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PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS OF TURKISH EFL LEARNERS IN NORTHERN CYPRUS

Research Article

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Abstract

This study investigated the pronunciation problems of Turkish EFL learners in state schools in Girne, TRNC. The researcher collected data through a pronunciation test and school visitations. The performance of thirty participants was video-recorded. In order to increase the validity of the results, two native raters listened to the recordings and rated the problematic sounds as correct or incorrect. Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the coded and analysed data, and SPSS (Version 20) was used to find the percentages and the frequencies of the data. The findings indicate that Turkish EFL learners have serious problems in pronouncing certain English consonants (i.e., /θ/, /ð/, /w/, /v/, /ŋ/) and some English vowels and diphthongs (i.e., /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /ɔ:/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/). Mother tongue interference seems to be the main cause of these errors since Turkish lacks most of these sounds. Moreover, a lack of sufficient exposure to target language and inadequacy in training can also be potential causes of these errors as most of the participants have never heard or practiced the correct pronunciation of these sounds. Similarly, English spelling may have played an important role in students' mispronunciation. The results of the study are thought to be useful for EFL and ESL teachers.

Keywords: Pronunciation problems, Turkish EFL learners, mother tongue interference, insufficient training and exposure to TL.

1. Background and Statement of the Study

Pronunciation of certain English words by Turkish EFL learners is a challenging task. The difficulty posed by pronunciation is closely related to little exposure to and interaction with native speakers and the differences between the phonological systems of English and Turkish. Previous studies on this topic show that most pronunciation problems are not only because of physical articulatory problems but also from L2's cognitive causes (Ahmadi, 2011; Fraser, 2001; Jones, 1997; Kendric, 1997). According to Fraser (2011), the problem behind not being able to produce the correct sounds is not only because they cannot physically produce the sounds, but also they do not distinguish between the sounds to be able to organize and manipulate them as required in the L2 sound system. The teaching method also affects the way learners learn the target language pronunciation. For example, if a learner studies English as a foreign language through the grammar-translation method, we cannot expect him/her to know how to pronounce every word correctly due to a lack of emphasis on pronunciation during classes. Jones (2002) stated that teachers who tend to use the Audio-Lingual or Direct Method pay special emphasis to pronunciation while teaching the target language. For instance, in the Audio-Lingual method, "pronunciation is taught from the beginning, often by having students work in language laboratories on discriminating between members of minimal pairs" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 46). On the other hand, according to Larsen-Freeman (2002), learners are expected to show communicative evidence in Communicative Language Teaching by using the target language. They need to speak L2 fluently and there is no need for complete accuracy.

On fossilization in Turkish teachers' pronunciation, Demirezen (2007) suggested the Audio Articulation Method (AAM) to deal with the teachers' incorrect articulation in order to be able to become more effective for EFL learners. In another study, Demirezen (2005) investigated categorizations of some of the problematic sounds and recommended the Audio Articulation Method to cure fossilized pronunciation errors which are generally made by EFL learners of English. We can clearly point out that these studies give us evidence on the role of the Audio-Articulation Method in tackling EFL learners' pronunciation problems. As Krashen has stated numerous times, all the learners acquire the language in the same way and we can consider that Audio Articulation Method in some ways is similar to his general approach, in which acquisition takes place subconsciously.

Turkish EFL learners of English have pronunciation problems because English and Turkish have different sound systems. In addition to this, Yule (1987) indicated that producing the correct sounds is not easy to guess because of English writing system. English is an irregular language and this makes pronunciation more difficult. Moreover, he claimed that there is not intercommunication between symbol and sounds in the system of English writing. Hence, English orthography is disturbing for Turkish EFL learners and it is deep (Katz & Frost, 1992). According to Lewis (1983) Turkish orthography is regular and it matches the pronunciation, so Turkish EFL learners of English have difficulties in L2 when transferring this language rule. On the other hand, Henry (1987) pointed out that English orthography is influenced by other languages, such as, Greek and Latin, therefore, the correct pronunciation of many words gets more difficult to guess when encountered. Speakers of English tend to be good at producing the English sounds correctly if they are familiar with the knowledge of Greek and Latin. He stated that if a speaker of English has knowledge about /ch/ being pronounced as /k/ in Greek, then it becomes easy for him/her to guess that the pronunciation of the word 'chemistry' as /'kemɪstri/ or /'kɛməstri/.

Learners in Northern Cyprus learn English as a foreign language and there is a huge difference between learning English as a foreign language and a second language. In this case, English is generally learned in the place where the target language is spoken around the learners, whereas in the formal way it is learned in the home-country of the ESL learners (Stern, 1983). For instance, an English learner learning English in England learns it as a second language because English is spoken around him/her. He/she will find the opportunity to listen to the language and imitate the words; whereas, in Northern Cyprus, the learners of English learn it as a foreign language and English is not spoken in the country around them. Although there are many English speakers on the island, not every Turkish EFL learner can find an opportunity to hear and practice the language. Therefore, it is difficult for most of the learners to listen to the language and become familiar with English words.

