

Exploring EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Pronunciation Teaching in a Saudi Setting

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Abstract

Recent research has shown that explicit pronunciation teaching is effective in improving learners' speech comprehensibility, and many studies have presented effective ways to teach pronunciation (Thomson & Derwing, 2014). However, it is still not yet known in many EFL (English as a foreign language) settings whether this finding has any effect on the current beliefs and practices of English language teachers. The current study examines what EFL teachers in a Saudi EFL context believe about teaching pronunciation, how they teach pronunciation, and what pronunciation training they have. Fifty-five English language teachers at the English Language Center at Taif University in Saudi Arabia were asked to complete an online survey regarding pronunciation teaching. Their responses were subjected to quantitative descriptive analysis. The results revealed that the teachers highly valued pronunciation teaching, and most of them considered it as important as teaching other language skills. In addition, most of the teachers reported incorporating pronunciation teaching into their English classes. The unavailability of pronunciation materials and technological recourses forced the teachers to employ traditional strategies to teaching pronunciation. The findings also showed a lack of specific pronunciation training available to the teachers, though the teachers desired to have more training opportunities.

Key words: EFL teachers, practices, pronunciation, teachers' beliefs, training

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1. Introduction

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL) requires teachers to focus on all language skills. Nevertheless, English pronunciation teaching, relative to other skills, is still neglected in ESL/ EFL classrooms (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Gilbert, 2010; Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, & Urzúa, 2016). Recently, pronunciation teaching has become a contentious issue (Foote et al., 2016). The debate has focused on the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching and how it can be effectively taught (Saito, 2011). However, teachers' cognition and practices have not received enough attention in previous research on pronunciation teaching (Buss, 2015).

Very few studies have examined teachers' beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation teaching in different EFL/ESL contexts, such as in Brazil (Buss, 2015), in Canada (Breitkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter, 2001; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011), in Europe (Henderson, 2013) and in Iran (Yunus, Salehi, & Amini, 2016). In Saudi context, empirical research on teachers' beliefs in general is still in its infancy (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016). Further, relative to other language skills, English pronunciation teaching in Saudi context has not been a frequently researched topic. Most of the few studies conducted on teaching pronunciation in Saudi context concentrated on the analysis of pronunciation errors produced by Saudi learners (e.g., Ahmad & Muhiburrahman, 2013; Bintuki, 2008), pronunciation difficulties and problems faced by students (e.g., Hameed & Aslam, 2015), and the effect of pronunciation instruction on learners' speech production (Algethami, 2016; Algethami, 2017). Because of the lack of research on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation teaching in Saudi Arabia, this study is an attempt to better understand teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching, how pronunciation is taught, and what pronunciation training teachers have in a Saudi EFL setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers' beliefs

To understand teachers' beliefs, it is crucial to define 'belief'. The term 'belief' can be defined from anthropological, social, psychological and philosophical perspectives (Zheng, 2009), and this makes belief difficult to define (Borg, 2001). According to Borg (2001), a belief is defined as:

A proposition which may be consciously or subconsciously held, it is also evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitments; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior. (p.186)

In terms of teachers' beliefs, Kagan (1992) defined teachers' beliefs simply as the assumptions that the teachers hold in classroom about students, learning, and the subject matter they teach. In the same vein, Richard (1998) claimed that teachers' beliefs are "the information, attitudes, values, expectation, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom" (p.66).

2.2. *Teachers' beliefs regarding pronunciation teaching*

Understanding teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching can help us understand teachers' practice in EFL classrooms. Most of the studies that have explored pronunciation issues have focused on students' beliefs and attitudes concerning pronunciation instruction (e.g. Alghazo, 2015; Benzies, 2014; Kang, 2015). Little research has been conducted on teachers' beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation teaching (Baker, 2014; Buss, 2015).

Sifakis and Sougari (2005), for example, investigated the beliefs about the importance of native-speakers' accents and their roles in pronunciation norms or models. A number of EFL teachers in Greece were surveyed to elicit their beliefs on issues of accents and ownership of English. Their findings showed that teachers in primary level schools believed that native-speaker norms were important models. Nonetheless, a significant number of teachers pointed out the central role of speech intelligibility. In the same vein, Buckingham (2015) examined teachers' beliefs about teaching particular accents in EFL classrooms in Oman. The author explored teachers' views on the importance of native-speaker accents in teaching English in the Gulf. The results showed that the majority of the teachers regularly taught different aspects of pronunciation; however, most of them did not use a particular accent as a model when teaching pronunciation. They rather emphasized the need for a variety of accents. The teachers showed greater awareness of the importance of teaching pronunciation but with 'clear English' rather than with a specific accent. Macdonald (2002) showed that Australian teachers were unwilling to teach pronunciation. He conducted a study to find out the reasons behind the avoidance of teaching pronunciation among teachers. Eight ESL teachers were interviewed, and it was found that the curricula they were using did not encourage them to teach pronunciation due to inadequate resources. In addition, they lacked the knowledge of how to assess students' pronunciation, and they did not feel comfortable with correcting or monitoring their students' speech.

