending time in a foreign country was not enough to have confidence in pronunciation. Besides, no significant relationship was found between classroom practices and teachers' perception towards teaching pronunciation. These findings confirm the results of an earlier Brazilian study, in which [Buss \(2015\)](#) showed that Brazilian teachers have positive attitudes towards teaching pronunciation. The study found that teachers directly corrected their pronunciation mistakes and rarely used resources to handle these mistakes. They only focused on teaching segments; since 46.7% used textbook exercises to teach pronunciation skills. However, the study reported that the most challenging parts of teaching pronunciation were vowel sounds and intonation.

Meanwhile, [Alsofyani and Algethami \(2017\)](#) explored EFL teachers' beliefs and practices at the English Language Centre at Taif University, surveying fifty-five English teachers. The responses were subjected to quantitative analysis. This study found that pronunciation was typically taught by correcting mispronounced words or teaching specific features of pronunciation. Moreover, teachers depended mainly on textbook activities to teach pronunciation. In addition, the lack of labs was found to affect the process of teaching pronunciation. Teachers also believed that repetition, segmental, and supra segmental activities were most effective for improving students' pronunciation. Meanwhile, individual sounds, vowels and supra segmental features were the most common pronunciation problems. In Turkey, [Yagiz \(2018\)](#) used a mixed method on 164 EFL teachers to understand their pronunciation cognition and teaching practices. The results showed that the teachers were confident to some extent about their knowledge of pronunciation. Furthermore, phonetics courses in college education proved 75% beneficial; instructors did not need any further training in teaching pronunciation. As for correcting students' pronunciation

mistakes, they tended to correctly correct them. Moreover, they preferred to practice segmental compared to supra segmental features. One study by Pourhosein and Rahimy (2019) examined how computer-assisted pronunciation teaching helped teachers improve their pronunciation practices by conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 Iranian teachers. The findings of this study showed that Iranian teachers have problems teaching pronunciation; such as lack of time, knowledge, experience, and insufficient suitable pronunciation materials.

### 2.2. Teachers' Perception of their Pronunciation

Little attention has been paid to teachers' perception, of their own pronunciation. A study by Sarikaya (2013) showed that teachers were usually satisfied with their pronunciation. Moreover, those who had completed phonetic courses concentrated more on teaching sounds than those who had not. Moedjito (2016) investigated 110 teachers and 230 university students in Indonesia through a written questionnaire aimed at discovering teachers' and students' perceptions of their pronunciation. This study found that EFL teachers and students considered pronunciation a problematic area in learning and teaching English. The results revealed that they prioritized segment features like consonants and vowels. Meanwhile, in a mixed-method investigation of 111 English foreign language trainees' self-perceptions toward pronunciation and their attitudes toward its instruction, Gürsoy and Hüseyinoglu (2017) found that most respondents believed that pronunciation was an important skill. Moreover, they also paid attention to correctly pronouncing sounds. However, they were not content with their pronunciation levels. Notably, they were advised to take phonetic courses to accurately produce sounds.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1. The Tool

The study tool was an online Google forms questionnaire. It was adapted from Sarikaya (2013) who designed this tool to reveal EFL Turkish teachers' perception of their pronunciation skills and their pronunciation pedagogies at a Turkish Gazi University. The questionnaire comprised four sections: personal information, time spent in teaching pronunciation, self-perception, and pronunciation practices. The current study questionnaire comprised a five-point Likert-scale of eighteen closed statements divided into three sections: personal information, EFL teacher perceptions of their pronunciation, and their pronunciation practices. The inquiry followed the multiple-choice format.

### 3.2. The Subjects

The respondents were 67 English teachers from Az Zulfi, a small city in the Riyadh region. They were asked to respond to an online questionnaire on google forms about their practices and self-perceptions regarding pronunciation. The questionnaire also asked them to provide demographic information, such as their gender, academic degree, and years of experience (Table 1). Each response was checked to identify any missing information, but all responses were complete. Forty female teachers and 27 male teachers participated; out of which 91% had BA degrees, and 9% had MAs. More than half had over ten years of teaching experience.

