



## Students' Pronunciation Errors on Vowels at Spoken English Activities (Speech) Class at English Department Universitas Negeri Padang

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### Abstract

*Pronunciation plays a significant role in effective communication. The incomprehensible pronunciation will lead to misunderstanding in communication. This present study aims to examine commonly mispronounced vowel sounds. This study investigated the pronunciation error of speech performance to get more naturalistic pronunciation as data. The source of data of this study was six speech recordings delivered by students at the speech class of spoken English activities at English Department (Universitas Negeri Padang). The recordings were analyzed to obtain pronunciation errors from the speeches. After it is done, the errors are were measured and interpreted. The result of this study revealed [æ], [i:], [ə], [əʊ], and [eɪ] were frequently made errors. These sounds were substituted as several sounds. Therefore, it is suggested that these specific errors should be taken into consideration when teaching English to L1 Indonesian EFL students.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is an acceptable or understandable way of language is spoken. Pronunciation is a golden key that plays a vital role in oral communication; it is a fundamental component of communicative competence (Hismanonglu, 2006; Gilakjani, 2017). It is the first thing that listeners notice from the speakers. Besides, having adequate pronunciation is necessary for speakers in order to be understood, incomprehensible pronunciation will lead to a misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, it is more likely to advocate that the very beginning of the English lesson should deal with pronunciation. If students do not have the opportunities to practice the correct pronunciation at the beginning of their learning, they may build their habits in pronouncing a word in the wrong way (Mathew, 2005; Kartyastuti, 2017; Singh, 2017). Taken together, these statements advocate that teachers ought to teach students how to pronounce English words correctly right from the very beginning to prevent pronunciation errors.

Unfortunately, in Indonesia, it seems that the field of pronunciation is left neglected by the overwhelming majority of English language teachers. They emphasize the L2 acquisition only in grammar and vocabulary. Knowing grammar and vocabulary is essential, but it will be useless if the students cannot produce and pronounce those structures and vocabulary correctly (Singh, 2017). As a result of this, pronunciation becomes one of the significant difficulties that Indonesian students encounter in learning the English language.

In the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in pronunciation research both on consonants and vowels. For instance, studies on consonant sounds were done by Umantari, Laksmi & Putra (2016); Fauzi (2014); Anggraini, (2016); Kurniawan (2016); Mulyadi, Ansar & Kholid (2018); Mathew (2005). They agree that [ð] and [θ] are the most problematic sounds for Indonesians, and Indonesian speakers tend to substitute /s/ for /ʃ/, and /z/ for /ʒ/. Besides, other studies were done by Stibbard (2004), who studied Cantonese students, and Nosratinia & Zaker (2014), who studied Iranian students. They also found that the percentage of [ð] and [θ] made errors by students was high. Therefore, it seems these two sounds are universal problems, not only for Indonesian. Moreover, several studies on English vowel sounds have been conducted (Donal 2016; Frijuniarsi 2018; Hambur 2018; Ilahi 2011; Fauzia, 2018; Putri & Rosa, 2020; Saadah & Ardi, 2020). These study outline that [æ] and [ə] are found to be mostly mispronounced.

In general, one of the limitations of the previous studies is that the focus is on testing the individual sound and reading aloud tasks, rather than actual performance to get the natural and relaxed pronunciation of students. Only a small number of took part in testing the actual performance, and there is no doubt that there remains a need to dig deeper into studying errors in English Pronunciation made by EFL students in actual performance such as in speech, storytelling, and debate rather than testing individual sounds. This present study, therefore, is intended to develop this point further, which focuses on errors in segmental features at EFL students' live performance, in this case, the researcher chooses speech. With this in mind, the primary purposes of this study are to identify which vowel sounds frequently mispronounced by EFL Indonesian college students.

