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Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English Pronunciation (A Case Study at One of the Senior High Schools in Ciamis)

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Abstract: Pronunciation is a crucial component of English communicative competence and plays a vital role in ensuring intelligibility in spoken interaction. In the Indonesian EFL context, teaching pronunciation remains challenging due to limited exposure to authentic language, mother-tongue interference, and insufficient resources. Despite previous studies on pronunciation pedagogy, research integrating the psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical dimensions of teachers' challenges, particularly at the high school level, remains limited. The present study aims to investigate the obstacles EFL teachers face in teaching pronunciation and to identify the strategies the EFL students employ to address these obstacles. This research uses a qualitative case study involving three EFL teachers in a senior high school in Ciamis, Indonesia. Data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, then analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal five primary challenges: low student self-confidence, limited time and resources, difficulties in linking spelling and pronunciation, first-language interference, and inconsistent practice. Teachers addressed these constraints through ice-breaking activities, contextualised repetition, constructive feedback, bilingual explanations, and materials connected to students' interests. The study concludes that effective pronunciation instruction requires balancing technical accuracy with affective support, providing consistent practice opportunities, and adopting adaptive strategies tailored to learners' needs. Overall, the findings emphasise that addressing both cognitive and emotional factors is essential for enhancing pronunciation learning in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: EFL context; English pronunciation; teachers' challenges; teaching strategies; pronunciation learning

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a critical aspect of communicative competence in English, significantly affecting both the speaker's confidence and the listener's ability to comprehend the intended message. Effective pronunciation involves not only the articulation of sounds but also suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, intonation, and phrasing. These elements are crucial for achieving fluency and clarity in speech. However, teaching pronunciation presents

unique challenges, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where many learners face difficulties stemming from first-language interference, psychological barriers, and insufficient exposure to authentic language input (Indrayadi, 2024).

In Indonesia, teaching English pronunciation is often neglected in favour of other skills, such as Reading and writing, due to curriculum constraints and limited teaching resources (Djuhari, 2024). As a result, many students struggle with proper pronunciation, often resorting to avoidance strategies to prevent ridicule or mistakes in front of peers. Furthermore, the lack of confidence, coupled with limited time allocated to pronunciation training, exacerbates the challenges in effective pronunciation teaching. Research by Derwing and Munro (2016) emphasises the need to focus not only on phonetic accuracy but also on communicative competence, where pronunciation should enable clear understanding rather than mere mechanical correctness.

Despite the importance of pronunciation for communication, the complexities of teaching this skill are rarely addressed comprehensively, especially in high school settings. In particular, studies that integrate psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical factors into the challenges faced by EFL teachers remain scarce. This study aims to explore these challenges in depth by examining the experiences of EFL teachers at a senior high school in Ciamis, Indonesia. Specifically, the research will identify the challenges these teachers face in teaching English pronunciation and examine the strategies they use to address them. By doing so, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into effective pronunciation-teaching practices and to enhance the quality of English-language instruction in Indonesia (Singh et al., 2019).

The present study aims to investigate the obstacles EFL teachers face in teaching pronunciation and to identify the strategies they employ to address them. The obstacles EFL teachers face in teaching pronunciation have been documented across contexts. Affective barriers, such as low student confidence and motivation, frequently impede pronunciation practice and classroom participation. First-language (L1) phonological transfer remains a pervasive source of segmental and suprasegmental errors among Indonesian learners and other EFL populations, making corrective instruction and focused drilling necessary. Limited exposure to native-like pronunciation models, constrained classroom time, and scarce teaching resources are repeatedly identified as structural constraints on sustained pronunciation instruction (Idrus et al., 2025). Research shows that effective teacher strategies include explicit pronunciation instruction integrated with communicative practice, targeted repetition/drilling, timely corrective feedback, and use of learner-relevant, contextualised materials. At the same time, bilingual explanations and L1-aware techniques can help reduce negative transfer (Singh et al., 2019). However, reviews of the literature and teacher-knowledge studies indicate a gap: few investigations simultaneously integrate psychological (affective), linguistic (L1 transfer/phonology), and pedagogical (materials, time, feedback) dimensions from the teachers' perspective in senior-high EFL settings. This gap motivates the present case study to be carried out.

