Teaching Pronunciation in EFL Classes: An Investigative Study Among Kurdish EFL Teachers[1]

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Abstract

Although studies have suggested that pronunciation is key to learning oral skills in a second language, not much research has been conducted to investigate teachers' cognition in this regard. However, pronunciation significantly affects learners' communicative competence and performance. Learners of English as foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) often indicate that pronunciation is crucial while learning L2. Research results have demonstrated that teaching pronunciation in EFL/ESL classes is often overlooked (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Gilbert, 2008). Therefore, this study explores fifty-seven EFL university teachers' views and cognition (knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions) towards teaching pronunciation at different universities in Iraqi Kurdistan and its values in L2 teaching and learning. The participants completed an online survey on teaching and learning pronunciation. The findings suggested that the instructors had positive perceptions of teaching pronunciation, but they also stated that pronunciation was challenging to teach and sometimes boring. This paper provides insights into teacher education, cognition, pronunciation skills, and there are several pedagogical implications.

Resumen

Aunque los estudios han sugerido que la pronunciación es clave para aprender habilidades orales en una segunda lengua, no se han realizado muchas investigaciones para investigar la cognición de los profesores a este respecto. Sin embargo, la pronunciación afecta significativamente la competencia comunicativa y el rendimiento de los alumnos. Los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) o inglés como segunda lengua (ESL) a menudo indican que la pronunciación es crucial al aprender L2. Los resultados de las investigaciones han demostrado que a menudo se pasa por alto la enseñanza de la pronunciación en las clases de EFL/ESL (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Gilbert, 2008). Por lo tanto, este estudio explora los puntos de vista y la cognición (conocimientos, creencias, pensamientos, actitudes y percepciones) de cincuenta y siete profesores universitarios de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) hacia la enseñanza de la pronunciación en diferentes universidades del Kurdistán iraquí y sus valores en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la L2. Los participantes completaron una encuesta en línea sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la pronunciación. Los hallazgos sugirieron que los instructores tenían percepciones positivas sobre la enseñanza de la pronunciación, pero también afirmaron que enseñar la pronunciación era un desafío y, a veces, aburrido. Este artículo proporciona información sobre la formación docente, la cognición y las habilidades de pronunciación, y tiene varias implicaciones pedagógicas.

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Introduction

Learning a second language (L2) is a complex process often due to the nature of the target language (TL). It consists of essential skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and also sub-skills such as pronunciation (Mahmood, 2021). English has become a lingua franca, secured a position, and is considered an international language (Crystal, 2012). A large body of research has been conducted on some language skills, such as reading and writing, and even on the importance of learning grammar for these skills (Dutta & Mukherjee, 2018; Graus & Coppen, 2016; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Based on the previous literature, some language skills (i.e., reading and writing) have been given more importance in second language acquisition (SLA). Nevertheless, learning a language is not solely dependent on mastering only specific TL skills. Other skills and sub-skills are equally important during the teaching and learning process. Throughout history, the perspectives on language teaching and learning have changed. The focus has changed from linguistic competence to communicative competence (Morley, 1991).

While teaching a second language, one of the critical areas of L2 teaching and learning is teacher cognition, leading to a better understanding of teacher education (Borg & Sanchez, 2020). Teacher cognition (TC) has been defined as the relationship between beliefs and knowledge in teaching practices (Borg, 2003). Researching teaching skills helps researchers and teachers to understand and answer questions concerning teacher cognition. Much research has been carried out on exploring teacher cognition, but primarily focused

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on grammar, reading, and writing to some extent (Baker, 2011; Farrell, 2006; Popko, 2005). Therefore, it is vital to investigate teacher cognition and conduct more research on other areas of a TL (e.g., pronunciation skills) because pronunciation is one of these skills which has relatively been unexplored in relation to teacher cognition.

