

STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract

Pronunciation is one of important language elements that should be mastered by the English language users. By producing good pronunciation, students can avoid misunderstanding in communication and they can deliver the message clearly. However, many EFL learners especially Indonesia have not shown good pronunciation. Many English learners still encounter difficulties in learning pronunciation. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with aim to find the students' difficulties in learning pronunciation. Questionnaire is used to investigate the students' difficulties in learning pronunciation. The findings show that students have good perception about the importance of English pronunciation, they are also well motivated to improve their pronunciation. The environment also allows students to get the best exposure of pronunciation since the lecturers give good examples of pronunciation and opportunity to practice their pronunciation. The lecturers also give feedback both in pronunciation class and other classes. However, the students still find difficulties in learning pronunciation. They still find difficulties in recognition of native English pronunciation. They do not know how to use phonemic symbols in pronunciation, they also get nervous in production, and feel ashamed to produce incorrect pronunciation.

Keywords: *Pronunciation, difficulties, learning, qualitative*

INTRODUCTION

English has become international language that is used in most countries in the world. This fact makes English significant to be mastered by people in any fields. Therefore, learning English becomes compulsory at schools including in Indonesia. Learning English involves

mastering 4 macro skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing and micro skills namely grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling.

English pronunciation is one of the micro skills that is important to be mastered by English language users. According to Aulia (2018), English pronunciation provides rules in using

segmental and suprasegmental features in spoken communication. Segmental features include vowel, diphthongs, and consonant sounds in English. Suprasegmental features include the use of stress and intonation in speaking. Indonesia language and English have same alphabet letters but different sounds. Related to speaking, English has 20 vowel sounds including 12 diphthongs and 24 consonant sounds.

A good pronunciation will support a good communication. When a person has a good ability in pronunciation, she or he will be able to pronounce correctly and gain self confidence in spoken communication (Prashant, 2018). It will also avoid misunderstanding since different pronunciation may have different meaning from what it is supposed to have. Fact sheet in Aniuranti and Suwartono (2020) states that understanding learners who have good pronunciation even though they make mistakes in other aspects is easier than understanding learners who have bad pronunciation even though they have a very good ability in grammar. It means having good pronunciation is very important if we want to be able to communicate in English effectively.

English was originally from England and dominantly used in some countries like United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and various nations in Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean (Potter & Crystal, 2022). As English is widely used around the world, it becomes the main foreign language that is used in many countries. It is undeniable that non-English speaking countries have their first language as well and it may have accent which is very different from English.

Received Pronunciation is rules of standard of how English language pronunciation is received by the native

English speakers (Gimson in Hayotxon, 2021). These rules allow the English users know about how to pronounce the English words correctly despite having their own accent from their first language. English language users do not have to pronounce the words perfectly like native speakers do since their first language may affect their pronunciation in which it makes them unique (Asante-Nimako, 2018).

Teaching pronunciation involves two interrelated skills, namely recognition of the flow of speech and production in the spoken language (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, 1980). English learners cannot produce a fluent speech if they cannot recognize the English sounds and relate them to their knowledge of the new language they are learning. There are principles about how to conduct pronunciation practice in the classroom (Broughton et al, 1980).

1. Recognition practice should precede production practice. However, production can be done before the learners achieve perfect recognition.
2. Sounds to be heard and spoken should be clearly highlighted and taught but not in extreme tongue twisters.
3. Students should be provided by different voice as models
4. It is possible to compare among English sounds or with sounds from native language.
5. The difference of the sounds should be shown to function meaningfully.

However, many English learners still experience problems in learning English pronunciation. Aulia (2018) conducted a research with aim to identify

the Banjarese students' problems in learning English pronunciation. The instruments used in the research were questionnaire and interview. The result shows that 50% of Banjarese students have problem related to the interference of their mother tongue when they are learning English pronunciation. The difference between English and Banjarese sound systems affects their pronunciation. The other factors that affecting students' pronunciation are having no prior knowledge of English pronunciation and low motivation.

