

A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH

Siti Shovia Nur Fitriani¹, M Shabir², M Sahril³

English Education Study Program
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor

shoviafitri02@gmail.com; zawsfaa@yahoo.com; msahril@uika-bogor.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menemukan elemen-elemen yang menyebabkan kesulitan siswa dalam belajar pelafalan bahasa Inggris di tingkat sekolah menengah atas. Penelitian dilakukan dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan melibatkan siswa SMA yang berada di Bogor. Data diperoleh melalui tes pelafalan, observasi, dan wawancara guna memahami jenis kesulitan dalam pelafalan serta alasan di baliknya. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa menghadapi masalah terutama pada bunyi vokal dan konsonan, penekanan pada kata, serta intonasi, yang mengakibatkan ucapan menjadi tidak jelas. Masalah tersebut dipicu oleh pengaruh bahasa ibu, kurangnya pemahaman fonetik, ketergantungan pada cara penulisan, sedikitnya paparan terhadap cara pelafalan yang benar, dan kurangnya latihan pelafalan yang terarah di kelas. Selain itu, faktor psikologis seperti kurangnya rasa percaya diri dan kecemasan saat berbicara juga menjadi halangan bagi siswa dalam melatih pelafalan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa kesulitan dalam pelafalan timbul dari gabungan faktor linguistik, pengajaran, lingkungan, dan emosional, yang membuat diperlukan adanya pengajaran fonetik yang jelas, latihan yang terfokus, paparan yang autentik, serta suasana belajar yang mendukung.

Kata kunci: kesulitan pelafalan, siswa EFL, interferensi bahasa pertama, pengetahuan fonetik, kecemasan berbicara

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the elements that cause difficulties for students in learning English pronunciation at the high school level. The study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method and involved high school students in Bogor. Data were obtained through pronunciation tests, observations, and interviews to understand the types of difficulties in pronunciation and the reasons behind them. The results of the study show that students face problems mainly with vowel and consonant sounds, word stress, and intonation, which result in unclear speech. These problems are triggered by the influence of the mother tongue, a lack of phonetic understanding, dependence on spelling, limited exposure to correct pronunciation, and a lack of focused pronunciation practice in class. In addition, psychological factors such as lack of confidence and anxiety when speaking also hinder students in practicing pronunciation. These findings indicate that difficulties in pronunciation arise from a combination of linguistic, teaching, environmental, and emotional factors, which necessitate clear phonetic teaching, focused practice, authentic exposure, and a supportive learning environment.

Keyword: pronunciation difficulties, EFL students, L1 interference, phonetic knowledge, speaking anxiety

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely used foreign languages and is taught extensively in many

countries across the world. It functions as a global communication tool in the domains of education, politics, science, technology, commerce, and

popular culture. For those who desire to interact with global professional and academic societies, being able to communicate in English has become increasingly important. English is widely used as a second or foreign language and serves as bridge that connects people from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Silaban et al., 2023).

Among the four primary language skills-speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Speaking is often regarded as the most crucial and challenging. Speaking allows students to express their ideas, feeling, and thoughts in a direct and meaningful way while also demonstrating their extensive language skills. Students can actively apply grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in actual conversation by speaking. Speaking effectively also increases students' self-esteem and motivates them to engage in academic and social contexts where oral communication is required. Therefore, while learning foreign language, developing speaking skills is both as linguistic goal and a practical necessity (Srinivas Rao, 2019).

Pronunciation is a key aspect of speaking skill. Pronunciation is essential for spoken communications, understandable, and clear. In oral communication, meaning is greatly influenced by suprasegmental features like stress, rhythm, and intonation in addition to the production of individual sounds and segmental features like vowels and consonants (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019; Wei, 2006). Pronouncing words correctly boosts learners' self-esteem, minimizes miscommunication, and facilitates more productive communication. However, compared to grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation frequently receives less instructional attention despite its significance (A Mutali, 2025).

Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) frequently have difficulty with pronunciation, which continues to be a significant obstacle to effective spoken communication. An inability to produce English sounds that are absent from their native tongue frequently results in decreased

intelligibility for learners. These difficulties include suprasegmental mistakes affecting stress and intonation patterns as well as segmental mistakes like mispronouncing particular vowels and consonants (Utami, 2020). For instance, learners often substitute more familiar sounds from their mother tongue language for uncommon English sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /ə/, or /v/. Due to the disparities between the sound systems of the learners' native language and English, vowel contrasts such as /ɪ/ and /i:/ or /ʊ/ and /u:/ are also frequently misinterpreted (Alfrans et al., 2025).

Previous studies have connected several of characteristic to pronunciation difficulties. Linguistic variables include limited phonological awareness, first language interference, and confusion caused by inconsistent English spelling-sound correspondences (Ray et al., 2025). Additionally, many students receive little explicit phonetic training because pronunciation is often neglected in classroom instruction and teachers may feel unqualified to teach it methodically (Pardede, 2018). Limited exposure to real English input, especially from native or proficient speaker, significantly reduces learners chances of developing accurate pronunciation models (Keshavarz & Keshavarz, 2022).

Non-linguistic elements are also significant. The confidence, motivation anxiety, and attitudes of learners toward learning pronunciation can all have a big impact on how well they succeed. It has been demonstrated that encouraging learning environments, captivating media, and the usage of digital tool such as social media or AI-based apps promote positive attitudes and raise students' readiness to practice pronunciation (Assalamah et al., 2024; Asyifah et al., 2025; Getie, 2020). Furthermore, intensive practice may be limited by classroom constraints like large class sizes, it has been found that effective teaching practice-such as modelling, drilling, explicit pronunciation instruction, and corrective feedback-improve learners' pronunciation accuracy (Arsi et al., 2025).

Pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners have been the subject of various research, but the majority of them concentrate on collage students or other learner demographics. Research specifically examining pronunciation difficulties among senior high school students in specific local context is still scarce, particularly when it comes to linguistic and non-linguistic contributing factors. Thus, the purpose of this study is to look into the different kinds of pronunciation issues that Bogor senior high school students have and to determine the internal and external factors that affect these difficulties. This study aims to address the subject of what factor affect students' difficulties acquiring English pronunciation by using a qualitative descriptive study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The influence of students' first language has been proven to be one of the main causes of their difficulties in pronunciation. Most students tend to pronounce English terms following the sound patterns found in Indonesian. For example, the dental fricative sounds in English /θ/ and /ð/ are often replaced with /t/ and /d/, as in the word "think," which sounds like /tɪŋk/, and "this," which becomes /dis/. In addition, the schwa sound /ə/ in words such as "into" is often translated as /o/, indicating that this vowel sound does not exist in Indonesian. The results of the observation also show that a number of students have difficulty applying the correct word stress patterns, indicating that they have not fully adapted to the sound system in English. The interview results reinforce these findings. One student stated, "I find Indonesian pronunciation easy, but English is more difficult because I don't know how to pronounce it" (SI 2/Q3). Another student added, "Pronunciation is also close to the language. The difference is that sometimes people read according to the letters" (SI 6/Q3). This statement shows that the sound system of the mother tongue greatly influences the way students produce English sounds.

A lack of understanding of phonetics was also found to be an important factor affecting how learners pronounce words. Many learners rely heavily on spelling when pronouncing words in

English, which results in incorrect sounds. For example, the word "down" is pronounced as /down/ and "judge" is pronounced with a /j/ sound, as in Indonesian. Further observation shows that students rarely pay attention to things such as the position of the tongue and lips when producing certain sounds such as /dʒ/ in "judge" or the vowel /ɔ:/ in "bought." This indicates that phonetic awareness among students is very limited. Data from interviews supports these findings, as expressed by one student, "I don't know how to read phonetic symbols, so I just follow the spelling" (SI 8/Q4). These findings indicate that a lack of understanding of English phonetics and phonetic symbols prevents students from producing accurate pronunciation.

