

ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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First Received: April 26, 2023

Final Proof Received: June 30, 2023

Abstract

This study aims to identify students' perceptions and expectations of English Phonetics and Phonology learning, as well as the impact of studying English phonetics and phonology on students' English pronunciation. This research is conducted at the English department of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, by taking English Department students as research subjects. Students' perceptions and expectations regarding the English phonetics and phonology course are described using a qualitative method gleaned from student interviews. The interviews show students' perceptions of the English phonetics and phonology course that the learning process is enjoyable, the lecturer's teaching method aids students to comprehend the course material, and the course material was well-explained. While the findings of interviews on students' perceptions of the impact of studying English phonetics and phonology on their English pronunciation show that through this course students gain a better understanding of phonetics symbols, are able to recognize and distinguish various English sounds, are capable of producing language sounds with the proper use of speech organs, can correctly apply stress and intonation to English words and sentences, and improve their English pronunciation. Finally, students have expectations about the teaching and learning of English phonetics and phonology, such as lecturers should use more interesting teaching techniques, provide more practice to students, and ensure students comprehend the lesson learned before class ends.

Keywords: Phonetics, Phonology, Perception, Expectation

INTRODUCTION

English learning basically aims to improve student's language skills, both in productive and receptive skills. Productive skills are language skills that are used to convey information through written and spoken forms, such as speaking and writing. While receptive skills are language skills that are used to obtain and understand information conveyed through spoken and written language, which includes listening and reading. Because it requires students to convey information or ideas in written and spoken forms, speaking and writing are usually regarded as two language skills that tend to be more difficult than the other two. This fact can be seen from many studies conducted as an effort to improve students' writing and speaking skills.

Speaking is a productive skill that requires more effort from students to learn, because this skill contains components of language that must be mastered by students so that the ideas or information they express can be conveyed clearly to the person they are talking to. Components in speaking skill include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Every English learner is required to be able to pronounce words in English correctly. Mastering English pronunciation includes the ability to comprehend the English sound system, and pronounce the English sounds correctly. Although it is undeniable that students' efforts to have English pronunciation like native speakers can be constrained by several factors such as the mother tongue or their first language, problems with organs of speech, or environmental problems that make it difficult for learners to practice speaking English; therefore, scientists say that the most important thing in English pronunciation is the learner can pronounce words that at least can be understood by English native speakers, though it is not exactly similar to the Received Pronunciation.

English pronunciation includes the production of English sounds and pronunciation of English words, phrases, and sentences that are correct both in spelling, stress, and intonation. Therefore, in English phonetics and phonology courses, students are initially introduced to phonetic transcription which makes it easy for them to recognize and distinguish English sounds, and how to pronounce them. Through phonetic transcription, students learn the English sounds and how to pronounce them in words. They also learn how mispronunciation can cause changes in the meaning of words. Therefore, studying English phonetics and phonology for English Department students is very important to support the learning process of their speaking course. If they are able to absorb well the knowledge taught and studied in English phonetics and phonology courses, this will greatly help them in the process of mastering English speaking skills. Therefore, teaching materials in English phonetics and phonology course must be adjusted to the learning needs of students, so that it can support their ability to speak English.

This study aims to provide information regarding students' perceptions of the English phonetics and phonology course's learning process and its impact on students' English pronunciation. In addition, this study also investigates the expectations of students regarding

the learning process of English phonetics and phonology. An earlier study on this subject, “Student Perceptions on English Pronunciation After Taking Course Phonetics and Phonology”, was conducted by Bani Ahmad (2018). According to this study, phonetics and phonology classes help English learners improve their pronunciation, decrease their number of errors, learn to understand phonetic transcription in dictionaries and feel more comfortable speaking English both in and outside of the classroom.

Based on the explanation regarding the significance of learning English Phonetics and phonology for students in supporting the improvement of their speaking skills, particularly their pronunciation, then it is essential to conduct this research. In addition, at the pre-observation stage, problems were found such as the students' English pronunciation ability which was still relatively low. Therefore, the implementation of this research can facilitate a bridge between learners and lecturers in English phonetics and phonology courses that are genuinely in line with students' perceptions and expectations. It is hoped that the results of this study provide the information needed by lecturers and students to improve the quality of English phonetics and phonology learning in the English Department so that the learning process and instructional materials in this course will truly meet the needs of the students.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative method to describe the students' perception on the impact of English Phonetics and Phonology learning on their English pronunciation. The data were analyzed qualitatively based on the result of interviews with the English department students.

The research was located at English Department of Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, and the participants were English Departments students. There were some students who have completely enrolled in Phonetics and phonology class taken as participants of this research. They were interviewed to get the information needed for this research.

