

The Analysis of Challenges in the Pronunciation of English Consonants Faced by English Education Students and English Literature Students of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates challenges in the pronunciation of English consonants identified among English Education (EE) and English Literature (EL) students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Employing qualitative descriptive method, data were collected from ten students (five from each program) through pronunciation tests and audio recordings. The analysis focused on common errors in the pronunciation of consonant sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /ʃ/. The results revealed that EE students struggled primarily with interdental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/), often substituting them with /t/ and /d/. Meanwhile, EL students faced greater challenges with voiced fricatives (/ʒ/ and /z/), substituting them with /s/ or /ʃ/. Both groups showed shared difficulties with palatal fricatives, indicating gaps in phonetic proficiency. These findings highlight the influence of curriculum focus, with EE students benefiting more from phonetic training, whereas EL students emphasize textual analysis, focusing more on literature interpretation and critique rather than oral practice. The study underscores the importance of targeted pronunciation interventions to address department-specific needs and improve linguistic proficiency among learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the specific difficulties faced by students in pronouncing English consonants. Pronunciation is a critical component of language acquisition, as it significantly influences communication effectiveness. According to Jahara (2021), challenges in pronunciation often stem from the influence of a learner's native language, leading to persistent mispronunciations.

Previous studies have explored some challenges in pronunciation faced by Indonesian students. For example, a study highlighted difficulties with sounds like /θ/ and /ð/ due to the absence of these sounds in the Indonesian phonological system (Pourhosein et al., 2020; Aisyah et al., 2024). While these studies provide insight into the universal struggles of Indonesian learners, they do not focus on differentiating between students pursuing different fields of study, such as English Education versus English Literature, within the same university setting. Moreover, prior studies typically rely on broad categorizations of learners without considering the unique pedagogical approaches employed in respective departments.

In addition to addressing specific challenges in pronunciation, innovative approaches in teaching, such as utilizing narrative texts, have shown potential in enhancing students' speaking and listening skills. Khoir et al. (2024) emphasized that incorporating literature into language instruction fosters student engagement and provides meaningful contexts for practicing language skills. Similarly, addressing pronunciation difficulties requires creative strategies to ensure learners achieve comprehensive linguistic proficiency.

Additionally, the research conducted by Nisak (2017) focused on Madurese students' phonetic features in English conversations but did not delve into department-specific differences. Similarly, another study by Islamiyah (2012) examined pronunciation errors among English learners but did not make comparison across different educational disciplines. Furthermore, investigations into specific consonant sounds often overlook contextual factors inherent to particular program curricula. Previous studies have primarily focused on general pronunciation issues rather than specifically examining the differences between English Education and English Literature students within the same institution.

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by specifically analyzing the challenges in pronunciation associated with English consonants among English Education and English Literature students at UIN Malang. Utilizing short pronunciation tests and recordings, this study is directed to identify which consonant sounds are most frequently mispronounced by each group. Our study contributes to the broader field of Applied Linguistics by providing detailed insights into department-specific difficulties in the pronunciation, a distinction not present in meaningful contexts for practicing language skills. Similarly, addressing pronunciation difficulties requires creative strategies to ensure learners achieve comprehensive linguistic proficiency in prior research.

Understanding these differences is crucial for informing instructional strategies tailored to meet the unique needs of each group. Targeted instruction focusing on difficult sounds can significantly improve students' pronunciation skills, as noted by Tran (2024). Additionally, recognizing variations in educational focus influencing sound production allows educators to adapt their teaching methodologies accordingly (Simarmata & Pardede, 2018).

Ultimately, our findings enhance teaching practices in English language education by addressing challenges in consonant pronunciation identified in this research. Effective pronunciation instruction remains essential for fostering clear communication skills among learners, as highlighted by Purba (2019). By comprehensively addressing these challenges, educators can better support their students in achieving proficiency in spoken English.

2. METHOD

This study employed descriptive qualitative method designed to analyze challenges in pronunciation in English consonants faced by undergraduate students. The design was chosen to provide a detailed understanding of the specific pronunciation issues experienced by students from two academic programs: English Education and English Literature. The participants consisted of 10 undergraduate students from UIN Malang, with 5 students from each program. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse academic years and linguistic backgrounds, capturing a broad spectrum of challenges in pronunciation.

