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VOICES OF PROFICIENCY: INSIGHTS INTO EFL PRONUNCIATION TEACHING CHALLENGES IN INDONESIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract: This study investigates English pronunciation teaching practices, challenges, and effectiveness in Indonesian senior middle schools. It aims to identify specific barriers teachers face and develop recommendations for improving pronunciation instruction. The research focuses on internal factors, such as teachers' self-proficiency and instructional techniques, and external factors, including curriculum constraints and student motivation. Interviews with four English teachers revealed that reading aloud is a common strategy for teaching pronunciation, with Teacher 1 using report texts and Teacher 2 incorporating role play. Teachers 1 and 2 actively participate in the MGMP discussion forum to enhance their teaching methods, whereas Teachers 3 and 4 value their phonetics training from college. The study identifies critical challenges, such as students' lack of practice, native language interference, and motivational issues. Teachers 1 and 2 noted that students' pronunciation struggles are compounded by their reliance on their mother tongue and limited practice. Recommendations include integrating dedicated pronunciation practice into the curriculum and using interactive activities to enhance students' engagement and proficiency in English pronunciation.

Keywords: English pronunciation, Indonesian middle schools, teaching challenges

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore and analyze the current practices, challenges, and effectiveness of English pronunciation teaching in Indonesian middle schools. As part of the national curriculum, English teaching plays a vital role in shaping students' language competence. However, the effectiveness of English pronunciation teaching in middle schools in Indonesia is uneven and inconsistent (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020).

Recent research has explored the difficulties encountered in teaching English Pronunciation. Studies on teaching English pronunciation in EFL reveal challenges and innovative efforts to improve effectiveness. Key aspects include vowel shifts, factors influencing pronunciation, and instruments. PABI in Indonesia and technology-based

approaches like Blackboard Collaborate Ultra improves Arab undergraduate pronunciation problems.

Fadillah (2020) explores three aspects pronunciation difficulties. They are vowel and consonant shifts, factors influencing pronunciation, and instruments used by researchers. Pronunciation factors include mother tongue influence, exposure to a target language, and ear perception. Karlina et al., (2020) study the development of Phonetic Alphabets for Bahasa Indonesia (PABI), a practical tool for English teachers and students in Indonesia to accurately transcribe English pronunciations into phonetic transcription, ensuring local readability and accessibility.

Purwati et al., (2023) explore the challenges four EFL teachers face in Indonesian vocational middle schools when teaching speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The teachers identified students' lack of vocabulary and poor pronunciation as significant issues and psychological factors like low confidence and motivation. The findings suggest that policymakers should reframe the current speaking curriculum in these schools.

Research conducted in countries where English is learned as a foreign language and is not the primary language, such as Quoc et al., (2021) investigate English pronunciation teaching at English centres in Vietnam, focusing on the role, goal, time allocation, and techniques used. Data from interviews and classroom observations revealed the importance of time contribution, corrective feedback, and authentic materials in addressing the unintelligibility of Vietnamese learners' English pronunciation and hindering their academic and career goals. The research uses questionnaires, SPSS analysis, and discussion to find solutions and contribute to language learning problem-solving efforts. Addressing pronunciation issues is crucial for effective communication with the world. Jahara & Abdelrady (2021) examine pronunciation problems faced by Arab undergraduate EFL learners, using questionnaires, recorded speech samples, and pronunciation tests. The study aims to improve pronunciation skills through repetition drills and phonemic inventory using the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Learning Management System. The research suggests feasible pedagogical techniques to impart English sounds and initiate learners to produce and acquire sounds more accurately. Results show improvement in pronunciation through constant motivation and participation in tests.

Tiwari & Prasad (2023) explore the challenges faced by secondary-level Instructors of English in teaching English pronunciation as a Second/Foreign Language (EFL/ESL) in Nepal. It identifies nine key issues, including priority conflicts, inadequacies, oversight of mispronunciations, temporal constraints, limited proficiency, peer emulation, resource scarcity, and limited exposure. The study suggests prioritizing pronunciation instruction, refining skills, and fostering reading habits.