METHOD

This research utilised a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges teachers face in teaching English pronunciation at a senior high school in Ciamis. The case study design was chosen because it provides a clear and detailed portrayal of real-life situations, enabling the researcher to explore the complexities of the phenomenon (Zen, 2020). The study participants were three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the participants had the specific characteristics necessary for the study's focus. The criteria for selection included: a background in English education, at least three years of teaching experience in a high school

setting, active involvement in teaching English pronunciation in the classroom, and a willingness to fully participate in the research.

The research was conducted at a senior high school in Ciamis, selected based on preliminary observations indicating that the teachers at this institution faced notable challenges in teaching pronunciation. These challenges included limited instructional time, a lack of learning media, and low student confidence in pronouncing English words. The school was selected for its relevance to the research questions, as it provided an appropriate environment to study these challenges in a real-world educational context. The teachers at the school showed a strong commitment to improving their teaching practices, making it an ideal site for exploring the phenomenon in question (Chu & Chang, 2017).

Data were collected using two primary techniques: non-participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were conducted in the classroom, where the researcher remained a passive observer, recording teacher-student interactions, the teaching strategies employed, and student responses during the pronunciation lessons. The researcher did not intervene in the teaching process but instead focused on observing and documenting the dynamics within the classroom. Findings from the observations were captured in field notes, which included both descriptive elements (such as classroom activities and teaching methods) and reflective elements (such as the researcher's thoughts and interpretations).

In addition to observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three teachers to further explore their experiences and perspectives. The interviews provided deeper insights into the challenges teachers face, the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, and their reflections on student motivation and pronunciation learning. Interview questions were designed to cover several key areas, including: major challenges encountered in teaching pronunciation, effective strategies used in the classroom, particularly difficult pronunciation materials, any negative experiences related to teaching pronunciation, and how teachers motivate students in pronunciation lessons. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, which involved several stages. First, the researcher re-reads the data from both the observations and interviews to familiarise themselves with the content. Next, key information was identified and coded according to categories such as linguistic challenges, affective barriers, teaching strategies, and student responses. These codes were grouped into broader themes, which were then analysed to identify recurring patterns. Finally, the researcher interpreted these themes, linking them back to the research questions and comparing them with existing literature on the topic.

To ensure the reliability of the research findings, triangulation was employed by comparing the data from observations and interviews. This process allowed the researcher to identify consistent themes and patterns across different data sources. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checking, in which participants reviewed the findings to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented. An audit trail was also maintained, documenting each step of the research process to ensure transparency and accountability. Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the research process. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their role in it. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and ensuring that all information was used solely for academic purposes (Hu & Chang, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONs

This section presents the study's findings on the challenges teachers face in teaching English pronunciation in a senior high school in Ciamis. The findings were derived from classroom observations and in-depth interviews with three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. These results are discussed in relation to the existing literature, highlighting both the

challenges and the strategies teachers use to address them. The discussion also provides insights into the implications of these findings for improving pronunciation teaching in EFL contexts.

Low Student Confidence

One of the most significant challenges identified in this study is students' low self-confidence in speaking English, particularly in pronunciation. During classroom observations, many students hesitated when asked to pronounce certain words, often avoiding eye contact or lowering their heads. In one observation, when the teacher asked students to pronounce the word "comfortable," most hesitated, and some looked down or smiled to avoid speaking. Teacher 1 commented, "When I ask them to pronounce certain words, some just smile or look down." This behaviour reflects a fear of making mistakes, a common trait among language learners (Tiwari, 2024).

Low self-confidence was evident in students' reluctance to participate actively during pronunciation exercises. This finding aligns with Idrus et al. (2025), which emphasises that speaking anxiety can significantly hinder pronunciation practice. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2013), affective factors, such as fear of ridicule or peer judgment, often prevent students from speaking up, even when they know the correct pronunciation. Teachers in this study addressed this issue by using ice-breaking activities, positive reinforcement, and interactive classroom dynamics.

Teacher 1 implemented tongue twisters and games to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, allowing students to practice pronunciation without the fear of failure. Teacher 1 stated, "We do tongue twisters at the beginning of every lesson to make the students laugh and feel more comfortable." These activities were effective in reducing anxiety and encouraging students to attempt difficult words. However, teachers noted that the effects were often temporary and required consistent application for sustained improvement (Pardede, 2018).