The data were collected using a simple pronunciation test and audio recordings. The pronunciation test consisted of a list of 1–5 common English words containing consonants challenging to pronounce, such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /z/. Each participant was asked to read a list of sentences containing target words aloud while being recorded. Recording sessions were conducted individually and kept brief, lasting approximately 2–5 minutes per participant, to minimize discomfort and encourage natural pronunciation.

The recorded data were transcribed using phonetic transcription to identify specific mispronunciations. The analysis process included familiarizing with the recordings through repeated listening to identify pronunciation patterns and notable errors. Errors were then coded into categories such as sound substitutions (e.g., replacing /θ/ with omissions or distortions). Subsequently, these errors were grouped according to the consonant sounds most frequently mispronounced by students in each academic program. The results were then combined into more general themes, like "differences in program-specific errors" and "common pronunciation challenges."

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

The analysis of challenges in pronunciation among English Education (EE) and English Literature (EL) students highlights notable differences in their ability to articulate specific English consonants. Both groups exhibited distinct patterns of mispronunciation, with EE students struggling more with interdental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/), while EL students faced greater difficulty with voiced fricatives (/z/ and /z/).

English Education students often replaced /θ/ with /t/ or /d/, as seen in "THOUGHT" /θɔ:t/ pronounced as /tɔ:t/ or "THIEF" /θi:f/ pronounced as /ti:f/. Similarly, /ð/ in "THE" /ðə/ was substituted with /də/ or

/zə/. These substitutions indicate challenges in tongue placement and airflow control required for interdental fricatives, which are absent in the Indonesian phonetic system.

In addition, some respondents also mispronounced the palatal fricative /ʃ/, a sound commonly represented by the letters sh in English words. For instance, "SHE" /ʃi:/ was sometimes pronounced as /si:/ or /ʃeɪ/, reflecting a lack of consistency in producing this voiceless fricative. This error may stem from insufficient familiarity with the articulation of /ʃ/, where the tongue is positioned close to the palate without fully contacting it.

On the other hand, EL students exhibited frequent errors with /ʒ/ and /z/, particularly in words like "PLEASURE" /'pleʒər/ pronounced as /'plesər/, and "ZEBRA" /'zi:brə/ pronounced as /'si:brə/. These errors suggest limited exposure to these voiced fricatives, possibly due to a curriculum focus on textual analysis rather than oral practice.

Table 1 summarizes the total errors for each student, highlighting these differences.

Table 1. Pronunciation Errors with Examples by Students

Student	/θ/ (e.g., THOUGHT)	/ð/ (e.g., THE)	/ʒ/ (e.g., PLEASURE)	/ʃ/ (e.g., SHE)	/z/ (e.g., ZEBRA)	Total Errors
S1 (EE)	/θɔ:t/ → /tɔ:t/	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
S2 (EE)	✓	/ðə/ → /də/	'pleʒər/ → /plesər/	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	3
S3 (EE)	✓	✓	'pleʒər/ → /plesər/	✓	✓	1
S4 (EE)	✓	/ðə/ → /zə/	'pleʒər/ → /plesər/	✓	✓	2
S5 (EE)	/ti:f/ → /ti:f/	/ðə/ → /də/	✓	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	3
S6 (EL)	/θɔ:t/ → /tɔ:t/	✓	'pleʒər/ → /plesər/	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	3
S7 (EL)	/θɔ:t/ → /tɔ:t/	✓	✓	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	2
S8 (EL)	✓	✓	✓	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	1
S9 (EL)	✓	✓	✓	✓	'zi:brə/ → /si:brə/	1
S10 (EL)	✓	✓	'pleʒər/ → /plesər/	✓	✓	1

From Table 1, it is evident that EE students made more frequent errors with interdental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/), while EL students struggled more with voiced fricatives (/ʒ/ and /z/). Additionally, both groups exhibited some challenges with the palatal fricative /ʃ/, particularly in words like "SHE," indicating that even common English fricatives can present difficulties. Interestingly, both groups exhibited similar difficulties with /ʒ/ in "PLEASURE," indicating a shared challenge with this voiced fricative sound.

