

Exploring English Education Department Students' Challenges in Adopting IPA for Pronunciation Accuracy

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ABSTRACT

The difficulties that students in the English Education Department encounter when attempting to accurately pronounce words using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) are examined in this study. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with students who were familiar with IPA. Significant challenges are shown by the data, such as trouble connecting symbols to sounds, a lack of practice opportunities, and a lack of instructional tools. Students recognize the value of IPA in enhancing pronunciation in spite of these obstacles, and they indicate a great desire for a more comprehensive and engaging education. To improve IPA education, suggestions include using audio-visual aids, doing more practice sessions, and utilizing collaborative learning techniques. These results offer insightful information for enhancing phonetics instruction and helping students gain self-assurance and pronunciation skills. What makes this study important is its focus on the practical challenges faced by students in mastering IPA, an area that is critical for language educators yet often overlooked in curriculum design. By identifying specific barriers and proposing targeted solutions, this research provides a unique contribution to phonetics instruction. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of innovative teaching methods in building students' confidence and pronunciation skills, offering a foundation for future studies aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practical application in English education.

Key words: Challenges; IPA; Pronunciation; Adopting

INTRODUCTION

Achieving native-like English pronunciation has become increasingly important to students pursuing degrees in English instruction in recent years. In addition to learning the language, these students are expected to mentor others in their language learning attempt as future teachers. Pronunciation is one of the most challenging features while learning English, especially by non-native speakers, due to its

complex phonetic system and diverse regional accents. Pronunciation is one of important part in speaking skills. Rinda et al., (2019) state that speaking is used to inform that has main point in transaction information. So, start with adopting the IPA for accuracy pronunciation. The most popularly adopted tool for the improvement of pronunciation accuracy is the International Phonetic Alphabet, a universal system of phonetic notation which represents the sounds of spoken language. According to (Dumaggas et al., 2024) that adopting IPA significantly improves pronunciation skills, so that IPA can help students learn the accurate pronunciation of words by providing a clear and consistent visual representation of each sound. However, despite its usefulness, adopting IPA poses several challenges, particularly for students who are new to phonetics (Espra et al., 2021).

The transition to IPA for pronunciation improvement can be overwhelming, with many English education students finding the symbols and sounds unfamiliar and difficult to memorize. Dumaggas et al., (2024) emphasized that learners need to know and familiar first with the IPA, if not the learners may face the struggle with listening, spelling, and pronunciation. Unlike conventional English orthography, which is often inconsistent in representing sounds, IPA offers a precise system, but this precision requires students to learn a new set of symbols and phonetic rules. For students accustomed to learning English through its standard alphabet and spelling patterns, shifting to IPA often requires a substantial adjustment. Additionally, students may encounter sounds in English that do not exist in their native languages, further complicating their ability to adopt IPA accurately. Such sounds may be challenging to produce and recognize, leading to a learning curve that can feel steep for many.

Another barrier in adopting IPA lies in the limited classroom time dedicated to phonetics. In many English education programs, phonetics is just one of many components in a packed curriculum that covers linguistics, literature, pedagogy, and practical teaching skills. Students could not get enough practice or instruction to become proficient in IPA because of this exclusive concentration on phonetics. Moreover, a lot of students may not have fluent or native English speakers around them, which could impede their pronunciation improvement. When students lack adequate instruction or hands-on practice, they often struggle to integrate IPA into their learning process and thus fail to attain overall pronunciation accuracy

Moreover, motivation and personal attitudes towards IPA play a significant role. Some students may view IPA as overly technical or irrelevant to real-world language use, reducing their enthusiasm to engage with it. Others may feel intimidated by the symbols or worry about making pronunciation mistakes, which can impact their confidence. This sense of intimidation or disinterest can contribute to students avoiding IPA or practicing it inconsistently, limiting their ability to make progress in pronunciation accuracy based on (Himmayati & Triyoko, 2024).

