

**EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN ENGLISH
PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY
OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana
Pendidikan in English Education



By:

NONI ALFIANA

SN. 2521111

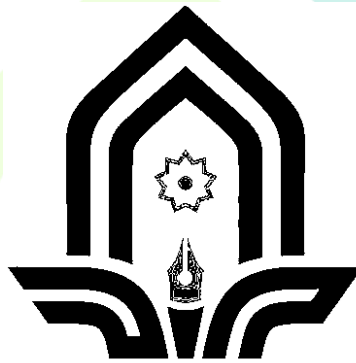
**ENGLISH TADRIS STUDY PROGRAM
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI
K.H ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN**

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2025

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Dengan ini mohon agar skripsi tersebut segera dimunaqosahkan.

Demikian nota pembimbing ini dibuat untuk digunakan sebagaimana mestinya. Atas perhatian bapak/Ibu, saya sampaikan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr.Wb.

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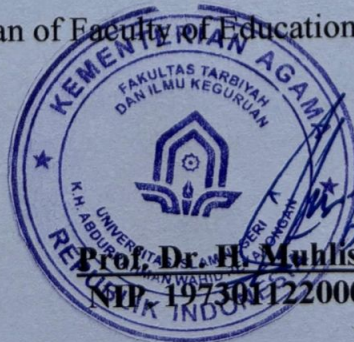
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MOTTO

“And do not weaken and do not grieve you will be superior if you are (true) believers.”

(Qs. Ali-Imran: 139)

“Believe you CAN and you are half way there.”

(Noni Alfiana)



ABSTRAK

Di sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia, pelafalan bahasa Inggris masih menjadi tantangan yang terus berlanjut karena adanya perbedaan signifikan antara sistem fonologis bahasa Inggris dan Bahasa Indonesia. Perbedaan ini sering kali menyebabkan kesalahan pelafalan yang sistematis, terutama ketika siswa menghadapi bunyi yang tidak dikenal atau struktur suku kata yang kompleks. Penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor linguistik yang menyebabkan kesulitan pelafalan bahasa Inggris pada siswa sekolah menengah pertama melalui pendekatan naratif. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pada dua faktor utama, yaitu interferensi bahasa pertama (L1) dan kendala fonotaktik. Data dikumpulkan dari tiga siswa kelas VIII yang dipilih secara purposive melalui wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa interferensi L1 menyebabkan penggantian bunyi bahasa Inggris yang tidak dikenal (misalnya /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/) dengan fonem yang mirip dalam bahasa Indonesia serta penyisipan vokal dalam gugus konsonan, mencerminkan penyesuaian terhadap aturan fonologis bahasa Indonesia. Selain itu, perbedaan aturan fonotaktik antara bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris menimbulkan kebingungan dan kesalahan pengucapan, terutama ketika bentuk tulisan tidak sesuai dengan pelafalannya. Pengalaman siswa juga menunjukkan adanya hambatan emosional seperti kecemasan, rasa malu, dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri saat berbicara bahasa Inggris. Namun, interaksi kelas yang suportif dan paparan berulang terhadap bunyi bahasa Inggris membantu meningkatkan motivasi dan performa siswa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa peningkatan pengajaran pelafalan bahasa Inggris harus mengintegrasikan aspek linguistik dan pengalaman untuk membantu siswa mengatasi kesulitan dengan lebih efektif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman mengenai bagaimana interferensi L1 dan kendala fonotaktik berinteraksi dengan pengalaman belajar siswa, serta menawarkan wawasan yang berharga bagi peningkatan pedagogi pelafalan dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa asing.

