Indonesian EFL Students' Difficulties in Recognizing English Letters

by Toni Indrayadi

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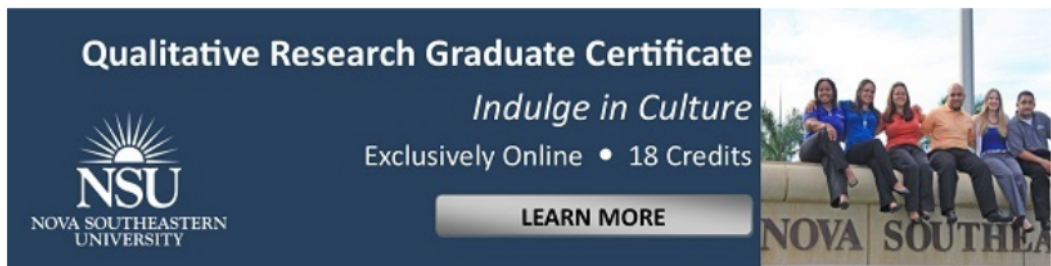*Jambi University, Indonesia*, heltyasafri@unja.ac.id

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the difficulties of Indonesian undergraduate students in recognizing English letters at one public Islamic higher education institution in Jambi Province, Indonesia as the basis for designing pronunciation teaching strategies for English lecturers. Using a qualitative methodology that attempts to investigate and understand human issues in a particular group (Harrison et al., 2017), 4 participants were interviewed. through semi-structured interview questions. The interviews were analyzed and compared along four dimensions of EFL English pronunciation mastery factors: motivation, attitude, first language pronunciation interference, and phonetic ability. The findings of this study provide evidence for lecturers on the importance of introducing pronunciation class in the English study program in the earlier years of study to improve students' English pronunciation ability. Implication and limitation of research are provided.

Keywords

EFL University Students, English Letters

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the difficulties of Indonesian undergraduate students in recognizing English letters at one public Islamic higher education institution in Jambi Province, Indonesia as the basis for designing pronunciation teaching strategies for English lecturers. Using a qualitative methodology that attempts to investigate and understand human issues in a particular group (Harrison et al., 2017), 4 participants were interviewed. through semi-structured interview questions. The interviews were analyzed and compared along four dimensions of EFL English pronunciation mastery factors: motivation, attitude, first language pronunciation interference, and phonetic ability. The findings of this study provide evidence for lecturers on the importance of introducing pronunciation class in the English study program in the earlier years of study to improve students' English pronunciation ability. Implication and limitation of research are provided.

Keywords: EFL university students, English letters

Introduction

All English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) learners in the world would hope to be able to pronounce English correctly like native speakers of English. Having correct pronunciation is important as it can lead to more efficient communication (Kaharuddin & Ahmad, 2018; Zhang, 2009) and support personal and professional development in speaking (Gilakjani, 2012; Kosasih, 2017; Poposka, 2016; Rivas et al., 2011). However, many learners have difficulties in producing correct English pronunciation, including Indonesian learners. According to Bui (2016), among the reasons why learning English pronunciation is difficult is the strangeness of English phonetics for EFL learners.

Riswanto and Haryanto (2012), revealed that age, phonetic ability, lack of practice, and attitude are factors that make it difficult for Indonesian students to pronounce English. Moreover, Andi-Pallawa and Alam (2013) argued that different sound systems of Indonesian with English as the target language presents a difficulty factor for Indonesian students in recognizing English letters and sounds. Yusriati and Hasibuan (2019) who focused their research on silent letters argued that English silent letters create problems for EFL learners and make the pronunciation even more difficult because the spelling and its pronunciation do not match. The learners tend to generalize the foreign language or second language sounds based on their mother tongue. For example, Indonesian students pronounce the English silent letter [k] in *know* in the same way as they pronounce the first letter of Indonesia consonant [k] in *kaki* without the absence of the /k/ sound. The mispronunciation of the silent consonant letter

above could be the result of the over-practice of the first language and a process of fossilization (Hasan, 2014). Fossilization refers to repetition of incorrect phonetics of a foreign language (Wei, 2008). Ellis (1985) further explained that fossilization is when a certain feature of his interlanguage has the same form as that of target language, then the fossilization of correct forms will take place. In conrast, when the feature is different, then the fossilization of errors form will occur.

