

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher presented the background of the study, research problem or research question, research aim, the significance of the study, the definition of key term, and the structure of the thesis.

A. Background of Study

Pronunciation in language consists of two main components, namely segmental (sounds such as consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental (additional elements such as intonation, word stress, and rhythm). These two elements complement each other to produce clear and understandable speech. Pronunciation teaching is not limited only to sounds (segmental), but must also involve suprasegmental aspects, because rhythm and stress in speaking greatly affect the understanding of the interlocutor.¹ This is supported by research, which shows that errors in suprasegmental features such as intonation and sentence stress are more likely to cause miscommunication than ordinary phonemic errors.² Therefore, effective pronunciation does not only mean listening to sounds correctly, but also regulating rhythm, intonation, and stress appropriately so that communication runs smoothly.

¹ John Levis and Murray J. Munro, "Phonetics and Phonology: Overview," *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, no. July (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0906>.

² Mujtaba Mohamed and Sallam Ahmed, "Impacts of " Stress , Intonation , Pitch and Rhythm " in Learning Speaking in English as a Foreign Language Impacts of " Stress , Intonation , Pitch and Rhythm " in Learning Speaking in English as a Foreign Language," no. December 2022 (2024).

In language learning, pronunciation plays an important role as one of the main indicators of fluency. Good pronunciation reflects the ability to articulate sounds clearly and accurately, which is very influential in oral competency tests such as IELTS. Accurate pronunciation helps improve the clarity and understanding of speech in the context of exams and everyday communication.³ Furthermore, pronunciation also represents a person's linguistic and social identity. Stated that accent and way of speaking reflect the origins of a person's language, and therefore become an important part of language identity.⁴ In line with the views, who explained that pronunciation is not just imitating native speakers, but the ability to convey messages clearly and acceptably in various social situations.⁵ Therefore, effective pronunciation not only requires compliance with phonetic norms but also takes into account language diversity in global communication practices.

The ability to pronounce words well contributes significantly to a person's speaking fluency and confidence in using a foreign language. Mastering proper pronunciation can strengthen learners' communicative

³ P S Sarhandi, R A Memon, and I F Khan, "Foreign Speech Accent and Comprehensibility: Technology Integration to Bolster EFL Learners' Pronunciation for Effective Communication," ... *Research Journal of Arts and ...*, no. May (2020), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/PirSarhandi/publication/341701288_Foreign_speech_accent_and_comprehensibility_Technology_integration_to_bolster_EFL_learners'_pronunciation_for_effective_communication/links/5ecf61754585152945183f2d/Foreign-speech-acc.

⁴ Huy Duc Nguyen, "The Effectiveness of Teaching Pronunciation Techniques for English Language Learners The Effectiveness of Teaching Pronunciation Techniques for English Language Learners Nguyen Duc Huy 33rd Annual Student Research Conference , SEMO University," no. April (2025): 0–17.

⁵ Tarık UZUN, "Foreign Accent, Identity and Accent Discrimination: A Literature Review," *International Journal of Language Academy* 45, no. 45 (2023): 252–66, <https://doi.org/10.29228/ijla.69110>

abilities because they feel more confident in conveying ideas.⁶ This is reinforced, who stated that consistent pronunciation practice increases the interlocutor's perception of a person's language competence, especially in academic and professional situations.⁷ Therefore, pronunciation is not just a technical skill, but also plays an important role in building social interaction and self-confidence when speaking.

In addition to being important for fluent communication, good pronunciation skills can also significantly improve listening skills. Routinely integrated pronunciation exercises can increase students' sensitivity to differences in accent and speaking speed in real conversational situations.⁸ In line with this, stated that understanding rhythm, word stress, and intonation can help students capture the meaning of speech more accurately and responsively.⁹ This means that when students have good pronunciation, they are not only clearer in speaking, but also better able to understand and respond to speech from other speakers more effectively.