While previous research has focused on the benefits of IPA or its implementation in language learning, this study is unique in that it examines the specific challenges

faced by students in adopting IPA and the impact of those challenges on their ability to achieve pronunciation accuracy (Thomson & Derwing, 2019). Some students who have studied and use IPA still face challenges in their speaking abilities, even though they understand phonetic symbols. This indicates that mastering IPA theory does not always translate to a significant improvement in practical speaking skills. On the other hand, some students who have not learned IPA demonstrate good pronunciation accuracy in English. This phenomenon suggests that other factors, such as exposure to native speakers, listening practice, and phonological intuition, also play a crucial role in improving pronunciation skills. By identifying these obstacles and proposing strategies to address them, this study provides insights that can enhance phonetics instruction, bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, and better prepare students to teach pronunciation effectively in their future careers.

This article explores these challenges faced by English education students in adopting IPA as a tool for pronunciation improvement. By identifying and understanding the specific difficulties they encounter, we can gain insights into potential strategies for supporting students in overcoming these obstacles. Enhanced support could include incorporating more phonetics-focused courses, providing interactive tools for IPA practice, or creating a classroom environment that encourages experimentation and confidence in pronunciation practice. Therefore, do the students face the challenges and difficulties when adopting IPA for accuracy pronunciations? Addressing these challenges will not only benefit students in their individual language proficiency but also prepare them to teach pronunciation effectively, ultimately contributing to a higher standard of English language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Pronunciation Challenges

Pronunciation is essential in language learning, particularly for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) settings. Non-native speakers frequently struggle with English pronunciation because of its intricate phonetic system and varied accents. Studies emphasize that correct pronunciation is crucial for effective communication and understanding. Rinda et al. (2019) note that pronunciation significantly influences speaking skills, affecting a speaker's clarity and self-assurance.

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is widely recognized as a valuable tool for improving pronunciation accuracy. According to Dumaggas et al. (2024), adopting IPA significantly enhances learners' pronunciation skills by providing a clear and consistent visual representation of sounds. However, as highlighted by Espira et al. (2021), the adoption of IPA often presents challenges, particularly for

students new to phonetics. These challenges include difficulties in memorizing unfamiliar symbols and associating them with sounds, as well as navigating the steep learning curve required to transition from conventional English orthography to IPA.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of structured phonemic training and systematic practice in mastering IPA. Thomson and Derwing (2019) found that explicit instruction in IPA improves learners' ability to recognize and produce target sounds, ultimately enhancing pronunciation accuracy. Similarly, research by Fouz-González (2024) highlighted the effectiveness of multimedia resources, such as audiovisual aids, in bridging the gap between phonetic symbols and their corresponding sounds.

The role of instructional design is also crucial in facilitating IPA learning. Traditional theoretical approaches often fail to equip learners with practical skills, while collaborative learning environments and interactive methods have been shown to yield better outcomes (Hancock & Fowler, 2021). For instance, Daska and Krekeler (2013) suggested that providing learners with explicit feedback on their phonetic production fosters greater confidence and precision in pronunciation.

Motivational factors and attitudes toward IPA also play a significant role in its adoption. Himmayati and Triyoko (2024) emphasized that students' perceptions of IPA as overly technical or intimidating can hinder their engagement and progress. Conversely, learners who view IPA as a useful tool for real-world communication are more likely to persist in overcoming its challenges.

Despite the proven benefits of IPA in improving pronunciation, research also shows that exposure to native speakers, listening practice, and phonological intuition are equally critical in developing pronunciation skills (Thomson & Derwing, 2019). These factors highlight the need for a balanced approach that integrates IPA training with broader phonetic and communicative competencies.

This review of existing literature underscores the significance of addressing both the technical and motivational barriers to IPA adoption. By building on these insights, this study aims to provide practical strategies to enhance IPA instruction and support students in achieving pronunciation accuracy.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study uses descriptive qualitative research methods in challenges faced by English education students in adopting IPA as a tool for pronunciation improvement. A descriptive qualitative technique was chosen because it helps the researcher to acquire a thorough grasp of students' experiences and perspectives using rich and detailed data. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling,

specifically targeting English education students familiar with IPA from their coursework. This method ensured that the participants had relevant experience and could offer valuable insights into the research topic.

Instrument and Procedure

The participants in this study were students of UIN Malang. A class of the students' English Education as the sample was purposely selected to ensure that the participants had experience in using IPA or new with IPA. Data for this article is collected from questionnaire and interviews. The interview was online that queried regarding participants' personal data and perceptions toward the experience of respondents that faced the challenges of the students. To enhance the credibility of the study, the content validity was confirmed through expert judgment, involving a lecturer from university in Malang. This expert review assured the study's objectives, thereby enhancing the reliability of findings.