Context of the Study

Our study was focused on exploring the students' difficulties in recognizing English consonant silent letters. The consonants are categorized in terms of their manner and place of articulation based on Roach's (2009) classification: firstly is plosive; bilabial [p] and [b], alveolar [t] and [d], and velar plosive [k] and [g]; second, fricative; alveolar [s] and glotal [h]; third, nasal, bilabial [m] and alveolar [n]; and fourth, approximant, lateral [l], post-alveolar [r], and velar [w].

Plosive is produced completely by stopping the airflow through the oral cavity (McMahon, 2002). [p] and [b] are bilabial plosives that are produced by pressing the lips together. [p] sometime absent in the initial and middle of words, for example, psychological /saɪkə'lɒdʒɪkl/, pneumonia /nju:'məʊniə/, however [b] only absent in the final of the words, for example cupboard /'kʌbəd/, receipt /rɪ'si:t/, bomb /bɒm/, and thumb /θʌm/. Consonants [t] and [d] are alveolar plosives. These two consonants are produced when the tongue blade touches the alveolar ridge. In several words, both [t] and [d] are silent in the middle, for example, listen /lɪsən/, handkerchief /'hæŋkətʃif/, and Wednesday /'wenzdeɪ/. Finally, [k] and [g] are velar plosive that are produced by pressing the back of the tongue against the hard palate. The velar plosive [k] usually absent in the initial of words, for example, knife /naɪf/, knock /nɒk/, and [g] is in the initial and middle of the words, for example gnome /nəʊm/, gnash /næʃ/, foreign /'fɒrən/, and sovereign /'sɒvrɪn/.

The result of two articulators being in close with each other, and the air passes between them are called fricative, however, [s] and [h] belong to a different manner of articulation. [s] is alveolar fricative that has the same place of articulation as [t] and [d] in which the air escapes through a narrow chanel of the mouth (Roach, 2009). It is the result of two articulators being in close with each other, and the air passes between them. This alveolar fricative is usually absent in the middle and final of the English words, for example, island /'aɪlənd/, aisle /aɪl/, debris /debri:/. However, [h] is glotal fricative that is produced by moving the vocal folds from wide apart to close together (Roach, 2009). This consonant is mostly absentin the initial position of the words that are followed by certain vowels in English, for example, heir /eə/, herbivore /'hɜ:bɪvɔ:/, honest /'ɒnɪst/, what /wɒt/, and when /wen/.

The consonant which is produced by involving complete closure in the mouth by lowering the back of the velum to allow airflow escape through the nose refers to nasal (Hayes, 2009). [m] is bilabial nasal and [n] is alveolar nasal. These two nasal consonants are produced quite similarly. [m] is produced by escaping air through the nose totally or air does not pass through the mouth. This bilabial nasal is only absent at the beginning of English words for example mnemonic /nɪ'mɒnɪk/. However, [n] is a different matter, it is produced by no escaping the air through thenose totally. This alveolar nasal is usually absent in the middle and final of the English words, for example, government /'gʌvənmənt/, column /'kɒləm/, damn /dæm/.

