

---

**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Research on Iraqi EFL Learners' Pronunciation: A Review Article**

**Amjed Alrickaby**

*Ministry of Education, Iraq*

**Corresponding Author:** Amjed Alrickaby, **E-mail:** [amjed.linguist@gmail.com](mailto:amjed.linguist@gmail.com)

---

**| ABSTRACT**

Reviewing existing research is of paramount importance for educational policy makers, practitioners, and researchers as it plays an important role in providing an updated overview of the current research focuses and identifying gaps and needs for future research. In the current study, an attempt is made to explore the landscape of research on Iraqi EFL learners' pronunciation. The examined corpus included 16 published research articles meeting established criteria for study selection. The included studies were scrutinized for their characteristics, design, strengths and limitations. The findings reveal that while the existing research employs a variety of research designs, collects both qualitative and quantitative data, and covers a wide spectrum of pronunciation-related issues, it is mostly limited to university undergraduate learners. Additionally, many studies suffer from small sample sizes, utilize basic data collection tools, and adopt traditional (and subjective) data analysis methods, often neglecting advanced statistical analysis techniques. The present review underscores the need for further research to diversify participants across different educational levels, increase sample sizes, conduct longitudinal studies, employ advanced analysis tools, and broaden the research focus to include interventional studies and examination of instructional methods.

**| KEYWORDS**

Pronunciation, Iraq, EFL learners, phonetics, phonology

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 01 February 2025

**PUBLISHED:** 17 March 2025

**DOI:** 10.32996/jweep.2025.7.1.4

---

### **1. Introduction**

Research reviews play a primary role in bridging gaps in the available literature. In the field of ELT, the available research is vast and ever-evolving and thus the task of making use of it and staying updated on the latest findings can be overwhelming for practitioners. For this end particularly, reviewing research plays a fundamental role in providing a comprehensive summary of existing research to identify gaps or to make informed decisions about the matters under discussion. For example, a research review by Farrell (2015) highlighted the need for more studies on the integration of critical thinking studies in language teaching and learning. By emphasizing such needs, review articles help in outlining the objectives and agenda for further research and motivate more research into underexplored areas. In a similar vein, reviewing existing research serves the process of evaluating pedagogical practices in language education by providing evidence for available studies on the effectiveness of these practices. For instance, in a meta-synthesis of studies on technology integration in language education, Zhao (2003) emphasized that while it is possible to utilize technological tools in the language classroom, its effectiveness and success in leveraging the learning outcome primarily depend on how it would be incorporated. These findings are of great significance for language educators to decide how to properly use technology in the classroom and how to render it effective in improving their teaching practices.

Additionally, this role also functions on a higher level: assisting policy decision making and curriculum development. These research studies are often used to advance educational policies and to improve curricula. In other words, it helps the decision makers understand what is efficient and what is not efficient for the situations at hand. For instance, curriculum implementation and or verifying whether the teaching materials and the textbooks used are based on the most effective strategies and methods

can be informed by research reviews of the different approaches and theories available, as demonstrated in Pica's (2008) review article of theories on second language acquisition. Therefore, it is very likely that adopting the findings of the research reviews can assist in policy development and the adoption of better language teaching practices and strategies for positive outcomes.

For the purposes of self-directed professional development, reviewing existing articles is likely to have great potential. This is essential in ensuring that the practitioners are well informed of the recent advancement and developments in their fields of practice. In the same context, review articles can be an important source of information for language teachers who aim at improving their knowledge and proficiency. They give teachers the opportunity to think about advanced practices and receive advice on what can be used in the language class. For instance, Richards and Rodgers' (2014) review article on the teaching methods used in language teaching helps educators by providing a thorough account of the approaches to teaching in various contexts. Hence, the provision of review articles means that teachers are able to update themselves with the current trends and the best practices in line with their professionalism.

Learning from existing studies can help bring together researchers from different disciplines. For instance, research reviews on language learning motivation often include theoretical perspectives from linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education. This is evidenced by Dornyei and Ryan's (2015) synthesis of the motivation research which founded the psychological theories in the language learning theories. Thus, cooperation between various researchers from different fields enables them to consider the process of language learning more comprehensively. This benefit can be expanded to the development of theoretical underpinnings. Review articles therefore assume a crucial role in theory development since theories are conventionally grounded on findings from empirical research. This can involve re-exploring such aspects of the field as second language acquisition theories or social cultural approaches to second language acquisition. For instance, Ellis's (2008) critical review article evaluates the theoretical frameworks of task-based language teaching and defines future research paths. This is beneficial to the development of the field since review articles encourage interaction with available theories and offer different ways of approaching them.

