

**THE ROLE OF PRONUNCIATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING:  
STUDENTS PERSPECTIVES AT MAN PEMATANG SIANTAR**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to explore the perceptions and attitudes of 11th-grade science students at MAN Pematang Siantar regarding the importance of pronunciation in English language learning. Using a descriptive quantitative method with a questionnaire as the main instrument, the study involved 34 participants who were analyzed based on four main indicators: perception of importance, technical challenges, self-study strategies, and the teacher's role in the classroom. The results of the study showed a very high level of awareness among students, with the majority acknowledging that correct pronunciation is the key to effective communication and a major factor in boosting confidence. Nevertheless, technical challenges still exist, particularly related to the inconsistency between written spelling and the way words are pronounced in English. The findings also revealed a high level of student independence in utilizing digital technology as well as a strong desire to receive direct feedback from the teacher.*

**Keywords:** *Pronunciation, Student Perceptions, English Language Learning, Self-Study Strategies, Digital Technology*

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi dan sikap siswa kelas XI IPA di MAN Pematang Siantar terhadap pentingnya pelafalan (pronunciation) dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Dengan menggunakan metode kuantitatif deskriptif dan kuesioner sebagai instrumen utama, penelitian ini melibatkan 34 partisipan yang dianalisis berdasarkan empat indikator utama, yaitu persepsi terhadap pentingnya pelafalan, tantangan teknis, strategi belajar mandiri, dan peran guru di dalam kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tingkat kesadaran yang sangat tinggi di kalangan siswa, di mana sebagian besar mengakui bahwa pelafalan yang benar merupakan kunci komunikasi yang efektif dan faktor utama dalam meningkatkan rasa percaya diri. Namun demikian, tantangan teknis masih ditemukan, terutama yang berkaitan dengan ketidakkonsistenan antara ejaan tertulis dan cara pengucapan kata dalam bahasa Inggris. Temuan penelitian juga mengungkapkan

tingkat kemandirian siswa yang tinggi dalam memanfaatkan teknologi digital serta adanya keinginan yang kuat untuk memperoleh umpan balik langsung dari guru.

Kata Kunci: Pelafalan, Persepsi Siswa, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Strategi Belajar Mandiri, Teknologi Digital

## **A. Introduction**

Pronunciation is an area within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) that is studied less frequently than other areas due to its more challenging nature for research, as well as the numerous variables that influence the process, such as gender, motivation, field dependence/independence, and others (Asher & Garcia, 1969). In addition to the absence of certain sounds in some languages, the learner's age also has a significant influence on the accuracy of sound pronunciation. In this regard, Piske, MacKay & Flege (2001) state that age is the most important predictor in acquiring a foreign language accent. According to CPH (Lenneberg, 1967), learners are at a disadvantage if they begin learning a language at an older age, particularly after puberty, for their first language.

## *Literature Review*

Because new sounds do not always correspond to existing sounds in their native language, teachers in foreign language classrooms tend to emphasize the linguistic difficulties students face in learning the target language. Since this is a problem faced by many teachers and students, some argue that it must be addressed clearly and concisely. In other words, pronunciation instruction will help students overcome anxiety in written communication, which is the primary consequence of a lack of correct pronunciation. One key factor in foreign language instruction is creating a "stress-free environment" and minimizing learning difficulties as much as possible (Krashen, 1982). According to Krashen (1982), the "affective filter" refers to students' inability to learn a language because they cannot process comprehensible information due to anxiety.

We all know that in a language learning environment, an effective filter is essential for achieving good learning outcomes; the learning process cannot proceed optimally because fear causes problems in people's lives. Although this is considered a crucial component in foreign language teaching, it is clear that this phenomenon has not received much attention.

Deng et al. (2009) state that pronunciation is often overlooked in academic studies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This is consistent with the limited research on learners' attitudes toward pronunciation (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Derwing, 2010; Elliott, 1995). In the context of secondary education, Burgess and Spencer (2000) found that instructors often consider pronunciation difficult to teach, particularly sounds not present in students' native language (L1).

For high school students, motivation to master pronunciation is often linked to self-image and social acceptance. The study indicates that pronunciation proficiency correlates with respect and perceptions of one's

social status and educational background. During adolescence, the desire not to appear different from peers drives students to strive to imitate native speakers' pronunciation as closely as possible to avoid social stigma.

However, a major obstacle arises from the pedagogical side; Foote et al. (2010) reveal that many teachers tend to avoid pronunciation material due to a lack of confidence in their own abilities. This poses a crucial challenge in the high school curriculum, where teachers are expected to serve as ideal language models for students.

In the process of learning a target language at the secondary school level, motivation is a crucial factor that must be taken into account. Dörnyei (1998) asserts that without adequate motivation, even exceptionally talented students will find it difficult to achieve long-term learning goals. This suggests that the effectiveness of classroom instruction will be hindered if students have mental barriers or resistance to the material. In line with this, Elliott (1995) and Suter (1976) found that students

who show a high level of concern for pronunciation tend to have superior pronunciation skills.

