

An Analysis of the Factors Causing Pronunciation Difficulties among Students in Grade X in SMAN 1 Kuningan

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti kesulitan pengucapan yang dialami oleh siswa EFL di SMAN 1 Kuningan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif yang didukung oleh data kuesioner kuantitatif. Sebanyak 32 siswa menyelesaikan kuesioner skala Likert, dan empat peserta (dikodekan sebagai P1–P4) mengambil bagian dalam wawancara semi-terstruktur. Analisis tematik mengungkapkan lima faktor utama yang berkontribusi pada masalah pengucapan siswa: tantangan linguistik, paparan terbatas terhadap masukan bahasa Inggris otentik, dukungan instruksional yang tidak konsisten, hambatan afektif, dan kebiasaan belajar yang lemah. Kesulitan linguistik muncul dari fonem bahasa Inggris yang tidak familiar dan korespondensi ejaan-bunyi yang tidak konsisten, sementara paparan di luar kelas masih kurang bagi sebagian besar siswa. Dukungan instruksional ada tetapi kurang latihan sistematis dan umpan balik yang konsisten. Faktor afektif muncul sebagai hambatan terkuat, karena siswa sering melaporkan kecemasan, rasa malu, dan kurang percaya diri saat berbicara. Lebih lanjut, kebiasaan latihan yang tidak teratur menghambat kemajuan dan membatasi peluang untuk perbaikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan pengucapan bersifat multidimensional dan saling terkait, membutuhkan pendekatan holistik untuk mengatasi faktor internal dan eksternal yang memengaruhi kinerja lisan siswa. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya pengajaran pengucapan yang terstruktur, peningkatan paparan, lingkungan kelas yang mendukung, dan pengembangan otonomi pembelajar dalam meningkatkan kompetensi pengucapan siswa.

Kata kunci: *Pronunciation difficulties, EFL Learners, Affective barriers, Learning habit*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pronunciation difficulties experienced by EFL students at SMAN 1 Kuningan using a qualitative case study design supported by quantitative questionnaire data. A total of 32 students completed a Likert-scale questionnaire, and four participants (coded as P1–P4) took part in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed five major factors that contribute to students' pronunciation problems: linguistic challenges, limited exposure to authentic English input, inconsistent instructional support, affective barriers, and weak learning habits. Linguistic difficulties arise from unfamiliar English phonemes and inconsistent spelling–sound correspondence, while exposure outside the classroom remains insufficient for most students. Instructional support exists but lacks systematic practice and consistent feedback. Affective factors emerge as the strongest barrier, as students frequently report anxiety, embarrassment, and low confidence when speaking. Furthermore, irregular practice habits hinder progress and limit opportunities for improvement. These findings indicate that pronunciation difficulties are multidimensional and interconnected, requiring a holistic approach to address both internal and external factors influencing learners' oral performance. The study highlights the importance of structured pronunciation instruction, increased exposure, supportive classroom environments, and the development of learner autonomy in improving students' pronunciation competence.

Keywords: *Pronunciation difficulties, EFL Learners, Affective barriers, Learning habit*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of oral communication, as it directly influences the listener's ability to understand the speaker. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL),

pronunciation does not simply refer to the ability to produce isolated sounds, but also the mastery of prosodic elements such as stress, rhythm, and intonation, which shape the natural flow and intelligibility of speech. Even when learners

possess adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge, breakdowns in communication still occur if the pronunciation is unclear or deviates significantly from target norms.

In Indonesia, pronunciation tends to receive less systematic attention compared to other language skills, particularly reading and writing, which are more frequently assessed in national examinations. As a result, students may technically “know” English but struggle to speak it intelligibly. This phenomenon is also visible in SMAN 1 Kuningan, where many students report feeling hesitant about speaking due to fear of mispronunciation or embarrassment.