Pronunciation is an important part of effective communication and serves as a foundational aspect of language proficiency. Accurate pronunciation not only enhances overall language skills but also enables clear and meaningful interaction. In recent years, pronunciation has become a key component of communicative second language (L2) teaching (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Levis et al., 2022; Levis, 2021; Burri, 2023; Morley, 1991; Vaníková, 2019)., yet, compared to other L2 skills and aspects, pronunciation has been given less attention. Recent statistical sources state that there are approximately 1.456 billion English speakers worldwide, with 373 million being native speakers and 1.08 billion non-native speakers (Ethnologue, 2022; Statista, 2023). This indicates that with the passing of time, non-native speakers of English will outnumber English native speakers. In Iraq, English has become one of the most in-demand languages for second language learners (Mahmood, 2021). Despite its importance, there is a notable gap in research on L2TC regarding pronunciation instruction. Understanding L2TC is essential for improving the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching, as it enables educators to reflect on and adapt their beliefs and strategies. This self-awareness can significantly enhance instructional outcomes, demonstrating the need for further research to better equip teachers for L2 pronunciation instruction (Couper, 2016; Kochem, 2021).

Based on prior research and the recognized need for further investigation into L2TC related to pronunciation, this area has become a vital aspect of foreign language teaching worldwide (Couper, 2016). Couper further emphasizes that a deep understanding of teacher cognition is crucial for ensuring that research and pedagogical recommendations are effectively aligned with classroom needs: "Understanding teacher cognition helps to ensure research and pedagogical advice are appropriately directed" (Couper, 2016, p.1). The current study focuses on exploring the views of EFL university teachers in teaching pronunciation and the factors that affect teacher cognition (i.e., their opinions, beliefs, knowledge, and values) concerning pronunciation instruction. It also examines teachers' perceptions to better understand pronunciation instructions and practices and some of the issues that pronunciation teachers face while teaching. The study results can reveal teachers' views on teaching pronunciation, which helps teachers, curriculum designers, and stakeholders to emphasize and give more importance to teaching pronunciation in ESL/EFL classes. The following research questions were addressed:

1. *What are EFL university teachers' beliefs and views on pronunciation teaching and learning?*
2. *To what extent are EFL teachers confident in teaching pronunciation?*
3. *What are these challenges that EFL teachers face while teaching pronunciation?*

Literature Review

Second language teacher cognition

As teacher cognition consists of multiple processes (i.e., belief, knowledge, theories, attitude, assumption, and decision), this makes it a very complex area to investigate because the researcher has to examine these different processes (Baker, 2011; Borg, 2003; Borg, 2019; Borg & Sanchez, 2020). Teacher cognition has been researched extensively. Borg (2006) mentioned and summarized the central notions that constitute teacher cognition:

> *These* [notions] *are* (*a*) *personal,* (*b*) *practical* (*though informed by formal knowledge*), (*c*) *tacit,* (*d*) *systematic, and* (*e*) *dynamic. Teacher cognition can thus be characterized as an often tacit, personally-held, practical system of mental constructs held by teachers and which are dynamic—that is defined and refined based on educational and professional experiences throughout teachers' lives (*p.40).

As can be understood, teachers' beliefs and ideas can be changed based on their teaching experience because their cognition is dynamic. That is, for instance, novice teachers might have a teaching philosophy at the beginning of their career, but after several years of teaching experience, their teaching philosophy might be changed to be more suitable to the learners' needs, especially, when it comes to teaching pronunciation.

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Borg (2003) identified two key components of teacher cognition: *belief* and *knowledge*. A teacher draws on knowledge of the learners, the curriculum, and the context in which they teach, all of which shape their teaching practices. On the other hand, *belief* is "an individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition" (Pajares, 1992, p. 316) and as such *belief* is related to a teacher's choice of practices and behaviors in the classroom (Baker & Murphy, 2011). Borg (2019) believed that teacher cognition is complex and could not simply be understood due to all the often-unseen factors affect it. Some elements are internal (i.e., beliefs, knowledge, and attitude), and others are external (i.e., school policies). Teachers have beliefs about themselves, their students, and how they teach in class (Borg, 2018). Therefore, it is critical to investigate teachers' beliefs for several reasons, such as the relationship between teachers' practices and their beliefs in implementing them.

