Analyzing Students' Problems in Pronunciation During Their Self-Study in Pandemic Situation

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Abstract

This study investigates the pronunciation practices of English Department students during self-study amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With the shift to online learning, students increasingly engaged in self-directed learning activities to enhance their pronunciation skills. A survey was conducted with 70 students to explore their preferred pronunciation activities, the challenges they faced, and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. The findings reveal that students favored listening to English songs and watching movies as primary methods for practicing pronunciation. However, they encountered significant difficulties, such as distinguishing similar-sounding vocabulary and limited opportunities for speaking practice. To address these issues, students utilized various strategies, including online resources, peer collaboration, and self-recording. This research highlights the critical role of self-study in language acquisition and emphasizes the importance of pronunciation as a key component of effective communication. The study underscores the need for educators to incorporate engaging resources and structured feedback to support students in their pronunciation development.

Keywords: *pronunciation, self-study, English language learning, COVID-19*

Introduction

In March 2020, the Indonesian government declared COVID-19 a national disaster (Kompas.com), leading to significant impacts across all sectors of life, particularly in education. The pandemic necessitated in-person interactions between students and teachers, which heightened the risk of virus transmission (Dhawan, 2020). To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, Indonesia's Ministry of Education implemented several policies, including the cancellation of the National Examination (UN), adaptations to school reviews, the adoption of e-learning, and the transition to online teaching methods.

E-learning, characterized by virtual learning environments, eliminates the need for face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. In this model, teachers assume the role of facilitators and guides, providing support from a distance. Consequently, students are required to engage in self-study, which involves independently seeking to understand their learning through various resources provided by teachers or found online. According to Sulastrini and Muslihati (2020), self-study fosters disciplined behavior, as individual learners develop the ability to learn

independently and organize actions that support their educational progress. This autonomy is crucial for helping students cultivate positive behaviors that contribute to their success.

Self-study is vital for students because it empowers them to pursue their educational goals without relying on others. It enables them to identify effective learning methods, complete tasks efficiently, and engage in learning activities independently (Rachmayani, 2014). In the context of learning a foreign language, pronunciation emerges as a crucial sub-skill of speaking, playing a vital role in effective communication. Clear pronunciation is essential for accurately conveying messages to listeners. Yates (2002, as cited in Pourhosein, 2016) notes that pronunciation involves producing sounds that convey meaning, while Otlowski (1998) defines it as the accepted manner of uttering words. Richard and Schmidt (2002) further describe pronunciation as the production of specific sounds, which learners master through repetition and correction of inaccuracies. As students begin to learn pronunciation, they develop new habits and work to overcome challenges stemming from their first language.

Initial observations by the researcher indicated that students often struggle to achieve correct pronunciation. While some utilize YouTube videos for guidance, others depend on Google Translate, leading to various challenges in their independent learning efforts. Each student's situation is unique, underscoring the need for research to explore the specific problems students encounter during self-study in pronunciation.

Previous studies have examined the effects of e-learning and self-study on pronunciation. For instance, Rahmawati (2021) identified issues related to pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and accuracy during the e-learning process, noting that students often feel embarrassed to speak and may become disengaged from practicing English. This disengagement can result in a decline in vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall speaking fluency and accuracy. Conversely, Krishnan (2020) found that learners viewed free online resources as valuable tools for improving their English skills, including reading, conversation, pronunciation, and vocabulary. These resources foster a motivating learning environment, enhance analytical and critical thinking skills, and promote social interaction among teachers, peers, and other participants. Thus, while e-learning presents challenges for students in mastering pronunciation, it also offers opportunities for growth through accessible online resources.

This study seeks to address the following questions: 1) What are the students' pronunciation activities during their self-study? 2) What kinds of problems do students primarily encounter in their pronunciation activities? 3) How do students minimize their pronunciation problems?

Literature Review

The Importance of Pronunciation

Pronunciation is crucial for effective communication, as incorrect pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings and negative impressions. Suwartono (2006: 41) emphasizes that pronunciation is an integral part of language, given that language is fundamentally spoken. For non-native English speakers, pronunciation often presents the most significant and complex challenge when learning English. A common mistake among international students studying English as a foreign language is neglecting proper pronunciation. Many students underestimate its importance, viewing it as less critical than other aspects of English, such as grammar, lexicology, and vocabulary.

