

THE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN PRONOUNCING ENGLISH VOWELS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the difficulties faced by ELT students in pronouncing English vowels, especially those that are not pronounced correctly and consistently. The subjects of this research are English language education students. The study adopted a descriptive qualitative and then utilized observation and video recording techniques to observe and analyze students' pronunciation of English vowel words. Results indicate that there were 11 words mispronounced by students with a percentage of 50% of the word langgon, 17% of the word early, 8.3% of the word catch, 33% of the word ligament, 17% of the word fork, 17% of the word yeast, 8.3% of the word lake, 8.3% of the word harm. 8.3%, the word suffer 8.3%, and the word fool 8.3%. The data shows that students often have difficulty pronouncing vowels correctly. The study also highlights the influence of a student's native language on the pronunciation of English vowels and the importance of understanding phonetic symbols for accurate pronunciation. Based on these findings, the study suggests that ELT students should be provided with additional resources and support to improve their pronunciation skills, particularly in the area of vowels. The study also highlights the influence of a student's native language on the pronunciation of English vowels and the importance of understanding phonetic symbols for accurate pronunciation. Based on these findings, the study suggests that ELT students should be provided with additional resources and support to improve their pronunciation skills, particularly in the area of vowels.

Kata kunci : Pronouncing, Long vowels, short vowels, analyze

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a fascinating and intricate system of communication, and at the heart of it lies the beauty of vowel sounds. Vowels are the melodic building blocks that shape the words we speak, enabling us to express ourselves, convey meaning, and connect with others on a profound level. Understanding and mastering vowel sounds is a

crucial step towards achieving clarity, fluency, and effective communication in any language.

From the moment we learn our first words as children, vowel sounds play a vital role in our linguistic development. They form the basis of our spoken language, serving as the core elements that blend together to create words and sentences. Yet, despite their ubiquity and importance, many

learners find vowel sounds challenging to grasp, leading to difficulties in pronunciation and comprehension. Unlike consonant sounds, which often appear as mere accompaniments, vowel sounds are like the stars of a phonetic show, stealing the spotlight with their melodic and resonant qualities. They provide the melody and rhythm that make spoken language so rich and expressive.

Interestingly, the production of vowel sounds involves an unimpeded flow of air through the mouth, with the positions of the tongue, lips, and jaw playing crucial roles in determining the specific sound produced. By varying these articulatory features, we can create different vowel sounds, each with its distinct quality and timbre.

In English, there are five primary vowel sounds: "a," "e," "i," "o," and "u." These vowel sounds can be further categorized into short and long variations. Short vowels are characterized by their brevity and less pronounced quality, while long vowels are more extended and carry a fuller sound. It is essential to understand the distinction between short and long vowel sounds, as they can drastically alter the meaning of words.

learners often encounter challenges when confronted with new sounds in the target language, particularly in pronunciation. Many errors arise, especially in the initial and middle positions when attempting to produce English vowels and consonants. Resolving these challenges is crucial for improvement. For instance, students encounter difficulty when encountering words that don't exist in their native language, such as: /ei/, /ai/, /au/, /uə/, /eə/, /iə/, /ɜ:/, /u:/, /ə/, /u:/, /i/ sounds, absent in their mother tongue. Research by Ramely (1996) has shown that errors in English vowel pronunciation among students stem from influences of their native language. Addressing these differences between languages becomes pivotal in overcoming these pronunciation hurdles.

The challenge arises from the contrast between the Indonesian language, which comprises only five vowels and three diphthongs, and English, which encompasses twelve vowels and nine diphthongs, as highlighted by Anas Syafei. This difference in

vowel and diphthong inventory between the two languages likely contributes to the difficulty experienced by Indonesian. Based on the information above, the research aims to determine vowel sounds which are not produced properly and correctly by students based on the pronunciation test.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Pronunciation is a way or habit of making sounds. The habit of speaking is developed by repeating it over and over again and correcting it when you make a mistake. Support for the Encarta dictionary from Mustari (2010). Pronunciation is the way sounds, words, or language are pronounced. It can then be articulated, specifically the act of articulating sounds or words according to accepted standards.

