

Investigating the Role of International Phonetic Alphabet to Enhance Highschool Students' Pronunciation Skill

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Abstract

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has been used to provide a unique symbol for each distinctive sound in a language. The IPA has been widely utilized by linguists and dictionaries with modifications for easier identification. This study focuses on how IPA supports Indonesian EFL learners with their pronunciation practice particularly in senior high school context. The present study is qualitative literary research. First, the researcher collected the data from the questionnaire, second, the researcher identified them and make it into conclusion. The result of the analysis showed that students gave their positive perspective in using the IPA symbols as they believed it could enhance their oral skills and technique for learning pronunciation. Although IPA symbols were regarded as useful and easier to learn, several students thought positively of using the phonetic symbol in their learning, most of them felt it is difficult, since the phonetic symbols each had distinctive symbols resulting in students confused to remember and comprehend. This study implies that while the learning curve is high, students were quite motivated to learn English pronunciation through IPA.

Keywords: International Phonetic Alphabet, Pronunciation, EFL, Senior Highschool

INTRODUCTION

There are many regions in Indonesia and each region consists of several tribes. Each tribe has its own sets of language but the main language in *Bahasa Indonesia* is as a united language for all Indonesian. Even though *Bahasa Indonesia* is the main language, Indonesian people prefer to speak their local language. However, when they want to speak to other people coming from other countries, they cannot use *Bahasa Indonesia* as a means of communication. English is a way to solve the miscommunication between Indonesian and people from other countries since English is used as an international language.

Everyone speaks English differently. They use their local accent. For example, Javanese people with Javanese accents, Makassarese with Makassar accents. Accent can influence the meaning of what people say. Speaking with an incorrect accent can make incorrect pronunciation. Incorrect pronunciation may produce the wrong meaning and miscommunication. The pronunciation of English reveals many problems because the way of pronouncing English and Indonesian language is different (Mariana: 2015).

Pronunciation is one of the important aspects of English, especially in oral communication. When EFL learners speak English the ability of pronunciation is attentive. Pronouncing the correct words means to understand the content of the language. According to Djiwandono (2008: 123), “Ability of pronunciation refers to the use of language with good pronunciation, understandable and acceptable.” By doing pronunciation correctly toward language sound, syllable, words, phrases, and sentences commonly, the content expressed by someone will understand the listener without misunderstanding.

One of the problems faced by people when they learn English is to pronounce English words correctly. Sometimes, some English words are difficult to pronounce. Another problem is that some people had difficulty to use the letters "f", "v", and "p". They may at times replace the sound of speech / f / and / v / for / p /. For the example, the words "fine" and "very" must be pronounced / faɪn / and /'ver.i/ were repeatedly pronounced / pain / and /'per.i/.

The non-native speakers of English who speak English must be very careful in pronouncing some English words or they may create misunderstanding. So, having an intelligible pronunciation is necessary rather than having a nativelike pronunciation. To solve these problems, phonology takes an important role. According to Ramelan (1994: 1), phonology is the study of phones or speech sounds. There are two studies of phonology, phonetics, and phonemics. Phonemics is the study of speech sounds to find out the significant units of sounds in each language. Phonetics is the study of speech sounds as sounds, without regard to their function as signaling units of language.

Phonetics deals with what takes place once the sounds are produced. Phonetics refers to the activity of the vocal tract, the acoustic features of sounds, and the perception of speech. These three stages also establish three different branches in phonetics. Those are Articulatory Phonetics, Acoustic Phonetics, Auditory Phonetics. Articulatory Phonetics deals with the articulation of sound. Within Articulatory Phonetics researchers usually study the different parts and activities of the vocal tract and the sounds that can be produced there: vowels and consonants. Acoustic Phonetics deals with the physical aspects of sounds, how sounds are, since, in essence, sounds exist only because there occur disturbances of air particles. Auditory Phonetics is a branch of phonetics which studies how sounds are perceived, the psychological and neurological implications of such an activity.