Another body of research focused on the preferred strategies and approaches used by teachers in teaching pronunciation, and which features of pronunciation should be taught. Baker's (2011a) found that teachers who took training courses in pronunciation instruction reported preference for the teaching of suprasegmental features in their classes. Similarly, Burri (2015) showed that the cognition of teachers about pronunciation instruction developed during a postgraduate subject on pronunciation pedagogy. Their beliefs shifted from teaching individual sounds (segments) to a more balanced approach to pronunciation instruction which included suprasegmental features. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) explored the preferred techniques teachers used when teaching pronunciation. Based on their survey results, they concluded that dictation, reading aloud, and dialogues were the three top preferred techniques reported by the teachers in their study. The authors also indicated that these techniques were traditional ones.

Baker (2014) differentiated between three types of techniques in teaching pronunciation: controlled, guided and free techniques. In controlled techniques, teachers play a dominant role in their instruction (e.g., repetition drills, listening discrimination, and minimal pair activities). The dominant role moves to students in free techniques. The students can collaborate with other students in open-ended activities, such as role play, drama, or presentations. Guided techniques refer to semi-controlled techniques. They are a blend of characteristics from controlled and free techniques, in that they may be both structured and open-ended (e.g., information gap activities,

interviews, or group discussions). In the light of these three techniques, Baker (2014) examined five ESL teachers' cognitions and practices in classrooms regarding pronunciation teaching. She used different methods including semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews to collect data from the teachers. She found that controlled techniques were the dominant techniques used by all five teachers. The same results were reached by Yunus, Salehi, and Amini (2016). Based on the results of these two studies, teachers may seem to be in favor of controlled techniques, although traditional approaches to pronunciation teaching are criticized and many recent communicative approaches appeared.

One of the few studies that investigated how the cognition of pronunciation teachers developed over time is the study of Baker (2011b). The results showed that programs containing at least one course focusing on pronunciation instruction had a significant impact on both teachers' beliefs and their practices, which in turn increased their confidence in teaching pronunciation. It was also found that many teachers did not possess the knowledge about English pronunciation and how to teach it.

One of the most recent projects that have examined EFL teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices regarding pronunciation teaching is the English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey (EPTiES) (Henderson, 2013). The survey showed a lack of professional training that deal with pronunciation teaching. The teachers' responses also indicated that most of them rated their own mastery of English pronunciation positively. According to the target model, most teachers preferred Received Pronunciation, though they recognized that General American English might be more popular amongst their students.

Breitkreutz et al. (2001) surveyed teachers from 67 ESL programs in Canada to explore their beliefs, their preferred methods for teaching pronunciation, and the pronunciation training opportunities they had received. The results showed that most of the teachers considered pronunciation teaching important to ESL learners at all levels. The results also indicated that most of the respondents believed in the importance of teaching both suprasegmental and segmental features. The authors also reported that focusing on troublesome sounds was the most favored strategy among the teachers surveyed. In term of pronunciation training, the results showed that the teachers lacked sufficient training, and indicated a dearth of training opportunities. Ten years later, the same study was replicated by Foote et al. (2011). They reexamined teachers' beliefs about pronunciation instruction in ESL classes across Canada. The purpose of the study was to find out whether teachers' beliefs and practices in Canada had changed since Breitkreutz et al. (2001). The findings revealed that there was no much difference between the two studies in terms of teachers' beliefs and practices. For instance, most of the teachers indicated that they would like more pronunciation training, and they considered pronunciation instruction as important at all levels of proficiency.

In another EFL context, Buss (2015) explored the beliefs and practices of sixty Brazilian teachers. The teachers were found to attribute high importance to pronunciation instruction. The teachers were also found to use traditional pronunciation teaching methods, such as repetition. The study also indicated the limited training opportunities available to Brazilian EFL teachers on pronunciation teaching.

The current study attempts to explore teachers' beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation instruction in a Saudi EFL setting. No previous study has yet explored the status of pronunciation teaching in Saudi context, particularly teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching, how English pronunciation is taught, and what pronunciation training teachers have.

The current study focuses on one sample from the Saudi EFL context, the English Language Centre (ELC) at Taif University. The following questions are addressed:

1. What pronunciation teaching practices do EFL teachers at Taif University use?
2. What beliefs regarding pronunciation teaching and learning do EFL teachers at Taif University hold?
- 3- What pronunciation training do EFL teachers at Taif University have?