Pronunciation

While learning a second/additional language, one must consider the components of the TL. Generally, spoken languages consist of essential skills (listening, speaking) and other subskills such as grammar and pronunciation. In order to communicate in a spoken language correctly, the learners should be able to produce the sounds in the TL, that is, phonology and pronunciation. Burgess and Spencer (2000), in their study, stated that phonology and pronunciation can be understood to be synonymous. Still, it is crucial to distinguish between the two in the teaching process. Burgess and Spencer defined both phonology and pronunciation:

> *The phonology of a target language (TL) consists of theory and knowledge about how the sound system of the target language works, including both segmental and suprasegmental features. Pronunciation in language learning, on the other hand, is the practice and meaningful use of TL phonological features in speaking, supported by practice in interpreting those phonological features in TL discourse that one hears (*p.191).

From the definitions above, a learner has to consider the sound system of the TL and be able to articulate the sounds not only at the segmental level (i.e., individual vowel and consonant phonemes), but also at the suprasegmental level (i.e., elements of stress, rhythm, and intonation) (Baker & Murphy, 2011).

Teaching pronunciation and teacher cognition

An extensive body of research has been conducted on pronunciation teaching strategies (Ababneh, 2018; Pawlak & Szyszka, 2018; Sardegna et al., 2017), but pronunciation has remained unexplored in the perspective of TC (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Foote et al., 2012), and other studies on pronunciation and TC were carried out in ESL contexts such as in Australia (Burri et al., 2017). In that study, the researchers investigated pre-service and in-service teachers' developing beliefs and knowledge about pronunciation instruction through 13 three-hour lessons with postgraduate students. The data were collected through a questionnaire, interview, and classroom observations. The results showed that pre-service and in-service teachers' cognition developed slightly during the course. One of the participants, Hayley, believed that teaching pronunciation through movement and learner involvement was enjoyable and improved pronunciation teaching and learning. At the end of the study, both groups were asked about pronunciation instruction. Most pre-service participants indicated that "they lacked the ability to teach pronunciation" (p. 11).

In another study by Baker (2013), the researcher attempted to explore teachers' knowledge of L2 pronunciation, TC, and student perceptions. Again, the participants (experienced teachers) were from a North American intensive English program (IEP). Baker sought to answer the question, "What cognitions do experienced teachers have about techniques for teaching L2 pronunciation in their OC (Oral Communication) classes?" (p.139). The results showed that almost all the participants believed intelligible speech could be achieved through listening perception.

Since the last decade, research in pronunciation has increased extensively in ESL, especially in Canada and the USA (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Foote et al., 2012; Foote et al., 2016), and Australia (Burri et al., 2017). These studies have investigated teachers' beliefs about pronunciation. Buss (2015) surveyed teachers working in Brazil. The findings suggested that the participant teachers had positive

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attitudes towards pronunciation and teaching, but they also reported that they wished to have more pronunciation training. It seems that although ESL/EFL teachers might have felt uncomfortable teaching pronunciation due to their lack of pronunciation training, they still valued teaching pronunciation (Fraser, 2000; Yates, 2001). Macdonald (2002) researched the views and practices of reluctant teachers regarding teaching pronunciation in Australia. The results were reported from three points of view: first, the participants indicated that the teaching materials did not encourage them to teach pronunciation; second, the materials provided did not have enough pronunciation requirements to force the teachers to teach pronunciation, and thus, pronunciation could be easily ignored (Couper, 2016; Nguyen & Newton, 2020); and thirdly, the participants stated that it was challenging to incorporate pronunciation materials into other areas of the target language (see also Burri et al., 2017; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Foote et al., 2016; Gilbert, 2010).

