JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES TOWARDS THE USE OF IPA (INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET) TO ENHANCE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

SKRIPSI

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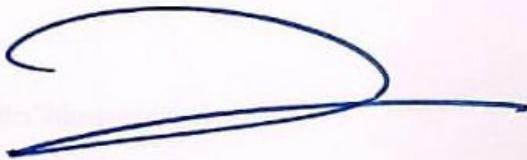
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Is the result of my own original work, and all sources of information used have been clearly cited in the reference list according to the scientific and academic code of ethics. I am aware that if any violations of scholarly ethics regarding to the authenticity of this work are found, I personally accept the consequences in accordance with the applicable regulations and am prepared to bear legal sanctions.

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MOTTO

"Seeking knowledge is an obligation for each Muslim"

— Prophet Muhammad (HR. Ibn Majah)

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Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family, friends, and everyone who has provided moral and academic support during this journey. Their encouragement and prayers have been a source of strength and motivation.

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ABSTRACT

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a system of phonetic notation designed to represent the sounds of spoken language accurately, and it has been increasingly applied in English language teaching to support students' pronunciation development. Despite its potential benefits, research on students' perceptions of IPA and the challenges they encounter in junior high school contexts remains limited. This study aims to describe junior high school students' perceptions of using IPA and to identify the obstacles they face in its application. Conducted in one junior high school where students had been introduced to IPA, this research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that: (1) most students perceived IPA as helpful for understanding accurate pronunciation and distinguishing sounds; and (2) students faced challenges such as memorizing phonetic symbols and applying them in daily communication. These findings provide insights into the practical use of IPA in junior high school English classrooms and highlight the need for engaging, contextualized learning strategies to support its effective implementation.

ABSTRAK

Maharani, (2025). Junior High School Students' Perceptions and Challenges towards the Use of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) to Enhance English Pronunciation, Skripsi, English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts Education, IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro, Advisor (I) Dr. Ima Isnaini Taufiqur Rohmah, M.Pd., (II) Ayu Fitrianingsih, M.Pd.

Kata Kunci : International Phonetic Alphabet, Pelafalan, Persepsi Siswa, Tantangan Pembelajaran, Siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) adalah sebuah sistem notasi fonetik yang dirancang untuk merepresentasikan bunyi bahasa lisan secara akurat, dan semakin banyak diterapkan dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk mendukung pengembangan kemampuan pelafalan siswa. Penelitian mengenai persepsi siswa terhadap IPA dan tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam konteks sekolah menengah pertama masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan persepsi siswa SMP terhadap penggunaan IPA serta mengidentifikasi hambatan yang mereka temui dalam penerapannya. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di salah satu SMP yang telah memperkenalkan IPA kepada siswanya, dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara mendalam. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) sebagian besar siswa menganggap IPA bermanfaat untuk memahami pelafalan yang akurat dan membedakan bunyi; dan (2) siswa menghadapi tantangan seperti menghafal simbol fonetik dan menerapkannya dalam komunikasi sehari-hari. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan mengenai penggunaan IPA secara praktis di kelas bahasa Inggris SMP dan menyoroti perlunya strategi pembelajaran yang menarik serta kontekstual untuk mendukung penerapan IPA secara efektif.

PREFACE

All praises be to Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, for His never-ending blessings, strength, and guidance that enabled me to complete this undergraduate skripsi entitled "Junior High School Students' Perception and Challenges Towards the Use of IPA to Enhance English Pronunciation."

This thesis is submitted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor's degree in the English Education Study Program at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. The process of completing this thesis has been a journey full of learning, self-discovery, and perseverance. Through every challenge and obstacle, I gained not only academic insights but also personal growth.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr. Ima Isnaini Taufiqur Rohmah, M.Pd., for her consistent guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support throughout every stage of this research. Her encouragement and attention to detail helped me improve both the content and quality of this thesis. My sincere appreciation also goes to my second supervisor, Mrs. Ayu Fitrianingsih, M.Pd., for her valuable insights, thoughtful corrections, and continued motivation during the writing process.

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Special appreciation is devoted to my beloved parents and family for their endless love, prayers, and support during this academic journey. To my closest friends who always stood by my side, especially in difficult times. Thank you for being my strength when I was weary.