[l], [r],and [w] are approximants. [l] is a lateral approximant that is made by using the tongue and alveolar ridge. O'Connor (1980) briefly stated that [l] is formed by not contacting the side of the tongue with the side of the palate to escape the air flow between them.[l] comes in two variations, a clear [l] and a dark [l] which are in allophonic relation, but the variations do not change the meaning of the words (Vančová, 2016). [l] is not pronounced in the middle

position of English words with certain conditions, for example, calm /kɑːm/, and half */haːf/*. However, [r] is a post-alveolar approximant that is produced by approaching the tip of the tongue to the alveolar as the way to produce [t] or [d], but never actually makes contact with any part of the roof of the mouth (Roach, 2009). These consonant silent letters perhaps only occur in standard British English pronunciation, not in American English, for example, car /kɑː/, far /fɑː/, card /*kɑːd*/, fork /fɔːk/, father /ˈfɑːðə/, and where /ˈweə/. [w] is velar approximant. It is pronounced like a vowel. This means that it is phonetically like vowels but phonologically like consonants (Roach, 2009). There is an interference of vowel [u] in producing [w] in English. It is pronounced without any real obstacle in the air stream, the articulating organs (lips) come to proximity, but they never touch (Vančová, 2016). Similarly, /w/ is produced by approximating the lips, though not enough to cause friction or obstruct the air-flow, and the back of the tongue is also bunched up (McMahon, 2002). Bilabial glide /w/ is absent at the beginning, middle, and final parts of the English words, for example, wrap /ræp/, write /raɪt/, answer /ˈɑːnsə/, hawk /ˈhɔːk/, raw /ˈrɔː/, and draw /ˈdrɔː/.

Several studies have been conducted related to pronunciation difficulty of EFL learners (Abugohar & Yunus, 2018; Bardakçi, 2015; Ercan, 2018; Keshavarz, 2017; Poposka, 2016; Shak et al., 2016; Sumbayak, 2009). These studies, however, were only concerned with identifying the types of mispronunciation EFL learners have in general.

Literature Review

To date, several studies have been conducted to investigate pronunciation difficulties encountered by EFL learners (Chaira, 2015; Donal, 2016; Mathew, 1998; Tambunsaribu & Simatupang, 2021; Utami, 2020). These previous studies allow us to gain a better understanding of the experience in pronouncing unrecognizable English phonetic sounds. Yet, most of these studies have been conducted outside of Indonesia with only five studies conducted in Indonesia to the best of our knowledge. No research to date has been done on Indonesia EFL learners in recognizing English consonant silent letters bilabial plosive [p] and [b], alveolar plosive [t] and [d], velar plosive [k] and [g], alveolar fricative [s], glotal fricative [h], bilabial nasal [m], alveolar nasal [n], lateral approximant [l], post-alveolar approximant [r], and velar approximant [w].

Chaira (2015) conducted the research entitled "Inference of First Language in Pronunciation of English Sugmental Sounds" by classifying and comparing Indonesian pronunciation as the participants' first language with English pronunciation. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design by collecting the data from the students of an Islamic Boarding School in Aceh, Indonesia. She found that participants' first language can cause English phononological errors, especially [ph], [th], [kh], [f] for the grapheme "ph," [v], [θ], [ð], [z] for the grapheme "s," [ʃ], [ks] for grapheme "x," [iː], [uː], [æ], and [e].

Donal (2016) investigated students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs involving 35 students at the University of Pasir Pengaraian, Riau Province, Indonesia. The study employed mixed methods and the data were collected using a pronunciation test and classroom observation to describe the factors that influence students' difficulties. The results showed that the English diphthong [aʊ] was the most difficult sound pronounced by the students. From the observation, the researcher suggested that the factors that affected students' problems were mother tongue intrusion, students' lack of knowledge of English sound systems, and unsuccessful usage of borrowed English words.

Mathew (1998) conducted research on the mispronunciations of English consonants by Indonesian EFL learners. The study involved a total of 24 EFL learners from three different first language groups (Indonesian, Gayo, and Acehnese) using an experimental design. The study aimed to describe errors made by each first language group. The data were collected

through an aural discrimination test, a word repetition test, a reading passage test, and interviews. The findings showed patterns of errors in the realization of certain English phonemes. The errors made by the students were mainly limited to final stops and sibilants and initial and final affricates and inter-dentals. Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that transfer and developmental factors, spelling interference, learning and communication strategies, and interaction of these all factors were attributed to the mispronunciations.