Kata kunci: Kesulitan Pengucapan, Faktor Linguistik, Sekolah Menengah Pertama, Pengalaman

ABSTRACT

In Indonesian junior high schools, English pronunciation remains a persistent challenge due to the significant differences between the phonological systems of English and Bahasa Indonesia. These differences often lead to systematic mispronunciations among learners, particularly when encountering unfamiliar sounds or complex syllable structures. This study investigates the linguistic factors contributing to English pronunciation difficulties among junior high school students through a narrative inquiry approach. It focuses on two main linguistic factors: first language (L1) interference and phonotactic constraints. Data were collected from three purposively selected eighth-grade students through in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that L1 interference leads to the substitution of unfamiliar English sounds (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, /f/, /tʃ/) with similar native phonemes and the insertion of vowels in consonant clusters, reflecting adaptation to the phonological rules of Bahasa Indonesia. Additionally, differences in phonotactic rules between Indonesian and English were found to create confusion and mispronunciations, especially when written forms do not match pronunciation. Students' experiences also demonstrated emotional barriers such as anxiety, embarrassment, and lack of confidence when speaking English, but supportive classroom interactions and repeated exposure enhanced their motivation and performance. The study concludes that improving English pronunciation instruction requires integrating both linguistic and experiential aspects to help learners overcome pronunciation challenges effectively. This research contributes to the understanding of how L1 interference and phonotactic constraints intersect with learner experience, offering valuable insights for enhancing pronunciation pedagogy in EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Pronunciation Difficulties, Linguistic Factors, Junior High School, Experience



PREFACE

Praises and gratefulness are sent to Allah SWT who has poured His grace and His gift and bestowed me guidance, health, and patience so that the writing process of my thesis entitled **“EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES : A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS”** can be completed. It is submitted to the English Education Department, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan to fulfill one of the requirements of the Sarjana Pendidikan degree at the English Education Department of Faculty of Education and Teacher Training UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. This proposed research can be accomplished because of many supports of several people. Therefore, on this occasion, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

The English pronunciation skills of junior high school students in Indonesia are generally still underdeveloped (Al Mawardi et al., 2023). Many students struggle to pronounce English sounds correctly, especially fricatives and affricates such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/ (Kartushina & Frauenfelder, 2014). A study by Utami (2018) revealed that students in a junior high school experienced significant pronunciation deviations in producing these sounds, indicating low pronunciation competence. These difficulties not only affect students' intelligibility but also reduce their confidence in using English for communication, potentially leading to reluctance to speak or engage in English-speaking activities (Jihad et al., 2024).

Swan & Smith (2013) explain many pronunciation difficulties experienced by learners stem not from lack of practice or motivation but from the influence of their mother tongue (L1), which shapes their perception and production of foreign language sounds (L2). The phonological system of a learner's native language often affects how they produce sounds in the target language (English). According to Flege (1995), when L2 learners encounter sounds that do not exist in their L1, they tend to substitute these unfamiliar sounds with the closest equivalents from their native phonological inventory, leading to systematic errors in pronunciation. This phenomenon, known as cross-linguistic influence or negative transfer, is especially common among

Indonesian learners of English due to significant phonological differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English. For instance, Widiyanti (2019) found that students whose mother tongue is Malay often struggled with voiceless plosive sounds /p/, /t/, and /k/ in English due to differences in phonological systems. These kinds of errors illustrate how phonological transfer from the L1 can lead to consistent pronunciation mistakes.

Having good pronunciation is essential for junior high school students learning English (Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021). Incorrect pronunciation can lead to communication breakdowns and decreased self-confidence. According to Yariyeva et al. (2024), students with poor pronunciation are more likely to feel isolated, face difficulties in job opportunities, avoid speaking English, and have limited access to further education. Similar conditions are observed among junior high school students in Batang, where those who perceive their English pronunciation as poor tend to lack confidence in speaking. This is evident when student asked to read English texts; they often read in a low and hesitant voice, indicating fear of making mistakes. Thus, effective pronunciation instruction should be an integral part of the English language curriculum at the junior high school level.

