

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

English pronunciation is an important aspect of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). According to Qizi (2024), pronunciation is the key to effective communication because good pronunciation can affect how well one can be understood by others. Conversely, mispronunciation can change the meaning of words, potentially causing confusion or misunderstanding in conversation. In addition, the ability to pronounce words correctly not only helps learners understand and convey messages clearly, but also increases their confidence in communication (Kobilova, 2022). Therefore, being proficient in pronunciation is very essential for EFL learners as it helps them speak more clearly and be easily understood when communicating. By paying attention to correct pronunciation, learners can avoid misunderstandings and improve their English language skills, resulting in fluency in English interactions.

However, there will inevitably be differences between one's own language (native language) and the foreign language being learned (target language). As stated by Khalid et al. (2024), native languages that have different phonetic systems from English tend to have difficulties in pronouncing English correctly. The differences from first language interference in sound systems, word stress, intonation, and rhythm between two languages can also be a major factor causing difficulties in pronunciation (Listyani et al., 2024). This is also conveyed by Fatimah (2020), who mentions that the learner's ability to pronounce words accurately is further hampered by differences in foreign sounds and speech patterns which result in certain words becoming more difficult because they are not used to or have never heard them.

Some studies have investigated pronunciation difficulties faced by EFL students. For example, Gunantar et al. (2020) connected students from various

majors who are required to take English courses, whose first languages are mostly Javanese and Indonesian. The results of the study found that English pronunciation errors made by students are often caused by the influence of the first language as well as differences in the way of writing and pronunciation in English words. This phenomenon attracts the researcher's attention to further research. Moreover, with the diverse cultures and languages that exist in various regions in Indonesia, EFL learners who come from different regional backgrounds can also feel pronunciation difficulties from the influence of the mother tongue on their English learning. Another study conducted by Octaviani et al. (2024), which investigated the pronunciation difficulties faced by four English language education students from different regional backgrounds (Sundanese, Batak, Jakarta, and Java), found that each student experienced different challenges in producing English sounds.

Based on the results of initial survey in this study, several students from various majors, such as mathematics education, physics education, and shariah economics department, who come from Sundanese backgrounds, often face challenges in English pronunciation, which is a compulsory course at their university. For example, they find it difficult to pronounce "thank you" correctly. Instead of pronouncing it as /θæŋk ju/ with a slight bite of the tongue, they pronounce it as /tæŋk ju/ with the tongue resembling the pronunciation of /t/ in Sundanese. In addition, they also often mispronounce words such as "make" /meɪk/ and "take" /teɪk/ as /mek/ and /tek/. These difficulties arise due to differences between Sundanese and English pronunciation systems and inconsistencies between English spelling and pronunciation. This is in line with a research conducted by Octaviana (2019) which showed that pronunciation challenges for Sundanese EFL learners are often caused by the same reasons, namely the difference between Sundanese and English pronunciation systems and the difference between the form of words written in English and how they are pronounced.

Likewise, students from non-English majors are often not as familiar with the concepts of phonology and pronunciation as English major. According to

Putra (2023), students who do not receive in-depth training on English phonology tend to rely more on spelling when reading or speaking in English. This can lead to pronunciation errors. In addition, students from non-English majors usually rarely hear or use English directly in their daily lives, they also may not get enough specialized lessons on how to pronounce English words correctly in their curriculum (Huong & Thao, 2024). These conditions contribute to the persistence of pronunciation problems, especially among students who have a regional language background such as Sundanese (Boediman, 2023).

However, previous studies (Listyani et al., 2024; Octaviana, 2019; Octaviani et al., 2024) have mostly focused on pronunciation difficulties experienced by students majoring in English, who are usually more frequently exposed to English phonetics and phonology lessons. In contrast, research on students from non-English majors is still very limited. Whereas, they also have to take English courses, but often do not get enough support or structured learning in terms of pronunciation. This is an important issue because they are still required to be able to use English in future academic and work contexts even though they have less exposure and limited access to pronunciation learning resources. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by examining the pronunciation difficulties faced by Sundanese EFL students from non-English majors, so as to provide a more specific and rarely discussed picture of how language background and academic context affect their challenges in English pronunciation.

B. Formulation of the Problems

The research question of this study is “What are the pronunciation difficulties faced by Sundanese EFL learners?”

C. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical use

This research is expected to contribute to enriching the literature in the field of language learning and increasing the understanding of the influence of the first language on pronunciation difficulties in second language learning, especially English for Sundanese EFL learners.

2. Practical use

The essence of this research is to provide valuable information for English educators and English learners of Sundanese origin to understand and overcome specific pronunciation difficulties, so as to develop more effective learning strategies that are appropriate to students' learning needs.

3. Empirical use

This study will provide insight into the recent data on pronunciation difficulties experienced by Sundanese EFL learners, which has previously received little attention. This data can also be used for further research in the field of language learning.

D. Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding in this study, the researcher presents several related definitions, as follows:

1. Pronunciation Difficulties

In this study, pronunciation difficulties refer to the challenges faced by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners from Sundanese backgrounds in producing English sounds that conform to standard pronunciation as performed by native speakers. These difficulties can appear in the form of pronunciation errors, inconsistent use of stress, inappropriate intonation patterns caused by first language interference, lack of exposure to pronunciation, and other cognitive factors that EFL learners may experience.

2. Sundanese EFL Learners

Sundanese EFL learners refer to students who are native speakers of Sundanese and are learning English as a foreign language. In the context of this study, these students are not majoring in English in higher education and may have limited exposure to detailed English language instruction or interaction with native speakers.

E. Aim of the Study

This study aims to identify and describe the specific pronunciation difficulties experienced by Sundanese EFL learners.