

# FACTORS AFFECTING EFL LEARNERS IN LEARNING

## ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

By:

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### ABSTRACT

**Abdul Rosyid** The purpose of this research is to investigate some factors hindering Sundanese in learning English pronunciation. This research attempts to answer the following research questions: What are the factors affecting Sundanese in learning English pronunciation? The participants of this study are 30 students who are still in the second semester in English Education Study Program, Pakuan University. The data were collected through documentation in a form of audio recording, and in-depth interview with six representative participants. The major findings of this study are: There are three major factors affecting Sundanese in learning English pronunciation, among others are; Mother tongue influence, Age and Target language exposure (2) The difficulties faced by Sundanese in learning English pronunciation are mostly in terms of segmental features; such as vowels, consonants and diphthong, and suprasegmental features like intonation, stress and linking sound.

Keywords: Sundanese, Case Study, Factors in learning pronunciation

### ABSTRAK

Abdul Rosyid. Faktor-faktor yang Mempengaruhi orang Sunda dalam Mempelajari *Pronunciation* Bahasa Inggris. Studi Kasus di Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Pakuan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menginvestigasi faktor-faktor yang menghalangi pembelajar bahasa Inggris dalam mempelajari *pronunciation* Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini difokuskan untuk menjawab pertanyaan; (1) Apakah faktor-faktor yang menghalangi orang Sunda dalam mempelajari *pronunciation* bahasa Inggris? Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 30 mahasiswa semester 2 Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Pakuan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara analisis dokumentasi berupa rekaman suara partisipan saat membaca kata dan kalimat, serta interview perwakilan dari partisipan. Temuan dari penelitian ini antara lain; (1) Ada tiga faktor utama yang menjadi penghalang pelajar berbahasa Sunda dalam mempelajari *pronunciation* bahasa Inggris, antara lain pengaruh Bahasa Ibu, usia serta penekanan Bahasa target. (2) Kesulitan yang dimiliki pembelajar berbahasa Sunda dalam mempelajari *pronunciation* bahasa Inggris terletak pada bunyi-bunyi konsonan, diftong, vowel, intonasi, penekanan serta penggabungan bunyi.

Kata Kunci; Pembelajar berbahasa Sunda, Studi Kasus, Faktor dalam belajar *pronunciation*

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Learning English pronunciation gives some constraints for EFL learners, especially if the main goal is to achieve native-like pronunciation. Meanwhile, the importance to learn English pronunciation for EFL learners is unquestionable due to some reasons. One of the basic reasons is related to the significant role of pronunciation in supporting students' speaking performance both in the classroom and in a real life situation. The successful of oral communication using English language is determined some language aspects like vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. From those three components, pronunciation is considered giving the biggest influence in succeeding the process of communication. No matter how well the sentences are constructed and how appropriate the diction is chosen with the context of the talk, if they are mispronounced the words, the process of exchanging the message is not running well.

Ironically, even English language is one of the subjects in Indonesia given to the learners in junior and senior high school; some of them still have difficulties to pronounce English words correctly. The learners have the constraint in producing not only segmental phoneme but also suprasegmental phoneme. The biggest

problems are faced by the learners who usually communicate using their native language, for example *Bahasa Sunda*. Pakuan University is located in Bogor, so *Bahasa Sunda* is a language commonly and mostly used in terms of communication. This condition influences the pronunciation score achieved by those who speak Sunda. Most of them get very low score in this subject. Seeing this phenomena, the researcher is interested to investigate further about the factors affecting Sundanese students in learning English pronunciation. Although some researchers have got the findings related this issue in different places with different mother tongue, the writer is curious to gather the data and to reveal other findings from the writer's surroundings.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research was used for this study since the researcher wants to investigate a recent phenomenon happened in the place of the study. Any single data taken and gathered using all data collecting techniques will be analyzed based on the procedure of qualitative method and will be displayed qualitatively. In other words, descriptive method is applied in this study.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The required data were mainly taken from interview, and then triangulated by the findings from result of audio recording. Based on the previous study and scholars, there are five factors affecting and hindering pronunciation learning, among others are Attitude (Elliot: 1995; Karahan: 2007), Motivation (Marinova, et.al: 2000; Masgoret, Gardner: 2003), Mother Tongue Influence (Avery & Erlich: 1992; Thanasoulas: 2003), Age (Gilkajani: 2011; Nation & Newton: 2009) , and Teachers' Instruction on Target Language (Gilkajani: 2011; Kelly: 2000; Pennington: 2004). There were only three factors investigated in this study; they are mother tongue influence, age, and teachers' instruction on target language. The findings and discussion regarding these three factors are elicited clearly in the following subsection.