This research aims to systematically identify and analyze the specific challenges and barriers that teachers face When guiding junior high school students in Indonesia to master English pronunciation. Building on the findings related to the challenges in teaching pronunciation, this research aims to develop practical and evidence-based recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of English pronunciation instruction in senior middle schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two main elements in English pronunciation which are phonetics and phonology (Asikin & Ibrahim, 2020). Phonetics is the branch of linguistics that studies the sounds of human speech. It focuses on the physical production, acoustic properties, and auditory perception of speech sounds (Rogers, 2014). Phonology explains how patterns in

a particular language can be formed from these speech sounds (Zsiga, 2024). Fauzia & Amri (2023) identified internal and external challenges in teaching pronunciation, focusing on individual factors and classroom factors that influence teaching methods.

Internal Challenges

Pronunciation challenges can be influenced by psychological, cognitive, and physiological factors. First language influences can lead to mispronunciations, while managing sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation can be overwhelming. Some learners struggle with understanding pronunciation rules, leading to cognitive overload. Consistent practice and effort are crucial for improvement, but a lack of motivation can stagnate skills. Language anxiety and low self-esteem can also hinder practice, leading to slower improvement.

Internal challenges in pronunciation, arising from psychological, cognitive, or physiological factors, significantly impact a learner's progress in mastering English pronunciation (Szyszka, 2017) (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019). The learner's first language (L1) can significantly influence their English pronunciation, potentially leading to mispronunciations due to the transfer of phonetic and phonological patterns (Nazir et al., 2019). Pronunciation involves managing sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation, which can be overwhelming for beginners, leading to cognitive overload and potential pronunciation errors (Vancova, 2020).

Some learners may struggle with understanding English pronunciation rules, leading to difficulty in identifying and distinguishing between phonemes, which can hinder their ability to produce accurate sounds (Li et al., 2024). Consistent practice and effort are crucial for pronunciation improvement, but lack of motivation can result in stagnation in pronunciation skills (Pennington, 2021). Some learners may prioritize grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, leading to neglect and persistent pronunciation issues that hinder communication (Kobilova, 2022). Language anxiety and low self-esteem can hinder pronunciation practice, leading to less practice and slower improvement (Boato, 2022). Fear of making mistakes and low self-esteem can discourage learners from attempting to improve their pronunciation (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017).

External challenges

Limited native-speaker interaction in EFL settings and limited access to English media can hinder learners' exposure to accurate pronunciation models, stress patterns, and intonation. The curriculum often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, leading to insufficient practice and feedback. Insufficient high-quality materials and limited access to technology can also hinder pronunciation learning. Cultural identity concerns or social stigma may also hinder pronunciation improvement.

Limited opportunities for native speaker interaction in EFL settings hinder learners' exposure to accurate pronunciation models, making it challenging to acquire correct sounds, stress patterns, and intonation (Low, 2021). Limited access to English media can hinder learners' development of a natural-sounding accent, as they may struggle to understand authentic pronunciation in different contexts (Xodabande, 2017).

The curriculum often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over pronunciation, leading to insufficient practice and feedback. Teachers may lack pronunciation-specific training, unable to address issues effectively. Additionally, limited use of phonetic tools and phonetic symbols may result in trial and error rather than systematic learning (Darcy, 2018). Insufficient high-quality materials and limited access to technology can hinder pronunciation learning, limiting practice outside the classroom. Technology tools like

apps and software can provide individualized feedback and self-paced learning opportunities (Cox et al., 2019). Some cultures may resist adopting a foreign accent due to cultural identity concerns or social stigma, leading to resistance to pronunciation. This can result in a lack of confidence or motivation to improve pronunciation, or learners may feel embarrassed (Zahoor & Kausar, 2018).

