THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: THE VOICE OF EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the obstacles faced by EFL teachers when teaching pronunciation in a multicultural classroom setting. Employing a qualitative case study design, the data were collected through observations and interviews with two senior English teachers from SMP Negeri 10 Kota Kupang. The analysis was conducted using a vivo coding. The key challenges include lack of confidence, knowledge, and training, as well as time constraints and low prioritization of pronunciation in the curriculum. The teachers expressed apprehension about making pronunciation errors, which undermined their confidence in teaching pronunciation. Additionally, they reported that inadequate knowledge of English pronunciation, contributed to their lack of confidence. Moreover, the teachers were uncertain with the significance of pronunciation in English teaching and faced difficulties in finding sufficient time to cover all required syllabus topics, leaving little room for pronunciation practice. The dearth of teaching materials and resources tailored to individual student's needs further exacerbated these challenges. The study concludes that addressing these challenges necessitates the support of educational authorities. The recommendations include providing targeted training sessions to enhance teachers' pronunciation teaching skills and incorporating pronunciation into English school assessments. By addressing these needs, educational institutions have to support EFL teachers by enhancing pronunciation instruction in multicultural classrooms.

Keywords: *pronunciation, multicultural classroom, training, educational authorities, EFL teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in effective communication (Burri & Baker, 2020; Berry, 2021; Shafwati, 2022). The ability of students to articulate English words accurately greatly contributes to the development of their speaking proficiency (Priya and Kumar, 2020). However, cultural and linguistic diversity significantly influences the way English pronunciation is taught in educational settings (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). In fact, English classrooms often bring together students and educators from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, it is essential to carefully consider the implications of this diversity on the teaching of English pronunciation. As a result, Instructors face significant challenges when

instructing English pronunciation in such diverse environments, and these challenges should not be disregarded as they hold utmost importance.

In a multicultural classroom context, like in Timor, where Indonesian, Kupang Malay, and various local languages from different regions of Timor such as Roti, Alor, Timorese, Helong, Amarasian, and Dawan are widely spoken, students bring a rich diversity of culture and language. In fact, these diverse backgrounds inherently influence their English pronunciation. EFL students may face challenges in adapting their pronunciation to meet the standards of English. The differences in accents, intonation, and vowel patterns are the problems that teachers need to overcome. Therefore, educational institutions are encouraged to incorporate standardized English pronunciation instruction in the classroom to familiarize students with the principles of standard pronunciation. However, the actual challenges arising from cultural and linguistic diversity in multicultural classrooms often differ from initial expectations.

Teaching is widely acknowledged as one of the most demanding and challenging professions (Bardach & Klassen, 2020). In particular, the effective teaching of Standard English pronunciation requires employing appropriate approaches to facilitate students' comprehension and assimilation of pronunciation concepts. According to Yürük, (2020), teachers need to devise engaging and interactive strategies that assist students in acquiring precise pronunciation skills. Additionally, it is crucial to tailor the teaching style to accommodate the individual needs and characteristics of students, given the diverse range of comprehension and pronunciation levels among them (Chetty et al. 2019)

Furthermore, the objective and consistent assessment of pronunciation poses a significant challenge, as pointed out by Rogerson-Revell (2021), he suggests that accurate evaluation of students' pronunciation proficiency necessitates the utilization of effective and consistent assessment tools. Teachers should consider employing clear and specific assessment rubrics that measure students' progress in pronunciation. Moreover, as highlighted by Chen et al, (2020) student motivation plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation of Standard English pronunciation teaching. Teaching that emphasizes correct pronunciation demands consistency and perseverance from students. However, some students may encounter frustration or boredom during the repetitive process of learning pronunciation. Creating a supportive, motivating, and

enjoyable classroom atmosphere poses a challenge for teachers. Therefore, they must discover effective methods to sustain students' interest and motivation in consistently learning English pronunciation (Ulfa & Bania, 2019).

Despite teachers' sincere efforts to foster an inclusive environment and facilitate effective instruction, the realities encountered in the classroom are often more complex than expected. Therefore, the teaching of Standard English pronunciation requires teachers to reflect on their instructional standards within the classroom (Darcy, 2018; Rasati, 2020), considering that teachers themselves come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As pointed out by Agrawal & McNair (2021), issues related to pronunciation and accent frequently intersect with complex socio-cultural matters, such as race and identity, within the classroom.

Several studies have shed light on the challenges encountered by English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in their classroom pedagogy, specifically in English pronunciation classes (Chee & Tan, 2021; Chusna, 2012; Gilakjani, & Sabouri, 2016; Jahan, 2011). However, there is a lack of extensive research on the challenges of teaching pronunciation in multicultural classrooms. This gap is particularly evident in the context of West Timor, where both teachers and students come from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, this study aims to achieve two main objectives: 1) explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching Standard English pronunciation in multicultural classrooms, and 2) investigate the solutions developed to overcome these challenges. It is hoped that this research will serve as a valuable resource for primary and secondary school teachers, offering guidance for the effective teaching of Standard English pronunciation in multicultural classroom settings.