Identifying the linguistic factors that contribute to English pronunciation difficulties among junior high school students is essential to improving English language teaching. By understanding the role of L1 interference and phonotactic constraints teachers can develop more effective strategies to help students overcome these challenges. This study aims to provide in-depth

insights into these linguistic factors, thereby contributing to the enhancement of English pronunciation instruction at the junior high school level.

1.2 Identification of The Problem

English pronunciation difficulties are a common issue among Indonesian junior high school students. These problems largely stem from linguistic factors, particularly first language (L1) interference and phonotactic constraints. According to Swan and Smith (2013), L1 influence shapes the way learners perceive and produce sounds in the target language (L2), leading to systematic errors in pronunciation (Suzukida, 2021). Similarly, Flege (1995) emphasizes that unfamiliar L2 sounds are often substituted with the closest L1 equivalents, causing consistent mispronunciations.

For example, Indonesian students typically have difficulty producing the English sounds /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/ because these do not exist in their L1 phonological inventory (Septa Aryanika, 2024). Furthermore, due to differences in phonotactic rules, learners insert vowels into consonant clusters to match the permissible sound sequences of their mother tongue (Yuliati, 2014). These challenges not only affect the intelligibility of their speech but also decrease their confidence in using English (Yariyeva et al., 2024).

Despite formal instruction, these linguistic factors are not explicitly addressed in most classroom settings, leading to persistent pronunciation errors. Therefore, identifying these linguistic sources is crucial for improving teaching strategies and helping students overcome pronunciation difficulties (Králová et al., 2021).

1.3 Limitations of The Problem

This study is limited to the investigation of linguistic factors, namely L1 interference and phonotactic constraints, in explaining English pronunciation difficulties among eighth-grade students. Other influential variables such as affective factors (motivation, anxiety), cognitive processes, learning environment, or socio-cultural exposure are outside the scope of this research (Gilakjani, 2016).

Additionally, the study only involves three participants, selected through purposive sampling, in line with the qualitative narrative inquiry approach that prioritizes depth over breadth (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Therefore, the findings may not represent all junior high school students in Indonesia.

Moreover, the data collection methods are limited to interviews without the use of acoustic or phonetic analysis tools (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). This limitation restricts the analysis to perceived and observed pronunciation difficulties rather than objective phonetic measurements (Darcy, 2018).

1.4 Formulation of The Problem

This study provides two research questions:

1. What linguistic factors contribute to English pronunciation difficulties among junior high school students?
2. How do students experience these pronunciation difficulties?

1.5 Aims of The Research

This research is conducted with the aims :

1. To identify and analyze the linguistic factors contributing to English pronunciation difficulties among junior high school students.
2. To explore the experience of students regarding their pronunciation challenges.

1.6 Operational Definitions

To ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings, the following operational definitions are provided for key terms used in this study:

1. **English Pronunciation Difficulties** : English pronunciation difficulties are problems students have when speaking English sounds, words, or sentences. These include saying sounds wrongly, stressing the wrong part of a word, or not knowing the difference between similar sounds. (Rohmatul Inayah, 2024)
2. **Linguistic Factors** : Linguistic factors are defined as internal language-related aspects that influence a learner's foreign language pronunciation. These include the interference of the first language (L1) phonological system, such as the transfer of L1 sound patterns into the target language

(L2), as well as the inherent phonological and phonotactic complexities of the L2 itself, like unfamiliar sounds or consonant clusters. (Králová et al., 2021)

3. Junior High School : Students Junior high school students are individuals who are officially enrolled in grades 7 to 9 (or the equivalent level, typically aged 12 to 15 years old) at a recognized junior high school institution. (Nishino & Nekoda, 2015)

1.7 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research can be divided into three types:

1. Theoretical : This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of English pronunciation difficulties by emphasizing the role of linguistic factors such as phonological interference and phonotactic constraints, as explained by Králová et al. (2021). According to Králová et al. (2021), pronunciation difficulties are not only the result of individual learner differences but are also strongly influenced by systematic linguistic factors, particularly the influence of the first language (L1) sound system on the target language (L2). This study highlights these

theoretical aspects by identifying which linguistic factors most affect junior high school students' English pronunciation.

