

Analysis Of Students' Difficulties In Learning Pronunciation Skill At Tenth Grade Of SMK Sore Tulungagung In Academic Year 2024/2025

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Abstract. *The study was conducted based on the observation that many students face challenges in pronouncing English words correctly, which hindered their speaking fluency and lowered their self-confidence in English communication. The study sought to identify specific pronunciation problems and explore the underlying causes of those difficulties. This research method used a qualitative descriptive approach. The subjects of this study were by tenth-grade students of SMK Sore Tulungagung in the 2024/2025 academic year with a total of 10 students. The data were collected through classroom observation, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed four major categories of pronunciation difficulties : phonetic differences (90%), lack of opportunity to practice (70%), low self-confidence (60%), and an unsupportive classroom atmosphere (40%). Data were analyzed through three steps : data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, where the researcher interpreted the findings. It is suggested that teacher should incorporate pronunciation-focused strategies such as modeling, repetition drills, and immediate corrective feedback. Students are encouraged to actively practice pronunciation both inside and outside the classroom. For further studies may explore ppronunciation challenges in larger or more diverse student populations the effectiveness of specific intervention techniques such as mobile-assisted pronunciation tools. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of creating a more supportive and interactive learning environment that fosters student confidence in speaking. Teachers can play a crucial role in reducing anxiety by providing a safe space for students to practice without fear of judgment. Collaborative activities such as peer-to-peer pronunciation exercises and pronunciation games could also help students gain more exposure to correct pronunciation in a less formal setting. Furthermore, integrating technology such as pronunciation apps or online platforms may allow students to practice at their own pace, enhancing their learning experience and improving their confidence in speaking English.*

Keywords: Analysis, Difficulties, English Learning, Pronunciaton Skill

1. INTRODUCTION

In English language learning, pronunciation is a fundamental aspect that directly affects students' oral communication skills. For EFL learners at the secondary school level, especially vocational school students, the ability to produce English sounds accurately can significantly influence their confidence and fluency in speaking. However, many Indonesian students still face serious challenges in mastering this skill. These difficulties often stem from the interference of their native language phonology, insufficient practice, and the lack of explicit pronunciation instruction in the classroom (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). This issue is especially evident among tenth-grade students at SMK Sore Tulungagung, where pronunciation problems frequently hinder students from participating actively in speaking activities.

Observations during classroom interactions show that pronunciation difficulties not only lead to errors in articulation but also cause students to withdraw from speaking tasks due to fear of making mistakes. Many learners hesitate or refuse to speak in English during lessons,

citing embarrassment or anxiety when asked to pronounce unfamiliar words. This hesitation, in turn, contributes to a cycle of low self-confidence and limited speaking experience. Moreover, pronunciation tends to receive less emphasis in the national curriculum compared to other language skills, which results in inadequate instructional support for learners who struggle with this aspect of English (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Thus, it becomes imperative to address pronunciation as a key factor affecting students' overall communicative competence.

Previous research has examined various factors influencing pronunciation problems, including phonetic interference, lack of input, and ineffective teaching strategies (Baker & Murphy, 2011; Derwing & Munro, 2005). However, studies specifically targeting vocational high school students in Indonesia, particularly in rural or under-resourced settings, remain limited. Most investigations have focused on university learners or general secondary schools, creating a gap in the literature concerning the unique challenges experienced by vocational students. Considering that these students often enter the workforce shortly after graduation, communicative proficiency, including correct pronunciation, is essential for their future employment prospects.

Recent studies have begun to address this gap. Gustary (2023) found that in a vocational high school in Tangerang, drilling and song-based activities were used for pronunciation teaching, yet students still faced barriers such as limited auditory discrimination, articulation challenges, sound distribution issues, and weak memory for word sounds. Similarly, Dewi (2024) highlighted the effectiveness of diverse teaching strategies—such as reading aloud, eliciting difficult words, class and individual drilling, and video-based listening activities—in improving students' pronunciation at a vocational high school in Tasikmalaya.

Innovative approaches have also shown promise. Rahmawati, Khatimah, Sunarti, and Aulia (2023) reported that implementing Power Teaching in a rural vocational school significantly enhanced students' speaking performance, with pronunciation receiving the highest score improvement. Fitriani and Zulkarnain (2023) identified that the most frequent pronunciation errors among vocational students occurred with vowels, followed by consonants and grammatical errors, emphasizing the need for more targeted phonological instruction. Beyond instructional methods, Milania, Wachyudi, and Mobit (2022) noted that both internal factors, such as low confidence, and external factors, such as limited exposure to English, hindered students' speaking and pronunciation abilities.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by analyzing the specific pronunciation difficulties encountered by tenth-grade students at SMK Sore Tulungagung and exploring the contributing factors behind those difficulties. The purpose of this research is twofold: first, to

identify the types of pronunciation errors most commonly experienced by students, and second, to investigate the underlying causes of these difficulties. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach through observation, questionnaires, and interviews, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the pronunciation challenges faced by students. The findings are expected to inform more effective teaching strategies and promote a supportive learning environment that encourages students to develop their pronunciation skills without fear of judgment. Ultimately, the study aspires to contribute to the improvement of pronunciation instruction in vocational education contexts in Indonesia, ensuring that learners can build both linguistic competence and communicative confidence (Zega, 2025).

