



ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

Roni¹, Ibrahim², Sunandar³, Baharuddin andang⁴

¹²³⁴ ITKES Muhammadiyah Sidrap

Email : auliaroni86@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols at The English Course in Sidrap. The research aims to describe the instructional process, assess student responses, and identify tutor strategies for overcoming pronunciation challenges. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, using interviews, observations, documentation, and questionnaires for data collection. The findings reveal that the course utilized a direct method combined with a reading aloud technique, supported by tools such as whiteboards, speakers, Oxford dictionaries, and module books. Students faced challenges with mother tongue interference, particularly in distinguishing vowel sounds. However, the incorporation of phonetic symbols, motivational strategies, and interactive techniques, such as songs, contributed to a positive learning experience. Tutors addressed difficulties by providing additional support materials and motivational strategies. The study concludes that teaching pronunciation using phonetic symbols can significantly improve learners' pronunciation skills when combined with engaging teaching strategies and continuous evaluation.

Keywords: *Pronunciation skills, phonetic symbols, language teaching, English course, case study, Sidrap.*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a critical component of language proficiency, yet it often remains underemphasized in English language instruction. Many language learners and educators prioritize grammar, vocabulary, and functional language skills while pronunciation is frequently sidelined.

However, accurate pronunciation is essential for effective oral communication, as it influences both intelligibility and confidence in speaking. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings, even when grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage are correct.

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

The use of phonetic symbols, particularly the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), has proven to be an effective tool for teaching pronunciation. Phonetic symbols offer a visual representation of speech sounds, helping learners understand and produce sounds that may not exist in their native language. By visually differentiating between similar sounds, learners can identify subtle distinctions in pronunciation, such as the differences between /θ/ and /ð/ or /i:/ and /ɪ/, reducing confusion caused by English's irregular spelling system.

The English Course in Sidrap has adopted a phonetic symbol-based approach to teaching pronunciation, aiming to address common pronunciation challenges among learners. This method involves direct instruction using phonetic transcriptions alongside reading aloud techniques and listening exercises. Students are encouraged to practice phonetic transcription and connect sounds with written symbols, fostering both auditory and visual learning.

Despite its effectiveness, teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols can present challenges. Learners often face issues related to mother tongue interference, where the speech patterns of

their first language affect their ability to produce English sounds correctly. Additionally, motivation and engagement can influence the success of pronunciation instruction, as repetitive drills may feel monotonous without creative teaching strategies.

This study explores the process of teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols at The English Course in Sidrap. It examines how phonetic symbols are integrated into lessons, the instructional strategies employed, and how students respond to this approach. Furthermore, the research identifies common pronunciation difficulties faced by learners and the strategies tutors use to address these challenges.

The findings from this study aim to provide valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance pronunciation instruction in language courses. By documenting effective teaching strategies and addressing common challenges, this research contributes to the ongoing development of innovative approaches in language education, emphasizing the importance of clear pronunciation for successful communication.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition, influencing both spoken communication and overall language proficiency. Effective pronunciation ensures clarity and prevents misunderstandings, yet it often receives limited attention in language instruction. According to Kelly (2000), pronunciation tends to be neglected not due to a lack of interest but because teachers often feel uncertain about how to teach it effectively. This section reviews relevant literature on the importance of pronunciation, the use of phonetic symbols in language teaching, and the challenges learners face in mastering pronunciation skills.

Clear pronunciation is essential for effective oral communication. Gilakjani (2012) emphasizes that pronunciation directly affects the intelligibility of spoken language, making it crucial for learners to achieve communicative competence. Poor pronunciation can hinder message delivery, even when grammar and vocabulary are used correctly. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) highlight that pronunciation instruction helps learners build confidence, reducing

anxiety and enhancing overall fluency in speaking situations.

Phonetic symbols, particularly the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), provide a standardized representation of speech sounds across languages. Akmajian et al. (1995) argue that the IPA helps learners identify and produce unfamiliar sounds more accurately, serving as a bridge between written and spoken language. The visual representation of sounds aids learners in differentiating minimal pairs, such as /ʃ/ in sheep versus /s/ in seat. Research by O'Connor (1980) further suggests that phonetic symbols can be especially helpful in languages like English, where spelling inconsistencies often create pronunciation challenges.