### a. Mother tongue influence

All aspects in the language related to pronunciation, such as sounds, stress and intonation of learners' native language, are sometimes applied when they learn a foreign language. In this study, the tendency of this first factor in hindering the learners in learning English pronunciation was found on their audio recording. From the first until third recording, almost all of the participants get difficulties in pronouncing consonant sounds like /v/ in *reversed*, / / in *thirtieth*,

/ð/ in *there*, / / in *sugar*, /t / in *temperatures*, and /d / in *intelligent*. The difficulty in pronouncing those sounds is caused by the unavailability of the sounds in participants' mother tongue. The participants who have *Sunda* as their mother tongue tend to produce sound /p/ or /f/ rather than /v/. It is because in *Sunda* language there is no such a sound. Those who have Java as their mother tongue tend to produce /d/ when they pronounce the word *there*. Therefore the word sounds /de / instead of /ðe /. For general, almost all of participants tend to pronounce sound /d / in *intelligent* by changing the sound with J in *Bahasa Indonesia* as *Jakarta*. Again, it is because sound /d / does not exist in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

The data is supported by the finding taken from the result of interview. One of the participants stated the following statement:

*saya ini agak kesulitan untuk menghafal phonetic, bagaimana cara pengucapannya, seperti itu. Atau misalnya recording, kalimat-kalimat yang panjang itu juga agak bingung juga gitu pak. Lingking sound, dimana harus lingking, gitu...*

I got difficulties to **memorize phonetic especially how they are pronounced**. It is also **difficult to read long sentences from recording especially in deciding where I should link the sound**.

(Interview#1)

From that statement, it can be inferred that the participant gets

difficulties in remembering how to pronounce some phonetic sounds. Besides, linking sound is another problem faced. It might be assumed that the problem appears because of the influence of L1. Since in *Bahasa Indonesia* there is no rule like linking sound, the participant viewed that point as a constraint in learning English pronunciation.

The findings explained in the previous paragraphs are actually in line with the point of view shared by Flege and Port (1981) in Nation and Newton (2009) and supported by Hewings (2004). For short, it might be brought to a close that mother tongue really influences and hinders the learners in learning foreign language, especially in the pronunciation aspect.

#### b. Age

The second factor that influences and hinders the participants in learning English pronunciation and it was found in this study is age. The age here refers to the period when the participants learn the pronunciation seriously and intensively. Based on the interview, five out of six participants said that they started learning pronunciation intensively when they came into a university. It can be seen from the following answers of the interview;

*Saya belajar Bahasa Inggris semenjak SMP kelas 1, tapi belajar pronunciation pas masuk kuliah*

I learn English Language since I was on the first grade of Junior High School. However, starting to learn pronunciation is when I enter a university.

(Interview#2)

*Sejak SD saya sudah belajar bahasa Inggris, SD, SMP Sma, Kalau untuk pronunciation saya baru kali ini belajar.*

I have learned English language since I were in elementary school. Learning pronunciation is just started lately.

(Interview#3)

*kalau untuk belajar bahasa inggris itu sendiri saya sudah mulai dari kelas 3 SD. Hingga sekarang, tapi untuk lebih mendalaminya itu saya baru mulai di perkuliahan ini, disini. Untuk pronunciation sama sekali belum pernah, baru disini sajah.*

I have started learning English Language since third grade of elementary school. But, I focus to learn the language now and also start learning pronunciation.

(Interview#4)

*Belajar bahasa Inggris sudah dari SD, Mr. Tapi Belajar pronunciation secara khusus, kayaknya gak terlalu, soalnya dari SD sampai SMA gitu kayaknya belajar bahasa Inggris itu cuman ya untuk vocabulary, gitu-gitunya ajah, kalau pronunciation sih gak terlalu fokus, fokus sih kayaknya di universitas ajah.*

Learning a language was started from Elementary school, but focusing on pronunciation is in university.

(Interview#5)

*Saya belajar bahasa Inggris sejak SD, tepatnya dari kelas 3 SD. yaa,, waktu di SD belajar English pronunciation tapi guru saya sejak SD sampai SMA itu gak fokus ke pronunciation*

*justu yang difokusin waktu saya belajar di SD itu sampai SMA yaa daftar-daftar vocabulary yang mereka ingatin, itu ajah pak, tapi pronunciation gak fokus seperti kuliah sekarang.*

I started learning English language from the third grade of elementary school. I learned pronunciation from elementary till senior high school, but it did not become a focus of the learning. **Focusing on learning pronunciation is just started in university level.**

(Interview#6)

The data from those excerpts reveals that the participants of this study started learning English when they were about eight to ten years old. According to some scholars, starting to learn a foreign language in an early age is better than adult. It means that the participants of this study were in an appropriate period called Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) to learn a foreign language. Unfortunately, they did not learn English pronunciation intensively and comprehensively when a very first time they learned English. They started doing so when they were about 18 years old, the average age of the freshmen. In other words, the participants started learning English pronunciation when they were not in a period called CPH.

