



Students' Beliefs And Strategies In Learning Pronunciation : A Narrative Research

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Abstract

This study aims to explore students' beliefs and strategies in learning English pronunciation. Employing a qualitative approach with narrative inquiry as the research design, this study focuses on understanding learners' experiences through their personal stories and reflections. The participants were students of the English Language Education Study Programme who had experience in learning English pronunciation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews to capture participants' beliefs, learning experiences, and strategies related to pronunciation learning. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns and key themes across the narratives. The findings reveal that students hold varied beliefs about English pronunciation learning, particularly regarding the importance of accuracy, exposure, and practice. In addition, students employed diverse strategies such as self-practice, listening to authentic materials, repetition, and seeking feedback to improve their pronunciation skills. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of learners' perspectives on pronunciation learning and provides practical implications for English pronunciation teaching in higher education contexts.

Keywords: learner beliefs, learning strategies, English pronunciation, EFL learners, narrative inquiry

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners are required to develop effective speaking skills in order to communicate meaningfully in academic and social contexts. Among the components of speaking, pronunciation plays a crucial role in ensuring intelligibility and avoiding miscommunication. Inadequate pronunciation may hinder interaction even when learners possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Therefore, pronunciation has become an essential aspect of EFL learning that deserves greater attention in language education. Pronunciation is also closely related to intelligibility, as accurate pronunciation enables listeners to understand spoken messages more easily, even when grammatical accuracy is limited (Harmer, 2007).

Despite its importance, pronunciation learning is often perceived as challenging by EFL learners. Difficulties in producing unfamiliar sounds, limited exposure to native-like

pronunciation models, and anxiety when speaking English frequently affect learners' confidence and performance. These challenges indicate that pronunciation learning is not merely a technical skill, but also involves learners' perceptions, beliefs, and emotional experiences during the learning process. Difficulties in pronunciation learning are often caused by differences between learners' first language sound systems and English phonology, which may result in persistent pronunciation errors if not addressed properly (Ahmad, 2019).

Learners' beliefs have been widely acknowledged as an influential factor in second language acquisition, as they shape how learners approach learning tasks and select learning strategies. Beliefs about pronunciation, in particular, can determine whether learners actively engage in practice, seek learning resources independently, or avoid speaking situations due to fear of making mistakes. When learners perceive pronunciation as important and improvable, they tend to adopt strategies that support continuous learning and self-improvement.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of English pronunciation learning, particularly focusing on learners' difficulties, beliefs, and learning strategies. Farahsani (2018) investigated students' pronunciation problems in English presentations and found that learners often experienced difficulties due to limited understanding of pronunciation principles and lack of confidence in oral performance. Similarly, Ahmad (2019) reported that pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners were largely influenced by differences between English and Indonesian sound systems, including problems with vowel and consonant production, which could be addressed through the use of audio-visual learning media.

In addition, Yuliana (2020) explored students' perceptions in a pronunciation course and revealed that although learners considered pronunciation an important component of English learning, they frequently struggled with word stress and phonetic symbols. Her study also highlighted the limited number of studies focusing specifically on learners' beliefs about pronunciation, particularly among pre-service English teachers. Furthermore, Kaymakamoglu and Atmaca (2016) emphasized that learners' beliefs significantly influence the strategies they employ in learning pronunciation, while Hapsari (2019) found that consistent listening and imitation practices supported by technology played an important role in improving pronunciation skills. These findings indicate that pronunciation learning is closely related to learners' beliefs, strategies, and learning experiences, yet studies focusing on successful pronunciation learners, particularly in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), remain limited.

In the context of the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Gorontalo State University pronunciation learning remains a challenging yet essential component of speaking courses. Students are expected to achieve intelligible pronunciation as future English teachers, yet they experience varied learning experiences, beliefs, and strategies in developing this skill. Understanding how ELESP students perceive pronunciation and how these beliefs influence their learning strategies is therefore important to support more effective pronunciation instruction.

Based on this gap, this study aims to explore students' beliefs about English pronunciation and the learning strategies they employ to improve their pronunciation. By employing a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, this study seeks to provide an in-depth interview understanding of learners' experiences in pronunciation learning within the ELESP UNG context.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a narrative inquiry approach to explore students' beliefs and learning strategies in improving English pronunciation. Qualitative design was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of learners' personal experiences, perceptions, and learning processes, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to examine how individuals make sense of their learning experiences and construct meaning through personal stories (Mahmud, Mokoolang, & Achmad, 2024).

The research participants consisted of three students from the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) who were purposefully selected based on their ability to demonstrate successful pronunciation development. The participants were considered information-rich cases that could provide meaningful insights into pronunciation learning experiences. The researcher played an active role as the primary research instrument, responsible for data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted to elicit participants' beliefs, learning strategies, challenges, and experiences related to English pronunciation learning. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature on pronunciation learning and learner beliefs. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage participants to share their experiences openly and honestly.