Data Analysis

The interview consisted of these questions. (See table 1.):

Table 1. The Percentage Score of Interview

Percentage Score	Questions
60%	Familiarity with IPA
60%	Understanding of IPA symbols
50%	Challenges in learning IPA
70%	Perceived effectiveness of IPA
80%	Desire for enhanced curriculum
90%	Expectations form learning IPA

The researcher conducted content analysis on the data collected from a set of written and audio interview transcripts. First, the data was gathered using the research questions. The interview findings are then provided in the form of text, along with an explanation of students' perspectives on the challenges faced when adopting IPA for accuracy pronunciation.

RESULT AND DISUSSION

After taking and analyzing the data, researchers obtain several research findings regarding English Education Department students' challenges in adopting IPA for pronunciation accuracy. According to students' perception taken from questionnaire and interviews, here the results:

Table 2. The Results Percentage of the Questionnaire

Questions	Response Options	Percentage
Familiarity with IPA	No prior experience	60%
	Some familiarity	30%
	Very familiar	10%
Understanding of IPA Symbols	Understand basic symbols	60%
	Difficulty connecting symbols	40%
Challenges in Learning IPA	Difficulty associating symbols	50%
	Lack of instructional materials	30%
	Uncertainty in pronunciation	40%
Perceived Effectiveness of IPA	Significantly aids pronunciation	70%
	Not as helpful	20%
Desire for Enhanced Curriculum	Strong desire for in-depth curriculum	80%
Expectations from IPA Learning	Enhance pronunciation skills	90%
	Boost confidence in speaking	85%

A questionnaire on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) highlighted key insights into students' experiences and perceptions. The results indicated that 60% of respondents were not familiar with IPA, 30% had some prior exposure, and only 10% were very familiar, showing a clear need for introductory training. While 60% grasped basic IPA symbols, 40% had trouble connecting them, underscoring the need for better instructional materials. Learning challenges included difficulty in associating symbols (50%), a lack of resources (30%), and uncertainty about pronunciation (40%), indicating the need for better guidance and support. Despite these obstacles, 70% of students recognized IPA's effectiveness in enhancing pronunciation, with 80% expressing a desire for a more detailed curriculum. Moreover, 90% aimed to improve their pronunciation skills, and 85% sought to build confidence in speaking, demonstrating the broader impact of IPA on language learning. Overall, the findings highlight the value of IPA while identifying significant gaps in familiarity, resources, and comprehension that educators can address through enhanced curricular support and comprehensive teaching materials.

Based on the results, it is evident that students face various challenges in adopting the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for pronunciation accuracy. These challenges include unfamiliarity with IPA symbols, difficulty in associating symbols with sounds, and a lack of sufficient instructional materials. Despite these obstacles, most students recognize the effectiveness of IPA in improving

pronunciation and express a strong desire for a more comprehensive curriculum. This discussion further explores these findings, addressing their implications and proposing strategies to overcome the identified barriers.

Familiarity with IPA

A significant portion of respondents (approximately 60%) reported having no prior experience with IPA before their studies in TBI. Among those who had some exposure, responses varied from "familiar" to "very familiar," suggesting a diverse range of backgrounds in phonetic knowledge. Approximately 60% of respondents indicated no prior exposure to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) before their studies, reflecting the challenges of introducing this complex system to learners with varying backgrounds. For many, the initial encounter with IPA is marked by confusion due to its abstract symbols and the absence of relatable reference points in their native languages (Mompean, 2015). This variance in familiarity is significant as foundational knowledge of IPA influences how quickly and effectively students can integrate it into their language learning. Dlaska & Krekeler (2013) highlight that learners with a basic understanding of phonetic principles adapt more readily to IPA systems, suggesting a need for pre-exposure to phonetics in general education. Students frequently noted initial challenges in grasping the complexity of IPA symbols, which later improved with structured practice and contextual learning.