Other research was conducted by Lasabuda (2017) which aims to identify the difficulties of students' pronunciation in the 4th semester of English Education Department in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. The data collection techniques were interview and documentation. The findings show that students find it difficult to distinguish words with same pronunciation, they also rarely practice in English, lack of vocabulary, interference of mother tongue, feeling ashamed and nervous and others.

METHOD

The study employed qualitative descriptive method which investigates the students' difficulties in learning pronunciation. Nassaji (2015) mentioned that a descriptive research has goal to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. The study is conducted to gathered information about what difficulties that the students face in learning English pronunciation.

The participants of the research were 25 students of English Education Department who have attended the English pronunciation class. They were selected through simple random sampling

technique from the total of 121 students. Simple random sampling is a probability sampling that all members of the population have equal and independent opportunity for being chosen (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010).

The data about the students' difficulties in learning English pronunciation were gathered using questionnaire. The questionnaire employed the Likert scale. Ary et al. (2010) explained that a Likert scale is used to measure individual's attitude toward a topic by providing statements with some options; strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of 22 statements and was created in Google form. The researchers then invited the participants to join Google meet for guiding the participants in filling the questionnaire. The result of the questionnaire was analyzed using simple statistics and presented in percentage in tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire is divided into four main categories; self-evaluation of students' pronunciation, perspective towards English pronunciation, pronunciation teaching, and activity of pronunciation.

Self-evaluation of students' pronunciation

Self-evaluation can help students being aware of their own ability. Relating to pronunciation, it may help students to evaluate the state of their pronunciation ability. There are 12 statements provided to self-evaluate students' pronunciation. The result can be seen on the following table.

Table 1. *Students' response on self-evaluation of their pronunciation*

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I am motivated to have correct and accurate pronunciation.	0%	0%	12%	40%	48%
2	I always pronounce English words correctly.	0%	24%	48%	24%	4%
3	I am satisfied with my English pronunciation.	24%	20%	32%	24%	0%
4	I am confident with my pronunciation when I speak English.	4%	24%	40%	28%	4%
5	I can understand native speaker when they talk.	8%	12%	40%	32%	8%
6	I feel nervous when I need to talk to native speaker.	4%	4%	32%	44%	16%
7	I am ashamed when people cannot understand when I talk in English.	0%	12%	20%	40%	28%
8	My biggest problem in speaking is pronunciation.	4%	24%	36%	32%	4%
9	I find it difficult to pronounce English words like native speaker.	0%	20%	28%	44%	8%
10	Phonemic symbols are difficult to understand that I don't know how pronounce properly.	4%	24%	36%	32%	4%
11	My mother tongue affects my English pronunciation.	8%	32%	20%	32%	8%
12	I never live abroad that I cannot pronounce English words like native speaker.	12%	28%	32%	20%	8%

The first statement evaluates students' motivation to have good pronunciation. The result shows that 40% of participants are motivated to acquire good pronunciation and 48% of participants have very strong motivation to do so. It means more that 80% of students are motivated to have good pronunciation. The second statement about awareness of pronouncing words correctly shows that 28% of participants give positive response, 24% of them think they do not pronounce English words correctly, and 48% of participants are not sure about their pronunciation.

The third statement about students' satisfaction of their pronunciation shows

that 44% of participants are not satisfied with their pronunciation, 32% of them do not know whether their pronunciation is satisfactory, and 24% of them are satisfied with their pronunciation. the forth statement about confidence in their pronunciation shows that 28% of students are not confident with their pronunciation, 40% of them are undecided, and 28% of them are confident with their pronunciation and 4% is very confident with their pronunciation.

The next statement about ability in understanding native speaker, 40% of students are able to understand native speaker when they talk, 40% are unsure, and 20% of them do not understand native speaker very well. While, the statement

about feeling nervous when they need to talk to native shows that 8% of students do not think they will get nervous to talk with native, 32% of students are undecided, 60% of students think they will get nervous to talk to native.