Table-1. English teachers' background information.

	Male		Female	
Number of respondents	27		40	
Academic degree	BA	23	BA	38
	MA	4	MA	2
	Ph.D.	0	Ph.D.	0
Years of experience	1-5	5	1-5	2
	6-10	10	6-10	12
	More than 10	12	More than 10	26

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected the quantitative data through an online questionnaire on Google forms. The link was sent to the English department educational supervisors in both sections (female and male) and to English teachers through WhatsApp. The questionnaire was open for two weeks from November 14, 2019 to November 28, 2019. It was a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The respondents were asked to choose the answer most suitable for them. As for data analysis, SPSS 17 was used to extract and analyze the data obtained through the questionnaire.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. English Pronunciation Practices

All 67 respondents responded to the questionnaire about general pronunciation practices and their pronunciation perception. There was no missing data.

Regarding the English pronunciation practices, the respondents were given ten statements related to teaching pronunciation. All respondents gave their opinions on these statements. Table 3 shows the mean and standard division of these ten statements.

Table-2. Measures of English teachers' practices on teaching pronunciation.

No.	Investigated item	n	Mean	Std. division
1	Teaching pronunciation is difficult	67	3.4328	1.07624
2	I am good at teaching pronunciation	67	2.2239	.81317
3	I feel confident in teaching pronunciation	67	1.7164	.86700
4	I depend only on textbook activities in teaching pronunciation	67	2.9104	1.05502
5	Communicative practice is the best way to teach pronunciation	67	2.0597	.81428
6	I give proper time to teaching pronunciation	67	2.2985	.71806
7	I do not care much for pronunciation since the skill is not assigned marks in the final exam	67	3.3284	1.09251
8	Lack of supplied labs affect my teaching of pronunciation	67	2.1940	1.09044
9	I am completely comfortable in teaching segments (individual sounds e.g., /p/)	67	2.1940	.76354
10	I am entirely comfortable in teaching supra segments (intonation, stress, and rhyme)	67	2.5522	.82174

The results in the Table 2 indicate that more than half of all respondents agreed that they were good at teaching pronunciation—16.4% strongly agreed and 52.2% agreed. Meanwhile, 2.2% of the respondents (n=5) reported that they were not good at teaching this skill (n=2.2).

Similar positive responses were given when the teachers were asked about how much time they gave to teaching pronunciation. The majority agreed that they allocated a proper amount of time to teaching pronunciation—9% strongly agreed, 58.2% agreed, 26.9% were neutral, and 6% disagreed.

Segments and supra segments are essential parts of teaching pronunciation. Along these lines, respondents were asked if they felt confident teaching segments (e.g., individual sounds such as /P/). Most respondents agreed that they felt confident—19.4% strongly agreed, 43.3% agreed, 35.8% were neutral, and only one teacher reported a lack of confidence. Little difference was evident regarding supra segments (e.g., intonation and stress). The majority of responses were between “agree” and “neutral”—47.8% agreed and 40.3% were neutral. The following pie charts Figure 1 illustrates the teachers' reactions to both segments and supra segments.