3. Method

3.1. *The survey*

The survey used in the current study was an online survey hosted on www.SurveyMonkey.com. It was adapted from the one used by Foote et al. (2011). It was originally developed to examine teachers' beliefs about pronunciation instruction in Canada. The original survey of Foote et al. (2011) comprised forty-five questions that allowed Canadian teachers to report on their beliefs and practices regarding pronunciation teaching. The survey in this study contained thirty-nine items divided into five major sections. A section on private or one-to-one pronunciation classes was omitted, as we do not have such classes at Taif University. The first section asked the teachers surveyed for background information related to their institution, EFL program, and their students. In addition, it included a Likert scale question about pronunciation training opportunities available to the teachers. The second section asked the teachers for technological resources available to them at the University to teach pronunciation. The questions in this section were five-point Likert scale questions, and open ended questions. The third section asked about how pronunciation teaching was integrated into general EFL classes. It focused on teachers' practices including the nature and the amount of pronunciation instruction given. Most of the questions in this section were in multiple-choice format. The fourth section asked the teachers to express their beliefs and practices about pronunciation teaching. It included twenty-two closed statements with a Likert scale of seven points to capture the teachers' levels of agreement with each item. The last section asked the teachers for personal background information (such as age, qualification, teaching experience) in a multiple-choice format.

To ensure the validity of the survey, it was sent to three applied linguists at the Department of Foreign Languages at Taif University. In addition, before distributing the survey, a pilot study was carried out to identify any modifications needed. Further, it was implemented to discover any weaknesses in either the survey or data analysis, which could enhance the validity and reliability of the main study findings. Ten teachers were invited to participate in the pilot study. Based on the findings from the pilot study, the survey was improved before it was used for the main study. Then, the English Language Center (ELC) at Taif University was approached to send a web link to access the online survey in an email to all teachers at the center.

3.2. *Participants*

All the participants were English language teachers at the ELC at Taif University. The participants were chosen based on their accessibility to the researchers, that is, it was a convenience sample. Fifty-seven teachers responded to the survey. Two teachers answered only one or two questions from the first section. Their responses were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the responses of 55 teachers were analyzed. Only 20 % of the participants were English native speakers. For the non-native English speakers, 70% reported that their first languages were Arabic, Urdu (26%), Filipino (2%), and Kwa (2%). Most of the participants were in their 30s (46%), with 26% in their 40s and 19% in their 20s. In terms of their highest level of education, more than half of the teachers (56%) had a master's degree, and 26% had a bachelor degree. Only 2% had doctoral degrees. Regarding TESL/ TEFL (teaching English as a second/foreign language) preparation, most of them (41%) held a master's in TEFL or applied linguistics. Seventeen percent held diploma from a university or college, whereas 20 % reported that they did not have any formal TESL/ TEFL preparation. Most of the participants (67%) completed their TESL/TEFL preparation between 2001- 2015. As for their experience in teaching English, 39% of the teachers had taught English for less than five years. The other teachers mentioned that they taught English between 10-15 years (28%), 5-10 years (17%), and 15-20 years (11%). Only two teachers had taught English for more than 20 years.

3.3. *Data Analysis*

After two months from opening the survey, the data were extracted and analyzed. For the quantitative data, the analysis provided by SurveyMonkey was used for descriptive analysis. The data collected from open-ended questions were categorized to be ready for analysis. Then, the number of mentions for each category was counted and percentages were calculated.

4. Results

4.1. *Pronunciation Teaching Practices*

The teachers' responses to the question that asked about the frequency of teaching pronunciation were generally positive. The majority of the teachers integrated pronunciation instruction into their EFL classes (always=31%, often = 29%, sometimes=31%). Only 8% said that they rarely taught pronunciation ($n=4$), and no one responded to this question by they never taught pronunciation ($n=0$).

These positive results were confirmed by the responses to the following question. The respondents were asked to select all the statements that applied to them between five statements. As indicated in Figure 1, 47% of the teachers frequently taught specific pronunciation features when needed, and just over half (51%) indicated that they always tended to correct any mispronounced words. Furthermore, 34% of the teachers taught pronunciation explicitly in their regular EFL classes.