Statement about being ashamed when people cannot understand the students' English results 68% of students agree about the statement, 20% undecided, and 12% disagree. The next statement about pronunciation as the biggest problem in pronunciation shows that 36% of students think so, 36% of them are no sure, and 28% of students do not think that pronunciation as the main problem of their speaking.

The next statement about the difficulty to pronounce like native reveals that 44% of the participants answer agree and 8% of them answer strongly agree. 28% of them are not sure and 20% of them disagree with the statement. The next statement is about phonemic symbols are difficult to understand that students do not know hoe to pronounce correctly. The result shows 32% of participants agree with the statement, and 4% of them strongly agree with it. 36% of participants are undecided, 24% disagree and 4 % strongly disagree.

The next statement is about the interference of mother tongue to English pronunciation learning. The result shows that 40% of participants do not think that their mother tongue affect their English pronunciation, 20% of them are undecided, 32% of participants think mother tongue affects their English pronunciation and 8% of them do think that mother tongue affects their pronunciation. The last statement about whether living abroad affects their pronunciation results 12% of participants do not agree, 28% of them agree, 32% of the participants are

undecided, 20% of them agree and 8% of them strongly agree.

Based on findings, it can be concluded several points. Students are actually quite motivated to have good pronunciation. It can be seen by positive response given by most of the participants despites their shortage in their pronunciation. They still feel dissatisfied and unconfident with their pronunciation. Therefore, to foster good pronunciation, students need to practice producing sounds over and over. Satisfaction and confidence in pronouncing English words will only be achieved through repetition or drilling.

The first problem faced by students in this research is they still get difficulties in understanding native speaker talks. It can be seen by result that shows 40% of the participants cannot understand native speaking well, while the other 40% of students are not sure about their ability in understanding native speech. On the other hand, Broughton et al (1980) mentioned that recognition process or understanding the speech has equal importance with the production process.

The other problems found is students feel nervous and unconfident when it comes to pronunciation when speaking. It can be seen by the response about feeling nervous and ashamed of incorrect pronunciation reached more than 60%. Another difficulty faced by the students is about the ability in understanding the phonemic symbols. 36% of participants think that phonemic symbols are difficult to understand that it affects them in understanding the way of words are pronounced. Moreover, 36% participants are still undecided about whether they can understand the phonemic symbols easily or not. According to Suryaleksana, Sari, Nadilia, and Bram (2022) students have to learn and must be able to use the symbols to produce proper

pronunciation. When they cannot understand and use the phonemic symbols properly, they will not be able perform good pronunciation.

The last difficulty faced by the students related to the effect of their mother tongue. 40% of participants think that their mother tongue affects their process of learning English pronunciation. It is undeniable since there may be significant differences between the participants' and English sounds. Some students are able to train their tongue and

immerse their pronunciation into English sounds well, but some others cannot.

Perspective towards English pronunciation

Students perspective towards the importance of pronunciation will affect their behavior in learning pronunciation. The following table provides information about students' perspective towards English pronunciation.

Table 1. *Students' response on perspective towards English pronunciation*

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I think that having good pronunciation is important in speaking.	4%	0%	12%	40%	44%
2	I think that improving English pronunciation is important.	0%	0%	8%	32%	60%

The first statement asks the students about the importance of good pronunciation in speaking. The result shows that 84% of participants agree that good pronunciation is important in speaking. The second statement is about the importance of improving English pronunciation shows that 92% of the participants agree on it. These findings mean that students have good perspective and awareness about importance of English.

Pronunciation teaching

Lack of exposure of good pronunciation becomes one of English learners' problems faced during learning. When students are not exposed to good pronunciation models, opportunities and feedback in pronunciation learning, it may lead to bad pronunciation. The following is the results regarding the process of pronunciation teaching.

Table 1. *Students' response on pronunciation teaching*

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Lecturers give examples of correct English pronunciation.	0%	0%	28%	48%	24%
2	Lecturers give opportunity to practice pronunciation.	0%	0%	24%	52%	24%
3	Lecturers give corrective feedback when I make mistakes during Pronunciation classes.	0%	0%	12%	52%	36%
4	Lecturers give corrective feedback when I make mistakes in other classes.	0%	8%	16%	32%	44%

The first statement is about correct pronunciation models given by lecturers.