The use of phonetic symbols in pronunciation instruction is often paired with direct teaching methods and active practice techniques. Larsen-Freeman (2000) describes the Direct Method, which emphasizes speaking and listening without translation, encouraging learners to associate sounds directly with meaning. Techniques such as reading aloud, repetition drills, and minimal pair exercises are commonly used to reinforce sound-symbol associations. Slattery and Willis

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

(2001) highlight that young learners, in particular, benefit from listening and mimicking activities when phonetic symbols are integrated into language lessons.

Several challenges arise in pronunciation instruction, particularly when using phonetic symbols. One of the primary difficulties is mother tongue interference, where the phonetic patterns of a learner's first language affect their ability to produce new sounds accurately (Yule, 1996). For example, learners from languages with fewer vowel sounds may struggle to distinguish between English vowels like /æ/ and /e/. Additionally, learners may find the abstract nature of phonetic symbols difficult to grasp without proper guidance and practice (Nixon & Tomlinson, 2005).

Research suggests several strategies for overcoming pronunciation difficulties using phonetic symbols. Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) recommend using multisensory approaches, such as combining visual aids, auditory practice, and kinesthetic activities to reinforce sound-symbol relationships. Incorporating motivational strategies, like using songs and interactive activities, can also enhance learner engagement (Millington, 2011). Furthermore, tutors play a crucial role in identifying individual

learner challenges and providing personalized feedback (Brown, 2004).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research approach to explore the process of teaching pronunciation through phonetic symbols at The English Course in Sidrap. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows for a detailed exploration of teaching methods, student responses, and tutor strategies in a natural learning environment. This design is particularly suited for examining educational processes, as it emphasizes understanding behaviors, experiences, and instructional strategies in context.

The research was conducted at The English Course in Sidrap, a private language institution specializing in English language instruction. The participants included a pronunciation tutor and a group of students enrolled in the pronunciation course. The students, diverse in age and educational background, shared a common goal of improving their English pronunciation. The tutor was an experienced language instructor with expertise in phonetic-based teaching methodologies.

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(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

Data collection involved multiple methods to ensure comprehensive coverage of the instructional process. Observations were conducted during live classes to document teaching techniques, student engagement, and instructional materials used. Semi-structured interviews with both the tutor and students provided deeper insights into their experiences, while questionnaires were distributed to gather broader student feedback on the teaching methods. Additionally, course documents such as lesson plans, phonetic worksheets, and assessment tools were analyzed for content and structure.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving three primary steps: data reduction, data display, and verification. Data reduction involved organizing and categorizing findings from the observations, interviews, and questionnaires into key themes such as instructional strategies, student challenges, and tutor interventions. Data display was conducted through tables and narrative summaries, while verification ensured consistency and reliability by cross-checking data from multiple sources.

Ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained

from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved, with all personal information anonymized in the reporting of results. This methodological framework ensures a thorough examination of the pronunciation instruction process and provides valuable insights for educators aiming to improve language teaching strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from the investigation conducted at The English Course in Sidrap regarding the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation. The results focus on the instructional process, student responses, and strategies implemented by tutors to address pronunciation challenges.

1. Instructional Process for Teaching Pronunciation

The teaching of pronunciation using phonetic symbols at The English Course followed a structured approach supported by a syllabus, lesson plans, and instructional materials. The tutor used a direct method of instruction, emphasizing minimal

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

translation and encouraging students to speak English throughout the sessions. The primary technique employed was the reading aloud method, where students repeated words and phrases after the tutor while focusing on phonetic transcription. Teaching aids such as whiteboards, speakers, and Oxford dictionaries were used to facilitate learning.

Lesson delivery typically began with the tutor introducing a set of phonetic symbols followed by demonstrations of how to produce the corresponding sounds. Students practiced through repetition drills and reading phonetic transcriptions aloud. The use of the direct method, which required continuous speaking in English, aimed to immerse learners in the language and reduce dependency on their native language. However, the lesson plans were not formally structured, as the tutor relied on a module book rather than a comprehensive, written lesson plan.

2. Student Responses and Engagement

The findings revealed mixed responses from students regarding the phonetic-symbol-based teaching method. Most students expressed positive feedback, stating that phonetic symbols helped them identify and correct pronunciation errors effectively.