Setting earlier research in the context of Challenges in teaching EFL pronunciation

Previous studies investigating the challenges in teaching EFL pronunciation have been extensively conducted. Abdalla et al., (2020) investigate the challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in correct pronunciation in spoken English. It aims to highlight the importance of pronunciation in teaching and learning English at the Arab speaker's tertiary level. Georgiou (2019) investigates the cognitions, challenges, and practices of various age groups of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Cyprus regarding pronunciation teaching. The older age groups reported different cognitions and faced similar challenges, such as limited time and lack of training. The results suggest the need for stronger EFL pronunciation teaching in Greek-Cypriot public schools to address the low interest in pronunciation in classrooms.

Ercan (2018) analyzed The pronunciation challenges faced by Turkish EFL learners in public schools located in Girne, TRNC. Thirty participants were recorded and rated by native raters. Results showed that Turkish learners struggle with certain English consonants and vowels, primarily due to mother tongue interference, Limited exposure to the target language, and insufficient practice. English spelling played a role in mispronunciation. Al Shaibani (2023) identifies pronunciation issues faced by female Saudi EFL learners, assesses their needs, and suggests teaching strategies. The research is relevant as young people represent the kingdom internationally. Obstacles faced by ESL instructors include self-confidence, professional development knowledge, and instructional methodologies. Fear of making mistakes and lack of familiarity with English pronunciation are common barriers. The most successful method is to include pronunciation tasks in English classrooms. Limited instructional materials and resources are available for each student's unique needs.

Abdelreheem (2023) investigates English pronunciation difficulties in Egyptian learners of English, focusing on segmental and suprasegmental aspects. It uses audio and video recordings of English conversation and presentation skills classes by Egyptian university students. The project involves contrastive analysis and error analysis to help EFL teachers predict problematic aspects and assess learners' seriousness. Khoshmuratovna (2023) investigates EFL students' English pronunciation issues and the factors influencing them. It found that initial syllable position English phonemes, such as /ð/, /θ/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/, /v/, and /z/, cause problems. The student's basic grasp of English pronunciation was the most significant contributor.

Nonetheless, studies examining the experiences of EFL teachers in teaching English pronunciation in Indonesian middle schools remain limited. Therefore, to fill the gap, this study explored Indonesian high school teachers' experiences of the challenges they encountered in teaching EFL pronunciation.

METHOD

The study analyzed the experiences and strategies of four English secondary school teachers in teaching pronunciation using a qualitative descriptive method, focusing on their

challenges, strategies, and experiences, providing valuable insights for pedagogical development and educational policy-making.

This study involved four English teachers from Senior Middle schools, each with experience in teaching English in the classroom. These teachers were selected based on their active involvement in English instruction within their schools.

Table 1 Participants

Teacher	Gender	Experience	Educational Background
T1	F	31	Master degree
T2	F	7	Bachelor
T3	M	2	Bachelor
T4	F	0	Student Teacher

The four teachers each with varying levels of experience and educational backgrounds, provide a diverse range of perspectives. Participant One holds a master's degree and has 31 years of teaching experience, bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the study. Participant Two possesses a bachelor's degree with 7 years of teaching experience, offering insights from a mid-career teacher. Participant Three, also holding a bachelor's degree, has 2 years of teaching experience, representing the viewpoint of a beginner teacher. Lastly, Participant Four is a student teacher with one month of teaching experience, contributing a fresh perspective with no prior teaching experience. The choice of these particular teachers was influenced by the fact that each school has two teachers who are actively involved in teaching English, allowing for a comparative and comprehensive analysis of their approaches to teaching pronunciation.