Research shows that pronunciation is considered problematic in teaching L2, and the difficulties could be due to segments, suprasegmental, learner variables, L1 interference/accent, and unclear guidelines (Buss, 2015; Couper, 2016; Darcy et al., 2011; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Foote et al., 2012; Gilakjani, 2012). Hence, it is vital to review previous studies to explore whether teachers had unchangeable beliefs on pronunciation as problematic, or whether their beliefs changed over time. Buss (2017) surveyed undergraduate TESL students from Canada. The results showed that after the participants were trained in a particular pronunciation training course, their views changed to more favorable opinions of pronunciation teaching. They became more confident in teaching it. We can conclude that TC is susceptible to change when specific issues are resolved, in the case of teaching pronunciation, providing more training courses to build more confidence among L2 teachers (Darcy et al., 2011).

Nguyen and Newton (2020) which was also conducted in an EFL context (i.e., tertiary EFL in Vietnam showed results suggesting that the participant teachers had planned before teaching pronunciation. They only provided corrective feedback to learners' pronunciation errors on segmental errors. The study also found that the participants lacked pronunciation training and professional learning opportunities. These factors were seen as obstacles while teaching pronunciation. These findings are similar to what was found in the study by Georgiou (2018) who found that EFL teachers in Cyprus faced difficulties while teaching pronunciation, such as limited time and lack of training.

Several studies reported the challenges that ESL/EFL teachers faced while teaching pronunciation. One major challenge that ESL/EFL teachers faced when teaching pronunciation was the diversity of students' first languages and dialects. This could make it difficult to standardize pronunciation instruction and to ensure that all students made progress. According to a study by Jenkins (2000), students' first language backgrounds can significantly influence their pronunciation in English and teachers need to be aware of the unique challenges that each student may face.

Another challenge is the limited opportunities students have to practice pronunciation in a natural and immersive environment. This can make it difficult for students to internalize the sounds and rhythms of English and to produce accurate pronunciation (Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, students may be shy or self-conscious about speaking English, which can make it challenging for teachers to provide constructive feedback and help students improve their pronunciation (Doughty & Long, 2003).

Finally, finding appropriate teaching materials and resources for teaching pronunciation can be difficult for ESL/EFL teachers. There may be limited resources available for teaching pronunciation in the students' first language or the resources available may not be appropriate for the students' level or needs (Brown, 2007). Additionally, not all pronunciation resources are based on empirical research, and some may not be effective in improving students' pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Iraqi Kurdistan

Teaching English and pronunciation in a developing country

The Iraqi Kurdistan province, a part of Iraq, is located in the northern part of Iraq and shares borders with Turkey and Iran. Since 1991 when Iraqi Kurdistan achieved its autonomy, in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), many schools and universities opened, such Salahaddin University, University of Sulaimani University of Dohuk, and Koya University. In all of these universities, students can obtain bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees in the English language. Those students who graduate from the English departments at these universities either become schoolteachers, freelance workers, or university teachers.

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Students must study for four years to obtain a bachelor's degree in English. They take various courses (i.e., grammar, pronunciation, phonology, morphology, general linguistics, syntax, teaching methods, essay writing, and research writing). English has become an essential part of school and university curricula in Iraq and in many other countries such as Iran, where English has gained special attention, and it is also offered during school and university studies (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012). Thus, the current research results might also be a way of understanding the pronunciation issues of EFL learners in other developing countries. Analyzing the length of time that the English language has been taught, just from 1991 to the present, very little research has been conducted, and little is in the Kurdish EFL context either related to pronunciation strategies (e.g., Muhammad & Othman, 2018) or Kurdish EFL issues in pronunciation (e.g., Haji & Mohammed, 2019; Mohammadi, 2014). The only research found that was related to the impact of training courses on the pronunciation performance of Kurdish EFL university students was by Othman and Muhammed (2018). Even in their study, the focus was only on pronunciation at the segmental level (i.e., phonetic training sessions). The results showed that learners' pronunciation abilities improved after phonetic training.

The teaching of English as a foreign language has a long-standing tradition in the Kurdish EFL context, yet there is a noticeable gap in research exploring second language (L2) learning challenges (Sofi-Karim, 2015). Furthermore, a search of major academic databases like Scopus and Web of Science-Clarivate revealed that no studies have examined Kurdish EFL teachers' perspectives and cognition regarding pronunciation instruction. This highlights the need for further exploration in this area to better understand the challenges and teacher cognition related to pronunciation teaching. Therefore, the current research could potentially be one of the first studies in an unexplored EFL.