Mispronunciations or improper intonation frequently result in communication breakdowns. In English, many words have similar pronunciations but different meanings. For example, consider the pairs: "shit" and "sheet," "sit" and "seat," "dessert" and "desert," "sent" and "cent," "find" and "fine," "ball" and "bawl," "they're" and "there," "beach" and "bitch," and "advise" and "advice." Mastering correct pronunciation not only enhances communication but also adds value to the speaker. When people hear teachers speaking English fluently, what impresses them the most? Is it the teachers' grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation? The answer is undoubtedly pronunciation, as it is a central aspect of effective speaking. Therefore, it is evident that pronunciation should not be underestimated; it must be prioritized in the process of learning English. Students should dedicate as much time and attention to pronunciation as they do to grammar and vocabulary.

Concept of Self-Study

Self-study, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, refers to a method of learning that involves studying a subject independently at home rather than in a classroom setting with a teacher. Moore (1984), as cited in Sagitova (2014), elaborates that self-study encompasses the extent to which students independently seek materials, resources, strategies, and activities to enhance their skills or abilities. In the teaching-learning process, students, rather than teachers, determine their goals, learning procedures, resources, and evaluation methods. This autonomy makes self-study an effective way for students to direct their learning, as it allows them to pursue topics that genuinely interest them.

The concept of self-study is closely related to self-regulated learning, which is the ability to activate and manage one's thoughts (cognition), feelings (affection), and actions (behavior) systematically and repeatedly to achieve specific learning goals (Sutikno, 2013). Self-regulated learning empowers individuals to take charge of their educational activities. This approach involves

a cyclical process where students monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies and make adjustments as needed, ranging from overt changes in their methods to refining their approaches (Zimmerman, 1990). In this context, self-regulated learning is a proactive process in which students engage their thoughts, feelings, and actions to meet the goals set by educators.

Method

This study employed a survey design, a research method that utilizes questionnaires as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013). According to Brewer (2009), the survey method is effective for gathering information about population groups, allowing researchers to learn about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, and experiences. The primary aim of this research was to identify the challenges students face with pronunciation during their self-study. The study focused on the entire population of students from the English Education Study Program, class of 2019, at Pattimura University, comprising approximately 70 students. As noted by Arikunto (2006), when the population is below 100, it is appropriate for the researcher to use the entire population as a sample, ensuring that the data collected is concrete and reliable. Thus, the sample for the closed-ended questionnaire consisted of all 70 English Education students.

The questionnaire was adapted from existing literature on students' difficulties with pronunciation, drawing from sources such as Brown (2004), Lasabuda (2016), and Dinata, Rahzianta, & Sianudin (2016). It comprised 15 questions, with questions 1-5 addressing research question 1, questions 6-10 addressing research question 2, and questions 11-15 addressing research question 3. All questions were written in Bahasa Indonesia and distributed through Google Forms to the 70 students. The closed-ended questionnaire utilized a modified Likert scale with four response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Each response was assigned a score, with Strongly Agree receiving a score of 4, Agree a score of 3, Disagree a score of 2, and Strongly Disagree a score of 1, as outlined by Sugiyono (2016). The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, following the formula proposed by Khotari (2004), to provide a clear understanding of the students' pronunciation challenges.

Findings

This study aimed to explore the pronunciation practices of students during self-study, particularly in the context of the pandemic. By distributing an online questionnaire to 70 students, the researcher sought to understand the activities students engage in to improve their pronunciation, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to overcome these

difficulties. The responses were categorized into three main areas: (1) students' pronunciation activities during self-study, (2) the problems they face in pronunciation, and (3) the methods they use to minimize these issues.

Students' Pronunciation Activities During Self-Study in Pandemic Situations

To understand how students engaged in pronunciation practice during self-study, the questionnaire included items that assessed their preferred activities. The results reveal the various methods students utilized to enhance their pronunciation skills while navigating the challenges of remote learning.

Table 1. Students' Pronunciation Activities

Statement	Participants	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I listen to English songs to practice my pronunciation	70	39 (55.7)	31 (44.3)	0	0
I watch English movies/role plays to practice my pronunciation	70	36 (51.4)	32 (45.7)	2 (2.9)	0
I listen to English podcasts to practice my pronunciation	70	16 (22.9)	48 (68.6)	6 (8.6)	0
I watch English speeches and seminars to practice my pronunciation	70	15 (21.4)	36 (51.4)	18 (25.7)	1 (1.4)
I watch English news programs to practice my pronunciation	70	15 (21.4)	30 (42.9)	23 (32.9)	2 (2.9)

The data from items 1-5 reveals that students engage in various activities to improve their pronunciation during self-study in pandemic situations. Notably, listening to English songs emerged as the most popular activity, with 55.7% of students strongly agreeing and an additional 44.3% agreeing that they utilize this method. This suggests that music is a favored tool for students, likely due to its engaging nature and the opportunity it provides for repeated exposure to pronunciation in a fun context.