A person cannot pronounce English words correctly because of the way the words are spelled. Although it is important to recognize that there are many regularities between written sounds and symbols, English spelling does not do a good job of conveying pronunciation. The common spelling of an English word sometimes has no obvious connection to its pronunciation. There is no one-to-one relationship between the sounds that are spoken and the letters that appear in the written word.

When speaking, humans produce a series of phonemes that evoke specific meanings. Phonemes are the basic sound system of a language, which combine with other phonemes to form units of meaning, such as words or morphemes. Different sounds create different meanings.

There are definitely vowels when speaking. Vowels are sounds made with the mouth open and the tongue not touching the upper part of the mouth, teeth, etc. Vowels are sounds made without any covering. Exhale air through your mouth. The tongue plays an important role in the formation of vowels. According to William, English vowels fall into two broad categories: simple vowels (also called pure vowels or monophthongs) and diphthongs. Furthermore, vowels are defined as

voiced sounds in which air flows continuously through the throat and mouth without any obstruction or constriction during formation.

2.1 TYPES OF VOWELS

There are two types of vowels, short vowels and long vowels. Short vowels are characterized by their subtle differences in lip rounding, tongue placement, and height, without significant variations in being higher or lower, back or front, closed or open. This essentially means these vowels produce shorter sounds. In Indonesian, these sounds vary notably, especially in the Batahan language, posing challenges for pronunciation and comprehension due to their unfamiliarity.

For students learning English as a foreign language, identifying short vowels often leads to confusion. They struggle to distinguish sounds like [ɒ], [o], and [ʌ] in "body" or [ə], [ɜ], and [e] in "nurse." To address these uncertainties, one approach is simplification by using one sound to represent another, such as representing "body" as [bɒdi] and "nurse" as [nɜːz].

Additionally, understanding the process of diphthong formation can clarify these ambiguities. Diphthongs are formed by combining short vowels and concluding with either centering, indicated by the end sound [ə], or closing, marked by [i] and [u]. This comprehension can aid in resolving these difficulties in identifying and interpreting short vowel sounds.

Then in this study, we explore different types of vowel sounds, especially long vowels, which contrast with short vowels not only in their duration but also in their quality. These long vowels—[i:], [ə:], [ɔ:], [ɜ:], and [u:]—tend to have longer durations than short vowels when given the same context. However, it is important to note that the length of English vowel sounds varies greatly based on various factors, such as the sound that follows it or the presence of stress.

To indicate their longer duration, these vowels are represented by symbols equipped with a long sign consisting of two dots [:]. In contrast to short vowels, these long vowels show differences not only in length but also in quality. For example, when comparing similar pairs such as [i] with [i:], [u] with [u:], or [ɒ] with [a:], marked differences emerge in duration and

quality, which are caused by linguistic variations. and lip position.

Although there are differences, both long and short vowels have different symbols. Even without the long sign, these symbols would still be distinct, underscoring that the long sign serves as a mnemonic aid for students to understand the differences in duration between the symbols. Although [ɜ:] and [ə:] appear very similar in quality, [ə:] is considered a special case. This similarity may be due to the fact that when a syllable ends with the letter or sound [r], the vowel sound tends to be elongated. This phenomenon further emphasizes the complexity of differentiating between long and short vowels, especially in syllables ending in [r].

2.2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF VOWELS.

There are three characteristics that describing about vowels, namely The first is Tongue Placement. The tongue stands out as the strongest and most distinctive muscle in the human body. Unlike other muscles, it has a single point of attachment and its other end is left to naturally stabilize itself within the open area of the mouth. When reproducing the vowel sounds found in words like "sit," "sat," "god," and "put" using tongue movements, these sounds can be transcribed as [i], [æ], [ɒ], and [u]. The second is the tongue height. The tongue height is divided into open vowels and closed vowels. The height of the tongue is at the high and low vowels. It is very important to make decisions from the beginning for the sake of continuity of sound and continuity of perception in subsequent studies. (Giegerich, 2018) Tongue height characteristics are divided into four categories: High vowels, mid-high vowels, low vowels, mid-low vowels. High vowels are [i: and u], mid-high vowels are [i, e, o and u]. Low vowels are [æ and a:], mid-low vowels are [ɜ, ɒ and ɔ:]. Middle tones are the interaction of tongue position and height, thus producing the sounds [ə and ʌ]. (Arkawati, 2014) Therefore, it can be said that the number of vowels in English is thirteen vowels. In British English, the number of vowels is twelve; like in American English, it is also twelve. However, there are significant differences between British English and American English, especially the back mid-high vowels and the low vowels, as shown in the vowel