Concerning the data and explanation above regarding age and learning a foreign language, especially pronunciation, the findings is actually in line with the ideas shared by Gilkajani,

Nation and Newton. Although there are also some scholars who do not in the same argument as three of them, the data above supports their idea.

Likewise, the data from the audio recording also supports the previous data gathered. Since the participants of this study started to learn pronunciation intensively in the age of 18, it can be said that they have mastered their mother tongue. This condition makes them get difficulties in pronouncing foreign language sounds which do not exist in their mother tongue. The data from the first until third audio recording show that almost all participants get difficulties in pronouncing sounds like /v/ in *reversed*, / / in *thirtieth*, /ð/ in *there*, / / in *sugar*, /t / in *temperatures*, and /d / in *intelligent*. As it is elicited in the previous subsection, the difficulties faced by the participants are because of the unavailability of those sounds in the participants' mother tongue. In this section, it is found that the age also has a role in making the participants get difficulties in pronouncing the sounds. The period of using mother tongue in daily conversation which takes very long hinders the participants to produce new foreign sounds. This is relevant to Nation and Newton who acknowledged that the most difficult point to do in learning a foreign language is implementing

phonetic sounds which do not exist in the first language or mother tongue. Thus, the data taken from the audio recording supports the conclusion that learning English pronunciation might be influenced by the age of the learners when they start learning the subject.

c. Target Language Exposure

The last factor that may influence pronunciation learning and it is also investigated in this study is target language exposure. Regarding this issue, it is better to see the following answers of the participants' interview;

*Saya belajar Bahasa Inggris semenjak SMP kelas 1, tapi belajar pronunciation pas masuk kuliah*

I learn English Language since I was on the first grade of Junior High School. However, starting to learn **pronunciation is when I enter a university.**

(Interview#7)

*Sejak SD saya sudah belajar bahasa Inggris, SD, SMP Sma, Kalau untuk pronunciation saya baru kali ini belajar.*

I have learned English language since I were in elementary school. **Learning pronunciation is just started lately.**

(Interview#8)

*kalau untuk belajar bahasa inggris itu sendiri saya sudah mulai dari kelas 3 SD. Hingga sekarang, tapi untuk lebih mendalaminya itu saya baru mulai di perkuliahan ini, disini. Untuk pronunciation sama sekali belum pernah, baru disini sajah.*

I have started learning English Language since third grade of elementary school. **But, I focus to learn the language now and also start learning pronunciation.**

(Interview#9)

*Belajar bahasa Inggris sudah dari SD, Mr. Tapi Belajar pronunciation secara khusus, kayaknya gak terlalu, soalnya dari SD sampai SMA gitu kayaknya belajar bahasa Inggris itu cuman ya untuk vocabulary, gitu-gitunya ajah, kalau pronunciation sih gak terlalu fokus, fokus sih kayaknya di universitas ajah.*

**Learning a language was started from Elementary school, but focusing on pronunciation is in university. Learning English language from elementary till senior high school was just focused on vocabulary.**

(Interview#10)

*Saya belajar bahasa Inggris sejak SD, tepatnya dari kelas 3 SD. yaa,, waktu di SD belajar English pronunciation tapi guru saya sejak SD sampai SMA itu gak fokus ke pronunciation justru yang difokusin waktu saya belajar di SD itu sampai SMA yaa daftar-daftar vocabulary yang mereka ingatin, itu ajah pak, tapi pronunciation gak fokus seperti kuliah sekarang.*

I started learning English language from the third grade of elementary school. I learned pronunciation from elementary till senior high school, but it did not become a focus of the learning. **Focusing on learning pronunciation is just started in university level.**

(Interview#11)

*Selama saya sekolah untuk dalam hal pronunciation itu tidak terlalu fokus, hanya manambah vocabulary, jadi lebih banyak itu translate, translate, translate..*

Pronunciation is a material that is not focused on to learn. **Along learning language before entering a university, the focus is only in terms of vocabulary, translating and translating.**

(Interview#12)