Because this study observed and analyzed the students' perception of the impact of English Phonetics and Phonology learning on their English pronunciation, the data were taken from the result of interviews with students. The interview was recorded, and its result was then analyzed.

The data were collected by interviewing the students who have taken and passed the phonetics and phonology classes. The interview was recorded and then transformed into written form to make it easy to observe and find the data of the research. The data, which were collected, were then analyzed to find the answer to the research questions. The interview is about the students' perceptions of the learning process of English Phonetics and Phonology subject, the student's perception of the impact of learning English Phonetics and Phonology subject toward their English pronunciation, and the students' expectations toward the teaching and learning of English Phonetics and Phonology subject.

When the data had been collected, then they were analyzed through some steps. The first was identifying and classifying the result of the interview. It aimed to identify the students' perceptions and expectations of English phonetics and phonology learning. The next step was analyzing and interpreting the data. The students' answers about their perceptions and expectation were then analyzed to get information on whether English phonetics and phonology learning could give an impact on their English pronunciation or not.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Students' Perceptions of the English Phonetics and Phonology Teaching and Learning Process

The first to the fourth questions of the interview probe the students' perceptions regarding the teaching and learning process of the English Phonetics and Phonology subject. The 10 interviewees responded positively to the interview questions. All of them answered that this subject's teaching and learning process was conducted as expected. This is due to the fact that the lecturers' teaching techniques allow students to enjoy the class and comprehend the material thoroughly. The following findings pertain to students' perceptions of the English Phonetics and Phonology learning process.

The Process of Learning English Phonetics and Phonology is Enjoyable.

Seven of the ten participants in the English Language Education Study Program reported that they had a great time studying English Phonetics and phonology. In addition to the engaging

manner in which the lecturers teach, the students are enthusiastic about this subject. According to them, the English phonetics and phonology materials assisted them greatly in enhancing their English pronunciation. In addition, the course material introduces students to several new concepts, thereby stimulating their eagerness to learn. The following extracts from the interview illustrate this point. *“The teaching method from the lecturer was easy to understand and also it gives the students ability to be active as participants in the classroom. Learning was really fun and easy”*

“The English phonetics and phonology class is very fun because it helps me to be able to pronounce English words correctly”

“In my opinion, studying this course is very interesting. I got a lot of new knowledge that makes me excited to learn”

The lecturer's teaching method aids students in comprehending the material.

Another viewpoint expressed by the participants about their experience learning English phonetics and phonology is that the lecturers' technique and method of instruction actually helped them comprehend the course materials easily. Some claim that lecturers usually use video when presenting content on lesson materials like English consonants and vowels, place and manner of articulation, etc. This makes it easier for students to comprehend the lesson, as they can learn English sounds from the lecturers as well as from English-speaking natives displayed in videos. In addition, lecturers also provide quizzes that challenge students to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge. These are the findings from interviews that reveal this.

“The teaching method that has been applied by the lecturer is helpful in understanding the lessons well”

“For certain materials, such as consonants and vowels, place and manner of articulation, the lecturer uses videos from English native speakers, so that we can also learn English sounds from native speakers directly.”

“One of the things I like is when the lecturer gives us quizzes, so we always feel challenged to participate in class”

The course material was well-explained and straightforward to comprehend.

In addition to the lecturer's fun teaching methods, students also stated that the learning materials were also delivered well by the lecturers, making it easy for them to understand. Participants stated that the lecturer delivered the material in a language that was easy for them to understand, sequentially from difficult material to easy material, so that they could easily understand the material presented. Here are excerpts from their statements.

"I am happy to study this course because the lecturers really understand our abilities. The delivery of the material is clear"

"The lecturer conveys the material clearly and well. But if there is something I don't understand, I will immediately ask the lecturer"

Due to a great deal of material to learn, students occasionally need a break between lessons.

All of the students' answers indicated that they feel happy and satisfied during the learning process of English Phonetics and Phonology in their classes. This is because the teaching methods implemented by the lecturers really help them to enjoy the learning process, so they can understand the lesson easily. Nonetheless, the individuals have slightly diverse perspectives. They stated that the amount of material they study each week is extensive and that they occasionally require a break between learning activities.

"Because of the large amount of new material, we have to learn in this course, we need to take a break between studies. Or maybe the lecturer can give us games for ice-breaking"

"The lecturer made me understand the lessons because he explained the whole material clearly, but sometimes I feel bored because there's no time to relax and we must be focused on the class till the end of the lecturer's presentation"

The responses reveal that during the learning process, students require a break to feel relaxed and not bored while following the course. To overcome this, the lecturer may be able to provide students with quizzes or games that relate to the subject being taught. Students can

refresh their brains and feel relaxed by taking quizzes or playing games, which will keep them from becoming bored while learning.