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' pronunciation difficulties in English learning. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences and perceptions related to pronunciation. According to (Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research allows researchers to analyze complex human behaviors by interacting directly with participants in natural settings. Through this design, the researcher was able to identify patterns of pronunciation errors and their underlying causes.

Participants

The participants in this study were ten tenth-grade students from SMK Sore Tulungagung in the academic year 2024/2025. They were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria: currently enrolled in English class and having shown notable pronunciation difficulties as identified by their English teacher. This selection method ensured that the participants were relevant to the research objectives and capable of providing rich data (Creswell, 2018).

Research Instruments

The main instruments for data collection were observation sheets, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interview guidelines. The researcher also acted as the key instrument, as is typical in qualitative research (Xu & Storr, 2012). Additional tools such as audio recordings and field notes were used to support the data collection process and ensure accuracy.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using three techniques:

- **Classroom Observation:** The researcher observed students during English lessons to identify common pronunciation errors and student responses. The observations focused on students' participation, confidence, and accuracy during speaking tasks.
- **Questionnaire:** An open-ended questionnaire with 15 items was distributed to the participants to gather their perceptions and self-reported difficulties in pronunciation.
- **Semi-Structured Interview:** Each participant was interviewed individually using ten guided questions, allowing them to elaborate on their pronunciation struggles and classroom experiences.

These three methods were implemented sequentially and triangulated to validate the findings from multiple perspectives.

- **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes three steps:

- **Data Reduction:** Identifying and summarizing key information from observations, questionnaire responses, and interviews.
Data Display: Presenting the reduced data in tables and descriptive formats to identify emerging themes.
- **Conclusion Drawing:** Interpreting the data to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the types and causes of pronunciation difficulties.

Triangulation

To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied using multiple data sources and methods. Observations, questionnaires, and interviews were compared to confirm the consistency of emerging themes. This methodological triangulation ensured that the data reflected the real experiences and challenges of the participants (Denzin, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings gathered from classroom observation, student interviews, and questionnaire data. The study aimed to identify specific pronunciation difficulties and explore their underlying causes among tenth-grade students at SMK Sore Tulungagung.

- Observation Result

The classroom observation was conducted on June 3, 2025. During the lesson, the researcher noted several indicators of pronunciation difficulties. Many students appeared hesitant to speak, especially when asked to pronounce unfamiliar words. One student expressed reluctance by saying, “Bu, malu kalau harus ngomong di depan. Nggak bisa ngucapinnya, Bu. Susah,” showing the emotional barrier tied to pronunciation challenges. Mispronunciations of words and substitution of unfamiliar sounds were frequently observed. Additionally, there was limited individual practice, and the teacher provided only general corrective feedback.

- Interview Result

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 selected students. The findings revealed recurring themes of phonetic confusion, lack of confidence, and limited practice opportunities.

Table 1. Interview Summary

Informant	Summary of Responses
1	Confused and afraid to speak due to lack of guidance; nervous when speaking in front of the class.
2	Struggles with similar-sounding words like <i>adds</i> and <i>ads</i> ; lacks speaking experience.
3	Rarely practices; confused with <i>fan</i> vs. <i>van</i> .
4	Finds pronunciation difficult; avoids speaking due to fear of mistakes.
5	Difficult to differentiate sounds like <i>fair</i> and <i>fare</i> .
6	Finds pronunciation difficult; emphasizes the need for a more supportive class.
7	Reports peer bullying when mispronouncing words; affected confidence.
8	Lacks motivation and finds pronunciation confusing.
9	Afraid of making mistakes; low motivation.
10	Struggles with pronunciation and vocabulary; hopes for better teaching strategies.

These responses indicate consistent pronunciation challenges across the participant group. Fear of mispronunciation and peer judgment emerged as dominant factors affecting students' performance.

- Questionnaire Result

To support the observational and interview data, a 15-item open-ended questionnaire was distributed to the 10 participants. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement

on various statements regarding pronunciation learning, using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Table 2. Percentage of Questionnaire Responses

Question No.	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	0	90	10	0
2	10	10	80	0
3	10	80	10	0
4	0	10	80	10
5	0	70	30	0
6	10	80	10	0
7	10	60	30	0
8	10	60	30	0
9	10	70	20	0
10	10	40	50	0
11	0	30	60	10
12	10	70	20	0
13	0	40	60	0
14	0	20	80	0
15	0	50	40	10

From these results, it was found that:

- 90% of students agreed they lack confidence when speaking English.
- 80% admitted feeling anxious when asked to speak.
- 70% agreed they struggled with unfamiliar English sounds.
- 60% said they did not know the correct way to pronounce many words.
- 50% or more avoided speaking due to fear of mistakes or lack of support.