Nowadays, most people learn English only focuses on improving their speaking skills, not focus on their pronunciation. This is wrong because the speaker who mentions a word incorrectly will result in miscommunication. So, improving pronunciation skills is important. One problem for people who want to improve their pronunciation skills is still confused about the standard used to learn pronunciation. Sometimes, people who want to know the pronunciation of a word, they can use a digital dictionary that can say the word. This is effective to do but not necessarily the people who listen to it can say the pronunciation correctly. These difficulties can be removed by introducing the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA).

International Phonetic Alphabet is the abbreviation for IPA. It defines the standard phonetic symbol for every alphabet in the English language. The IPA symbols are usually written in the Latin symbols. IPA defines the standard sound representation for oral language. IPA is considered as the standard for linguistics, so, the authors concludes that

IPA symbols are important to learn to pronounce English words correctly. Therefore, the present study mainly aims to; (1) analyze the presence of International Phonetic Alphabet in enhancing senior high school students' pronunciation, and (2) analyze students' perceptions towards International Phonetic Alphabet.

METHOD

In this study, the authors used a qualitative approach. This approach is closely related to the way data such as words, sentences, or pictures are analyzed. Therefore, the study did not include calculating and numeric analysis. According to Gay et al (2015), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Hence this qualitative study was aimed at investigating the role of International Phonetic Alphabet to enhance Students' Pronunciation, and the students' perception towards the international phonetic alphabet.

In this study, the authors used several books in the library as references and data sources, such as scientific books, papers, internet, from credible resources such as Google Scholar, Sage, Elsevier etc. They were especially English books about pronunciation, phonology, phonetics, and the International Phonetic Alphabet. Some English books that were used are: How to teach pronunciation (2000), Introducing Phonology (2005), English Phonetics and Phonology (2009), etc.

Data collection is a critical process in the study, so the authors must determine what method was used to get the data. According to Arikunto (1993), there are six methods of collecting the data. They are questionnaires, interviews, observation, rating scales, tests, and documents. In this study, the authors used observation and interview methods. First, the authors gathered the data from books and papers. Second, the authors interviewed the students online and asked them about their perception of The International Phonetic Alphabet. Then the authors described the data that had been obtained. The reason why the authors interviewed the students online because when this study was conducted it was very difficult to interview face to face due to government policies to work from home in times of COVID 19 crisis.

The last step was analyzing the data. According to James (2012), the method is motivated by theories of the nature of human language, how it is acquired, and how it is used. Soon after the data were assembled, the authors analyzed the data. The techniques for analyzing data were varied. The authors analyzed by describing the ability of the international phonetic alphabet to enhance pronunciation and students' perception towards the international phonetic alphabet. The technique was directed to provide answers to the research question about pronunciation problems. To get the objective, The authors took some procedures or steps based on Miles & Huberman (2014) data analysis technique which are as follows:

- a. Presenting Data
- b. Analysis of Data
- c. Describing
- d. Concluding the interpretation of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of the International Phonetic Alphabet

The International Phonetic Alphabet is a large collection of symbols used for precisely representing the sounds of (theoretically) every language in the world. This tool can be used for many things:

- a. Documenting the sounds of an unknown language (field linguist)
- b. Jotting down a client's speech errors (speech-language pathologist)
- c. Introducing foreign students to the sound system of languages such as English, which has a complex spelling system, and correcting their mistakes (EFL teacher)

Phonetic symbols, in particular the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), are used to describe the phones (sounds) that comprise the human language. Linguists use IPA instead of language's alphabets, syllabaries, and other writing systems because these phonetic symbols better capture the actual character and distinctions present in human speech, while traditional spelling and other writing techniques rely on other aspects of language - allophony, knowledge of assimilation, etc. - to guide pronunciation.

One aim of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was to provide a unique symbol for each distinctive sound in a language—that is, every sound, or phoneme, that serves to distinguish one word from another.