University EFL learners in a study conducted by Bekleyen (2007) stated that oral skills were ignored during their high school education, and their language teaching was based on reading. Since listening and speaking skills are not included in some tests in Northern Cyprus, instructors do not find it necessary to emphasis on pronunciation matters (Bekleyen, 2007). Furthermore, Crystal (1999) claimed that pronunciation requires special emphasis by the teachers in order to improve communication skills of EFL learners in the target language, since there are certain components such as intonation, stress and rhythm in words. When learners of English utter incorrect sounds, then the intended meaning may be misunderstood. Therefore, the interlocutors may get the idea wrong. It is the same in all languages because to put stress on any word or to get the audience to receive our messages clearly, there should be a rising or falling tone on syllables, words or sentences when we want to emphasize them.

Aro and Wimmer (2003) conducted a study on reading success levels of primary learners in Finland, Germany, Sweden, Spain, France Netherlands to compare learners with similar backgrounds. The findings indicated that native learners of other languages except English are highly correct in guessing the correct pronunciation of words. Orthography is a factor and it plays an important role in guessing the correct pronunciation of the words and it shows us that even native speakers of English may have some difficulties to guess the correct pronunciation of some words in their language.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate pronunciation problems of Turkish EFL learners at state schools in Girne, Northern Cyprus. Different learners from different schools were observed and evaluated. The researcher also provided recommendations regarding developing English pronunciation. Moreover, the participants' thoughts about the system of Ministry of Education and the methods used in the classes in Northern Cyprus were sought and their opinions were compared in accordance with different schools (Girne Anafartalar High School, Oğuz Veli Secondary School and Lapta Yavuzlar High School). The findings of the study will assist lecturers of English and provide insights.

3. Significance of the Study

There have been many studies on pronunciation problems of Turkish and foreign learners in the literature. However, this study contributes to the field with its focus on the pronunciation problems of Turkish EFL learners and it will function as a reference for them. Moreover, revealing pronunciation problems of Turkish EFL learners will also be the indicator of the classroom practices of other learners and teachers, therefore, other learners and teachers will have a chance to analyse their own teaching and learning process. In addition, this may also help improve the quality of the programs offered at schools.

4. The Current Status of the Topic and a Brief Review of Relevant Empirical Studies

There are many studies in literature regarding teaching pronunciation and many authors have been expressing their ideas in order to make language learning easier for both EFL and ESL learners all over the world. Some researchers suggested audio materials and repetition, some studies suggested the same method including practice of segmentals (Demirezen, 2007; Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998; Sönmez & Karataş, 2011). On the other hand, there are other studies that suggested the role of cognitive development, sociological and psychological conditions. (Ahmadi, 2011; Fraser, 2001; Jones, 1997; Kendric, 1997).

Derwing et al. (1998) highlighted that teaching segmentals and supra-segmentals plays a very important role in teaching of English and they provide empirical evidence on this subject. In a study done by Wahba (1998), Egyptian learners' pronunciation problems were investigated. In his study, the results showed that the certain errors made by the participants were due to stress and intonation. He pointed out that the errors that Egyptian learners faced were because of the phonological differences between the sound system of Arabic and English. Şenel (2006) suggested the importance of stress and intonation for EFL classes to get the learners to pay attention to sounds in order to produce correct pronunciation. In his study, the learners were given instructions to pronounce sounds as in *th* (/ð / and /θ/). He stated that drawing attention on voiced and unvoiced sounds and demonstrating some of the sample words let them be aware of uttering them with care. In this way, the learners assessed themselves and got aware of ideal sounds. Eventually they developed knowledge from audio lingual perspectives to cognitive approaches. In another study, Hişmanoğlu (2007) stated the importance of the Audio Articulation Method where the learners of English have a chance to practice their articulation skills and suggests that non-native lecturers of English should give

their learners awareness about uttering the problematic sounds, in which they are orally uttered and demonstrated with some diagrams. Karakas and Sönmez (2011) planned a lesson in order to teach pronunciation through Audio Articulation Method where the learners have more chance to improve their speaking skills. The lesson aimed to teach the learners common problematic *th* (/ð / - /θ/) sounds.

Hişmanoğlu (2007) suggested that learners of English should be encouraged to pick up the correct pronunciation in order to overcome their problems about pronouncing the sounds incorrectly. Karakaş and Sönmez (2011) pointed out that we as teachers should not elicit from our learners within a lesson. In the literature it is very clear that many lecturers used AAM to teach the correct pronunciation to their learners within different contexts through different techniques and exercises. A study conducted by Bayraktaroğlu (2008) focused on isolated sounds, stress and rhythm. He stated that the lecturers should show students how to utter sounds correctly. On the other hand, Yule (1994) stated that learners of English because of its orthography tend to transfer their mother tongue sound articulations into target language and this affects acquisition in negative ways. He pointed out that they tend not to speak out what is written. Moreover, in a study of Bekleyen (2011) it was claimed that articulation problems of EFL learners are due to a lack of emphasis on stress patterns while learning English language. She stated that EFL learners of English do not have enough opportunities to practice weak and strong articulations of the words and that's why they tend to produce different sounds and overgeneralize in their performances while they try to speak in the target language (L2). In order not to overgeneralize and transfer L1 forms to L2, she advises some weak and strong exercises to be done while learning English. She also pointed out that English spelling took an important role in EFL/ESL learners' mispronunciations.