2. Empirical : This study provides real data on the pronunciation errors made by Indonesian junior high school students and the specific L1-based influences that shape these errors, thus validating the concepts proposed by Králová et al. (2021) The research findings are expected to offer evidence-based insights into how linguistic factors—such as L1 transfer and phonotactic differences—manifest in actual classroom settings, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice in pronunciation studies.

3. Practical : Practically, the research findings offer useful recommendations for English teachers to improve pronunciation instruction by addressing the specific linguistic difficulties identified, in line with Králová et al. (2021)'s view that effective pronunciation teaching must consider the learners' L1 background and phonological system. These recommendations aim to help students produce clearer and more accurate English speech, build confidence in using English, and enhance their overall communication skills.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the linguistic factors contributing to English pronunciation difficulties among junior high school students through a narrative inquiry approach. Based on the data collected from in-depth interviews and supported by theoretical frameworks, two primary linguistic factors were identified: first language (L1) interference and differences in phonotactic rules between Bahasa Indonesia and English. The findings revealed that L1 interference significantly affects the students' ability to produce accurate English pronunciation. Students often substitute English phonemes with the closest equivalents from their L1, especially for unfamiliar sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/. In addition, there was a strong tendency among students to insert epenthetic vowels when encountering English consonant clusters, reflecting adaptation to Bahasa Indonesia's simpler phonotactic structure.

Students' experiences further demonstrated that pronunciation difficulties are not solely linguistic but are also influenced by social and psychological aspects. Feelings of shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence were commonly expressed, especially when students were required to speak English in front of their peers. However, supportive classroom environments and repeated exposure to English sounds contributed to increased confidence and motivation to improve pronunciation. The study

concludes that addressing English pronunciation difficulties requires a comprehensive approach that considers both the linguistic structure of students' native language and their personal experiences with the target language. Effective pronunciation instruction must acknowledge these factors to enhance both intelligibility and learner confidence.

5.1 Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve English pronunciation learning among junior high school students. For English teachers, it is recommended to incorporate explicit pronunciation instruction into daily classroom practices, particularly focusing on English phonemes that do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia. Teachers should provide auditory models and frequent listening and repetition exercises to help students build accurate phonological representations. Additionally, creating a supportive and open classroom atmosphere is essential to reduce students' anxiety and encourage active participation during pronunciation practice. Visual aids and simplified phonetic spelling can also be utilized to bridge the gap between English orthography and pronunciation.