Limited exposure to authentic English pronunciation is another contributing factor. The majority of students revealed that they generally only hear English from their teachers in class and rarely encounter authentic or natural English in other situations. The results of the observations show that students often construct sentences such as "He bought a new car yesterday" and "What are you doing there?" in a flat tone that sounds unnatural. The interview results also support this lack of exposure. One student said, "I rarely hear foreigners speaking English, only teachers" (SI 2/Q5). Other students stated "I only occasionally hear English from short videos on social media or when watching movies, but I rarely imitate how they pronounce it" (SI 1, S3, SI4, SI5/Q5). As a result, students are not familiar with the rhythm, stress, and natural intonation patterns in English. Psychological aspects such as low self-confidence also affect the way students pronounce words. Some students appear hesitant when they read sentences such as I don't like coffee, but I like tea or He's going to the market today.

Observations show that students often cannot read fluently and frequently pause for long periods of time. This indicates that they are afraid of making mistakes. These findings are reinforced by the interview results:

"When I read long sentences, I am afraid of mispronouncing the words." (SI 8/Q6)

This shows that anxiety when speaking prevents students from practicing their pronunciation properly.

Another important aspect to note is the lack of focus on pronunciation practice in classroom learning. Students revealed that in English lessons, more attention is given to grammar and vocabulary than to pronunciation. From observation, it is evident that pronunciation practice often occurs incidentally when students read texts, without any specific practice on difficult sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, or vowel differences such as the words ship and sheep. Findings from interviews support these observations. One student stated, "Pronunciation practice is not done often, usually only limited to reading texts" (SI 4/Q4). With limited and unorganized practice, students have fewer opportunities to improve their pronunciation skills.

The findings of this study indicate that students face significant challenges in producing segmental and suprasegmental features when speaking English, which affects the clarity of their oral communication. Errors in the pronunciation of certain vowels and consonants, as well as incorrect stress and intonation, often make their speech unclear. This confirms the importance of pronunciation in speaking ability, as the clarity of communication depends not only on individual sounds but also on prosodic features such as rhythm and stress (Pennington, 2021; Wei, 2006). When these elements are not produced accurately, spoken messages become more difficult to understand, even if learners have sufficient vocabulary and grammar.

One important finding in this study is the influence of the first language. Students often change unusual sounds in English, such as /θ/, /ð/, /ə/, and /v/, into sounds that are more familiar in Indonesian. They also have difficulty distinguishing between vowels such as /ɪ/ and /i:/. These results support previous findings showing that differences between students' first language sound systems and English often lead to consistent pronunciation errors (Alfrans et al., 2025). This suggests that students tend to use sound patterns they are familiar with from their native language when encountering sounds that do not exist in their language.

This study also shows that many students are very dependent on spelling when they pronounce words in English, which causes them to produce incorrect sounds. This reflects poor phonological understanding and low knowledge of how spelling and sounds are related in English. These results are in line with the study by Ray et al., (2025), which states that the irregularity between spelling and sound in English often confuses learners. This problem is also related to the lack of focus on teaching clear pronunciation in the classroom, as revealed by Pardede, (2018). Without sufficient phonetic practice, students are more likely to use spelling rather than their phonetic understanding.

Another important factor found in this study was the lack of exposure to authentic English input. Students revealed that they rarely listened to native speakers or those who were proficient in English outside of class. As a result, they had difficulty producing natural stress and intonation patterns, which often sounded flat or unnatural. This finding supports Keshavarz, (2022), which emphasizes that it is important to be exposed to proper pronunciation models to help students develop their speaking skills. Lack of exposure limits students' opportunities to adapt natural speech patterns, which are essential for effective oral communication.

In addition to language and environmental conditions, emotional factors were also identified as influencing students' pronunciation performance. Some students experienced low self-confidence and anxiety when speaking, causing them to hesitate and pause frequently during pronunciation activities. These findings are in line with Getie, (2020) research, which shows that students' motivation and confidence greatly influence their speaking abilities. When students are afraid of making mistakes, they tend to be less actively involved, thereby reducing their opportunities to practice and improve their pronunciation.