I am fully aware that this thesis is far from perfect. Therefore, I welcome any constructive suggestions for improvement. I sincerely hope that this work can be beneficial for future researchers, educators, and anyone interested in the development of English language pronunciation.

Bojonegoro, 4 July 2025

Puguh Putri Maharani

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Pronunciation is a cornerstone of communication in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) settings, involving clear and meaningful interaction between speakers and listeners, ensuring mutual understanding despite potential language barriers. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings, reducing a speaker's intelligibility and confidence (Gilakjani, 2016) Despite its significance, pronunciation is frequently given less attention in language teaching compared to other language skills like grammar and vocabulary (Murphy, 2014).

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is widely regarded as a valuable instrument in addressing articulation challenges. By providing a standardized representation of speech sounds, IPA helps learners understand and produce unfamiliar phonemes more accurately (Gilakjani, 2016). Studies show that incorporating IPA in language instruction improves students' phonological awareness, leading to better pronunciation outcomes (Asrul & Husda, 2022)

However, integrating IPA in EFL classrooms is fraught with challenges that can hinder its effectiveness. In the junior high school context, these challenges become more apparent. A recent study by (Jonathan, 2023) found that Indonesian junior high school students often struggle to connect IPA symbols with actual English sounds, face time limitations in learning pronunciation, and are taught by teachers with limited phonetic training. These factors

collectively reduce the effectiveness of IPA instruction and highlight the need for context-appropriate teaching strategies.

First, the abstract and symbolic nature of IPA can be overwhelming for learners, especially those unfamiliar with phonetic concepts. The lack of direct correspondence between IPA symbols and learners' native language orthography adds a layer of complexity, making it difficult for students to map the symbols to actual sounds (Asrul & Husda, 2022). This challenge is further compounded in contexts where students are already grappling with a significant phonological gap between English and their first language, such as in Indonesia. For instance, students may struggle with sounds that are absent in their native phonology, and IPA's technical nature can exacerbate their difficulties rather than mitigate them.

Secondly, the introduction of IPA often assumes a foundational understanding of phonetics, which many EFL students lack. Without sufficient scaffolding, learners may perceive IPA as an unnecessarily technical or irrelevant addition to language learning, leading to resistance or disengagement. Teachers also play a pivotal role in this dynamic. Unfortunately, many educators lack adequate training in phonetics and phonology, which inhibits their ability to teach IPA effectively (Levis et al., 2020) This lack of expertise can result in inconsistent or superficial instruction, depriving learners of the full benefits that IPA can offer.

Furthermore, instructional time constraints in many EFL settings pose a significant barrier to the effective integration of IPA. Given the comprehensive nature of language curricula, pronunciation let alone IPA instruction is often sidelined in favour of more easily assessed skills like grammar and vocabulary. As a result, teachers may feel pressured to prioritize other components of language learning, leaving IPA instruction fragmented or omitted entirely. In cases where IPA is taught, it is often done in isolation rather than integrated into communicative activities, limiting its practical application for learners.

Cultural and attitudinal factors also influence the adoption of IPA. In many EFL contexts, including Indonesia, students may prioritize communicative fluency over phonetic accuracy, viewing pronunciation as secondary to the ability to convey meaning. This perception diminishes the perceived relevance of IPA and undermines learners' motivation to engage with it. Additionally, institutional support for phonetic instruction is often inadequate, with limited access to resources such as training materials, pronunciation software, or native-speaking models, further reducing the feasibility of implementing IPA in classroom settings.

Understanding students' perceptions of IPA and the multifaceted challenges they face is crucial for addressing these barriers. Learners who view IPA positively are more likely to persevere despite its technical nature, while those who see it as daunting or irrelevant may avoid its use altogether (Gilakjani, 2016). Addressing these perceptions requires a nuanced approach that takes into account linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural factors.

Given the limited emphasis on pronunciation in Indonesia's EFL curriculum, this research is especially important. By exploring students' perceptions and the challenges associated with using IPA to enhance English pronunciation, the study seeks to identify practical solutions for integrating phonetic instruction into existing curricula. The findings will contribute to the development of innovative instructional strategies that address both technical and motivational challenges, ultimately fostering better communicative competence in learners.