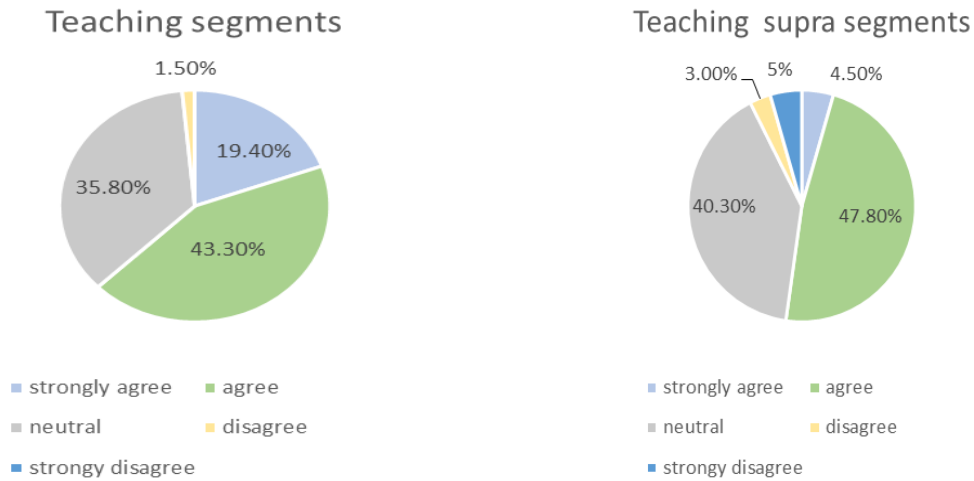


Figure-1. Teaching segments and supra segments.

Regarding the best way to teach pronunciation skills, the teachers were asked if they felt the communicative practice was the best way to teach this skill. More than half agreed that it was the best way—52.2% agreed and 23.9% strongly agreed. Only 6% disagreed. Regarding the material the teachers used, they were asked whether they depended only on textbook activities or added other content. More than one quarter reported that they used material other than textbook exercises (32.8%); however, 41.8% said that they incorporated textbook activities.

As for the statement “I don’t care much for pronunciation since there are not assigned marks in the final exam for this skill,” the teachers’ positions differed—just over one quarter disagreed (34.3%), 1.5% strongly disagreed, 28.4% agreed, and 20.9% were neutral. In teaching English, sometimes obstacles can affect the pedagogical process. Our questionnaire identified the lack of supplied labs as an obstacle. More than half of our respondents noted the effect of the lack of provided labs—31.3% strongly agreed and 35.8% agreed (n= 2.1).

When teachers are confident in their pedagogies, they are more likely to effectively deliver their material. Therefore, a lack of self-confidence results in poor education and outcomes. In this study, the majority revealed that they felt confident—49.3% strongly agreed and 35.8% agreed. The respondents were asked whether they felt teaching pronunciation was difficult. Their responses showed a variety of opinions: 20.9% agreed, the same percentage was neutral, 40.3% disagreed, and 14.9% strongly disagreed. The following bar chart Figure 2 illustrates their positions.

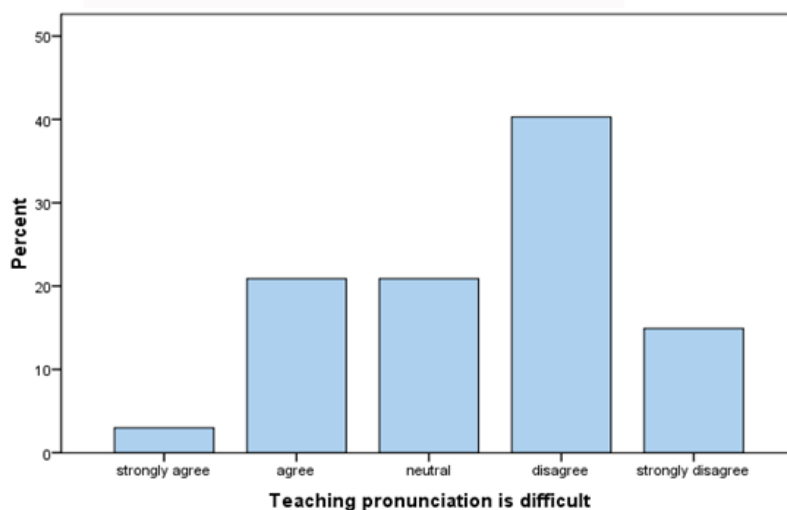


Figure-2. EFL teachers' positions regard teaching pronunciation.

