ENGLISH PHONOLOGY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS: EXPLORING LEARNERS' PREFERENCES

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Abstract
English Phonology is an absolutely necessary subject that should be mastered by foreign language learners in learning English. It is taught mostly at university level. However, there are still many students who are not aware of how important learning English Phonology is and less interested in learning this subject. There also has been little study that concerns students' preferences in learning English Phonology whereas knowing students' preferences on topics or themes used in learning materials is a good step to make better learning outcomes. This study aims to investigate the most and least preferred topics and themes by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students during English Phonology learning. This was a descriptive quantitative research by using a cross-sectional survey design. The data was collected with questionnaire from 112 participants of English Education Study Program students. The result showed phonological process pattern in English becoming the most preferred topic and theme while segmental phonology becoming the least preferred topic and theme in learning English Phonology.

Keywords: EFL student, English Phonology, learning English, pronunciation, student preference

Introduction

Learning English is certainly not an easy thing, especially for foreign language learners. English is a dominant language which is globally used in many sectors of life such as in business, politics, technology, science, education, and many more (Crystal, 1997; Nunan, 2003). In Indonesia, the status of English is as a foreign language. It means that English is not frequently used in daily life, especially by students. Mostly English is only used when they are studying at school or only as target language (the language used as a learning objective). There are components that must be mastered in learning English. Pronunciation is a part of language components. The way people pronounce English is an important skill to pay attention to. As stated by Brown (1991), learners' pronunciation ability will influence their English learning outcomes. However, many foreign language learners still have difficulty in pronouncing English words. One of the reasons is the influence of their mother tongue, Indonesian language, on their target language, English (Gozali, 2019). Adeline (2020) claimed that Indonesian students face difficulty in pronouncing English because there are differences in language sound systems between Indonesian language and

English. She also explained that students feel less motivated to check the correctness of their pronunciation when pronouncing words in English, for example in pronouncing /g/ sound correctly. Incorrect pronunciation can cause a change in meaning of the word. It can lead to misunderstanding. Mentioned by Savitri and Andrianto (2021), EFL students need to be aware of English sounds to understand the language accurately. This is why learning English Phonology is quite important.

English Phonology

According to Rabiah (2018), phonology is a part of language subsystem. It explains that learning a language is inseparable from learning phonology because phonology is a part that forms language. Phonology is the study of sound systems, that is about how the sound in a language can be produced, patterned, and functioned (Hyman, 1975; Catford, cited in Fikry, 1988; Collins et al., 2008). This means that learning phonology is important in order to know how to pronounce language correctly.

The existence of phonology is closely related to phonetics. Phonology also discusses phonetics in terms of transcribing the speech sounds. However, they are both different. Dardjowidjojo (2009) claimed that the difference between phonology and phonetics lies in focus of the study. The focus of phonetics is in formation, production, and perception of sounds rather than the way how sounds are directly used and formed. Phonology in each language can be different. The example is in English Phonology. In learning English Phonology, there are several topics that can be studied which are accent difference, intonation analysis, phonetics transcription, speech rhythm, segmental phonology, phonological process pattern in English, vowel system, and consonant system.

In pronouncing a language, everyone from different countries can have a different accent. Accent is "several ways in which language can be pronounced" (Collins et al., 2008, p.2). It is also in speaking English. There are different ways of speaking English such as British English, American English, Australia English, Indian English, Singaporean English or Chinese English, and etc. Supported by Mahmud (2018), even the language that people speak is the same language, people can have several differences such as influenced by dialect, etc. These differences can be caused by mother tongue or first language used in daily life.

Intonation belongs to phonological phenomena. Intonation refers to "the pattern of rises and falls in pitch across a stress speech" (Becker & Bieswanger, 2017, p.67). According to Becker and Bieswanger (2017), pitch is also called accent which is the normal melodic height that an individual can reach when his/her vocal folds vibrate. Spence (2014) expressed that intonation analysis deals with analyzing the intonation patterns which are tonality, tonicity, and tone. Tonicity is "the division of continuous speech into melodic units called tone groups", while tonicity is "the placement of the melodic nucleus or tonic of each group of tone" (Spence, 2014, p.5). Tone is variations of pitch that affect the meaning of a word (Becker & Bieswanger, 2017).

Collins et al. (2008) described that phonetics transcription is an indicator which can show a small details articulation of any particular sound by using differently shaped symbols, e.g. [ʔ ɹ], or by adding little marks (known as diacritics) to a symbol, e.g. [ã t̪]. Then, Becker and Bieswanger (2017) claimed

phonetic transcription as a way to transcribe spoken language using square brackets which reflect the actual pronunciation in very detailed. In example, the phonetic transcription of 'language' is [ˈlæŋgwɪdʒ].