Given that communication is the primary goal, high school students need to be encouraged to pay attention to the accuracy of sound production in order to improve their speaking skills overall. Brown (2000) views motivation from two perspectives: the provision of rewards (extrinsic) and a deeper cognitive understanding of the process (intrinsic). In this context, Gass & Selinker (2008) believe that motivated students will master a second language more quickly and achieve a higher level of proficiency.

In addition to motivation, age also plays a significant role. For high school students in their late teens, age is a significant predictor of foreign language pronunciation acquisition (Granena & Long, 2012). This relates to the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967; Nunan, 1998), which states that language acquisition becomes more challenging after a certain developmental stage has passed. In the classroom, obstacles often arise due to negative transfer from the first language (L1), which can

interfere with clarity of meaning. This problem is exacerbated if teachers lack adequate phonological competence, as their inability to provide correct pronunciation models directly impacts students' failure to develop competence. Ultimately, for adolescents, pronunciation is not merely a linguistic issue but also an aspect of identity that reflects their background and self-image when communicating.

## **B. Method Research**

### **I. Participants**

This research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Pematang Siantar, one of the leading educational institutions in Pematang Siantar. The research focused on 11th-grade science students, who generally showed high enthusiasm for learning English, both as a compulsory subject and as an independent effort to improve their language competence. Considering the research subjects are high school students in grade 11, the participants' ages range from 16 to 17 years. A total of 34 grade 11 science stream students voluntarily participated in this study. The distribution of participants

by gender is presented in detail in Table 1 below:

| Gender | f  | %    |
|--------|----|------|
| Male   | 12 | 35.3 |
| Female | 22 | 64.7 |
| Total  | 34 | 100  |

## II. Data Collection Procedure

In this study, a questionnaire was used as the main instrument to collect data from 34 participants. This instrument was designed to cover four main indicators related to pronunciation:

- 1) Students' perceptions of the importance of pronunciation (Items 1-3).
- 2) Difficulties and obstacles in pronunciation (Items 4-5).
- 3) Independent learning strategies (Items 6-8).
- 4) The role of teachers and the classroom environment (Items 9-10).

This questionnaire uses a modified rating scale to measure the level of student agreement, ranging from "Strongly Agree," "Agree," to "Disagree/Others." The data collection procedure is conducted in the school environment to ensure that students can provide responses that correspond to their learning experiences in the classroom.

## III. Data Analysis

The research results were analyzed using descriptive statistical

techniques to determine the frequency and percentage of each response item. The data were categorized based on four main indicators to identify trends in perception, technical obstacles, the use of digital technology in independent learning, and the effectiveness of time allocation for classroom practice. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of linguistic awareness and psychological factors, such as self-confidence, that affect students' pronunciation abilities.

## C. Result and Discussion

### I. Result

The results of this study are derived from a questionnaire distributed to 34 grade 11 IPA students at MAN Pematang Siantar, comprising 12 male and 22 female students. The data is categorized into four main indicators: students' perceptions of the importance of pronunciation, difficulties and obstacles, independent learning strategies, and the role of teachers and the classroom environment.

#### I. Students' Perception of Pronunciation Importance

Data analysis shows that students have a very high awareness of the importance of pronunciation in language learning. The following table summarizes the students' responses:

| No | Statement | Strongly | Agree | Disagree/Others |
|----|-----------|----------|-------|-----------------|
|----|-----------|----------|-------|-----------------|

|   |                                            | Ag<br>ree | e<br>e            |      |
|---|--------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|------|
| 1 | Import<br>ance of<br>comm<br>unicati<br>on | 61.<br>8% | 3<br>5.<br>3<br>% | 2.9% |
| 2 | Risk of<br>misun<br>derstan<br>ding        | 55.<br>9% | 4<br>1.<br>2<br>% | 2.9% |
| 3 | Confid<br>ence<br>factor                   | 67.<br>6% | 2<br>9.<br>4<br>% | 3%   |

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the data analysis results, it can be concluded that 11th-grade science students at MAN Pematang Siantar have a very positive attitude toward the urgency of mastering pronunciation in English. This awareness is not only limited to linguistic aspects to avoid communication misunderstandings, but is also closely related to emotional and psychological aspects in building self-confidence in an academic environment. The main obstacle faced by students is structural, namely, difficulties in adapting to the inconsistent spelling of English, while the influence of the native language accent is no longer a dominant obstacle for most respondents. On the other hand, the use of digital media such as YouTube, films, and online dictionaries has become an effective proactive strategy to support independent learning outside of school. Although the role of the teacher in delivering the material has been considered good, the limited

allocation of time for hands-on practice in the classroom is a crucial note that needs to be addressed in order to balance theoretical understanding with students' practical skills.

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