A more recent study was undertaken by Tambunsaribu and Simatupang (2021) to investigate the errors of English pronunciation among Indonesian university students. Using a case study methodology, the data were collected from 50 students at a university in Jakarta. The data were obtained through students' talk when they introduced themselves in the first meeting of an English class. The researchers typed all the mispronounced words and recorded the students' voices. The researchers then made a list of the mispronounced words and asked the participants again to pronounce them in front of the class in the following meeting. The participants were also interviewed to explore the reasons for their difficulties. The findings revealed that the students faced many types of problems in pronouncing English words. The students were confused about pronouncing some English words because of the inconsistency of the pronunciation of vowel letters, vowel-letter combinations, silent letters, and the sounds of two or three combinations of consonant letters. The interview results showed that there are several reasons why the students have problems pronouncing the English words although they have learned English for more than 12 years. Among the reasons are lack of training on pronunciation and English speaking and reading-aloud practice, more grammar-oriented and teacher-centred English instruction.

Research entitled "EFL Learner's Pronunciation Problems was conducted by Utami (2020) who analyzed a Chinese post graduate student problem in pronunciation /ð/, /θ/, /r/, and /l/ sounds through case study. The participant began to study English as a compulsary subject from primary school until university. Using interview, the data of her study werecollected to provide information related to /ð/, /θ/, /r/, and /l/ sounds. Her study found that the Chinese post graduate studentfaced difficulty in pronouncing /ð/, /θ/, /r/, and /l/ sounds.

The findings of the studies presented above showed that English pronunciation errors appeared to be specific to speakers of a certain language. While several studies on English pronunciation have been conducted in the Indonesian contexts, most of the studies have focused on identifying common errors made by the students. Although influencing factors were identified in the studies, some were only based on observations rather than interview results. The present study is different from the above-mentioned studies as it specifically investigated Indonesian undergraduate students' difficulties in recognizing English consonant silent letters in which the data were collected using interviews.

Regarding the importance of English consonant silent lettersrecognition, the present study aims to explore the difficulties of English department students in an Islamic higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia. The research related to English consonant silent letters is very importantbecause the research is still rare, especially at English departments in Indoensia. This study would also attempt to fill the gap related to students' difficulties in recognizing English consonant silent letters. The question of inquiry for this study was, "What are the difficulties of undergraduate students in recognizing English consonant silent letters?"

Authors' Context

The first, second, and third authors of this study are English lecturers in the English department in Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci,while thefourth author is an English lecturer of Universitas Jambi who is interested in pronunciation.Most of the authors were experienced in teaching pronunciation class. As English lecturers, we often discussed pronounciation

problems faced by EFL learners, especially Indonesian learners. Based on the results of our discussion, we decided to conduct research on English silent letters to explore the Indonesian EFL learners'difficulties in recognizing English consonants silent letters. We believed that this research result can be supplementary for the English lecturers to developappropriate teaching techniques or strategies for teaching pronunciation class.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study since we are investigating and understanding EFL students' difficulties in recognizing consonant silent letters. This approach attempts to answer the research question about phenomenon and the issue of an individual, group, institution, and community in a natural real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011; Flick, 2009). Creswell (2013) stated that a qualitative approach attempts to empower the individuals to share their experiences about an issue or phenomena naturally through direct interview between the researchers and the participants of the research. Therefore, we decided to employ this approach to gather richer understanding of the students' difficulties in recognizing silent letters.