Students' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Studying English Phonetics and Phonology on Their English Pronunciation.

The fifth to the ninth interview questions pertain to the second research question, which concerns how the students perceive the impacts of English Phonetics and Phonology learning on their English pronunciation. When responding to these questions, students provided a variety of answers.

Here are the students' responses to the interview questions regarding whether the subject is helpful and useful in improving their English pronunciation, as well as the examples of the improvement that they experienced after taking the subject.

Students gain a better understanding of phonetics Symbols

In response to questions about the impact of learning English phonetics and phonology on their English pronunciation, all participants indicated that this course significantly enhanced their English proficiency, particularly their pronunciation. Their initial response demonstrated that, as a result of this course, they were able to recognize phonetics symbols, which greatly aided their ability to accurately pronounce English sounds. The following are excerpts from the participants' responses.

"This course gave me a lot of new knowledge, especially about phonetics symbols. And it really helped me in recognizing English sounds"

"By learning about phonetics we can distinguish between one and another word by seeing its phonetic symbol which represents each word. They are very useful"

"Learning about phonetic symbols gave me a new experience that was very useful for improving my English skills."

Students are able to recognize and distinguish various English sounds

In addition to being able to recognize and comprehend phonetic symbols, participants reported that the Phonetics and phonology course has equipped them with the ability to

differentiate the different English sounds. Initially, they frequently mispronounced English sounds; however, after completing this course, they were able to distinguish between the various sounds of the English language. This is indicated by the student's response below.

“by this subject, I have known how to pronounce vowel and consonant sounds well”

“Now I can properly say the words such as “the”, “thanks”, “shoe” and, etc because I have known how to properly pronounce them”

Students are capable of producing language sounds with the proper use of speech organs.

The participants claim that one advantage of studying phonetics and phonology is that they have a better understanding of how to pronounce English words with the appropriate speech organ. They initially pronounce English words with Indonesian sounds, treating it the same as they pronounce words of Indonesian language. After taking this course, they acknowledge that English sounds are more varied and numerous, with various place and manner of articulation.

“When I was in senior high school, I spoke English like Indonesian. But after learning about phonetics, I realized that the sounds are pronounced differently in English, using different articulators too”

“This course gave me a broad insight into the speech organ and how to use them in producing language sounds”

Students can correctly apply stress and intonation to English words and sentences

One of the advantages of this course is that students learn how to use stress and proper intonation in English words and sentences. The use of appropriate stress when pronouncing words and intonation when pronouncing sentences will undoubtedly aid students in verbally communicating with others. This will greatly assist others in understanding the meaning of the word or sentence conveyed. Here are the students' responses regarding this point.

“In this course, I learned not only how to pronounce English words correctly, but also how to use the right stress in English words, and how to use the right intonation in various types of sentences.”

“Now if I speak English, I am more concerned with English stress and intonation”

Students' Speaking Skill is Improved

One component of effective speaking is pronunciation. The improvement of students' speaking ability can undoubtedly be influenced by the improvement of their pronunciation. Learning English phonetics and phonology improves students' English pronunciation and has a big impact on their speaking ability was revealed by several students' responses in interviews. Additionally, they claimed that this course teaches them how to pronounce English words accurately, with appropriate stress and intonation, like native speakers. Excerpts from the students' answers that illustrate these points are provided below.

"Speaking is easier because I become confident with my pronunciation after learning about English sounds in this course"

"In English phonetics and phonology, I can learn about how the sounds are produced and the pattern of them. So it helps me to improve my pronunciation and speaking skills"

Students' Expectations Regarding the Teaching and Learning of English Phonetics and Phonology

In answering questions about expectations regarding the Teaching and Learning of English Phonetics and Phonology, the students gave several answers.

Lecturers should implement more interesting teaching methods

The use of appropriate and enjoyable teaching methods and techniques by lecturers is one factor that makes students interested in and motivated to learn. Students who are disinterested in learning are inevitably bored by a monotonous teaching method. In response to the question about students' expectations for learning phonetics and phonology, one of the responses provided by some participants was that lecturers should be able to implement more interesting and varied teaching techniques and methods. Games are a technique that is widely recommended. Here are some participant responses to this question.

"I enjoy the class, but I hope there will be improvements in teaching methods and also I hope the lecturer will create some mini games to create the fun class"

“My hope is that the lecturer will give us lots of games after teaching us a lot of theories, concepts, and examples, so that we don't get bored studying”.