Major causes contribute to this problem. According to Listiyani, Ardiyarso and Andrew (2024) stated that pronunciation errors by Indonesian English learners are caused by the habit of pronouncing words in Indonesian and a lack of knowledge about the ideal concept of native speaker pronunciation. It means that students do not consistently hear accurate phonological input, making it difficult for them to internalize sound patterns. At the same time, L1 interference leads students to articulate English sounds using the phonetic rules of their local language, which affects both segmental features (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental features (intonation and stress). These factors interact with classroom practices, where pronunciation is often treated as an optional skill rather than a communicative priority.

Given these realities, a deeper exploration is required to understand the sources of students’ pronunciation difficulties and how these challenges manifest in the classroom. This study employs a qualitative case study design supported by questionnaire data to investigate the complex factors influencing pronunciation challenges among students at SMAN 1 Kuningan. By examining their experiences, affective conditions, learning environment, and instructional context, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and propose insights useful for improving pronunciation instruction in the EFL classroom.

A number of previous studies conducted during the last five years have explored the causes of pronunciation problems in EFL learners. Qiao and Zhao (2023) found that insufficient exposure to authentic English input results in weak

phonological representation, preventing learners from internalising correct sound patterns. Similarly, Zou et al. (2023) showed that without consistent listening and speaking interaction, students rely on inaccurate sound models, which leads to persistent mispronunciation even after years of study.

Putri, Sakina, and Arifin (2024) conducted a qualitative descriptive study to investigate pronunciation difficulties among eleventh-grade students in a private senior high school in Bandung. Their research found various segmental issues, including substitution and voicing errors, as well as challenges in distinguishing between voiced and voiceless consonants. Students also experienced problems with suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. These difficulties were influenced by several internal factors such as motivation, attitude, and limited practice and external factors like first-language interference, classroom conditions, teacher pronunciation models, and teaching methods.

A study conducted by Sabilla and Kaniadewi (2025) also examined the challenges faced by Indonesian senior high school students in using English, employing a descriptive qualitative approach. Their research revealed that students struggled with several linguistic components namely vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation which collectively hindered their speaking performance. The researchers additionally found that psychological factors, such as lack of confidence and anxiety about making mistakes, contributed to students’ reluctance to speak.

Another major cause highlighted in the literature is L1 interference. Studies by Revita et al. (2024) and Bakhtiar & Suwandi (2022) observed that students frequently substitute English phonemes with their native language equivalents. This substitution is not random but systematic, indicating that students default to familiar L1 articulation habits when faced with unfamiliar sounds. Such interference affects both segmental and suprasegmental features, resulting in reduced intelligibility.

Instructional factors also play a significant role. Almusharraf (2024) reported that pronunciation is often neglected in classroom instruction due to the dominance of exam-oriented

teaching practices. Teachers may emphasise grammar and vocabulary at the expense of oral performance. A similar finding was presented by Umaroh et al. (2023), who stated that even when technology is introduced, pronunciation difficulties persist if teachers do not provide structured modelling and corrective feedback.

Affective factors further exacerbate pronunciation problems. Bakhtiar & Suwandi (2022) documented that low confidence and anxiety discourage students from speaking English aloud, limiting opportunities for practice and reinforcing fossilised errors. As a result, students remain passive listeners rather than active speakers.

Widyasworo (2019) conducted a descriptive qualitative study to examine the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at a vocational high school in Purworejo. The study showed that learners struggled with both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of speaking. The linguistic difficulties included a limited range of vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and weak grammatical knowledge. Meanwhile, the non-linguistic challenges involved issues such as inhibition, lack of ideas, unequal participation, mother-tongue interference, anxiety, shyness, low confidence, and low motivation. The research also reported several strategies used by the teacher to help students overcome these problems, including role-play, drilling, brainstorming, and providing motivation.

In their investigation, Anggrarini, Prawiro, and Rohmaeni (2023) explored vowel pronunciation issues experienced by Indonesian senior high school learners. They reported that several vowel sounds most notably [æ], [ə], [ɜ:], [ɑ:], and [ʌ] were regularly produced inaccurately. According to their analysis, the primary reasons behind these errors were the strong influence of students' first language and the minimal exposure they received to spoken English in authentic contexts. Because learners frequently relied on familiar Javanese and Indonesian sound patterns, their English vowel production often deviated from native-like norms. While the research focused on vowel articulation specifically, it also underscores the broader challenge of pronunciation accuracy among Indonesian EFL learners.