Participants

Selection of Participants

This study was conducted at the teachers training and education program in one state Islamic higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia, that has more than 1500 students. We asked permission from the head of English department to involve the students in our study. We informed him that we would like to interview English department students. He responded to our aims positively by giving us the opportunity to conduct our study if we did not disturb the students' teaching and learning processes. We used purposive sampling in selecting the participants since it judges participants based on our study purpose. Purposive sampling aims to have relevant data based on the specific research topic (Kumar, 2011). To employ purposive sampling in this study, 35 of fourth semester English department students that belong to three classes were asked to pronounce English words containing 13 English consonant silent letters; bilabial plosive [p] and [b], alveolar plosive [t] and [d], velar plosive [k] and [g], alveolar fricative [s], glotal fricative [h], bilabial nasal [m], alveolar nasal [n], lateral approximant [l], post-alveolar approximant [r], and velar approximant [w] as a basis for selecting participants. This pronunciation test was designed by us only as requirement for selecting the study participants. In this test, each correct pronunciation was scored 1 and incorrect was 0 to come to know each student's ability. Our inclusion criteria was a score of less than 32 (a quarter of the total test score conversion). The pronunciation test showed that six students were selected as the research participants because they got a score below 32. However, two students were not willing to be interviewed because of personal problems, therefore four students participated in this study.

Participant Students

We used pseudonyms for our four participants to ensure confidentiality; they are Nur, Budi, Fitri, and Doni. Nur is a student with limited Englishphonetic recognition. She never recognized English phonetics when she was at senior high school like her classmates in the English department. Budi is a student who has no background with English phonetic recognition because he was taught by a senior high school teacher who did not have any English

phonetic background. His English teachers never explained to him about the importance of English phonetic recognition and therefore, he had to rely upon himself to recognize English phonetic patterns. Fitri, the third participant, had no intention of studying in the English language study program when she took the proficiency test at an Islamic higher education institution in Jambi Indonesia. The English program was as a second choice; he had preferred biology, but his parents forced him to take an English study program. This, unsurprisingly, made Fitri less enthusiastic about learning English which influenced the lack of mastery of pronunciation, skills in English, and other aspects of the English language. The fourth participant was Doni, who has good skills with regards to many aspects of English learning, except for pronunciation. He finds it difficult to recognize English phonetics, especially English consonant silent letters, so he pronounces English silent letters like he is pronouncing consonants in his first language.

All participants in this study were students we (the first three authors) know as they are studying English in our department within an Islamic higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia, where we teach. This relationship helped us conduct deep conversations to gain in depth-information related to the participants' difficulties in recognizing English consonant silent letters. This trusting relationship between participants and the researchers enabled us to clarify the data needed for this study. Moreover, underlying relationship and trust allowed us to reach the participants any time we needed to conduct additional interviews. Only the fourth author did not have a relationship with the participants as she teaches at another higher education.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant lasting 45 and 60 minutes at the location of each participant's choice over a 4-month period from June to December 2020. This technique of data collection provides us rich data with respect to the difficulties of silent letters in English pronunciation learning. Creswell (2012) stated that conducting semi-structured interviews is the most appropriate technique for collecting data from human beings. Open-ended and follow up questions are implemented in this interview based on our experiences. After asking questions about the participants' basic demographic information, first we asked, "How interested are you to recognize English phonetics for better pronunciation?" to learn their motivation in recognizing English phonetics. Second, we asked "How aware are you of recognizing English phonetics like a native?" to learn their attitude in recognizing English phonetics. Third, "What is the role of your first language towards your English phonetics?" to learn about the influences of their first language on English phonetics. Finally, we asked "How important is English phonetics ability for you?" to learn their English phonetic knowledge.

Before the interviews were conducted, objectives of the research were explained. Each participant was also asked to sign a document of informed concern that has been approved by secretary of English department.

All willing participants were interviewed in a face-to-face format by the first author. Each interview which was conducted using the participants' first language and was audio recorded for transcribing purposes. Furthermore, each participant was interviewed a second time. Interviewing the participants more than once provided the interviewer with the opportunity to confirm and clarify the previous interview (Bolderston, 2012). In that interview, we gave opportunity for each participant to clarify their answers from the first interview if they thought it was needed.