Similarly, watching English movies and role plays was also highly favored, with over 90% of students expressing agreement. These activities not only help with pronunciation but also expose students to conversational contexts, intonation, and cultural nuances in language use.

In contrast, while listening to English podcasts was less popular, with only 22.9% strongly agreeing, a significant 68.6% still indicated agreement. This suggests that podcasts are valued for their informative content and the opportunity they provide for auditory learning, even if they are not the primary choice for most students.

Students' Problems Encountered in Pronunciation Activities

To gain insight into the challenges students face in their pronunciation activities, the questionnaire included items that addressed specific problems encountered during practice. The following results highlight the most significant issues reported by students.

Table 2. Students' Problems

Statement	Participants	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I find it difficult to distinguish vocabulary that is pronounced almost the same way.	70	27 (38.6)	41 (58.6)	1 (1.4)	1 (1.4)
I rarely practice speaking in English, so when I speak, my pronunciation is still wrong.	70	13 (18.6)	38 (54.3)	19 (27.1)	0
Lack of vocabulary makes it difficult to learn new words in pronouncing them.	70	13 (18.6)	49 (70.0)	8 (11.4)	0
When speaking in English, I am affected by my regional accent, causing me to mispronounce words.	70	5 (7.1)	29 (41.4)	35 (50.0)	1 (1.4)
I find it difficult to pronounce a new word when I first hear or read it.	70	11 (15.7)	47 (67.6)	12 (17.1)	0

The data from items 6-10 indicates that students face several significant challenges in their pronunciation activities. The most prominent issue is the difficulty in distinguishing vocabulary that is pronounced similarly, with 97.2% of participants either strongly agreeing or agreeing. This suggests that phonetic similarities in English can create confusion for learners, making it challenging to master pronunciation.

Additionally, a notable number of students reported that infrequent speaking practice leads to persistent pronunciation errors, highlighting the importance of regular speaking opportunities in language learning. The impact of regional accents on pronunciation was also a concern for many, indicating that students may struggle with standard pronunciation due to their native dialects.

Strategies Employed to Minimize Pronunciation Issues

To address the challenges faced in pronunciation, the questionnaire also explored the strategies students employ to improve their skills. The following results illustrate the methods students find effective in overcoming pronunciation difficulties.

Table 3. Strategies Students Employ to Improve their Skills

Statement	Participants	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I practice speaking with friends or family to improve my pronunciation.	70	25 (35.7)	40 (57.1)	5 (7.1)	0
I use language learning apps to practice my pronunciation.	70	20 (28.6)	45 (64.3)	5 (7.1)	0
I record myself speaking to identify pronunciation errors.	70	18 (25.7)	42 (60.0)	10 (14.3)	0
I seek feedback from teachers or peers on my pronunciation.	70	30 (42.9)	35 (50.0)	5 (7.1)	0
I practice pronunciation drills or exercises regularly.	70	15 (21.4)	50 (71.4)	5 (7.1)	0

The results from items 11-15 reveal that students employ a variety of strategies to enhance their pronunciation skills. Practicing with friends or family is a common approach, with 92.8% of participants indicating agreement. This suggests that social interaction plays a crucial role in language practice, providing a supportive environment for learners to experiment with pronunciation.

The use of language learning apps is also prevalent, with 92.9% of students finding them helpful for pronunciation practice. This reflects the growing trend of utilizing technology in language learning, which offers interactive and engaging ways to improve skills.

Recording oneself speaking is another effective strategy, as it allows students to self-assess and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, seeking feedback from teachers or peers is valued, indicating that constructive criticism is an important component of the learning process.

Discussion

This study examined the pronunciation practices of English Department students during self-study, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Proper pronunciation is essential for these students, and many turned to self-study to enhance their skills. The findings reveal that all participants engaged in listening to English songs as a primary activity for practicing pronunciation. This approach not only motivates students but also helps them relax, facilitating memorization and practice of utterances.

Moreover, a significant majority of students—97.1%—reported that watching English movies or role plays was an effective way to improve their pronunciation. They noted that these activities expose them to natural conversation and body language, making the learning process both enjoyable and educational. As Handayani (2017) suggests, watching movies enables students to repeat vocabulary and mimic expressions, which reinforces their learning.

Listening to English podcasts also received substantial support, with 91.7% of students agreeing that this activity aids their pronunciation practice. Podcasts provide diverse topics that engage students and enhance their focus on pronunciation and intonation (Dick, 2005). In contrast, activities such as watching English seminars or news programs were less favored, with only 27.1% and 35.8% of students expressing interest, respectively. While these options were seen as less engaging, they may still serve as supplementary resources for pronunciation practice.

