
ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY BASIC SCHOOL PUPILS IN SUDAN

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study was to identify the problems encountered by Basic School pupils in Abu Hamad Locality. The participants are Sudanese pupils of Basic schools limiting to Abu Hamad locality in River Nile State. The descriptive-analytical method was used. An interview and questionnaire were designed and distributed to the participants from different schools in the locality to collect data, which were analyzed with the SPSS program. The main findings based on the investigation found that it is so important to pay more attention to teaching English pronunciation at Basic School Levels, increasing the interactive activities to practice pronunciation, make and intensify efforts to organize regular training courses and workshops for English language teachers; using different ways of teaching to engage pupils and encourage their interaction in classes, using audios and CDs to facilitate English pronunciation. Basic school curriculum designers also have to give more attention to the syllabus design to provide more effective ways to enhance teaching pronunciation.*

KEYWORDS: basic school levels, pronunciation problems, teaching/ leaning pronunciation. teaching aids.

INTRODUCTION

In brief definition, pronunciation is how we pronounce a word. Most of the pupils face many problems in acquiring the correct pronunciation of the English language. To overcome these problems of English language pronunciation is one field in the EFLT which requires more attention. The beginning point in this respect is to know the English language sounds and how they differ from the Arabic language (L1), and what problems that caused by these differences between the two language systems (L1&L2).

Just like that contrastive familiarness of the sound systems of L1, and L2, is helpful to the teachers in many ways:

- 1- The teacher gets familiar with those sounds that exist in English but not found in Arabic.
- 2- The teacher should be acquainted with the sounds that exist in L1 but not in L2.
- 3- This deep Knowledge of the two language sound systems can help the teacher determining the problem domain and find the solutions.
- 4- The teacher can know the most problematic L2 sounds with his pupils, and which L1 sounds will be interference with the situation of learning pronunciation.
- 5- To know the problematic area in L2 or FL's pronunciation either in sound, production, or articulation can help the teacher to overcome any problems effectively.

Statement of the Problem:

The researcher has been teaching the English language for over ten years and likes to make her pupils participate accurately and actively in the classroom cause the correct pronunciation can give students confidence in using language effectively. In her experience, she feels that most pupils have several problems and difficulties in producing and pronouncing some English words.

Aims of the Study:

- To find out the pronunciation problems that face the Basic School pupils.
- To find out the most appropriate teaching aids for teaching / learning English pronunciation.
- To suggest ways of improving the teaching of pronunciation to Basic School Pupils.

Questions of the Study: This study tries to answer the following question:

- What are the pronunciation problems that face the Basic School pupils?
- What are the most suitable teaching aids for teaching / learning English pronunciation?
- Are there any effective ways of improving the teaching of pronunciation to Basic School Pupils.

Significance of the study:

This study attempts to introduce some practical solutions to the problems and difficulties of English language teaching and learning to enhance the pupils' performance in pronunciation. In addition, the coming researchers should suggest effective methods and techniques in teaching pronunciation in the shed of the present study.

Limits of the Study:

This study is limited to Abu Hamad area- Basic school level in the school year 2011-2012.

LITERATURE REVIEW& PREVIOUS STUDIES**English Pronunciation**

Pronunciation is the way we pronounce a word, especially in a way that is accepted generally understood. The way we speak also conveys sometimes about ourselves to the people around us. Learners with good English pronunciation are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other ears. Celce (1987) Defines pronunciation as the " production of sounds used to make meaning. It also includes attention to the particular sounds of language, and aspects of speech beyond the level of individual sounds, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm, voice, production. The older pronunciation textbooks usually focused on sound discrimination. This is one of the myths held by teachers and students. A pronunciation class should include much more than a contrast of word sounds, and the pronunciation of consonants and vowels. There are basic components of pronunciation:

1-Consonants: consonants are generally made by a definite interference of the vocal organs with the air stream, and so are easier to describe and understand.

2-Vowels: Vowels are made by voiced air passing through different mouth shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different positions of the tongue and the lips.

3-Stress: Stress requires more energy attendant the stressed syllable, or in other words the amount of effort used on words and sentences. This stress is taken from the vowel.