By incorporating phonetic transcriptions and examples, this study provides a clearer depiction of the challenges faced by these groups, highlighting the need for targeted pronunciation interventions.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study align with those of previous research that highlight significant challenges in pronunciation faced by Indonesian EFL learners, particularly with fricative sounds like /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /z/. As noted by Adnyani (2021), fricative sounds are among the most problematic for Indonesian learners due to their absence in the Indonesian phonological system and the complexity of English orthography. For instance, English Education students often replaced /θ/ with /t/ or /d/, as seen in "THOUGHT" pronounced as /tɔ:t/, and /ð/ with /d/ or /z/ in "THE." Similarly, English Literature students substituted /ʒ/ with /s/ or /ʃ/, as observed in "PLEASURE" pronounced as /plesər/, and replaced /z/ with /s/ in "ZEBRA."

These findings are consistent with those of the research carried out by Chaira (2015), who observed that first-language interference plays a significant role in mispronunciations. The substitutions of /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/ reflected the absence of interdental fricatives in the Indonesian language. Similarly, voiced fricatives like /ʒ/ and /z/ were replaced with simpler sounds like /s/ or /ʃ/, mirroring patterns identified by Tiono & Yosta (2008) in their analysis of phonological errors by English learners in Indonesia. These substitutions demonstrate the learners' reliance on familiar sounds to approximate unfamiliar ones.

Luthfianda et al. (2024) further highlighted the substitution of /ʒ/ with /z/ or /ʃ/ among Indonesian EFL learners as a result of L1 interference and insufficient exposure to English phonetics. Their findings align closely with this study's observations, particularly in the errors made by English Literature students who replaced voiced fricatives with sounds that are more familiar in their native phonological system. These results emphasize the importance of

targeted phonetic instruction to address such persistent errors.

Islomov (2021) also emphasized the interrelation between Phonetics and Phonology, arguing that effective pronunciation training must integrate both perspectives. This study's findings echo this assertion, as participants exhibited recurring patterns of substitutions that can be mitigated through structured instruction targeting both segmental and suprasegmental features. Similarly, Salam & Jaafar (2019) observed that substitution and deletion are common phonological strategies employed by learners when dealing with unfamiliar sounds, such as interdental and voiced fricatives.

The differences between the two groups also reflect variations in curriculum focus. English Education students, who are more likely to receive training in Phonetics, performed better with voiced fricatives like /ʒ/ and /z/, but still struggled with interdental fricatives due to insufficient practice. Conversely, English Literature students, whose studies emphasize textual analysis, exhibited greater difficulties with voiced fricatives due to limited exposure to spoken English and phonetic instruction.

As suggested by Chaira (2015) and Adnyani (2021), these findings underline the importance of targeted pronunciation training. For English Education students, practice with interdental fricatives through minimal pair activities (e.g., think vs. sink, the vs. de) could help them overcome these errors. For English Literature students, incorporating meaningful contexts like narrative texts (Khoir et al., 2024) or structured drills focusing on voiced fricatives like /ʒ/ and /z/ may improve their pronunciation.

While this study provides insights into the specific challenges faced by these groups, it is limited by its small sample size and the lack of detailed background information on participants, such as prior pronunciation training or regional accents. Future research can expand on this study by involving a larger sample and exploring the influence of individual factors on pronunciation performance. Additionally, investigating how different teaching methodologies impact phonetic accuracy can offer valuable insights for designing more effective curricula.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study shed light on the distinct challenges in pronunciation faced by students of English Education (EE) and English Literature (EL) at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. EE students exhibited greater difficulty with interdental fricatives, such as /θ/ and /ð/, which they commonly replaced with /t/ and /d/. This suggests limited exposure or practice in mastering sounds absent in the Indonesian phonological system, despite the theoretical emphasis on Phonetics in their curriculum. On the other hand, EL students struggled with voiced fricatives, particularly /ʒ/ and /z/, often substituting them with /s/ or /ʃ/. These challenges indicate that the EL curriculum's primary focus on textual analysis may limit opportunities for practical oral exercises, which are crucial for phonetic development.

Both groups share difficulties with the palatal fricative /ʃ/, reflecting broader challenges in adapting to English's complex sound system. These observations emphasize the importance of incorporating targeted and program-specific pronunciation interventions. For EE students, activities such as minimal pairs focusing on interdental fricatives can enhance their precision. For EL students, incorporating phonetic-focused drills within meaningful contexts, like literature-based narratives, may bridge the gap in their oral proficiency.

In summary, this study highlights the interplay between curriculum design and linguistic performance, offering insights into how tailored teaching approaches can improve English consonant pronunciation. Future research is encouraged to include a broader participant base and explore the efficacy of innovative teaching methods in addressing these phonetic challenges.

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