

Analysis of EFL Students' Difficulties in Learning English Phonology and Phonetics at English Department, Victory University of Sorong

Marissa Swanda Tupamahu
marissaswandatupamahu@gmail.com

Sherly Gaspersz
sherlygaspersz91@gmail.com

Universitas Victory Sorong

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the difficulties faced by EFL students in learning English phonology and phonetics at the English Department of Victory University of Sorong. The research involved 46 participants from the 5th and 7th semesters who had completed the English phonology and phonetics course. The findings reveal that students encounter significant challenges due to various factors, including interference from their first language (L1), inconsistencies in English spelling and pronunciation, and limited exposure to authentic speech and diverse accents. Additionally, cognitive constraints such as processing limitations and insufficient phonological working memory further hinder their ability to apply phonological theory in real-world communication. The lack of focused phonological training in the curriculum, combined with psychological barriers like pronunciation anxiety, also contributes to the students' struggles. These findings highlight the need for enhanced phonological instruction, increased exposure to varied spoken English, and strategies to build student confidence, which are essential for overcoming the difficulties in mastering English phonology and phonetics.

Keywords: EFL Students; Students' difficulties; English Phonology and Phonetics

INTRODUCTION

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learning Phonology and Phonetics presents unique challenges for students. Phonology focuses on the abstract, cognitive aspects of sounds in language, while phonetics deals with the physical properties of speech sounds. These two subfields of linguistics, which deal with the study of speech sounds and sound systems, are critical in developing proper pronunciation and understanding of spoken English. However, many EFL students encounter significant difficulties in mastering the sounds of English, especially when these differ from those in their native languages. These difficulties may arise from various factors, including the influence of their first language (L1), lack of exposure to native pronunciation, and the complexity of English phonetic rules. For instance, students may struggle with distinguishing between similar sounds do not present in their native languages or may find it challenging to produce sounds that require different articulatory movements.

Students in the English Phonology and Phonetics class at the English Department of Victory University of Sorong are not immune to these difficulties. They perceive this course as challenging, particularly in understanding phonetic transcriptions. Students feel unfamiliar with the sounds of English and struggle to comprehend their phonetic representations. These difficulties can affect not only pronunciation but also listening comprehension and overall communicative competence (Asri & Permatasari, 20014). The challenges faced by students have a direct impact on their academic success. Many students find the course content, particularly phonetic transcription, to be demanding. This difficulty in understanding the sounds of English and their representations often results in students failing the course and are required to retake it in the following semester.

Research indicates that the phonological awareness of EFL students is often underdeveloped, leading to mispronunciations and communication breakdowns (Zhang, 2017). Furthermore, studies suggest that explicit instruction in phonetics can significantly improve learners' pronunciation skills (Aliaga-Garcia, 2017). However, many EFL curricula may not adequately address these areas, leading to persistent difficulties (Thompson, 2019). All of these prior studies have focused either on phonology (segmental and suprasegmental features like intonation and stress) or phonetics (articulation of specific sounds, IPA, and transcription) individually, but very few studies have comprehensively addressed the intersection of both areas in a single study. This study could bridge the gap by providing a holistic analysis of both phonological and phonetic difficulties, exploring how EFL learners struggle with both understanding sound systems and accurately producing them. This comprehensive approach is relatively underexplored and could add significant value.

Phonology and Phonetics are core components of linguistics that involve the study of the sound systems of languages and the physical properties of speech sounds (Oden, 2018). Understanding these subjects is crucial for students pursuing a degree in English or Linguistics, as it forms the foundation for more advanced studies in language analysis, language acquisition, and language teaching. However, the abstract nature of phonological theory and the technical aspects of phonetic transcription often make these subjects difficult for students to master through traditional teaching methods. As a result, there is a pressing need for instructional strategies that can make these concepts more accessible and engaging for students.