Although pronunciation learning brings many benefits, its implementation at the secondary education level still faces various obstacles. One of the main obstacles is the availability of open materials and appropriate methods for speaking skills training, especially in the pronunciation aspect. In

⁶ Md Rabiul Alam et al., "Accelerating Learners' Self-Confidence Level in Second Language Acquisition: A Qualitative Study," *ICRRD Quality Index Research Journal* 2, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.53272/icrrd.v2i3.5>

⁷ Alam et al

⁸ Pedro Luis Luchini, "Integrating Pronunciation Teaching and Intercultural Communicative Competence : Enhancing Intelligibility and Adaptability in L2 Learners," no. April (2025), <https://doi.org/10.30438/ksj.2024.12.1.2>

⁹ Vy Thi, Mai Luu, and Andrew Lian, "PROSODY-BASED TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS ' LISTENING SKILLS in Proceedings of the 8th OpenTesol International Conference 2020 (" 2020, no. July (2020): 263–76

a study, it was found that many teachers have not paid special attention to pronunciation teaching because they do not understand phonology and have limited special training in this aspect.¹⁰ In addition, limited technological support, such as the lack of audio devices, language laboratories, or adequate digital media, is also a major inhibiting factor in the learning process. These obstacles not only reduce the frequency of student practice, but also have an impact on the low accuracy of pronunciation and students' confidence in speaking English orally.

Although the benefits of pronunciation practice are widely recognized, several challenges hinder its effective implementation in language classrooms. One major obstacle is the lack of appropriate teaching materials and systematic teaching strategies that specifically focus on segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features. Many teachers neglect pronunciation instruction or do not emphasize it sufficiently due to limited pedagogical training or classroom time constraints.¹¹ In addition, students often have difficulty distinguishing between similar phonemes, and if this difficulty is not addressed with targeted practice, such as minimal pair practice, incorrect habits can become second nature. Furthermore, limited access to technological devices further complicates pronunciation practice, especially in resource-constrained educational settings. As a result, learners receive

¹⁰ Hannifiah Rahmah, "Investigating the Relationship between Students' Habit of Singing English Songs and Their Pronunciation Ability in a Senior High School in East Jakarta" 12, no. 1 (2025): 590–604.

¹¹ Murat Hismanoglu, "The Pronunciation of the Inter-Dental Sounds of English: An Articulation Problem for Turkish Learners of English and Solutions," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2009): 1697–1703, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.301>.

inadequate feedback and have fewer opportunities to develop phonological awareness. This calls for an emphasis on methods such as the minimal pair technique, which systematically trains learners to recognize subtle phonemic contrasts and improves their listening comprehension and comprehension over time.

Several international studies have shown that the minimal pair technique is an effective strategy in improving English pronunciation skills. Research showed that systematic practice using minimal word pairs can improve students' ability to distinguish and imitate difficult English sounds, especially among Arabic-speaking learners.¹² Similar results were obtained, who found a significant increase in Iranian students' pronunciation accuracy after being given minimal pair practice, especially in distinguishing similar vowel sounds.¹³ Meanwhile, developed a technology-based pronunciation training tool that uses synthetic speech feedback. Their research showed that the use of minimal pair-based technology can improve students' listening skills and phonological awareness more effectively.¹⁴ Another study also supports the effectiveness of this technique, especially in overcoming stubborn pronunciation errors and increasing students' confidence in

¹² Allison M. Jendry, "Reflections on the Way We Were Raised: Socialization within a Same-Sex Family," 2015.

¹³ Mina Haghighi and Ramin Rahimy, "The Effect of L2 Minimal Pairs Practice on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Pronunciation Accuracy," *International Journal of Research in English Education* 2, no. 1 (2017): 42–48, <https://doi.org/10.18869/acadpub.ijree.2.1.42>.

¹⁴ Cristian Tejedor-García et al., "Evaluating the Efficiency of Synthetic Voice for Providing Corrective Feedback in a Pronunciation Training Tool Based on Minimal Pairs," *7th ISCA Workshop on Speech and Language Technology in Education, SLaTE 2017*, 2017, 25–29, <https://doi.org/10.21437/SLaTE.2017-5>.

speaking.¹⁵ On the other hand, conducted in a university environment showed that the minimal pair strategy was able to significantly improve aspects of students' articulation, word stress, and intonation.¹⁶

However, most of these studies were conducted at the higher education level or in adult learning contexts, and many utilized digital media as the main support. There have not been many studies that specifically highlight the effectiveness of the minimal pair technique on junior high school students, especially in face-to-face learning in regular classes. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap by raising the topic “The Effectiveness of Minimal Pair Teaching Strategy in Improving Pronunciation Accuracy”.