Bayraktaroğlu (2008) indicated that there is a barrier for EFL learners while acquiring language because of differences between Turkish and English orthography. Therefore, he suggested that teachers of English could do more transcription exercises in order to draw learners' attention to the differences between the two languages. He pointed out that they would distinguish the two languages more easily if they worked on more symbolized language exercises and learn the target language (L2) in a more effective way. According to Elliot (1995), many teachers' instructions of foreign languages focus on four areas (reading, writing, listening and speaking). In the first year of education, they tend to emphasize on pronunciation as the curriculum introduces the target language's sound system and alphabet. However, for the rest of the years, they rarely give special attention to teaching pronunciation features. The lack of emphasis on teaching pronunciation might be due to the lack of enthusiasm on second language teachers and learners, that producing correct sounds of a target language is not important. In addition to this, Pennington (1994) stated that teachers tend to view pronunciation as a component of linguistic rather than conversational fluidity. Furthermore, many teachers view teaching a sound system of a target language as the least beneficial of the fundamental language skills. Hence, they spend their time on teaching other areas of second language (Elliot, 1995). Repetitions, exercises, exhortation, guidance and modelling are the main focus in all the studies mentioned above.

There are some studies which speculated that the role of mental characteristics is more important than physical or articulatory causes. Unfortunately, it is generally thought that teachers do not pay enough attention or spend time on teaching pronunciation during their classes (Fraser, 2001). On the other hand, students should be able to differentiate between the characteristics of the phonetic sounds. When the Audio Articulation Method is used, it was believed that students may not be able to define the sounds, whereas, it is more beneficial to use conceptualization way of learning to teach the theoretical and practical knowledge of

sounds. In this way, sounds would be manipulated much more easily by the learners. Besides Fraser (2001) and Baker's (1981) studies also supported the conceptualization.

It was theorized by Baker (1981) that learners are not able to learn how to pronounce words by just hearing the correct form of articulation. For individuals who do not have sufficient capacity of hearing, repetition and imitation exercises would not be helpful to acquire the language (Kenworthy, 1987). O'Connor and Fletcher (1989) also claimed that individuals without sufficient capacity of hearing may not be able to pronounce sounds correctly. That is, teachers should use alternative methods, tasks and approaches in order to give opportunity to learners to be able to perform their output. Some learners have innate talent to pronounce the correct pronunciation but the rest of the learners are affected by some external factors such as the amount of exposure to L2, age of learning, formal instruction and use of certain strategies.

In a study done by Chang (2000), Mandarin Chinese speakers of English had difficulties with pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/ sounds and he stated that this was due to the lack of these sounds in Chinese language. Lu (2008) pointed out that speakers of English choose /t, d/, /s, z/ or /f, v/ as substitutes for /θ/ and /ð/ dental fricatives. Moreover, Chang (2000) conducted a study and investigated the problematic English diphthong /eɪ/, and the results showed that general Chinese learners have problems with pronouncing it. In addition to this, Mandarin Chinese language system does not have the same noun plural forms as English languages does, therefore, Mandarin Chinese speakers of English face difficulties while uttering the correct sounds (Liu, 2006). According to Menyuk (1968) and Schmidt (1977), dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are the last sounds which native speakers comprehend while acquiring their own language and these sounds have the most frequent substitutes replaced by the learners of English during their learning process.

On the other hand, Bolton and Kwok (1990) stated that there is a difference between English and Chinese language system: English is an intonation language whereas Chinese is a tone language and this distinctive system of pronunciation causes Chinese learners to be perceived impolite and inconsiderate while speaking in English. They also pointed out that intonation transfer from L1 to L2 is a natural phenomenon and many empirical studies found that there are many different accents spoken by different Chinese dialect groups. Moreover, comprehension may be affected in negative ways if learners of English have more serious intonation transfers (Bolton & Kwok, 1990). O'Connor (2003) has studied pronunciation problems of Arab learners and reported that many of the pronunciation problems (/p/ and /b/, /θ/ and /ð/) of EFL/ESL learners are due to their L1 transfer and it is very difficult to change the obtained habits since childhood. He stated that it needs a long time and regular practice to change these habits. It was also stated that all of this process is linked to the age of learners. According to him, the main pronunciation problems that EFL/ESL learners make are caused by sharing different backgrounds and substitution of sounds. Moosa (1979) stated that there is a conflict between the sound systems of L1 and L2 and the Arab learners of English come up with habits of their L1. Therefore, they build the phonological features in a second language and this leads them into encountering many difficulties in differentiating particular sounds between L1 and L2.

Alkhuli (1983) studied the effect of sound system while teaching and learning pronunciation and showed that the main problems result from the differences in individual's mother tongue (Arabic) and his second language (English). He also stated that some sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in Arabic spoken language, therefore, Arab learners while learning English have serious pronunciation problems in distinguishing between their mother tongue and English. Another important reason why learners of English from different nationalities unable to learn how to produce the correct sounds for the words is probably that one vowel sound has

more than one articulation. Therefore, this issue makes learners suffer from guessing the correct pronunciation and leads to mispronunciations.