Observation in this study involved taking field notes on the behaviour and activities of participants at the research site. These field notes documented the actions and interactions observed, using either an unstructured or semi-structured format based on pre-determined inquiry questions. Observers can assume various roles, ranging from nonparticipant to complete participant. In addition to observation, the researcher conducted personal interviews, individually engaging with each teacher to gain insights into their experiences. These interviews were designed to explore the teachers' opinions on their experiences, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The questions focused on classroom activities, with teachers sharing their experiences in teaching English pronunciation, discussing the specific challenges encountered, and describing the methods they use to address these issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method employed to identify and interpret patterns of meaning, known as themes (Joffe, 2011). This analysis involved categorizing the data, grouping similar categories, and examining the relationships between these categories. After transcribing the interviews, themes were labelled Drawing from the common viewpoints of the participants and the identified categories were organized accordingly. In conclusion, the connections among the categories were analyzed to comprehend the overall significance Of the information.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study highlights the challenges and strategies of four junior high school English teachers in teaching pronunciation, focusing on three main areas: instructional techniques, self-proficiency, and the lack of pronunciation training. It emphasizes the

need for targeted pronunciation practice through interactive activities. More explanations are presented below.

Educators' Challenge while Teaching Junior High School Students in English Pronunciation

The teachers' interviews were categorized into three main areas: instructional techniques, self-proficiency, and the lack of pronunciation training. All four teacher participants identified reading aloud as a key strategy for teaching English pronunciation. This method involves students reading books aloud to practice correct pronunciation. Teacher 1, for instance, uses report texts for this purpose. When students encounter difficulties with certain words, Teacher 1 provides feedback by pronouncing the words correctly. Additionally, Teacher 2 highlighted the use of role-play as another effective approach for teaching pronunciation. However, Teachers 3 and 4 do not incorporate role play in their pronunciation instruction. Teachers 1 and 2 use role play to help students learn pronunciation. Teacher 1 instructs students to form pairs or small groups, encouraging them to peer-correct each other. However, if all group members struggle with certain words, they seek assistance from the teacher to pronounce the words correctly. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 incorporate these strategies—reading aloud and role play—into their English pronunciation lessons, effectively using them in the classroom.

In addition to discussing the strategies they use, participants were asked about their English language competence. Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned that, although they graduated in English, they do not consider themselves particularly proficient since they are not native speakers. They described their English pronunciation as "quite good." Similarly, Teachers 3 and 4 also rated their pronunciation skills as "quite good," attributing this to their studies in phonetics and phonology during college.

Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned that they participate in the MGMP discussion forum, a platform for Subject Teachers to discuss classroom challenges and collaborate on improving teaching practices. This forum helps them enhance their teaching abilities through shared insights and experiences. In contrast, Teachers 3 and 4 reflected on their training during their fourth semester as students, where they received instruction in phonetics and phonology, a subject they both enjoyed and found beneficial for developing their pronunciation skills.

The teachers reported that several factors affect their students' ability to learn English pronunciation. In the students' experiences, four main themes emerged. Teachers 2 and 3 highlighted that a primary factor is the lack of motivation among students, who often find English difficult and are disheartened by the challenges. Teachers 1 and 2 noted that students struggle with pronunciation primarily due to a lack of practice and the fact that English is not their first language. The reliance on their mother tongue further complicates pronunciation, as the differences between their native language and English create additional challenges.

Teachers 1 and 2 identified that schools with students from various regions face challenges due to language differences, with limited understanding of English pronunciation acting as a barrier. Teachers 3 and 4 observed that students tend to give up easily when faced with pronunciation difficulties. To address these issues, it is crucial to integrate dedicated pronunciation practice into the curriculum. Engaging students in interactive activities, such as vocabulary-building games and pronunciation exercises through reading, can help them become more comfortable with the nuances of English pronunciation.

Strategies and Methods Employed by Teachers to Tackle The Challenges of Teaching Pronunciation

The strategies and methods employed by teachers to address the challenges of Instruction on English pronunciation in the classroom can be categorized into three main areas: instructional techniques, self-proficiency, and the lack of pronunciation training. In terms of instructional techniques, all four teachers highlighted reading aloud as a key strategy, where students practice pronunciation by reading texts aloud and receiving immediate feedback from the teacher. For instance, Teacher 1 uses report texts and corrects students' mispronunciations by modelling the correct pronunciation. Additionally, Teachers 1 and 2 incorporate role play into their lessons, allowing students to practice pronunciation in interactive and engaging scenarios. Teacher 1 encourages peer correction in small groups, while Teacher 2 uses role play to provide practical contexts for pronunciation practice. Both teachers emphasize collaborative learning, fostering engagement by encouraging students to support each other.