4-Intonation: Intonation refers to the way the voice goes up and down in pitch when we are speaking and the rise and fall of our voice as we speak. Firth (1992:54) suggested that " teachers should check the following questions: are the students using suitable Intonation patterns? Are yes or no questions signaled through the use of a rising Intonation? Are the students changing pitch to indicate the major stress in a sentence?

5-Voiced and Voiceless: All vowels in English are voiced, whereas only some of the consonant sounds are voiced. One problem faced by many pupils with pronunciation is whether or not a consonant is voiced. When pronouncing consonant sounds, they will feel no vibration in their throats, Just a short explosion of air

Between Arabic & English

The main problems and difficulties in English pronunciation resulted from the obvious differences and contrast between Arabic sound systems and the English ones. The most distinguished areas of differences in summary are:

a) Equivalents in Consonants: /f ,s ,z ,ʃ ,h ,t ,k ,b ,d ,g ,tʃ ,m ,n ,l ,j , w ,r/.

b) Difficulties:

- 1- /p/ and /b/ is phoneme in English but an allophone of /b/ in Arabic.
- 2- /d/ and /t/ dental stops in Arabic but alveolar in English.
- 3- /c/ is an allophone of /k/ in Arabic but it is a phoneme in English.
- 4- /t/ is dental in Arabic but alveolar in English.
- 5- /ŋ/ is phoneme in English but not in Arabic .
- 6- /ɔ/ does not exist in Arabic but it is a phoneme in English.
- 7- /f/and /v/ is a phoneme in English but it does not exist in Arabic./f/ being used for both.
- 8- /r/ is flat in British English but it is a trill in Arabic.

c):Vowels: Equivalents: /i: ,e , ʊ , ə , æ , a: , u: , ai , aʊ ,ɔ: , ɔi /

d): Difficulties:

- 1- /i/ and /e/ are confused, /e/ being used for both
- 2- /æ/ and /a:/are not entirely independent in Arabic.
- 3- /ʌ/ and /D/ are confused, an intermediate vowel being used for both.
- 4- Unlike Arabic in English consonants cluster together in same syllable , but this can not occur in Arabic, fore instance : scream , school, string,etc.

Ways of improving pronunciation problems:

In this part, there is some suggestion that may help teachers to reduce pupils' pronunciation problems.

- 1-The teachers have to check the words' pronunciation before the lesson to provide their pupils with the correct pronunciation of sounds.
 - 2-The teacher should produce and pronounce words accurately regarding consonants, vowels, stress, and intonation.
 - 3-Students have to listen carefully before pronouncing the new words.
 - 4-The teacher should elicit the pupils' attention to unpronounced letters. Such concentrating is more helpful in learning both spelling and pronunciation.
 - 5-The teacher should focus more on words with problematic sounds than others.
- The teacher has to create exercises that overcome the common pronunciation problems.

Previous studies:

This part provides an overview of the previous studies that are related to this study.

The first study conducted by Moosa (1972), who observed that the Arab learners of 23 English form manners of their first language (Arabic), so they strongly construct the phonological features of Arabic; this makes them face many challenges in distinguishing sound systems between the first language and the second language. For the Sudanese basic school pupils is that there is a big difference between the Sudanese sound system as Arabic speakers and the sound system in the English language.

The second study entitled: The effect of sound system on learning pronunciation was conducted by (Alkhuli, 1983) who indicated that the major problem in teaching and learning English pronunciation results from the differences in the sound system of English and the native language, so a speaker of Sudanese Spoken Arabic is not familiar to produce for example /θ/ sound and /ð/ sound, because they do not exist in his first language accent. This means that

the organs of speech of the learner are not rehearsed to pronounce such sound systems because they are uncommon to him; that is the reason he uses the nearest sounds such as /s/ and /z/.

The third study by (Cruttenden, 1994) claimed that in the area of (SLA), learners with different linguistic backgrounds would encounter different challenges to produce English sounds, because of the differences between the two languages (e.g. Arabic & English). These contrast between the sound systems are considered as an obstacle to performing in the pronunciation of the English language, because the new sounds still strange for their organs of speech yet, particularly if they begin learning English after a late age, but by keeping practice and hard work, this problem is expected to be solved after a while. The fourth study, as Yates and Zielinski (2009), pay much attention to English pronunciation emphasizes that pronunciation has an impact role in learning English. If teachers don't present the general rules and principles toward comprehensible pronunciation to their EFL learners, nobody will certainly do it. This is the responsibility of EFL teachers to do this by teaching the new sounds, words, sentences, and phrases and creating appropriate materials for understandable pronunciation in their EFL classes. EFL teachers should discover methods of indicating, practicing, and giving feedback on English pronunciation that are appropriate for learners to learn English pronunciation effectively and smoothly.