This study looks into the difficulties faced by students on English phonology and phonetics class, and factors contribute to the students' difficulties. That is why, the researcher makes effort to analyze it under the title "Analysis of EFL students' difficulties in Learning English Phonology and Phonetics at English Department, Victory University of Sorong.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of phonology and phonetics is crucial for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, as these areas significantly impact their speaking and listening skills. Phonology refers to the abstract, cognitive aspects of sounds in a language, while phonetics focuses on the physical properties of these sounds. Understanding the challenges EFL students face in these areas is essential for developing effective teaching strategies.

Phonology and Phonetics in EFL Learning

Phonology and phonetics play crucial roles in language comprehension and production. Phonetics, the study of the sounds of human speech, provides learners with an understanding of articulation, acoustic properties, and auditory perception (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2018). Phonology, on the other hand, deals with how sounds function within a particular language or languages (Oden, 2018). EFL students must grasp not only how individual sounds (phonemes) are produced but also how these sounds interact in connected speech.

Phonetics is the scientific study of the physical aspects of speech sounds. It examines how speech sounds are produced (articulatory phonetics), how they are transmitted (acoustic phonetics), and how they are perceived by the human ear (auditory phonetics). For EFL learners, phonetic competence involves the ability to produce and recognize sounds in a way that approximates native speaker norms. The articulatory aspect of phonetics is especially important for learners, as it requires precise control over the vocal tract, including the lips, tongue, and vocal cords. For example, the English sounds /θ/ (as in "think") and /ð/ (as in "this") are produced by placing the tongue between the teeth, a position that is unfamiliar to speakers of many languages, making these sounds particularly difficult to pronounce accurately (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2018). In addition to articulation, acoustic phonetics deals with the properties of sounds such as pitch, loudness, and duration. This is vital in distinguishing between English sounds that differ in subtle ways, such as the short /ɪ/ in "bit" and the long /i:/ in "beat." Many EFL learners struggle with these distinctions, especially when their native languages do not have a similar vowel system.

Phonology, in contrast, deals with the abstract, cognitive aspects of how sounds function in a particular language. It is concerned with the way sounds are organized in the mind and how they interact in speech. Phonology involves understanding the rules that govern sound patterns in a language, such as which sounds can appear together in a syllable and how sounds change in different contexts (Clark et al, 2018). One central concept in phonology is the phoneme, the smallest unit of sound that can distinguish meaning. For instance, in English, the words "pat" and "bat" are distinguished by the phonemes /p/ and /b/. EFL learners must become aware of these phonemic contrasts, which may not exist in their native languages. Indonesian speakers, for instance, often have difficulty with the contrast between /v/ and /f/ because their native language does not differentiate between these two sounds (Syafei, 2016). Another key area of phonology is syllable structure and stress

patterns. English, as a stress-timed language, places a strong emphasis on rhythm, where certain syllables are stressed more than others. This contrasts with syllable-timed languages like Indonesian, where each syllable receives roughly equal stress. EFL learners often struggle to adapt to English's stress-timed rhythm, which can affect their fluency and comprehension (Saito, 2017).

For EFL learners, mastering both phonetics and phonology is essential for effective communication in English. Phonetic competence allows learners to physically produce the sounds of English correctly, while phonological competence enables them to use these sounds in ways that are appropriate within the language's system. Difficulty in mastering the sounds of English can lead to pronunciation problems that affect learners' intelligibility. Mispronouncing phonemes can result in misunderstandings, especially when errors involve sounds that distinguish word meanings. For example, failing to produce the /ɪ/ and /i:/ distinction in minimal pairs like "ship" and "sheep" can lead to confusion. Phonology and phonetics also play a key role in listening comprehension. If learners cannot perceive and distinguish English phonemes, they may struggle to understand native speakers. For instance, EFL learners who have not acquired the ability to hear the difference between voiced and voiceless sounds (e.g., /b/ vs. /p/) may have difficulty identifying words in fast speech.

Research shows that learners' first language (L1) can influence both their speech perception and production in the target language (L2) (Saito, 2015). This is often referred to as cross-linguistic interference or L1 transfer. When learners encounter sounds or sound patterns in English that do not exist in their L1, they may substitute familiar L1 sounds, leading to accented speech. For example, learners whose L1 lacks a distinction between /s/ and /ʃ/ may pronounce "sip" and "ship" identically. Similarly, speakers of languages that do not use vowel length distinctions, such as Indonesian, may not perceive the difference between long and short vowels in English, affecting both their pronunciation and comprehension of words.