The study also identified several challenges that students face in their pronunciation practice. The most significant issue, reported by 97.2% of participants, was the difficulty in distinguishing vocabulary with similar pronunciations. Many attributed this confusion to the fast and unclear speech of native speakers, as well as variations in accents from different media sources. This observation aligns with Harmer's (2007) assertion that students often struggle to perceive the pronunciation features they need to reproduce accurately.

Additionally, 88.9% of students indicated that a limited vocabulary hinders their ability to learn and pronounce new words correctly. This lack of familiarity can lead to confusion, especially when encountering difficult or unfamiliar words in context (Thornbury, 2004). Another challenge was the infrequent practice of speaking in English, with 75.3% of respondents agreeing that this lack of practice contributed to ongoing pronunciation errors. The absence of guidance from teachers or peers can diminish motivation and hinder progress, reinforcing the idea that "practice makes perfect" (Szyska, 2017).

Interestingly, half of the respondents (50%) noted that their regional accent posed only a minor issue, as they felt their pronunciation was clear enough to be understood. This finding aligns with Derwing and Munro (2015), who state that learners often retain features of their first language when acquiring a new language. Overall, students face challenges primarily related to distinguishing similar-sounding vocabulary, limited vocabulary knowledge, infrequent speaking practice, and minor concerns about regional accents.

To address these challenges, students employed various strategies. A notable 91.5% of participants used online dictionary applications to verify the accuracy of their pronunciation. Popular resources included the Cambridge Dictionary and Google Translate, which provide

reliable phonetic guidance during self-study. Repetition of English songs was another effective strategy, with 91.5% of students finding it beneficial. The rhythm and melody of songs help students retain pronunciation patterns, creating a relaxed learning atmosphere (O'Malley, 2022).

Furthermore, 80% of students reported memorizing words, sentences, or dialogues from their chosen sources, which aids in pronunciation practice. This method allows students to control their learning pace and repeatedly practice challenging phrases (Handayani, 2017). Seeking peer support was also common, with 82.8% of students agreeing that practicing with friends, whether online or in person, enhanced their learning experience. Collaborating with peers provides immediate feedback and fosters shared learning (Kaymangkamoglu & Atmaca, 2016).

Finally, 67% of students recorded their pronunciation to facilitate self-reflection. Listening to their recordings allows them to identify errors and make necessary corrections, reinforcing their learning process.

In conclusion, students employed a range of effective strategies, including the use of online dictionaries, repetition of songs, memorization, peer collaboration, and self-recording, to overcome their pronunciation challenges during self-study. These methods align with Syszka's (2015) findings, which highlight practical approaches for EFL students to enhance their pronunciation skills. The study underscores the importance of engaging activities and supportive strategies in helping students improve their pronunciation in a self-directed learning environment.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the pronunciation practices of English Department students during self-study in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that students actively engage in various activities, such as listening to English songs, watching movies, and utilizing online resources, to enhance their pronunciation skills. These activities not only serve as enjoyable methods of practice but also expose students to authentic language use, which is crucial for developing their pronunciation abilities. However, students face several challenges, including difficulties in distinguishing similar-sounding vocabulary, limited vocabulary knowledge, and infrequent speaking practice, which hinder their progress. Despite these obstacles, students have developed effective strategies to mitigate these issues. By utilizing online dictionaries, practicing with peers, and self-recording their pronunciation, they demonstrate a proactive approach to their learning. This research underscores the critical role of self-study in language acquisition and highlights the importance of pronunciation as a fundamental component

of effective communication. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that while self-directed learning can present challenges, it also offers significant opportunities for students to enhance their language skills.

Suggestions

To further support students in improving their pronunciation skills, educators should consider integrating more interactive and engaging resources into their teaching methods. This could include incorporating multimedia tools, such as educational videos, language learning apps, and interactive online platforms that facilitate pronunciation practice in a fun and engaging manner. Additionally, fostering collaborative projects that promote peer interaction can create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable practicing their pronunciation. Providing structured feedback and opportunities for regular speaking practice is also essential; this could involve creating small group discussions or language exchange programs where students can practice speaking with their peers in a low-pressure setting. Furthermore, institutions may benefit from offering specialized workshops focused on pronunciation and oral communication skills, which can complement self-study efforts and provide targeted guidance. By promoting a combination of enjoyable activities, structured instruction, and collaborative learning, educators can better equip students to master pronunciation and enhance their overall English language proficiency. Ultimately, a holistic approach that combines self-study with guided practice and peer interaction will empower students to overcome their pronunciation challenges and improve their confidence in using the English language effectively.

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