The fifth study. James (2010) conducted and stated that different types of models can be found for teaching and learning English pronunciation. One can turn on his/her TV and find channels such as CNN International, BBC, or Sky News. These channels help one hear many different people from Germany, France, and the other non - English-speaking countries. All of these channels have acceptable pronunciation and this will facilitate the process of learners' understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Participants:

The participants' age ranged from 11 to 14 years old. (10) teachers of English language at Abu Hamad Locality Basic Schools, and (95) pupils they selected from several schools in Abu Hamad Locality. They were randomly required to complete the questionnaires regardless of their age, class, and English level. Secondly, (5) teachers and (25) pupils were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. At the same time, (3) classes were observed by the researcher, to help answer the research questions more validly.

Instruments

The researcher used an interview and questionnaire as data gathering tools to investigate respondents' perceptions towards the learning and teaching pronunciation and the towards the problems that face them in learning pronunciation, besides classroom observation and drilling practice.

Validity:

To measure the validity of the questionnaire and interview questions, they were submitted to five educational experts to assess their and suitability and clarity to pupils' level and needs. According to their suggestions and advice, the researcher designed the questionnaire and the interview questions and also their relevance to the field and context.

Data collection method and procedure

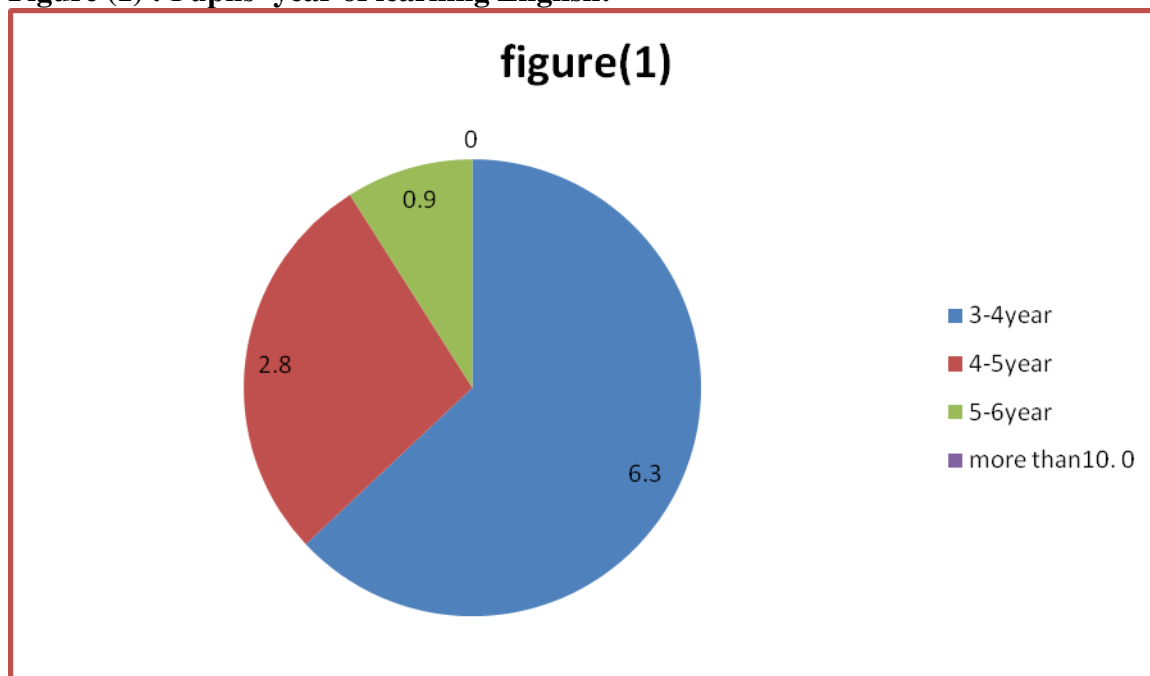
In order to answer the questions of this study, three tools were used, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and class observation was exploited in this study. The questionnaire is one of the most popular tools for collecting data in this study, the question for the student has been written in simple English. There were four types of questions in the questionnaire for the pupils (1) factual questions aimed at the