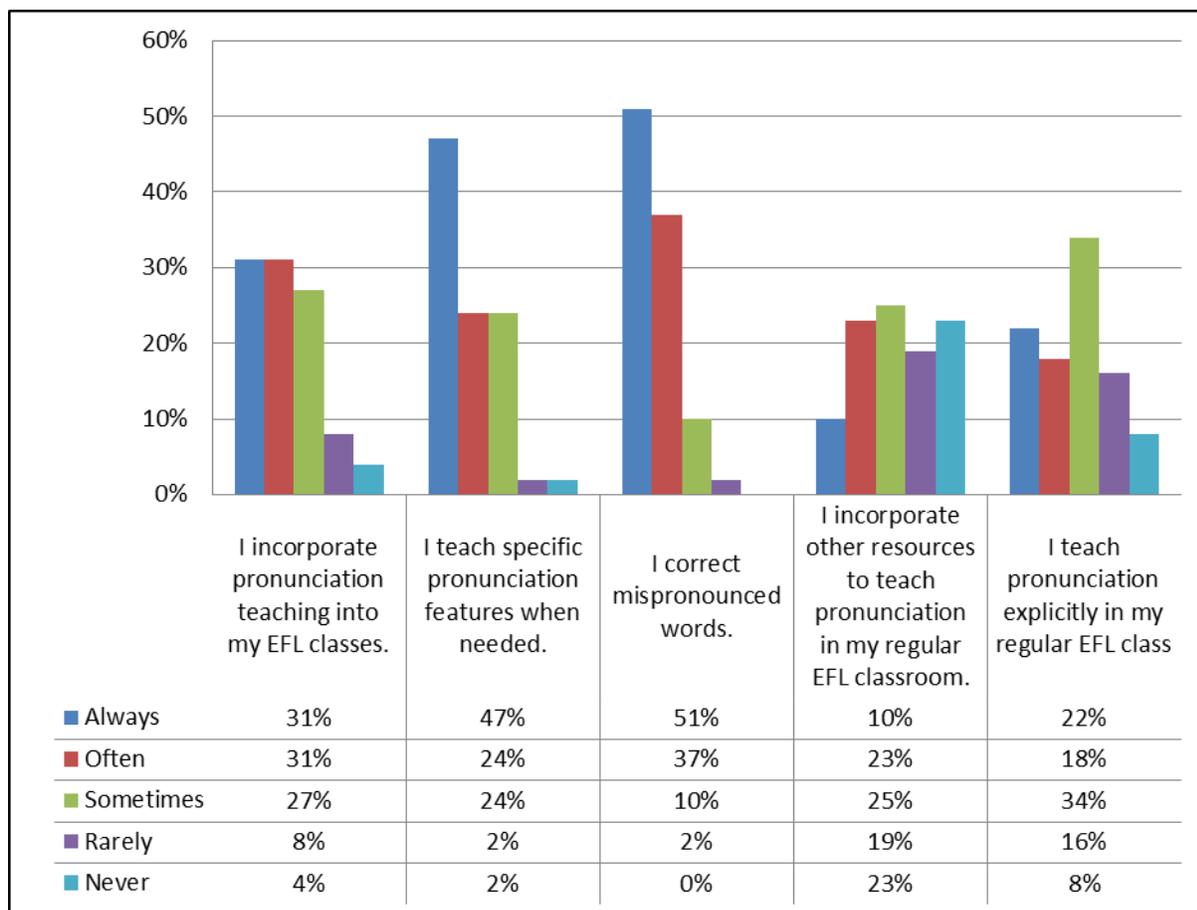


Figure 1. Main approaches to pronunciation teaching

Figure 1 shows that most of the teachers taught pronunciation by either correcting mispronounced words or teaching specific pronunciation features. Using extra resources to teach pronunciation was the least frequently used approach by the teachers. Additionally, the teachers' were relatively positive when asked if most of the EFL instructors in their center could integrate pronunciation instruction into their classes, with 66% indicating that they could. Only 18% reported that they could not, and 16% were unsure. Because *can* is different from *do*, around one third of the teachers (35%) agreed that EFL instructors in their center integrated pronunciation instruction into their classes. Twenty-five percent of the teachers mentioned that they did integrate pronunciation instruction, and 40% were unsure in this regard.

Regarding the materials and resources in teaching pronunciation, the majority of the respondents (78%) indicated that they used pronunciation activities in their general skills textbooks. However, around 97% did not use specific pronunciation textbooks in their classes. Similarly, 82% of the teachers responded *no* to the question about using resource or reference books to supplement their classes. One of the three who answered *yes* indicated the use of worksheets. The remaining two reported that they used YouTube videos.

As for the amount of time spent in teaching pronunciation, the teachers were asked first to write the time they spent in teaching English in general per week. Most of the teachers spent 12 hours in teaching English per week ($n=35$). Then, they were asked to select the amount of time given to pronunciation instruction from a list: none (10%), less than 15 minutes (18%), 15 minutes (28%), 30 minutes (8%), 60 minutes (14%), 90 minutes (4%), 120 minutes (6%), more than 120 minutes (10%). Moreover, almost all teachers reported that they spent at least some time on teaching suprasegmental features (e.g. syllable structure, stress, rhythm, and intonation). Most of the teachers (76%) indicated that they spent between 10% and 50% of the time to teach suprasegmental features. Only 15% of the teachers reported that they spent 70% or more of the time on suprasegmentals ($n=7$). No one indicated spending all their time on suprasegmental features.

The teachers also were asked which activities were the most effective in helping students to improve their pronunciation. Their responses were categorized into three main activities according to the activities frequently mentioned by the teachers: segmental activities, suprasegmental activities, and repetition. The segmental activities such as using phonetic symbols, individual sound exercises, and minimal pairs were the most frequently used activities by the teachers. The second type of activities was suprasegmental activities. These activities included stress placement activities and syllable structure activities. Repetition was also mentioned seven times. Other activities were also reported by the teachers, such as listening (two times), tongue twister, and using mirror. One of the teachers wrote the following comment "I don't use a lot of pronunciation activities because our textbook doesn't give much time to pronunciation or a variety of activities".

