

The Analysis of Students Difficulties in Pronouncing German Language

Suryawati Br Lumbantoruan¹ Rahel Indah Yemima Purba² Ningsi Warni Hutagalung³
Mariana Br Sihaloho⁴ Fitri Ervina Tarigan⁵

Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4,5}

Email: suryawati.2232432005@mhs.unimed.ac.id¹ rachellpurba2003@gmail.com²
ningsi.2233132032@mhs.unimed.ac.id³ mariana.2233132042@mhs.unimed.ac.id⁴

Abstract

Pronunciation is an important aspect of learning a new language because it helps learners speak clearly and communicate effectively. Many students experience difficulties in pronouncing German words because the sound system of their first language differs from that of German. This study aims to analyze the difficulties faced by students in pronouncing German words and to identify the factors that cause these difficulties. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research method. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with students, and pronunciation tests. The collected data were then analyzed to identify common pronunciation errors and the factors that influence students' ability to pronounce German words accurately. The results show that students experience several challenges in pronouncing German words, particularly sounds that do not exist in their native language. The most common difficulties include pronouncing German consonant clusters, producing umlaut vowels such as ä, ö, and ü, and articulating specific sounds such as ch, r, and z. In addition, factors such as the influence of students' first language, limited practice opportunities, low speaking confidence, and insufficient exposure to authentic German speech also contribute to these difficulties. Overall, students' pronunciation difficulties arise from both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Therefore, teachers should provide more opportunities for pronunciation practice, listening activities, and interactive speaking exercises to help students improve their pronunciation and communicate more effectively in German.

Keywords: German Phonetics, German Pronunciation, Pronunciation Challenges, Pronunciation Difficulties, Second Language Learning



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INTRODUCTION

To avoid confusion, here are the definitions of some important terms used in this paper. Pronunciation refers to the way words are spoken, including the sounds, stress, and intonation patterns used in speech. According to Kelly (2000), pronunciation is an essential component of language learning because it affects how clearly a speaker can communicate with others. German is a Germanic language spoken in several countries, including Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland. Students often face difficulties when trying to pronounce German words correctly because some sounds do not exist in their native language. Gilakjani (2016) states that pronunciation plays a very important role in communication because incorrect pronunciation may cause misunderstandings. Students' difficulties refer to the problems learners face when trying to pronounce German sounds correctly. According to Fraser (2000), learners often struggle with pronunciation due to differences between their first language and the target language. These definitions help clarify that this study focuses on the difficulties students face in pronouncing German words.

How you say words is very important when learning a language because it directly influences how well you can communicate. Even if someone knows a lot about grammar and words, if they say them the wrong way, it can be hard for others to understand them. So, how you say words is very important when you're learning to speak well. For students who are

learning German as a second language, saying the words correctly can be really hard. German has some sounds that might not be in the learners' own language. For example, sounds like /ch/, /ö/, /ü/, and some combinations of consonants can be hard to say correctly. German also has special rules about how to stress words and how to speak with certain tones, which are different from other languages. Because of these differences, many students find it hard to say German words correctly. It's important for teachers and students to understand these challenges so they can create better ways to teach and learn how to pronounce words correctly. Many scholars have discussed the importance of learning correct pronunciation in a foreign language. Harmer (2007) explains that pronunciation is an important part of speaking skills because it helps listeners understand the speaker clearly.

Previous studies have shown that students often experience difficulties in pronouncing foreign languages. Gilakjani (2016) found that pronunciation problems are commonly caused by differences between learners' native language and the target language. These differences can influence how learners produce certain sounds. In addition, Fraser (2000) states that lack of exposure to the target language and insufficient pronunciation training can also cause pronunciation difficulties. Environmental factors and learning experiences can influence how well students pronounce words in a foreign language. These previous studies are related to this research because they show that pronunciation difficulties are common among language learners. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the difficulties students face in pronouncing German words. The goal of this paper is to look at the challenges students have when saying German words. This study looks to find out the usual pronunciation issues students face and to learn what causes these challenges. The study wants to give teachers helpful information so they can create better ways to teach German pronunciation to students. This study looks specifically at the challenges students face when trying to pronounce the German language. It doesn't look at other parts of learning English like grammar, word knowledge, or writing abilities. The study is based on a particular group of students and might not show how all German learners experience things. So, the results might not apply to all situations where people are learning German. This paper is organized into several sections. The introduction presents the background of the study, definitions of key terms, previous studies, the purpose of the research, and its limitations. The literature review discusses the theoretical background related to speaking ability and the psychological factors influencing pronunciation.

Literatur Review

Theoretical Framework of Speaking Ability

Speaking ability is one of the most important skills in language learning because it enables learners to convey ideas and information effectively. According to Harmer (2007), speaking is a productive skill that allows learners to express their thoughts and interact with others in communication. In addition, Brown (2004) states that speaking ability includes several aspects such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. These components help learners deliver their messages clearly and effectively. Pronunciation also plays an important role in speaking ability. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) explain that pronunciation is an essential element of communicative competence because errors in pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings in communication. Therefore, students need regular practice, listening activities, and guidance from teachers to improve their pronunciation skills, especially when learning a foreign language such as German. Psychological and environmental factors can have an important influence on students' ability to pronounce words correctly. According to Brown (2004), psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety can affect students' performance in learning a foreign language. Students who experience anxiety or lack confidence often hesitate to speak, which reduces their opportunities to practice pronunciation.