In addition to individual sounds, learners must also grasp the suprasegmental features of English, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm. These features can greatly affect meaning in English. For instance, incorrect word stress can lead to misunderstandings. A classic example is the word "record," which is pronounced differently depending on whether it is used as a noun (/ˈrek. ɔrd/) or a verb (/rɪˈkɔrd/). EFL learners often transfer the stress patterns of their native language to English, leading to awkward or unintelligible speech (Asher & Garcia, 2019).

Challenges in Learning Phonology and Phonetics

One of the most frequently cited difficulties in learning phonology and phonetics for EFL students is pronunciation. Numerous studies indicate that EFL learners struggle with English sounds that do not exist in their native language (L1). For example, Al-Rubaat (2015) identified that Arabic-speaking learners often have difficulties distinguishing between the English /p/ and /b/ sounds, as their L1 lacks

the /p/ phoneme. Similarly, Indonesian EFL learners may struggle with sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ because they are absent in the Indonesian phonological system (Syafei, 2016).

Mastering the suprasegmental features of English, such as intonation, rhythm, and stress, is another major challenge. EFL learners tend to apply the intonation and stress patterns of their native language to English, which can result in misunderstandings and hinder communication. According to Derwing & Munro (2019), stress misplacement in words and sentences can lead to unclear or incorrect meanings. Indonesian EFL learners, for instance, often struggle with English stress-timing as their native language is syllable-timed, causing difficulties in adapting to English rhythm (Suhartono, 2018). EFL learners not only face challenges in producing the correct sounds but also in perceiving them accurately. L1 categories influence the perception of L2 sounds, making it harder for learners to distinguish between phonemes that are not present in their native language. For example, learners may find it hard to distinguish between minimal pairs like “ship” and “sheep” due to the influence of their L1 phonetic system.

Factors Contributing to Difficulties in Learning Phonology and Phonetics

Cross-linguistic influence is one of the primary sources of difficulty for EFL learners. According to Moyer (2019), L1 interference occurs when learners apply rules or patterns from their native language to the target language. For example, the absence of certain phonemes in a learner's L1 may lead to difficulty in both producing and perceiving these sounds in English. Phonological awareness is a key factor in language acquisition. According to Asher and García (2019), students with strong phonological skills tend to have better reading and pronunciation abilities. EFL learners who lack this awareness may find it particularly difficult to develop proficiency in phonology and phonetics. For instance, Khan (2018) highlights that the lack of certain phonemes in students' first languages can lead to difficulties in distinguishing similar sounds in English. A study by Aliaga-Garcia (2017) suggests that explicit phonological training can help mitigate these challenges by raising students' awareness of English sound patterns. The methods used to teach phonology and phonetics also impact learners' success. Traditional grammar-translation methods, which often prioritize written forms over spoken language, can leave learners with inadequate speaking and listening skills (Gonzales, 2020). Furthermore, limited exposure to native-like pronunciation models can hinder learners' ability to internalize correct phonetic forms.

Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties

Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners struggle with the complexities of English phonology and phonetics, leading to pronunciation issues, misunderstandings, and difficulty in both speaking and comprehension. However, several teaching strategies have proven effective in helping learners overcome these challenges. This section explores these strategies in depth, focusing on explicit

instruction, technology-assisted learning, and phonological awareness training. One of the most effective ways to help EFL students overcome difficulties in phonology and phonetics is through explicit phonetic instruction. This approach involves directly teaching students about the articulatory mechanisms and sound patterns of English, rather than assuming they will pick up these skills intuitively.

a. Teaching Phonemes and Articulation

Teaching students how to physically produce sounds (articulatory phonetics) is crucial in addressing pronunciation difficulties. This can be done by introducing learners to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It can help them understand the precise articulation of sounds. By learning phonetic symbols, learners can visualize the differences between challenging sounds, such as the /θ/ in "think" and the /s/ in "sink." Using diagrams or 3D models to show how sounds are produced in the vocal tract can be very effective. For example, demonstrating how the tongue is placed for producing the English /r/ or /l/ helps learners who may substitute these sounds with those from their native language.