The excerpts above represent that their previous teachers, teachers in

Elementary, Junior and Senior High school, did not teach or did not focus on teaching them pronunciation. Their teachers only taught them vocabulary, reading, and so forth. Such condition shows that the exposure in the area of pronunciation is very limited. As a result, when they started learning English pronunciation in a university, their previous experience influences their learning. Almost all of the participants get difficulties in learning pronunciation since they do not get used to learn such a subject. Such this condition will not be faced by the participants who have previous experience or have been exposed in learning English pronunciation before they are in a university level. It is better to see the answer of interview from one of the participants;

*saya lebih fokus belajar pronunciation itu sejak saya belajar di sebuah yayasan sama dikampus. kalau tutor saya di yayasan, kita lebih pronunciation itu karena kita bertemu dengan native speaker, jadi saat kita ngucapin salah, mereka akan langsung, 'sorry, can you repeat?'. Jadi mereka akan ngulangin karena kita mengucapkan, eh salah mengucapkan kata.*

I started to focus on learning pronunciation **when I learned in a foundation and in a university. My tutor in foundation taught us pronunciation since we always met native speaker there.** So, when we mispronounce the words, the native speaker will ask us to repeat saying the intended words.

(Interview#13)

Seeing the answer, it can be said that this participant has previous experience in learning English pronunciation before entering a university. The previous teacher gave participant kind of practice on pronunciation in a form of conversation. Such this instruction, of course, gave the participant opportunity to develop her pronunciation. As a result, the process of pronunciation learning in a university will not be hindered by the factor mentioned in this section.

Supporting the data gathered for the needs of this section, the data taken from the audio recording also shows that the participants who started learning English pronunciation in a university level tend to have more difficulties than the participant who has learned English pronunciation before entering a university level. In contrast, the participant who has learned English pronunciation before entering university level can read the sentences given more intelligibly than others. It might be assumed that the instruction given by the teachers in the previous classroom settings affect pronunciation learning and achievement in the following one. In short, seeing the comparison between the participants who have and have not learned English pronunciation before learning it intensively in a university level, the

influence of exposure given by the teacher in learning English pronunciation is unquestionable.

The explanation in this section is actually in accordance with the points of view proposed by Pennington (1994) regarding the teachers' perspective about teaching pronunciation in the classroom and Gilkajani (2011) who claimed target language exposure as one of factors that may hinder pronunciation learning.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Factors Affecting Pronunciation Learning**

English becomes increasingly the language used for international communication. This condition makes the English speaker should be able to communicate effectively and understandably. In order to achieve such that goal, either native or non-native English, should be able to pronounce the words intelligibly. Brazil (1994) defines the word intelligibly as being able to make one's meaning and intentions clear to a listener. However, in a real condition, pronunciation teaching in the classroom, especially in EFL classroom is still neglected. As a result, being intelligible in communicating is quite difficult to grasp by EFL learners.

Furthermore, the achievement of teaching and learning pronunciation can be

seen not only from teaching process but also from the process of learning. Some researchers have investigated several factors that affect the process of learning pronunciation. These factors, automatically, gives the influence to the learners' ability to pronounce the words correctly and intelligibly. The factors are as follows:

#### (1) Attitude

A research conducted by Alliot (1995) discovered that the subjects' attitude toward acquiring native or near-native pronunciation was the principle variable in relation to target language pronunciation. It might be said that if the students were more concerned with the pronunciation of target language, their pronunciation achievement better than those who ignore it. It is supported by Karahan's argument (2007) that "positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation toward learning English". In other words, attitudes play a very crucial in the process of language learning, not only in learning pronunciation, since it can influence students' success or failure in their learning.

#### (2) Motivation

In the learning process, affective variables have become an important issue. The effect of this variable in learners' successful in learning process becomes some researchers feel interest to conduct

the research. One of affective variables that can give great influence in the process of learning is motivation. Marinova-Todd, et al. (2000), Masgoret & Gardner (2003), Bernaus, et al. (2004), and Gatbonton, et al. (2005) have discovered the same findings that having a personal or professional goal for learning English can influence the need and desire for achieving native-like pronunciation. In simple words, it might be said that the one who has great motivation to learn a language will be very possible to achieve the target language in every aspects, one of them is pronunciation.

### (3) Mother Tongue Influence

Avery and Ehrlich (1992) cited in Thanasoulas (2003) explain that the rule and pattern of students' native language is transferred into their second or foreign language, and it causes foreign accents. This condition is actually experienced by all foreign language learners. Sounds, rules, patterns, and intonation of their native language, sometimes, is applied when they learn a foreign language. As a result, mispronunciation is always occurred.