Concerning the main pronunciation problems experienced by their students, the teachers' responses were categorized into three main categories: individual sounds, suprasegmental features and vowels. These were the most serious pronunciation problems mentioned by the teachers. Problems with individual sounds were the most frequently reported (31 times), especially voiced and voiceless contrastive sounds, such as /p/ and /b/, /v/ and /f/. Five teachers mentioned the problem of distinguishing between /ʃ/ and /tʃ/. Vowels and suprasegmental features followed individual sounds, with 21 instances for each. One of the teachers made the following comment:

The students face issues especially with vowels, as Arabic and English vowel systems are entirely different. Also, consonant clustering patterns are different in both languages because of which my students tend to insert vowels between certain consonants when they are not required. Also, they have problem with stress due to the influence of L1.

Another teacher mentioned that some students pronounced short vowels instead of long vowels. As for suprasegmental features, they referred to suprasegmental problems in general, but intonation ($n=10$) and stress ($n=7$) were the most common problems. Furthermore, *-ed* ending was listed as a problem by two teachers.

The teachers were also asked to describe the most difficult aspects of pronunciation to teach. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The Most Difficult Aspects of Pronunciation to Teach

Aspect of Pronunciation	Number of Mentions	Percentage
Stress	11	26%
Individual sounds	9	21%
Intonation	8	19%
Vowels	8	19%
Syllable	6	14%

As Table 1 indicates, stress was the most difficult features to teach (11 times). The other challenging features were individual sounds (9 times), intonation (8 times), vowels (8 times), and syllable (6 times). One teacher listed rhythm as a difficult aspect in pronunciation teaching.

The teachers were also asked about the strategies they recommended to students to deal with communication breakdowns that were related to pronunciation errors. The teachers selected all that applied from a checklist. Repetition was the most popular strategy (85%), followed by focus on trouble sounds (66%), speak louder (40%), spell the word (38%), and speak slower (32%).

Regarding technological resources, the majority of the teachers (83%) reported *no* to the question about the availability of language or computer labs for the teaching of pronunciation in their institution or center. Seventeen percent of the teachers who answered *yes* indicated that most of them (79%) did not use either a language lab or a computer lab. Only 12% of the teachers have used a language lab ($n=4$), and 11% have used a computer lab ($n=3$). The reason why the teachers slightly varied in their answers to question about the availability of language or computer labs at their instruction is likely to be because their interpretations of what a pronunciation teaching language or computer lab actually is.

4.2. Beliefs regarding Pronunciation Teaching and Learning

The majority of the teachers (96%) believed that their students have difficulty with pronunciation. Two teachers only answered *no* to the question. The teachers indicated the importance of teaching pronunciation. They were asked to rate on a Likert scale the importance of teaching pronunciation to their students of different proficiency levels (beginners, intermediate learners, advanced learners) from 1= not at all important to 7= extremely important (Figure 2).

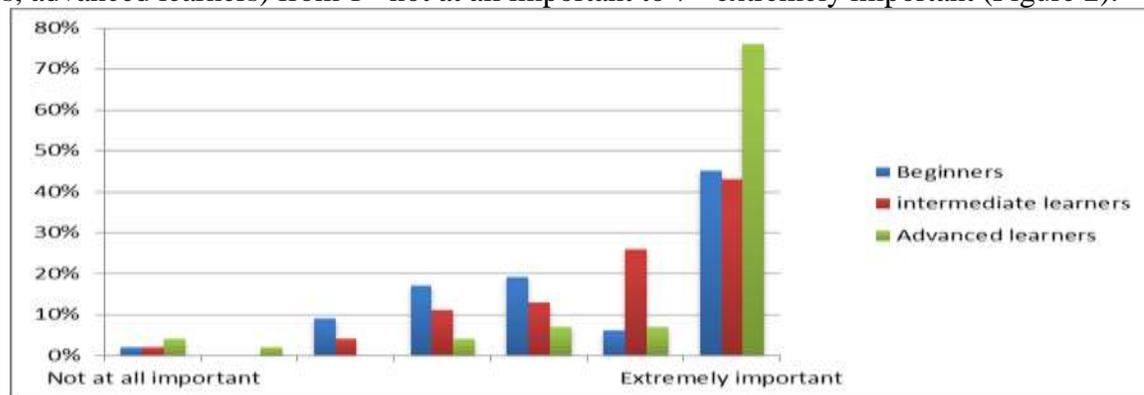


Figure 2 The importance of teaching pronunciation

Overall, the teachers highly valued teaching pronunciation for learners at all levels. Most of the teachers (70%) reported that it was important for beginners, 82% mentioned that it was important for intermediate learners, 90% reported that it was important for advanced learners, and 76% of them considered it extremely important for advanced learners.