Sayogie and Adbaka (2022) examined Indonesian senior high school learners and

identified consistent pronunciation errors caused by interlingual transfer, particularly in consonant contrasts such as /v-f/, /θ-t/, /ð-d/, and /dʒ-j/. These errors occurred because students relied heavily on Indonesian phonological patterns when speaking English, which ultimately affected their overall speaking clarity.

Nafi'a et al. (2025) conducted a descriptive qualitative study to examine pronunciation challenges faced by second-grade students in a senior high school. Their research found that learners experienced significant segmental difficulties, particularly in producing diphthongs such as /aɪ/ and /aʊ/. These errors were caused by several factors, including first-language interference, limited exposure to English sounds, misinterpretation of English spelling, and difficulties in articulating unfamiliar phonemes. The study also identified effective strategies to help students improve their pronunciation, such as phonetic drills, listening and imitation activities, and guided pronunciation practice.

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that pronunciation problems in EFL learners stem from the interplay between L1 interference, limited exposure, insufficient instructional focus, and affective barriers. However, most of these studies were conducted at the tertiary level or through quantitative designs, leaving a gap in qualitative research within senior high school settings. This study addresses that gap by investigating the causes of pronunciation problems among students at SMAN 1 Kuningan through a qualitative case study design, focusing on real classroom conditions rather than controlled experimental environments.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study design with quantitative descriptive data to explore in-depth the root causes of Grade X students' pronunciation problems at SMAN 1 Kuningan. A case study focuses on real classroom situations, thus it allows exploring the real world in a more detailed way. The addition of quantitative data obtained from questionnaires makes the patterns more visible and gives more depth to the interpretation of the results.

The research participants are 32 students from the 10th-grade English class at SMAN 1 Kuningan who all answered a pronunciation-

focused questionnaire. The researchers wanted to get as many different ideas as possible, so they conducted semi-structured interviews with four students chosen to represent differences in proficiency and input in the English language. These individuals gave the researchers detailed and vivid accounts that helped them see how the individual interacted within the larger group.

The study employed two methods that complemented each other and were tailored to the research objectives. A 15-item questionnaire developed with a five-point Likert scale was used to understand the respondents' perception on the issues raised. The main areas covered in the questionnaire were: language difficulties, exposure, and opportunities for input, influence of teaching, affective side such as motivation and anxiety, and personal learning habits. The responses to this instrument provided quantifiable data that highlighted prevalent trends. This was complemented by the semi-structured interviews with the four main participants, during which they shared their experiences of the pronunciation difficulties and talked about the topics of linguistic barriers, support in the classroom, emotional reactions, access to real language models, and study routines. Each interview session revolved around 15 question prompts that allowed the conversation to be flexible but still focused and that helped the interviewees reveal the intricacies that were beyond the surface of the data.

The data collection was carried out in an orderly fashion to allow for thorough coverage and the observance of the ethical principles. The questionnaires were handed out to the 32 students physically during the class time assigned for the task. The students' answers were collected and counted manually to keep everything as close to the time and as accurate as possible. After this, interviews with P1 through P4 were arranged in a quiet, secluded place where the participants would feel at ease. Each of the meetings was audio-recorded with the permission of the people involved, word-for-word notes were done, and the parts of the conversation that most clearly gave rise to themes were identified through initial coding.

The analysis methods of this study were structurally divided, though collegially coordinated, and took mixed-methods principles into account. Quantitative information extracted from the questionnaires was subjected to