Segmental phonology is one of recognized branches in phonology. It deals with the analysis of speech into phonemes (or segmental phonemes), which correspond fairly well to phonetics segments of analyzed speech. Crystal (1981) stated that segmental phonology is how analyzing speech into variant units, or segments, as the primary of the sound system. Furthermore, Becker and Bieswanger (2017) defined segmental phonology as individual sounds function in a language which is called segments. Chomsky and Halle (1968) mentioned that segments consist of vowels and consonants. Vowels and consonants can be referred to as segmental phonemes.

Form of words and sounds can change when they occur in connected speech (Becker & Bieswanger, 2017). This is a natural process called phonological process. Phonological process is "rules used to simplify pronunciation of words in a language" (Leung & Brice, 2012, p.2). In this process, there are several processes adapted from Becker and Biswanger (2017). These processes consist of strong and weak forms, assimilation, and liaison.

Vowel system is one of main topics in learning English Phonology, which is side by side with the topic of consonant systems. Mahmud (2018) explained that this topic focuses on how vowels can be pronounced by speech organs and differences between one sound to another when it is produced. Mahmud also mentioned that there is a specific symbol of each sound that can differentiate the sounds. Adapted from Dardjowidjojo in Mahmud (2009), there are 11 vowels in English which are /iː/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ə/, /uː/, /u/, /ɔ/, /o/, and /a/. Dardjowidjojo also stated that the vowel system has four parameters in vowel production. The parameters are the height of the tongue, the position of the tongue, the protrusion or rounding of the lips, and the tense or lax state of the muscles.

Mahmud (2018) explained that the consonant system focuses on how consonants can be pronounced by speech organs and differences between one sound to another when it is produced. It is similar to the vowel system that every sound in the consonant system has a different and particular symbol to differentiate each sound. There are 24 consonants in English which are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /f/, /v/, /ð/, /θ/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, tʃ/, dʒ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /w/, /r/, and /y/ (Dardjowidjojo, 2009). Adapted from Dardjowidjojo in Mahmud (2009), consonants have five parameters in explanation which are state of the vocal cords (voiced or voiceless), lateral or central, oral or nasal, place of articulation, and manner of articulation.

Students' Preference in Learning English Phonology
Students are one of indispensable components to increase the power of learning, especially in this case is language learning. However, each student has differences in which this can affect the results of learning. According to Naka (2015) stated that what distinguishes students from each other when learning in the classroom is not their physical characteristic, but the differences can be seen in the way they study, the topics they are interested in, the length of time they study, the motivation they need, the type of environment they are comfortable studying

in, and many more. It means that there are many different factors that can determine students' success in learning a language.

To increase students' success in language learning, teachers' roles are very needed. As a teacher, it is needed to discover what and how students want to learn (Papangkorn, 2015). Therefore, it is also important to pay attention to students' opinions about what they want to learn. What students want to learn indicates learning material which is related to topics or themes given. Each student can have a different opinion about which topics or themes that they are interested in. Then, it can be called students' preference.

Students' preference is a choice chosen by students based on their more liking for one option over another. The choice of students' preferences when it comes to learning can be comprehensive. This can lead to preferences towards learning strategies, learning styles, learning topics or themes, and many more. Many studies have conducted research on students' preferences in learning strategies and learning styles, but only a few studies have conducted research on students' preferences on topics or themes of learning material. Lintunen and Mäkilähde (2013) declared that there was still rare to do research on teaching and learning phonetics, especially on aspects of student preferences, even though students' opinions influence the results of the learning. Interesting topics given to the students can help to increase students' motivation when they are learning language (Harmer, 2001; Naka, 2015). Shabani (2012) also mentioned that interesting topics given in foreign language learning is a factor which can influence the success of learning.

Students can have different perspectives about their interesting topics in learning. In a small interview that the researcher did to some students, one of the main reasons stated is they find English Phonology to be difficult to learn so they are less interested in learning this subject. Furthermore, knowing which topics that make students interested will help to motivate students in learning English Phonology. It can be known by investigating students preferences' on topics and themes which are given in English Phonology learning.

This study dealt with students' preferences in learning English Phonology. The purpose of this study was to investigate the most and least preferred topics and themes by EFL students during English Phonology learning using a descriptive quantitative approach. Result of this study was expected to make better learning in English Phonology subjects, especially to the materials which are given by the lecturers based on students' preferences to the topics and themes in English Phonology subject.

Method

This study used a descriptive quantitative method by using cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional survey design is a type of research design by making inferences from collecting data of a large population at one point of time (Lavrakas, 2008). According to Setia (2016), participants in this cross-sectional survey are selected based on criteria set by the researcher without being given any treatment then. This research design is suitable for answering the research question of this study because it is in accordance with the purpose of holding this research that is to get a conclusion from the data taken from large numbers of participants at same time. This study involved 112 participants from 4th and 6th

semester students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya in the academic year 2019/2020, who have taken English Morphology and Phonology course. The participants were randomly selected without considering any specific categorization.

