



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***PRONUNCIATION ERRORS OF ARABIC CONSONANTS AMONG
CHINESE STUDENTS IN GANSU, CHINA***

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FBMK 2021 35



**PRONUNCIATION ERRORS OF ARABIC CONSONANTS AMONG
CHINESE STUDENTS IN GANSU, CHINA**

By

MA YALAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts**

October 2020

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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October 2020

Chairman : Prof Mohd Azidan Bin Abdul Jabar, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This thesis illustrates the similarities and differences between Arabic and Chinese phonetic systems by comparing its phonetic systems. This research mainly focuses on two research questions: (1) What errors were made by Chinese students (in Northwest Normal University first-grade to fourth-grade) in pronunciation of Arabic consonants that do not exist in Chinese? (2) What are the factors of the Arabic pronunciation errors on letters made by the Northwest Normal University students of first-grade to fourth-grade? Correspondingly, the researchers selected Northwest Normal University students as the research samples, and used qualitative research methods to conduct descriptive analysis to achieve the following two research objectives: (1) To identify Chinese students' pronunciation errors in Arabic consonants that do not exist in Chinese. (2) To describe the factors of errors made by the Northwest Normal University students of first-grade to fourth-grade. Namely, to investigate the consonant pronunciation errors of Chinese students in the process of Arabic phonetic learning, and use interviews to find the reasons for these students' mistakes. Through research, we found that Chinese students are prone to make consonants, for example, it is easy to pronounce $\text{ﻩ} / \text{h} /$ as $\text{h} / \text{x} /$ or $\text{ﺥ} / \text{h} /$. The researcher hopes to improve Chinese students' comprehensive understanding of Arabic phonetic learning and avoid the same errors in the process of learning consonants.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**KESALAHAN PENTAKSIRAN LONSONAN ARAB DI ATAS PELAJAR CINA
DI GANSU, CHINA**

Oleh

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Pengerusi : Prof Mohd Azidan Bin Abdul Jabar, PhD
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Tesis ini menggambarkan persamaan dan perbezaan antara sistem fonetik Arab dan Cina dengan membandingkan sistem fonetiknya. Penyelidikan ini terutama memfokuskan pada dua persoalan kajian: (1) errors Kesalahan apa yang dilakukan oleh pelajar Cina (di Universiti Normal Barat Laut kelas pertama hingga kelas empat) dalam sebutan konsonan Arab yang tidak terdapat dalam bahasa Cina? (2) Apakah faktor-faktor kesalahan pengucapan bahasa Arab pada huruf yang dibuat oleh pelajar Northwest Normal University dari kelas satu hingga kelas empat? Sejalan dengan itu, para penyelidik memilih pelajar Northwest Normal University sebagai sampel kajian, dan menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif untuk melakukan analisis deskriptif untuk mencapai dua objektif penyelidikan berikut: (1) Untuk mengenal pasti kesalahan pengucapan pelajar Cina dalam konsonan Arab yang tidak terdapat dalam bahasa Cina. (2) Untuk menerangkan faktor-faktor kesalahan yang dilakukan oleh pelajar Northwest Normal University dari kelas satu hingga kelas empat. Yaitu, menyiasat kesalahan pengucapan konsonan pelajar Cina dalam proses pembelajaran fonetik Arab, dan menggunakan wawancara untuk mencari alasan atas kesilapan pelajar ini. Melalui penyelidikan, kami mendapati bahawa pelajar Cina cenderung membuat konsonan, sebagai contoh, mudah untuk menyebut $\text{v} / \text{h} /$ sebagai $\text{h} / \text{x} /$ atau $\text{ç} / \text{ñ} /$. Penyelidik berharap dapat meningkatkan pemahaman komprehensif pelajar Cina mengenai pembelajaran fonetik Arab dan mengelakkan kesalahan yang sama dalam proses pembelajaran konsonan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude goes to Allah. This study would never have come into reality without the grace and protection. Upon the completion of the thesis, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Mohd Azidan Bin Abdul Jabar, who has offered me constructive guidance for the planning of the thesis and invaluable advice and encouragement for its completion and improvement, which is of great value to my future academic life. He is such a devoted teacher that though busy in his teaching and research, he never hesitates to offer me timely and spiritual support. He spares no effort to read, comment on and polish my thesis. Without his help and encouragement, my thesis would have been impossible.