B. Formulation Research Question

This research questions is formulated as: How is the effectiveness of the minimal pair technique strategy in improving the seventh grade student's pronunciation at MTsN 10 Blitar?

C. Research Objective

Based on the statement of the research question above, the purpose of the research is to determine the effectiveness of the minimal pair teaching strategy in enhancing pronunciation among the seventh grade students at MTsN 10 Blitar.

¹⁵ Grafik Dizayn-, “Ta’ Lim Innovatsiyasi va Integratsiyasi Ta’ Lim Innovatsiyasi va Integratsiyasi,” 2024, 2023–25.

¹⁶ “Author: Acosta Acosta Erika Lucia Tutor: Dra. Mg. Wilma Elizabeth Suárez Mosquera Ambato – Ecuador 2023,” 2023.

D. Research Hypothesis

There are two hypotheses in this study, namely the null hypothesis (H₀) and alternative hypothesis (H₁).

- a. H₀: The use of minimal pair in teaching English does not significantly improve pronunciation among the seventh grade students at MTsN 10 Blitar.
- b. H₁: The use of minimal pair in teaching English significantly improves pronunciation in the seventh grade students at MTsN 10 Blitar.

E. Significance of the Research

This thesis is anticipated to provide valuable contributions to teachers, students, and researcher.

a. The Teacher

This study provides an alternative teaching method that can be used to improve students' pronunciation skills. Through the application of the minimal pair technique, teachers can help students overcome difficulties in distinguishing similar sounds, which are often the source of errors in pronunciation. The results show that this method not only helps students be more precise in pronouncing language sounds, but also to foster their confidence when speaking. This technique is very suitable for application in classes that focus on developing communication and language skills.

a. The Students

This study highlights the importance of pronunciation in the language learning process for students. The minimal pair technique

provides a practical approach to improving comprehension and communication skills, through the practice of distinguishing similar sounds, students not only improve their pronunciation but also add vocabulary. this approach helps students become more confident when interacting in class and overall improve their language skills, making the learning process more effective and enjoyable.

b. The Future Researcher

This study makes an important contribution to the field of language education, especially in the teaching of pronunciation. the findings of this study show that the minimal pair technique is an effective strategy and worthy of further development. this study also opens up opportunities to examine the application of this technique to various age groups and different language backgrounds. in addition, the approach and methods used in this study can be used as a reference for future studies that want to explore innovative teaching methods, as well as enrich academic discussions about language acquisition and learning strategies.

F. Scope of the Research

This study focuses on the effectiveness of the minimal pair teaching strategy in improving the accuracy of English pronunciation in junior high school students at MTsN 10 Blitar. of the four available classes 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D, two classes were selected as samples, namely classes 7A and 7B. the selection of this class was carried out using purposive sampling method, which is a sampling technique based on certain considerations of the

researcher. in this case the class was chosen because it was considered to represent characteristics that were in accordance with the research objectives, such as a balanced level of ability and readiness to follow the threatened learning treatment.

The teaching materials used focused on minimal pairs with vocal and consonant sounds that often cause confusion in English pronunciation. these sounds were chosen because they are often a source of error among intermediate level learners. therefore, emphasizing the differences in similar sounds, the minimal pair strategy is expected to help students more easily distinguish phonemes that are often confused, so as to improve the accuracy of their pronunciation.

G. Definition of Key Terms

Explaining key terms is very important so that the research topic can be understood as a whole. as for the main terms in this study include the minimum pair technique and pronunciation, which are described as follows:

a. Minimal Pair Teaching Strategy

The Minimal Pair Strategy is a pronunciation teaching technique that uses pairs of words that differ in only one sound to train students' ability to recognize and produce accurate phonemic contrasts.¹⁷

b. Pronunciation accuracy

Pronunciation accuracy includes the production of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns that conform to the norms of the target

¹⁷ Haghghi and Rahimy, "The Effect of L2 Minimal Pairs Practice on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Pronunciation Accuracy."

language. This accuracy plays an important role in delivering understandable speech and effective oral communication.¹⁸

¹⁸ Haghghi and Rahimy.