METHOD

This study employed a case study design within a qualitative methodology. According to Creswell (2013) qualitative method is used to explore the interpretations that the individuals or communities make regarding social or human concerns. The researcher used observation and interview to gather data on the challenges faced by teachers in integrating pronunciation practice into their teaching and learning processes. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using vivo

coding. Saldana (2013) defines "vivo coding as the process of assigning codes to words or short phrases from the actual language used in the qualitative data.

This research was conducted in SMP Negeri 10 Kota Kupang due to its reputation as prominent educational institution. It attracts many students from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and its convenient accessibility. The participants in this study were two senior English teachers from SMP Negeri 10 Kota Kupang. The selection of these individuals was based on multiple factors, including their status as permanent civil servant teachers, the endorsement provided by the school principal, their voluntary willingness to participate in the research endeavor, and their extensive experience as senior English teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study produced valuable findings in response to the two research questions: (1) identifying the challenges faced by teachers in teaching Standard English pronunciation in multicultural classrooms, and (2) examining the solutions implemented to overcome these challenges. Based on the result of thematic analysis, four challenges of teaching English pronunciation emerged, namely, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and training, time constraint, less priority. Further each of the following challenges was followed by the solutions to cope with those challenges done by the two EFL teachers in SMPN 10 Kota Kupang.

Lack of confidence

Speaking instruction was mandated for EFL teachers at SMP Negeri 10 Kota Kupang in addition to pronunciation sessions during the English teaching and learning process. To properly instruct the class, they had to modify their pronunciation knowledge in response to this demand. Unfortunately, their ignorance of pronunciation and their poor teaching methods caused them to overlook pronunciation instruction in the classroom. Concerning the initial facet of pronunciation teaching issues, study participant 2 acknowledged that she lacked confidence in her ability to teach pronunciation due to her lack of familiarity with its characteristics, as seen by the following quote.

> "To be honest, one of the hardest things when it comes to teaching and mastering pronunciation to my students is deciphering the phonetic symbols. It can be difficult because you have to prepare the right phonetic sign spelling in order to pronounce the

words and sentences to my students. I'm from Timor, and I've noticed that my accent makes it difficult for me to pronounce several sounds correctly. Yes, I was a little shy. [Teacher 1]

The teacher used videos from YouTube and other internet platforms, which they believed were quicker and easier to use, especially when it came to accurately pronouncing words, phrases and sentences.

Lack of knowledge and training

A major obstacle to teaching pronunciation is not just a lack of confidence but also a lack of understanding about the subject. The mother tongue of the ESL teachers may have an impact on this issue. Some educators struggle to talk with the appropriate emphasis and intonation, which affects how they educate in the classroom (Egwuogu, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative that language teachers prepare in order to guarantee that pupils understand and learn complicated language abilities; this calls for careful planning and preparation. Furthermore, research has shown that teachers are not proficient in teaching pronunciation to students. Fraser (2000), for instance, clarified that while the majority of ESL teachers are not opposed to teaching pronunciation, they are genuinely unsure of how best to assist pupils in acquiring the skill. In a similar vein, Couper (2017) found that uncertainty about what and how to teach in the classroom was caused by a lack of prior knowledge and training in pronunciation teaching.

> The reason I don't feel confident in my ability to teach pronunciation in my class is, I believe, that I haven't had enough training on how to teach English, specifically pronunciation. Lacking adequate training on effective classroom teaching methods, the majority of teacher training offered by Kupang's local government—in this case, the Department of Education—focuses mainly on curriculum implementation, particularly lesson plan formulation training. [Teacher 2]

> I attended a few outside trainings, but they weren't particularly focused on teaching pronunciation. This particular program focuses on creating lesson plans. [Teacher 1]

In order to address this problem, the teachers independently researched online pronunciation exercises with their teaching assistant.

> Until now, as far as I can recall, I haven't attended any types of pronunciation lecture or workshop. [Teacher 2]

As evidenced by the aforementioned interview experts, one of the teachers expressed discomfort in conducting pronunciation exercises due to a lack of understanding regarding the potential benefit of such practice. It became evident to the teachers that improving their own proficiency in pronunciation was imperative to enhance their ability to teach this skill. However, the institution had to independently implement measures to improve their level of pronunciation practice literacy, as they lacked training programs dedicated to pronunciation practice.

Time constraint

Regarding the third aspect of challenges in teaching pronunciation, it was clear that both EFL teachers face difficulties due to time consuming process. The teachers were occupied with teaching students to prepare for tests, which resulted in their sole focusing on teaching grammar. In fact, in the school curriculum, pronunciation was considered less important compared to other subjects. This is why they prioritized teaching grammar over speaking and pronunciation.