They reported an increase in confidence when speaking English and noted that phonetic transcription aided their understanding of sound patterns. The use of engaging techniques, such as songs and word connection exercises, further motivated learners and created a positive learning atmosphere.

However, some students encountered difficulties, particularly with vowel differentiation and word stress. Mother tongue interference remained a significant challenge, as certain phonetic sounds not present in their native language were difficult to master. Students also highlighted that while phonetic symbols were helpful, they initially found the symbols complex and abstract without consistent practice and tutor guidance.

3. Pronunciation Challenges and Difficulties

The primary challenge identified among students was mother tongue interference, which affected their ability to produce specific English sounds accurately. Vowels, in particular, posed difficulties due to variations between English and their native language sound systems. Students often substituted unfamiliar English sounds with the closest equivalents from their native

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

language, leading to persistent pronunciation errors.

Another significant issue was the complexity of the phonetic symbols themselves. Some learners found it difficult to understand and memorize the IPA symbols without continuous reinforcement. Additionally, there were instances of students lacking motivation, especially when struggling with difficult phonetic concepts.

4. Tutor Strategies for Addressing Pronunciation Difficulties

The tutor implemented several strategies to address these pronunciation challenges effectively. One approach involved integrating motivational elements such as songs and tongue twisters to make lessons more engaging. The tutor also encouraged peer correction and self-assessment, allowing students to reflect on their progress.

To address vowel-related issues, the tutor provided focused practice sessions with minimal pairs and word connection drills. Visual aids, including phonetic charts and pronunciation videos, were used to reinforce learning. Furthermore, the tutor maintained a supportive classroom

environment, frequently giving positive reinforcement and personalized feedback.

5. Evaluation and Assessment

Assessment of student progress was conducted through a written test at the end of the program. The test evaluated students' ability to transcribe words using phonetic symbols and pronounce words correctly based on their transcriptions. Students scoring above 80% were allowed to progress to the next level, while those scoring below were offered remedial sessions. This evaluation system ensured continuous monitoring of student progress and provided opportunities for further skill development.

The findings suggest that the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation at The English Course in Sidrap was generally effective in enhancing students' pronunciation skills. The direct method and reading aloud techniques, combined with the use of phonetic transcription, helped students develop a better understanding of English sounds. However, challenges related to mother tongue interference and symbol complexity indicate the need for more structured lesson plans and consistent practice sessions. Overall, the study highlights the importance of combining

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

phonetic instruction with motivational strategies for optimal learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the use of phonetic symbols in teaching pronunciation at The English Course in Sidrap, focusing on instructional strategies, student responses, and tutor interventions for overcoming pronunciation challenges. The findings suggest that phonetic symbols, when effectively integrated into language instruction, can significantly enhance students' pronunciation skills by providing a clear, visual representation of speech sounds.

The instructional approach employed a direct method with reading aloud techniques, which encouraged active speaking practice and minimized translation into the native language. Teaching aids such as whiteboards, speakers, Oxford dictionaries, and module books were effectively used to support the learning process. However, the lack of formally structured lesson plans was noted, indicating a need for more comprehensive planning to ensure consistent delivery of content.

Student responses were generally positive, with many reporting improved pronunciation confidence and better understanding of English sound patterns. However, challenges such as mother tongue interference and the complexity of phonetic symbols were identified as barriers to learning. Despite these difficulties, motivational strategies, including songs and word connection exercises, contributed to maintaining student engagement and progress.

Tutors addressed pronunciation difficulties through personalized feedback, minimal pair drills, and the integration of engaging activities. The assessment process, which involved written tests focusing on phonetic transcription and pronunciation accuracy, further supported skill development by providing a clear measure of student progress.

In conclusion, the use of phonetic symbols can be an effective tool in pronunciation instruction when combined with engaging teaching techniques and continuous practice. Future recommendations include the development of structured lesson plans, increased focus on vowel differentiation, and ongoing professional development for tutors to enhance instructional

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS THROUGH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY AT THE ENGLISH COURSE IN SIDRAP

(Roni, Ibrahim, Sunandar, Baharuddin Andang)

effectiveness. These improvements can further strengthen pronunciation teaching and help learners achieve greater fluency and clarity in spoken English.

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