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Innovating Pronunciation Pedagogy in the Gulf: Teacher Cognitions and Practice-Based Challenges in English Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and challenges related to pronunciation instruction in two Gulf countries—Oman and Qatar—where Arabic-monolingual classrooms dominate English language teaching. Grounded in Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r), a mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating surveys (n = 60), classroom observations (n = 10), and interviews (n = 12). While teachers valued pronunciation for communicative competence, they reported limited training, inadequate curricular focus, and institutional barriers that constrain effective instruction. Segmental features were more frequently taught, whereas suprasegmentals such as stress and intonation were often overlooked. Findings highlight a gap between teacher cognition and classroom practice, shaped by systemic limitations in pedagogical preparation and policy. The study offers theoretical insights into pronunciation input delivery and pedagogical recommendations for professional development and curriculum reform in the Gulf region.

Keywords

pronunciation instruction, teacher cognition, Gulf EFL contexts, speech learning model, segmentals, suprasegmentals, Oman, Qatar, monolingual classrooms, second language pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation instruction has gained renewed attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in contexts where English serves as both an academic requirement and a marker of social capital (Couper, 2021; Derwing & Munro, 2015). Despite a growing body of research emphasizing the role of intelligible pronunciation in communicative competence, empirical studies exploring how pronunciation is actually taught and perceived by teachers in the Gulf region remain scarce. This study focuses specifically on Oman and Qatar—two Gulf nations that share linguistic, educational, and sociocultural similarities but diverge in their institutional approaches to English language education. By investigating teacher beliefs, pedagogical practices, and classroom challenges in these two contexts, the study contributes to a more localized and comparative understanding of pronunciation pedagogy in Arabic-monolingual English classrooms.

Unlike many Western or urban cosmopolitan contexts where multilingualism is common, English language classrooms in Oman and Qatar are overwhelmingly monolingual, with Arabic as the shared first language (L1) among learners. This linguistic homogeneity presents both pedagogical opportunities and limitations. On the one hand, it allows educators to draw on shared phonological features when designing instructional interventions; on the other hand, it increases the risk of L1 transfer effects becoming fossilized—especially when pronunciation is not

systematically addressed in the curriculum (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Dorsey, 2018). Compounding this challenge is the fact that many English language teachers in both countries have limited formal training in phonetics or pronunciation pedagogy, and they often operate under curricular frameworks that emphasize grammar and vocabulary over phonological accuracy (Algethami, & Al Kamli, 2025; Elkouz & Munoz, 2023).

The urgency of enhancing pronunciation instruction is further heightened by national policy shifts in both Oman and Qatar toward English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education and certain public school streams. These policies, while intended to improve global competitiveness, have inadvertently magnified existing gaps in learners' oral proficiency—particularly in prosodic features such as stress, intonation, and rhythm, which are rarely taught explicitly (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023). In both nations, pronunciation is frequently marginalized in teacher education programs and omitted from high-stakes assessments, thereby weakening its perceived instructional value and reducing the likelihood of its consistent classroom implementation.

To date, most pronunciation-related research in the Gulf has been confined to descriptive phonological analyses of learner errors or contrastive studies of Arabic and English segmental features (Al-Khresheh, 2024). While such studies provide valuable insights into learners' difficulties, they overlook the equally critical dimension of **teacher cognition**—the beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions that inform instructional choices (Borg, 2003, 2015). Understanding what teachers in Oman and Qatar believe about pronunciation instruction, how they implement it (if at all), and what constraints they face can offer practical and theoretical insights into both local and broader SLA pedagogical debates.

This study adopts Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) as its theoretical lens. SLM-r offers a psycholinguistic framework to understand how L2 phonological categories are formed in adulthood, especially when L1 phonological boundaries interfere with accurate L2 sound perception and production (Flege & Bohn, 2021). This model is particularly suited to Arabic-speaking learners of English, whose L1 phonology presents well-documented challenges in acquiring certain English consonants, vowels, and suprasegmental patterns. Within this framework, teacher input is not merely a delivery mechanism but a critical component influencing whether learners can successfully form new phonetic categories.

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are English language teachers' beliefs in Oman and Qatar regarding the role and importance of pronunciation instruction in L2 learning?
2. What instructional strategies are employed to teach pronunciation, and how do these vary between the two national contexts?
3. What institutional and pedagogical challenges do teachers report in integrating pronunciation into their classroom practice?