Regarding self-proficiency, all four teachers rated their pronunciation as "quite good," acknowledging their non-native status while crediting their education in phonetics and phonology during college as instrumental to their skills. Teachers 1 and 2, despite being English graduates, recognized their limitations and the need for continuous improvement. Meanwhile, Teachers 3 and 4 relied on their academic training during their student years to enhance their pronunciation abilities. Teachers 1 and 2 also actively participate in the MGMP (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*) discussion forum, which serves as a platform for professional collaboration and sharing best practices. Conversely, Teachers 3 and 4 primarily depend on their past academic training for insights into pronunciation instruction.

The internal factors affecting pronunciation are multifaceted and profoundly impact students' ability to learn and master English pronunciation. Lack of Practice is a significant barrier, as pronunciation requires regular, deliberate practice to develop muscle memory and auditory discrimination. Without consistent practice opportunities, students struggle to internalize and reproduce correct pronunciation patterns, resulting in persistent errors and difficulties in speaking clearly. Native Language Interference further complicates pronunciation, as students often rely on the phonetic rules of their native language. Similarly, Ercan (2018) and Khoshmuratovna (2023) underline the persistent role of mother-tongue interference and limited exposure to target-language sounds as major barriers. This reliance can lead to mispronunciations of English sounds that are absent in their native language, making it challenging to produce English sounds accurately.

Motivation and Attitude also play crucial roles; when students perceive English as difficult or uninteresting, their engagement and effort in practising pronunciation decrease, leading to minimal practice and poor performance. In line with Trang & Lan, (2024) and Albaladejo (2022), suggest that overcoming motivational and attitudinal barriers in English pronunciation requires a supportive learning environment with interactive activities, practical relevance, and trial and error, providing actionable strategies for improved outcomes.

Lastly, the Self-Proficiency of Teachers impacts pronunciation instruction, as teachers who lack confidence in their pronunciation skills may struggle to model and correct pronunciation errors effectively. Addressing these internal factors involves creating a supportive learning environment, providing ample practice opportunities, and fostering positive attitudes toward language learning to enhance overall pronunciation

skills. Georgiou (2019) and Abdalla et al., (2020) highlight the need for teacher training and curriculum enhancements to address time constraints and a lack of emphasis on pronunciation.

The external factors affecting pronunciation reflect broader systemic issues within the educational environment. Language Differences in Schools pose significant challenges, as schools serving students from diverse regional backgrounds encounter difficulties due to linguistic variations. These differences can hinder students' ability to learn English pronunciation effectively, as the phonetic systems of their native languages often conflict with English pronunciation rules.

Lack of Pronunciation Training is another major barrier, as the absence of dedicated pronunciation instruction within the curriculum means that students miss out on essential guidance needed to develop accurate pronunciation skills. Without a systematic and focused approach, pronunciation often receives inadequate attention, impacting overall language development. Similarly, Abdelreheem (2023) and Al Shaibani (2023) highlight the importance of integrating pronunciation tasks into classroom practice and addressing educators' professional development to overcome these challenges.

Additionally, Limited Use of Effective Strategies contributes to inconsistent pronunciation instruction. While some teachers use methods such as role play and reading aloud, others do not, leading to uneven pronunciation outcomes across different classrooms and schools. Reinforce by Omar et al.,(2022) and Jafari et al., (2021), suggest that effective teaching of pronunciation relies on diverse, interactive strategies like role play and reading aloud, which can create disparities in students' progress.