Data Analysis

Having transcribed the interview data, we analyzed the data using Saldaña's (2009) qualitative data analysis approach that focuses on coding to assign a summative, essence-capturing, evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. We used the spirit of Saldaña's analysis to find out exactly what the participants told us regarding their motivation for learning English phonetics through in vivo coding. We highlighted and report exactly what they said in answer to the question about their motivation. Then we did the same for each interview question category of attitude, first language interference, and phonetic ability. This coding process was established to connect codes and to attribute meaning to the units of data (Veloso et al., 2021). The example of coding process is provided in the table below.

Table 1
Example of Coding Process

Transcript	Categories
Nur: Although most of my classmates paid their attention on English phonetic recognition during study at English department, *I am not interested to recognize English phonetics, because its rule makes me more confused. I mean, there is the inconsistency of the letters with their phonetics in English.*	Motivation
Budi: Although I have limited English phonetics, *I never focus my attention on phonetics until now although pronunciation classes include obligatory subjects that must be taken in the English department at my college.*	Attitude
Fitri: *As a beginner EFL learner, I cannot avoid my first language intervention for certain English phonetics. A different rule of both languages bothered me in recognizing English phonetics*. My first language not only influence me in pronunciation, but also in speaking and grammar.	First Language Interference
Doni: I do not know that there are any different phonetics between English and my first language for certain letters. Therefore, *I feel no problems with my limited English phonetics. It doesn't affect another English subject I learnt as an English department student.*	Phonetics Ability

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, we undertook several methods recommended by Tracy (2010); triangulation and member reflections. In triangulating the information, we compared our observations and knowledge of the participants with their interviews to avoid subjectivity bias and to test consistency of the findings. While for member reflection, we provided the copies of interviews for member reflection or member-checking by involving all participants to give feedback to ensure their views were not misprinted and reflected the participants' true experiences. Involving the participants to check their interview results making sure of the accuracy of their contributions (Creswell, 2014).

Findings

This study aimed to examine the difficulties of students in recognizing English silent consonant letters at one Islamic higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia. The participants were clear in explaining to us about their motivation, attitude, first language interference, and ability with respect to recognizing silent letters in English pronunciation. Our study findings revealed that although participants expressed similar views related to the difficulties in recognizing English consonants silent letters, each had their uniqueness.

Motivation

This category focuses on participants' motivation to recognize English phonetics. Motivation cannot be separated from pronunciation because it can encourage the EFL learners to recognize English phonetics for better pronunciation. During the interview, the participants were asked about their interest to recognize English phonetics in learning English as foreign language. A view of interest emerged from the participants of the study that they were uninterested in recognizing accurate English phonetics. This view assumed there was no phonetic contribution to the English subjects they study in English department. Although all participants mostly have similar thoughts of recognizing English phonetics, each of them has different reason.

> I am not interested to recognize English phonetics, because its rule makes me more confused. I mean, there is the inconsistency of the letters with their phonetics in English. (Nur)

> Recognizing phonetics do not guarantee me in learning English lectures at the English department, such as reading, writing, and speaking, that's why I just underestimate them and focus on the aspect of grammar and vocabulary which is necessary for learning English skills as I mentioned before. (Budi)

> As long as I know, little beat errors in English phonetics is a common problem for EFL learners, therefore I lack interest to recognize English phonetics as my classmates do. I am still able to learn English better without accurate phonetics. (Fitri)

> As an EFL learner, accurate English phonetics is not important as long as I understand the words and sentences meaning of the English book we read. I mean, phonetics cannot help me to comprehend English subjects written in English, for example, morphology, phonology, cross-culture understanding, etc. (Doni)

It can be seen from these views that most participants in this study were uninterested in recognizing English phonetics due to confusion and lack of utility.