By narrowing its geographical focus to Oman and Qatar, this study offers a comparative and contextually rich exploration of pronunciation instruction in Arabic-monolingual classrooms. Its findings aim to inform regional teacher education programs, support policy reform in EMI-driven systems, and contribute to applied phonological theory by connecting teacher cognition with learner outcomes in under-researched educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronunciation in Second Language Acquisition

Pronunciation remains a fundamental component of L2 oral proficiency, shaping learners' intelligibility, comprehensibility, and listener perceptions of competence (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis & Echelberger, 2022). Yet, despite its communicative centrality, pronunciation instruction is often neglected in L2 curricula, especially in Arabic-speaking contexts. This marginalization has been attributed to misconceptions that pronunciation either develops naturally through exposure or is too complex to teach systematically (Couper, 2021; Madzo, 2019).

Recent meta-analyses, however, confirm that explicit instruction—targeting both segmental and suprasegmental features—can produce significant gains in learners' speech accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility (Alghazo, Jarrah, & Al-Salem, 2023; Sakai & Moorman, 2018; Yağız, Kaya, & Ötügen, 2024). In particular, high-variability phonetic training and form-focused pronunciation instruction (FFI) have been shown to facilitate L2 phonological category formation and speech intelligibility (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). These developments underscore the critical need for pronunciation to be treated as a pedagogically tractable and essential skill within L2 instruction.

2.2 Teacher Cognition and Pronunciation Pedagogy

Teacher cognition—the beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions teachers hold—has a powerful influence on classroom practice, particularly in areas where formal training is limited (Borg, 2003, 2015). Pronunciation instruction exemplifies this relationship. In many educational contexts, teachers must make independent decisions about whether, how, and to what extent pronunciation is taught, often in the absence of institutional guidance or curricular emphasis.

Research in Gulf contexts suggests a persistent gap between teachers' favorable attitudes toward pronunciation instruction and their limited classroom implementation. For example, Algethami and Al Kamli (2025) found that Saudi teachers supported pronunciation pedagogy in principle, yet cited lack of training, materials, and curriculum time as major constraints. Similar trends were identified in Jordan, where Elkouz and Munoz (2023) reported that even when teachers recognized the importance of pronunciation, they felt unprepared to deliver effective instruction. This disconnect highlights the importance of studying teacher cognition as both a mediating and limiting factor in L2 pronunciation outcomes.

2.3 Pronunciation in Arabic-Monolingual Classrooms

Arabic-speaking learners of English face well-documented challenges in segmental production, including difficulties with phonemes absent in Arabic (/p/, /v/, /ŋ/), interdental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/), and final consonant clusters (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Al-Salman, 2021; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021). Yet, most literature focuses narrowly on learner errors, often overlooking the pedagogical practices or teacher strategies that might address such difficulties.

Unlike many Western L2 classrooms, Gulf classrooms are typically monolingual and homogenous in learners' L1 background, making L1 transfer effects highly predictable (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023). However, this predictability may also lead to the normalization of fossilized pronunciation patterns—especially when teachers share learners' L1 and are unaware of critical L2 phonological contrasts. Consequently, teacher input and metalinguistic feedback become key variables in shaping learners' phonological development.

2.4 Policy and Practice in Oman and Qatar

Both Oman and Qatar have implemented broad educational reforms that emphasize English Medium Instruction (EMI), particularly in higher education and STEM disciplines (Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023). Despite these macro-level policy shifts, English language instruction remains heavily weighted toward grammar, reading, and writing, with pronunciation receiving minimal attention in curricula, assessment, and teacher training programs (Dorsey, 2018; Thakur, 2020).

In Qatar, differences between private and public education systems further exacerbate disparities in pronunciation instruction. While some private schools incorporate pronunciation components within communicative curricula, public institutions often follow centralized syllabi that marginalize spoken fluency and phonological accuracy (Allouh, 2021; Naz & MacLeod, 2016). These systemic limitations create a disconnect between the linguistic demands of EMI and the instructional realities of English language classrooms.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: The Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)

This study is theoretically grounded in the **Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, developed by Flege and Bohn (2021), which offers a comprehensive psycholinguistic explanation of how L2 phonetic categories are acquired, retained, or inhibited by L1 phonological systems. Unlike earlier models (e.g., the original SLM-r or Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis), SLM-r posits that L2 category learning is possible across the lifespan, provided learners receive sufficient rich input, particularly in the auditory-perceptual domain.

