

STUDENTS' ENGLISH INTONATION ABILITY IN USE: A STUDY OF FOURTH SEMESTER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT IAIN PAREPARE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the proficiency level of fourth-semester EFL students at IAIN Parepare regarding their application of English intonation patterns. Intonation serves as a crucial element within pronunciation that significantly influences meaning conveyance and emotional expression during verbal communication. The research employed a quantitative descriptive approach involving twenty student participants. Data collection utilized two assessment instruments: a multiple-choice examination and voice recording tasks, each containing ten items focused on ascending and descending intonation patterns. Research findings indicate that students demonstrate "Fair" competency in English intonation usage, achieving mean scores of 58.5 on the multiple-choice assessment and 59.5 on the voice recording evaluation. Data analysis reveals that most participants encounter difficulties implementing descending intonation patterns, particularly at sentence-final positions. Contributing factors to these challenges include native language interference and habitual use of elevated pitch during daily communication, especially among students from Buginese cultural backgrounds. These research outcomes provide concrete insights into areas requiring enhanced emphasis within pronunciation instruction, specifically intonation components, to improve students' communicative effectiveness in English.

Keywords: EFL Student, English Intonation, Speaking Skills, Language Learning for Students.

INTRODUCTION

The articulation of words, phrases, and language during speech encompasses what we understand as pronunciation. Multiple elements require mastery, including vowel phonemes, consonant phonemes, and stress distribution patterns (Zhang & Yuan, 2021). Due to extensive focus on segmental features such as vowels and consonants, learners often perceive intonation as secondary and consequently neglect its significance in language production.

However, intonation holds paramount importance in English communication, as improper intonational patterns fail to effectively transmit the speaker's intended message (Setter, 2019),

potentially resulting in communication breakdowns between interlocutors. The absence of appropriate intonation produces mechanical, robot-like speech, necessitating strategic pitch variations across different utterance segments. Incorrect intonational choices can fundamentally alter sentence meanings (Reed & Levis, 2019) or render speech peculiar to listeners.

Pronunciation instruction and practice constitute essential components of language learning (Thomson & Derwing, 2015). According to standard definitions, pronunciation encompasses the manner in which words, languages, and sounds are articulated. The pedagogical scope of pronunciation instruction encompasses three primary domains: segmental features, rhythmic patterns, and suprasegmental elements (Couper, 2017). Language learners must develop competence in recognizing and producing target language sounds through phonetic transcription systems, as English employs varied symbols depending on dialectal variations. Rhythm represents the second component, involving the strategic combination of stressed and unstressed elements within utterances. English speech rhythm depends on prosodic units containing single stressed syllables.

Intonation constitutes the third fundamental component of pronunciation instruction. As defined by scholarly sources, intonation encompasses the diverse pitch variations employed in speech production (Gut, 2021). Speakers convey meaning and emotional content through strategic tone manipulation, utilizing elevated or reduced pitch levels (Gordon & Darcy, 2016). Through intonational variation, communicators express numerous semantic distinctions (Jun, 2022), encompassing emotional states and attitudinal information. Stress patterns correlate with intonational features, assisting readers in comprehending and conveying textual content to audiences (Warren, 2016). Individuals experiencing intonational difficulties encounter challenges in text comprehension.

Mastering English intonation proves crucial for language learners, as appropriate intonational patterns create naturalistic speech quality (Hahn, 2018) and maintain listener attention throughout utterances. Linguistically, intonation represents pitch variation systems used for lexical differentiation. Intonational patterns serve multiple communicative functions, including attitude and emotion expression, statement-question distinction, and emphasis placement. Core intonational components include pitch range, rhythmic organization, temporal pacing, voice quality, phrasing, and prominence patterns. Conversational exchanges involve alternating stressed-unstressed syllable sequences, allowing speakers to manipulate pitch levels, speaking rates, and pause placement. Occasionally, intonational patterns become monotonous or aurally uncomfortable. Speakers should avoid erratic pitch fluctuations on individual words and

sentence-final rising patterns. Some linguists suggest that monotonous intonation surpasses inappropriate intonational choices.

Most learners experience challenges implementing correct intonational patterns. Having acquired native language patterns from early childhood, students encounter difficulties modifying articulatory habits to produce foreign sound systems and intonational patterns (Munro & Derwing, 2015). English production ability requires learners to perceive and recognize target language acoustic properties. Students frequently underestimate intonation's significance, producing utterances without appropriate intonational patterns, often experiencing uncertainty regarding rising versus falling intonational choices.

Research observations at IAIN Parepare revealed instances where students engaged in conversational exchanges or reading activities without employing intonational variation, instead utilizing monotone delivery patterns. Intonation's primary function involves conveying emotional states and communicative intentions; varied delivery methods produce distinct semantic interpretations. For instance, expressing "okay" with elevated pitch indicates complete agreement, while low-pitched delivery suggests reluctant acceptance.

Students enrolled in IAIN Parepare's English Department, specifically fourth-semester cohorts, participate in pronunciation courses requiring intonational competency development. Consequently, this investigation examines "Students' English Intonation Ability in Use: A Study of Fourth Semester English Department Students at IAIN Parepare" to determine learners' intonational application proficiency in English speech production.