table. (Hinkel, 2018) Indonesians, especially another regional language such as Batak-Toba, typically pronounce vowels with their tongue in the center of their mouth. Apparently, all vowels are pronounced the same as the letters "a, e, i, o, and u." (Hamka, 2011). The last is Vowel sounds can be clearly recognized based on the rounding of the speaker's lips. However, identifying English vowel sounds just by listening, especially for non-native speakers, can be challenging—even when using media. In everyday conversation, it is almost impossible to rely solely on hearing to understand the pronunciation of vowel sounds accurately.

Moreover, in English, the meaning of lip rounding is not as prominent compared to other languages. Most English vowel sounds do not require extreme lip positions; instead, they tend to fall towards the middle without being particularly high or low. This middle-of-the-road positioning is a unique characteristic of English vowel sounds, distinguishing it from languages where rounding of the lips plays a more important role.

For clarity, consider referring to the image below illustrating certain vowel sounds in English and the corresponding lip rounding positions. This visual aid can help in understanding how English vowel sounds relate to lip position even if they do not show very high or low rounding

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, as outlined by Creswell (2014), to delve into the meaning of an individual or group to a social or human issue. This approach focuses on understanding, interpreting, describing, and developing theories about phenomena or settings, utilizing a systematic, subjective approach to provide meaning to life experiences. Specifically, this study aimed to describe speech sounds that are especially not pronounced correctly, and are the most difficult for students to pronounce in pronouncing English vowel words the research subjects were English language education students.

The data sources used by researcher were Primary Sources and Secondary Sources. The primary data

source involves pronunciation test of English language education students, meanwhile Secondary sources include relevant journals. The data collection process involves observation and Video recording. Observation was a way to collect the data in the research which the researcher observed in the field Video recording was employed to pronunciation test process was carried out to obtain more complete data about pronouncing the English Vowel.

Furthermore, the data was analyzed using the model by Miles and Huberman (1992). In this model, there are three component analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The first is data reduction. After collecting vocal words, researchers collected data by observing and listening to video recordings of the pronunciation of English words by several English language education students. All recorded data and observation data were collected and then the researcher listened and wrote down the incorrect pronunciations of words from the recording. At this stage, researchers identify correct and incorrect pronunciations of vowel words. The second is data display. This is the process of minimizing the amount of data that needs to be stored in a data storage environment. In this study, the researcher selected data obtained during observation and pronunciation tests, and then the data was classified and selected simply. The last is draw conclusions. The final step in analyzing data is drawing conclusions. Conclusion Drawing involves stepping back to consider the meaning of the data being analyzed and assessing its implications for the question at hand. In this step the researcher draws conclusions and verifies the answers to the research questions that have been carried out, displays the data and analyzes it. Then, the researchers reached a conclusion about Students' Difficulty In Pronouncing English Vowels.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on this test, the researcher got students who were wrong and right in the sound of vowel words in their pronunciation. Researchers use two instruments for collecting data, the instruments that researchers use are observation and video recording.