SLM-r also emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between L1 and L2 phonetic systems—suggesting that L1 may adapt in response to sustained L2 exposure (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Recent empirical studies validate these predictions. Desmeules-Trudel and Zamuner (2021) found that children exposed to early L2 input developed more native-like perception of phonetic

contrasts; similarly, meta-analyses by Sakai and Moorman (2018) show that perceptual training can yield moderate-to-strong effects in L2 production, thus confirming the perception-production link central to SLM-r. (see also Dong, Clayards, Brown, & Wonnacott, 2019; Saito, 2021; Uchihara, Karas, & Thomson, 2025, on input variability and talker heterogeneity).

These findings are particularly relevant to Arabic-speaking learners, whose shared phonological systems present common perceptual difficulties. However, the classroom environment becomes a decisive factor in determining whether learners receive the quality input necessary to reshape L2 categories. Teachers' instructional choices, feedback types, and phonological awareness all influence the input conditions described in SLM-r. Despite its relevance, very few studies have explored pronunciation instruction or teacher cognition through the lens of SLM-r in Arabic-monolingual contexts—marking a significant theoretical and empirical gap that this study aims to fill.

2.6 Summary and Research Gap

This review has identified three primary gaps in the literature:

1. **Limited application of SLM-r to teacher cognition and pronunciation instruction**, especially in monolingual Arabic-speaking contexts;
2. **Under-researched classroom practices in the Gulf**, despite their relevance to global EMI developments;
3. **Mismatch between teachers' favorable beliefs and limited implementation**, underscoring the need for theory-informed inquiry into pronunciation pedagogy.

By exploring how English language teachers in Oman and Qatar conceptualize, prioritize, and enact pronunciation instruction—within the cognitive framework provided by SLM-r—this

study contributes to both regional applied linguistics research and broader discussions on teacher agency in L2 phonological development.

3. Methodology

This section adopts a **mixed-methods approach** to balance the depth of qualitative inquiry with the generalizability of quantitative data.

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a **convergent parallel mixed-methods design**, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and challenges related to pronunciation instruction in Oman and Qatar. This design was selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both measurable trends and context-specific narratives, allowing for triangulation of findings and increased validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2020; Lee, 2019). The study is framed within the **Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)** (Flege & Bohn, 2021), which necessitates examining both the quality of input (teacher practices) and the contextual factors that shape that input (teacher beliefs, institutional conditions) and emphasizes the importance of phonetic input quality and variability in shaping L2 category formation (Uchihara, Karas, & Thomson, 2025).

3.2. Research Context

The study was conducted in state and private secondary schools, language institutes, and foundation programs in higher education institutions across urban and semi-urban areas of **Muscat (Oman)** and **Doha (Qatar)**. Both countries have adopted English Medium Instruction (EMI) at various academic levels and share similar sociolinguistic characteristics, such as Arabic-

monolingual classrooms and national educational policies that prioritize English for academic and professional advancement (Dorsey, 2018; Gitsaki & Zoghbor, 2023; Naz & MacLeod, 2016).

3.3. Participants

A total of 60 English language teachers participated in the study—30 from Oman and 30 from Qatar. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling** to ensure representation across institutional types, teaching experience levels, and nationalities (native and non-native English-speaking teachers). All participants held at least a bachelor's degree in English language or a related field, and 85% reported prior exposure to pronunciation instruction either as learners or teachers. This sampling strategy aligns with prior teacher cognition studies seeking theoretically relevant representation (Borg, 2003, 2015; Couper, 2021). **Table 1** presents participant demographics and data collection summary.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Data Collection Summary

Variable	Oman (n = 30)	Qatar (n = 30)	Total (N = 60)
Gender	14M / 16F	13M / 17F	27M / 33F
Years of Experience	1–5: 10	1–5: 8	1–5: 18
	6–10: 12	6–10: 14	6–10: 26
	11+: 8	11+: 8	11+: 16
Institutional Affiliation	Schools: 16	Schools: 14	Schools: 30
	HE/Colleges: 14	HE/Colleges: 16	HE/Colleges: 30
Formal Pronunciation Training	Yes: 9	Yes: 11	Yes: 20