Cruttenden (1994) stated that those whose native languages have less complex vowel systems, are lucky to guess the correct pronunciation of the words. The speakers of L2 tend to produce a majority of different sounds and apply them to different words instead of some certain sounds as in the words come /kʌm/ or /mʌnki/. They tend to use another vowel sounds such as /ɔ/ or /u:/ and replace them. This problem is very common for learners of English and they picture this idea and apply it to many of the words in English. This way, producing the correct sounds for the words become much more difficult due to the wrong idea of having only one type of pronunciation for each vowel.

For the EFL learners in Turkey, Bekleyen (2007) stated that language tests being held do not contain oral-aural components and pronunciation skills are less emphasized. Teachers only work on grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing skills and this makes pronunciation unnecessary to teach it. Önem (2012) on the other hand put forward that all examinations in ELT departments depend on vocabulary, grammar and reading. He also stated that there is no sufficient evaluation on other language skills and speaking is the less evaluated skill. Therefore, EFL learners in Turkey do not pay attention to pronunciation and speaking skills as they are not going to be tested. It was stated by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) that many of the ESL learners of English are not interested in learning the correct pronunciation of the sounds and, therefore, they find it very difficult to work on. Another important point made by him was that teachers of English do not make their learners aware of the importance of pronunciation and nor use the correct tools to improve their pronunciation skills. Moreover, English instructors should use the correct methods in order to match the needs of their learners to help them with learning pronunciation. Learners of languages have different ways to speak the target language. They sometimes speak it totally different or slightly different than native speakers (Avery & Ehrlich, 2013).

According to Kenworthy (1987) language problems can be overcome if learners/speakers focus more and effort on them. He stated that an individual's native language is the most powerful factor for EFL learners' pronunciation and he pointed out that if learners are aware of the sound system of their own language, then they will be able to become successful in diagnosing their own difficulties. Furthermore, there are twenty-four consonants and twenty vowels all together with diphthongs in English and totally it makes forty-four phonemes. EFL learners of English should be able to produce all of them while their learning process. Considering different language backgrounds of learners, there will be many difficulties to pronounce all of the phonemes correctly because of their L1 background (O'Connor, 2003). Language experience plays an important role for pronunciation ability (Siriwisut, 1994 & Serttikul, 2005). As indicated in their studies it had an effect on pronunciation ability. The learners were regarded as weak due to poor language experience and those who were regarded as strong due to good pronunciation. Therefore, it was stated that learners with good pronunciation would develop better communication skills than the poor ones. For this reason, as found by Şenel (2006) and Haymes (2000), the findings showed that learners in a country where English is spoken around them tend to improve themselves more since they listen to the target language a lot. For the sounds /n/ and /ŋ/, as Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) stated, although they exist in the sound system of Arabic, they are allophones of the same phoneme /n/. Whereas, /n/ and /ŋ/ are two different sounds in English. Therefore, Arabic learners of English have tendencies to produce the same sound instead and do not distinguish between them. They mostly put the sound /g/ or /k/ at the end of the words which finish with /ŋ/. Odlin (1997, p.119) stated that according to a study done on Arabic EFL learners in the literature, supra-segmental features of L1 would be very effective if L2 shares the similar backgrounds with it. Then, it

becomes easier for the EFL learners to distinguish between the two languages. Moreover, Keller-Cohen (1997) pointed out that similarities in both languages in the supra-segmental features may help learners to learn the syntax of the target language. Fraser (2000) noted that today's ESL teachers of English have serious difficulties with teaching correct pronunciation of the sounds and stated that they have insufficient foundation for them to improve their L2.

On the other hand, the term *motivation* is a very important factor that affects one's developing native-like pronunciation. Moyer (2007) found that positive inducement to the target language might be so positive for its learners to develop their native-like pronunciations. In a case study done on Spanish learners by Shively (2008), it was pointed out that learners of English should be encouraged to use L2 outside the class and given some useful tasks to complete in order to match structures of English. It was stated by Case (2012) that most of the Spanish learners of English fail using short vowels and have difficulties in distinguishing between long and short vowels. Another common difficulty is voiced consonantal sound /d/. They mainly tend to fall on long vowel /a:/ when pronouncing some words such as *say*. In addition to this, they have another problematic issue that they mainly replace /v/ with /b/ because in Spanish alphabet both letters /v/ and /b/ are pronounced as /b/. Obviously this is due to their native language interference (Frederick, 2005).

As for the Japanese learners of English, it was pointed out by Othata (2004) that they in their native language put a vowel to end of every single word ends in a consonant and this causes mispronunciations when learning L2. They mainly tend to add a vowel sound at the end of words end in consonants as in the word 'bath' /basu/. We can clearly say that Japanese learners of English are influenced by their first language sound system as they acquire L2 (Parker & Riley, 2009). On the other hand, Lado (1957) claimed that lecturers of second/foreign languages who emphasis on the comparison between the native and the target language will be better at knowing what is needed for their learners to learn. Moreover, he stated that teachers can provide better teaching if they are aware of contrastive analysis features of the two languages.