The data analysis followed a thematic analysis process, in which interview transcripts were carefully read, coded, and categorized into meaningful themes related to the research focus. The analysis involved identifying recurring patterns and relationships among participants' narratives, which were then interpreted to answer the research questions. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data validation was conducted through careful data checking, repeated reading of transcripts, and consistency between participants' responses and the interpreted themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed four major themes related to students' beliefs and strategies in learning English pronunciation. These themes include students' beliefs about pronunciation, learning strategies applied, challenges in learning pronunciation, and improvements experienced during the learning process. The results describe how students of the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo perceive pronunciation learning and how they experience the process of developing their pronunciation skills.

The first theme focuses on students' beliefs about pronunciation. The results show that students generally perceive pronunciation as an essential component of speaking skills. They believe that accurate pronunciation is important to ensure clear communication and to avoid misunderstanding when using English. Students also reported that pronunciation plays a significant role in building confidence when speaking, especially in academic activities such as classroom discussions and presentations. As pre-service English teachers, students considered good pronunciation as part of their professional responsibility.

The second theme concerns the learning strategies applied by students in learning pronunciation. The results indicate that students employed various strategies to improve their pronunciation skills. Listening and imitation were the most frequently used strategies. Students reported listening to English songs, watching movies and online videos, and

using pronunciation tools in online dictionaries or mobile applications. Some students also practiced pronunciation by repeating words and sentences and by recording their voices to monitor their pronunciation accuracy.

The third theme highlights the challenges experienced by students in learning English pronunciation. The results show that students faced difficulties in pronouncing unfamiliar English sounds, applying correct word stress, and distinguishing similar vowel and consonant sounds. In addition to linguistic difficulties, students reported experiencing anxiety and lack of confidence when speaking English. Fear of making mistakes and being evaluated negatively by others often limited their willingness to practice pronunciation in front of peers.

The final theme relates to improvements experienced during the learning process. The results indicate that students experienced gradual improvement in their pronunciation as a result of continuous practice and increased exposure to English. Students reported becoming more aware of their pronunciation errors and more confident in speaking English over time. These improvements were influenced by students' learning experiences, including classroom activities, feedback from lecturers, and independent learning through media and technology.

The findings of this study indicate that students' beliefs play a crucial role in shaping how they approach learning English pronunciation. Students who perceived pronunciation as an important component of speaking tended to demonstrate greater motivation and confidence in improving their pronunciation skills. This finding supports the view that learners' beliefs influence their learning behavior and engagement in language learning (Horwitz, 1988; Kaymakamoglu & Atmaca, 2016). When learners believe that pronunciation is essential and can be improved, they are more likely to invest effort and persist in practice.

The results also show that students' beliefs are closely connected to the learning strategies they employ. The frequent use of listening and imitation strategies suggests that students actively seek exposure to authentic pronunciation models. This finding aligns with previous studies which emphasize that listening-based strategies and imitation are effective approaches for developing pronunciation accuracy in EFL contexts (Gilakjani, 2016; Hapsari, 2019). Technology-assisted learning tools, such as online videos and pronunciation applications, further support learners by providing flexible access to pronunciation input and repeated practice opportunities.

Challenges in learning pronunciation identified in this study reflect common difficulties faced by EFL learners. Problems related to unfamiliar sounds, word stress, and differences between English and Indonesian sound systems are consistent with earlier findings reported in pronunciation research (Ahmad, 2019; Fraser, 2000). In addition to linguistic challenges, psychological factors such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes were found to hinder students' willingness to practice pronunciation. This supports the argument that affective factors play a significant role in oral language performance and pronunciation development (Krashen, 1982; Farahsani, 2018).

Despite these challenges, the findings demonstrate that students experienced noticeable improvements in their pronunciation over time. Continuous practice, increased exposure to English, and positive learning experiences contributed to students' growing confidence and awareness of pronunciation accuracy. This finding supports the notion that pronunciation development is a gradual process that requires sustained effort and meaningful input (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Feedback from lecturers and supportive classroom environments also played an important role in encouraging students to engage more actively in pronunciation practice.

Overall, the discussion highlights that pronunciation learning among ELESP students is a dynamic process influenced by the interaction between beliefs, strategies, challenges, and learning experiences. Learners' beliefs shape their choice of strategies, while challenges and learning experiences influence how these strategies are applied. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating pronunciation instruction with opportunities for meaningful practice and reflective learning, particularly for pre-service English teachers who are expected to model accurate pronunciation in their future teaching contexts (Mahmud, Mokoolang, & Achmad, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' beliefs play a central role in shaping their approaches to learning English pronunciation. The findings indicate that pronunciation is perceived as essential for intelligible communication and speaking confidence, which motivates learners to engage actively in pronunciation practice. In response to these beliefs, students employ a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective learning strategies, particularly through autonomous and technology-assisted practices.

Despite encountering linguistic and emotional challenges, learners demonstrate continuous improvement in pronunciation through sustained practice and self-regulation. This study highlights that successful pronunciation learning is not determined by the absence of difficulties, but by learners' ability to adapt learning strategies in accordance with their beliefs and experiences. Overall, the findings emphasize the dynamic relationship between beliefs, learning strategies, and pronunciation development among EFL learners, contributing to a deeper understanding of pronunciation learning in higher education contexts.

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