

**AN ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES
IN LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION**

A THESIS

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



By:

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

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

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr.Wb.

Pekalongan, 29 April 2026
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"Semua jatuh bangunmu, hal yang biasa. Angan dan pertanyaan, waktu yang menjawabnya. Berikan tenggat waktu, bersedihlah secukupnya. Rayakan perasaanmu sebagai manusia."

(Mata Air - Hindia)

"Masih banyak makanan enak yang harus dicoba, serial yang harus ditamatkan, dan tempat indah yang harus dikunjungi. Mungkin bagi kita hidup menyakitkan, tapi bagi orang-orang di sekeliling kita akan lebih menyakitkan kalau kita nggak hidup. Seberat apapun keadaan, jangan menyerah ya!"

(Fiersa Besari)



ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa sekolah menengah dalam belajar pelafalan bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif untuk mengeksplorasi permasalahan pelafalan siswa di sebuah SMP di Kabupaten Batang. Metode pengumpulan data meliputi observasi kelas saat kegiatan membaca nyaring, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan siswa dan guru bahasa Inggris, serta dokumentasi hasil pelafalan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan pada aspek segmental dan suprasegmental dalam pelafalan bahasa Inggris. Kesulitan segmental terutama berkaitan dengan konsonan, vokal, dan diftong, sedangkan kesulitan suprasegmental berkaitan dengan tekanan kata, ritme, dan intonasi. Kesulitan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor, antara lain interferensi bahasa pertama siswa (Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Jawa), terbatasnya waktu pembelajaran untuk latihan pelafalan, kurangnya rasa percaya diri, serta minimnya paparan bahasa Inggris di luar kelas. Dengan mengidentifikasi kesulitan pronunciation yang dialami siswa, penelitian ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi proses pembelajaran pronunciation bahasa Inggris mereka.

Kata kunci: kesulitan pelafalan, siswa sekolah menengah, fitur segmental, fitur suprasegmental



ABSTRACT

This research investigates the difficulties faced by secondary students in learning English pronunciation. This study uses a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design to explore students' pronunciation problems in a junior high school in Batang Regency. Data collection methods include classroom observations during reading aloud activities, semi-structured interviews with students and the English teacher, and documentation of students' pronunciation performance. The findings indicate that students experience difficulties in both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. Segmental difficulties are mainly related to consonants, vowels, and diphthongs, while suprasegmental difficulties are related to stress, rhythm, and intonation. These difficulties are influenced by several factors, including the interference of students' first languages (Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese), limited classroom time for pronunciation practice, lack of confidence, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Despite these challenges, identifying students' pronunciation difficulties provides valuable insights into the factors that influence their English pronunciation learning process.

Key words: pronunciation difficulties, secondary students, segmental features, suprasegmental features

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

English pronunciation is not an easy skill to acquire for many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, especially those at the secondary school level. Unlike Bahasa Indonesia, which generally has a more consistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation, English pronunciation has a more complex sound system and many inconsistencies between spelling and pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). As a result, learners often experience difficulties in producing English sounds accurately, which may affect their confidence and speaking ability. This issue is also found among students at a junior high school in Batang Regency, where many students experience difficulties in learning English pronunciation. Gilakjani (2016) states that the irregular correspondence between English spelling and pronunciation can hinder learners' speaking performance and reduce their motivation. Similarly, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that poor pronunciation can prevent students from being understood and may discourage them from participating in spoken communication. Therefore, improving pronunciation instruction is essential for developing students' speaking skills and boosting their overall communicative competence.

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects of learning English because it directly affects how well learners can be understood in spoken

communication (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). However, pronunciation often receives less attention than other language skills in English language teaching, as teachers are required to cover various aspects of language learning within limited instructional time (Fraser, 2000). As a result, English lessons frequently focus on grammar, reading, and writing, leaving less time for pronunciation practice. This situation makes it difficult for students to build strong speaking skills. According to Gilakjani (2016), pronunciation is a key component of communicative competence, and students who lack clear pronunciation may struggle to express their ideas even if they know the correct grammar or vocabulary. Similarly, Fraser (2000) points out that poor pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings and can lower a student's confidence when speaking English. Because of these challenges, teachers need to give more focus and creative effort to pronunciation teaching. Providing special activities, using audio-visual materials, or integrating pronunciation into daily lessons can help students practice more effectively, even when class time is short. Research shows that consistent exposure and practice are crucial for improving pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2015). In the Indonesian context, where English is a foreign language, students may have limited opportunities to hear and use authentic English outside the classroom. This makes the teacher's role even more important in providing meaningful pronunciation instruction and practice (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). By understanding the specific difficulties that secondary students face, such as problems with English sounds that do not exist in Indonesian,

teachers can better recognize students' pronunciation problems and provide appropriate support during the learning process.