Understanding of IPA Symbols

Although many respondents said they understood the fundamental IPA symbols, a sizable portion (about 40%) said they had trouble matching symbols to sounds. Many language learners find it difficult to understand the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols; in recent research, over 40% of participants said they had trouble associating IPA symbols with the sounds they represent. The abstract nature of the symbols, which are not directly represented in the native phonetic systems of the learners, is frequently the cause of this problem. Furthermore, learners may struggle to internalize these symbols due to insufficient practice and exposure, as well as the absence of interactive instructional methods. Many students shared that their initial exposure to IPA was overwhelming due to the complexity of the symbols. One student noted, "*I felt lost at first, but once I started practicing, it became clearer.*"

Research highlights the importance of explicit instruction and systematic practice in overcoming these challenges. Thomson & Derwing (2019) found that structured phonemic training significantly improved learners' ability to recognize and produce target sounds, emphasizing the need for repetitive exposure to IPA in diverse contexts. Another study by Fouz-González (2024) reinforced this, demonstrating that incorporating multimedia resources, such as audiovisual aids, can effectively bridge the gap between symbols and sounds.

Moreover, the pedagogical approach plays a crucial role. Traditional theoretical instruction often falls short in equipping learners with practical skills, while methods that integrate real-word applications of IPA are shown to be more effective. A study by Hancock & Fowler (2021) advocates for integrating collaborative learning environments, where peer interactions facilitate deeper comprehension and application of IPA symbols.

To address these barriers, modern language instruction frameworks are increasingly recommending blended learning models that combine digital tools, such as interactive IPA charts, with face-to-face pronunciation practice sessions. These models not only cater to diverse learner needs but also foster an engaging environment for mastering phonetic transcription and its practical implications in spoken language (Thomson & Derwing, 2019).

Challenges in Learning IPA

The most common challenges identified included:

- a) Difficulty in associating symbols with sounds (50%).
The challenges in learning the International Phonetic Alphabet are very diverse and significantly affect the process of learning among students. One of the major issues is associating symbols with their respective sounds, reported by about 50% of respondents. This is especially true for non-native speakers, as understanding and articulating unfamiliar sounds that do not exist in their first language can be particularly demanding. This challenge is further compounded by the complexity of phoneme articulation, which often requires detailed instruction to properly guide learners on how to position the tongue, lips, and mouth to produce accurate sounds (Holmes, J., 2022).
- b) Lack of sufficient instructional materials and practice opportunities (30%).
Another common challenge, reported by about 30% of students, is the lack of sufficient instructional materials and practice opportunities. Students often find that textbooks and typical classroom activities do not provide enough engaging or varied practice. Practical exercises involving the IPA, such as listening and repeating activities, are essential but sometimes limited due to time constraints or lack of resources (Chow et al., 2024).
- c) Uncertainty in the correct pronunciation of certain symbols (40%).
Furthermore, a significant number of learners (around 40%) expressed uncertainty in pronouncing certain symbols. This difficulty often arises from the insufficient emphasis placed on understanding and producing the sounds associated with those symbols. Without targeted activities or tools like phonetic charts or interactive apps, students struggle to practice and receive feedback on their pronunciation (Mariam et al., 2022).

The combination of these challenges underscores the need for more structured and interactive teaching approaches that include ample practice opportunities and clear,

systematic instruction to help learners master IPA symbols and their pronunciations.

Perceived Effectiveness of IPA

A majority of the respondents (70%) agreed that the IPA significantly improves pronunciation accuracy. This effectiveness can be attributed to its capacity to clarify the relationship between sounds and symbols, offering a systematic approach to pronunciation. Recent studies support these claims, indicating that phonetic training using IPA facilitates learners' ability to distinguish and produce challenging phonemes, ultimately improving their overall intelligibility and fluency Saito & Plonsky (2019). IPA training has proven effective in both explicit and integrated instructional contexts. Explicit instruction, which focuses on segmental pronunciation (individual sounds), has shown considerable benefits in developing learners' phonetic accuracy. In the interviewed, a recurring theme was the impact of IPA on students' confidence in speaking. Many reported that understanding IPA helped them feel more secure in their pronunciation. One interviewee shared, "*Knowing how to read the symbols gave me the confidence to try speaking without fear of mispronouncing words.*" Meanwhile, integrated approaches, such as task-based pronunciation teaching, emphasize suprasegmental features like intonation and rhythm, helping learners achieve a more natural-sounding speech pattern (Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Trofimovich et al., 2017).