## **METHOD**

This study employed qualitative research because qualitative methods offered an effective way of describing and explaining errors that occurred in this study. The source of data of this study was the recordings of students' speech at speech class (SEA) Universitas Negeri Padang. There were six speeches as the source of data of this research, taken from speech class (SEA). The data were in the form of the pronunciation of vowels articulated by the students.

To collect the data, some steps were performed, such as making tables to accumulate the data into and making phonological transcriptions based on transcripts of the speeches. This study used British English phonetic transcriptions because it is essential to stick to one variety of English as reference (Low, 2015, p. 49). Also, it is the model mostly used in phonetics and phonology books (for example, Roach, 2000; Carr, 2013; Kelly, 2000). Although RP is the model chosen, in analyzing the data, the researcher will consider another variety like General American English (GA) because

those are the varieties that are mostly taught to EFL learners across the globe (Roach, 2000). When these steps have been done, the initial stage of collecting the data was to listen to recordings. During this phase, the researcher noted the errors made by participants. Finally, after assessing all the recordings, the data obtained from the speeches were moved into the data accumulation table to characterize them accordingly. Besides, to control for bias, data analysis was also carried out by a lecture of the English department Universitas Negeri Padang.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**1. Research Finding**

It was found that there were 415 errors made by the students. From all of those errors, it was found that [æ], [i:], [ə], [əʊ], were [eɪ] were the most frequently mispronounced sounds. The following table shows the percentage of mispronounced sounds.

**Table 2.** Percentage of Vowel Errors

o	Vowels	Students						Total	Percentage of Errors
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	/ɪ/		5	1	3	3		12	2,9%
2.	/ʊ/							0	0,0%
3.	/e/		7	1		2		10	2,4%
4.	/æ/	14	4	27	16	22	11	94	22,7%
5.	/ə/	1	9	21	5	10	4	50	12,0%
6.	/ʌ/		3	9	3	5		20	4,8%
7.	/ɒ/				1		1	2	0,5%
8.	/i:/	19	9	11	9	10	14	72	17,3%
9.	/ɜ:/	1			3			4	1,0%
10.	/ɑ:/		1					1	0,2%
11.	/ɔ:/	1	1	7		2	4	15	3,6%
12.	/u:/	2	2	1		4	4	13	3,1%
13.	/ɪə/		1	1				2	0,5%
14.	/eə/							0	0,0%
15.	/ʊə/							0	0,0%
16.	/eɪ/	8	10	8	3	9	4	42	10,1%
17.	/aɪ/				1			1	0,2%
18.	/ɔɪ/							0	0,0%
19.	/əʊ/		10	18	8	5	7	48	11,6%
20.	/aʊ/	2	2		1	3		8	1,9%
<b>Total</b>		49	66	108	57	80	55	415	100%

As shown in Table 1, the sound [æ] is the highest mispronounced sound, which made up 22% of the errors. The second biggest error occurred on [i:], where the frequency was 72 times, which made up 17% of the total errors. Furthermore, the sounds [ə], [əʊ], and [eɪ] had a relatively smaller occurrence on the total of errors, at 12%, 11%, and 10% respectively. Combined, all of these errors made up nearly 70% of the data. The occurrence of other sounds was relatively low, which made up below 5% on average.

## 2. Discussion

This study found that the sound [æ] is the highest mispronounced sound. This study found that [e] is a common substitution for [æ]. For instance, the words ‘family /'fæm.əl.i/, stand /stænd/, and imagine /ɪ'mædʒ.ɪn/' were pronounced /feməli/, /stend/, and /ɪmedʒɪn/. This is in line with previous results (Putri & Rosa, 2020; Islamiyah, 2012; Hadi, 2015). They also found that the sound [æ] was problematic. The rationale for this phenomenon is that [æ] does not exist in Indonesian. Therefore, the students substituted [æ] with [e] because it is the closest sound to [æ].