b. Minimal Pairs Exercises

Minimal pairs exercises are designed to help learners distinguish between two similar sounds that change the meaning of a word. For instance, exercises contrasting /p/ and /b/ (e.g., "pat" vs. "bat") can help learners who struggle to distinguish these phonemes, as is common with speakers of languages that lack this contrast (Al-Rubaat, 2015). These exercises focus on both perception and production, enabling students to better hear and pronounce the target sounds.

c. Suprasegmental Features Training

Explicit instruction in intonation, stress, and rhythm is crucial since these suprasegmental features are often overlooked in traditional language classrooms. Teaching learners how to stress syllables correctly and use intonation patterns in questions versus statements, for instance, can drastically improve both their pronunciation and intelligibility (Gonzales, 2020).

Another way to help EFL students overcome difficulties in phonology and phonetics is by doing a Phonological Awareness Training. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of a language, including syllables, onsets and rimes, and individual phonemes. Training in phonological awareness is particularly effective for improving both pronunciation and listening comprehension in EFL learners.

a. Phoneme Segmentation and Blending

Training learners to segment words into individual phonemes and blend phonemes together can improve students' ability to perceive and produce English sounds. For example, a teacher might say the individual phonemes /k/, /æ/, and /t/ and have students blend them to form the word "cat." This helps students develop a better awareness of sound structures and improve their ability to differentiate similar-sounding words (Saito & Sun, 2021).

b. Rhyming and Alliteration Activities

Phonological awareness can be enhanced through activities like rhyming and alliteration. By engaging in these exercises, learners become more attuned to sound patterns in English. Rhyming activities help students practice vowel sounds, while alliteration activities focus on consonant sounds, making learners more sensitive to the distinctive features of English phonemes.

c. Dictation and Shadowing Exercises

Dictation exercises, where students write down what they hear, help develop their listening and phonological awareness. Shadowing exercises, where learners repeat what they hear as closely as possible, can also improve pronunciation and fluency. These exercises are beneficial for training learners to perceive the nuances of English sounds and reproduce them more accurately (Rashote & Torgesen, 2021).

METHOD

Design and Samples

Descriptive qualitative method was used to this study. A qualitative method describes and interprets events, conditions, or situations of the present. Qualitative research is also defined as an unfolding show that takes place in a natural setting, allowing the analyst to create a level of detail from the inclusion of rich experiences in the real world (Flick, 2021). Furthermore, Miles et al. (2014) state that qualitative research is conducted in a naturalistic setting through intense and or prolonged contact with participants. Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over any other. The subjects of this study were 46 students of English Department at Victory University of Sorong, who have taken the English phonology and phonetics class which are 5th and 7th semester.

Instrument and Procedures

This study employs a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection from the students. The questionnaire is designed to consider various difficulties that students may encounter in learning phonology and phonetics. It is a Likert scale items to measure the level of difficulty students experience in comprehending and producing English sounds. The researcher was developing a questionnaire based on common difficulties encountered by EFL learners in phonology and phonetics and distributed to the respondents through Google Forms. Respondents was given a brief explanation of the research purpose and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data in this research, the researcher used descriptive and qualitative analysis. According to Moleong (2017:280), data analysis is the process of organizing and sorting data into patterns, categories, and the basic outline of the unit, so the researcher can find the data. Analysis can be defined as consisting of three current flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data from the questionnaire distributed through google form, showed that students experienced difficulties in learning English phonology and phonetics. The specific difficulties experienced by students according to the questionnaire data such as difficulties in understanding basic concept of phonology and phonetics, difficulties in listening and producing sounds in English phonology, and difficulties in applying theory to practice in English phonology and phonetics.