Finally, the results of the study show that students have few opportunities to practice pronunciation in a regular manner. Teaching activities in the classroom often emphasize grammar and vocabulary rather than pronunciation. These results are in line with the opinion of Simona et al., (2015),

who stated that the lack of opportunities to practice hinders students in mastering correct pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels. Without consistent and planned practice, it is difficult for them to improve their pronunciation skills.

In general, this analysis shows that students' difficulties in speaking are influenced by various interrelated factors, such as linguistic, teaching, environmental, and psychological aspects. These results indicate that in order to improve pronunciation, it is necessary to focus not only on how to produce sounds, but also on increasing access to authentic materials, clear phonetic teaching, a supportive learning environment, and adequate opportunities for targeted pronunciation practice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that high school students have problems learning how to pronounce English, which includes segmental and suprasegmental elements. This often makes their oral communication unclear. These various problems are influenced by many interrelated factors, such as interference from their first language, lack of knowledge about phonetics, dependence on spelling, lack of experience with actual English, and lack of regular pronunciation practice in class. Psychological factors such as low self-confidence and anxiety when speaking also prevent students from practicing. Overall, the results of this study show that pronunciation problems are caused by linguistic, teaching, environmental, and emotional factors. This indicates the need for clearer phonetic teaching, more experience with authentic examples, a supportive learning environment, and consistent and focused pronunciation practice.

REFERENCES

- A, M. (2025). *The Role and Place of Pronunciation in Teaching Oral*. 2(51), 146–152.
- Alfrans, M. N., Jenlionika, D., Saragih, B., & Melisa, P. (2025). *Analysis of Pronunciation Learning Activities in English Class at SDN 060877 through Direct Classroom Observation Techniques*. 3(November).
- Arsi, A. K., Farahdiba, S., & Ariyani, A. (2025). *The Influence of Pronunciation on Students' Speaking Confidence*. 4(1), 26–32.
- Assalamah, T. M., Hilza, I. F., & Wafiroh, L. H. (2024). *Students' Attitudes Toward the Use of Edtech as a Powerful Pronunciation Learning Tool in EFL*. 2(3), 161–177.
- Asyifah, I., Rahmawati, Y., & Puspita, R. H. (2025). *Students' Attitude Toward the Use of TikTok for Learning English Pronunciation*. 2250–2261.
- Getie, A. S. (2020). Factors affecting the attitudes of students towards learning English as a foreign language. *Cogent Education*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1738184>
- Keshavarz, M. H., & Keshavarz, A. (2022). The Effect of L2 Input on Young Learners' Pronunciation Performance in English. *Mextesol Journal*, 46(3), 0–2. <https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v46n3-4>
- Pardebe, P. (2018). Improving EFL Students' English Pronunciation by Using the Explicit Teaching Approach. *JET (Journal of English Teaching)*, 4(3), 143. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v4i3.852>
- Pennington, M. C. (2021). Teaching Pronunciation: The State of the Art 2021. *RELC Journal*, 52(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211002283>
- Pennington, M. C., & Rogerson-Revell, P. (2019). English Pronunciation Teaching and Research. In *Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47677-7>
- Ray, N. A., Rambe, T. F., Raihani, & Lubis, Y. (2025). *Spelling What You Hear: Investigating The Role of Pronunciation in English Spelling Difficulties*. 5, 354–359.
- Silaban, W. Y., Waruwu, M. L., Barumbu, D. N., Robot, S., Kawet, K., Sunkudon, Y. A., & Winoto, D. E. (2023). *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding History of English Become an International Language*. 359–366.
- Simona, Ş., Kilyeni, A., & Suci, L. (2015). *Strategies for Improving The English*

- Pronunciation of The 1st Year “ Translation - Interpreting ” Students. 191, 2157–2160.*
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.222>
- SRINIVAS RAO, P. (2019). *THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS. 401(2), 6–18.*
- Utami, V. (n.d.). *EFL LEARNER ' S PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS : 171–184.*
- Wei, M. (2006). A Literature Review on Strategies for Teaching Pronunciation. *Online Submission, 1995, 1–22.*
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED491566.pdf>