Indonesian Students use English with wrong pronunciation may cause a miscommunication problem. The listener cannot receive a message from the speaker well because of different understandings among them. The speaker doesn't get correct feedback from the listener. Take one example, when a learner says soap /səʊp/ in a situation such as a restaurant where they should have said soup /su:p/, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding (Kelly, 2000:11). Therefore, pronunciation is important to be learned, because good communication occurs when the listener and speaker understand each other. As the case above, Kelly was exploring a condition where the speaker and the listener got misunderstanding because of the wrong pronunciation. When students learn about pronunciation they should know about how to read the phonetic symbols.

No matter how many times a teacher says many times a word, it will not help students to understand or distinguish the physical characteristics of sound production. For example, a teacher who wants to teach students about the different pronunciation of the words "affect" and "effect". If the two words are read without phonetic symbols, students will find it difficult to distinguish the pronunciation of the two words. However, if the word "affect" / e-fekt / and "effect" / i-fekt / is read in the presence of phonetic symbols, students can distinguish the pronunciation of the two words and pronounce them correctly.

In this study, the authors concluded that the use of phonetic symbols has many advantages that supports students to be more confident in fostering their communication skills, to make meaningful conversation, and effectively guide them as a student to learn pronunciation. Phonetic transcription does have a few drawbacks, the most widespread of that is that it requires that both instructors and college students be acquainted with the IPA or whatever system of transcription is used. Fortunately, the IPA is easy to learn, notwithstanding the daunting appearance, it might have at the beginning because there is an exact one to one correspondence between written symbols and spoken sounds.

Students' Perceptions Towards International Phonetic Alphabet

This study also examines students' perceptions of The International Phonetic Alphabet. the researcher conducts interviews with students who have passed their phonetic or pronunciation subject. There are even some of them taking pronunciation lessons to learn more about pronunciation. Researchers interviewed as many as 6 students as participants. The 6 participants are consisting of 3 male and 3 female. Researchers used Google forms to collect results from interviews. This is because the situation makes it impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews. This interview is to see students' perceptions of The International Phonetic Alphabet.

For the main data, the researcher took from the participants' questionnaire. There are 4 statements and 4 questions in the questionnaire. 4 statement to see whether the participants agree or disagree with the statement of researchers. Researcher's statement in the form of International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn, International Phonetic Alphabet is useful to learn, International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to learn, and The Symbols in International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to memorize. 4 questions to see their reasons for the statement and see their opinions on the International Phonetic alphabet.

After researchers interviewed the six participants, it can be seen that all of the participants agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn. all of them agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet useful to learn. all of them agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to learn. Five of them agree with The Symbols in International Phonetic Alphabet difficult to memorize.

The researcher also asked questions to explain the participants' reasons for agreeing to the statement and seeing their perceptions about the International Phonetic Alphabet.

International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn.

Based on the results of the interview, all of participants agreed that the International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn. The first participant said:

"Very very important, because it is able to fix our accent". The second participant said "its important bcs the beginning of good pronuncaitation u must know phonetic", the third participant said "Very important". The fourth participant said "more important". The fifth participant said, "The importance is based on someone's purpose in learning English if she / he is focused on speaking or listening, I personally suggest to make phonetic priority". The sixth participant "The international phonetic alphabet is so important because IPA is the way we speak up in every language especially in English"

Although the third participant and the fourth participant agreed that The International Phonetic Alphabet is important to study, the two participants did not give their reasons clearly. However, the researcher can conclude from the sixth participant's perception. Based on participants' perceptions it can be concluded that the International Phonetic Alphabet is important in improving pronunciation and accent. If students want to focus on improving their speaking abilities, these students must focus to learn phonetics.

International Phonetic Alphabet is useful to learn.