In addition, environmental factors also play an important role in language learning. Harmer (2007) states that exposure to the target language, teaching methods, and the learning environment can influence the development of students' speaking and pronunciation abilities. Students who frequently hear and use the foreign language will find it easier to improve their pronunciation skills. Therefore, creating a supportive learning environment and providing regular opportunities to speak can help students overcome difficulties in pronunciation.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data in this study were collected through several steps. First, the researcher determined the research participants, namely second-semester students of the German Language Education study program. Second, the researcher prepared the research instrument in the form of a questionnaire. Third, the researcher conducted classroom observations during German speaking lessons to identify the strategies used by students and the difficulties they experienced. Fourth, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to several students to obtain more in-depth information about their experiences, learning strategies, and challenges in speaking German. Finally, all collected data were recorded and documented for further analysis. The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014). The analysis involved three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher identified and categorized students' pronunciation errors based on German sound patterns and pronunciation rules. The findings were then interpreted to determine the common difficulties experienced by students in speaking German.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following data presents the findings from a questionnaire distributed to 15 students regarding their difficulties in pronouncing German. The results are categorized based on students' perceptions of their abilities, phonetic challenges, and the learning environment.

Table 1. Survey Results of Students' Perceptions on German Pronunciation (N=15)

No	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	Difficulty in pronouncing certain German sounds	0	26.7	46.7	40.0	0
2	Need more speaking practice to improve	6.7	0	13.3	40.0	46.7
3	Difficulty in pronouncing umlaut sounds (ä, ö, ü)	0	21.4	50.0	28.6	0
4	Audio/video media help improve pronunciation	6.7	0	6.7	60.0	33.3
5	Native speakers' speed makes imitation difficult	6.7	0	13.3	66.7	13.3
6	Rare practice outside the classroom	6.7	13.3	20.0	46.7	13.3
7	Lecturer's explanation helps understanding	0	0	33.3	53.3	13.3
8	German is more difficult than other languages	0	33.3	53.3	13.3	0
9	Difficulty in pronouncing the "ch" sound	0	46.7	40.0	20.0	0
10	Often make mistakes when speaking	0	6.7	53.3	40.0	0

Notes: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

Discussions

Based on the findings in Table 1, the analysis reveals several critical themes regarding the pronunciation challenges faced by second-semester students:

1. **The Gap Between Awareness and Practice.** There is a significant awareness among students regarding the importance of practice. Statement 2 shows that 86.7\% of students agree that they need more speaking practice. However, this awareness does not translate into consistent action, as 60\% of respondents admitted to rarely practicing outside the classroom (Statement 6). As noted by Fraser (2000), a lack of exposure and insufficient training are primary causes of pronunciation difficulties.
2. **Impact of Native Speaker Velocity.** External factors, particularly the speed of native speech, pose a substantial barrier. 80\% of students (Statement 5) found that the natural velocity of native speakers makes imitation difficult. This aligns with Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), who emphasize that pronunciation is a key element of communicative competence; if students cannot parse fast-paced speech, their ability to reproduce those sounds accurately is hindered.
3. **Specific Phonetic Challenges vs. General Fluency.** While the literature suggests that sounds like "ch" and Umlauts (ä, ö, ü) are typically difficult, the survey data shows a high percentage of "Neutral" and "Disagree" responses for these specific items (Statements 3 and 9). For example, 46.7\% of students disagreed that the "ch" sound was difficult. This suggests that for these specific respondents, the challenge may lie more in overall fluency and sentence-level stress rather than individual phonetic segments.
4. **The Role of Instructional Support.** The data highlights the vital role of pedagogical tools. 93.3\% of students agreed that audio and video media are helpful (Statement 4), and 66.6\% felt that the lecturer's explanations were essential for their understanding (Statement 7). This confirms Harmer's (2007) theory that a supportive learning environment and effective teaching methods are crucial for developing pronunciation skills. In summary, while students do not necessarily view German as more difficult than other languages (Statement 8), their progress is hindered by linguistic factors like native speech speed and non-linguistic factors such as limited independent practice.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully achieved its aim of identifying the primary pronunciation difficulties faced by second-semester German students. The results clearly indicate that while students possess a high awareness of their need for practice, external factors such as native speaker velocity and a lack of autonomous practice remain significant hurdles. The implication of this research is that German language instruction should incorporate more adjustable-speed audio materials and encourage students to engage in independent phonetic drills outside the classroom. Interestingly, a new insight from this study is that students do not find specific sounds like "ch" or "umlauts" as difficult as previously assumed in general literature; rather, they struggle with the overall rhythm and speed of speech. In summary, the main obstacles are a lack of practice and the fast pace of native speech, while lecturer guidance is seen as a vital support. Compared to similar studies, these findings confirm that psychological factors like confidence play a major role in pronunciation success. However, this study is limited by its small sample size of 15 respondents, and future research should involve a larger group of participants to gain broader insights. As Kelly (2000) stated, "Pronunciation is the Cinderella of language teaching," often neglected but essential for true communication.

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