Learners might face difficulties in the pronunciation of English sounds as a foreign language especially where the sound systems of both English and the learners' first language are quite different. The reason for this is that Iraqi EFL learners mainly use Iraqi Arabic as their first language, and they encounter various challenges in mastering the pronunciation of the English sound system because of the differences between the two languages and their distinctive features. The current review article will provide a summary of the literature regarding the pronunciation difficulties and issues faced by Iraqi EFL learners. Although recent research on pronunciation challenges of EFL learners in diverse learning context across the globe is available, there is a dearth of research on Iraqi learners' pronunciation of English as a foreign language. This review article holds importance not only for elucidating the connection between proficiency and pronunciation but also for its pedagogical implications. This paper aims to synthesize research on Iraqi EFL learners' pronunciation, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses, and identifying direction for future research. This can be beneficial for researchers as well as policy makers as it can help them by keeping them updated about the current issues of this fundamental research area and directing their attention to existing gaps and needs.

## **2. Methodology and Data collection**

To minimize bias and ensure that the findings are both reliable and replicable, a structured and transparent data collection procedure has been implemented in this review article. It employs a research synthesis design to evaluate and assess the quality of available research on the pronunciation issues and challenges of Iraqi EFL learners, aiming to highlight both the strengths and gaps in the literature to offer data-driven recommendations for practitioners and policy makers (Cohen et al., 2011). Following the protocol outlined by Evans and Benefield (2001), this review adhered to a series of steps in conducting the research review. First, a systematic search method was employed to identify relevant studies. This process involved searching multiple databases (e.g., PubMed, Scopus, Clarivate) and other sources (e.g., Google Scholar and Iraqi Journals Database) regardless of the publication language to include as many relevant studies as possible. The search terms included the research review key terms: pronunciation, Iraqi EFL learners, English as a foreign language in Iraq, and phonetics and phonology of Iraqi EFL learners. Second, once relevant studies were identified, they were screened against the predetermined eligibility criteria. This process typically involved two stages: initial screening based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text assessments of potentially eligible studies. Studies published in suspicious and commercial journals were excluded. Data from each study included systematically extracting information using a standardized form. Key information typically included study characteristics (e.g., authors, year of publication), sample size, study design, subjects' level of education, intervention details, outcomes measured, and results. This step ensures that data is collected consistently across all studies included in the collected corpora.

## **3. Data Analysis and Discussion**

A total of 16 published studies were selected for review following the data collection stage. The analysis stage encompassed two steps. First, the studies were screened to identify the study design (e.g., experimental, survey, etc.). Second, a coding scheme was developed to identify the focus and objectives together with the other features targeted in this research review. The coding process utilized a deductive strategy (Hennick et al., 2020). Likewise, the initial coding scheme was scrutinized by three senior Iraqi TESOL specialists in order to minimize potential bias and ensure objective code development (Mills et al., 2006). After discussion and revisions on the coding scheme, the data were analyzed accordingly. In Table (1) below, the studies, along with the main codes, are displayed.

**Table (1): Studies on Iraqi EFL learners' pronunciation**

Author	Year	Participants	Sample size	Design	Focus	Data collection tool
Sarhan & Hamza	2018	Primary school	50	Experimental (intervention)	Examining the effect of multimedia on pronunciation	Test
Al-Thalab & Abdalla	2021	Postgraduate students	32	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring the influence of gender and dialect on stress placement	Test
Altaie	2022	Undergraduate students	25	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring the effect of spelling on pronunciation	Wordlist recording
Altaie	2021	Undergraduate students	20	Experimental	Investigating participants ability to pronounce English vowels	Wordlist recording
Al-Mislimawi & Sahib	2024	Undergraduate students and university instructors	50 + 20	Survey	Investigating difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners	Questionnaire
Sidgi & Shaari	2017	Undergraduate students	20	Experimental	Examining the role of automatic speech recognition eyespeak in improving learners' pronunciation	Questionnaire
Abdul-Abbas, Rashid, & Younus	2021	Secondary school teachers	50	Survey	Exploring Iraqi secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices of teaching pronunciation	Questionnaire
Khalaf & Mohammed	2022	Undergraduate students	60	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring the dialectal effect on EFL learners' pronunciation of English vowels	Wordlist recording
Shaymaa & Rezqallah	2021	Undergraduate students	30	Experimental	Examining Iraqi EFL learners difficulties of pronouncing diphthongs and triphthongs	Wordlist recording
Al-Atabi & Alhusseini	2018	Undergraduate students	140	Experimental	Investigating Iraqi EFL learners awareness of morphophonemic changes pronunciation	Wordlist recording
Mahmoud	2024	English teachers	57	Survey	Investigating teachers' views on the teaching of pronunciation	Questionnaire
AlMuselhy	2024	Undergraduate students	40	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring EFL learners' ability of consonants pronunciation	Wordlist recording