Avery and Ehrlich (1992) cited in Thanasoulas (2003) further elaborate that there are three ways the native language or students' mother tongue can influence the target language pronunciation; L2 or FL. The first way that can influence the

process of pronunciation learning in terms of mother tongue influence is the absence of certain sounds of target language in the students' native language. For example, sounds /t /, /ð/, and /æ/ do not exist in Indonesian language, so the students, sometimes; get difficulties in pronouncing those sounds and, as a result, it influences the process of pronunciation learning. Flege and Port (1981) cited in Nation and Newton (2009:80) shared that 'the most important interference from L1 to L2 occurs at the level of phonetic implementation'. It means that the difference in terms of phoneme or sounds in L1 and L2 will hinder the learners in learning foreign language. This view is supported by Hewings (2004:3) who said that the difference phonemes lied in the first and second language becomes one of the problems faced by any learners in learning any language. Second, when the rules of combining sounds into words in the target language are different in the learners' mother tongue, such this condition can cause the problems. The main reason of this problem is because of the different rules in combining sound in every language and those rules are very specific in each language. Third, the rule of stress and intonation in terms of words and sentences in students' native language is different with the target language. Sometimes, the students apply the stress

pattern and intonation of their native language into the target language. This situation makes the students get failed in achieving the pronunciation of target language.

#### (4) Age

Most of learners in Indonesia started learning a foreign language when they go to an Elementary school. Seeing from the average age, most of the students in Elementary school are 7 – 13 years old. This period is a very optimal period to learn a foreign language. According to Nation and Newton (2009:78), if the students started to learn and even to speak in L2 before 6 years old, there will be no accent. However, if they start doing so when they are more than 12 years old, there will be always an accent. The meaning of ‘accent’ here refers to the L1 of the participants. From the points of view it might be said that the younger is better than the older in terms of learning a foreign language. It might be caused of the influence of L1 concept in the learners brain. In line with learning English pronunciation, Gilkajani (2001:78) views that the influence of age on language acquisition and specifically pronunciation may make adults find more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation.

Another point of view regarding the influence of age in learning a foreign

language is related to the theory about Critical Period Hypothesis. The theory about CPH proposed by Lenneberg (1967) cited in Gilkajani (2001) shared that there is a biological period which ends around the age of 12. Furthermore, he claimed that after this period it becomes extremely difficult to attain complete mastery of a second language, especially pronunciation. From points of view, it leads to a conclusion that a golden age to master a foreign language, especially to gain native-like pronunciation, is before 12 years old. However, this theory was unacceptable by some scholars; two of them are Flege (1987) and Patkwocki (1990) cited in Nation and Newton (2009). They have such an intellectual explanation regarding the relationship between age and mastering foreign language especially pronunciation aspect. They viewed that the learners have learned the sound of their mother tongue and it automatically interferes their process in learning L2. They further explained that when learners got older and older, their perception about sound of their L1 is increasingly well-integrated and stable.

The different perception or intellectual explanation from some scholars regarding the impact of age in learning a foreign language especially related to pronunciation mastery brings us to a close that some scholars basically have the same agreement that starting to

learn a language in a young age is better than adult.

#### (5) Teachers' Instruction on Target

##### Language Exposure

Foreign language instruction generally focuses on four main areas of development: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pennington (1994) cited in Gilkajani (2001: 77-78) maintains that pronunciation which is typically viewed as a component of linguistic rather than conversational fluency, is often regarded with little importance in a communicatively oriented classrooms. According to Elliot (1995) cited in Gilkajani (2001: 77-78) teachers tend to view pronunciation as the least useful of the basic language skills and therefore they generally sacrifice teaching pronunciation in order to spend valuable class time on the areas of language.

#### CONCLUSION

1. There are two major conclusion in this study. There are three major factors that hinder Sundanese in learning English pronunciation, they are mother tongue influence, age and target language exposure. These three factors are interrelated one and another. Most of participants started to learn English pronunciation when they become a freshmen, around 17 to 18 years old. It means that they have been very familiar

speaking in their own mother tongue. Besides, the situation on their environment does not support them to practice English pronunciation regularly. Again, it is due to the condition that put them to keep communicating using their mother tongue with people around them.

2. In relation to the factors mentioned in advance, the participants find some difficulties in learning English pronunciation. The difficulties are in terms of segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation, among others are consonants, diphthongs, vowels, linking sounds, and intonation. Those problems are the result of the influence of their mother tongue.

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