Besides, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my co-supervisor, Dr Ng Chwee Fang, who have taught me and given me unselfish support during my three postgraduate years. It is my great honor to have known all those respectable teachers. It has been a privilege of knowing and working with them. Finally, I am deeply indebted to my beloved family and mother--Ma HuiFeng. Because of their love, care, understanding and encouragements, I can complete my thesis writing eventually.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASR	Automatic Speech Recognition
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NNU	Northwest Normal University
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to study Arabic pronunciation errors among Chinese students. This chapter elaborates the overview of this research background and clarifies the main research directions such as problem statement, research objectives and questions, research scope, and research significance and definition of key terms.

1.2 Background of Study

Pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as well as performance. In order to learn a language not only the learner will need to develop his/her skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, but also need to learn pronunciation skills to avoid pronunciation mistakes and accurately express his/her meaning.

It is widely thought that pronunciation is one of the most neglected aspects of language teaching and learning. But intelligible pronunciation is an important part of communicative competence. If learners do not have perfect pronunciation skills they will not be able to communicate effectively; Poor and unintelligible pronunciation will make unpleasant and misunderstanding for both speakers and listeners (Ikhsan, 2017). In fact, almost all Arabic language teachers in China get students to study grammar and vocabulary, practice functional dialogues, take part in productive skill activities and become competent in listening and reading. As a result, Sabouri said, "Language is primarily a means of communication, and this communication needs to be understood by all, so teaching pronunciation should be a priority. If you don't pay attention to the common pronunciation, there will be a risk that the subject will not understand" (Pourhosein Gilakjani, A., & Sabouri, N. B., 2016).

Regarding this aspect of language, it is important to point out that, as Morley said, comprehensible pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' ability and one of the most important features of language teaching (Gilakjani & A. P., 2016). Good pronunciation leads to learning, but bad pronunciation brings great difficulty to language learning (Gilakjani & A. P., 2016). This consideration shows that pronunciation teaching is essential to help students develop the skills necessary to communicate in the target language. Meanwhile, "pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and

sounds characteristics (and their meanings), but also greatly improves their oral skills, thereby "helping them achieve the goal of improving comprehension and intelligibility" (Modesti & S, 2016). Therefore, Pourhosein believes that "The goal of pronunciation instruction is not to ask learners to pronounce like native speakers. Instead intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of oral communication" (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016).

Arabic is one of the world's oldest languages. Currently, among Semitic languages, Arabic has been described as the most widely spoken with a number of over 330 million speakers according to the CIA report for 2008 besides being the sacred language of more than a billion Muslims around the world. It is the sixth most widely spoken language in the world and one of the six official languages of the United Nations (Al-Huri, I. 2015). Meanwhile, it is an official language in more than 22 countries of the world such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan Oman etc (Rahmani & Fatiha, 2018). Arabic is the concerted element that unifies them linguistically being constitutionally the official language of all Arab countries from the Ocean to the Gulf (Al-Huri, I. 2015).

Arabic is a Semitic language which has many differences when compared with Sino-Tibetan languages such as Chinese. Some of the differences include unique phonemes and phonetic features, and a complicated morphological word structure. It has been shown that Arabic is a Semitic language which has many differences when compared with other languages that include unique phonemes, phonetic features and complicated morphological word structure (Schiff, R & Saiegh-Haddad, E, 2018). Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) system for Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has major difficulties with distinctive characteristics of the Arabic sound system, namely, geminate, emphatic, uvular, and pharyngeal consonants, and vowel duration (Daalache, M. R. Let al., 2017). Arabic has 34 phonemes consisting of three short vowels (/i/, /a/, /u/), three long vowels (/i:/, /a:/, /u:/ which are the counterparts of the short vowels), and twenty-eight consonants (Jassem & Z. A., 2016). Note further that there are as many as 26 consonants in Chinese Mandarin, but there are only four tones, plus a neutral tone, which is hardly ever seen in tone errors (Hao, Y. C., & Liu, J. L. C., 2019). This also caused the main difficulty for Chinese students to learn Arabic as a second language.