Despite the positive outcomes, it was evident that building self-confidence required long-term efforts. Teachers must continuously foster an environment where making mistakes is viewed as a natural part of the learning process, not something to be ashamed of. This approach is supported by Tiwari (2024), who argues that a supportive, non-judgmental classroom environment is crucial for language learners, particularly during pronunciation practice. Creating a classroom culture that values effort over perfection can improve student confidence and participation.

Limited Time and Resources

The second major challenge faced by teachers was limited time and resources for pronunciation instruction. According to observations, the time allocated for pronunciation activities was generally very brief, typically only 5-10 minutes at the beginning or end of the class. As Teacher 2 explained, "...sometimes after being taught, they forget the following week again. Maybe because it has not really sunk in yet." This time constraint significantly limited students' opportunities to practice and internalise correct pronunciation.

This finding is consistent with Abidin et al., (2020), who argue that pronunciation instruction is often marginalised in favour of other skills, such as reading and writing, that are more heavily tested. The lack of teaching resources further exacerbated this challenge. Teachers in this study reported that their classrooms lacked audiovisual materials and interactive technology that could have supported more diverse and effective pronunciation practice. This shortage of resources, combined with time constraints, made it challenging to provide sustained exposure to native-speaker pronunciation.

To overcome these challenges, teachers integrated short, regular pronunciation exercises into their lessons, using minimal pairs and repetition to reinforce correct pronunciation. These strategies align with Plailek & Essien, (2021), who recommend repetitive drills as an effective way to improve pronunciation skills. While these efforts were beneficial in the short term, the

teachers acknowledged that more time and resources were needed to achieve more significant, long-lasting improvements in students' pronunciation.

Spelling-Pronunciation Mismatch

A third challenge that emerged from the data was the difficulty students had in understanding the relationship between spelling and pronunciation. This was particularly evident with irregular words such as "know," "knew," "known," "though," "through," and "thought." As shown in Table 1 :

Table 1. Challenges teachers face in teaching pronunciation

Teacher	“Today we are learning the pronunciation of irregular verbs, such as know, knew, and known.”
	"Um... so know is pronounced /nəʊ/, knew is /njuː/, and known... hmm... /nəʊn/?

Many students struggled to pronounce these words correctly, often guessing the pronunciation based on their spelling. For example, students would pronounce "know" as "no," and "though" as "thow," resulting in significant pronunciation errors.

Rizzato (2013) identifies orthographic-phonological mismatches as a common source of errors for EFL learners, particularly in languages like English, where the relationship between spelling and pronunciation is highly irregular. Teachers in this study addressed this issue by grouping words based on their phonetic patterns and providing contextual examples within sentences. This approach was designed to help students internalise the correct pronunciation by associating words with real-world contexts.

Additionally, word games were used to increase student engagement and make the learning process more interactive. Teacher 2 noted, *"I use word games to help the students practice pronunciation in a fun way. For example, they have to say the words correctly to score points."* These activities not only created a more relaxed learning atmosphere but also encouraged students to practice pronunciation without the pressure often associated with formal speaking tasks. The gamified approach supported greater learner participation, as students were more willing to take risks and experiment with unfamiliar sounds when the activity felt enjoyable and competitive. This indicates that game-based learning can stimulate intrinsic motivation, enhance vocabulary retention, and promote oral fluency by reducing anxiety and increasing task engagement.

However, despite the motivational benefits of word games, the challenge of understanding the complex relationship between English spelling and pronunciation persisted. Many students continued to struggle with irregular phoneme-grapheme correspondences, which often led to repeated mispronunciations. This issue is well documented in EFL contexts, where learners with limited exposure to authentic spoken English rely heavily on written forms, making it difficult for them to internalise correct phonological patterns. (Ali, 2021). To address this ongoing challenge, further exposure to native-speaker pronunciation through audio materials, multimedia resources, or pronunciation-focused applications could help reinforce accurate sound patterns. Incorporating tools such as minimal-pair exercises, phonetic transcription practice, or shadowing techniques may also help learners develop stronger phonological awareness and reduce fossilised pronunciation errors. Ultimately, combining engaging classroom activities with structured pronunciation input may lead to more comprehensive and sustained improvement in learners' pronunciation accuracy.