Additionally, tools like computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT) leverage IPA for individualized feedback, which is particularly advantageous in ESL/EFL contexts. Studies have demonstrated that learners using CAPT tools alongside IPA training exhibit notable improvements in both segmental and suprasegmental features, leading to enhanced confidence in oral communication (Liankin et al., 2017). Ultimately, the use of IPA in language learning is recognized not only for its role in pronunciation accuracy but also for its contribution to reducing learner anxiety and fostering confidence through a clearer understanding of phonological structures.

Desire for Enhanced Curriculum

80% of the respondents gave a strong indication of their need for a more extensive program on IPA. Results showed that a full 80% of the respondents wanted more detailed and comprehensive lessons regarding the International Phonetic Alphabet. This shows that the learners themselves increasingly realize that effective and communicative competence and language proficiency should be systematically and structurally acquired. The demand for an enhanced curriculum aligns with the finding of Nguyen et al. (2021), who established that EFL contexts should give explicit and systematic instructions in pronunciation. This study revealed that both students and teachers value communicative approaches that integrate pronunciation into broader language learning objectives. Similarly, Levis & Sonsaat (2021) emphasized that an effective curriculum must provide learners with practical tools

to decode and produce accurate sounds, enhancing intelligibility and confidence in spoken communication.

Moreover, studies such as Lee et al. (2015) have identified a gap in traditional language programs where pronunciation is often underemphasized compared to grammar and vocabulary. This underrepresentation can leave learners struggling with oral communication, even when they have robust knowledge of other language components. Addressing this gap by incorporating IPA-focused modules could equip learners with a deeper understanding of phonetic structures and pronunciation subtleties. For successful implementation, it is recommended that curricula adopt multi-modal teaching strategies, including audio-visual resources, interactive software, and real-life speaking exercises. Furthermore, educators should receive training in phonetics to deliver these modules effectively and adapt to students' diverse linguistic needs.

Expectations from IPA Learning

Respondents hoped that a deeper understanding of IPA would enhance their pronunciation skills and boost their confidence in speaking English. The majority of respondents in the study expressed the hope that a deeper understanding of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) would enhance their pronunciation skills and boost their confidence in speaking English. This expectation underscores the belief that mastering IPA can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge of phonetics and practical language application.

Research supports this perception. A study by Eren (2023) highlights that students often associate familiarity with IPA symbols with improvements in their phonological awareness and speaking clarity. It was found that learners who actively use IPA as part of their practice can more effectively correct pronunciation errors and reduce the anxiety often linked with speaking a second language. Furthermore, Gilakjani (2022) emphasized that using IPA allows learners to independently decipher correct pronunciations without constant teacher intervention. This autonomy not only enhances learning outcomes but also fosters self-confidence as learners become more adept at identifying and producing accurate sounds in real-life contexts. Finally, the integration of IPA into speaking exercises has been shown to improve intelligibility and oral fluency.

Although this study offers important insights into the difficulties students encounter when learning the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), it mainly centers on student viewpoints without including the perspectives of educators or instructors. This excessive focus on student viewpoints restricts the examination of the wider instructional factors that affect learning results. Teachers are essential in creating and implementing IPA instruction, and their perspectives could offer a deeper understanding of issues like curriculum development, instructional methods, and resource distribution. For example, teachers' insights in tackling students' struggles or their methods of incorporating IPA into comprehensive language teaching might

uncover useful answers to these issues. Integrating these viewpoints would facilitate a more comprehensive grasp of how students and educators manage the intricacies of IPA learning, leading to more focused and efficient enhancements in phonetics instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges faced by English Education Department students in adopting the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for improving pronunciation. While IPA is effective in enhancing pronunciation accuracy, students encounter difficulties such as associating symbols with sounds, limited instructional resources, and insufficient practice. Despite these challenges, students recognize the value of IPA and express a strong desire for a more comprehensive curriculum. To address these issues, programs should incorporate interactive teaching methods, audio-visual aids, and additional practice sessions to support students in mastering IPA. Enhancing IPA instruction will not only improve students' pronunciation skills but also prepare them to teach effectively, contributing to higher standards in English language education. Based on these findings, it is recommended that researchers investigate alternative approaches to addressing these challenges. This could include creating innovative teaching resources, examining how motivation and confidence influence the mastery of IPA, and evaluating the sustained impact of improved IPA instruction across various learning contexts.

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