AlJumaily	2024	High school students	50	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring difficulties of pronouncing English multisyllabic words	Wordlist recording
Al Abdely	2021	Undergraduate students	20	Experimental (non-intervention)	Exploring difficulties of pronouncing English low vowels by Iraqi high school students	Wordlist recording
Yousif & Ameen	2018	Undergraduate students	25	Experimental (non-intervention)	Analyzing improper pronunciation of diphthongs by Iraqi EFL learners	Wordlist recording
Al Abdely	2023	Undergraduate students	20	Experimental (non-intervention)	Examining learners' ability to realize variation on vowel length	Wordlist recording

While the studies in the corpus involved a range of participants including primary school students, high school students, undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and teachers, they are particularly directed towards EFL undergraduate students. This imbalance in the focus on the different levels of English learners negatively impacts our understanding of the development of the learners' pronunciation and does not help provide a comprehensive picture of the situation across the different educational levels. Likewise, some of the studies' reviews show sample size limitations. In fact, most of these studies have relatively recruited quite few numbers of participants (e.g., 20 to 60 participants). This sample size can limit the generalizability of the reported findings and conclusions and fall short of providing more reliable and representative results.

For the research design of the reviewed studies, most of them are found to employ a non-intervention experimental design focused on investigating a specific variable affecting the learners' pronunciation. The other articles included three studies implementing a survey design and one study implementing an interventional experimental design. This observation highlights an important gap in the available literature on Iraqi EFL learners' pronunciation: the lack of interventional experiments to look at and improve pronunciation. Moreover, the data collected in these studies included recordings of the participants reading out loud wordlists of the researchers' choices. These recordings were analyzed by the researchers without the aid of any specialized software, apart from two studies. This may open the door for the researchers' biases and impressions in judging the accuracy of the variable effect to be observed and measured. In addition, with the exception of one study, all these studies appear to be cross-sectional, focusing on a single point in time. Longitudinal studies tracking pronunciation development over time can provide deeper insights into the learning process, the encountered challenges, and the long-term effectiveness of different interventions.

The research focus covers a broad spectrum of pronunciation-related issues including multimedia effects, gender influence, dialect influence, spelling effect, automatic speech recognition, and morphophonemic changes as well as exploring teachers' views and practices. While these studies offer a well-rounded understanding of the factors that may influence the Iraqi EFL learners' pronunciation of English sounds and words, a notable gap in the focus area can be seen in the negligence of intervention studies and examining the different instructional methods of pronunciation. Also, no research has been conducted to investigate the challenges of teaching pronunciation to Iraqi EFL learners across different educational levels or the local challenges that these learners face.

Finally, two main data collection methods were utilized to collect the data: wordlist recordings and questionnaires. Some of these studies combined experimental and survey designs thus utilizing both data collection methods, allowing for more in-depth analysis of the targeted variables and, helping triangulating data and enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. However, while these methods yielded both quantitative and qualitative data, there is no mention of utilizing advanced statistical, linguistic, or phonetic and phonological analysis software, which could have enhanced the depth and precision of the reported findings. Incorporating such techniques can offer more nuanced insights into pronunciation patterns and challenges and help reduce the effect of the researchers' biases and subjective judgments.

#### 4. Conclusion

The corpus of the reviewed published studies provides a comprehensive account of the pronunciation challenges encountered by Iraqi EFL learners, though it primarily focuses on undergraduate students. The existing literature enjoys diverse focus areas and a variety of data collection methods. The combination of different data types offers valuable insights into the issues under investigation. However, this corpus suffers a range of serious issues related to different aspects. Firstly, these studies targeted one educational level specifically at the expense of other levels and were rather limited in their sample sizes. Secondly, the literature is

predominated by non-intervention experimental designs relying heavily on cross-sectional studies. Thirdly, the collected data primarily involved recordings of participants reading wordlists, which are subsequently analyzed by researchers, not by cutting-edge phonetic and phonological analysis tools. Fourthly, the available literature ignores the exploration of the different teaching methods of pronunciation, intervention experiments, and the challenges that face Iraqi EFL learners. Fifthly, the reported results can be negatively impacted by the absence of advanced statistical and linguistics analysis techniques.

