Some Phonetic Differences between Arabic and English Vowels

The traditional approach in the description and classification of Arabic vowels has been carried out, for Classical Arabic and the various dialects, in terms of chronemic (categories of length) rather than qualitative criteria. Primary distinction is often drawn between three short vowels, viz. \( [I, u, a] \) and three long counterparts, viz. \( [i:, u:, a:] \). Priority is usually given to the description and classification of consonants, and a complete inventory of consonantal units is usually displayed at the initial stage of the phonological description.

Unfortunately, the traditional approach has led to much confusion, and although most authors take account of the main vowel phonemes, they often run into difficulty over the question of 'emphasis'. In general, no adequate classification of vowels has yet been satisfactory achieved; the main weaknesses have been 'pedagogical classification, lack of order in presentation, emission of important vowel phonemes with the concomitant relegation of important phonetic features to an 'irregular' or 'stylistic' status, and finally lack of interest in contrastive relationships obtaining between the vocalic elements.