Variable	Oman (n = 30)	Qatar (n = 30)	Total (N = 60)
	No: 21	No: 19	No: 40

3.4. Instruments

The study used three primary instruments:

1. **Teacher Questionnaire**

   A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated instruments used in previous teacher cognition research (Borg, 2003, 2015; Couper, 2021). It comprised **five sections**: (1) demographic data, (2) beliefs about pronunciation instruction, (3) reported teaching practices, (4) perceived challenges, and (5) institutional and curricular support. Items were a mix of Likert-scale (5-point), multiple choice, and open-ended formats.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews**

   Twenty participants (10 per country) were interviewed to explore instructional rationales, pedagogical beliefs, and professional development experiences related to pronunciation. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted 30–45 minutes, and followed a semi-structured guide informed by prior cognition studies (Alghazo, Jarrah, & Al-Salem, 2023; Tsunemoto, Trofimovich, & Kennedy, 2023). Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person, depending on logistics.

3. **Classroom Observations**

   A subset of 10 participants (5 from each country) allowed non-intrusive observation of 1–2 pronunciation-focused lessons. A standardized observation checklist was used to track frequency and types of pronunciation instruction (segmental vs. suprasegmental), use of phonetic symbols, corrective feedback, and learner engagement.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred over a three-month period from **January to March 2025**. After obtaining institutional permissions and informed consent from all participants, questionnaires were distributed electronically via Qualtrics. Interviews and observations were scheduled flexibly to accommodate participants' teaching commitments. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Observations were conducted in person or via video-recorded lessons, depending on institutional policy.

3.6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using **SPSS (Version 29)**. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were calculated for all closed-ended items. Comparative analyses (e.g., independent samples t-tests, chi-square tests) were conducted to detect statistically significant differences between Oman and Qatar in teacher beliefs and practices.

Qualitative data (interview transcripts and observation notes) were analyzed thematically using **NVivo 14**. An initial coding scheme was developed based on the research questions and the SLM-r framework. Two independent coders analyzed the data, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using **Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$)**, indicating strong agreement (McHugh, 2012). Themes were refined through iterative analysis and member checking with a subset of participants to enhance credibility.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from both participating institutions and adhered to the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality. Pseudonyms were

assigned to all participants to protect anonymity. Data were stored on password-protected drives accessible only to the researcher.

3.8. Summary

The methodology section outlines a rigorously designed and ethically grounded research process that integrates teacher-reported data with observational and interview-based evidence. By adopting a mixed-methods approach and embedding the study in a strong theoretical framework (SLM-r), the research provides a multifaceted view of pronunciation instruction in two under-examined Gulf contexts: Oman and Qatar.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study in two parts: (1) quantitative findings from the teacher questionnaire and (2) qualitative themes derived from interviews and classroom observations. Each subsection addresses the research questions related to teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and pedagogical challenges in pronunciation instruction.

4.1. Teacher Beliefs About Pronunciation Instruction

Quantitative analysis revealed that a significant majority of teachers in both Oman and Qatar perceive pronunciation as essential to communicative competence. As shown in **Table 1**, 91.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that pronunciation should be integrated into all levels of English instruction. However, only 40% reported feeling "very confident" in teaching it effectively, indicating a notable belief-practice gap.

Table 1

Teachers' Beliefs About Pronunciation Instruction (N = 60)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pronunciation is essential for communication in English.	0	1	4	27	28
I feel confident teaching English pronunciation.	3	9	24	17	7
Pronunciation should be explicitly taught in all levels of English classes.	1	2	2	26	29
My training has adequately prepared me to teach pronunciation.	7	16	18	13	6