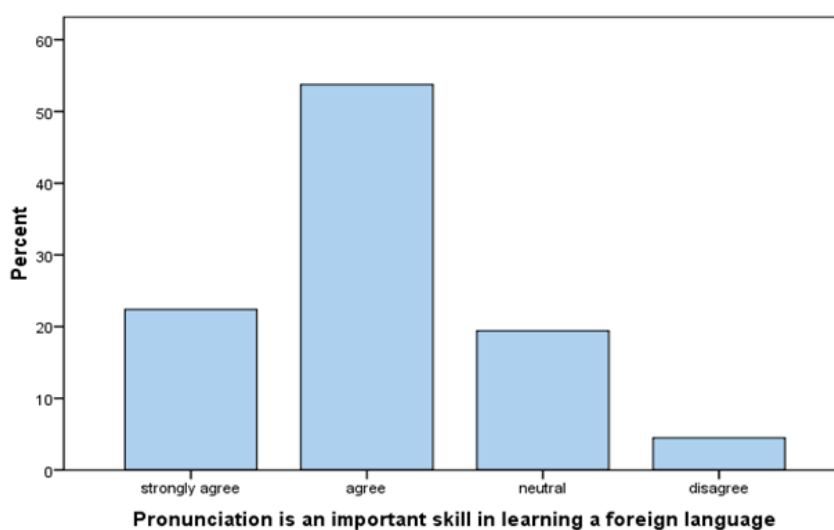
#### 4.2. English Teachers' Perceptions of their Pronunciation

In this section, the respondents responded to eight statements related to how they evaluated their pronunciation. Table 3 shows the mean and the standard division of these statements.

**Table-3.** Measures of english teachers' perceptions of their pronunciation.

No.	Investigated item	n	Mean	Std. division
1	Pronunciation is an important skill in learning a foreign language	67	2.06	.776
2	I wish that I had taken more courses on pronunciation during my BA.	67	1.9104	.84802
3	I always check the dictionary for words about which I am unsure	67	3.2090	1.05223
4	Sometimes, I find it difficult to distinguish between voiceless and voiced sounds	67	3.3284	1.05008
5	My native language affects my pronunciation of some English sounds	67	3.0448	1.09313
6	I need to read more about the phonological characteristics of individual English sounds	67	2.4179	.97155
7	My pronunciation would be better if I spent time abroad or if I took online courses on pronunciation	67	1.8060	1.00361
8	I need to improve my pronunciation of individual English sounds	67	2.4179	1.14348

Regarding the first investigated item, over half of all respondents—53.7%—agreed that pronunciation was an important skill; only 4.5% disagreed. The following bar chart Figure 3 illustrates the respondents' responses to this statement.



**Figure-3.** Responses to the statement 'pronunciation is an important skill'.

The same positive response was found when 50.7% agreed that they wished that they had studied more phonetics courses during their BAs ( $n = 1.9$ ). Meanwhile, when the teachers were asked whether their native language affected their pronunciation of some English sounds, their responses were more ambivalent—31.3% agreed and 32.8% disagreed.

Around half (49.3%) of respondents strongly agreed that their pronunciation would be better if they spent time in an English-speaking country ( $n = 1.8$ ). Regarding the difficulties in distinguishing voiceless and voiced sounds, 41.8% reported that they faced challenges. Similar results were seen when respondents considered the need to improve their pronunciation of individual sounds (40.3% agreed).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess EFL teachers' pronunciation practices and their perceptions of their pronunciation. Overall, EFL teachers showed positive attitudes toward teaching pronunciation.

To answer the research's first question: 'What pronunciation teaching practices do EFL teachers use?' the researcher included the following items in the questionnaire: The first investigated item sought to determine whether they found teaching pronunciation difficult. More than half (55.2%) disagreed that this was a problematic area of teaching. However, this result differs from Moedjito (2016) study, which found pronunciation a problematic area for teachers and students. It is somewhat surprising that 85.1% of our respondents felt confident about teaching pronunciation. This result may explain why over half of the EFL teachers (68.6%) positively responded to the statement: "I am good at teaching pronunciation." The results of Henderson et al. (2012); Sarikaya (2013) and Yagiz (2018) align with this finding.

We also identified a significant difference in teachers' dependency on textbook activities for teaching pronunciation. Around half of our sample reported that they depended only on textbook exercises (46.3 %). Notably, this result shows that teachers are aware of the importance of teaching pronunciation, a long-neglected skill, and moreover, of the need to incorporate materials beyond the textbook in their teaching methods. This finding contrasts with those of earlier studies by Buss (2015) and Alsofyani and Algethami (2017) which showed that teachers depended only on textbook activities. Moreover, most English teachers (51) in the study agreed that communicative practice, an interaction between two or more people that involves correction and feedback, is the best way of teaching pronunciation. This finding is consistent with those of Buss (2015) and Alsofyani and Algethami (2017) whose studies showed that 85% of teachers preferred this method.