Attitude

Attitude also plays an important role in English pronunciation. It refers to awareness of the EFL learners to recognize English phonetics, that the more the learners are aware the more accurate pronunciation they have. Under this category, the participants were asked about their awareness in recognizing English phonetics. Most of our participants reported that they did not focus on phonetics during their study in the English department. They were not aware of the importance of accurate phonetic in learning English. They reflected:

> I never think of accurate phonetics during my study in the English department, I just recognize English as I recognize my first language. (Nur)

> I never focus my attention on phonetics until now although pronunciation classes include obligatory subjects that must be taken in the English department at my college. (Budi)

> Phonetics is not my priority during studying in the English department. I feel enough with the English phonetics I learn in Senior High School although it is not as detail as I have learned in the English department. (Fitri)

> I ignore English phonetics during studying in the English department because I think this ability can be learnt later after four English skills. Focusing on phonetic in learning English only help me in listening class, not in other English skill. (Doni)

Learning English without recognizing English phonetics has inspired our participants not to recognize accurate English phonetics. Most of them expect that it is not important to recognize English phonetics in learning English. This negative assumption makes them not pay attention to the importance of phonetics that can support their English learning.

First Language Pronunciation Interference

The interference of first language in English pronunciation referred to transferring the learners' native language to English as the target language. Our participants reported that they were influenced by their first language when we interviewed them about first language interference in recognizing English phonetics. They testified that rules of their first language phonetics interfere them in recognizing English phonetics.

> My first language phonetics always influences me for both consonants and vowels. I mean the consistency of my first language letters and phonetics influences my English phonetics. As long as I know any letters in English are different between its letters and phonetics. (Nur)

> Rule of my first language phonetics always disturbs me in recognizing English phonetics. For example, s letter is recognized as /s/ in its phonetic, different from English. I mean s letter is sometimes recognized as /z/ in English phonetics. (Budi)

> As a beginner EFL learner, I cannot avoid my first language intervention for certain English phonetics. A different rule of both languages bothered me in recognizing English phonetics. (Fitri)

> I often transfer my first language phonetic rule when I feel doubt with my English phonetics recognition. I do this way because I am aware of my limited phonetic knowledge. (Doni)

Our participants expressed that different phonetics of both languages became main reason for them transferring their first language phonetics into English. The examples of thought showed that their first language was used by the participants in recognizing English phonetics.

Phonetic Ability

Phonetic ability serves as basis element of target language pronunciation which relates to knowledge of sound-symbol. When our participants were asked about the importance of

English phonetics ability toward English pronunciation, our participants reported that this study category did not have any contribution for most of the English skills they learn.

> Phonetics recognition ability is considered unimportant for me as long as I have the vocabulary and know the way to arrange the sentences grammatically. (Nur)

> Not too important compared to mastering vocabulary and grammar, because vocabulary and grammar can give a contribution to me in learning writing, reading, and speaking. (Budi)

> Although I don't recognize some English phonetics, it does not negatively influence my English writing, speaking, listening, and reading subjects learning. Recognizing English phonetic only waste my time. (Fitri)

> I feel no problems with my limited English phonetics. It doesn't affect another English subject I learnt as an English department student. (Doni)

These views show that our participants ignore the phonetics as the important aspect in learning English. Our participants did not believe that the phonetic knowledge cannot help them in learning English compared to vocabularies and grammar.

Discussion

The findings our study provided information of the participants' difficulties toward English consonant silent letters recognition on Islamic higher education institution. Recognizing English phonetics is very important for EFL learners for better pronunciation. Our study findings indicated that although English phonetics have been introduced through pronunciation class in English department, the participants still faced difficulties in recognizing them. The difficulties were caused by their negative assumptions of English phonetics role in supporting their English learning. With respect to motivation of recognizing English phonetics, our study results indicated that all our participants reported that they were not interest in recognizing English phonetics. They did not believe that English phonetics supported them to learn English better. It is consistent with Fauzi's (2016) research results: lack of knowledge related to the importance of pronunciation can cause lack of interest in recognizing English phonetics. Al Yaqoobi et al. (2016) pointed out that inadequacy in recognizing English phonetics can affect EFL learners' pronunciation problems.

