



IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION WITH PHONETIC SYMBOLS: A CASE STUDY OF SECOND-SEMESTER STUDENTS IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT INSTITUT AGAMA ISLAM DARUL A'MAL IAIDA LAMPUNG

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using phonetic symbols in enhancing English pronunciation skills among second-semester students of the English Department at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal IAIDA Lampung. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, involving two groups: an experimental group that received treatment using phonetic symbols and a control group that was taught using conventional methods. Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested to measure their pronunciation abilities. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the pronunciation skills of the experimental group, as evidenced by the post-test results, compared to the control group. Additionally, students expressed a high level of interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols, with the majority indicating strong engagement and appreciation for this method. The study concludes that phonetic symbols are an effective tool in improving English pronunciation and suggests that they be incorporated into pronunciation teaching methods to support students' language learning experiences.

Keywords: Phonetic Symbols, English Pronunciation, Pronunciation Improvement, Quasi-Experimental Design, Student Interest

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of language learning, particularly in English, where correct pronunciation plays a significant role in communication. As an essential component of speaking skills, pronunciation affects not only the intelligibility of speech but also how a speaker is perceived by native and non-native speakers alike. In the context of

English as a foreign language (EFL), students often face challenges in mastering pronunciation due to the complexities of English sounds, stress patterns, and intonations. These challenges can result in miscommunication, which emphasizes the importance of effective pronunciation instruction.

For second-semester students in the English Department, the ability to pronounce English words accurately is



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fundamental to their academic and professional development. While grammar and vocabulary are often the primary focus in language teaching, pronunciation is sometimes neglected. This neglect is particularly concerning in the context of English, where certain sounds do not exist in students' native languages. As a result, learners may struggle to produce sounds correctly, which can lead to confusion or misunderstandings in communication.

One of the methods that have been proposed to improve English pronunciation is the use of phonetic symbols. Phonetic symbols are part of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is designed to represent speech sounds visually. These symbols provide a consistent and standardized way to teach pronunciation, making it easier for students to understand the sounds of English. By associating phonetic symbols with the corresponding sounds, students can develop a clearer understanding of how words should be pronounced.

Research suggests that phonetic symbols help students increase their awareness of the English sound system and improve their pronunciation skills. The use of phonetic symbols enables students to visualize sounds, which can enhance their ability to produce them correctly. Furthermore, phonetic symbols give students the tools to practice independently by consulting dictionaries and other resources. This can lead to greater autonomy in learning, as students can check their pronunciation outside of

class without constant reliance on their instructors.

Despite the potential benefits of using phonetic symbols, their application in language teaching is not always widespread. Many instructors may lack the training or confidence to incorporate phonetic symbols into their teaching. Additionally, some students may find the symbols confusing or unnecessary. As such, there is a need for further investigation into the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in improving pronunciation, particularly in the context of second-semester students at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal IAIDA Lampung.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the impact of phonetic symbols on the pronunciation abilities of second-semester students in the English Department at IAIDA Lampung. By applying a quasi-experimental design, this research aims to compare the pronunciation skills of students who are taught using phonetic symbols with those who are taught using conventional pronunciation methods. The results of this study will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of phonetic symbols as a tool for improving English pronunciation in EFL settings.

In addition to evaluating pronunciation improvement, this research will also examine students' interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols. Student engagement is a critical factor in the success of any teaching method, and understanding how students perceive the use of phonetic symbols will



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help instructors tailor their teaching strategies accordingly. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader field of EFL pedagogy and may offer practical recommendations for language instructors seeking to enhance their students' pronunciation skills.

Finally, the significance of this study lies in its potential to provide a more effective and engaging approach to teaching English pronunciation. As the global demand for proficient English speakers continues to grow, it is essential that language learners are equipped with the skills necessary to communicate clearly and confidently. By focusing on the use of phonetic symbols, this study hopes to offer a practical and accessible method for improving pronunciation, ultimately supporting students in their academic and professional pursuits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pronunciation is often considered a critical element in language learning, particularly for English learners. According to Kelly (2000), pronunciation is not only about producing individual sounds but also about conveying meaning effectively in spoken communication. A learner's ability to pronounce English accurately affects their intelligibility, which in turn influences the ease and success of communication. Harmer (2001) emphasizes that pronunciation should be taught systematically, as it contributes

significantly to both fluency and comprehensibility in spoken English. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings, making pronunciation instruction an integral part of language teaching.