The second highest mispronounced sound is long vowel [i:]. This sound was found to be shortened as [ɪ] in this study. Equally important, all long vowel sounds were also found to be shortened by the students. Even though the percentage of other long vowel sounds was low, the evidence showed that the students do not distinguish long and short vowels. These findings of the current study are consistent with those of Stibbard (2004); Islamiyah (2012); Habibi (2016); Emran & Anggraini (2017), who found that the distinctive feature between long and short vowels are not realized, i.e., long vowels are shortened. They found that [i:] was shortened to [ɪ], [u:] to [ʊ], [ɜ:] to [ə], [ɔ:] to [ɒ], and [ɑ:] to [ɑ]. This latter point correlates reasonably well with the results of this study except that the long vowel [ɑ:] was realized as the Indonesian vowel [a] in the current study. These studies highlighted that errors on long vowels occur because they cannot be found in the first language vowel inventory.

Moreover, turning to the sound [ə], this sound was significantly made errors by the students. The occurrence of this error was 50 times, which made up 12% of the total errors, which is fairly high. The result of Putri & Rosa (2020) is in line with this. They found that the percentage of this error was 15,1%. The rationale of this phenomenon is that Indonesian is a syllable-timed language, whereas English is a stress-time language. In a syllable-timed language, each syllable is given the same amount of time and loudness. In English, on the other hand, not every syllable is given stress, and the unstressed syllable is usually pronounced with the sound [ə] or the “schwa” to allow unstressed syllables to be said more quickly. As a consequence, the participants unconsciously get influenced by the Indonesian language. They tend to stress every syllable in words, and eventually, they change the sound [ə] in unstressed syllables as many different sounds either due to spelling interference or faulty generalization.

Moreover, turning to diphthongs sounds, this study found that [eɪ], [əʊ], [aʊ], [aɪ], and [ɪə] were made errors. The errors on [eɪ] and [əʊ] were more prominent than [aʊ], [aɪ], and [ɪə]. However, the results of this study differ with those of Saadah & Ardi (2020), who found that [ʊə] was the highest mispronounced sound. In contrast to their findings, however, no evidence of [ʊə] was detected. A possible explanation of this might be that [ʊə] is a special feature of Received Pronunciation (RP) or British English. It seems possible that Saadah & Ardi (2020) did not consider other varieties when analyzing pronunciation errors. It is important to stick to one variety as a reference, but when analyzing data, other varieties should be considered. Furthermore, previous studies of pronunciation error on diphthongs made by Indonesian did not show that [eɪ] was troublesome for Indonesian. Donal (2016), Fauzia (2018), Saadah & Ardi (2020) pointed out that [eɪ] was one of the easiest diphthongs to pronounce by

Indonesian. This study, however, has been unable to support this. [eɪ] was mostly substituted as [e] in this study. It is possible to hypothesize that this condition is less likely to occur in individual sound tests. It is suggested that perhaps the students have not fully realized the pronunciation of [eɪ], which made them able to pronounce it in isolation, but not in speech.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has shown that [æ], [i:], [əʊ], [ə], and [eɪ] were the sounds that erroneously mispronounced by the participants. The percentage of errors on these sounds made up 70% of the total errors. The errors in the remaining sounds were relatively low. Therefore, generally, [æ], [i:], [əʊ], [ə], and [eɪ] were the problematic sounds for the students.

Some significant limitations need to be considered. First, the scope of this study was limited in prepared speech performance. Second, the current instrument was limited by the recordings of the students. Third, the current research was not specifically designed to analyze factors related to suprasegmental features such as stress and connected speech. It is recommended that future work be done in the context of spontaneous speech sample to get more potential pronunciation errors to understand the nature of error of L1 Indonesian learners. Moreover, further research could address for varying instruments of the research, such as tests and interviews. Also, other parts of suprasegmental features such as intonation, rhythm, and connected speech are vital issues needed to be further researched to investigate errors in this area. They are fundamental to be carried out to draw the whole picture of Indonesian EFL errors, and to improve pronunciation teaching in Indonesia.

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