1) Difficulties in Understanding Basic Context of Phonology and Phonetics

Learning phonology and phonetics presents unique challenges for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners due to the complex nature of the sound system of English. One of the core difficulties in phonology is distinguishing between phonemes and allophones. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that can change the meaning of a word, while allophones are variations of a phoneme that do not alter meaning. Many learners struggle to recognize which sounds are phonemically distinct in English (e.g., /p/ and /b/ in "pat" and "bat"). Moreover, it is difficult for the students to understand that different sounds may be allophones of the same phoneme in various linguistic contexts, such as the aspirated [p^h] in "pot" versus the unaspirated [p] in "spot". English has a large number of vowel phonemes, and students were struggle to distinguish between them. For instance: The distinction between short and long vowels (e.g., /ɪ/ in "ship" versus /i:/ in "sheep") is problematic for learners whose native languages do not have such contrasts. The theoretical distinction between phonemes and allophones can be abstract for beginners, especially when students' first language (L1) has different phonological rules. Inadequate practice in identifying phonemic contrasts in real-world examples, leading to difficulties in application. This can affect the learners' ability to understand sound contrasts that are essential for meaning in the target language, particularly in distinguishing minimal pairs. In addition, this can be happened also because students are struggle with recognizing and using phonetic symbols (IPA—International Phonetic Alphabet) and applying them to transcribe spoken language correctly. The possible reasons for this include lack of familiarity with the IPA system, which requires practice and memorization of abstract symbols and limited exposure or practice in transcription exercises, which are essential for mastering phonetic representation. This difficulty may lead to challenges in distinguishing between subtle sound variations in different words and sounds, affecting pronunciation and listening comprehension in the target language.

Vowels in English vary widely in terms of length, quality, and position within the mouth, leading to difficulties in pronunciation and recognition (Cruttenden, 2014). Suprasegmental features like stress, rhythm, and intonation add another layer of complexity for the students. In English, incorrect stress placement can change the meaning of a word (e.g., "record" as a noun versus "record" as a verb). Students often transfer stress patterns from their first language, resulting in unintelligible or unnatural pronunciation (Asher & Mayo, 2019). English also is a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at regular intervals, which can be challenging for learners from syllable-timed languages like Indonesian language (Gill, 2022). Stress patterns, intonation contours, and speech rhythm can be difficult for students to understand and produce. Possible reason for this case is many students' L1 not have stress-timed rhythms (like English), making it harder to adapt to languages where intonation and stress are key to meaning and have difficulty in applying theoretical knowledge to real-time speech production, particularly in spontaneous conversation. This can result in flat, monotonous speech or incorrect stress patterns, affecting both clarity and the naturalness of speech. Misunderstanding intonation patterns also leads to difficulties in conveying the correct emotional tone or question/statement distinction. This can lead to challenges in distinguishing between subtle sound variations in different words and sounds, affecting pronunciation and listening comprehension in the target language.

Another struggle faced by the students is with phonological processes that occur in connected speech, such as assimilation where a sound becomes more like a neighboring sound (e.g., in "good boy," the /d/ may assimilate to a /b/ sound, resulting in "goob boy"). These processes often cause confusion for learners, particularly in listening comprehension, as they may not be familiar with these rapid speech alterations in their native languages (Hayes, 2022). The reason for difficulty in grasping phonological rules such as assimilation, elision, or vowel reduction in connected speech probably because phonological processes are often implicit in natural language, and without clear instruction or contextualized examples, students may fail to recognize them in spontaneous speech. Moreover, theoretical explanations without practical examples can make these rules seem overly abstract and hard to apply in real-life scenarios.

2) Difficulties in Listening and Producing Sounds in English Phonology

Listening Difficulties

English has several phonemes that are acoustically similar, which can make it difficult for learners to distinguish between them, especially if their native language doesn't have similar distinctions. Common problematic phoneme pairs include:

/ɪ/ and /i:/: Words like "ship" and "sheep" are confused due to the subtle difference between the short vowel /ɪ/ and the long vowel /i:/.

/ʃ/ and /s/: Students struggle to hear the difference between words like "she" and "sea," especially if their native language lacks the /ʃ/ sound.