To examine teachers' beliefs about pronunciation instruction, they were asked to respond to 22 statements about teaching pronunciation. The teachers were asked to express their levels of agreement on a seven-point scale (from 1=strongly agree to 7= strongly disagree). Following (Buss, 2015), their responses were collapsed into three categories: agree (1-3), neutral (4), disagree (5-7) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Teaching Pronunciation

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teaching pronunciation does not usually result in permanent changes.	36	15	49	4.60	1.93
Teaching pronunciation is difficult.	55	17	28	3.64	2.07
Communicative practice is the best way to teach pronunciation.	85	6	9	2.17	1.56
A heavy foreign accent usually makes students' speech incomprehensible.	62	19	19	2.91	1.72
The best person to teach pronunciation is someone who is specialized in phonetics.	55	11	34	3.55	2.09
You can't teach pronunciation to lower levels.	17	13	70	5.34	1.61
Only native speakers should teach pronunciation.	15	8	77	5.53	1.94
There is an age-related limitation on the acquisition of native like pronunciation.	43	6	51	4.23	2.23
Pronunciation instruction is only effective for highly motivated learners.	51	13	36	3.64	1.95
Some individuals resist changing their pronunciation in order to maintain their L1 identity.	48	22	30	3.67	1.88

Pronunciation is best to be learned by living in a country where English is the first language.	53	9	38	3.94	2.18
The goal of a pronunciation program should be to eliminate, as much as possible, foreign accent.	51	11	38	3.73	2.03
I'm completely comfortable teaching segmentals (i.e., individual sounds, such as /p/).	78	13	9	2.43	1.58
I'm completely comfortable teaching all aspects of prosody (suprasegmentals: syllable structure, stress, rhythm & intonation).	68	11	21	2.94	1.85
I wish I had more training in teaching pronunciation.	83	2	15	2.26	1.71
To teach English pronunciation to Arabs, one needs to have some knowledge about the sound system of Arabic.	68	15	17	2.85	1.91
Pronunciation teaching is often unnecessary, as most learners are able to pick up on pronunciation when frequently exposed to good input.	36	19	45	4.32	1.86
Native speakers should be the model for pronunciation teaching.	55	13	32	3.62	1.98
Most learners don't like teachers to correct their pronunciation.	64	17	19	3.34	1.68
I don't like teaching pronunciation.	20	4	76	5.50	2.12
The only goal of pronunciation teaching is to make students comfortably intelligible to their listeners.	54	13	33	3.50	1.98
Pronunciation is best learned through language immersion, without the need for rules or theoretical explanations.	53	13	34	3.74	2.23

The majority of the teachers (85%) believed that communicative practice is the best way to teach pronunciation (mean= 2.17). The teachers' responses regarding their abilities to teach certain aspects of pronunciation were positive. They were completely comfortable with teaching segmentals (78%), and 68% agreed that they were completely comfortable teaching all aspects of prosody. Moreover, 83% of the teachers wished they had more training in teaching pronunciation. Sixty-eight percent of the teachers believed that knowing the sound system of Arabic is necessary to teach English pronunciation to Arab learners. Although more than half of them (55%) found teaching pronunciation difficult, 76% of them indicated that they liked teaching pronunciation. Most of the teachers (77%) disagreed with the notion that only native speakers should teach pronunciation, whereas 55% believed that native speakers should be the model for pronunciation teaching. Also, most of them disagreed with the statement "You can't teach pronunciation to lower levels" (mean=5.34). Thus, they indicated the possibility of teaching pronunciation to lower levels.

4.3. Pronunciation Training

When the teachers were asked if the instructors in their center had special training in pronunciation, 22% reported that some of the instructors had special training, and 27% said that none did. Just above half of the teachers ($n=28$) were unsure. Regarding the pronunciation training opportunities available to them, 48% of the respondents indicated that the teachers could access university or college courses, and the same percentage mentioned that the teachers were able to attend conference presentations and workshops. Forty-two percent of the respondents said that the teachers could access in-house seminars. Only 24% indicated that teachers could take commercial courses offered by private sectors as shown in Figure 3.