Lecturers should provide more practices to students

In addition to expecting more engaging teaching methods, participants hoped that the lecturers would provide them with more opportunities for practice. Students believe that English phonetics and phonology courses are essential for enhancing their pronunciation abilities. If their pronunciation is enhanced, their ability in speaking English will undoubtedly improve. On the basis of these considerations, a number of participants recommended that the lecturers incorporate more practices into the classroom.

“For me, this course is very important to improve our pronunciation. I hope there will be more practices for us to pronounce English words correctly”.

“About the lesson, I really enjoy it. I think it will be good if we practice in every single meeting that we have”

Lecturers must ensure students understand the material before ending class.

Several participants wished that lecturers would always ensure that they comprehended the content being studied before completing class activities. This is crucial to them since there are typically certain students who find it difficult to comprehend the topic, thus they require an additional explanation from the lecturer. There are students who lack the confidence to explicitly ask the lecturer, so they hope that the lecturer would take the initiative to inquire and clarify whether they understood or not. These are their comments on the matter.

“I am sometimes embarrassed to ask the lecturers in class, so I hope the lecturers can ask us directly whether we understand the material being taught or not before ending the class.”

“To make sure whether we understand the material that has been learned or not, I hope the lecturer can check directly with us by asking and giving us questions before ending the class”.

To sum up, most of the participants' expectations are quite similar. Although they stated at the beginning of the interview that they enjoyed learning this course, when questioned further about their expectations, some stated that they required more games and exercises to boost their motivation to learn and improve their pronunciation. In realizing those expectations, the lecturers need to set the appropriate teaching techniques or methods to be implemented in the classroom. For most of the students, studying English Phonetics and Phonology is not easy. They are required to master the pronunciation of a foreign language (English) that they are not familiar with. Therefore, they need to be in a situation that does not make them feel nervous, anxious, or bored so that they can easily understand the lessons.

Discussion

English phonetics and phonology is a compulsory subject for first-semester students in the English Department. As new students with no prior experience in linguistics courses, students must exert greater effort to study this subject, as there are several new concepts they must learn and comprehend. Considering its importance, students must be attentive to studying this subject. The essence of learning Phonetics is to study the sounds of language physically, whereas phonology is the study of the functions and conditions of language sounds in the sound system of the concerned language, based on phonetic data. Consequently, these two disciplines are essential for the students to develop their pronunciation skills. If their pronunciation improves, so will their speaking and listening abilities.

The purpose of this study is to describe how students perceive the learning process in the English Phonetics and Phonology course and whether or not it fits their learning expectations and needs. In addition, this study explores how students perceive the impact of learning English Phonetics and Phonology on their ability to pronounce English words, or, more generally, whether the results of learning this course may actually assist students to enhance their ability to speak English. Participants who were involved in the research interview were drawn from different classes, to obtain different findings about their perceptions.

The interview results revealed that, in general, students had a positive perception of this course, yet towards the end of the interview, it was revealed that the students still have some

expectations for enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process in this course. Students are excited about this subject because of the lecturers' engaging teaching style. They claim that the English phonology and phonetics materials were incredibly useful to them in improving their English pronunciation abilities. Besides that, the course material exposes students to a number of new ideas and stimulates their interest in learning. This student viewpoint corresponds with the findings of Bani Ahmad's (2018) research, which disclosed that the phonetics and phonology course is very beneficial in enhancing students' English pronunciation skills.

In response to questions regarding their perceptions of this course, students provided several positive responses. The first is that students enjoy the learning process in this course. This is due to a number of factors, including the lecturers' enjoyable and easy-to-understand teaching methods, as well as the students' eagerness to participate in this course because they believe it is essential for enhancing their pronunciation skills. This finding is in line with Bani Ahmad's research (2018) which revealed that one of the factors that makes students enjoy taking English phonetic courses is their motivation to improve their English pronunciation skills. Second, according to them, the lecturer's teaching style facilitates their comprehension of the material. Some participants responded that lecturers frequently use videos to teach English sounds so that students can more easily apprehend the material and also learn and practice English consonant and vowel sounds directly from English native speakers via videos. Giving students the opportunity to learn independently and work on improving their pronunciation skills in this way is important, as stated by Hamka (2021) that learning English phonology demanded a change from imitating and practicing English sounds to producing, describing, and perceiving all English sounds themselves.

Furthermore, students thought the course material was well-explained and simple to grasp. The material is presented in a clear and straightforward manner by the lecturer. This greatly aids their comprehension of the material and encourages them to participate in class. Third, the students feel that they require a break between lessons during the learning process. This is because there is a lot of material for them to understand and learn in this course, and they sometimes need a break to refresh their minds before continuing the learning process.