One of language skills that have to be mastered by students in learning Arabic is speaking. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. Poor pronunciation leads to the possibility of serious misunderstanding. The listener may be forced to ask for repeated clarification or elaboration (Jackson, J. W., Williams, D. R., & Vander Weele, T. J. 2016). Most of learners feel difficult to speak because they are shy, nervous, afraid to make mistake with their pronunciation, and unconfident to say something in Arabic. Having a good pronunciation is important for learners. It will facilitate them in improving their ability to speak. The students should be able to pronounce the sounds easily understood by others. However, pronouncing the Arabic sounds is not easy for

Chinese student. This problem is due to the fact that most of Arabic sounds do not exist in the Chinese language. Moreover, mother tongue also affected to their Arabic pronunciation. Therefore, pronunciation of Arabic should be practiced by the students.

However, for Arabic teaching in Chinese universities, pronunciation teaching is only six to eight weeks from the beginning of the entry period. Other than this some of these same teachers make little attempt to teach pronunciation in any overt way and only give attention to it in passing. In addition, with the global character of the language is strengthened every day, a great number of its Chinese teacher start realizing that the importance of Arabic grammar and vocabularies is getting overshadowed by the desire to sound intelligible. Correct pronunciation makes it easy to understand what the speaker has said. Incorrect pronunciation will make misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener (Levis, J. M. 2006). Clear and correct pronunciation is more likely to communicate more effectively, even if there are inaccurate applications of grammar and vocabulary. According to Ikhsan, When someone's pronunciation is wrong, although the vocabulary and grammar are good, it will cause misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener, but if the pronunciation is not clear, the communication will not be good (Ikhsan, 2017).

Moreover "difficulty in pronunciation may mean that students cannot convey their message even with the correct words, or they may not be able to understand what is said to them" (Modesti, S., 2016). This also aggravated the psychological burden of foreign language learners, who feared that the other party could not understand what she meant and reduced communication. In fact, as Yates claims, "learner with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking knowledge, even if the listener simply responds to their pronunciations" (Modesti, S. 2016).

For a foreign language learner, when communicating with the native speaker, the native speaker is more sensitive in terms of pronunciation mistakes. MacCarthy says, "there is no doubt that people have views on the subject of how their language should be spoken, how they like to hear it spoken – particularly by foreigners" and "it would be unwise for the learner to disregard them entirely" (Amiruddin, A., 2019). He also points out that, "Subconscious attitudes that are unfavorable to foreign speakers may only be caused by his "speaking style", and "these attitudes may be manifested as impatience due to inappropriate hesitation or slowness; It's like certain special pronunciations become annoying when they repeat repeatedly; lack of sympathy or intimacy or deepened understanding due to widespread strangeness; or the speaker may pay more trouble to speak his language better." (Amiruddin, A., 2019). This also makes us pay more attention to the pronunciation mistakes of foreign language learners.

1.3 Statement of Problems

Although languages of the world may have universal features in common, they are different from each other. Each language has its own linguistic system. That is to say that each language has its own semantic, grammar, morphology, phonetics, phonology and syntax. So, language has both specialty and commonality, which also provides language learners with a way to master the language. The Arabic alphabet consists of 29 letters, 26 of which represent consonants. The remaining 3 letters represent the long vowels of Arabic (the phonemes /i:/, /a:/, /u:/) and, where applicable, the corresponding semivowels (the phonemes /y/ and /w/). Each letter can appear in up to four different shapes, depending on whether it occurs at the beginning, in the middle, or at end of a word, or in isolation (Al Ghanem & Kearns, 2015). In terms of its phonetic features, Arabic is a very special language in the world's language, and it can also be said to be a distinctive language. Starting from the pronunciation part, the pronunciation of most languages in the world is mostly concentrated on the tongue, upper jaw, lips, tip of the tongue, teeth and other organs. In fact, in addition to these vocal organs, there are other organs with vocal functions, such as the larynx (also divided into deep throat, middle throat, shallow throat), tongue root, tremor of the tip of the tongue, and joints between the parts. It can be said that Arabic is the only one that uses all the vocal organs that people have. That is to say, twenty-eight letters practice the pronunciation function of all organs from the left and right lungs to the lips.