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

The study was carried out in Girne, in Northern Cyprus. 30 students (16 Male and 14 Females) ages ranged between 16 and 19 years (17,17±0,14) participated in this study. The participants were Turkish learners whose parents were born in Northern Cyprus. They were high school EFL learners who study English. They have been studying English for nine years. They receive six hours of instruction in English per week but they still have communication and performance problems. Their English is expected to be at A2 level, but they are A0 level when it comes to using L2. Especially their speaking skill is very low.

5.2. Instruments

The design of this study was descriptive. A questionnaire was used to collect information about the participants' background and a pronunciation test was used to elicit pronunciation problems of students. A pronunciation test was used to investigate the major segmental pronunciation problems of Turkish EFL learners. Forty-three items containing consonants, vowels and diphthongs were measured in this test. The test was designed by the researcher's supervisor. According to his experiences and observations of Turkish EFL learners in Northern Cyprus, he suggested the researcher researcher's testing the items which were given to him. The participants were asked to pronounce English words in isolation or in sentences, as well as through the description of picture, while being audio-recorded. All of the participants were informed about the study and the questions were answered related to the study. All the data

were analysed by two independent native English-speaking judges (a female and a male). They rated the items as correct and incorrect.

5.3. Data Collection Procedure

Randomly selected participants amongst public schools in Girne participated in the present study. The researcher received permission from the school principals in order to attend the classrooms, observe and audio record the participants' performance. In addition to this, the researcher carried out interviews with both participants and teachers. As the researcher interviewed them, their conversations were recorded. All of the participants were informed about the study and the participants pronounced items loudly while they were video-recorded. Then, all videos were analysed by two independent native English-speaking judges. They rated the items as correct or incorrect. The data were analysed to test inter-rater reliability using Pearson Correlation and frequency and descriptive analysis were performed in SPSS (ver. 20).

6. Results

First, in order to ensure the reliability of the study, a Pearson Correlation reliability test was conducted, the result of which is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Pearson Correlation of inter-rater reliability*

| | Rater 1 | Rater 2 |
|---------|---------|---------|
| Rater 1 | 1 | .763* |
| Rater 2 | .763* | 1 |

* $p < 0.01$

As shown above, there is a significant correlation between Rater 1 and Rater 2 ($r=0.76$, $p<0.01$).

Next, the frequencies and percentages of participants' difficulties in pronouncing English consonants were analysed. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Frequency of Turkish EFL learners' mispronunciation of English problematic consonantal sounds*

| Problematic Consonant | Participants' Mispronunciation | Frequency and Percentage Judges' assessment | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---|------|-----|------|
| | | J 1 | | J 2 | |
| | | N | % | N | % |
| /w/ | /v/ | 23 | 76.6 | 22 | 73.3 |
| /v/ | /w/ | 26 | 86.6 | 23 | 76.6 |
| /θ/ | /t/ | 24 | 80 | 26 | 86.6 |
| | /f/ | 3 | 10 | 4 | 13.3 |
| /ð/ | /z/ | - | - | - | - |
| | /d/ | 26 | 86.6 | 26 | 86.6 |
| | /ɪn/ | - | - | - | - |
| /ŋ/ | /ɪng/ | 2 | 6.6 | 4 | 13.3 |
| | /ɪnk/ | 25 | 83.3 | 26 | 86.6 |

As shown in Table 2 above, Turkish EFL Learners have pronunciation problems with consonants /w/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/ and /ŋ/. The first problematic consonant sound was /w/. According to Judge 1, most of the participants (76.6 %) mispronounced this English consonant as /v/, as

in the word ‘west’ which was pronounced as /vest/. For the second Judge, the score was very close and most of the participants (73.3%) mispronounced the consonant /w/ as /v/.

Another problematic consonant sound was /v/. Many of the participants (86.6%) mispronounced it as /w/ as in the words ‘villages’ which was pronounced as /'vɪlɪdʒəz/, ‘Virginia’ which was pronounced as /'vɪdʒɪni:ə/. This may be due to the fact that learners have not been taught how to use their articulatory system to produce this sound since Turkish EFL learners are not aware of this to be able to produce correct /v/ sounds as in ‘villages’. While talking, they do not know what to do to produce it correctly. For the consonant /w/, they also do not know that they have to make their mouths round as a kissing position, so that they can produce it without touching their lips with their teeth. If they had known this clue about these two separate consonants, then they would have produced the correct sounds. The second Judge also found the similar case and most of the participants (76.6%) who he listened to could not produce the correct /v/ sound. Another problematic consonant English sound was /θ/. As can be seen in Table 2 above, according to Judge 1, most of Turkish EFL learners (80%) mispronounced it as /t/. For second judge, we can clearly point out that more participants (86.6%) mispronounced it as /t/ and the results show that Turkish EFL learners have serious articulation problems with /θ/ sound. The common words which they had problems were ‘think’ as /tɪŋk/ ‘three’ as /tri:/, ‘thin’ as /tɪn/, ‘with’ as /wɪt/. According to Judges 1’s decision, only a few (10%) of the participants pronounced /θ/ as /f/ and for Judge 2, 13.3% of the participants had problem with the consonant /θ/ and they replaced it with /f/.



