Preferences and Attitude toward English Phonetics Learning: The perspectives of Indonesian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

English learners should aware of English sounds, more specifically English phoneme, to comprehending the English language accurately. In order to completing the goal this research aimed to find out students’ preferences and attitude of English Education Program in Universitas Brawijaya. This was a descriptive quantitative research by using a survey design. The participants of this study were 103 (a hundred and three) students of batch 2015 to 2017 in English Language Education Program. The researcher used adopted questionnaire which consist of 8 items preferred themes and 19 statements of attitude in phonetic as the instrument by Lintunen and Makilahde (2013). This research was analyzed using SPSS program. The result of this study revealed student’s preference and attitudes toward phonetics learning. The most preferred topic chosen by the participants are the vowel systems (28.20%), speech rhythm and accent difference (27.20%), and intonation analysis (26.20%). The students performed a positive attitude toward English phonetic learning that can improve their skill in English especially in their pronunciation (98.1%). It is concluded that the students thought English Phonetics is important to increase their knowledge and their skill in learning English. The researcher suggested for future researcher, they can conduct the research by considering the correlation between pronunciation in English phonetics and speaking skill in English language.

Keywords: Students’ Preferences, Students’ Attitude, English Phonetic Learning

1. Introduction

Language as an object of linguistic study has a spacious scope. When we discussed language, it means we talked about humans and their activities that required language as their communication. The English language is one of the languages used by almost all countries in the world. Comprehending the English language needs mastering various skills such as listening, reading, speaking and writing. But before being able learning those basic skills, English Learners should aware of English sounds, more specifically English Phoneme, to comprehending language accurately.

Phonetics and Phonology are the branches of linguistics that study sounds. Since both of the studies are related to sound production, many people still did not understand the difference between both studies. Phonetics is the study of sounds, especially how sounds are produced, transmitted and received (Crystal, D., 2008). While phonology is a study of sounds, especially on how sound is organized into a system and apply in the language (Catford, 1988 cited in Fikry). Therefore, Phonetics doesn't study one particular language, while Phonology can study one specific language because a language may not be available in another language.
This is why many students face problems in spoken foreign languages. Being aware of the phonemic aspect will contribute much to the succession of EFL learning. This capacity is called phonological awareness. It is the ability of someone to be aware of the oral language that includes manipulating and identifying the sound. According to (Hamilton, G. E., 2007) Phonological awareness plays an essential role in learning activities in any language in the world. He also mentions that phonological awareness is a skill that needs to be developed before the student can maximize their success in reading because ensuring the student to read from their volition is a critical problem in education. The teacher must find the best way in the assessment and teaching phonetics to raise the phonological awareness of the students into the everyday classroom environment which the researcher feels is still unclear.

Being aware on English phonemes is essential for Indonesian EFL learners as (Rokhman et al., 2020) assumed that the English phonemic awareness, specifically awareness on identifying phoneme in isolation, contributed to the word processing that can help Indonesian EFL learners comprehending English words better. Moreover, (Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N.B. 2016) report that most of Indonesian EFL are facing difficulties with listening such as information processing, native speakers' language contents, the use of colloquial language, reduced forms, English proficiency, distraction and as well as the subject self-problem. There are still many students who learn English then facing all the difficulties that mention above. As a result, many teachers made a new innovation about teaching media or learning strategies to make student interest and have the motivation to decrease the difficulties that they are facing. Therefore, the learning of English Phonetics is important to enhance student's awareness of English phonetic and phonological processes in Indonesia. In Indonesia, English taught as a foreign language and used as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of education. According to (Eshghinejad, S. 2016) attitude is an important factor that has an influence on language performance and gets great attention from the researcher. This researcher (Siwi, H. L., 2017) claimed that students have a different attitude when they learning English as a foreign language. When a student has a good attitude in any subject of the study, it can also bring a good impact on their performance. The purpose of the present study was focus on the English Language Education Program students’ preferences and attitude toward English Phonetic Learning. Therefore, the present study aims know the Indonesian EFL learners’ preferences and attitude toward English Phonetic Learning.

