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An Analysis Of Students' Ability In Pronouncing English Fricative Sounds: A Case Study Of Second- Semester Students Of The English Departmen

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Abstract

This study investigates students' ability to pronounce English fricative sounds and examines the influence of the first language (L1) on their pronunciation. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved six second-semester students in an English Education program. Data were collected through pronunciation recordings and in-depth interviews, and analyzed using phonetic transcription and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students' pronunciation ability varies across sound types and phonological positions. While /θ/, /ð/, and /v/ were generally produced accurately in initial and medial positions, greater variation occurred in final positions. Among the target sounds, /ʒ/ was identified as the most difficult, showing the highest degree of inconsistency. Pronunciation variations were mainly reflected in substitution patterns, indicating reliance on more familiar sounds. The influence of L1 was evident, particularly for sounds absent from the learners' phonological system; however, it was not consistently dominant across all participants. Other factors, including exposure to English, articulatory practice, and phonological awareness, also played a significant role. Additionally, a discrepancy between actual pronunciation performance and learners' self-perception suggests limited awareness of pronunciation accuracy. Overall, the findings highlight that pronunciation development is shaped by a dynamic interaction of linguistic and experiential factors, emphasizing the need for increased exposure and focused pronunciation practice.

Keywords: *Pronunciation, Fricative Sounds, L1 Influence, EFL Learners, Phonological Awareness.*

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti kemampuan siswa dalam mengucapkan bunyi frikatif bahasa Inggris dan mengkaji pengaruh bahasa pertama (L1) terhadap pengucapan mereka. Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan enam mahasiswa semester kedua dalam program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui rekaman pengucapan dan wawancara mendalam, dan dianalisis menggunakan transkripsi fonetik dan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan pengucapan siswa bervariasi di berbagai jenis bunyi dan posisi fonologis. Meskipun /θ/, /ð/, dan /v/ umumnya diucapkan secara akurat pada posisi awal dan tengah, variasi yang lebih besar terjadi pada posisi akhir. Di antara bunyi target, /ʒ/ diidentifikasi sebagai yang paling sulit, menunjukkan tingkat inkonsistensi tertinggi. Variasi pengucapan terutama tercermin dalam pola substitusi, menunjukkan ketergantungan pada bunyi yang lebih familiar. Pengaruh L1 terlihat jelas, terutama untuk bunyi yang tidak ada dalam sistem fonologis pembelajar; namun, pengaruh tersebut tidak selalu dominan di antara semua peserta. Faktor lain, termasuk paparan bahasa Inggris, latihan artikulasi, dan kesadaran fonologis, juga memainkan peran penting. Selain itu, perbedaan antara performa pengucapan aktual dan persepsi diri pembelajar menunjukkan kesadaran yang terbatas tentang akurasi

pengucapan. Secara keseluruhan, temuan ini menyoroti bahwa perkembangan pengucapan dibentuk oleh interaksi dinamis antara faktor linguistik dan pengalaman, menekankan perlunya peningkatan paparan dan latihan pengucapan yang terfokus.
Kata Kunci: Pengucapan, Bunyi Frikatif, Pengaruh L1, Pembelajar EFL, Kesadaran Fonologis
Pendahuluan.

A. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation mastery has become an essential focus in the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in the context of global communication where intelligibility and accuracy play a crucial role in effective interaction. Pronunciation competence reflects learners' ability to produce target language sounds accurately and consistently, which is fundamental for successful oral communication. As highlighted by Levis (2018), accurate sound production is a core component of pronunciation competence, while Derwing and Munro (2021) emphasize that pronunciation difficulties may persist even when learners demonstrate adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge.

Among various pronunciation challenges, English fricative sounds pose significant difficulty for EFL learners, especially in the Indonesian context. Sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /v/ are often problematic due to their limited or absent equivalents in the Indonesian phonological system. Previous studies have consistently reported substitution patterns, such as [v] being replaced by [f], [ð] by [d] or [t], and [θ] by [t] (Agustina et al., 2023). Similarly, Sabbu et al. (2025) found that dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ exhibit the lowest accuracy levels among Indonesian learners, mainly due to first language (L1) interference and limited exposure to accurate pronunciation models.

From a theoretical perspective, the influence of L1 on second language (L2) pronunciation has been widely explained through the concept of phonological interference or negative transfer (Dörnyei, 2015). Learners tend to substitute unfamiliar L2 sounds with the closest equivalents in their L1 phonological system. This phenomenon is evident among Indonesian learners, as reported by Yulianti et al. (2021) and Aryanika (2024), who found systematic substitutions of /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/. Furthermore, the Speech Learning Model (Flege, 1995) suggests that learners' perception of L2 sounds is strongly influenced by existing L1 categories, making it difficult to establish new phonetic distinctions.