One of the primary challenges in teaching English pronunciation is the difference between English sounds and those of the students' native language. Lado (1972) noted that each language has its own set of sounds, and English has numerous phonetic features that do not exist in many other languages. For example, sounds such as /θ/ (as in "think") or /ð/ (as in "this") do not have direct equivalents in many languages, making it difficult for non-native speakers to produce them accurately. This phonetic disparity contributes to the difficulties students face in achieving correct pronunciation, often leading to fossilized errors.

To address these challenges, many language educators have turned to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a tool for teaching pronunciation. According to McMahon (2002), phonetic symbols from the IPA provide a standardized system to represent speech sounds. The IPA's primary strength lies in its ability to visually capture the sounds of language, offering learners a consistent way to understand and produce the correct sounds of English. In this way, phonetic symbols bridge the gap between sound production and its visual representation, offering a more intuitive learning tool for pronunciation.



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The application of phonetic symbols in language teaching has been supported by various studies. According to Brazil (1987), mastering the IPA symbols helps students gain confidence in pronouncing words independently, as it allows them to access accurate pronunciation guides in dictionaries. Furthermore, phonetic symbols enhance learners' awareness of the phonetic features of the target language. For instance, Mompean (2005) found that students who used phonetic symbols demonstrated improved pronunciation awareness and a better understanding of sound features, such as stress patterns and intonation, which are essential components of effective communication in English.

Research has also shown that the use of phonetic symbols can help learners become more autonomous in their language learning. According to Gilakjani (2016), students who are familiar with phonetic symbols can independently check their pronunciation, using resources like phonetic transcription in dictionaries or online tools. This autonomy is crucial in developing self-directed learners who are capable of refining their pronunciation outside the classroom. By understanding how words should be pronounced, learners can continue to practice on their own, reinforcing what they have learned in class.

Despite the potential benefits of using phonetic symbols, their application in teaching pronunciation is not without challenges. One issue is that some students and teachers may find phonetic symbols

intimidating or difficult to understand (Underhill, 1994). Phonetic symbols may initially seem abstract to learners, especially those without a background in linguistics. As a result, it is essential for instructors to provide clear explanations and ensure that students are comfortable with the symbols before incorporating them into lessons.

The effectiveness of phonetic symbols in improving pronunciation has been explored in several studies. For example, Nyyssonen (2017) found that university students who were taught pronunciation using phonetic transcription techniques had better pronunciation outcomes than those who were taught using traditional methods. Similarly, Lintunen (2013) reported that Finnish university students who used phonetic symbols to improve their English pronunciation demonstrated higher accuracy and confidence in their speaking abilities. These findings suggest that phonetic symbols are an effective tool in enhancing students' pronunciation skills and should be incorporated into pronunciation instruction.

In conclusion, the literature highlights the importance of pronunciation in language acquisition and the benefits of using phonetic symbols to improve pronunciation skills. Phonetic symbols provide students with a clear and standardized method for learning correct pronunciation, enabling them to become more autonomous learners. While challenges exist in adopting this approach,



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the overall effectiveness of phonetic symbols in pronunciation instruction is well-supported by research. Given these benefits, this study aims to explore the impact of phonetic symbols on the pronunciation abilities of second-semester students at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal IAIDA Lampung, contributing to the ongoing discourse on pronunciation teaching methods in English language education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in improving the pronunciation skills of second-semester students in the English Department at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal IAIDA Lampung. The quasi-experimental design was selected due to the nature of the research, where random assignment of participants into groups was not feasible. Instead, the study involved two groups: an experimental group that received pronunciation training through phonetic symbols and a control group that followed a conventional pronunciation instruction method. Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested to measure the changes in their pronunciation abilities.