/p/ and /b/: The distinction between voiceless /p/ and voiced /b/ is difficult for learners from languages where this contrast does not exist.

This can lead to misunderstandings in both spoken comprehension and pronunciation. For instance, mishearing a word due to phoneme confusion can result in incorrect responses or misunderstandings in conversations. Phonological awareness involves the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken language, including awareness of syllables, onsets, and rimes. This impact students with limited phonological awareness difficult to break words down into their component sounds, which is essential for both listening comprehension and accurate pronunciation. Moreover, English is a stress-timed language, meaning that the rhythm is based on the stress patterns of words rather than syllable count and intonation plays a critical role in conveying meaning and emotion. Learners may struggle with the appropriate placement of stress in multisyllabic words and the correct intonation patterns in sentences, which can result in flat or unnatural speech.

Students also find it difficult to comprehend spoken English due to various factors such as speed, accent variations, background noise, and unfamiliar vocabulary. These challenges can lead to frustration and a lack of confidence in speaking and listening situations, resulting in reduced participation in conversations and language activities. Listening comprehension becomes even more challenging when learners have to deal with background noise or competing sounds, which can make it hard to pick out individual words or phrases. This difficulty is amplified when they are not accustomed to native-speaker speeds or accents (Yavas, 2021).

Some strategies are address to overcome these difficulties such as incorporate explicit training that focuses on phoneme discrimination through listening exercises, minimal pairs, and phonemic drills to improve sound recognition and production. Use visual aids, such as articulatory diagrams or videos, to help students understand how to produce challenging sounds. Repetition and practice in isolation and within words can improve their articulation. Engage students in listening activities that emphasize different accents, speeds, and connected speech. Use audiobooks, podcasts, or conversations recorded at various speeds to familiarize them with real-world listening scenarios. Conduct exercises focusing on stress patterns and intonation. Use music or poetry to help students practice rhythm and melody, making it more enjoyable and memorable. Implement role-playing exercises that mimic real-life situations to practice spontaneous speech. This encourages learners to apply their phonological knowledge in a more dynamic context.

3) Production Difficulties

Many English phonemes do not exist in learners' native languages, leading to difficulties in pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2019). Common issues include: /θ/ and /ð/: These dental fricatives, as in "think" and "this," do not exist in many languages, and learners often substitute them with /t/, /d/, or /s/ sounds, depending on their L1. English has a distinction between long and short vowels (e.g., /ɪ/ in "bit" and /i:/ in "beat"), which many learners find difficult to produce correctly,

leading to unintelligibility. The inconsistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation in English often leads to incorrect pronunciation. Students might pronounce words based on their spelling (e.g., pronouncing the "l" in "calm" or the "k" in "knife"), leading to non-native-like production. Silent letters and irregular vowel sounds (e.g., "ough" in "thought," "through," and "cough") further complicate pronunciation for students. Another difficulty is students' first language can heavily influence how they produce sounds in English. Students also may apply phonological rules from their L1 to English, resulting in errors such as adding extra syllables or mispronouncing unfamiliar sounds (Cruttenden, 2014).

Some strategies to address production difficulties such as implementing focused phonetic drills and exercises that emphasize articulation of challenging sounds (Golonka & Gor, 2020). Use tools like visual aids (articulatory diagrams) and audio recordings to demonstrate correct pronunciation. Use minimal pair exercises to help learners distinguish between similar sounds and practice correct pronunciation. This helps raise awareness of phonemic contrasts. Teach learners to identify and practice the correct syllable structures and stress patterns in English words through repetition and modeling. Incorporate listening and speaking exercises that focus on connected speech patterns, helping learners become more familiar with natural English pronunciation and encouraging them to use reductions in their speech. Conduct activities that promote phonological awareness, such as rhyme recognition, syllable counting, and sound manipulation exercises to improve overall sound production. Simplify tasks initially and gradually increase complexity as learners gain confidence. Encourage practice in low-pressure environments to reduce anxiety and cognitive load during speaking. Provide constructive feedback on pronunciation and articulation, encouraging self-monitoring and peer feedback in speaking tasks to raise awareness of production difficulties.