Through the observation of Chinese students in the process of learning Arabic pronunciation, we found the following main problems:

1. Chinese students will have obvious errors in the pronunciation of some Arabic consonants that do not exist in Chinese. According to Luna, "Arabic consists of 28 letters, from the bilabial consonant to the glottis, the wide range of pronunciation," (Lestiono, R., & Gusdian, R. I. 2017). "The pronunciation of 12 letters, such as glottal consonant, apico-dental, uvular consonant, apico-alveolar and apical consonant, is not available in Chinese, such as: /ح/, /خ/, /ع/, /غ/, /ق/, /ث/, /ظ/, /ط/, /ر/, /ز/, /ض/, /ذ/, " (Alhawary, M. T., 2019). This shows that the pronunciation methods and pronunciation parts of Arabic and Chinese are quite different. Students need to establish a new phonetic learning system to understand the pronunciation part and pronunciation method to adapt to the Arabic phonetic system and language habits.
2. Chinese students tend to confuse several similar tones in Arabic. Since some of the 28 letters in Arabic are very close to each other, it is easy to confuse them for second foreign language learners, such as: "ح", "خ", "ه", are voiceless glottal fricative, voiceless velar fricative and voiceless glottal fricative, but after observing the pronunciation of Chinese

students, these students are not very accurate in grasping these three pronunciations. Most students will see the same pronunciation of these three letters, as well as “ت” and “ط”, “ذ” and “ز”, “ع” and “غ”, “س” and “ث”, etc.

3. Because some of the Arabic pronunciation does not exist in Chinese, it will be affected. Influenced by the pronunciation habits of mother tongue, Chinese students will use similar Chinese Pinyin consonants as an aid to learn Arabic, which will result in similar Chinese consonants when Arabic pronunciation is pronounced, such as: “ص” in Arabic replaced with “d” in Chinese, “ث”, “س” in Arabic replaced with “s” in Chinese, “ط” in Arabic replaced with “t” in Chinese, “ظ”, “ذ” in Arabic replaced with “z” in Chinese, “ع”, “غ” in Arabic replaced with “e” in Chinese, “ح”, “خ” in Arabic replaced with “h” in Chinese, etc.

Chinese learners' inefficacy in pronouncing Arabic is supposed to be due to many factors, such as the content to be studied, the methodology of teaching to be applied, the lack of practice, nature of the Chinese language, and interferences of L1, among others. Combined with the Chinese education system and educational characteristics, the main factors that cause pronunciation errors in the process of Chinese students learning Arabic are as follows: Whether it is in school teaching activities or in daily life, Chinese students lack an environment for learning Arabic, and there is a lack of native Arabic speakers around them, making them completely surrounded by the Arabic language atmosphere; Secondly, Chinese students have adapted to China's traditional education model. Although they are learning a language, they pay more attention to passing the test and achieving satisfactory results, and not paying attention to the practical application of the Arabic language; In terms of teaching, most of the teaching principles of teachers focus on memorizing vocabulary and grammar. There is a lack of recitation exercises for Arabic pronunciation in the classroom, and students are not paying attention to the pronunciation and oral expression of the Arabic language; Last but not least, students are largely interfered by their mother tongue in the process of learning Arabic, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation of Arabic. Consequently, this study was conducted to help to clarify these issues.

It is difficult for a second language learner to speak with native-like pronunciation. Therefore, this research attempts to identify the problematic areas of pronunciation let Chinese students understand the Arabic letters that are prone to erroneous pronunciation during the process of phonetic learning, and realize the key points and difficulties of phonetic learning.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The main goal of this research is to study Arabic pronunciation mistakes among Chinese students. In order to address this goal, the following objectives and questions are addressed:

Research Objective 1:

To identify Chinese students' pronunciation errors in Arabic consonants that does not exist in Chinese.

Research Question 1:

What errors were made by Chinese students (in Northwest Normal University first-grade to fourth-grade) in pronunciation of Arabic consonants that do not exist in Chinese?

Research Objective 2

To describe the factors of pronunciation errors was made by the Northwest Normal University students of first-grade to fourth-grade.

Research Question 2:

What are the factors of the Arabic pronunciation errors on letters made by the Northwest Normal University students of first-grade to fourth-grade?