Teaching pronunciation, unlike other skills, needs specialized labs. These labs help students listen to speeches by native speakers, which create an environment similar to being immersed in an English-speaking country. In the current study, the teachers were asked if the lack of supplied labs had any effect on teaching pronunciation. More than half of respondents (67.1%) agreed with this statement. This result matches those observed by Alsofyani and Algethami (2017) and (Pourhosein & Rahimy, 2019). Regarding teaching segmental and supra segmental, the results showed no significant differences. Most respondents were comfortable with teaching segmental and supra segmental. Therefore, it can be concluded that EFL teachers at Az Zulfi focus on both segments. This finding supports (Berikrentz et al., 2001) but contrasts with the earlier findings of Moedjito (2016); Alsofyani and Algethami (2017) and Yagiz (2018) surveyed above.

As for the second research question: 'What are the EFL teachers' perception of their own pronunciation?' Our most important finding was that 76.1% of respondents agreed that pronunciation is an important skill. Recognizing pronunciation's importance led respondents to be attentive to teaching it, as they would any other meaningful skill. This result aligns with the results of Henderson et al. (2012) most teachers affirmed the importance of pronunciation as a means of communication. In the current study, 83.5% expressed the wish to have taken more phonological courses during their BA. Notably, studying phonetics courses during university helps teachers understand the nature of sounds and find the best way to teach pronunciation. This idea was supported in Sarikaya (2013) study, which indicated that those who had studied phonetic courses seemed more willing to teach pronunciation than those who had not. In Yagiz (2018) study, respondents revealed that college phonetics courses were 75% beneficial and thus they did not need any training in pronunciation. This result showed the importance of studying phonetics courses during a BA.

Moreover, in the current study, 59.7% of teachers expressed a desire to improve their pronunciation of individual sounds, and 62.7% said they felt they needed to read more about individual sounds' phonological properties. These results can be attributed to the lack of phonological courses they may have completed during their BAs. In response to the statement, "My pronunciation would be better if I spent time abroad or if I took online



courses on pronunciation,” 80.6% of respondents agreed. This may be due to the fact that the speaker had the chance to communicate effectively with native speakers and correct pronunciation mistakes. In contrast to earlier findings from Sarikaya (2013) those who had been in an English-speaking country were less comfortable with their pronunciation than those who had not had this experience.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The present study was designed to fill the literature gap by giving a general overview of EFL teachers' pedagogies and self-perception of pronunciation in the Saudi context, that is, at Az Zulfi. We used a questionnaire to collect our data. Ultimately, we found that English teachers generally have a positive attitude toward teaching pronunciation and regard it as an essential skill. Accordingly, they give it proper time when teaching. Another important finding was that respondents concentrated on both segmental and supra segmental in teaching pronunciation. Moreover, our respondents considered communicative practice the best way to teach pronunciation. However, they showed a desire to read more about phonology and the phonetic properties of sounds, perhaps because they felt they had not completed enough phonological courses during their BAs. Moreover, a lack of phonological labs affected their teaching of pronunciation.

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the pronunciation practices and self-evaluation of English teachers, especially in the Saudi context. Notably, the present study examined only 76 English teachers in Az Zulfi; therefore, its results cannot be generalized to all English teachers across Saudi Arabia. Another limitation of this study was that it only used the questionnaire tool due to paucity of time through survey method. Alternative methods can be used in future studies where more time is available. Future studies may incorporate both questionnaire and interviews in studying English teachers. A questionnaire alone cannot provide a complete picture as was the case in this study. It failed to answer several questions that emerged while the data was being analyzed. It is also recommended to carry out applied research on best practices for pronunciation pedagogy. The sample size was also a constraint in this study. Future research with larger sample and population will help to better understand the current situation of pronunciation pedagogy.

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