Mother Tongue Interference

The fourth challenge identified was mother tongue interference, particularly the influence of the Sundanese dialect on students’ pronunciation. As observed, students often replaced English sounds that do not exist in their native language, such as /θ/ and /ð/, with /t/ and /d/, respectively. Teacher 3 explained, "…students often pronounce them as /t/ or /d/ because those

sounds do not exist in their language." This phenomenon is consistent with Mohamed and Ahmed's (2022) findings, which suggest that first language phonology can significantly interfere with second language pronunciation.

To address this issue, teachers provided articulation demonstrations and encouraged students to focus on their tongue position and airflow. For example, Teacher 1 used minimal-pair exercises (e.g., "think" vs. "tink") to help students distinguish between similar sounds and raise their awareness of subtle phonemic contrasts. Minimal-pair practice has long been recognised as a practical approach for improving learners' phonemic discrimination (Celce-Murcia et al., 2013), and its use in this context allowed students to identify how small changes in articulation could alter meaning. Despite these efforts, the influence of the Sundanese dialect persisted as a challenge. Local language interference often affects learners' production of English fricatives, dental sounds, and final consonants, as these features do not consistently exist in the Sundanese phonological system. This indicates that first-language phonology strongly shapes learners' articulatory habits, making some English sounds particularly difficult to acquire.

This suggests that more targeted intervention, such as using visual aids (e.g., mirrors to monitor mouth position) or phonetic drills, could help students become more aware of the physical aspects of sound production. Implementing tools such as phonetic diagrams, IPA-based instruction, and slow-motion video demonstrations may further support learners in understanding how native speakers articulate problematic sounds. Additionally, integrating pronunciation software equipped with visual waveform or spectrogram feedback could provide learners with real-time insights into their articulatory accuracy. Such multimodal approaches have been shown to enhance learners' metacognitive awareness of pronunciation and reduce fossilised errors over time (Hikmah & Wibowo, 2020). Therefore, a combination of articulatory instruction, visual support, and technology-assisted feedback may be necessary to overcome entrenched dialectal influence and promote more accurate pronunciation development.

Low Consistency in Practice

The fifth and final challenge identified in this study was the low consistency in practice. Observations revealed that many students did not practice pronunciation outside the classroom, leading to a decline in retention of the pronunciation rules they had learned. Teacher 1 noted, "...the challenge is only in individual application—some are focused, some are not." This finding is consistent with Brien (2021) that consistent practice is essential for maintaining phonetic accuracy.

To address this, teachers encouraged students to practice pronunciation on topics of personal interest, such as song lyrics or movie dialogue. Teacher 3 mentioned, *"…if the topic is music, they look up song lyrics; if it is sports, they look up related terms. Then I teach them how to pronounce them."* By linking pronunciation practice to students' interests, teachers hoped to increase motivation and make learning more engaging. This approach aligns with studies emphasising the positive effect of interest-driven learning on students' willingness to participate in pronunciation activities (Atli & Su, 2012). When learners are personally invested in the material, they are more likely to practice pronunciation voluntarily and demonstrate increased effort, curiosity, and persistence.

However, while this strategy made pronunciation practice more enjoyable, the lack of consistent practice outside of class remained a significant challenge. Limited exposure to English in learners' immediate environment often results in insufficient reinforcement of pronunciation skills, leading to slow or uneven progress. Previous research has highlighted that without frequent and repetitive practice, learners struggle to internalise new phonological patterns and may revert to first-language-influenced pronunciation (Purwanto, 2019). Therefore, there is a growing need for accessible tools that can extend pronunciation learning beyond the classroom.

