

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Speaking is a crucial language skill in English learning because it is the primary means of communicating and expressing ideas, feelings, and opinions. According to Ikhtiyarovna (2024), speaking is an active skill that enables a person to produce utterances to convey messages effectively. In the context of learning, Penny Ur (1996) emphasizes the importance of providing students with ample opportunities to speak, as speaking is the core of language acquisition and the key to efficient communication. Without good speaking skills, students will experience speaking anxiety (Alton, 2023), which can hinder participation and the development of overall language skills. Therefore, speaking is a fundamental skill that determines successful communication in English learning.

Research on pronunciation challenges has been conducted by several researchers. Jawaid et al. (2024) identified phonetic difficulties, lack of group interaction, and limited teacher feedback as key barriers, influenced by phonetic, socio-cultural, and educational factors. Nubba (2025) highlighted the challenges of using English dictionaries, particularly variations in phonemic transcription, inconsistencies in online and offline formats, and learner cognitive load. Meanwhile, Al-threshed (2024) found consistent errors in the pronunciation of the phoneme /p/ due to interlingua interference. Overall, these studies confirm that pronunciation difficulties are systemic and have a direct impact on students' speaking performance.

Tankosić and Dovchin (2023) view the local linguistic context as a specific sociolinguistic environment outside the mainstream of globalization. They highlight how linguistic and translingual practices on

social media can be reapplied within local contexts. The local context serves as a space for communities to shape their linguistic identities, negotiate social positions, and develop forms of expression that align with their realities. Meanwhile, Kauf et al. (2024) define local linguistic context as the immediate textual environment surrounding a word or sentence. This context can involve relationships between words within a single sentence or with preceding sentences in a discourse. According to Costley, Kula, and Marten (2023), local linguistic context refers to the social and cultural setting in which language is dynamically used in everyday life. This context reflects local identities and the community's multilingual practices in accordance with communication needs. Overall, local linguistic context encompasses social, cultural, and linguistic aspects.

Therefore, local linguistic context is not only related to language use in specific situations but also encompasses the values, customs, and social norms inherent in community life. Language is viewed as part of social practices that are constantly evolving. The meaning of language is shaped through interactions among speakers within a community and is influenced by the environment in which communication takes place. Thus, the local context plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals use, understand, and adapt language in their daily lives. The local environment directly influences language choices and communication styles in social interactions. This understanding helps explain the influence of the social and cultural environment and the relationships among linguistic elements. Language is always connected to the social and cultural environment of its speaker.

Various studies have also highlighted the influence of local linguistic context on pronunciation ability and English language learning. Yu and Li (2025) demonstrated that language transfer occurs specifically per strategy,

with a predominance of positive transfer from the second language. Erdoğan (2025) demonstrated that semantic transfer from the mother tongue can influence English vocabulary acquisition, but its negative effects can be minimized through the support of linguistic context. Jiang and Huangfu (2025) emphasized the importance of contrastive analysis to promote positive transfer and reduce negative transfer. These findings are relevant to students' local contexts, as first language background plays a significant role in shaping pronunciation patterns and speaking accuracy.

Several studies emphasize the importance of socio-cultural factors and local context in English speaking activities. Burekovic, Mujicic, and Eminovic (2025) found that although textbooks were in line with the curriculum, the available activities were still dominated by individual written exercises and did not support communication and critical thinking skills. Pradowski, Whitby, Czuba, and Brodka (2024) revealed that the development of social interaction networks played a significant role in improving students' second language acquisition during intensive programs. Althobaiti and Alsaawi (2025) added that code-switching practices aid comprehension but have the potential to hinder English fluency. These studies show that the learning environment and social interactions greatly influence students' speaking abilities.

Although various studies have examined pronunciation challenges, the influence of linguistic transfer, and social factors in speaking learning, there remains a gap in studies that comprehensively integrate these three aspects within a specific local context. Most studies tend to focus on phonetics or language transfer separately, without deeply connecting them to students' real-world speaking practices. Furthermore, research specifically examining students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu is still very limited, necessitating a more contextual and specific study.