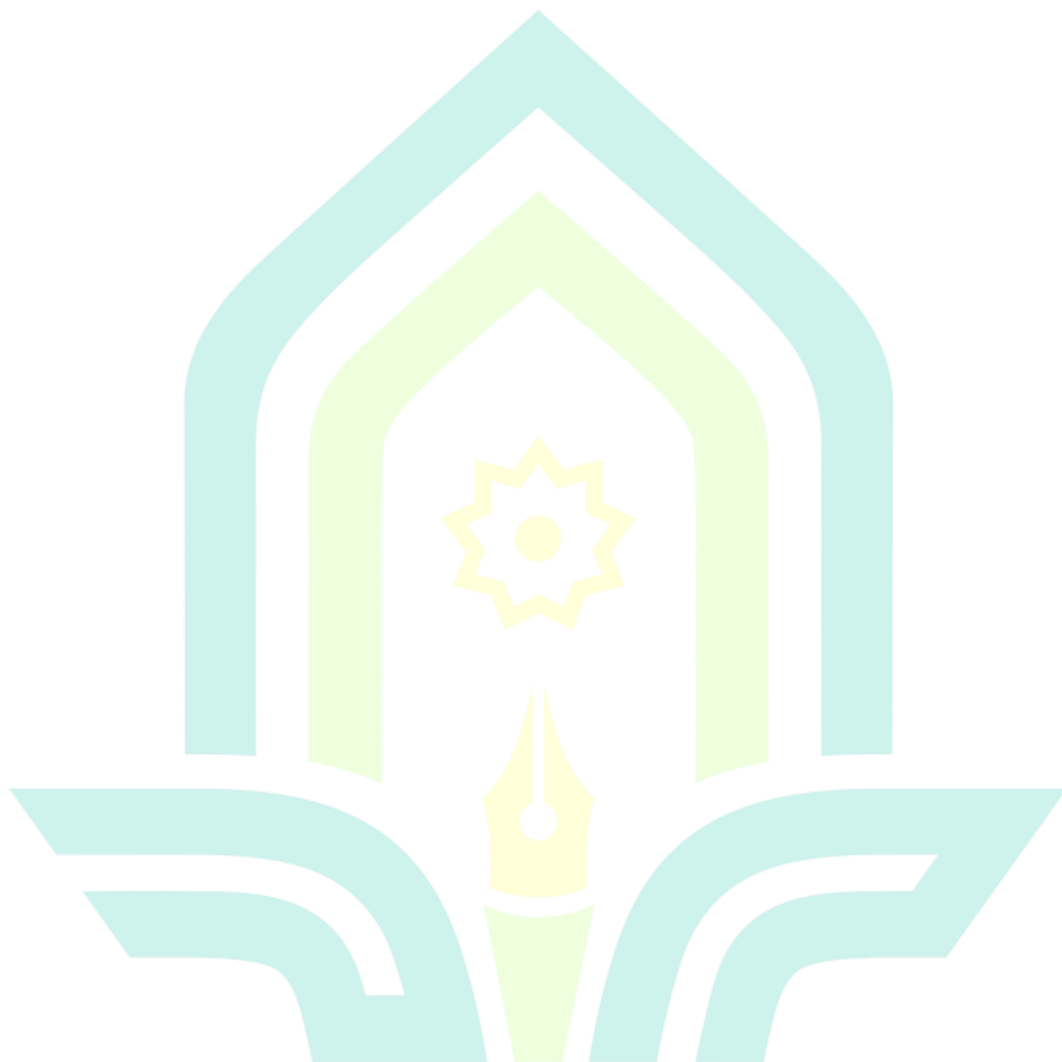
For curriculum developers, it is advisable to formally integrate pronunciation components into English language syllabi. Materials and activities should be designed to address the specific challenges Indonesian students face due to L1 interference and phonotactic differences. For future researchers, further studies could explore pronunciation challenges involving

regional languages beyond Bahasa Indonesia, utilize acoustic tools for objective measurement, and investigate affective or sociocultural factors that influence pronunciation learning.

Finally, for students, active engagement in self-practice and exposure to authentic English pronunciation through digital platforms is encouraged. Students should develop self-awareness of their pronunciation issues, remain open to corrective feedback, and seek regular opportunities to practice speaking English in and outside of the classroom. By combining structured instruction, psychological support, and learner initiative, pronunciation teaching can become more effective and responsive to students' actual linguistic needs.

For future researchers, this study opens up several opportunities for further exploration. It is recommended that future studies expand the participant scope to include learners from diverse regions and linguistic backgrounds, particularly those whose first languages differ significantly from Bahasa Indonesia. Investigating how regional languages (e.g., Javanese, Sundanese, or Madurese) affect English pronunciation could enrich the understanding of multilingual interference in second language acquisition. Additionally, future researchers are encouraged to employ acoustic phonetic analysis or speech recognition tools to obtain more objective and measurable data on pronunciation errors. Incorporating mixed-method approaches, such as combining narrative inquiry with experimental or quantitative methods, could also provide a more comprehensive view of learners' pronunciation development. Furthermore, exploring sociocultural, psychological, or

cognitive variables—such as learner motivation, anxiety, or attitudes toward English—may yield valuable insights into the broader factors influencing pronunciation learning.



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