Technology-based solutions, such as pronunciation apps, speech-recognition tools, or online platforms offering guided drills, could help students maintain regular practice between lessons. These tools provide features such as instant corrective feedback, model pronunciation, and gamified learning paths, all of which have been shown to support improved accuracy and learner autonomy (Lee & Hsieh, 2023). Integrating these resources into classroom instruction could help bridge the gap between in-class learning and independent practice, ultimately fostering more sustained pronunciation development.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several challenges in teaching English pronunciation, many of which align with patterns reported in previous research. Low student confidence in pronunciation is consistently identified as a significant barrier in EFL classrooms (Tiwari, 2024). The present study further confirms that speaking anxiety—often intensified by the fear of mispronouncing words in front of peers—significantly reduces students' willingness to participate in pronunciation-focused activities. This finding aligns with earlier studies showing that affective variables, such as anxiety, self-consciousness, and fear of negative evaluation, play a crucial role in shaping learners' engagement in oral tasks (Liu et al., 2025).

These affective constraints not only inhibit students' oral production but also undermine their readiness to experiment with unfamiliar sounds, which is a necessary part of pronunciation development. Teachers in this study sought to address these challenges by fostering a supportive, interactive learning environment. Strategies such as ice-breaking activities, collaborative pair work, and consistent positive reinforcement were used to help reduce tension and encourage students to take risks during pronunciation practice. These practices resonate with recommendations from recent studies, which emphasise the importance of creating a psychologically safe classroom environment to enhance learners' pronunciation performance. (Purwanto, 2019). However, the findings indicate that these strategies alone are insufficient without sustained, long-term interventions to build learners' confidence and autonomy. Approaches such as integrating technology-assisted pronunciation tools, offering individualised feedback, and providing repeated low-stakes speaking opportunities have been shown to promote gradual improvement in learners' confidence and accuracy (Liu & Park, 2024). Therefore, teachers may benefit from adopting a combination of short-term motivational strategies and long-term confidence-building techniques to support students' pronunciation development effectively.

Pronunciation instruction is often sidelined due to curricular pressures and resource limitations. Although teachers in this study attempted to integrate short pronunciation exercises into existing lessons, the lack of multimedia materials, access to native-speaker models, and pronunciation-specific training significantly limited the effectiveness of instruction. This suggests the need for greater institutional support, including updated teaching materials, training workshops, and digital tools to facilitate more systematic pronunciation instruction (Levis, 2015).

Moreover, the spelling–pronunciation mismatch remains a persistent challenge in English language teaching (Salehi & Gholampour, 2022). The study demonstrates that students often struggle with irregular spelling patterns, which impede their ability to generalise pronunciation rules. Teachers attempted to address this by grouping words based on phonetic patterns, a strategy that helped students recognise recurring sound–symbol relationships. However, this alone is insufficient; increased exposure to native-speaker input, contextualised oral practice, and explicit phonological instruction are essential for helping learners internalise these patterns.

Mother tongue interference also emerged as a significant factor affecting pronunciation accuracy. As Mohamed and Ahmed (2022) highlighted, first-language phonetic habits strongly influence learners' ability to acquire second-language sounds. While teachers employed articulation drills

and minimal-pair exercises, the findings indicate a need for additional support, such as visual articulatory models, phonetic diagrams, and repeated guided practice, to fully address these fossilised patterns.

Finally, inconsistent practice was found to be a significant obstacle to sustained pronunciation improvement. Dung (2024) emphasises that regular and repeated practice is necessary for developing phonetic accuracy, yet many learners in this context rarely engage with pronunciation outside the classroom. Although linking pronunciation to students' personal interests increased motivation, it did not fully address the limited out-of-class practice. Technology-based solutions, such as pronunciation apps, online platforms with instant feedback, and speech-recognition tools, offer promising avenues for extending learning beyond classroom boundaries and fostering greater learner autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Overall, these five challenges are interrelated. Low self-confidence can exacerbate inconsistent practice, while limited time and resources limit teachers' opportunities for continuous improvement. These findings reinforce Celce-Murcia et al.'s (2013) view that pronunciation instruction must combine technical skill development with adequate affective support. Practical solutions, therefore, require a holistic approach that considers psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical factors simultaneously. Future research should explore technology-assisted pronunciation learning to sustain student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Teaching English pronunciation in the context of study is hindered by intertwined psychological, pedagogical, and linguistic factors. Addressing these challenges requires supportive learning environments, varied contextualised activities, and consistent practice. Future research should explore technology-assisted pronunciation learning to sustain student engagement and improve learning outcomes.

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