2. Research Method (10)

This study employed a survey design. 103 Indonesian EFL learners participated in the survey. The participants are the EFL learners who has completed English Phonetics Course; therefore, they have understood about English Phonetics. The questionnaire was adapted based on Lintunen and (Makilahde, 2013) that consist of 8 preferred themes and 19 attitude statements. Statistical validity and reliability were applied to ensure the consistency of the questionnaire. The results of the instrument test, the Cronbach's alpha value is equal to 0.802, which is more than the r-table of 0.1937 so it can be concluded that the questionnaire or questionnaire is stated reliable as a data collection tool in the study. Statistical descriptive data analysis was employed to elaborate the survey result.

3. Result and Analysis (10)

**Students Preferences toward Phonetics Learning**

Figure 1 shows that there were eight available themes in phonetic subject. The students chose the theme based on what they thought which the theme is important and wanted to learn. According to the Google survey form, most of the student answer strongly agree with 28.2% in the vowel system. In the scale of somewhat agree, 51 students chose the scale with 55.3% for consonant system. While, in the scale of agree students chose 45.6% in linking phenomena. In the scale of somewhat disagree, there were 8 students who chose that scale with 7.8% in Accent differences. We can see that the segmental system was not often chosen by the participant. Only 13.60% of the participant chose the segmental as the important theme.

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Students' Attitudes Towards English Phonetic Learning

Table 3. Students’ Attitude toward English Phonetics Learning

| No  | Statement                                                                 | Mean | Median |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 1.  | Phonetics teaching has made me aware of the sound system of English       | 4.28 | 4      |
| 2.  | I would like to hear about many varieties of English during phonetics lectures | 4.06 | 4      |
| 3.  | Phonetics teaching has helped me to improve my pronunciation              | 4.42 | 5      |
| 4.  | Phonetics is a challenging discipline to study                            | 4.01 | 4      |
| 5.  | I find phonetics interesting                                             | 3.58 | 4      |
| 6.  | I think phonetic knowledge will be important for my future career        | 3.88 | 4      |
| 7.  | Phonetics is difficult because there are so many new terms               | 3.84 | 4      |
| 8.  | Information on different manners and places of articulation has helped me to improve my pronunciation | 4.13 | 4      |
| 9.  | Learning phonetic transcription has helped my pronunciation              | 4.13 | 4      |
| 10. | Phonetics has too many details to remember                                | 4.24 | 4      |
| 11. | I can list the consonant sounds of English                                | 3.51 | 3      |
| 12. | I can list the vowel sounds of English                                    | 3.64 | 4      |
| 13. | Learning phonetics has made me more confident about my pronunciation     | 4.11 | 4      |
| 14. | Learning phonetics has made me more nervous about my pronunciation       | 2.81 | 3      |
| 15. | The learners find phonetics important because they think that languages are pronounced as they are written | 3.71 | 4      |
| 16. | Phonetics is too theoretical                                             | 3.47 | 3      |
| 17. | I think it would be better to focus on larger segments of speech than phonemes when teaching phonetics | 3.45 | 3      |
| 18. | I think we should focus on one variety during phonetics lectures         | 3.48 | 3      |
| 19. | I think I will not need phonetics later in my life                        | 2.41 | 2      |

As we can see in Table 3, if we focus on the distribution of the answers, the student most agreed with the statement that phonetics can help them improve their pronunciation. 98.1% of
the participant agreed with this statement and only 1.9% of the participant chose somewhat disagree (the distribution of the answers on the five step Likert scale strongly agree - strongly disagree was 57.3% - 29.1% - 1.9% - 0%).