respondents' personal information. (i-e names, age, year of learning English, (2) attitudinal questions which excite their interests in learning English pronunciation, (3) the teachers, use of audio teaching aids in the class and, the effectiveness of audio teaching aids, behavioral questions were used to see the common teaching aids that their teachers have utilized when teaching English pronunciation (4) open-ended question which aimed at investigating other aspects that related to this study. Similarly, there were factual questions, attitudinal questions, behavioral questions, and open-ended questions in the questionnaire for teachers. Besides, (10) semi-structured interviews with teachers of English at Abu Hamad locality for basic schools level, and (25) with their pupils. In addition, a classroom observation was utilized and different drilling practices were used together with the above methods.

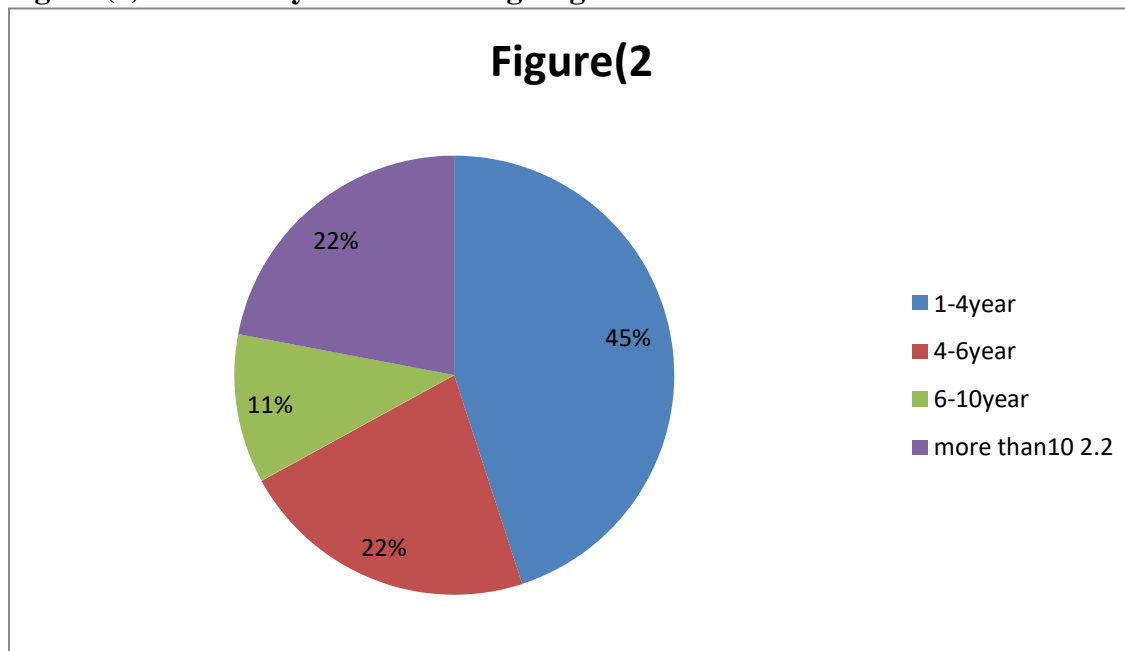
Data Analysis and discission:

This section analyzes and interprets the data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and class observations. However, firstly, below is some factual information about the pupils and teachers of English learning and teaching, which was found out from the questionnaires and interviews. At first, (65) questionnaires were distributed to pupils from five Basic schools, all questionnaires collected. As found in the answer to question (1), the student's years of learning English can be showed in Figure (1):

Figure (1) : Pupils' year of learning English:



The brief results in the above chart show that (63%) have learned English language for 3 – 4 years , where as (28%) have been learning English for 4 – 5 years , and (10%) for 5 – 6 years , but there is no pupils who learn English for more than 10 years.

Figure (2) Teachers' years of teaching English.