Based on the results of the interview, all of participants agreed that the International Phonetic Alphabet is useful to learn. The first participant said:

"Be able to fix our accent, our pronunciation, and our speaking skills". The second participant said "u can fasihhh berbahasa inggris, baik itu British or English. so many benefits u get if u learning phonetic", the third participant said, "Help us good at pronunciation". The fourth participant said, "we can know the phonetic of the other country". The fifth participant said, "This helps you easily understand when speaking". The sixth participant "The benefit is we can speak clearly"

Based on the participants' perceptions it can be concluded that the International Phonetic Alphabet has the benefit of making pronunciation better, both the British and American accents. Thus, the conversation can run smoothly because the speaker can speak correctly and clearly so that the listener can easily understand what the listener is hearing. So, The International Phonetic Alphabet can make conversations easier to understand.

International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to learn.

Based on the results of the interview, five of the six participants agreed that the International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to learn. The first participant said:

"some International Phonetic Alphabet symbols are similar to the Indonesian alphabet". The second participant said "the symbol i think ehhehe", the third participant said, "The symbols are hard to memorize". The fourth participant said, "we're in the same phonetic, that makes our tongue difficult to try that". The fifth participant said, "When it comes to memorizing and matching the symbol and the sound". The sixth participant "There is a lot of symbols we must know"

The first participant assumes that learning the International Phonetic Alphabet is not difficult because some of the symbols in the International Phonetic Alphabet are similar to the alphabet in Indonesian. However, 5 of 6 participants assume that the difficulty in learning the International Phonetic Alphabet lies in its symbols.

Based on the participants' perceptions it can be concluded that the difficult thing from the International Phonetic Alphabet is to pronounce the symbols correctly and memorize the symbols.

Knowing there are so many advantages in learning international phonetic alphabet, most of the participants said that the most difficult in learning international phonetic is memorize the symbols and pronounce the symbols. From the previewing indicators above, it could be concluded that most of the participants have a very positive perception of learning pronunciation independently after knowing IPA Symbols.

From the previewing students' perception above, it could be concluded that the participants have a positive perception of IPA symbols that give participants' burden to implementation of IPA symbols as a pronunciation learning system. However, the majority have a very positive perception, several students feel learning IPA symbols is difficult and confusing among students

B. Discussion

After the researcher read the book literature that discusses The International Phonetic Alphabet, role of the International phonetic alphabet is a presentation of sounds created by the human mouth. that way, the students can say a word correctly. the researcher also finds that students can improve their pronunciation by learning The International Phonetic Alphabet. The teachers use The International Phonetic Alphabet to teach students about pronunciation. Not only at the university using The International Phonetic Alphabet, even some English course usually has a special pronunciation class that uses The International Phonetic Alphabet. This proves that The International Phonetic Alphabet has a very important role in improving students' pronunciation.

This study also examines students' perceptions of The International Phonetic Alphabet. the researcher conducts interviews with students who have passed their phonetic or pronunciation subject. There are even some of them taking a pronunciation course to learn more about pronunciation. Researchers interviewed 6 students as participants. The 6 participants are consisting of 3 male and 3 female. This interview is to see students' perceptions of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

To make the interview process easier, the researcher submitted 4 statements and 4 questions. All of the participants agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn. All the participants agreed with the International Phonetic Alphabet difficult to learn. All of the participants agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is useful to learn. Five of the participants agree with The Symbols in International Phonetic Alphabet difficult to memorize. The researcher also gives 4 questions to participants to find out the reason they agreed with the statement that the researcher gave.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study suggests that the existence of the International phonetic alphabet (PIA) is a presentation of sounds created by the human mouth. that way, the students can say a word correctly. this can help students to improve their pronunciation and can reduce misunderstanding in their conversation. This study also shows students' perceptions of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The results showed that students' perceptions of the International Phonetic Alphabet as a system of learning pronunciation from a positive perspective. all of the participants agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is important to learn. all of them agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet useful to learn. all of them agree with the International Phonetic Alphabet is difficult to learn. Five of them agree with The Symbols in International Phonetic Alphabet difficult to memorize.

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