Instrument used in this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from Lintunen and Mäkilähde (2013) by choosing just six statements and changing one statement from eleven available statements which were part of content of lecture series and adding one different statement. Five statements adapted from Lintunen and Makilahde were accent difference, intonation analysis, phonetic transcription, speech rhythm, vowel system, and consonant system. One statement changed was assimilations changed into phonological process pattern in English, while one different statement added was segmental phonology. These changes and additions were made to suit the topic used in this study which was English Phonology because previous research was more focused on English Phonetics. The statements were completely with a five-step Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" that students have to choose based on their preferences.

Validity and reliability tests have been carried out before the instrument was used to collect data. The validity test functions to test that data collected has covered the actual condition of research (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). The result was valid because all scores of ryx value was 0.495 and above which showed that it was higher than r table value which was 0.306. The reliability test functions to test a measurement of a phenomenon providing stable and consistent results (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The result was reliable because all Cronbach's alpha value was 0.852 and above which was more than r-table of 0.306.

Data analysis is a part of process of collecting the data (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The data was collected by using google form as an online questionnaire. The data of this study consisted of students' answers to the eight topics and themes based on their preferences in learning English Phonology. For answers strongly disagree was worth 1 point, disagree was worth 2 points, neutral was worth 3 points, agree was worth 4 points, and strongly agree was worth 5 points. Then, the data was calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and analyzed descriptively.

Findings and Discussion

English Phonology is a course that is taught at university level. It becomes one of subjects taught in the 4th semester in English Education Study Program. This subject is taught together with English Morphology subject in English Morphology and Phonology course which has three credits.

In this section, the researcher tried to explain the survey result to answer the research question: "Which topics and themes are the most and least preferred by EFL students during English Phonology learning?". The data result was gained from a survey conducted from May 21st until June 8th, 2020. The link of google form was distributed to 4th and 6th semester students who have taken English Morphology and Phonology class. The total respondent involved in this research was 112 respondents. The respondents consist of two groups of students which were 103 of 4th semester and 9 of 6th semester students.
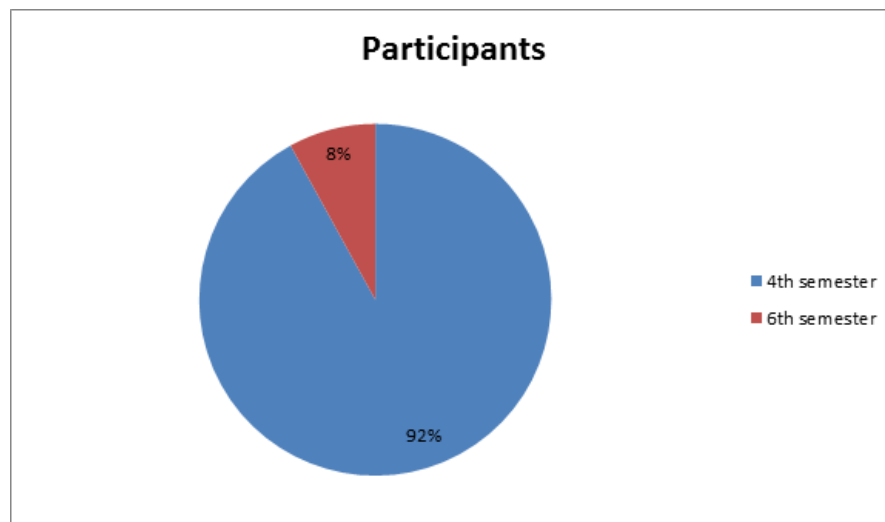
Figure 1. Percentage of students involved