Methods

The current study investigates university EFL teachers' views and perceptions of teaching pronunciation in EFL classes. A quantitative method was utilized to collect data. The participant teachers responded to an online survey questionnaire. The reason behind using an online questionnaire was that the researcher attempted to collect as much data as possible from Kurdish EFL university teachers in different universities and cities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Participants

This study involved 57 Kurdish EFL university teachers from different universities in Iraqi Kurdistan in the academic year 2021- 2022. In the beginning, the study aimed to collect data from 70 university teachers, but after the survey questionnaire was distributed among them, only 57 of them filled it out; therefore, incomplete copies of the survey (i.e., 13 participants) were excluded from this study. The online survey questionnaire was distributed anonymously to Kurdish EFL teachers, ensuring equal opportunities for all participants. This anonymity helped create a comfortable environment for teachers to complete the survey without hesitation. The participants included both males and females regardless of their age range. All the participants either had an MA degree or a Ph.D. degree in English (i.e., linguistics, TESL, TESOL, literature, or applied linguistics) and they taught undergraduate and graduate-level students obtaining BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in English. All the teacher participants were native speakers of Kurdish and had learned English as a foreign language. In the survey questionnaire, the teachers were asked whether they taught pronunciation courses or not. The background information is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
One Year	4	7.0	7.0
Two Years	2	3.5	10.5
Three Years	3	5.3	15.8
Five Years	1	1.8	17.5
Six and more	47	82.5	100.0
Total	57	100.0	

Table 1: How long have you been teaching the English language?

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	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	24	42.1	42.1
No	33	57.9	100.0
Total	57	100.0	

Table 2: Pronunciation courses taught

The data showed that 42.1% had indicated that they taught pronunciation courses, and 57.9% stated that they had not taught pronunciation courses. In addition, those who had taught pronunciation courses were asked for the length of time they had taught. The data revealed that the majority of teachers (82.5%) had extensive experience teaching pronunciation, with smaller proportions having less experience: 7%, 3.5%, 5.3%, and 1.8% across varying levels of experience.

Research instrument

The data were collected through an anonymous online survey using *Google Forms*. Most of the questionnaire items were adopted from several different studies (Buss, 2015; Foote et al., 2012; Georgiou, 2018; Gilakjani, 2012). The online survey questionnaire was modified, and some items were changed and adapted to suit the Kurdish EFL context. The main factor for the survey questionnaire items modification and adaptation was that they had been designed to be suitable for the context and participants their specific areas and participants. After the item's adaptation and modification, they were reviewed by two EFL professors with 15- and 20-years of experience in teaching EFL. The questionnaire was distributed among Kurdish EFL teachers' groups (i.e., *Viber*, a teachers' group). They were also asked to send the questionnaire to their colleagues (i.e., English language university teachers). The questionnaire consisted of twelve statements, and the statements were about teacher cognition towards pronunciation, the ability of non-native English teachers in teaching pronunciation, and some of the issues that EFL teachers faced while teaching it. The questionnaire items were measured through a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly agree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree. In Table 3 below the answers for each item are given as percentages.

Data collection, procedure, and analysis

As mentioned before, the data were collected through an online survey questionnaire. The IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used for the coding and analysis processes. The collected data were coded and transferred into IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (Table 3); after labeling and coding the variables, descriptive and frequency statistic tests were run to extract the percentage for each item and mean (M) and standard deviation values (SD) in the survey questionnaire.

Results

Teacher cognition and beliefs towards pronunciation

Based on the survey questionnaire statements, two major aspects were explored: 1) Kurdish EFL cognition towards pronunciation teaching, and 2) pronunciation issues among EFL teachers. After the questionnaire items were reviewed, the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items. The results showed that the value for Cronbach's Alpha was (α=.813). Hence, the reliability value for the items was "good" since when Cronbach's alpha reliability value is ($0.8 \leq$ " <0.9), the reliability test and internal consistency are considered "good." (Hinton et al., 2004).