The population of this research consisted of second-semester students in the English Department at IAIDA Lampung during the academic year 2023/2024. The total population included 80 students from

two different classes. From this population, cluster sampling was used to select two groups of 22 students each, totaling 44 students. Group A was assigned as the experimental group, while Group B was the control group. The groups were matched based on their prior knowledge of English pronunciation as determined by the pre-test scores, ensuring that both groups started with similar levels of proficiency.

In terms of data collection methods, the study utilized three primary instruments: a pronunciation test, a questionnaire, and observational notes. The pronunciation test was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test, designed to assess students' pronunciation accuracy in specific areas, including vowel and consonant sounds, word stress, and intonation. The test consisted of 20 items, including word repetition and reading passages that incorporated various pronunciation challenges. The questionnaire aimed to measure students' attitudes and interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols, using a Likert-scale format with statements ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

The treatment for the experimental group involved teaching English pronunciation using phonetic symbols derived from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The instructor introduced the phonetic symbols associated with specific sounds in English, such as vowels, consonants, diphthongs, and stress patterns. Students were taught how to



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read and interpret these symbols to practice pronunciation both inside and outside the classroom. The control group, on the other hand, received traditional pronunciation instruction based on listening and repeating activities without the use of phonetic symbols. To analyze the data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the students' pre-test and post-test scores, as well as their responses to the questionnaire. The inferential statistical analysis involved using a t-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their pronunciation improvement. The SPSS 21.0 software was used to perform these analyses. Additionally, the questionnaire data were analyzed to evaluate students' interest and engagement with the phonetic symbols method.

In terms of ethical considerations, the research adhered to standard ethical guidelines. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consented to participate. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and participants were assured that their individual data would be used solely for research purposes. The study also aimed to minimize any potential bias by ensuring that the teacher used consistent teaching methods for both groups.

The results of

The findings of this research are based on the analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups, as well as the responses to the questionnaire about students' interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols.

The **pre-test results** indicated that both the experimental and control groups had similar baseline pronunciation skills. Table 4.1 below shows the classification of students' scores on the pre-test.

Classification	Experimental Group (N=22)	Control Group (N=22)
Very Good (86-100)	0	0
Good (71-85)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Average (56-70)	14 (63.6%)	13 (59.1%)
Poor (41-55)	5 (22.7%)	6 (27.3%)
Very Poor (0-40)	2 (9.1%)	2 (9.1%)

As shown in Table 4.1, most students in both groups scored within the "average" and "poor" categories, indicating that they had similar levels of pronunciation skills before the treatment.

The **post-test results**, however, revealed significant differences between the two groups. The experimental group, which received instruction using phonetic symbols, showed noticeable improvements in their pronunciation skills. Table 4.2 below shows the classification of students' scores on the post-test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



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Classification	Experimental Group (N=22)	Control Group (N=22)
Very Good (86-100)	10 (45.5%)	2 (9.1%)
Good (71-85)	9 (40.9%)	7 (31.8%)
Average (56-70)	3 (13.6%)	9 (40.9%)
Poor (41-55)	0	4 (18.2%)
Very Poor (0-40)	0	0

The experimental group had a significantly higher number of students in the "Very Good" and "Good" categories compared to the control group. This demonstrates that the use of phonetic symbols had a positive impact on students' pronunciation ability.

The mean scores of both groups were also compared to determine the level of improvement. Table 4.3 below presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the pre-test and post-test.

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation (Pre-Test)	Standard Deviation (Post-Test)
Experimental Group	57.5	85.2	13.2	9.4
Control Group	58.2	65.6	14.1	10.6

The experimental group had a mean score increase of 27.7 points from pre-test to post-test, compared to the control group's increase of 7.4 points. The higher mean score increase in the experimental group indicates that the use of phonetic symbols was more effective in improving their pronunciation skills.