RESEARCH METHOD

This investigation employed a descriptive quantitative research design. Descriptive quantitative methodology serves to characterize and synthesize various situational phenomena (Taherdoost, 2016), circumstances, and research variables according to observable events through photography, interviewing, observation, and other data collection techniques. As explained by established researchers, quantitative descriptive approaches aim to create objective situational descriptions utilizing numerical data, encompassing collection procedures, interpretation processes, and result presentation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Multiple-Choice Intonation Assessment Results

The research team administered a comprehensive assessment consisting of five rising intonation items and five falling intonation questions. Following answer evaluation, six participants demonstrated predominant rising intonation errors, nine students exhibited falling intonation mistakes, and five participants achieved equivalent scores across both intonation types. Among twenty participants, eleven students committed rising intonation errors in initial positions, while ten participants demonstrated mistakes in final positions. Regarding falling intonation, fourteen students exhibited errors in initial positions and ten in final positions. These results indicate superior student knowledge of rising intonation in initial positions compared to final positions. Similarly, students demonstrated better falling intonation comprehension in initial rather than final positions.

The multiple-choice assessment yielded an average score of 58.5, categorized as **fair** performance level. Results indicate that no fourth-semester IAIN Parepare students achieved Very Good ratings. One student reached Good category performance. Fourteen students attained Fair category rankings. Two students received Poor category ratings, while three students fell into Very Poor category classifications.

2. Voice Recording Assessment Results

The research team conducted identical assessments using voice recording methodology rather than written responses. Following voice recording evaluation, six participants exhibited predominant rising intonation errors, eleven students demonstrated falling intonation mistakes, and three participants achieved equivalent performance across both intonation categories. Among twenty participants, seven students committed rising intonation errors in initial positions, while eighteen participants demonstrated mistakes in final positions. For falling intonation patterns, ten students exhibited errors in initial positions and fifteen in final positions. These findings suggest superior student comprehension of rising intonation in initial compared to final positions. Additionally, students showed better falling intonation understanding in initial rather than final positions.

Voice recording assessment results produced an average score of 59.5, categorized as fair performance level. No fourth-semester IAIN Parepare students achieved Very Good classifications. Three students attained Good category performance. Fifteen students reached Fair category rankings. Two students received Poor category ratings, with no students classified in Very Poor categories.

3. Student Intonational Competency Analysis

Both assessment methodologies revealed fair-level student intonational abilities, indicating requirements for enhanced learning and practice in English intonational competency development. Multiple-choice testing showed six students with predominant rising intonation errors, nine with falling intonation mistakes, and five with equivalent scores across both types. Voice recording assessment revealed six students with rising intonation errors, eleven with falling intonation mistakes, and three with equivalent performance levels.

Most participants demonstrated falling intonation errors (Walker, 2019), utilizing elevated pitch at sentence conclusions where initial high pitch would be appropriate. Students experiencing rising intonation difficulties similarly employed high pitch in initial positions where final elevation would be correct. Multiple-choice results indicated predominant falling intonation errors in initial positions, suggesting better comprehension of final position falling patterns compared to initial positions. Rising intonation errors occurred primarily in initial positions, indicating superior final position understanding. Voice recording assessments showed rising intonation errors predominantly in initial positions, suggesting better final position comprehension. Falling intonation errors occurred mainly in final positions.

According to established research, two primary factors influence student pronunciation: native language background and habitual patterns (Algethami et al., 2018). Native language influence manifests in daily communication preferences for first language rather than target language usage. Habitual influences create recurring error patterns through everyday practices. Most participants originated from Buginese cultural backgrounds, where elevated pitch usage in speech represents cultural norms, creating difficult-to-modify patterns that extend to English production without attention to appropriate intonational choices. English intonation possesses unique characteristics distinct from other linguistic systems. Some individuals incorrectly assume universal intonational patterns across languages, causing reduced attention to English-specific intonational requirements and preference for familiar daily-use patterns.

Understanding student intonational competency serves to assist educators and learners in identifying areas requiring additional practice focus. Poor intonational patterns interfere with communicative effectiveness, and as established in communication theory, conversational exchanges involve free thought and feeling expression (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015). Conversations typically occur among individuals sharing social contexts, including classroom settings, neighborhoods, or public transportation environments. Effective communication requires proper message transmission, necessitating clear understanding of intended communication and appropriate intonational usage to prevent listener confusion regarding

intended messages and emotions. For example, gratitude expression using consistently high pitch throughout entire utterances may convey insincere appreciation to recipients.

Phonological and phonetic learning, particularly intonational aspects, presents various student challenges. Participants experienced rising intonation comprehension difficulties, especially regarding final position applications where frequent errors occurred. Students reported pronunciation difficulties in these areas. According to educational psychology research, learning difficulties stem from two primary sources (Lightbown & Spada, 2020): internal factors originating within learners, including physiological elements (health status) and psychological components (intellectual capacity), and external factors from environmental sources, encompassing social elements and non-social factors such as parental relationships, learning materials, and educational conditions. Both factor categories influence student pronunciation difficulties. Students attribute their challenges to negative mindset perspectives, believing intonational pronunciation represents inherently difficult skills. Additionally, they demonstrate reduced motivation and enthusiasm for intonational practice. Students also report incomplete comprehension of instructor explanations. This research aims to enhance student motivation for intonational skill improvement, fostering increased learning enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

Based on comprehensive discussion, presentation, and analysis of preceding chapters, researchers conclude that fourth-semester English Department students at IAIN Parepare demonstrate "Fair" level intonational competency in English usage. Research analysis indicates fair-level student intonational abilities, with average test scores ranging from 60-70 points. The investigation employed dual assessment methodologies—multiple-choice and voice recording—providing comprehensive evaluation perspectives. Testing results suggest students possess adequate intonational application abilities.

Most participants exhibited falling intonation errors, utilizing elevated pitch at sentence conclusions where initial high pitch would be appropriate, attributed to daily habitual patterns involving high-pitched speech with others. Results indicate superior student knowledge of rising intonation in initial positions compared to final positions. Similarly, students demonstrate better falling intonation comprehension in initial rather than final positions.

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