B. Formulation of the Problems

While the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) suggests significant benefits to improving English articulation, its implementation in the classroom is not without challenges. Understanding how students perceive this tool is crucial, as their attitudes and engagement can greatly influence its effectiveness. Additionally, learners often face various obstacles when using IPA, such as difficulties in recognizing symbols and associating them with corresponding sounds.

Given these considerations, this research pursues to attend two key research problems:

1. How do the seventh graders of SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Balen perceive the role of IPA in enhancing their English pronunciation?

2. What challenges do seventh graders of SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Balen face when using IPA in learning English pronunciation?

C. Objectives of the Study

In line of the research problems identified, this research aims to give a widespread perceptive of students' experiences with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). By exploring their perceptions, the research seeks to uncover how students view IPA as a instrument to enlightening articulation. Additionally, identifying the challenges they face will help shed light on the practical difficulties that may hinder their progress.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To investigate seventh graders' perceptions at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Balen regarding the use of IPA in enhancing their English pronunciation.

2. To identify challenges that seventh graders at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Balen encounter in using IPA for pronunciation practice.

D. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to the hypothetical perceptive of pronunciation instruction in examining the function of IPA in enhancing learners' phonological awareness. By providing empirical data on these aspects, this study will enrich the

information on articulation teaching and learning, offering a nuanced perspective on the integration of phonetic tools in EFL instruction.

2. Pedagogical Significance

From a pedagogical standpoint, this research underscores the practical implications for language educators. The findings will help teachers understand the importance of using IPA as a tool to improve students' pronunciation. Furthermore, the study will offer strategies to address common challenges, such as symbol recognition difficulties and students' initial resistance to phonetic instruction. These insights will equip educators with the knowledge to design more effective and engaging pronunciation lessons, fostering a more comprehensive approach to language teaching.

3. Practical Significance

On a practical level, the study aims to benefit not only students and teachers but also curriculum developers and policymakers. For students, understanding the value of IPA can enhance their learning experience, improving both their articulation ability and confidence in speaking English. For teachers, the study will provide actionable recommendations to integrate IPA effectively into their teaching practices. Lastly, the research may inform curriculum designers and policymakers about the importance of incorporating phonetic instruction in language programs, ultimately promoting better language learning outcomes.

E. Definition of Key Terminology

To provide a pure perceptive of the conceptions explored in this research, it is essential to define the key terms used. Precise definitions will ensure that readers interpret these terms within the context of this research, avoiding ambiguity and facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the study's focus. The following definitions are provided:

1. Student's Perception

   According to Smith and Brown (2015) student perception is the individual viewpoint students hold toward their learning environment and instructional methods, which significantly affects their motivation and engagement. They argue that positive perceptions can boost student confidence and encourage active participation in class activities. Conversely, negative perceptions might lead to disengagement or resistance to learning. Smith and Brown highlight that student perceptions are also influenced by peer interactions, teacher behaviour, and available resources, all contributing to the overall educational experience. This broader understanding helps educators identify barriers to learning beyond just the curriculum.

   Additionally, Johnson (2017) explains that student perception encompasses not only cognitive interpretation but also emotional responses to educational experiences, shaping attitudes and academic behaviours. Emotional factors such as anxiety, interest, and self-esteem are integral parts of how students perceive their education. Johnson's research shows that students who feel emotionally supported tend to develop more positive perceptions and achieve better academic outcomes. Furthermore, these perceptions can impact students' willingness to take risks and engage in challenging tasks, which are important for deeper learning. Recognizing the emotional dimension of perception is essential for creating supportive learning environments.

   Furthermore, Rachman (2022) describes student perception as the process by which learners interpret, evaluate, and make sense of their educational experiences, which are influenced by their prior knowledge, social environment, and personal

expectations. He emphasizes that student perception affects motivation and engagement, playing a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes.

Student perception encompasses how learners understand and evaluate their educational environment. These perceptions shape their academic behaviours and can determine the success of learning initiatives. Understanding students' perceptions is particularly important when exploring the use of tools like IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) in enhancing English pronunciation, as these perceptions can influence their openness to such tools and the effectiveness of their learning outcomes.