The Student Support Systems within the educational framework also play a critical role. The lack of interactive activities and integrated pronunciation practice limits students' opportunities to engage with and improve their pronunciation skills. Zhai & Wibowo (2023) similarly emphasize the importance of student support systems in language learning, particularly in developing pronunciation skills. The need for interactive activities and institutional structures to support consistent practice and engagement was emphasized, thereby enhancing students' ability to improve and master pronunciation.

Finally, External Motivation Factors, such as the perception of English as a difficult subject, affect students' motivation and persistence in learning pronunciation. When students find English challenging, their engagement and effort can wane, leading to reduced practice and lower performance. Çolak (2024) and Donohue (2021) underlined that students' perception of English as a challenging subject significantly impacts their learning outcomes. Negative perceptions can lead to disengagement and lower motivation, resulting in inconsistent effort in pronunciation practice. Strategies to improve students' perceptions and motivation are crucial. Addressing these external factors requires systemic changes to improve curriculum design, instructional strategies, and support systems, ultimately enhancing pronunciation outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study focuses on the challenges and strategies faced by four junior high school English teachers in teaching pronunciation. It emphasizes the importance of instructional techniques, teacher self-proficiency, and addressing the lack of focused pronunciation training. The study found that methods like reading aloud and role play, along with active student engagement, are crucial for improving pronunciation skills. However, teachers also reported barriers such as lack of practice, native language interference, and insufficient motivation. The study also highlighted The necessity for continuous professional

growth for educators to improve their skills. External factors like language differences and lack of systematic pronunciation training contribute to inconsistent outcomes. Student support systems are essential for fostering a consistent and interactive approach to pronunciation practice.

The study reveals that English pronunciation instruction in senior middle schools is influenced by instructional techniques, self-proficiency, and lack of dedicated training. Reading aloud is a fundamental strategy, but teachers use report texts and role play differently, leading to varied instructional practices. Teachers 1 and 2 view their English proficiency as "quite good," while Teachers 3 and 4 rate it as "quite good," attributed to their phonetics and phonology background. They actively participate in the MGMP discussion forum for collaborative learning.

The study also uncovered several internal and external factors affecting students' pronunciation learning. Internal factors like insufficient practice, native language interference, lack of motivation, and teachers' self-perceived proficiency hinder students' English pronunciation mastery, affecting engagement and performance. Language differences in schools, lack of pronunciation training, inconsistent instructional strategies, inadequate student support systems, and motivational factors contribute to challenges in diverse student populations, hindering their development and impacting motivation and persistence. Addressing internal and external factors, creating a supportive learning environment, integrating pronunciation practice, implementing effective instructional strategies, enhancing teacher training, and fostering positive attitudes can significantly improve pronunciation outcomes.

Overall, Addressing challenges in pronunciation requires teacher and institutional changes, including professional development, curriculum integration, and a supportive learning environment, to improve student outcomes. The study results emphasise the need for instructional techniques, teacher self-proficiency, and dedicated training. It suggests methods like reading aloud and role play, along with student engagement, are crucial for improving pronunciation skills. The study also emphasizes the importance of student support systems and professional learning communities for continuous improvement.

The study implication emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development in pronunciation instruction, including regular training and collaboration through professional learning communities. Schools should integrate dedicated pronunciation practice into their curriculum, providing students with consistent opportunities for practice and feedback. Effective student support systems, flexible instructional strategies, and motivational strategies can help address diverse needs and improve learning outcomes. Creating engaging, context-based activities and reducing fear of mistakes can also boost student motivation.

Further research could explore the relationship between pronunciation practice frequency, instructional strategies, teacher self-perception, teacher development, student motivation, and the impact of technology on pronunciation learning. It could focus on varying levels of practice, instructional strategies, teacher self-perception, long-term teacher development programs, student motivation, and the role of digital tools in improving pronunciation. Additionally, longitudinal studies could evaluate the long-term impact of professional development programs on teaching practices and student outcomes. These studies could help identify the most effective methods for diverse learners and educational contexts.

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