We also found that our participants have negative attitudes toward English phonetics recognition. They did not make the effort to recognize accurate English phonetics for better pronunciation while learning English. This unawareness made our participants underestimate the important rule of English phonetics. This finding is in line with AlMansour's (2016), study that unawareness of English pronunciation would result in negative effects on students' success in learning English as foreign language. Likewise, Tambunsaribu and Simatupang (2021) revealed that the Indonesian university student's held unconscious attitudes towards accurate pronunciation because of confusion over the inconsistency of English phonetics.

Regarding first language interference, our participants were influenced by their first language in recognizing English phonetics. They reflected that they tended to transfer from their first language into English phonetics. It was caused by the inconsistency of the English letters and phonetics. This case made our participants use their first language as the basis of recognizing English phonetics. Our study findings related to first language interference were consistent with Luo (2014), who recognized that EFL students' first language always interferes

in recognizing English phonetics. Similarly, Chaira (2015) found that the students tended to transfer their Indonesian phonetic pattern into English, particularly when the English phonetics do not exist in their first language. In addition, Authar (2018) revealed that Indonesian students negatively transferred [z] and [v] because both never occur in the final position of Indonesian phonetics.

The findings, furthermore, demonstrated a lack phonetic ability of the participants in pronunciation. Our participants assume that phonetics did not have any contribution for them in learning English. Therefore, they ignored the phonetics rule. Our study results support the previous research findings by Al-Rubaat and Alshammari (2020) and Febriana et al. (2019). Al-Rubaat and Alshammari (2020) revealed that English phonetics recognition does not contribution to Saudi EFL learners in learning English, because it is impossible for them to recognize English phonetics as accurate as an English-speaking native. Febriana et al. (2019) found that Indonesian EFL learners negatively perceive the usefulness of English phonetics in English learning because it is difficult to recognize.

Involving small sample in this study was our greatest limitation. However, it gave us a starting place for looking at our teaching and curriculum. We can change our emphasis to stress that EFL learners are expected to recognize English phonetics to have better English pronunciation. We hope that knowing the difficulties and attitudes of students that the rector as the policy maker in the higher education institutions would consider inviting English native lecturers to train English lecturers to teach pronunciation class. In addition, as the authors of this study, we hope the next researchers to conduct similar research by involving English department students from another higher education institution to learn more.

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Appendix A

Pronunciation Observation Test

No	Words
1	Psychology
2	Pneumonia
3	Cupboard
4	Receipt
5	Doubt
6	Subtle
7	Bomb
8	Thumb
9	Christmas
10	Fasten
12	Handkerchief
13	Wednesday
14	Knee
15	Knock
16	Gnaw
17	Gnash
18	Sovereign
19	Campaign
20	Island
21	Viscount
22	Debris
23	Heir
24	Honor
25	What
26	While
27	Mnemonic
28	Solemn
29	Autumn
30	Palm
31	Salmon
32	Almond
33	Chart
34	Fork
35	Father
36	Car
37	Mother
38	Wrap
39	Write
40	Answer
41	Hawk
42	Raw
43	Draw

Appendix B

Score of Pronunciation Observation Test

No	Name	Raw Score	Conversing Score
1	Meri	33	76
2	Noni	30	70
3	**Nur**	**11**	**25**
4	Vepi	30	70
5	**Budi**	**5**	**70**
6	Moli	34	79
7	Titi	36	84
8	**Fitri**	**7**	**16**
9	Rohida	35	81
10	Novita	33	76
11	Yeni	35	81
12	**Rani**	**8**	**19**
13	Bela	32	74
14	Mona	36	84
15	**Doni**	**10**	**23**
16	Ela	34	79
17	**Ani**	**9**	**21**

Notes. The scoring technique of each student by totaling item by item, then converting it into 0 to 100by using the formula below:

$$\text{Value} = \frac{\text{The Number of Correct Items}}{\text{The Total of Item}} \times 100$$

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