From the research problem, the researcher wanted to find out the preferred topics and themes that students chose in learning English Phonology. The researcher tried to calculate the result of data by SPSS. The data was shown in bar chart completely with percentage for each topic and theme.
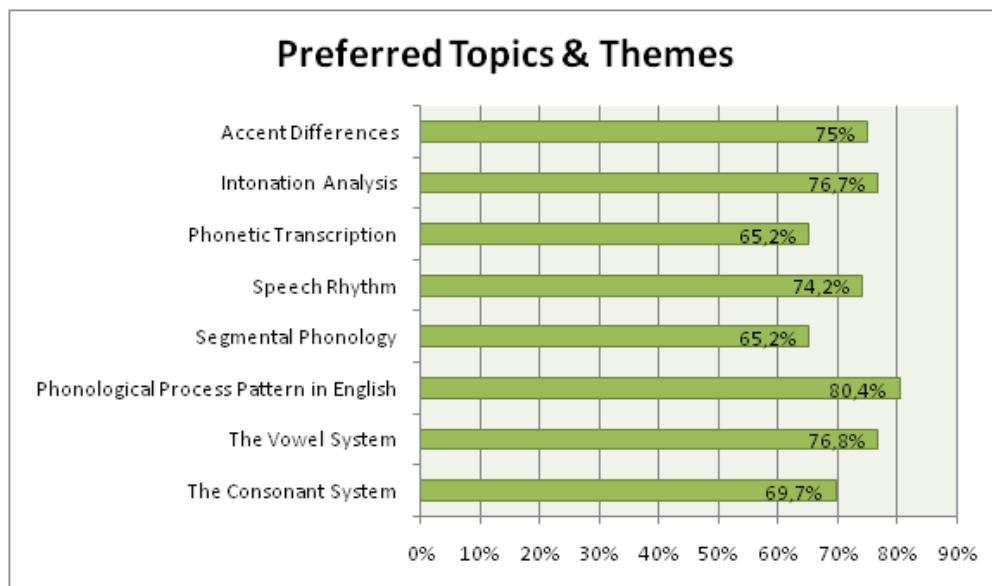

Figure 2. Percentage of students' preferred topics and themes

In the figure, there were eight available topics and themes in English Phonology subject. The percentage was the result from data calculation of percentage strongly agree and agree answers by students. The students chose the topics and themes based on what they thought which topics and themes that they interested in and preferred in learning English Phonology. According to an online survey using google form that had been done, the result most of the students chose 80.4% on phonological process pattern in English. This result consisted of 29.5% strongly agree answers and 50.9% agree answers. In the middle result of the percentage, there were 76.8% students choosing the vowel system, 76.7% students

choosing the intonation analysis, 75% students choosing the accent differences, 74.2% students choosing the speech rhythm, and 69,7% students choosing the consonant system. The difference in proportions was not that far. While we can see that the phonetic transcription and the segmental phonology were less chosen by students. 65.2% of the students chose the phonetic transcription and the segmental phonology as their preferred topics and themes.

The aim of this study was to investigate the most and least preferred topics and themes by EFL students during English Phonology learning. The research finding showed most students choosing phonological process pattern in English (80.4%) and least students choosing phonetic transcription and segmental phonology (65.2%) as their preferred topics and themes in learning English Phonology. The researcher compared the finding of this study with previous study conducted by Lintunen and Mäkilähde (2013). The result of that previous study was accent differences becoming the most preferred topic which reached 69.2% percentage higher than other topics, while the consonant system becoming the least preferred topic which reached 5.3% percentage. Agustina and Andrianto (2021) conducted the same study as Lintunen and Makilahde did and got result of the vowel system (28.2%) as the most preferred topic and segmental (13.6%) as the least preferred topic. From the findings of three studies, it can be concluded that there was a different result on most and least preferred topics and themes chosen by students.

Papangkorn declared that as a teacher, knowing what students' want to learn is a must. As stated by Harmer, students who were given an interesting topic in learning got increased motivation. Finding out the most and least preferred topics and themes in learning English Phonology is a way to discover one of students' needs to increase their motivation in learning. However, problems faced by students in learning English are not just the less interesting topics they get. As explained by Adeline, students' lack of awareness in checking the correctness of their English pronunciation was one of the stumbling blocks in learning a language. Rokhman et al. (2020) explained that a crucial skill which has to be considered in learning English well is phonemic awareness. They added that phonemic awareness is a valuable help for improving speaking skills by more accurately dissecting deeper into the sounds which can improve vocabulary by understanding the words, pronouncing it correctly, and avoiding word writing mistakes.

Conclusion

All in all, knowing students' preferences especially on topics and themes in learning English Phonology is essential to enhance the quality of teaching, to meet learners' expectations, to support learning and learning motivation. Although each student may have different preferences in learning English Phonology, it is needed to know what they are interested in. The result showed that phonological process pattern in English became the most preferred topics and themes which reached 80.4% percentage higher than other topics and themes, while phonetic transcription and segmental phonology became the least preferred topic which reached 65.2% percentage. Theoretically, the result of this research is expected to help further researchers who conduct research in English Phonology field, especially dealing with students' preferences. The further researchers

hopefully can find appropriate ways to improve students' preferences in learning English Phonology using least topics and themes so the learning process will be more effective. Practically, the result of this research is to help the students to get better outcomes in learning English Phonology because their preferences are researched and needed to enhance learning activities. So, the learning process is not only seen and considered from the lecturers' point of view, but it is also from the student's point of view. One limitation of this research was the data collection only using questionnaire.

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