descriptive statistical treatment aimed at calculating descriptive indicators such as frequency and percentage as well as modal responses to find out the most prevalent tendencies of each aspect examined. Consequently, it provided a preliminary overview of the collective inclinations, e.g. how often certain difficulties or behaviors were encountered. At the same time, qualitative records of interview transcriptions were analyzed through thematic coding, which involved the systematic identification of the recurring themes from the five major constructs and referencing them to the questionnaire findings. Triangulation was the link that combined the different methods, that is the correspondence and discrepancies between the two data streams were checked to confirm the interpretations, minimize the biases, and to increase the explanatory power of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter delineates the empirical results from the questionnaire administered to 32 Grade X students at SMAN 1 Kuningan and the semi-structured interviews with four selected participants (P1–P4). The analysis integrates quantitative patterns, derived from descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and dominant response tendencies, with qualitative insights to provide a multifaceted portrayal of pronunciation difficulties. These findings illuminate the interplay of linguistic, environmental, instructional, affective, and habitual factors, aligning with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter II while addressing the research questions on causation, environmental contributions, and the influence of linguistic and affective elements.

Questionnaire Findings

The 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire (ranging from 1: Strongly Disagree [SD] to 5: Strongly Agree [SA]) targeted five constructs: linguistic challenges, exposure/input, instructional factors, affective factors, and learning habits. Responses were tabulated to identify prevailing trends, revealing affective factors as the most pronounced barrier, followed by exposure limitations and linguistic hurdles. Neutral responses were common in instructional and habitual domains, suggesting ambivalence or inconsistency in these areas.

Table 1. summarizes the key patterns.

No	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	L1 interference	2	7	17	6	0
2	Difficulty with new sounds	1	6	14	10	1
3	Errors in consonants/vowels	1	8	12	10	1
4	Rarely hear native models	0	5	11	13	3
5	Lack of authentic input	0	7	13	10	2
6	Insufficient school input	1	6	10	14	1
7	Teacher rarely gives practice	3	10	12	5	2
8	Lack of teacher feedback	1	9	13	6	3
9	Materials do not help	2	8	13	7	2
10	Feel embarrassed	0	7	4	15	6
11	Afraid of mistakes	0	5	9	12	6
12	Low confidence	0	7	4	14	7
13	Rarely practice at home	1	10	9	12	0
14	Low motivation	2	12	11	7	0
15	Rarely use English daily	1	4	10	12	5

Interview Findings

Interviews with P1–P4, lasting 20–30 minutes each, elicited nuanced explanations for the questionnaire trends. Thematic coding aligned responses with the five constructs, revealing personal narratives that contextualized aggregate data. Excerpts are presented verbatim for authenticity, with interpretations linking back to prior literature

Theme 1: Linguistic Challenges

Students consistently cited phonological mismatches between Indonesian and English as a core issue, echoing L1 interference. Questionnaire items 1–3 elicited 53.1% neutral-to-agree responses, reflecting moderate but pervasive difficulties with segmental features like /θ/, /ð/, /v/, and /æ/.

- P1: “English pronunciation is complicated because the spelling does not match the

sounds, which makes even familiar words difficult.”

- P2: “I still make many pronunciation mistakes because I am not used to the sounds.”
- P3: “Some English words are difficult because the sounds don’t exist in Indonesian, so I don’t know how to say them.”
- P4: “My pronunciation is influenced by Indonesian, so sometimes the English sound becomes different.”

These accounts illustrate orthographic-phonological dissonance and articulatory transfer, aligning with Anggrarini et al. (2023) on vowel errors and Sayogie and Adbaka (2022) on consonant contrasts. The cognitive burden of unfamiliar phonemes hinders internalization, as per Kazuya's (2021) segmental framework, perpetuating fossilized errors without targeted intervention.

Theme 2: Limited Exposure to English Input

Lack of authentic auditory models emerged as a key environmental constraint, corroborating Qiao and Zhao (2023). Items 4–6 showed 59.4% agreement, with students reporting sporadic rather than sustained input. Interviews revealed variability tied to personal contexts.

- P1: “I rarely hear real English pronunciation, so sometimes I feel confused or anxious when I try to say it.”
- P2: “I’m not used to English sounds because I don’t hear them often.”
- P3: “I hear English from video calls and my family, so it helps me learn the pronunciation.”
- P4: “I learn from music and movies, but I don’t do it regularly.”

P3's access to familial input exemplifies how extramural exposure fosters phonological awareness, while others' deficits reinforce reliance on suboptimal models. This disparity underscores Input Theory's emphasis on comprehensible, frequent exposure for prosodic mastery (suprasegmental features per Kazuya, 2021).