2. Student's Challenges

(Malik et al., 2021) discuss that students face a range of challenges in the learning process, including cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors. These challenges can hinder their academic progress, especially when learning a second language. Further elaborate that specific challenges in language learning include difficulty in mastering pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, which are often exacerbated by insufficient exposure to these skills. These challenges are particularly relevant when introducing new tools like IPA in language learning, as students may find it difficult to connect IPA symbols with sounds without proper guidance.

Similarly, Derakhshan and Karimi (2021) highlight that pronunciation learning poses significant challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly due to the influence of their first language phonological system. They emphasize that these challenges often lead to learner anxiety and lack of confidence,

which negatively impact speaking performance and willingness to participate in oral activities.

Furthermore, Nguyen and Boers (2020) discuss environmental challenges faced by learners, such as limited opportunities for authentic communication and insufficient feedback from teachers. Their study underlines the importance of interactive and supportive classroom environments and access to effective learning tools, like IPA, to facilitate better pronunciation skills and reduce learner frustration.

To summarize, students face a variety of challenges in their educational journey, ranging from cognitive barriers to issues with teaching methods and classroom engagement. In the context of language learning, these challenges are often more pronounced, especially when introducing complex concepts such as IPA.

3. International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a standardized system of symbols designed to represent the unique sounds of spoken languages in a clear and consistent manner. (Trazo & Abocejo, 2019) define the IPA as an essential tool for educators and linguists, as it helps connect the divergence between written text and spoken language by offering a precise transcription of sounds. It plays a significant role in teaching pronunciation, allowing students to understand the specific articulation of sounds, particularly those not present in their native language.

Similarly, Kwon (2018) emphasizes that the IPA is fundamental in language teaching, particularly in second language acquisition, as it helps learners visualize and practice the articulation of unfamiliar sounds. The clear symbolic representation assists students in distinguishing subtle differences in phonemes, which is critical for achieving native-like pronunciation. Kwon also points out that effective use of

the IPA can reduce learners' anxiety related to pronunciation errors, enhancing their confidence in speaking.

Furthermore, Lado (2016) highlights the IPA's role in phonetic research and practical language instruction, noting that it provides a systematic way to analyze and teach the sounds of any language. Its application in classrooms promotes learners' phonological awareness, which is vital for both listening comprehension and speaking fluency. By integrating IPA into language curricula, educators can offer more accurate feedback and targeted pronunciation practice.

To summarize, The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a universal system that standardizes the representation of speech sounds, making it an invaluable tool in language learning and phonetic research. Its application in educational contexts allows learners to connect symbols with specific sounds, improving their pronunciation and comprehension. By focusing on sound visualization and articulation, the IPA supports second language learners in overcoming common pronunciation challenges, ensuring more effective communication and language proficiency. The use of IPA is integral in fostering both linguistic accuracy and confidence in learners.

4. English Pronunciation

Gilakjani (2016) defines English pronunciation as the way in which sounds, stress patterns, and intonation are articulated to convey meaning effectively in spoken English. It involves not just the articulation of individual sounds, but also the rhythm and intonation patterns of speech.

Similarly, Saito (2017) argues that English pronunciation plays a critical role in second language acquisition, affecting learners' comprehensibility and communication success. Saito highlights that focusing on both segmental sounds and suprasegmental features improves learners' intelligibility and social integration. She suggests that pronunciation instruction should be an integral part of language teaching to help learners overcome accent-related barriers.

Furthermore, Schmidt and Lee (2019) discuss pronunciation as a multidimensional skill that requires the coordination of articulation, rhythm, stress, and intonation to achieve effective spoken communication. They stress that pronunciation teaching must balance accuracy with fluency, incorporating both perception and production activities. Their research supports the view that mastering pronunciation enhances learners' overall language proficiency and communicative competence.

In summary, English pronunciation encompasses the correct articulation of sounds, stress, and intonation necessary for effective communication. It is a fundamental skill in language acquisition, particularly for English learners, as it directly affects their ability to be understood and engage in fluent, meaningful conversations. Ensuring that learners master English pronunciation is essential for their success in both formal and informal communication.