NO	Word	True	False
1	Yeast	/ji:st/	/yest/
	Wield	/wi:ld/	-
2	Lake	/leIk/	/lek/
	Did	/dId/	-
3	Beg	/be'g/	-
	Tread	/tred/	-
4	Catch	/kætʃ/	/kets/
	Sandwich	/'sæ nwidʒ/	-
5	Harm	/ha:m/	/harm/
	Last	/la:st/	-
6	Hall	/hɔ:l/	-
	Forks	/fɔ:ks/	/fɔrks/
7	Bottom	/'bɒtəm/	-
	O'clock	/ə'klɒk/	-
8	Look	/lʊk/	-
	How	/haʊ	-
9	Lagoon	/lə'geun/	/ləgen/
	Fool	/fu:l/	/full/
10	Where	/weə(r)/	-
	Ligament	/'ligəmənt/	/ligament/
11	Cover	/kʌvə/	-
	Suffer	/sʌfə/	/suffer/.
12	First	/fɜ:st/	-
	Early	/'ɜ:li/	/'ɜrli/

Table 1 The Data Analysis of video recording

After analyzing the data, the researchers found incorrect pronunciation of vowel sounds. There were 24 vowel words which the researchers would analyze. There were 11 words mispronounced by students with a percentage of 50% of the word langgon, 17% of the word early, 8.3% of the word catch, 33% of the word ligament, 17% of the word fork, 17% of the word yeast, 8.3% of the word lake, 8.3% of the word harm. 8.3%, the word suffer 8.3%, and the word fool 8.3%. The students' correct and incorrect pronunciation of vowel sounds corresponds to their lack of understanding of phonetic symbols. Furthermore, when students are able to pronounce words correctly because these words are familiar and sufficient for them.

DISCUSSION

Based on findings from observations and video recordings, English education students often encounter

difficulties in pronouncing certain English vowels. This challenge becomes evident through data analysis conducted during oral tests, highlighting specific English vowel sounds that pose challenges for students in their pronunciation.

O'Connor (1980) asserts in *Better English* that there's a distinct contrast between single vowels and diphthongs. One potential stumbling block is pronouncing /i:/ as /i/. It's crucial to ensure that /i/ approaches the quality of /e/ and is consistently shorter than /i:/.

To discern discrepancies between these words, grasping phonemes becomes imperative. Phonemes serve as the foundational components of language phonology, amalgamating with others to form meaningful units like words or morphemes. Varied sounds yield disparate meanings, rendering phonemes as pivotal groups or sound units that significantly distinguish meanings (Ramelan 1985).

The incorrectly Short vowel that the students in /i/ in the word "Lake" in phonetic /leIk/ students pronounce phonetic /lek/. Then on /æ/ the word "catch" in the phonetic /kætʃ/ students pronounce the phonetic /kets/. Next, in the /ə/ word "Ligament" in the phonetic /'ligəmənt/ students pronounce the phonetic /ligament/. the last one on /ʌ/ the word "suffer" in phonetic /sʌfə/ students pronounce the phonetic /suffer/. This is because they do not understand phonetic symbols and have never received material about phonetics.

The incorrectly Long vowel that the students in /i:/ the word "Yeast" in phonetic /ji:st/ students pronounce phonetic /yest/. Then on /ɑ:/ the word "Harm" in the phonetic /ha:m/ students pronounce the phonetic /harm/. Next, in the /ɔ:/ word "Forks" in phonetic /fɔ:ks/ students pronounce the phonetic /fɔrks/. Then at /u:/ the word "Lagoon" in phonetics /lə'geun/ students pronounce phonetics /ləgen/, the word "Fool" in phonetics /fu:l/ students pronounce phonetics /fuul/. And finally, in /ɜ:/ the word "early" in the phonetic /'ɜ:li/ students pronounce the phonetic /'ɜrli/. This is because they do not understand phonetic symbols and have never received material about phonetics

In fact, students typically struggle to pronounce phonetic symbols accurately; their proficiency often relies on familiarity with the words rather than the symbols themselves. To improve, students should

actively engage in learning and reading about phonetic symbols across various contexts. This research can enhance their grasp and proficiency in accurately pronouncing these symbols, even in unfamiliar words.

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5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The article discusses the difficulties students face in pronunciation of English vowels in English teaching. The study used observations and video recordings to collect data, which were then analyzed using the Myers and Huberman model. Researchers have found that students often mispronounce certain English vowels due to differences between English and their native language. The study highlights the importance of understanding phonemes and distinguishing between short and long vowels. The researchers concluded that students' correct and incorrect pronunciations of vowels were related to their lack of understanding of phonetic symbols.

LIBRARY DOWNLOADS

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