

The Problem of Pronunciation of /r/ Sound among Kurdish EFL Learners at Koya University

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**Abstract**

This research will discuss the important of /r/ sound pronunciation that plays a main role in learning as foreign language. It then outlines key components of English /r/ sound pronunciation that justify learners' and teachers' attention. Whenever the learners feel that the mother tongue pronunciation doesn't take over the target foreign language as much the learners spontaneously feel as native speakers. Consequently, the learners make comparison between mother tongue and foreign language sound system. It provides much self-confidence to the learners. Thus, this research studies the pronunciation of /r/ sound among EFL Kurdish Sorani learners at Koya University in Iraqi Kurdistan. Besides, in total of 80 learners participated in this research to find the problems and issues among EFL learners in relation to /r/ sound. The results presented some substantial issues that faced to the reciters of /r/ sounds. TEFL researchers can utilize the outcomes of the study in the teaching fields in relation to pronunciation, and they can be aware of these problems.

**Introduction**

What most EFL learners may wish to acquire is a perfect pronunciation. At Koya University, two major departments strive to prepare and present their learners for the marketplace. At this University, learners face challenges in relation to few specific sounds. In the matter of fact, /r/ sound is one of the sounds that students cannot avoid making mistakes during recitation. Different nationalities around the world affect diverse issues with pronunciation of specific sounds. Lim and Seo (2016) stated that Korean TEFL learners have dilemma of pronunciation /r/ and /r/ sound. Ercan and

Kunt (2019) studied the issues of pronunciation (/ð / and /θ/). In addition to that, researching on consonants are not the only parts of conducting analyses. Besides, Mirzaei *et al* (2015) researched on vowel sound recitation among EFL learners in relation two different ethnicities in Iran.

In relation to several studies that were carried out on pronunciation in the recent research, this research is assumed to supply to the field with its main points on learners on how they can improve their pronunciation specifically for the proposed sounds. In addition, the research can assist and pave the way to other pronunciation phenomena that facilitators and learners can take benefit. Consequently, other future students and instructors are able to assist the learning and teaching developments. In addition to this, the results of this study may contribute to improve the way of pronunciation /r/ sound.

## Methodology

### Participants

This research was carried out with participation of 80 EFL learners. They are all second-year students in English language and education department at Koya university. Their age was varied between 20 to 23. They had studied phonetics and phonology for two semesters. They are familiar with pronunciation matters in English language. Their English language proficiency fluctuated from pre-intermediate to intermediate since they are second stage in English language studies. Two activities were presented to the participants. One of the activities was a set of individual words which they have (r) letter in them. The second one was pair words or phrases which they have (r) letter at least in one of them. The learners were supposed to read out loud the words and phrases in their natural tones. Their pronunciations were recorded and collected. Their pronunciation was analysed and listened at least twice by the researcher.

The specific words in these two activities were chosen to enclose specifically for the purpose of comprehending the pronunciation of /r/ sound as the learners confused most of the time in transcription the words.

### Design

The research used qualitative approach for collecting the data. The learners' errors and mistakes in the reading aloud activities were analysed in relation to the rules of RP British English.

### Data Collection Procedure

As dictated above, the data were gathered through the read aloud tasks which were recorded by the participants in their comfortable environment. After they recorded themselves, they uploaded to a link. Every single learner was given two tasks one of them was single word that has words with (r) letter within it and the other one was phrases that has (r) in it. It was expected to read them aloud while they were recording themselves. The recordings were listened carefully and diagnosed the pronunciation mistakes by comparing the produced sound with those correctly produced RP British English. After analysing the recordings, the phenomena appear from the data were discussed.

### Results and Discussion

Many Kurdish EFL students have difficulty with /r/ sound pronunciation. As it was stated before, the main reason of this research was to study /r/ sound pronunciation problems among EFL learners whose first language was Kurdish Sorani. Most reasonable of the participants whenever they find letter (r) within the words they pronounced. They did not pay attention to the sound that the word has it. For instance, the word (actor) has (r) letter at the end of the word and the sound is schwa. Besides, some learners read the words as they are in actual RP pronunciation. Sometime a vowel letter with (r) letter make a long vowel sound such as /ɑ:/ and /ɜ:/. The learners repeated the same mistake that they have faced with schwa sound. In addition, this could be generalised for the rest of similar words within the activities.

In Kurdish Sorani language, when the letter is written, it will pronounce. In other words, if the letter (r) appears in any Kurdish words, it will pronounce by the reader. It does not matter wherever appears within the word. Consequently, this tells the researchers that the EFL Kurdish Sorani learners may be influenced by their mother tongue.

Table 1. The pronunciation of some English words by Kurdish Sorani EFL learners.

Words	NS	NSCP	NSIP
Bride, Cried, Room, Groom, Group, Round, Ground, Appreciation	80	70%	30%
Car, Hard, Slippery, Door, Floor, Turn, Burn, Girl,	80	20%	80%
Actor, Worker, Drier, Player, Weaver, Passer, Preparator, Retainer, Printer, Paper, Winter, Summer	80	15%	85%

NS=Number of students. NSC= Number of students with correct pronunciation.  
Number of students with incorrect pronunciation

Moreover, Hancock stated that different accents of English language do not pronounce /r/ sound after vowel sounds. When the learners find the /r/ sound in the words to be read out they have not recited in the similar of the characteristics of /r/ sound. Peter Roach stated the tip of the tongue close the alveolar zone in almost the way it would be for a /t/ or /d/, and it does not essentially touch with any part of the rooftop of the mouth (Roach, 2009). The results showed that, %70 of the participants was not able to pronounce with the characteristics of /r/ sound.

It is interesting to say that learners could not make a comparison between Kurdish /r/ and the English one. This might be related to their limited study in this area. However, during their recitation some of them were influenced by American accent in the matter of pronouncing /r/ sound. Besides, O'Conner (1980) mentioned that learners could have issue in pronouncing /sl/ and /sr/ sounds. This is a supported idea that learners could face such challenges. In the matter of explaining the characteristics of /r/ sound especially with these two sounds /tr/ and /dr/ Gimson expressed that 'the soft palate is being raised and the nasal passage shut off. However, Kurdish TEFL learners may not comprehend these detail distinctions as mentioned above in the matter of Gimson discussion about characteristics of /r/ sound. The Kurdish EFL learners are not familiar with detailed characteristics of /r/ sound so It is another reason that learners challenge the pronunciation of /r/ sound when it is not pronounced in the word.

## Conclusion

The current research presented important of /r/ sound of Kurdish Sorani EFL learners at Koya university. It concluded that English /r/ sound pronunciation is significant for foreign language learners. The result shows that the participants challenge some difficulties during reading out loud tasks for the words that carry the letter (r). They are not aware that the /r/ sound can be pronounced, or they are silent. There is not any subtle similarity between Kurdish Sorani sound system and English sound system. This study could assist teachers and students for improving pronunciation of /r/ sound. Additionally, the future EFL learners may find about /r/ sound, improve their pronunciation skills and practice more as English is not second language around them in Kurdistan.

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