

## The Influence of the Amazigh Vowel Inventory on Amazigh EFL Learners.

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### Abstract

The influence of native language phonological systems on EFL has been a topic of considerable interest in the field of applied linguistics. In the context of EFL acquisition, research has highlighted the significant impact of learner's native language phonetic features on their ability to perceive and produce the English sounds accurately (Major, 2001; Derwing & Munro, 2011). Drawing upon this theoretical framework, we aim to explore how the phonetic features of the learners' native Amazigh language (a Hamito-Semitic language affiliated with the African branch of the Afro-Asian language family (Achab, 2001), characterized by a limited vowel inventory: i,u,a (Ridouane, 2014)) shape their acquisition of English vowels. Previous research suggests that the phonetic nuances of Amazigh vowels may impact the acquisition of the English vowels (Odlin, 2003). However, empirical studies specifically addressing this topic are limited, warranting further investigation into the nature and extent of cross-linguistic influence on English vowel acquisition by Amazigh-speaking learners. Our study focuses mainly on vowel quality, length, and allophony, employing a mixed-methods approach by conducting qualitative interviews with Amazigh-speaking learners and gathering audio recordings that were analyzed using acoustic-phonetic techniques to identify the challenges faced by the learners and examine the accuracy of production. EFL learners from Amazigh-speaking backgrounds participated in perception tasks and pronunciation assessments, providing data on their ability to perceive and produce the English vowels. Our findings reveal several key insights: First, Amazigh-speaking EFL learners tend to transfer the nuances of Amazigh vowel quality to English, resulting in difficulties in distinguishing between similar English vowel sounds. Second, while the Amazigh language lacks phonemic vowel length distinctions, variations in vowel duration are observed in English pronunciation by these learners, impacting their ability to differentiate vowel length contrasts. Third, allophonic variations in Amazigh vowels influence the articulation of English vowels by EFL learners, affecting intelligibility in spoken English. This study contributes to the broader understanding of cross-linguistic influence on 3rd language phonological acquisition and provides practical insights for the development of effective pedagogical strategies for addressing pronunciation challenges faced by EFL learners in multilingual contexts.