In the analysis two main aspects of pronunciation teaching were explored among the participants: their cognition towards teaching pronunciation, and the challenges and issues EFL teachers usually face during teaching pronunciation. Although two main broad aspects of teaching pronunciation were highlighted, several other sub-aspects were extrapolated among the questionnaire items. For example, in Table 3, items (4 and 5) report whether pronunciation was challenging and boring at the same time, or if it was challenging, but not necessarily boring. Furthermore, the aspect of being native and non-native speakers has been discussed in terms of their abilities in teaching pronunciation. For instance, it was asked whether only native English speakers are capable of teaching pronunciation or if non-native speakers are also able to do so.

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	Kurdish EFL Teachers' Cognition about Teaching Pronunciation					
	Statements	**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**
1.	I feel more uncertain about English pronunciation instruction than about grammar and other language components.	7.0	3.5	26.3	49.2	14.0
2.	I am confident in teaching pronunciation to non-native speakers of English.	0	12.3	8.8	52.6	26.3
3.	Pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching an L2.	0	12.3	8.8	52.6	26.3
4.	Teaching English pronunciation is boring.	19.3	28.1	19.3	22.8	10.5
5.	I do not have adequate knowledge to teach English pronunciation.	21.1	52.6	15.8	10.5	0
6.	Only native speakers can appropriately teach English pronunciation.	22.8	43.9	8.8	24.6	0
7	English pronunciation instruction is not essential for EFL teachers.	40.4	47.4	8.8	3.5	0
	Pronunciation issues among Kurdish EFL Teachers					
1.	I do not have enough time to teach pronunciation in my classes	10.5	38.6	24.6	24.6	1.8
2.	I do not have appropriate English pronunciation materials for instruction.	7	31.6	26.3	29.8	5.3
3.	I do not have educational facilities such as computer technology and pronunciation software for teaching English pronunciation.	8.8	12.3	19.3	40.4	19.3
4.	I do not have enough motivation and interest in teaching English pronunciation.	15.8	42.1	22.8	15.8	3.5

Notes: Numbers represent the percentages of participants; SD = Strongly disagree, D= Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA= Strongly agree

Table 1: Kurdish teacher cognition and teaching pronunciation issues

As illustrated in Table 3, only 10.5% of the participants were confident to teach pronunciation compared with other components of the TL, such as grammar; whereas 63.2% reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt uncertain about teaching pronunciation and the remaining 2.3% were neutral. This high percentage of uncertainty (i.e., 63.2%) with a mean of 2.98 and standard deviation of 1.203 confirms that the Kurdish teachers would prefer to teach any other L2 skill than pronunciation. This high standard deviation shows the inconsistency among the responses for the first statement. In addition to that, the participants were asked if this uncertainty in teaching pronunciation was due to being a non-native speakers, 78.9% reported that they were confident when teaching pronunciation even though they were non-native teachers. The participants were also asked if teaching pronunciation was challenging L2 aspect. Most of them (78.9%) agreed or strongly agreed.

An important question was whether since teaching pronunciation was a challenging task did it make the teachers feel bored. To investigate this aspect, the participants were asked to respond to two statements (i.e., five and seven in Table 3). The results showed that 73.7% indicated that they had adequate knowledge to teach pronunciation, whereas 15.8% were neutral, and only 10.5% said that they did not have enough knowledge to teach pronunciation.

Two survey questionnaire items were specifically designed to ask about "pronunciation is boring" and "pronunciation is challenging". The results showed that 33.3% indicated that teaching pronunciation was boring, and 78.9% said that teaching pronunciation was challenging. To investigate whether there was a relationship between the two options (i.e., teaching pronunciation being boring or challenging), Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test was run. The main reason for using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was the nature of the data, that is, as the data had been organized in an ordinal way, statistics suggested using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient for the analysis (Frost, 2021). The results of Spearman's rho correlation coefficient indicated that there was no significant association between teaching pronunciation being boring and teaching pronunciation being a challenging task, r=.28, p-value=.834>"=0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that although teachers might see teaching pronunciation as a challenging task, it does not make it boring to teach. Hence, other factors might cause teaching pronunciation to be seen as a boring task.