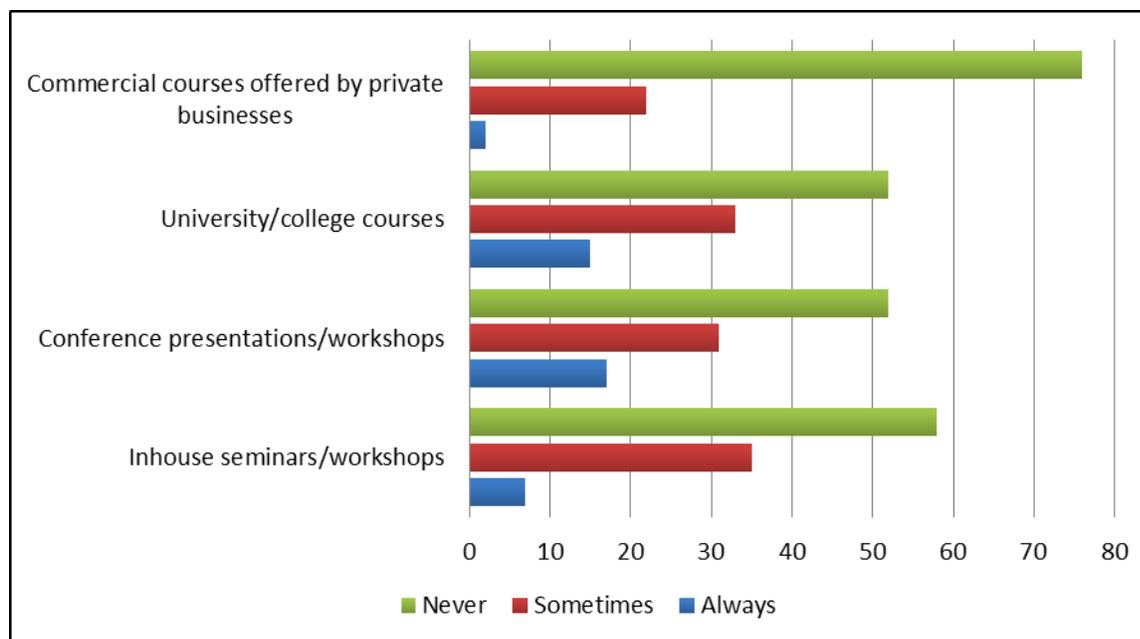


Figure 3 Pronunciation training opportunities available to the teachers

As figure 3 indicates, it could be concluded that most teachers indicated that there was no sufficient training opportunities available to them. Then, the teachers were asked to point out what types of formal pronunciation training they themselves had received. Most of the teachers (49%)

had taken linguistics courses such as phonetics and phonology, and 49% of the teachers had received training as a part of a general TESL/TEFL. Forty-four percent of the teachers indicated that they had received a combination of linguistics courses and a pedagogical course in pronunciation. Only 16% of the teachers had taken a credit course at a university that focused specially on pronunciation teaching. Eight teachers reported that they had no training to teach pronunciation. The majority of the teachers had received general training, such as linguistics courses and general TESL/TEFL courses. Only seven teachers had taken specific courses on pronunciation teaching and four teachers had attended sporadic courses at conferences. The responses to the open-ended question "Are there any pronunciation training opportunities currently not available to you which you would like to have access to?" represent the need for more specific pronunciation training. The teachers indicated that they wanted more professional pronunciation training opportunities. For example, some of the teachers wrote, "Any training related to pronunciation" and "specific pronunciation training".

5. Discussion

The EFL teachers in the current study showed a positive tendency toward integrating pronunciation instruction into their classes. Most of the EFL teachers in the current study reported that they taught pronunciation to their students. For example, half of the teachers always tended to correct mispronounced words. These findings concur with Breitzkreutz et al. (2001), Buss (2015) and Foote et al. (2011). They agreed that teachers usually included pronunciation instruction into their regular classes. Also, 73% of the Canadian teachers in the study of Foote et al. (2011) regularly corrected mispronounced words. On the contrary, the study of Buss (2015) indicated that correcting mispronounced words was the least frequent approach used by the Brazilian EFL teachers.

Almost all of the teachers (97%) used neither specific pronunciation books nor additional reference books to supplement their classes. They rather focused mainly in their teaching of pronunciation on activities presented in their general skills textbooks. Similar results were found in Buss (2015). Likewise, Breitzkreutz et al. (2001) indicated the disappointment of the teachers regarding the material available to them. In contrast, Foote et al. (2011) found that half of the teachers in their study used specific-pronunciation books and supplementary textbooks.

The findings of the current study also showed that most of the teachers in the ELC did not use either a language lab or a computer lab, and the majority of them (more than 80%) said that they were not available to them. Although the teachers did not use these technological resources that supported teaching pronunciation, they indicated the importance of using technology in pronunciation instruction.

The teachers preferred activities that focused on segmental features. They reported that activities like phonetic symbols, individual sound exercises, and minimal pairs were the most effective activities that helped students to improve their pronunciation. This preference to focusing on segmental features more than on suprasegmental features in pronunciation instruction was also found in Buss (2015), and Foote et al. (2016). In contrast, Breitzkreutz et al. (2001) showed a more balanced view of teaching pronunciation; the teachers focused on segmental features as well as suprasegmental features. In addition, the emphasis on segmental features explains the teachers'

own challenges to teaching some suprasegmental aspects. The teachers in the current study considered stress, as a main suprasegmental feature, as the most difficult aspect of pronunciation to teach. The teachers in the present study tended to focus on the features that were most challenging for their students. The findings revealed that individual sounds, such as /p/ and /b/, /v/ and /f/, and /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ were the most frequent problems experienced by their students. Buss (2015) also indicated that the individual sounds were the most challenging aspects for Brazilian learners, especially the *th* sound /θ/ and /ð/. In agreement with Buss (2015) and Foote et al. (2011), repetition was the most popular strategy used by the teachers for the learners who had encountered a communication breakdown. Although repetition was the most frequent strategy used by the teachers in pronunciation instruction, only a small number of the teachers ($n=7$) looked at it as an effective activity to help students improve their pronunciation.