Based on the limitations identified in the existing literature, a number of recommendations can be made. It is evident that more work is needed to address these gaps. Future research should aim to diversify the participant base across educational levels, increase sample size, incorporate longitudinal designs, and employ advanced analysis tools. Additionally, greater attention should be paid to interventional studies and instructional methods. This will be crucial for the development of effective strategies to improve pronunciation among Iraqi EFL learners. By addressing these gaps, researchers and practitioners can better understand and support the pronunciation development of EFL learners, ultimately enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence.

## References

- [1] Abdul-Abbas, I. H., & Rashid, Q. J. (2021). Belief and practice in the teaching of pronunciation in the Iraqi context. *Journal of Archaeology of Egypt*, 18(3), 451 – 471.
- [2] Abdul-Aziz, S., & Habab, L. (2010). Difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL college students in the area of English syllables. *Al-Fatih Journal*, 45(1), 50 – 78.
- [3] Al Abdely, A. A. (2021). The pronunciation of English low vowels by Iraqi EFL learners: An intralingual analysis. *Journal of Language Studies*, 21(3), 154 – 171.
- [4] Al Abdely, A. A. (2023). Vowel length variation in the pronunciation of Iraqi EFL learners. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 5(2), 185 – 203.
- [5] AlJumaily, R. (2024). Investigating the difficulties encountered Iraqi EFL learners in pronouncing multisyllabic English words. *IJLLT*, 7(9), 60 – 68.
- [6] AlMuselhy, A. A. H. (2024). Iraqi students' English consonant pronunciation mistakes: an analytical study. *MESR*, 2(2), 30 – 43.
- [7] Al-Muslimawi, I. A. J., & Sahib, R. K. (2024). A survey study of the factors influencing Iraqi EFL learners' English pronunciation. *Iraqi Journal of Humanitarian, Social, and Scientific Research*, 14(1), 1042 – 1064.
- [8] Altaie, F. A. K. (2021). A descriptive study between Iraqi EFL learners and English native speakers in pronouncing English vowels: A contrastive study. *Journal of Misan Research*, 17(34), 428 – 480.
- [9] Altaie, F. A. K. (2022). The influence of spelling on the pronunciation of English as a foreign language as made by Iraqi EFL learners at the university level: A descriptive study. *Journal of College of Education*, 46(3), 503-511.
- [10] Al-Thalab, H. S. A., & Abdalla, J. K. (2021). Gender influence on the pronunciation of stress by Iraqi and Kurdish EFL learners. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 28(11), 24-49.
- [11] Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- [12] Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The Psychology of the Language Learner Revisited*. Routledge.
- [13] Ellis, R. (2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- [14] Evans, J., & Benefield, P. (2001). Systematic reviews of educational research: does the medical model fit? *British Education Research Journal*, 27(5), 527-541.
- [15] Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). *Promoting Teacher Reflection in Second Language Education: A Framework for TESOL Professionals*. Routledge.
- [16] Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- [17] Khalaf, H. K., & Mohammed, F. J. (2022). Dialectal differences in the production of English vowels by Iraqi EFL learners at university level. *Al-Adab Journal*, 2(143), 57 – 72.
- [18] Pica, T. (2008). *Second Language Acquisition Research: Applied and Theoretical Perspectives*. Routledge.
- [19] Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- [20] Sarhan, S. S., & Hamza, H. A. (2018). The effect of using multimedia techniques on Iraqi EFL learners' performance in vocabulary and pronunciation at the primary stage. *Journal of College of Basic Education*, 24(101), 61-79.
- [21] Shaymaa, S. M., & Rezqallah, M. S. (2021). An error analysis: Iraqi EFL college learners problems in British diphthongs and triphthongs pronunciation. *Al-Ustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences*, 60(1), 93 – 114.
- [22] Sidgi, L. F. S., & Shaari, A. J. (2017). The usefulness of automatic speech recognition (ASR) eyespeak software in improving Iraqi EFL students' pronunciation. *Australian International Academic Centre*, 8(1), 221 – 226.
- [23] Yousif, M. M., & Ameen, A. A. (2018). Analysing the improper pronunciation of diphthongs by Iraqi EFL learners. *Jurnal Arbitrer*, 5(1), 17 – 22.
- [24] Zhao, Y. (2003). The Use of Technology in Language Learning: A Literature Review. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(1), 13-25.