English pronunciation is a crucial aspect of language learning, especially for eighth-grade students who are in a foundational stage of developing their communication skills. Proper pronunciation helps students to be understood clearly by others, reducing misunderstandings and building confidence in their English-speaking abilities (Derwing & Munro, 2005). At this stage, learners are also forming habits that can influence their long-term language abilities. According to Gilakjani (2016), accurate pronunciation plays a significant role in enhancing listening comprehension and speaking fluency, both of which are essential for effective communication. When students can pronounce words correctly, they are more likely to participate actively in class discussions and oral presentations, contributing to their overall academic performance.

In the long term, good English pronunciation can provide significant advantages in higher education and professional settings. As English continues to be the dominant global language in science, technology, and international business, the ability to speak it clearly and confidently becomes increasingly valuable (Morley, 1991). Mispronunciation can sometimes lead to communication breakdowns in real-life situations such as job interviews, academic conferences, or workplace interactions. As Derwing and Munro (2005) emphasize, pronunciation is not just about sounding like a native speaker but about being intelligible to listeners from various backgrounds.

Therefore, investing in pronunciation practice at an early age can help students develop a strong foundation that supports their future academic and career success.

Several previous studies on English pronunciation difficulties have mainly focused on senior high school and university students. For example, research conducted by Le & Trung (2024) investigated pronunciation difficulties among university students, while Rahmi (2021) examined pronunciation problems experienced by senior high school students. However, studies focusing on junior high school learners, particularly in the Indonesian context, are still limited. In addition, previous studies have often focused on identifying pronunciation errors rather than exploring students' experiences and the factors contributing to their difficulties through qualitative approaches such as interviews and classroom observations. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by investigating English pronunciation difficulties among students in one of the junior high schools in Batang Regency through a qualitative case study approach that also considers their first language backgrounds.

1.2 Identification of The Problem

Based on the background of the study, the identification of the problem is that eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Batang Regency face difficulties in English pronunciation due to the mismatch between spelling and sounds, the influence of their first languages such as Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese, and limited classroom time for pronunciation practice. These

difficulties lead to frequent pronunciation errors, low self-confidence, and less active participation in speaking activities. Several previous studies, such as those conducted by Le & Trung (2024) and Rahmi (2021), have mainly focused on university and senior high school students, while pronunciation difficulties among junior high school learners, particularly those influenced by local language backgrounds, remain less explored. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the pronunciation difficulties experienced by junior high school students to provide insights for teachers in improving instructional strategies and supporting students' communicative competence.

1.3 Limitation of The Problem

From the identification of the problem in this research, this research is focused on problems that need to be investigated. Specifically, this research focuses on the pronunciation difficulties faced by eighth-grade students in learning English at one of the public junior high school in Batang Regency.

1.4 Formulation of The Problem

Based on the above background, this study conducted with the formulation of the problems:

1. What are the difficulties faced by secondary students in learning English pronunciation?
2. Why do secondary students find it difficult to learn English pronunciation?

1.5 Operational Definition

To avoid misunderstanding the terms in the study, the researcher provides some definitions related to the study as follows:

1. Secondary students : Secondary students are learners who are in the stage of education that occurs after the completion of primary school and before entering tertiary or higher education (Brown, 2007).
2. Difficulties : In the context of learning English pronunciation, difficulties refer to obstacles in producing both segmental sounds and suprasegmental features that hinder the learner's intelligibility (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).
3. Pronunciation : Pronunciation is the way in which a language or a particular word is pronounced, involving the use of speech organs to produce sounds in a comprehensible and acceptable manner (Roach 2009).