Statement	***r***	***M.***	***Std.***	***p.value***
Pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching an L2.	.28	3.93	.923	.834
Teaching English pronunciation is boring for me.		2.77	1.296	

Table 4: Spearman's rho correlation coefficient

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Regarding the significance of pronunciation instructions, the participants believed that pronunciation instructions were vital for EFL teachers 87.8% (M= 1.75; Std.=.763) and disagreed that pronunciation instruction was not essential for EFL teachers. Participants from previous research (e.g., Mahboob, 2004) believed native-speaker teachers could provide an ideal model for pronunciation. In the current study participants were asked if only native English-speaking teachers could teach pronunciation. The results showed that 66.7% either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement while 24.6% agreed that only native English speakers teach pronunciation appropriately.

Although most participants had been teaching English pronunciation for more than six years (70.1%, M= 3.068, Std.= .948), they wished to have more training in pronunciation courses. The previously asked question could be answered based on the statistical results. Non-nativeness, pronunciation as a challenging task, and lack of knowledge these teachers were not the cause with 63.2% of them feeling "*uncertain*" about teaching pronunciation. As 71.1% wished to have more pronunciation training courses, a lack of training can be considered the cause of being "*uncertain*" about teaching pronunciation.

Pronunciation issues among EFL teachers in a developing country

Teacher cognition is not only related to what teachers know or believe (i.e., internal factors), but it is also about the external factors they face (Borg, 2018). Thus, another aspect that was examined was pronunciation issues that Kurdish EFL teachers faced while teaching pronunciation. The results showed that almost half of the participants believed that in teaching pronunciation, materials, teaching aids, and lack of motivation were some of their major challenges (limited time=26.5%, teaching materials=35.1%, teaching aids and facilities=59.7%, and lack of motivation=19.3%). Therefore, we can infer that in developing countries, numerous factors contribute to EFL teachers' lack of confidence when teaching pronunciation, which impedes their ability to teach it effectively. Among the most prominent challenges is the lack of teaching aids and facilities, with 59.7% of respondents identifying this issue. This suggests that similar to developed countries where teachers also experience nervousness but have access to advanced resources, providing adequate teaching infrastructure and resources is crucial for improving the quality and effectiveness of pronunciation instruction in EFL contexts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to investigate Kurdish EFL teachers' opinions about teaching pronunciation and some of the significant pronunciation issues that EFL teachers faced while teaching their classes. The first research question was to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs and views on pronunciation teaching and learning. The results showed that the Kurdish EFL teachers in the study had positive thoughts on teaching pronunciation. This finding encourages ESL/EFL teachers to be more self-confident in teaching pronunciation because they have to realize that not only English native speakers are perfect models of teaching English as an L2. In contrast with what Freudenstein (as cited in Phillipson, 1992) stated, that native speakers should teach ESL/EFL since they know what is important and how to teach it in the classes. In fact, non-native speakers are also capable of teaching all L2 skills and aspects, and pronunciation as an example.

The participants in the current study were uncertain about incorporating pronunciation into their EFL classes. This issue needs to be investigated more because this could be due to several factors such as the aims and objectives of the class, the textbooks used, and the overall curriculum. The participants preferred teaching grammar classes to pronunciation, which answers the second research question. However, the underlying cause for this preference was not entirely clear. The participants indicated that pronunciation is challenging and sometimes boring to teach, and the proposed reasons for holding this option were explained in the results. Although it is difficult to provide reasons for the challenges of teaching pronunciation among Kurdish EFL teachers due to the limited literature available in this context, the issue remains significant. However, based on anecdotal information, two reasons might explain the issue. First, lack of pronunciation training and a lack of effective teaching of pronunciation materials. Therefore, this issue should be investigated in future research. For instance, research could be carried out on to what extent available pronunciation teaching materials could be used for teachers to teach pronunciation effectively, and how much learners could benefit from them.