Figure 1. Mispronunciation of English problematic consonantal sounds

The next problematic sound for Turkish EFL learners was /ð/. The most substitution was /d/ (86.6%) as in the words ‘southern’ which is pronounced as /'sʌðən/, ‘the’ which is pronounced as /di:/, and ‘their’ which is pronounced as /deə/. Both Judges came up with the same decision as can be seen in Table 3 below. This is due to the fact that these two consonants do not exist in Turkish, therefore, Turkish EFL learners tend to produce either /t/, /f/ or /d/ sound instead. They find it easier to pronounce this way and they say that feel strange to the audience. Hence, they only replace the sounds with /t/, /f/, /d/ and pronounce the words. As to the English consonant sound /ŋ/, most of the participants (83.3%) regarding the first Judge’s decision mispronounced it as in the words ‘something’ which is pronounced as /'sʌmtɪŋk/ and ‘think’ which they pronounced as /θɪŋk/. According to the second judge, similar to Judge 1, 26 participants (86.6%) mispronounced /ŋ/ sound. As can be seen in Table 2, for Judge 1, only 6.6% of the participants pronounced /ŋ/ sound as /ɪŋg/ and according to the results of Judge 2, 13.3% of them replaced it with /ɪŋg/. The results were followed by major problematic vowels and diphthongs. The frequencies and percentages of participants’ difficulties in pronouncing English vowels and diphthongs were analysed. The results are presented in Table 3 below. As

can be seen in Table 3, regarding the vowels and diphthongs, according to Judge 1, 22 of the participant (73.3%) mispronounced the vowel sound /ʊ/. They replaced it with the vowel sound /u:/. For Judge 2, 23 of the participants (76.6%) mispronounced and replaced it with the same vowel sound.

Table 3. *Frequency of mispronunciation of problematic English vowels and diphthongs by Turkish EFL learners*

| Problematic Vowels and diphthongs | Participants' Mispronunciation | Frequency and Percentage | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------|---------|------|
| | | Judges' assessment | | | |
| | | Judge 1 | | Judge 2 | |
| | | N | % | N | % |
| /ʊ/ | /u:/ | 22 | 73.3 | 23 | 76.6 |
| /ɪ/ | /ei/ | 22 | 73.3 | 24 | 80 |
| /aʊ/ | /əʊ/ | 23 | 76.6 | 23 | 76.6 |
| /əʊ/ | /ɒ/ | 21 | 70 | 23 | 76.6 |
| | /ʌ/ | 3 | 10 | 5 | 16.6 |
| /ɔ:/ | /əʊ/ | 16 | 53.3 | 18 | 60 |
| | /aʊ/ | 12 | 40 | 12 | 40 |

The second problematic vowel sound was /ɪ/ which many of the participants (73.3%), according to Judge 1, mispronounced it as /ei/ as in the word 'village'. Instead, they said /veɪlɪdʒ/. According to second judge, the result is similar and 24 of them (80%) had a problem pronouncing it correctly. The third problematic sound according to both judges was /aʊ/ which was mispronounced as /əʊ/ as in the words 'cows', which is pronounced as /kəʊs/, 'found' which is pronounced as /faʊnd/ and 'shower' pronounced as /'ʃəʊə/. What I believe is that teachers in most of the state schools do not spend time on teaching the sound system of English to their learners and this causes mispronunciation. Therefore, when they graduate from high school and go to university it is observed that many of them are at the level of beginners. They should have learned at least how to speak some basic English with acceptable pronunciation, but unfortunately they cannot. Another problematic sound which was tested was /əʊ/ (North American English, /oʊ/) diphthong and mispronunciation of it was approximately 73.3% and participants pronounced it as /ɒ/ as in the words 'soap' which is pronounced as /səʊp/ and 'wrote' which is pronounced as /rəʊt/. According to both Judges, only 13.3% of the participants mispronounced /ʌ/ sound as in the word 'notes' which is pronounced as /nəʊts/. The last sound was /ɔ:/. According to Judge 1, half of the participants produced /ɔ:/ as /əʊ/, as in the words 'author' which was mispronounced as /əʊθə/, and 'bought' as /bəʊt/. For second Judge, the result of the same sound was 60%. On the other hand, the results showed us that both Judges agreed on the mispronunciation of the same sound (40%) and they believed that participants pronounced it as /aʊ/ as in the words 'daughter' which was pronounced as /'daʊtə/ and 'taught' which was pronounced as /təʊt/.