This research seeks to add to existing understanding by integrating studies on pronunciation challenges, the influence of local linguistic context, and speaking activities into a single, coherent analytical framework. By simultaneously examining phonetic aspects, language transfer, and social factors in speaking practice, this study provides a more comprehensive perspective on the difficulties faced by students. In addition, this study also enriches the literature by presenting empirical data from the local Indonesian context, especially fourth-semester students, who have been underrepresented in previous research.

Various studies show that the first language (L1) can influence second language (L2) learning, including in sound production and phonological features. Chen (2022) explains that Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI) can take the form of either positive or negative transfer. Positive transfer occurs when similarities between L1 and L2 facilitate learning, whereas negative transfer arises when differences between the two lead to errors in L2 production. In pronunciation, differences in sound systems can cause students to carry over phonological patterns from their L1 into English. Domalaon and Gilbas (2023) add that linguistic transfer can affect speaking ability, particularly when the L1 sound system differs from that of English. Furthermore, Nakamura and Begole (2023) demonstrate that speaking experience and anxiety can also influence the production of phonological features, including word stress. Thus, pronunciation difficulties are influenced by the interaction between the sound systems, the environment, and the students' psychological states.

This research is important to conduct because good pronunciation skills are very important in determining the success of communication in students' speaking activities. By deeply understanding the various challenges faced, lecturers can design more effective and contextual

learning strategies. In addition, the results of this study are expected to help students increase their confidence and accuracy in speaking English. More broadly, this research also makes a practical contribution to the development of curricula and teaching methods that are more responsive to students' local linguistic needs and characteristics.

Based on this background, this study aims to identify and analyze pronunciation challenges in English speaking activities for fourth semester students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. This study also aims to examine how the local linguistic context, including the influence of the mother tongue and social environment, affects students' pronunciation abilities. By using a case study approach, this research is expected to provide an in-depth and contextual picture of the phenomenon being studied, as well as offer practical implications for improving the quality of speaking learning in higher education.

Based on initial observations conducted on fourth semester students of UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu on February 3, 2026, several pronunciation challenges were identified during English speaking activities. Many students show difficulty in pronouncing certain sounds such as vowels, consonants, diphthongs, and word stress. Some students have difficulty distinguishing sounds like /s/ and /ʃ/, pronouncing words like “girl,” and producing correct verb forms like V2. The influence of mother tongue and local accents was also evident in students' intonation. Although some students felt nervous or hesitant when speaking in front of the class, they generally remained confident and actively participated in class discussions (*Appendix 1 on the classroom observation instrument, Appendix 2 on the results of the initial research classroom observation*).

Interviews with several fourth-semester students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu revealed that many students experience pronunciation

difficulties during English speaking activities. Some reported confusion between English spelling and pronunciation, resulting in errors such as pronouncing "politely" as "pilət" or difficulty with sounds like /ʃən/, /s/ at the end of words, and the difference between words like "beach" and "bitch." Others mentioned difficulty articulating sounds like /r/ or words like "girl." Interviews also indicated that regional languages sometimes influence intonation and rhythm of speech. Some students also said they felt nervous and sometimes lacked self-confidence (*Appendix 3 regarding the student interview instrument. Appendix 4 regarding the results of preliminary research student interviews*).

Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled “PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN A LOCAL LINGUISTIC CONTEXT (A Case Study in Fourth Semester Students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu)”. Based on the results of initial observations and interviews, it was found that students still face various difficulties in English pronunciation, especially in pronouncing vowels, consonants, diphthongs, and word stress. In addition, the influence of the mother tongue and local accent also influences the intonation and rhythm of students' speech. Some students also experience confusion between spelling and pronunciation of words in English. However, they still show active participation in learning. Therefore, this research is important to conduct in more depth to examine the challenges of pronunciation in the local linguistic context.

B. Identification of the Problems

Based on the background, the problems identified in this study are as follows:

1. Students have difficulty pronouncing vowels, consonants, and diphthongs in English.
2. Students have difficulty distinguishing similar sounds such as /s/ and /ʃ/ in speaking activities.
3. Mistakes in word stress and intonation still frequently occur when speaking.
4. The influence of mother tongue and local accent affects the pronunciation patterns and rhythm of students' speech.
5. Students experience confusion between spelling and pronunciation of words in English.
6. Mispronunciation of certain words such as “girl” and differences in meaning of words are still frequently found.
7. Lack of group interaction and speaking practice hinders students' pronunciation development.
8. Feedback from lecturers regarding pronunciation is still limited in the learning process.
9. Students experience anxiety and lack confidence when speaking English in front of the class.
10. The learning environment does not fully support the optimal development of speaking skills.