Some suggested that the lecturer could fill this gap by providing students with ice-breaker games so that they do not become bored while learning.

Another interview question focused on students' perceptions of the impact of studying English phonetics and phonology on their English pronunciation. Students responded with a variety of answers to this question. According to them, the first benefit of this course is that students gain a better understanding of phonetic symbols. Recognizing phonetic symbols greatly aids them in differentiating English sounds and correctly pronouncing English sounds. Furthermore, students agree that by taking this course, they are able to recognize and distinguish various English sounds, such as "thanks," which they did not know how to pronounce before taking this course. There are also many more English sounds that they can recognize and can pronounce after taking this course. The same findings were achieved by Bani Ahmad (2018), that the student's ability in pronouncing English words is improving and their tendency to mispronounce words is declining as a result of phonetics and phonology learning.

Furthermore, students also believe that learning English phonetics and phonology has improved their ability to pronounce English words by using speech organs that correspond to the place of articulation. They used to pronounce English sounds in the same way as Indonesian sounds, but when taking this course, they learned about human articulators and how to use them to produce English sounds. Additionally, through this course, they have also been able how to correctly stress and intonate English words and sentences for oral communication. They also become aware of the importance of using appropriate stress and intonation in spoken language to avoid misunderstandings between speaker and listener. The students concluded by saying that this course improved their English-speaking abilities and greatly benefited them in speaking class.

However, one participant disclosed that, despite having taken this course, he occasionally had trouble pronouncing English words due to his nervousness when speaking the language. His response indicates that the primary issue is not his pronunciation ability, but rather his anxiety and nervousness, which make it difficult for him to speak in class. In short, the fact that he cannot speak does not indicate that he cannot pronounce words. Although he knows how to pronounce words, psychological issues make it difficult for him to speak.

A special approach may be able to be provided by lecturers to students who experience these psychological issues. The first step that lecturers can take is to personally encourage the students to increase their self-confidence. Lecturers can also give them the chance to practice in class so that he becomes accustomed to it. As Salim (2015) asserts that “Lectures should always require students to practice and practice, so the students have quite strong general self-confidence. Lecturers should also provide motivation and facilitation to increase the students' general confidence.”

The interview concluded with a question about the students' expectations for the teaching and learning of English Phonetics and Phonology. Participants responded to this question with a variety of perspectives and inputs regarding their hopes and expectations for this course. The participants' inputs and suggestions are based on their experiences learning Phonetics and Phonology; thus, the suggestions differ depending on the participants' respective classes.

The first expectation of students in English phonetics and phonology courses is that lecturers will implement more engaging teaching strategies. Despite the fact that some participants from different classes stated that they were satisfied and pleased with the lecturers' learning methods, others revealed that they wanted the lecturers' teaching methods to be improved. The majority of their responses are that lecturers can provide games between learning activities to prevent students from being bored.

Moreover, students hope that lecturers will give them more time to practice in class. They hope that every meeting will afford them the opportunity to practice pronouncing English words, with the appropriate stress and intonation, in order to become proficient. To overcome this, lecturers may assign students additional in-class and homework-based practice activities. Because the allotted learning time is insufficient, additional time is required for students to practice.

Finally, students hope that the lecturer will check to see if they have understood the material before ending the learning activity. Each student varies in how quickly and how slowly they can comprehend the material being taught. In order to determine whether or not students have understood the material they have learned, they, therefore, hope that the lecturer will ask questions or conduct an evaluation before the class ends.

CONCLUSION

The result of data analysis reveals important points regarding the students' perceptions and expectations toward the teaching-learning process of the English Phonetics and Phonology subject. The first is studying this subject gives many benefits to the improvement of students' pronunciation. Therefore, it gives much effect on the improvement of their speaking ability. In addition, most of them feel happy and satisfied during the learning process of English Phonetics and Phonology in their classes. This is because the teaching methods implemented by the lecturers really help them to enjoy the learning process, so they can understand the lesson easily. So, it can be concluded that implementing good and appropriate methods in teaching will be helpful in making the students happy in class and making them more get engaged in the learning process.

Students also stated that they benefited from this course. They become familiar with some English sounds which are not known by them before. By having practiced in class, they can finally recognize and pronounce those sounds. Another benefit that they take is that they have been able to read the phonetic symbols. So, whenever they find a word that is not familiar to them, they just need to open and read the phonetic symbols of that word in dictionary. Hopefully, the findings of this study can help lecturers develop strategies and methods for teaching English phonetics and phonology that are more relevant to students' learning needs.

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