Despite the growing body of research on English fricative pronunciation, most studies in the Indonesian context have predominantly focused on identifying pronunciation errors rather than examining learners' pronunciation ability in depth. For instance, Angkarini (2023)

identified recurring deviations in fricative pronunciation; however, the study did not sufficiently explore learners' articulatory control or the phonological processes underlying these deviations. Consequently, there remains a lack of qualitative investigations that analyze how learners produce fricative sounds from both phonetic and phonological perspectives, particularly among early-stage learners.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the ability of second-semester English students to pronounce selected English fricative sounds (/θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /v/) and to examine the influence of their first language (L1) on their pronunciation. By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide a detailed description of learners' phonetic realization and phonological patterns. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of applied linguistics, particularly in the areas of phonetics, phonology, and EFL pronunciation teaching, while also offering practical insights for improving pronunciation instruction in early stages of language learning.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on second language (L2) pronunciation has consistently demonstrated that differences between the phonological systems of the first language (L1) and L2 play a central role in shaping learners' pronunciation patterns. Empirical studies indicate that learners tend to experience greater difficulty when producing sounds that are absent or significantly different from those in their L1. For instance, Chen and van de Weijer (2022) found that Mandarin speakers showed the highest degree of accentedness in producing the fricative /ʒ/, highlighting the impact of phonological distance on L2 sound acquisition. Similarly, Nulahan and Rose (2024) reported that fricative sounds with L1 equivalents, such as /f/ and /v/, were acquired more rapidly than interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, which lack direct counterparts in the learners' native language.

In the Indonesian EFL context, numerous studies have documented persistent difficulties in the pronunciation of English fricative sounds. Agustina et al. (2023) identified common substitution patterns, including /v/ → /f/, /ð/ → /d/ or /t/, and /θ/ → /t/, influenced by factors such as mother tongue, age, and exposure to English. Likewise, Adhani (2021) emphasized that limited knowledge of the English phonological system contributes to learners' inability to produce fricative sounds accurately. Marpaung et al. (2021) further reported that fricative sounds are frequently mispronounced in word-final positions, with /ʒ/ showing the highest error

rate. Although these studies provide valuable insights into pronunciation patterns, they predominantly rely on quantitative approaches and tend to focus on error frequency rather than learners' underlying articulatory and phonological processes.

Theoretically, the influence of L1 on L2 pronunciation is explained through several complementary frameworks. The Speech Learning Model Revised (SLM-r) proposed by Flege and Bohn (2021) suggests that L2 learners form new phonetic categories based on their perception of similarities and differences between L1 and L2 sounds. When L2 sounds are perceived as similar to L1 sounds, learners tend to assimilate them into existing categories, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation. This process, known as equivalence classification, is supported by Aoyama (2020), who found that adult learners often retain L1-based phonetic patterns in producing L2 fricatives. Additionally, the model highlights the role of exposure and perceptual sensitivity in improving pronunciation accuracy (Flege, 2022; Derwing & Munro, 2021).

Another relevant framework is the Perceptual Assimilation Model for L2 (PAM-L2) developed by Best and Tyler (2007), which explains how learners perceive L2 sounds through the lens of their L1 phonological system. According to this model, unfamiliar sounds are categorized based on their similarity to existing L1 categories, leading to systematic substitution patterns such as /θ/ → /t/, /ð/ → /d/, /ʒ/ → /ʃ/ or /dʒ/, and /v/ → /f/ (Setiawan, 2023). Recent findings by Nam (2025) further suggest that these perceptual mappings are not static but can evolve with increased exposure and experience, allowing learners to gradually refine their phonetic distinctions.

In addition to perceptual and phonological perspectives, articulatory phonetics provides important insights into how fricative sounds are physically produced. Fromkin et al. (2018) explain that fricatives are generated by forcing air through a narrow constriction in the vocal tract, creating turbulent airflow. Roach (2009) further classifies /θ/ and /ð/ as interdental fricatives, /ʒ/ as a voiced postalveolar fricative, and /v/ as a voiced labiodental fricative. Difficulties in producing these sounds often arise from learners' inability to control articulatory mechanisms accurately. Situmorang et al. (2023) and McLeod and Baker (2017) emphasize that coordination of speech organs and familiarity with articulatory patterns are key challenges for L2 learners.