Regarding teachers' beliefs, the teachers agreed on the importance of teaching pronunciation in their classes. They showed positive attitude towards pronunciation instruction. They believed that it was important to teach pronunciation to all levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Most of the responses to the last question "Is there anything else you would like to mention about pronunciation instruction at your institution or in general?" represent this attitude, as they all mentioned the importance of pronunciation teaching in language classes. This is similar to the finding in Buss (2015) and Foote et al. (2011) where the teachers considered pronunciation teaching as highly important and had positive attitudes towards it. Most of the teachers' beliefs in the current study were in line with previous studies (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Buss, 2015; Foote et al., 2011). For instance, the majority of the teachers (85%) believed that teaching pronunciation communicatively is the best way to improve learners' pronunciation. They agreed that intelligibility and comprehensibility are the main goal for teaching pronunciation. In addition, they did not believe that a native speaker should be the best person to teach pronunciation. Another finding is that the teachers expressed their confidence in teaching pronunciation. They mentioned that they felt comfortable teaching different aspects of pronunciation, including segmental and suprasegmental aspects. Hence, 76% disagreed with the statement "I don't like teaching pronunciation". This is contrary to the findings of Macdonald (2002), which found that teachers didn't have enough confidence to teach pronunciation, and then they tended to avoid teaching pronunciation. Most of the teachers (83%) also expressed a wish for more training opportunities in teaching pronunciation.

The result of the present study is unlike the results of previous studies in that half of the teachers in the present study believed that native speech should be the model for pronunciation instruction; however, they did not think that the native speaker is the best person to teach pronunciation. Along the same line, Sifakis and Sougari (2005) found that Greek teachers had a tendency to use native-speakers norms in teaching pronunciation. Furthermore, most of the teachers expressed the ineffectiveness of explicit instruction of pronunciation. They believed that exposure to an appropriate input is the best way to improve pronunciation. One teacher wrote: "Frequent exposure to good input and high motivation in my opinion is better than explicit pronunciation teaching". This belief of explicit pronunciation teaching as being ineffective was also found in Foote et al. (2011).

Generally, and in agreement with Breitzkreutz et al. (2001), Buss (2015) and Foote et al. (2011), the teachers' responses in the current study indicated a lack of pronunciation training opportunities. In terms of pronunciation training, most of them had only received general training, either in linguistics courses, such as phonetics or phonology, or general TESL/TEFL courses. They lacked both professional and specific training on teaching pronunciation. From what was mentioned above, it seems plausible to assume that the teachers focus on segmental aspects was due to the kind of training they had received, as most of them had taken general courses in phonetics and phonology (Foote et al., 2011), where usually the focus of these courses tend to be on segmental aspects of speech. Therefore, as noted earlier, the majority of the teachers had a wish for more pronunciation training opportunities.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the current study show a clear need for more professional development and training in the area of pronunciation teaching among EFL teachers. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to effectively integrate pronunciation in their teaching at both levels, segmental and suprasegmental. Introducing more materials and technological resources may help to fill the current teaching gap, which is mainly a result of traditional strategies and a focus on pronunciation tasks found in general English language textbooks.

7. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the current study can give a glimpse of the current practices and beliefs regarding pronunciation teaching in English language centers in Saudi Arabia, it is limited to the ELC at Taif University, and therefore, it is difficult to generalize the results to other English language centers in Saudi Arabia. Future research needs to explore beliefs and practices about pronunciation teaching in all English language centers and institutes in Saudi Arabia. Another limitation is related to the tool used in the current study. Because the use of survey is not enough to capture the full range of practices by the teachers, a study that uses observations and interviews are needed for thorough investigation.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to fill the gap in the literature by providing a snapshot of the current status of pronunciation instruction in a Saudi EFL setting, particularly at Taif University. It investigated the beliefs that the EFL teachers at Taif University held about teaching pronunciation, the way pronunciation was taught, and the pronunciation training the teachers had. The EFL teachers at the English Language Centre (ELC) at Taif University were surveyed to find answers for these questions. It is evident from the results of this study that a high level of agreement was expressed with regard to the importance of pronunciation teaching. However, the teachers were not satisfied with the materials available to them to teach pronunciation. They were also not satisfied with the training they had received for teaching pronunciation. Thus, it is hoped that more professional training opportunities will become available to help the teachers integrate pronunciation teaching into their English language classes

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