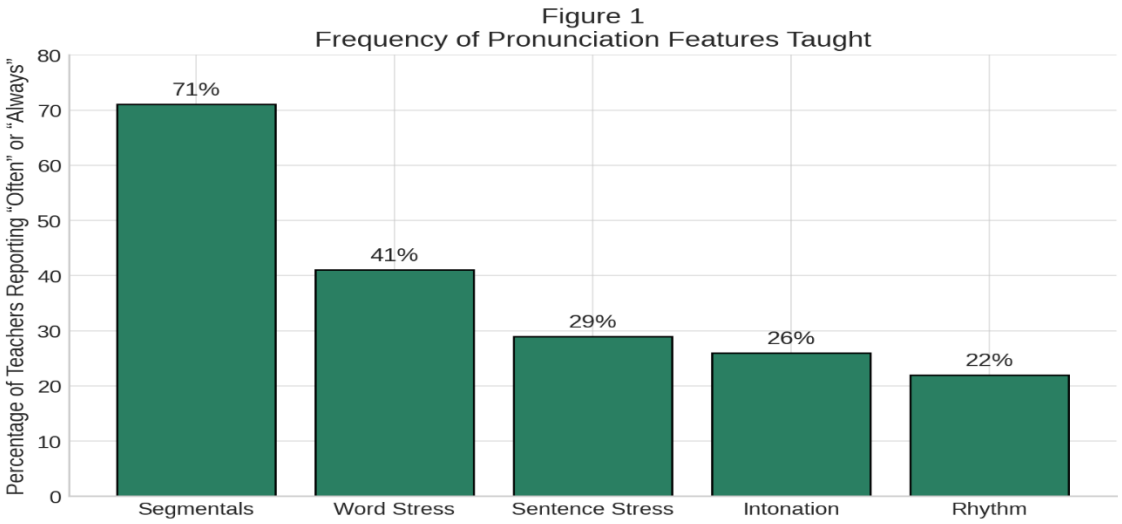
These beliefs were consistent across the two national contexts, with no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). However, qualitative responses revealed that teachers in Qatar were more likely to describe pronunciation as a "priority skill" in EMI contexts, whereas Omani teachers described it as "important but often sidelined." Interview data reinforced these findings. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the communicative value of pronunciation, especially in oral assessments and speaking interviews. For instance, a Qatari instructor stated, *"If students mispronounce academic terms, it affects their credibility—even when their grammar is correct."*

4.2. Reported Instructional Practices

In terms of classroom practice, segmental features (e.g., individual consonants and vowels) received more attention than suprasegmental elements (e.g., stress, intonation, rhythm). As illustrated in **Figure 1**, over 70% of respondents reported frequently correcting segmental errors, whereas fewer than 30% reported consistently teaching suprasegmentals.

Figure 1

Frequency of Pronunciation Features Taught



Moreover, while 58% of teachers reported occasionally using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), only 17% used it consistently. Several teachers reported relying on "repetition drills" and "listening-and-repeating" strategies without articulatory explanations. Notably, the majority of participants (67%) said they lacked access to pronunciation-specific teaching materials.

Classroom observations supported these self-reports. As shown in **Table 2**, segmental correction was the most frequently observed activity, while guided intonation practice was absent in all ten classrooms.

Table 2

Observed Pronunciation Instruction Strategies in 10 Classrooms

Strategy Observed	Frequency (out of 10 classrooms)
Segmental correction (e.g., /p/ vs /b/)	9

Strategy Observed	Frequency (out of 10 classrooms)
Teacher modeling with repetition	8
Minimal pair activities	5
Use of IPA on the board or slides	3
Stress or intonation activities	2
Guided intonation drills	0

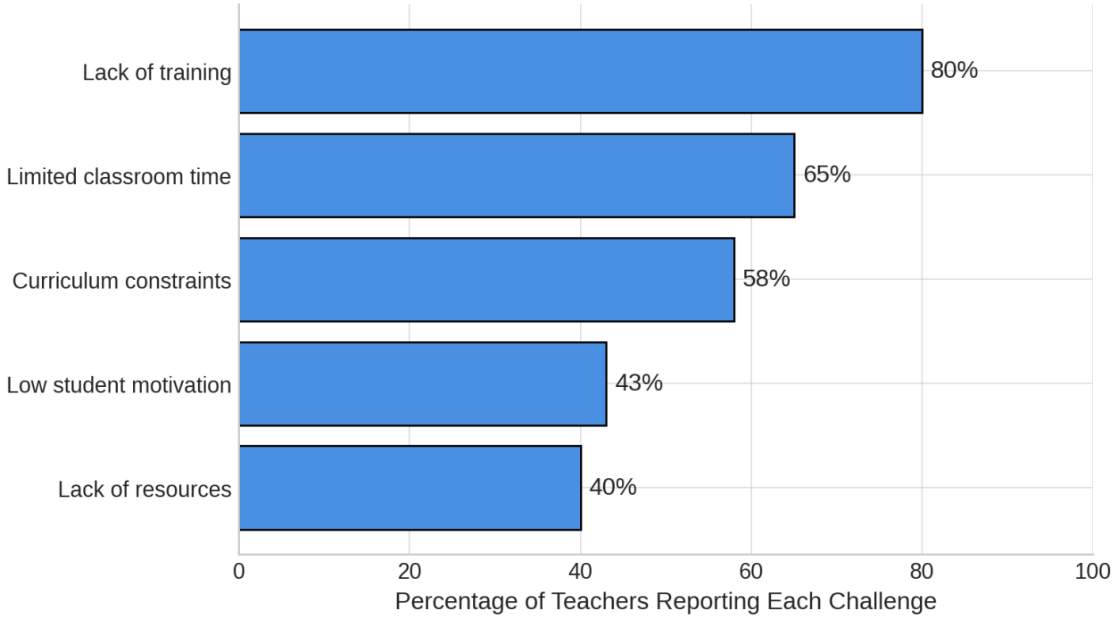
4.3. Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges

Both quantitative and qualitative data highlighted systemic and pedagogical challenges that limit effective pronunciation instruction. According to the questionnaire, the most frequently reported barriers were lack of training (80%), insufficient classroom time (65%), and lack of curriculum integration (58%). These barriers are summarized in **Figure 2**, which depicts the top five reported challenges.

Figure 2

Most Commonly Reported Challenges to Pronunciation Instruction

Figure 2
Most Commonly Reported Challenges to Pronunciation Instruction



Interview narratives provided nuanced insight into these obstacles. One teacher in Oman noted, *"Pronunciation is seen as 'extra'—if there's time, we cover it. If not, it's skipped."* Another teacher in Qatar commented, *"We are expected to prepare students for exams, but pronunciation isn't on the test, so it gets ignored."* Notably, many teachers expressed a desire for professional development in this area. As one Omani participant explained, *"We need workshops focused on practical techniques—not just theory."*

4.4. Comparative Trends Between Oman and Qatar

While general patterns were similar across both contexts, a few differences emerged. Teachers in Qatar were more likely to report institutional support for pronunciation (e.g., inclusion in syllabi, access to materials), whereas Omani teachers described more rigid curriculum frameworks and heavier emphasis on grammar. These trends are visualized in **Table 3**, which compares reported perceptions of institutional support.

Table 3

Perceived Institutional Support for Pronunciation Instruction

Indicator of Support	Oman (n = 30)	Qatar (n = 30)
Curriculum includes pronunciation goals	9	18
School provides teaching materials	6	16
Pronunciation included in oral tests	7	12
CPD offered for pronunciation teaching	4	9

Although these differences were not statistically significant (p = .06), they suggest Qatar may offer a slightly more supportive environment for pronunciation pedagogy. Nevertheless, in both countries, the lack of systemic prioritization continues to hinder consistent instructional implementation.

4.5. Summary

The results indicate strong teacher belief in the importance of pronunciation instruction, yet limited practice due to structural and pedagogical constraints. Segmentals receive more instructional attention than suprasegmentals, and institutional support varies across contexts. These findings validate the need for targeted professional development, curricular reform, and further theoretical inquiry—particularly in Arabic-monolingual EMI environments such as Oman and Qatar.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the beliefs, practices, and institutional challenges related to pronunciation instruction among English language teachers in Oman and Qatar. Grounded in **Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, which emphasizes the importance of input quality and L1–L2 phonetic category differentiation (Flege & Bohn, 2021), the study's findings reveal critical insights into how teachers mediate L2 phonological development in Arabic-monolingual classrooms. This discussion integrates the quantitative and qualitative findings with broader SLA theory and pedagogical research to address the study's three research questions.

5.1. Teacher Beliefs: High Value, Limited Confidence

The data revealed that teachers in both Oman and Qatar overwhelmingly recognize pronunciation as central to communicative competence. This belief aligns with recent literature asserting the importance of intelligible pronunciation in spoken interaction, particularly in EMI environments where oral fluency is closely tied to academic and professional success (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Yağız, Kaya, & Ötügen, 2024). However, the low levels of instructional confidence reported—particularly in Oman—mirror findings from other Gulf contexts where teachers are often inadequately prepared to teach pronunciation (Algethami, & Al Kamli, 2025; Elkouz & Munoz, 2023).