Similarly, among several teachers who responded to the questionnaire, their experience of teaching English varied significantly, there are (45%) of teachers who have been teaching English for three or four years, whereas (22%) of the ten teachers have taught this subject for four to six years, and the teachers who have been teaching for six to ten were (11%) The rest of those who have the longest experience of teaching more than ten years were (22%).

Types of audio aids used in teaching English pronunciation (as perceived by the pupils)

The pupils (100%) of the pupils said that their teachers didn't use any types of audio aids. On the other hand, the percentage of teachers using audio aids in teaching English pronunciation, all the teachers (100%) admitted that they have never used any audio aids to teach English pronunciation.

Figure: (3) Type of audio aids used in teaching English pronunciation (as perceived by the teacher)

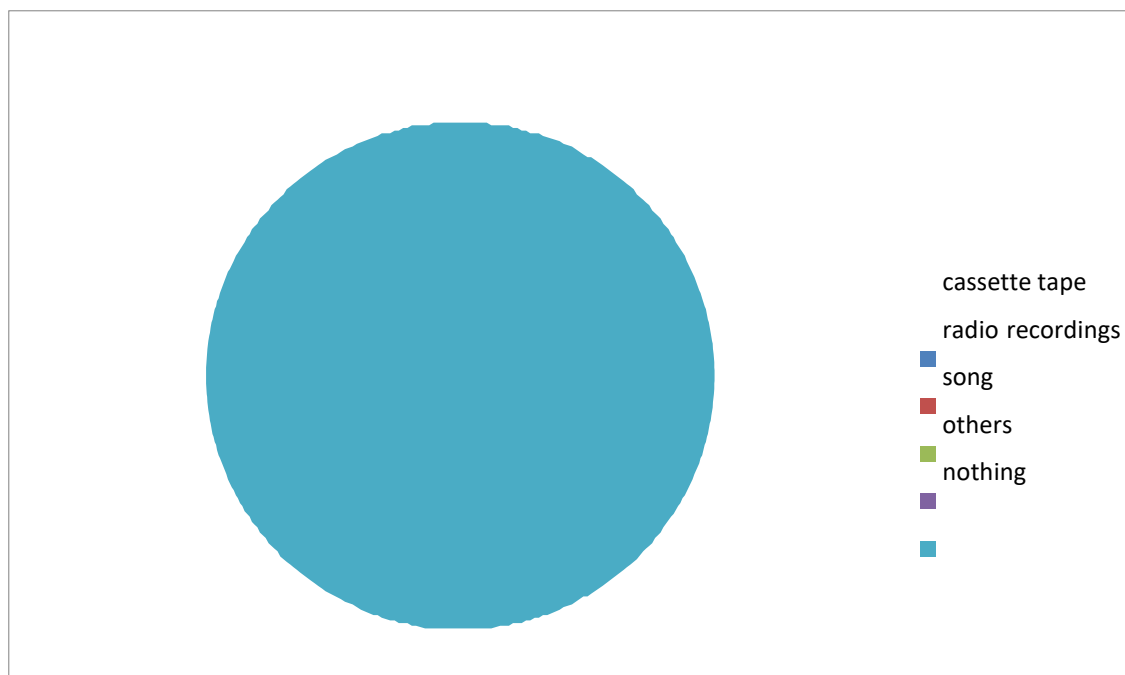
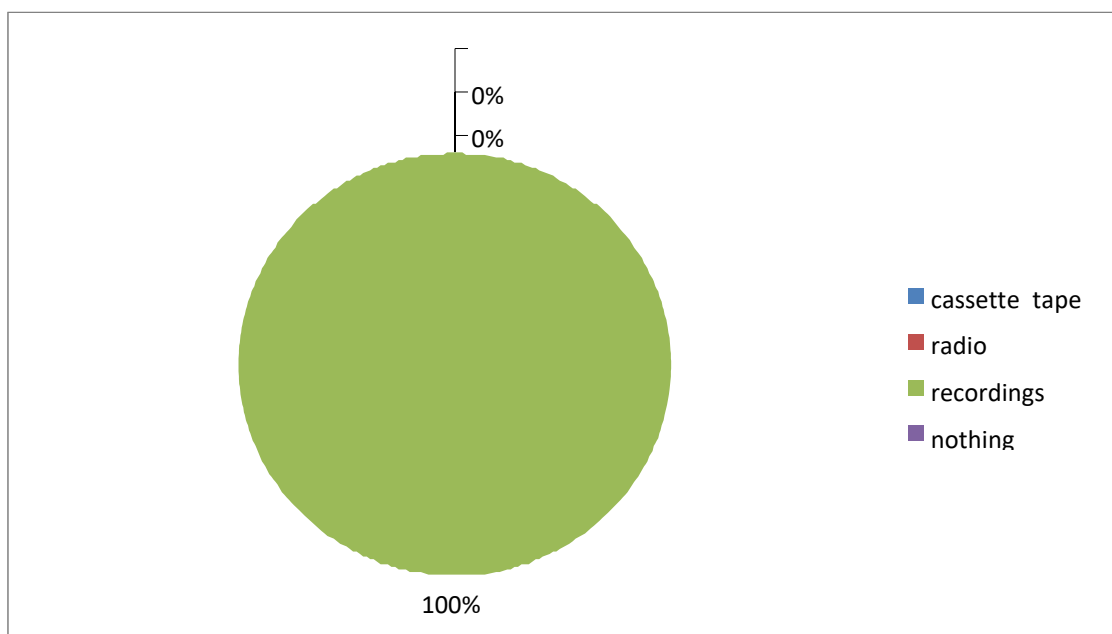
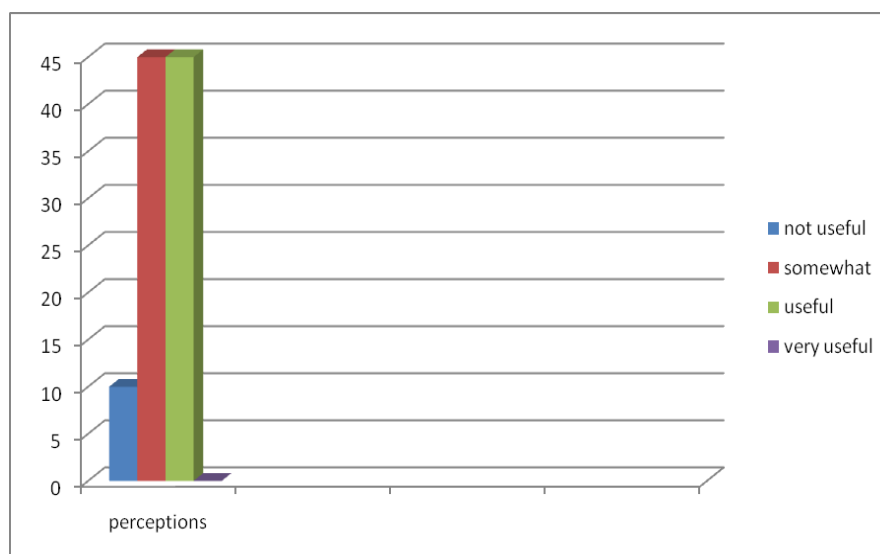