4) Difficulties in Applying Theory to Practice in English Phonology and Phonetics

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners often face challenges in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge of English phonology and phonetics and its practical application in real-world communication. These difficulties can hinder their ability to speak and understand English effectively. While students may be able to understand phonological theory and recognize the distinctions between sounds in a controlled environment (e.g., in a classroom setting or a phonology test), applying this knowledge in real-life communication is often more difficult. They were able to identify minimal pairs (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/ in "pat" vs. "bat") in theory but struggle to produce these sounds correctly during spontaneous speech. Students often practice phonetic transcription as part of phonological studies in class, which helps them break down and understand individual sounds. However, they find it challenging to apply this skill to real-world listening and speaking. They accurately transcribe a spoken passage in a classroom setting but struggle to understand fast, connected speech in real-life conversations, especially when sounds are reduced or elided. One of the significant challenges for students is applying phonological and

phonetic theory in spontaneous communication. In a classroom, students often engage in controlled pronunciation exercises where they focus on specific sounds or patterns (e.g., distinguishing /s/ and /ʃ/). However, in real-life conversations, they revert to default patterns influenced by their L1, making it difficult to maintain correct pronunciation.

Design curriculum activities that bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications can be a strategy to address these difficulties. Use real-life scenarios, such as role-plays or simulations, to help learners apply phonological knowledge in context. Engage students in phonetic transcription tasks, where they transcribe spoken language, helping them connect theoretical concepts to actual speech sounds. Use listening exercises that highlight phonological features, such as stress patterns and connected speech, to enhance awareness and understanding of these concepts in practice. Encourage collaborative learning, where students can practice speaking with each other, provide feedback, and reinforce phonological concepts through teaching. Implementing regular assessments that focus on both phonological knowledge and its practical application. Provide timely feedback to help students identify areas for improvement and monitor their progress.

5) Factors Contributing to Difficulties in Learning English Phonology and Phonetics

EFL students face numerous challenges in mastering English phonology and phonetics, which stem from a variety of factors. One of the most significant is L1 interference, where differences in phoneme inventory and phonological rules between the learner's first language and English lead to mispronunciations and difficulty perceiving certain sounds. Students from syllable-timed languages may struggle with English's stress-timed rhythm, resulting in unnatural speech patterns (Low, 2020). Additionally, English's inconsistent spelling-pronunciation rules further complicate learning, as learners must memorize varying pronunciations of similarly spelled words (Cruttenden, 2014). Limited exposure to authentic speech and diverse accents compounds these difficulties, as classroom settings often emphasize standardized models that don't reflect the wide range of spoken English variations learners will encounter. Cognitive factors, such as the high processing demands of managing phonological accuracy while speaking, alongside limited phonological working memory, make it harder for students to apply theory in real-world communication (Gathercole & Baddeley, 2021). Insufficient phonological training in many EFL curricula, where grammar and vocabulary take precedence, further limits opportunities to practice crucial pronunciation and prosodic features (Gillon, 2020). Additionally, psychological factors like pronunciation anxiety and overcorrection can cause learners to avoid speaking or hyper focus on producing sounds perfectly, hindering fluency and natural speech. Without sufficient interaction with native speakers or advanced English users, students lack the feedback and real-world practice needed to fully develop their phonological and phonetic skills. Thus, overcoming these challenges requires targeted instruction,

ample exposure to varied speech contexts, and strategies to build learner confidence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, EFL students face significant challenges in mastering English phonology and phonetics due to a range of interconnected factors. These difficulties arise primarily from L1 interference, where differences in sound systems and phonological rules between the learners' native language and English hinder accurate pronunciation and comprehension. Additionally, the inconsistencies in English spelling and pronunciation, combined with limited exposure to authentic speech and diverse accents, make it harder for learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world communication. Cognitive constraints, such as processing limitations and insufficient phonological working memory, further complicate the application of phonological rules in spontaneous speech. Moreover, the lack of focused phonological training in many EFL curricula, coupled with psychological barriers like pronunciation anxiety, prevent learners from practicing and refining their skills. These factors underscore the need for more comprehensive phonological instruction, increased exposure to varied spoken English, and strategies to build learner confidence and reduce anxiety, all of which are crucial for overcoming the difficulties students face in mastering English phonology and phonetics.