The result shows that 72% of participants agree that they are exposed to correct English pronunciation models by the

lecturers. The lecturers also give enough opportunity to practice their pronunciation. It can be seen by the result that shows 76% of students respond agree and strongly agree.

The next statements are about the corrective feedback given by the lecturers both in the pronunciation class or in other classed. The result shows 88% of participants agree that in pronunciation class the corrective feedbacks are given by the lecturers. The statement about corrective feedback in other classes also shows a good result, up to 76%. It is a good point since corrective feedback is necessary for students' betterment. Lee in

Wulandari (2022) mentioned that corrective feedback is essential to facilitate learning because mistakes and errors can be found in any stages of learning. Feedback is given to make the students aware of their mistakes so that they can avoid the same mistakes in the future.

Activity of pronunciation

Activity of pronunciation can influence the ability to pronounce the English words correctly. Here are the participants' responses related to their activity of pronunciation.

Table 1. *Students' response on activity of their pronunciation*

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I speak English outside the classroom learning every day.	0%	40%	48%	8%	4%
2	I practice my pronunciation every day.	0%	24%	36%	28%	12%
3	I have strategy to improve my English pronunciation.	0%	0%	32%	48%	20%
4	I always check the correct pronunciation in the dictionary.	0%	0%	32%	44%	24%

The first statement about students' English speaking outside the classroom learning. The result shows that only 12% of participants practise their English outside the classroom learning every day, 48% of students are not sure about their activity in English speaking and 40% of them do not use English outside the classroom. This becomes the reason why they still have difficulties in performing good pronunciation.

The next statement shows whether the participants have strategies in improving their pronunciation. The result shows that 68% of them have strategy to improve their pronunciation while the other 32% is still not sure about the strategy to improve their pronunciation.

The next statement about practicing pronunciation every day. 24% of participants do not practice their pronunciation. 36% of them are undecided which means they do not really practice their pronunciation. The rest 40% of them practices their pronunciation. This support the previous statement about their English speaking, they barely use English as their communication tools that they lack practice their pronunciation.

The last statement investigates whether participants always check their pronunciation in the dictionary. The result shows that 68% of the participants always check their pronunciation while 32% of them is neutral. It can be concluded that they barely check their correct pronunciation. Checking correct pronunciation is one of strategies that can

be used to improve our pronunciation. Learners are provided by phonemic symbols to help them pronouncing the words correctly. Underestimating the phonemic symbols or international phonetic alphabet is one of problems in learning pronunciation beside forgetting how to use phonemic symbols, lack of motivation and knowledge (Suryaleksana et al, 2022).

CONCLUSION

There are several positive and negative points that can be concluded based on the research findings. According to the result of the research, students are well motivated to have good pronunciation. the environment also supports them to improve their pronunciation. The lecturers give correct examples of pronunciation and opportunity to practice their pronunciation. Lecturers also give corrective feedback when students make mistakes in their pronunciation.

However, there are several findings about English education students' difficulties in learning pronunciation. The first is about being nervous in speaking to native speaker. Most learners are afraid to make mistakes in speaking especially related to the pronunciation. They also feel ashamed if they make mistakes. Based on researchers' experience in teaching pronunciation and other lectures related to speaking English, students would get ashamed to speak because they lack good pronunciation.

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The other difficulty faced by the learners is they do not know how to pronounce English words properly because they do not understand about phonemic symbols well. It is important to understand and know how to use the symbol in pronunciation. The mother tongue interference also becomes the difficulty for some students in learning pronunciation. It is because there are some English sounds which are not available in the mother tongue, and students are not accustomed to pronouncing the English sounds. The ignorance to check the correct pronunciation in the dictionary also becomes the reason why the students still cannot achieve the maximum result of the pronunciation practice.

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