C. Limitation of the Problems

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, this study only focused on fourth-semester students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, so the results cannot be broadly generalized to other contexts or populations. Second, this study only examined pronunciation

challenges in speaking activities, limited to phonetic aspects such as vowel sounds, consonants, word stress, and intonation, without discussing other linguistic aspects in depth. Third, the influence of the local linguistic context analyzed in this study was limited to the mother tongue and the phenomenon of linguistic transfer, so other, more complex linguistic factors were not discussed thoroughly. Fourth, the social and psychological factors studied only included self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and the learning environment, so other factors such as motivation, learning strategies, and individual background were not analyzed in depth. Finally, this study used a case study approach, so the data obtained were contextual and dependent on the conditions and situations observed during the research process .

D. Research Questions

Based on the research problems that have been described, several research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

1. What are the pronunciation challenges faced by fourth-semester students of UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu in English speaking activities, especially those related to phonetic aspects such as vowel sounds, consonants, word stress, and intonation?
2. How does the local linguistic context, including mother tongue influence and linguistic transfer, affect students' pronunciation skills in English speaking activities?
3. How do social and psychological factors, such as self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and the learning environment, influence students' speaking performance when facing pronunciation challenges?

E. The Purposes of the Research

Based on the research questions that have been formulated previously, the objectives of this research are formulated to provide a clear direction in achieving the results of the scientific study as follows:

1. To identify and analyze various pronunciation challenges faced by fourth semester students of UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu in English speaking activities, especially those related to phonetic aspects such as vowel sounds, consonants, word stress, and intonation.
2. To examine the influence of local linguistic context, including mother tongue and linguistic transfer phenomena, on students' pronunciation abilities in English speaking activities.
3. To analyze the influence of social and psychological factors, such as self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and learning environment, on students' speaking performance in facing pronunciation challenges.

F. The Significances of the Research

This research has important significance in the development of English language learning, especially in speaking skills related to pronunciation in the local linguistic context. With the increasing need for global communication, accurate speaking skills have become crucial for students. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the various challenges faced by students and the factors that influence them in real learning situations in higher education.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of applied linguistic studies, especially in the field of pronunciation and speaking in the EFL context. This research enriches the literature by integrating phonetic aspects, linguistic transfer, and social and psychological factors into one comprehensive analytical framework. In addition, this study also provides a new perspective regarding the influence of local linguistic context on students' pronunciation abilities, which has been limited in previous research. Thus, the results of this study can be a reference for further researchers in developing similar studies.

Practically, this research is expected to provide benefits for lecturers, students, and educational institutions. For lecturers, the results of this study can be used as a basis for designing more effective and contextual learning strategies to improve students' pronunciation skills. For students, this research can help increase awareness of pronunciation errors and encourage increased confidence in speaking English. In addition, for institutions, this research can be used as a consideration in developing curricula and learning methods that are more appropriate to the local linguistic needs of students.

In conclusion, this research is expected to not only provide academic contributions, but also have a real impact in improving the quality of speaking learning in higher education. By comprehensively understanding pronunciation challenges, it is hoped that a more supportive and responsive learning environment can be created to meet students' needs, so that their English communication skills can develop optimally.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

To avoid differences in interpretation, the following explains important terminology which is defined operationally so that this research has clear concepts and study boundaries:

1. *English Speaking Activities* are oral communication activities in English that involve formal and informal interactions, where students are required to speak fluently, accurately, and according to pronunciation rules.
2. *Pronunciation Challenges* refer to students' difficulties in pronouncing English sounds accurately, including vowels, consonants, word stress, intonation, and speech rhythm.
3. *Local Linguistic Context* is the local language environment that includes speaking habits, dialects, and mother tongue influences, which influence how students produce and learn English pronunciation.