> Actually, one of the most challenging aspects of teaching pronunciation is the preparation phase. It is incredibly time consuming because not only do I have to handle administrative tasks as a teacher, but also need to ensure that my students are prepared to pass the grammar test. [Teacher 2]

> In term of preparation, I would say that it is not easy because it takes a long time to gather the necessary materials. I have to ensure that the lesson materials align with the pronunciation topic, and I have to find perfect materials to support this specific aspect from my students. On the other hand, if I am teaching different topic such as grammar or reading, I do not need to prepare as much since I already have resources in my lesson plan bank. [Teacher 1]

To address this issue, the teachers used online platforms like Kahoot and Quizizz.

> I believed these platforms were convenient and efficient for creating and implementing pronunciation lessons. [Teacher 2]

Furthermore, the observation revealed that both EFL teachers consistently followed similar lesson plans and utilized the same teaching materials. As a result, they did not need to create new teaching activities. Based on the classroom observations, teacher 1 frequently rely on previously materials, while teacher 2 primarily focused on grammar. The interviews and observations indicated that developing the pronunciation materials was perceived as a time-

consuming process, as the teachers had to create new materials specifically for pronunciation instruction Therefore avoiding pronunciation practice altogether could serve as an alternative solution for the teachers.

Less priority

Despite the important of good pronunciation for effective communication, schools still do not prioritize the teaching of pronunciation (Machackov, 2012). When the teachers find it is challenging to dedicate an entire lesson to pronunciation practice, they treat it as an optional topic. In addition, the goal of learning English is often limited to passing an examination, which does not include an oral pronunciation test. Many schools place greater emphasis on academic achievement rather than the actual learning and skills acquisition of students. When students are not made aware of the important of pronunciation, it can negatively impact the teaching of pronunciation in the classroom. If students are not interested in learning, teachers may feel less motivated to prioritize pronunciation instruction. As a result, teachers tend to focus more on the components that will be tested in the examination, simply training students to obtain a good grade in English.

> I rarely teach pronunciation because it is not tested in Englsih school exam. These exams only focus on grammar and reading skills. [Teacher 2]

> Pronunciation is not mentioned specifically in the school syllabus. That is why I never teach it to my students. If I teach pronunciation lessons, I would simply say words or sentences and have the students repeat after me. In truth, I am not confident in my own pronunciation skills, so I tend to skip this topic. [Teacher 1]

The quotes above reveal that the teachers have neglected teaching pronunciation due to some reasons such as it is not being tested in school exams, lack of confidence, and it is not appearing in the English school syllabus. These cases have led teachers to ignore teaching pronunciation. The findings from the interviews align with the observations indicated that the two EFL teachers disregarding teaching pronunciation but mainly concentrated on teaching grammar and reading.

Referring to the findings of the first objective of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that the two EFL lecturers at SMPN 10 Kota Kupang faced several challenges in assessing their

students in pronunciation class. This is because they rarely incorporated pronunciation into their English lessons. They admitted that they did not consider pronunciation to be as important as other subjects. Additionally, they lacked training programs, such as workshops and seminars, on teaching pronunciation from the institution. This led to a sense of uneasiness and discomfort teaching pronunciation, which is relevant to the previous studies about teachers feel uncomfortable teaching pronunciation in their classes (Murphy, 2014; Couper, 2017). The participants encountered several hindrances, including the low priority given to pronunciation and time constraints. These technical problems were related to the school curriculum, which prioritized grammar teaching, and the test school system, which caused teachers to neglect pronunciation in their teaching activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found the school curriculum and test system contributes to the neglect of pronunciation lessons in the teaching process (Ahmad, 2019; Gilakjani, 2011). Consequently, teachers became less enthusiastic about teaching pronunciation. These problems also led to another hindrance in terms of teachers' teaching competencies.

CONCLUSION

When teaching pronunciation in schools, the teachers faced several challenges included a lack of confidence, knowledge, and training, as well as time constraints and a lower priority given to pronunciation. The teachers expressed fear of making mistakes when pronouncing words, which affected their confidence in teaching pronunciation to their students. Furthermore, the teachers themselves reported lacking confidence in pronouncing certain words, indicating a lack of knowledge in English pronunciation. Teachers were unsure whether pronunciation was considered a priority in teaching English to students. They also reported struggling with limited time to cover all the required topics in the syllabus. Additionally, the teachers found a lack of teaching materials and resources for pronunciation due to the individual differences and needs of each student. These challenges were the main obstacles faced by the teachers when trying to teach pronunciation to students during their practical teaching at school. As a final point, it is recommended that authorities in primary educational institutions be aware of the challenges encountered by teachers when teaching pronunciation. By providing sufficient support, similar challenges can be prevented. The educational department should conduct training sessions

focused on teaching pronunciation so that teachers become familiar with effective techniques. Additionally, the English school tests should include pronunciation as a component, alongside grammar and reading skills.

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