From a phonological perspective, Generative Phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968) explains pronunciation variation as the result of differences between underlying representations

(UR) and surface realizations (SR). Learners who have not yet developed stable phonological representations for certain sounds tend to produce deviant surface forms. Kenstowicz (1994) supports this view by arguing that phonological variation is influenced by the structure of sound systems and contextual rules. In the context of Indonesian learners, the absence of certain fricative sounds in the L1 leads to unstable phonological representations, which are reflected in systematic pronunciation deviations.

Overall, previous studies highlight the significant role of L1 influence, phonological distance, and articulatory difficulty in shaping learners' pronunciation of English fricative sounds. However, research in the Indonesian context remains largely dominated by quantitative approaches, with limited attention given to qualitative analyses that explore learners' pronunciation ability in depth. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by employing a qualitative approach to examine students' pronunciation of English fricative sounds from both phonetic and phonological perspectives, as well as to analyze the influence of L1 on their pronunciation performance

C. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore students' ability in pronouncing English fricative sounds and to examine the influence of their first language (L1) on pronunciation. Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of linguistic phenomena in natural contexts and focuses on participants' experiences and meaning-making processes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A case study design was adopted to investigate the phenomenon within a specific group of learners, allowing for a detailed and contextualized analysis (Yin, 2018). The study was descriptive in nature, aiming to provide a comprehensive account of students' pronunciation performance without manipulating variables (Sandelowski, 2000).

The study was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at a university in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participants consisted of six second-semester students who were enrolled in a phonology course. These students were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) active enrollment in the second semester of the English Education program, (2) prior or current exposure to phonology instruction, and (3) willingness to participate in pronunciation recordings and interviews. This group was considered appropriate because they were in the early stage of developing

phonological competence, allowing for observable variation in pronunciation performance.

Data were collected through two primary techniques: pronunciation recordings and in-depth interviews. In the recording task, participants were asked to read a list of words containing the target fricative sounds /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /v/. Each word was pronounced three times to ensure consistency and reliability of the data. The recordings were used to capture the actual phonetic realization of the target sounds. Subsequently, the audio data were transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to facilitate systematic phonetic and phonological analysis. A majority-based evaluation was applied, in which a pronunciation was categorized as correct if it was accurately produced in at least two out of three repetitions.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions of pronunciation difficulties and the influence of L1 on their ability to produce English fricative sounds. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses. To enhance the credibility of the data, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from pronunciation recordings and interview data, and member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

Data analysis followed the qualitative framework proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data condensation stage, pronunciation data were transcribed into IPA and relevant patterns of sound production and substitution were identified. The data were then organized and presented in descriptive form and tables to illustrate pronunciation patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting consistent patterns in the data and examining the relationship between pronunciation performance and L1 influence. To maintain participant confidentiality, codes such as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 were used to represent each participant throughout the analysis.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Students' Ability in Pronouncing English Fricative Sounds

This section presents the findings on students' ability to pronounce English fricative sounds /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /v/, based on pronunciation recordings and IPA transcription. Each participant pronounced each word three times, and the results showed consistent productions; therefore, the data presented represent statistics.

Pronunciation of /θ/

Table 1. Pronunciation of /θ/ in Initial Position

Word Test		Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target Based IPA
Think		/thɪŋ/	/θɪŋk/	/tɪŋ/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋk/
Thank		/thæŋ/	/θæŋk/	/tɛŋ/	/tɛŋ/	/θæŋk/	/θɪŋ/	/θæŋk/
Three		/θri:/	/θri:/	/θri:/	/θri:/	/tri/	/θri:/	/θri:/

Table 1 shows that most participants were able to pronounce /θ/ accurately in initial position, although substitutions with /t/ were observed in several cases.

Table 2. Pronunciation of /θ/ in Medial Position

Word Test	Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target Based IPA
Nothing	/ˈnɒtɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/	/ˈnʌθɪŋ/
Method	/ˈmeθəd/	/ˈmeθəd/	/ˈmeθəd/	/ˈmeθəd/	/ˈmeθəd/	/ ˈmɛθəd/	/ˈmeθəd/
Something	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/	/ˈsʌmθɪŋ/

Most participants demonstrated accurate pronunciation of /θ/ in medial position.

Table 3. Pronunciation of /θ/ in Final Position

Word Test	Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target

							Based IPA
Bath	/bæd/	/bæd/	/bæd/	/bæθ/	/bʌt/	/bɛθ/	/bɑ:θ/
Truth	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/	/tru:θ/
Health	/hɛlp/	/helθ/	/helθ/	/helθ/	/helθ/	/helθ/	/helθ/

Greater variation occurred in final position, especially in *bath*, where substitutions with /t/ and /d/ were common.