REFERENCES

- Aliaga-García, C. (2017). The impact of phonetic training on EFL learners' pronunciation. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 235, 134-141.
- Al-Rubaat, M. (2015). Difficulties in learning English sounds for Arabic speakers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(3), 596-603.
- Arniati, F. (2016). Developing Students' Speaking Ability Through Suggestopedia Method At Sma Tomakaka Mamuju. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pena: Sains dan Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(2), 157-165.
- Asher, J., & García Mayo, M. P. (2019). Phonological awareness and its role in second language acquisition. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, 5(2), 123-139.
- Asri, N., & Permatasari, S. (2014). Phonological problems of Indonesian EFL learners. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 2(3), 45-56.
- Baker, A. (2014). The role of phonetics in English language teaching. *Journal of Linguistics*, 50(2), 345-367.
- Clark, J., Yallop, C., & Fletcher, J. (2018). *An introduction to phonetics and phonology* (4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cruttenden, A. (2014). *Gimson's pronunciation of English* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2019). The importance of pronunciation in language learning revisited. *Language Teaching*, 52(3), 340-366.

- Dewi, A. Y. (2024). *Analysis of Teaching Methods to Address The Disparities in English Proficiency Among Students* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sorong).
- Flick, U. (2021). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Gathercole, S. E., & Baddeley, A. D. (2021). *Working memory and language*. Psychology Press.
- Gil, D. (2022). The phonology and prosody of syllable-timed languages: Indonesian and beyond. *Phonology and Phonetics*, 59(1), 45-67.
- Gillon, G. T. (2020). *Phonological awareness: From research to practice* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Gonzalez, J. (2020). The role of phonological awareness in second language acquisition: A systematic review. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(1), 67-93.
- Golonka, E. M., & Gor, K. (2020). Cognitive processing in second language phonology and phonetics: Listening and pronunciation challenges. *Second Language Research*, 36(4), 555-580.
- Hayes, B. (2022). *Introductory phonology*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Khan, S. (2018). Phonological awareness in EFL contexts: Challenges and strategies. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9(2), 345-353.
- Ladefoged, P., & Johnson, K. (2018). *A course in phonetics* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Low, E. L. (2020). Prosodic characteristics of Indonesian. In *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (pp. 130-135). Cambridge University Press.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Moyer, A. (2019). Phonological and phonetic factors in achieving near-native pronunciation. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 57(1), 49-72.
- Odden, D. (2018). *Introducing phonology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Rashotte, C. A., & Torgesen, J. K. (2021). Phonological awareness and reading achievement: A review of the evidence. *Reading Psychology*, 42(7), 585-610.
- Saito, K. (2017). Effects of phonetic instruction on the development of L2 pronunciation in adult learners. *Language Learning*, 67(3), 527-563.
- Saito, K., & Sun, H. (2021). The effects of phonological awareness on L2 learners' pronunciation: A meta-analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 42(2), 235-253.
- Samsur, F. R., & Wardani, R. C. (2019). Students Ability in Constructing Paragraph of Recount Text. *Interaction*, 6(1).
- Samsur, F. R., & Wardani, R. C. (2019). Students Ability in Constructing Paragraph of Recount Text. *Interaction*, 6(1).
- Suhartono, T. (2018). Indonesian EFL learners' difficulties in English stress and intonation patterns. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(2), 97-104.
- Syafei, M. (2016). Challenges in learning English sounds for Indonesian EFL learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 18(2), 98-115.

- Thompson, G. (2019). Phonological awareness and second language learning: An empirical study. *Language Learning Journal*, 47(1), 22-40.
- Yavas, M. (2021). *Applied English phonology* (4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zhang, C. (2017). Chinese EFL learners' difficulties with English intonation patterns. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7(3), 41-52.