These findings confirm that students face multiple pronunciation difficulties, including segmental (e.g., vowels, consonants) and suprasegmental features (e.g., intonation, stress), and that emotional and environmental factors further complicate their learning process.

This study investigated the specific difficulties encountered by tenth-grade students at SMK Sore Tulungagung in learning English pronunciation, along with the underlying causes of these challenges. The findings revealed four main issues: phonetic confusion, lack of practice opportunities, low self-confidence, and an unsupportive learning environment. These results align with and expand upon prior studies in the field of English pronunciation pedagogy.

Specific Pronunciation Difficulties

Students were found to struggle with both segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation. Segmentally, many had difficulty distinguishing similar vowel and consonant sounds, particularly in minimal pairs such as ship/sheep, fan/van, and fair/fare.

These issues mirror the findings of Derwing and Munro (2005), who argue that learners often substitute unfamiliar English phonemes with sounds from their native language, resulting in systematic mispronunciations. The data collected from both interviews and questionnaires in this study confirmed that most students could not differentiate certain English sounds due to their absence in Indonesian or Javanese.

Suprasegmentally, students demonstrated poor control over word stress and intonation, leading to speech that lacked natural rhythm and was difficult to understand. These issues align with the observations of Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) who emphasized the importance of teaching stress patterns and intonation explicitly, as these features are crucial for intelligible communication.

Underlying Causes of Pronunciation Difficulties

The underlying causes identified in this study reflect a complex interaction of linguistic, psychological, and instructional factors.

First, phonetic interference from the first language (L1) was found to be the most prominent cause. Many participants admitted replacing English sounds with those from their native language unconsciously, as previously described by Zega (2025). For example, /v/ was often replaced by /f/, and the /θ/ sound was absent altogether. This supports the argument that the absence of equivalent phonemes in the L1 makes acquisition of accurate L2 pronunciation especially challenging.

Second, the lack of regular speaking practice both in and outside the classroom hindered the development of pronunciation skills. Students reported limited exposure to spoken English and minimal opportunities for repetition or pronunciation drills. This is in line with Baker and Murphy (2011), who found that frequent and meaningful speaking practice is crucial for developing accurate pronunciation. Furthermore, classroom observations showed that pronunciation practice was not integrated into daily teaching, and feedback was mostly generic rather than individualized.

Third, low self-confidence and anxiety emerged as key barriers to pronunciation learning. Many students expressed fear of speaking English in front of their peers due to potential ridicule or correction. This emotional component echoes the findings of MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who highlighted that language anxiety, particularly in speaking tasks, impairs performance and reduces students' willingness to communicate.

Lastly, an unsupportive classroom environment further compounded these difficulties. Several students noted that they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed in class, especially when

the learning atmosphere lacked encouragement or was dominated by peer criticism. This reinforces Goh and Burns (2012) argument that a supportive learning environment is essential for building students' confidence and promoting oral participation.

Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications for English teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers. Teachers need to prioritize pronunciation in their daily instruction by employing targeted strategies such as modeling, repetition, and corrective feedback. Moreover, the classroom environment must be carefully managed to foster psychological safety, so that students feel free to take risks and practice speaking without fear of failure.

Curriculum developers should consider integrating pronunciation-focused activities that go beyond isolated word drills and instead simulate real-life communicative contexts. Additionally, pronunciation software or mobile apps can be explored as supplementary tools to encourage independent learning, consistent with the suggestions of (Stockwell, 2012).

For researchers, this study highlights the need for further exploration of pronunciation instruction in vocational schools, where students may face distinct challenges due to their educational and social backgrounds. Future studies might examine the effectiveness of intervention strategies such as peer tutoring, gamified pronunciation training, or mobile-assisted pronunciation learning.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of this study indicate that tenth-grade students at SMK Sore Tulungagung experience significant difficulties in English pronunciation, primarily involving phonetic confusion, minimal pair distinctions, and improper stress and intonation, all of which are closely tied to their linguistic background, limited exposure to authentic language use, and lack of confidence. These findings answer the research objectives by identifying the specific types and causes of students' pronunciation problems. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that English teachers implement more consistent and targeted pronunciation instruction, while fostering a supportive classroom environment that reduces students' fear of making mistakes. Students should also be encouraged to practice independently using digital tools or peer collaboration. Nonetheless, the study is limited by its small sample size and localized context, making broader generalizations uncertain. Future research is suggested to explore pronunciation instruction across more diverse school settings and to assess the

effectiveness of specific pedagogical interventions using larger samples or experimental designs.

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