According to SLM-r, effective pronunciation learning depends heavily on the quality and consistency of L2 input, especially when learners' L1 phonological systems exert strong influence over their perception and production of L2 sounds (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Teachers who lack confidence may provide inconsistent or insufficient input, limiting learners' exposure to target-like phonetic models and decreasing the likelihood of category reformation. The observed belief–

practice gap therefore has direct theoretical implications, as it suggests that learners are receiving suboptimal input conditions for robust phonological development.

5.2. Instructional Practices: Emphasis on Segmentals, Neglect of Suprasegmentals

Consistent with prior research (Couper, 2021; Madzo, 2019), this study found that segmental features (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/) receive far more instructional attention than suprasegmentals (e.g., stress, intonation, rhythm). Teachers were more likely to correct mispronounced consonants than to guide students through sentence-level prosody—a pattern observed in both self-reports and classroom observations.

From the perspective of **SLM-r**, this emphasis is both understandable and problematic. While segmentals are often more salient and easier to correct explicitly, suprasegmental features contribute significantly to intelligibility and comprehensibility, especially in L2 speech involving global or academic audiences (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2008; Derwing, Waugh, & Munro, 2021). Moreover, suprasegmental instruction supports learners in developing more native-like rhythm and stress patterns, which SLM-r suggests are difficult to acquire without explicit and repeated input that challenges L1 timing schemas.

The limited use of tools such as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), as well as the reliance on repetition drills without articulatory explanation, further limits learners' opportunities to map new L2 categories. Teachers are providing some phonological input, but not at the frequency, depth, or metalinguistic richness required for optimal L2 category formation as defined by SLM-r.

5.3. Institutional Constraints and Pedagogical Challenges

A recurring theme across both contexts was the structural marginalization of pronunciation in curricula, assessments, and teacher training programs. Teachers reported that pronunciation instruction was deprioritized due to exam-focused syllabi, limited classroom time, and insufficient access to materials—findings echoed in studies across other Arab nations (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Dorsey, 2018). This mirrors global concerns that pronunciation, despite its communicative significance, remains the "neglected orphan" of language teaching (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

SLM-r posits that input quality and frequency are paramount for phonological restructuring. If institutional systems do not encourage, assess, or resource pronunciation instruction, learners are unlikely to receive the dense, varied, and corrective input required for robust L2 category development. These findings also speak to the ecological dimension of SLM-r—while the model focuses on learner cognition, the surrounding pedagogical environment directly mediates input and learning outcomes.

5.4. Comparative Trends Between Oman and Qatar

While Oman and Qatar share many structural similarities, notable contextual differences emerged. Qatari teachers reported greater access to pronunciation materials, more institutional encouragement, and better integration of pronunciation into oral assessments. This may be attributed to Qatar's broader investment in international curricula and its larger number of EMI institutions, which necessitate more comprehensive oral communication training.

These disparities have implications for the generalizability of findings and also support the SLM-r model's emphasis on variability across learner environments. Learners in more input-rich contexts (e.g., Qatar) may experience more phonological development not because of cognitive

differences but because their teachers are better resourced and institutionally supported in delivering consistent and high-quality phonetic input.

5.5. Implications for Teacher Training and Policy

The findings of this study underscore the need for regionally grounded professional development that equips English language teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools to teach pronunciation effectively. Training should include instruction in articulatory phonetics, IPA use, classroom-based correction techniques, and suprasegmental modeling. Moreover, curriculum designers in Oman and Qatar should embed pronunciation goals explicitly into English syllabi and align them with assessment practices to raise the instructional status of pronunciation.

At the policy level, Ministries of Education and Higher Education in both nations should consider integrating pronunciation outcomes into national proficiency benchmarks, particularly in EMI-stream institutions. Aligning these reforms with theoretical models such as SLM-r ensures that pedagogical decisions are grounded in well-established principles of phonological learning and SLA.

5.6. Summary

Viewed through the lens of **SLM-r**, the study's findings highlight a mismatch between the phonological input learners need and the input they are currently receiving in Arabic-monolingual classrooms in Oman and Qatar. Teachers value pronunciation instruction but face structural and pedagogical limitations that constrain their ability to deliver input of sufficient quality and quantity. Addressing this gap requires systemic reform, professional development, and a re-evaluation of pronunciation's place within L2 curricula and pedagogy.