1.5 Scope of Study

Basically, the study is aimed to answer the two research questions to present an analysis of pronunciation errors made by Chinese students. This study is concerned only with the consonants systems of Mandarin Chinese and Arabic. This study investigates the problems in Arabic pronunciation experienced by learners whose first language is Chinese. In other words, to find the problematic sounds and the factors that causes these problems. The subjects for the study were 30 students from Northwest Normal University (NNU) in China. Second, the instrument and sampling was only focused in one organization. In addition, the population of the experimental group is small, only 30 respondents might not represent the entire of students in university of China. Meanwhile, the samples will take from only one university in Gansu, China, so it cannot be the representative of the rest of the population.

This study only for Arabic language learners in China (in Chinese) as a mother tongue in Arabic consonant pronunciation problems existing in the study, to 28 Arabic consonants in the recording test and interview, through the comparative analysis method to find the Chinese learners' pronunciation errors, and analyzes the reasons of these errors. In the end, students will realize the importance of speech learning and understand their Arabic consonants pronunciation errors during the learning process.

This study chose Gansu as the sample area considering that Gansu is located in northwestern China, in the geographic center of China, and is also a "golden area" for the development and construction of the "Belt and Road" policy in China. The important and unique geographical location determines its role in connecting China's internal geographical transportation and human-to-people exchanges. "Language first" is an important means and link for the normal operation of the "Belt and Road" initiative, and it is an important help to clear the language barriers in the construction of the "Belt and Road". Therefore, colleges and universities in Gansu continue to offer Arabic language majors in order to cultivate language professionals. By making use of the professional advantages of various universities, we hope to cultivate a large number of practitioners who are proficient in Arabic translation and communication. However, because many colleges and universities have continuously opened this major in the past two years, teachers lack experience, and many problems have appeared in teaching and other aspects. Therefore, colleges and universities are constantly improving and exploring. Secondly, there are a large number of Muslim groups in Gansu. They may have been exposed to Arabic due to their religious beliefs. Therefore, we selected students from Gansu as a sample to make our research results more convincing.

1.6 Significance of Study

Many studies were conducted on the pronunciation errors of Arabic consonants among Chinese students. However, few studies of this research were proposed to manage pronunciation errors of Arabic consonants among Chinese students. This research contributes to propose pronunciation errors for Arabic consonants among Chinese students in order to manage to find factors that made by Chinese students in Arabic consonants.

The main significance of this research is the possibility to improve Chinese students' pronunciation skills, especially in consonants. Adding many benefits to students, teachers and further researcher such as the following:

1. For students, students can understand the difficulties and mistakes in the process of learning Arabic pronunciation. Blanco argue that firstly learners need to understand there is an error, then know precisely where it is (often requiring visual support), what it is, and then how to produce it accurately (Blanco, C., & Amairani, S. 2017). After that they will try to eliminate their pronunciation errors so that they can improve the pronunciation of their Arabic words, learning as much as possible about these easy-to-speak wrong letters to avoid making mistakes again in the future.
2. For the Arabic teacher, this study can clearly understand the difficulties

and problems students have in learning Arabic pronunciation. Couper draw on the conceptual nature of pronunciation to explain how teachers can help learners to improve their pronunciation (Couper, G., 2019). Therefore, teachers need to explain how they hear what the learner is saying and help to compare and contrast the difference between what they said and what they wanted to say. In order to teach Arabic language to Chinese students in the teaching process, the teacher will design and improve more pronunciation teaching methods, by changing teaching methods, teaching focus. Lee found that teacher's corrective feedback helped to reduce learners' anxiety. (Lee, E. J. E. 2016) By appropriately changing the method of class, students are more likely to master Arabic pronunciation at the basic stage.

3. For the other researchers this research can be used as material consideration if she/he will investigate the same subject. So that ways, the researcher tries to give the best contributions (Bastian, A. A., 2018).

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The following are the definitions of the main variables in this research:

- i. **Pronunciation:** Refers to how we make sounds that express meaning when we speak. It includes specific consonants and vowels of a language (segment), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual segments, such as stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, (suprasegmental aspects), and how the voice is projected (voice quality). Although we often talk about these issues as if they are separate, when we talk, they all work together, so difficulties in one area may affect another, and it is the result of these mergers that make someone Easy or difficult to understand.
- ii. **Consonants:** Also known as consonant, are sounds formed when airflow is blocked in the mouth or pharynx. The airflow is obstructed by various vocal organs during pronunciation. The vocal cords may not vibrate, and the phonemes that are not clear and loud enough are called consonants. Airflow from the lungs does not necessarily vibrate the vocal cords, through the mouth by a certain obstruction, this mainly depends on the obstruction of the sound is called consonant.
- iii. **Arabic Letters:** Has twenty-eight letters all of which are consonants. It sounds to be on and in letters above or below the symbol (including an ي organization three letters). There are twelve articulatory symbols (not including overlapping notes). Apart from the stills and nasal notes, the

eight other phonetic symbols are equivalent to vowels in other languages.