Most participant also think that phonetic can made them more aware of the sound system in English with reach 99% (distribution 37.9% - 53.4% - 7.8% - 1% - 0%). These two statements provoked the most positive reaction from the participant. Even though, Phonetic can help them to improve their pronunciation they believe that there are many details in phonetic to remember (43.7% - 38.8% - 15.5% - 1.9% - 0%). Information on different manners, places of articulation (0% - 31.1% - 50.5% - 18.4% - 0%) and learned phonetic transcription can improve their pronunciation (35% - 45.6% - 16.5% - 2.9% - 0%). They also believe that learning phonetic can made them more confident with their pronunciation (35% - 41.7% - 22.3% - 1% - 0%). The participant wanted to hear about many varieties of English (28.2% - 51.5% - 18.4% - 1.9% - 0%). The participant believe that phonetic knowledge will be important for their future career (27.2% - 35.9% - 35% - 1.9% - 0%). Based on the answers, the challenges that phonetic made can be partly explained by the many new terms that the participant are faced (30.1% - 33% - 28.2% - 8.7% - 0%).

The remaining statements were often disagreed based on the students answer is learning phonetic has made them more nervous about their pronunciation when they talked in English (10.7% - 11.7% - 35% - 33% - 9.7%), very few student believe they cannot make a list of consonant (21.4% - 25.2% - 39.8% - 10.7% - 2.9%) and vowel sounds (22.3% - 35% - 30.12% - 9.7% - 2.9%) in English and also they did not interest in English Phonetic (15.5% - 37.9% - 37.9% - 6.8% - 1.9%) so then they thought there is challenging discipline to learn English Phonetic (37.9% - 33% - 23.3% - 3.9% - 1.9%). Student reacted neutrally with the statements when teaching phonetics teacher more focus on larger segments than phonemes (8.7% - 35% - 49.5% - 5.8% - 1%). The student was most disagreed with the statements that they don’t need any English phonetic in their life later (7.8% - 13.6% - 18.4% - 32% - 28.2%). It means they thought that English Phonetic can help them to increase their English skills even the English Phonetic area is theoretical (17.5% - 27.2% - 42.7% - 9.7% - 2.9%).

The current study reveals that English Language Education Program students’ themes preferences of phonetic teaching from the most to the least are (1) the vowel system (28,20%), (2) Speech Rhythm (27,20%), and (3) Accent differences (27,20%). The finding is difference with the first previous study from (Lintunen and Makilahde, 2013) which the result of the preferred themes is (1) Accent differences, (2) Intonation analysis, (3) Phonetic transcription. The students’ attitude of English Language Students Program toward English Phonetic Learning is the English phonetic can improve the students’ ability in pronouncing the word and they can be more aware about the sound systems in English. Based on the results of questionnaires learning English Phonetics considering the challenge for EFL learners. According to (Pardede 2018), many EFL learners always find it difficult to speak confidently because of their poor pronunciation. (Pikkert, P., McCormick, T., & Langford, B., 2005) also mention that when we try to speak in English, the pronunciation is not the first factor of our fluency but the pronunciation is the first thing that the native speaker notice. However, Students of English Language Education Program Students (98.1%) agreed that learning English Phonetic improve the students’ pronunciation. (Lestari, 2015) support that teaching pronunciation is very important because of teaching pronunciation is very important for our students. This leads them to be better understand native speakers and improve their ability to communicate.

There were two statements that had a low score. That statement was statement 14 and statement 19. Statement 14 that reached 2.81 in the score, talked about that phonetic can made the students felt nervous because of their pronunciation. This statement has contradicted with the final results stating that their skills can be increased by learning English phonetics. Besides that, in statement 19 reached 2.41 in the score, talked about the students did not need any phonetic later in their life. In a fact, English phonetic is important to increase much their knowledge and abilities in English. In the end, the researcher has answered the problem of the study by presenting and describing the result from the instrument to reveal the students’ preferences and attitude toward English phonetic learning.

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4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The result of this research implies that phonetic learning is favorable for students of English Language Education Program as their preferences and attitude toward English Phonetic learning is positive. Based on the result of findings and discussion, the writer concluded that the students preferred themes of the participants are the vowel system, speech rhythm and accent different with the highest chosen from the students. Furthermore, students’ attitudes toward phonetics learning are positive. Based on the answers, English phonetics was important to improve their ability in English such as pronunciation, the awareness of sound systems in English, and the varieties in English. Afterwards, by learning English phonetics they felt more confident with their pronunciation in English. These two statements provoked the most positive reaction from the participants.

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