6. Conclusion

This study explored English language teachers' beliefs, practices, and instructional challenges surrounding pronunciation pedagogy in Arabic-monolingual classrooms in Oman and Qatar. Grounded in **Flege's Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r)**, the research offers a theoretically and empirically informed account of how pronunciation instruction is conceptualized and implemented in two underrepresented Gulf contexts.

The findings revealed a strong belief among teachers in the communicative importance of pronunciation, yet a widespread lack of confidence and formal preparation in delivering effective pronunciation instruction. While segmental features were commonly addressed in classrooms, suprasegmental elements—critical for intelligibility and prosodic naturalness—were consistently underemphasized. Institutional and curricular constraints further limited the scope and frequency of pronunciation-focused pedagogy. Differences between the two national contexts also emerged, with teachers in Qatar reporting marginally greater institutional support compared to their counterparts in Oman.

The findings also carry important implications for teacher training programs and EMI policy in the Gulf. By integrating pronunciation-focused modules in both pre-service and in-service training, and by aligning institutional language policies with communicative goals, educators in the region can be better prepared to address learners' pronunciation challenges in a more systematic and pedagogically sound manner.

Interpreted through the lens of SLM-r, these findings underscore the mismatch between learners' phonological input needs and the instructional input currently available in many Gulf classrooms. The absence of consistent, high-quality input—particularly in suprasegmentals—

reduces the likelihood of L2 phonological category formation and long-term intelligibility gains. As such, pronunciation instruction remains an unmet need in L2 English education in the region.

This study makes several key contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of SLM-r to a new sociolinguistic context, demonstrating its relevance not only to learner cognition but also to teacher agency and institutional ecology. Pedagogically, the findings advocate for the integration of pronunciation into national curricula, teacher education, and classroom assessment practices. They also highlight the need for practical, classroom-oriented training that bridges theoretical phonology and day-to-day instruction.

Nonetheless, the study is not without limitations. The sample size, while adequate for a mixed-methods investigation, limits broad generalization across the wider Gulf region. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias, though this was mitigated by triangulation with interviews and observations.

Future research should expand this line of inquiry by including more diverse educational settings across the Gulf, longitudinally tracking the effects of pronunciation-focused teacher training, and incorporating learner outcome data to directly measure phonological gains. Studies could also examine the role of digital tools and AI-assisted pronunciation software in enhancing classroom input quality, especially in resource-constrained environments.

In conclusion, addressing the persistent marginalization of pronunciation instruction in Oman and Qatar requires systemic, pedagogical, and policy-level reform. Teachers are willing, but underprepared; learners are motivated, but underserved. With informed investment and theoretically grounded change, pronunciation pedagogy in the Gulf can evolve from peripheral concern to core communicative competency.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teacher Survey on Pronunciation Instruction

Section 1: Background Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Years of English Teaching Experience: ☐ 1–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11+
3. Country of Teaching: ☐ Oman ☐ Qatar
4. Institutional Type: ☐ School ☐ Higher Education
5. Have you received formal training in pronunciation instruction? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 2: Beliefs about Pronunciation Instruction

(Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation is essential for communication in English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel confident teaching English pronunciation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pronunciation should be explicitly taught at all proficiency levels.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My training has adequately prepared me to teach pronunciation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 3: Instructional Practices

(How often do you include the following in your teaching? 1 = Never, 5 = Always)

Feature / Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching segmental sounds (e.g., /p/ vs /b/)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teaching word stress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teaching intonation or sentence rhythm	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using IPA in teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Correcting pronunciation in real-time speech	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Challenges and Support

(Please check all that apply.)

☐ Lack of training in pronunciation

☐ Lack of classroom time

☐ Curriculum does not emphasize pronunciation

☐ Lack of teaching resources

☐ Low student motivation

☐ Pronunciation not assessed in tests

☐ Other: _____

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How important do you think pronunciation is in your students' overall English proficiency?
2. Can you describe how you typically teach pronunciation in your classes?
3. What challenges do you face when teaching pronunciation?
4. Do you feel that your training has prepared you to teach pronunciation effectively?
5. Are there any institutional supports or resources available to help you teach pronunciation?
6. How do you decide which pronunciation features to focus on (e.g., segmentals vs suprasegmentals)?
7. What improvements would you suggest for teaching pronunciation more effectively in your context?