Theme 3: Inconsistent Instructional Support

Classroom practices were viewed ambivalently, with neutral responses (items 7–9; 50% N) indicating sporadic rather than systemic

emphasis. This resonates with Almusharraf (2024) on exam-oriented neglect. Interviews highlighted feedback gaps despite occasional efforts.

- P1: “The teacher gives feedback, but not very often.”
- P2: “We get feedback sometimes, but pronunciation practice is limited.”
- P3: “We practice pronunciation during presentations or certain activities.”
- P4: “The teacher helps, but I think we need more practice.”

Perceptions of “limited” integration suggest pronunciation as an add-on, not core, aligning with Indonesian EFL contexts. Umaroh et al. (2023) advocate structured modeling, yet here, irregular activities impede retention, answering RQ2 on environmental contributions.

Theme 4: Affective Barriers (Most Dominant Theme)

Affective factors dominated, with 62.5% strong agreement (items 10–12), validating on anxiety's role. Interviews exposed emotional cascades from fear to avoidance, per the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

- P1: “I feel anxious, so sometimes I forget how to pronounce the word.”
- P2: “I get nervous, and then I make mistakes when speaking.”
- P3: “I’m not confident when speaking in front of the class.”
- P4: “I feel embarrassed when I pronounce the word incorrectly.”

This theme addresses RQ3, showing affective influences (e.g., low confidence) amplify linguistic errors, as in Bakhtiar and Suwandi (2022). Embarrassment fosters silence, reducing practice and entrenching issues, a cycle evident across participants.

Theme 5: Weak Learning Habits

Habitual inconsistencies (items 13–15; 43.8% mixed) reflected low autonomy, per Widyasworo (2019). Interviews linked this to motivation dips and environmental voids.

- P1: “I rarely practice pronunciation outside school.”
- P2: “I don’t practice at home because I forget or I’m not motivated.”
- P3: “I practice because my family uses English, so it helps me.”

- P4: “Sometimes I practice, but it depends on my mood.”

P3's proactive habits contrast others' inertia, highlighting unequal opportunities (RQ2). Without routines, suprasegmental fluency lags, as per Ra'no (2020).

Discussion

Triangulating data reveals pronunciation difficulties as multifaceted, stemming from L1-driven linguistic gaps, under-resourced environments, and amplified affective hurdles. Affective dominance (Theme 4) interacts with exposure deficits (Theme 2), creating avoidance loops that fossilize errors, echoing Putri et al. (2024) and Sabilla and Kaniadewi (2025). Instructional neutrality (Theme 3) exacerbates this in Indonesia's exam-centric system, while habits (Theme 5) vary socio-contextually.

These interplay supports an ecological view: isolated fixes (e.g., drills per Nafi'a et al., 2025) falter without holistic support. Limitations include a small interview sample; future quantitative scales could quantify interactions. Overall, the findings urge an integrated pedagogy that blends input-rich activities, feedback, and anxiety mitigation to enhance intelligibility.

SIMPULAN/CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the questionnaire and interviews, this study concludes that the pronunciation difficulties experienced by Grade X students at SMAN 1 Kuningan are caused by several interconnected factors. Linguistically, students struggle with English sounds that do not exist in Indonesian, and L1 interference strongly affects how they articulate consonants and vowels. Limited exposure to authentic English input further prevents students from developing accurate phonological awareness.

In addition, pronunciation instruction in the classroom is not consistently emphasised, resulting in few opportunities for structured practice and corrective feedback. Affective factors such as fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and low confidence also play a major role and often discourage students from speaking. Finally, students' learning habits, including infrequent practice at home and inconsistent engagement with English media, contribute to the persistence of pronunciation problems.

All these findings indicate that pronunciation difficulties among the students emerge from the interaction of linguistic, environmental, instructional, affective, and habitual factors. Improving pronunciation therefore requires a more focused and supportive learning environment that provides sufficient input, regular practice, constructive feedback, and encouragement to reduce students' anxiety in using English.

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