1.6 Aims of The Study

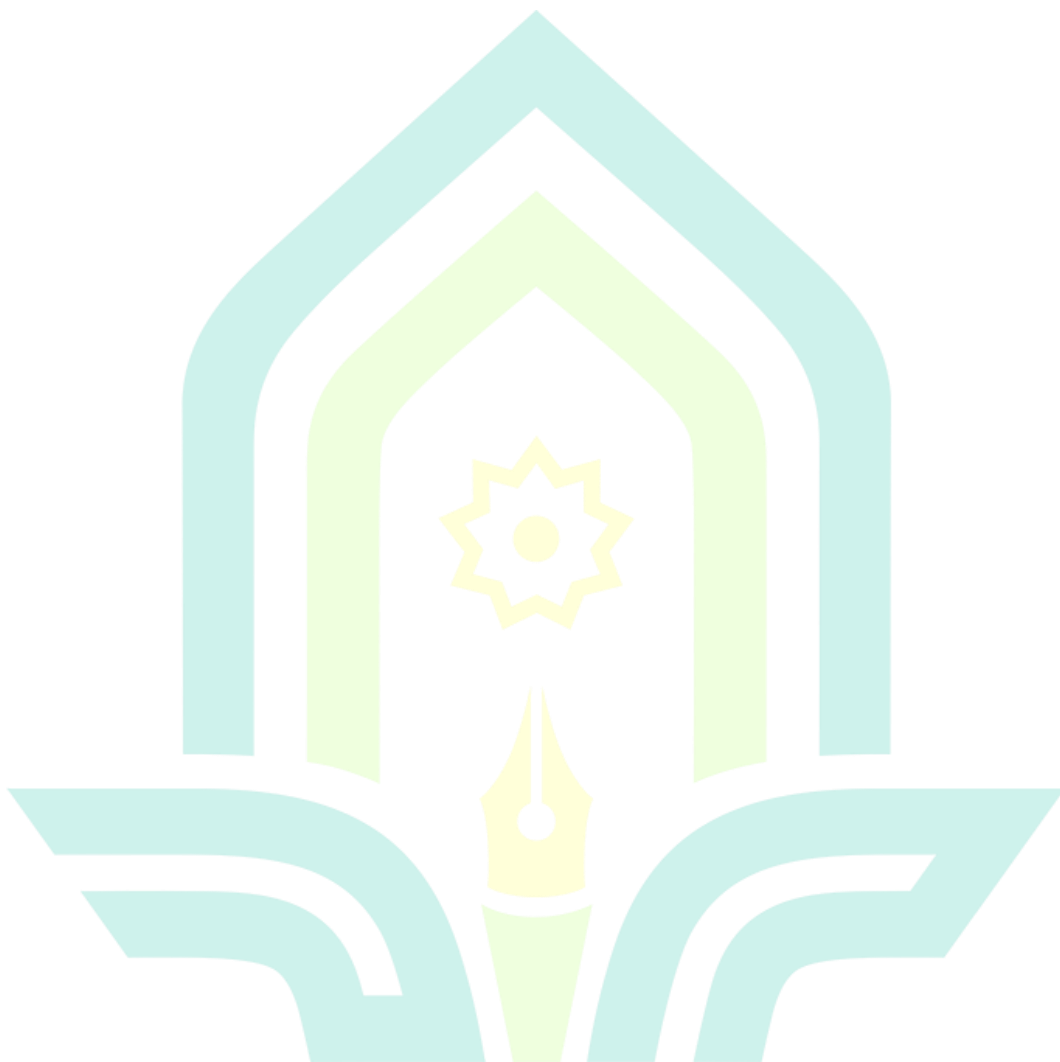
Based on the formulation of the problem written above, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To find out the difficulties faced by secondary students in learning English pronunciation.
2. To identify the reasons for the difficulties faced by secondary students in learning English pronunciation.

1.7 Significances of The Problem

1. Theoretical significance : This study is expected to enrich the theoretical understanding of students' pronunciation difficulties in English as a foreign language, especially at the secondary school level.
2. Empirical significance : This research provides real data and insights from 8th-grade students in a junior high school in Batang Regency, which can serve as a reference for future studies on pronunciation issues.
3. Practical significance : The findings of this study can contribute to a better understanding of secondary students' difficulties and the factors influencing their English pronunciation

learning, which can serve as useful information for English teachers in recognizing students' pronunciation problems.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of The Findings

This study investigated the difficulties faced by secondary students in learning English pronunciation and the reasons behind those difficulties. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students faced several difficulties in learning English pronunciation. The difficulties included differences between English sounds and Bahasa Indonesia, differences between English spelling and pronunciation, silent letters, and mispronunciation of segmental features. Students often struggled to produce English sounds that do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia, such as /θ/ and /v/, and tended to replace them with more familiar sounds from their first language. In addition, students frequently pronounced English words based on their spelling, which caused errors, particularly in irregular words such as “enough” and “hour”. Silent letters also created difficulties because students were accustomed to pronouncing every written letter in Bahasa Indonesia.

Regarding the reasons behind students’ pronunciation difficulties, the findings revealed that these problems were influenced by several factors, including linguistic, psychological, instructional, and environmental factors. Linguistically, students’ first language influenced their production of English sounds, causing difficulties in pronouncing

unfamiliar sounds. Psychologically, students experienced lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, which were reflected in hesitation, low voice, and avoidance during speaking activities. In addition, instructional factors, such as limited focus on pronunciation practice in classroom activities, and environmental factors, such as limited exposure to authentic English outside the classroom, also contributed to students' difficulties in learning English pronunciation.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed. For English teachers, it is recommended to provide more explicit and consistent pronunciation instruction, especially on difficult sounds, silent letters, and spelling-pronunciation differences. Teachers are also encouraged to provide regular pronunciation practice and modeling, as well as create a supportive classroom environment to reduce students' anxiety and increase their confidence in speaking.

For students, they are suggested to practice pronunciation more frequently both inside and outside the classroom by listening to and imitating correct pronunciation from teachers, audio materials, or digital tools. Students should also be more confident and not be afraid of making mistakes, as errors are part of the learning process. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct further studies focusing on pronunciation improvement strategies or experimental research with a larger number of participants to obtain more comprehensive results.

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