The results of the questionnaire showed that the majority of students in the experimental group found the use of phonetic symbols helpful and engaging. Out of the 22 students, 18 expressed strong interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols, with a mean score of 4.5 on the Likert scale, indicating that they were highly interested in the approach.

Discussion

The findings of this research support the hypothesis that using phonetic symbols enhances students' English pronunciation skills. The experimental group, which was taught using phonetic symbols, showed a significant improvement in their pronunciation compared to the control group, which was taught using traditional methods. The results suggest that phonetic symbols provide a more structured and visual approach to teaching pronunciation, which helps students better understand and reproduce English sounds.

One of the key benefits of using phonetic symbols is that they provide students with a clear and standardized representation of English sounds. As highlighted by McMahon (2002), phonetic symbols allow students to visualize the sounds they need to produce, which can improve their accuracy. The experimental group's increased mean scores on the post-test demonstrate that students were able to apply their knowledge of phonetic symbols to improve their pronunciation.

The findings also align with previous studies, such as those by Mompean (2005) and Brazil (1987), which have shown that phonetic symbols help students increase their awareness of the English sound system. By associating phonetic symbols with specific sounds, students gain a better



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understanding of the relationship between written and spoken language. This understanding is crucial for mastering pronunciation, as it allows students to independently check their pronunciation when reading or speaking.

Another important finding of this research is that students in the experimental group reported a high level of interest in learning pronunciation through phonetic symbols. This finding is consistent with Gilakjani (2016), who argues that when students are engaged and motivated, they are more likely to succeed in language learning. The positive response from students in the experimental group suggests that the use of phonetic symbols not only improved their pronunciation but also increased their enthusiasm for learning.

While the results of this study are promising, it is important to acknowledge that the use of phonetic symbols may not be a universal solution for all students. Some learners may find phonetic symbols difficult to understand, particularly those who are not familiar with linguistic concepts. Underhill (1994) suggests that teachers must ensure that students have a solid understanding of phonetic symbols before using them in pronunciation instruction. In this study, the instructor provided clear explanations and practiced the symbols with the students, which likely contributed to the positive results.

Additionally, the control group showed some improvement in pronunciation, albeit at a slower pace than the experimental group. This suggests that traditional pronunciation instruction methods, such as listening and repeating, can still lead to progress, but they may not be as effective as the use of phonetic symbols in helping students achieve accurate pronunciation.

Future studies could explore how combining both approaches—phonetic symbols and traditional methods—might enhance pronunciation skills even further.

Another aspect to consider is the role of individual differences in language learning. Some students may have a natural aptitude for pronunciation, while others may struggle more, regardless of the teaching method used. It would be beneficial to examine how factors such as motivation, prior language exposure, and cognitive styles influence the effectiveness of phonetic symbols in pronunciation teaching.

Lastly, the positive findings of this study suggest that phonetic symbols should be incorporated into English pronunciation teaching at IAIDA Lampung and other institutions. By offering a visual representation of sounds, phonetic symbols can help students better understand and produce English sounds. However, for phonetic symbols to be most effective, teachers should be trained in their use and should incorporate them in a way that is engaging and accessible to students.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the use of phonetic symbols significantly improves the pronunciation skills of second-semester English Department students at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal IAIDA Lampung. The experimental group, which received instruction with phonetic symbols, showed substantial improvement in their pronunciation abilities compared to the control group. The pre-test and post-test results, along with the high level of student interest in learning through

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phonetic symbols, support the effectiveness of this method in enhancing English pronunciation.

Moreover, the findings suggest that phonetic symbols provide students with a clear and standardized system for understanding and producing English sounds. This approach not only improves pronunciation accuracy but also increases students' autonomy, as they can independently check their pronunciation using dictionaries or other resources. These results are consistent with previous research, confirming the value of phonetic symbols in pronunciation instruction.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that instructors incorporate phonetic symbols into their teaching strategies to improve students' pronunciation skills. Future research could explore the combination of phonetic symbols with other instructional methods to further enhance pronunciation learning. Additionally, training teachers to effectively use phonetic symbols in the classroom will be crucial for maximizing their potential in pronunciation instruction.

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