Figure (4)



In short, as perceived by both Pupils and teachers who have not used any kinds of audio aids.

- **.Effectiveness of audio teaching aids on the students' pronunciation learning:**
- **Figure(5):Teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of teaching aids in teaching and learning English pronunciation.**



Regarding the effectiveness of audio aids on students' pronunciation learning, the two questions, which appeared in the questionnaires for students and their teachers and the teachers shown in Figures (5) and (6), are different. Firstly when asked about the usefulness of audio teaching aids to the students

English pronunciation learning more than (45%) of teachers said —helpful and the same number said somewhat they are effective, while nearly (10%) considered audio teaching aids are useless for teaching English pronunciation. And, unfortunately, no one has agreed that using audio teaching aids is —very useful for pronunciation teaching and learning. From the perceptions, to conclude is that teachers' believes and the usefulness of audio teaching aids to teaching English pronunciation is quite positive.

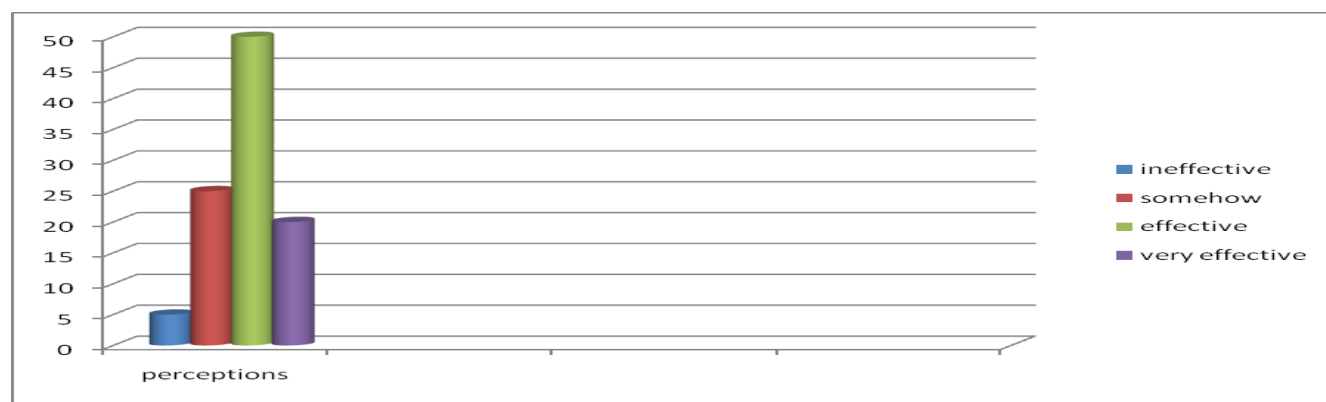


Figure (6) :Pupils' perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching aids in learning pronunciation:

When pupils are asked about the effectiveness of audio teaching aids on their pronunciation learning, it is good to see that most of the students' attitudes are affirmative as shown in figure (6). This assumption can be clarified by the pupils interviewed, as they stated. "I like audio aids because they help me inaccurate pronunciation – I feel more interested in the lesson ...Normally I can remember the words' pronunciation. Also, as observed in the English class in which the teachers used a recoded BBC program to introduce some words, the researcher saw that pupils felt more interested and tended to be more motivated, they did very well in the exercise.

RESULTS

Table 1. Problems affected on learning pronunciation & effective methods of teaching pronunciation:

| No | Statement | Agree | Not sure | Disagree |
|----|--|-------|----------|----------|
| 1- | Vowels considered as one of the main problems of Learning pronunciation. | 64% | 26% | 10% |
| 2- | Silent letters is one the major problems in learning pronunciation. | 55% | 15% | 30% |
| 3- | Fist language (L1) affect negatively on EFL learning pronunciation. | 70% | 10% | 20% |
| 4- | The curriculum needs many modifications to suit learning pronunciation. | 60% | 36% | 4% |
| 5- | Lack of using of audios, CDs,... etc to promote learning pronunciation. | 80% | 13% | 7% |
| 6- | Using authentic material such as radios , podcast, songs, movies are one of the effective methods of teaching pronunciation. | 60% | 30% | 10% |

The brief results of the table above show that 64% of the participants agreed that vowels were considered to be one of the main problems of learning pronunciation. Also, 70% indicated that the first language affects adversely pronunciation processes, and 60% of the participants agreed that the curriculum needs many modifications to suit learning pronunciation.

Question (5) shows that the majority of the participants agreed with, the lack of using audio and CDs affect negatively on teaching pronunciation, and 55% believed that silent letters are one of the major learning pronunciation. Consistent with the table above, 60% of the participants agreed that using authentic materials is one of the most effective ways to promote learning pronunciation..

CONCLUSION

As known, accurate pronunciation is considered one of the most fundamental problems which encounter EFL pupils at Basic schools in learning pronunciation, and most of the Sudanese Basic Shool pupils of the English language encounter such problems because in Arabic the vowel system is extremely easy and the learner can read an Arabic word smoothly without any hesitation, but in the English language he may pronounce /i/ for /e/for example /hit/, /hen/. About sound system differences between NL and FL. In British English the /r/ is distinctly pronounced only before a vowel example, the /r/ after a vowel is unpronounced. In Arabic however, the /r/-sound is distinctly pronounced in all positions, before or after a vowel. So, the Sudanese students in English pronounce /r/ in any position of an English word such as in words like mirror,

race, and after. So as stated above this study aims at identifying the pronunciation areas of problems in learning English pronunciation and to provide some more effective strategies to engage the learners through real material using audios, recordings CDs, and videos, besides the qualified and well-trained teachers.

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