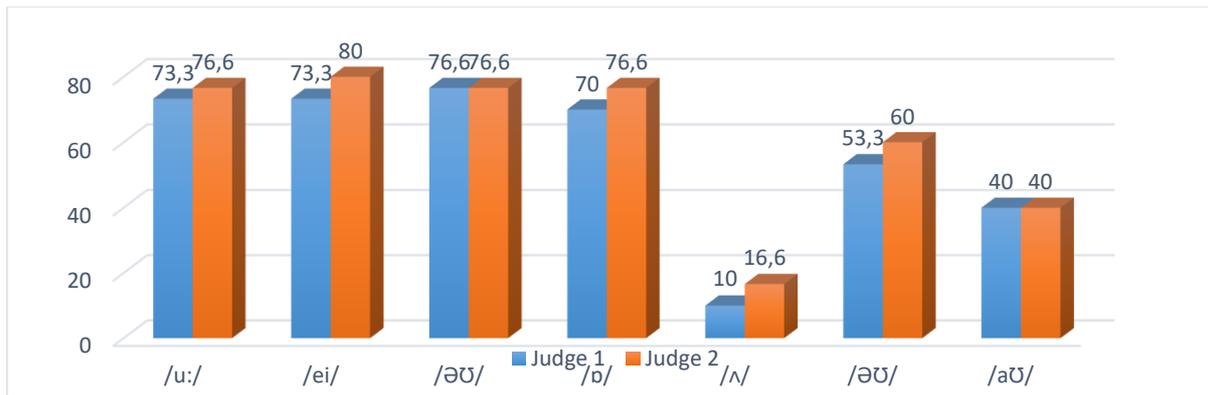


Figure 2. Frequency of mispronunciation of problematic English vowels and diphthongs by Turkish EFL learners

The above chart (Figure 3) illustrates the percentages and the numbers of errors made by the participants in the vowel and diphthongs. As can be seen diphthong /ei/ has the highest percentage (80%), the vowels and diphthong /u:/, /ɒ/, /əʊ/ have the medium percentage 76.6 and the vowel /ʌ/ has the lowest percentage (13.3%).

7. Discussion

The results of this study are related to other empirical studies such as Hakim (2012), Kwary and Prananingrum (2006), Pal (2013), Field (2003), Ahmadi (2011). For example, as the results show, Turkish-speaking learners have problems with the pronunciation of the English consonants (/ð/, /w/, /θ/, /ŋ/) which do not exist in the Turkish sound system. Therefore, Turkish EFL learners find them difficult to pronounce. In a similar study, Hakim (2012) found that, /ð/ was a problematic sound for Java speakers' mispronunciation of English. L1 is the main cause for them to mispronounce it as /d/, which Turkish EFL learners do the same. Additionally, Turkish education system for L2 is a complicated issue because there are many non-native teachers who teach EFL learners of English but there is not sufficient focus on communicative tasks and tasks that include pronunciation. Therefore, the learners of English face many difficulties in their real life situations while speaking in the target language and breakdowns in communication can occur. Moreover, EFL learners should be given both weak and strong forms of pronunciation.

According to Field (2003), the teachers should have some time to work on strong forms of the words rather than just working on weak forms. As many researchers conducted many studies on pronunciation, according to Kwary and Prananingrum's (2006) findings, some vowel and consonant sounds were problems for Indonesian University learners of English due to their negative transfers from L1. They investigated the influence of their MT on the production of some L2 sounds. Furthermore, Pal (2013) investigated Hindi learners of English to figure out their problematic L2 sounds. The results showed that they had serious problems with /ʒ/, /ʃ/, /s/, /z/, and /dʒ/. The conceptualization theory is very important for EFL learners in phonetics teaching in L2 because in this way learners can be given the chance to use the appropriate level of L2 and its components. The learners of L2 should be given what 'concept' means first as a start, then gradually get them to go into language system to observe the most successful outcome from them. According to Ahmadi (2011), teachers should observe their EFL learners and focus more on supra-segmental characteristics of L2 by giving their learners the chance to see outcomes of teaching. If these are applied, then the learners can have that opportunity to perform word stress and intonation in effective ways. Many of the Turkish EFL learners make errors when they learn English and it is obvious that their L1 is the most important impact which causes them to mispronounce some sounds.

Demirezen (2005) stated that the mother tongue is a factor for EFL learners' not producing the correct sounds in English. On the other hand, the Turkish EFL learners do not pay sufficient attention to pronunciation and this sometimes leads them to speak unintelligibly. As Hebert (2002) states, the learners and lecturers should be aware of the importance of articulation when learning/teaching a foreign language. Otherwise, the learners tend to be unclear in L2. On the other hand, Varol's (2012) findings clarified that Turkish EFL adult learners also had problems in producing the correct /θ/, /ð/, /ɹ/ /ʒ/, /æ/ sounds as they do not exist in their mother tongue. He conducted a study on Turkish adult learners to find out the influence of their L1 sound system on English. Bada's (2001) findings also proved that Japanese learners of English also had the similar difficulties in pronouncing some of the English sounds such as /l/, /r/, /θ/, /ð/, and /v/. These pronunciation problems were due to their L1 interference.

According to a study done by Chan (2009) who investigated the articulation difficulties of Cantonese learners of English in Hong Kong, the findings revealed that although they had studied English for long years, they still had serious pronunciation problems with some certain sounds that do not exist in their MT. In another study Hakim (2012) investigated why Java learners of English were not able to produce the correct sounds and he found that they had difficulties with pronouncing /d/ and /ð/. The articulation of these sounds was the most difficult one for them.