- iv. **Arabic Sounds:** Of the twelve phonetic symbols, only four are essential, namely, three actions (opening, teeth, closing) and one still. Long, soft notes are three dynamic character and nose notes in a ي, ن organization and consonant combination. Each letter produces twelve different sounds according to the different pronunciation symbols, so the total pronunciation of the twenty-eight letters is 336.
- v. **Errors:** Types of pronunciation errors can be classified into three categories; Segmental, stress related errors, and prosodic errors. Segmental pronunciation errors are manifested mainly in the realization of some 'problematic' consonants and vowels.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter clarifies the main research directions such as research background, problem statement, research objectives, research scope, and research significant. In summary, this research focuses on pronunciation errors of Arabic consonants among Chinese students. The next chapter provides the literature review that would provide a related research and explanation about Chinese and Arabic phonetics. The following figure is a general introduction to the structure of the entire dissertation.

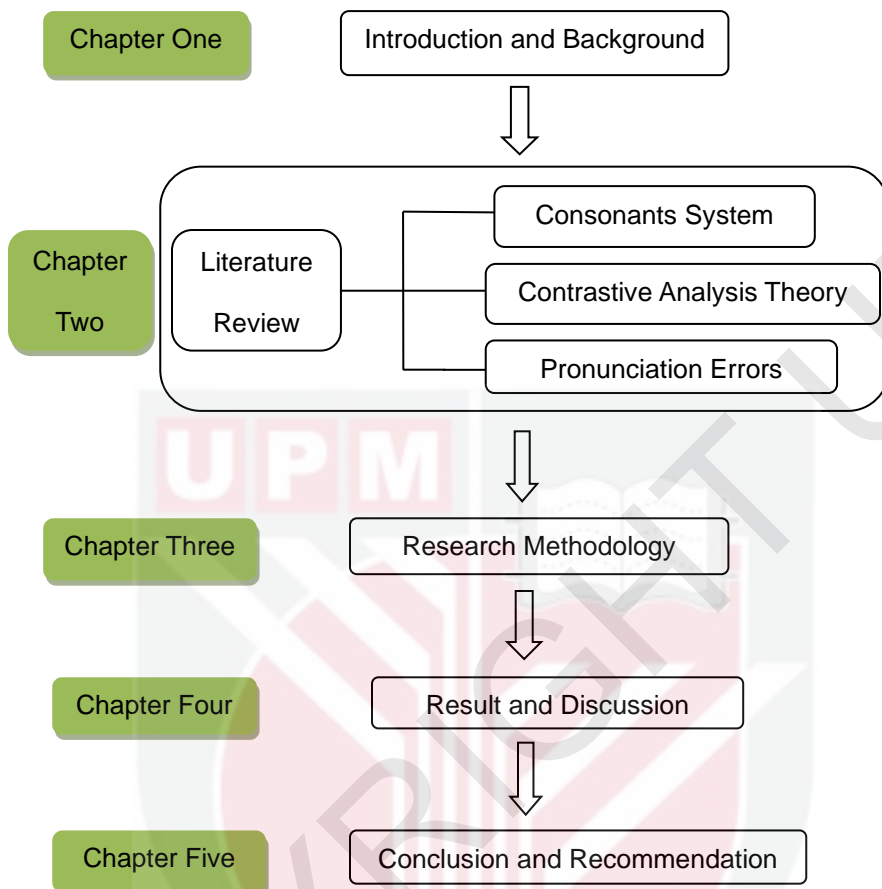


Figure 1.1 : Structure of the Dissertation

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PUBLICATION

Ma Yalan, Mohd Azidan Bin Abdul Jabar, Ng Chwee Fang (2021). Pronunciation Errors of Arabic Consonants among Chinese Students in Gansu, China. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(3),841-851.





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