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As several research areas still remain unexplored, further research is necessary to investigate them explicitly. This study suggests that having inadequate knowledge of pronunciation and teachers' low self-confidence might cause the EFL teachers to doubt their teaching pronunciation abilities. This agrees with the findings of Burri et al., (2017). Another finding worth noticing that most of the participants believed that they lacked pronunciation training, and they wished to have more training. This seems to confirm some previous research findings (Burri et al., 2017; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Doughty & Long, 2003; Foote et al., 2016; Fraser, 2000; Gilbert, 2010; Othman & Muhammed, 2018; Yates, 2001). The abovementioned reasons might be the causes of pronunciation being a difficult task to be incorporated into other teaching L2 classes, even in pronunciation courses. Regarding teacher cognition and beliefs about the importance among EFL teachers, the results show that despite being a challenging task to teach, pronunciation is recognized as a valuable aspect of a TL and is essential for EFL teachers. This finding validates previous research findings (Breitkreutz et al., 2001; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Morley, 1991).

The third research question examined pronunciation issues among Kurdish EFL teachers. The data showed that limited class time, a lack of appropriate materials and education facilities (i.e., suitable technology to teach pronunciation), and teacher self-motivation were among the significant pronunciation issues these teachers encountered. This has also been supported by Brown (2007) and Derwing and Munro (2015) as they believe that pronunciation teaching materials have to be added to pronunciation curriculum based on findings from empirical studies in the area of L2 pronunciation.

Conclusion

This research focused on Kurdish EFL teachers' views and beliefs (i.e., cognition) regarding teaching pronunciation in Iraqi Kurdistan. This research adds a bit more to what has been found on teaching pronunciation and teacher cognition in ESL and EFL contexts in other countries. Interestingly, the results, to a great extent, revealed that the teachers in the study were relatively confident in teaching pronunciation, challenging the assumption from previous research (e.g., Levis et al., 2016; Mahboob, 2004) that being a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) is the primary reason for a lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation. This suggests that other factors beyond native speaker status may influence teachers' confidence in teaching pronunciation. It is apparent that other causes must also be investigated to address the issues of teaching pronunciation in ESL/EFL contexts. The results of this study have revealed a lack of certainty in teaching pronunciation among EFL teachers, but the value of pronunciation was recognized and confirmed. Although teaching pronunciation was challenging and tiresome for some teachers, they continued to teach it. There might have been other obstacles that impede the teaching processes, such as limited class time, a lack of suitable material and of facilities and technology. This study recommends that more practical research be conducted to investigate other factors hindering ESL/EFL teachers from teaching pronunciation courses.

Pedagogical implication and future research

As the study was conducted in an EFL context and in a developing country, several pedagogical implications can be drawn from the results. First, offering and including more pronunciation courses in EFL/ESL classes could be useful. Teaching must take place in a broader range of classes not only focusing on grammar, listening, reading, and writing, or even speaking with ignoring pronunciation instructions and teaching. Another crucial point would be to create more target-based syllabi incorporating more pronunciation teaching materials and practices. Stakeholders also should think about assigning non-native teachers to teach pronunciation but, of course, after meeting and resolving other issues that have been found in this study, such as lack of proper facilities, time, and teacher training through teacher development courses. Finally, the results suggest that although EFL teachers were uncertain about teaching pronunciation, it was because of teacher professional development. This result should encourage education authorities to provide teacher training courses led by experts in the field or send EFL/ESL teachers abroad to an English-speaking country to get the required knowledge so they could be more confident when teaching pronunciation courses.

This study opens many doors for conducting future research. For example, different variables can be considered as research topics, for instance, the impact of teacher training on teaching pronunciation or what areas of pronunciation are the most challenging for ESL/EFL teachers, at the segmental or suprasegmental levels. Another topic could be to what extent ESL/EFL textbooks assist both teachers to teach pronunciation

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and learners to learn pronunciation or what could be done and to what extent ESL/EFL teachers can incorporate teaching pronunciation into other classes such as reading, writing, or listening.

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