On the other hand, as many other researchers investigated the pronunciation problems of Arabic learners of English, the results of Baloch's (2013) study clarified that Arabic learners had a very serious problem with pronouncing the consonant sound /p/. Instead, they tend to produce /b/ which is the closest sound and this was due to lack of /p/ sound in their native language. As the results of this study clearly show, many of the other areas and aspects such as motivation, personality, mother tongue, environmental conditions, lexical learning, orthography, etc. should be taken in educators' consideration in order to be effective in teaching EFL learners. We, as EFL teachers, should respond to their needs and set everything accordingly. Otherwise, quality learning might not take place in our classes. In a study done by Jabbari and Samavarchi (2011) Persian children were chosen as participants and they were told to repeat some words individually after the authors. The results revealed that they had problems with consonant clusters due to negative transfer from their native language, Persian. The findings of the present study are in line with those of Varol (2012), Bada (2001), Keshavarz and Khamis (2017). They also found that their participants had problem with certain English consonants and vowels namely /ð/, /θ/, /ŋ/, /v/, /w/, /æ/. The learners of English whether they were Turkish, Farsi or Japanese mainly had problems with producing the correct sounds due to lack of some sounds, mother tongue interference or differences between the native and the target language sound system. In Demirezen's study (2009) the participants' findings indicated that as instructors, we need to be models of our learners who learn to speak another language and provide them every single sound that does not exist in their mother tongue. In his findings, schwa sound could not have been able to transcribed correct in any of the words and this was due to lack of emphasis on applied phonetics.

On the other hand, in a study conducted by Tokoz-Goktepe (2014), the findings revealed that Turkish EFL learners had problems with learning the correct pronunciation of the sounds and they mainly claimed that although speaking activities are included in their English books, the teachers do not cover speaking tasks and do not draw attention to pronunciation features. Another problem many of the teachers stated about their learners of English was that they get so excited in front of their friends while performing and fear of being laughed at by others. In a study conducted by Dung (2015) pronunciation problems of Vietnamese learners were measured and the findings of the study showed that Vietnamese learners of English had serious problems about pronunciation including tense and lax vowels, consonant endings, stress and

intonation. Some of the findings of the present study share the same common results with Dung's study. Both Turkish and Vietnam languages do not have the fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, therefore, for both of Turkish and Vietnamese learners of English it is very difficult to produce the correct th sounds. They mainly tend to replace /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/, /d/, /z/, /f/. As mentioned before, thoughts in line of Elliot's (1995) seemed to be positive that many instructors in Girne ignored teaching pronunciation to Turkish EFL learners in their courses. Therefore, many of the sounds are not practised during their education and this causes serious pronunciation problems in their daily life. They cannot be understood by other speakers of English in their communications. Moreover, they feel very excited of speaking in front of other people due to the lack of good pronunciation skills. In the present study, the findings supported the idea that Turkish EFL learners in Girne have serious difficulties with some certain vowels, consonantal sounds and diphthongs. Two of the basic reasons for this were their mother tongue interference and lack of emphasis by their language teachers on pronunciation on certain difficult sounds in English.

According to Couper (2011) and Fraser's findings on critical listening and constructed metalanguage to test speech performance and perceptions of the learners. The results showed that knowing phonological in both native and target language affected learners to become more successful in pronouncing the sounds correct. It also found that explicit instructions by the educators helped the learners to overcome their pronunciation skills in order to become more intelligible. Considering the finding of the present study, Turkish EFL learners in Northern Cyprus are not shown the differences of sounds systems in both languages. Therefore, they usually tend to suffer from pronunciation when speaking in English.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

The recommendations which could be useful for further research are as follows:

1. The present study was administrated in the eleventh grades who study foreign language and social science in High Schools used in the study, in Girne. A similar study could be done at different state schools in Northern Cyprus to investigate if other EFL English learners have the same pronunciation problems.
2. For further study, the researcher could give a number of teaching lessons to the target participants so that they can pay more attention to why they are going to study the target language and emphasize more on sound system of it to be able to produce the correct sounds.
3. When recording the participants' pronunciations, the researcher can set everything in a quiet room because it is very important that participants of the study should feel motivated and not interrupted by others outside of the room.
4. The participants of the study may be told to read the test items slowly while they are being recorded in order to listen to and transcribe them easily and appropriately later on.
5. The teachers should be their learners' model to lead them. They should give them awareness of the importance of pronunciation skill to be able to develop communication performance in L2.
6. The learners should be informed sufficiently about phonology and phonetics to be able to overcome its difficulties.
7. The learners of second/foreign language should be given authentic materials including problematic sounds. Therefore, they are able to face them as they learn subconsciously.
8. The teachers should encourage their learners to be motivated during the courses. Without motivation, learning becomes much more difficult for them.

9. For all L2 programs, there should be a regular and systematic curriculum for learners including IPA symbols in order to practice.
10. There should be sufficient listening activities during EFL/ESL classes.
11. Oral communication courses should be added to teaching programs.
12. Non-native teachers should improve themselves and identify their learners' needs to be able to increase the quality of learning during classes.
13. Sounds that do not exist in the learners' mother tongue should be identified, considered to be the most important part of L2 and given special attention.
14. The language teachers should respond to learners' needs and prepare their materials accordingly. Moreover, they should consider their level, learning styles, learning speed, and special needs/problems.

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