Pronunciation of /ð/

Table 4. Pronunciation of /ð/ in Initial Position

Word Test	**Pronounce S1**	**Pronounce S2**	**Pronounce S3**	**Pronounce S4**	**Pronounce S5**	**Pronounce S6**	**Target Based IPA**
This	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/	/ðɪs/
That	/ðæt/	/ðæt/	/ðæt/	/ðæt/	/ðæt/	/ðæt/	/ðæt/
They	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/	/ðeɪ/

All participants pronounce /ð/ accurately in initial position.

Table 5. Pronunciation of /ð/ in Medial Position

Word Test	**Pronounce S1**	**Pronounce S2**	**Pronounce S3**	**Pronounce S4**	**Pronounce S5**	**Pronounce S6**	**Target Based IPA**
Mother	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/	/ˈmʌðər/
Father	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/	/ˈfɑ:ðər/

Brother	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌðər/

All participants pronounce /ð/ accurately in medial position.

Table 6. Pronunciation of /ð/ in Final Position

Word Test	Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target Based IPA
With	/wɪð/	/wɪð/	/wɪð/	/wɪð/	/wɪð/	/wɪð/	/wɪð/
Smooth	/smuːð/	/smuːð/	/smuːð/	/smuːð/	/smuːð/	/smuːð/	/smuːð/
Bathe	/bɛd/	/bæd/	/bæd/	/bæd/	/bæd/	/bæθ/	/beɪð/

Variation appeared in *bathe*, where most participants substituted /ð/ with /d/.

Pronunciation of /ʒ/

Table 7. Pronunciation of /ʒ/ in Medial Position

Word Test	Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target Based IPA
Measure	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/	/ˈmeʒər/
Pleasure	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/	/ˈpleʒər/
Vision	/ˈfɪʃən/	/ˈfɪʃən/	/ˈvɪʒən/	/ˈvɪʒən/	/ˈvɪʒən/	/ˈfɪʒən/	/ˈvɪʒən/

Variation appeared in *vision*, where some participants substituted /ʒ/ with /ʃ/ and /v/ with /f/.

Table 8. Pronunciation of /ʒ/ in Final Position

Word Test	Pronounce S1	Pronounce S2	Pronounce S3	Pronounce S4	Pronounce S5	Pronounce S6	Target Based IPA
Beige	/beɪt/	/beɪt/	/beɪʒ/	/beɪʒ/	/ biːʧ/	/beɪʒ/	/beɪʒ/
Rouge	/raɪt/	/raɪt/	/raʊʃ/	/ruːʒ/	/rɑk/	/roʊg/	/ruːʒ/
Garage	/gəˈrɑːʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/	/kʌrɪdʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/

The findings indicate that /ʒ/ is the most difficult sound, with high variation, especially in final position.

2. The Influence of First Language (L1)

The findings indicate that the influence of the first language (L1) on students' pronunciation of English fricative sounds was variable, ranging from significant to minimal across participants. Most participants reported that Indonesian influenced their production of fricative sounds, particularly those absent from their native phonological system, such as /θ/, /ð/, and /ʒ/. Difficulties were evident in words such as *bath*, *beige*, *vision*, *rouge*, *garage*, and *bathe*, where substitution patterns frequently occurred. This reflects phonological interference, in which unfamiliar L2 sounds are replaced with the closest equivalents in L1 (Fauzi, 2021).

In addition to phonological differences, inconsistencies between English orthography and pronunciation contributed to learners' difficulties. Unlike Indonesian, which has a relatively consistent spelling–sound correspondence, English exhibits irregular relationships between written forms and their phonetic realization. This mismatch has been identified as a major source of pronunciation difficulty among EFL learners (Indrayadi et al., 2021).

However, the influence of L1 was not consistently observed across all sounds or participants. For example, although difficulty in producing /θ/ in *three* was identified in the pronunciation test, it was not explicitly attributed to L1 influence by the participants. This suggests that other factors, such as limited articulatory familiarity and insufficient practice, also contribute to pronunciation variation. Previous research confirms that pronunciation development is shaped not only by L1 background but also by exposure, instructional

experience, and phoneme complexity (Pacheco Vásquez & Veas Aguirre, 2025).

Furthermore, several participants reported that the influence of L1 decreased with increased exposure to English through listening, reading, and interaction. One participant also indicated that prior experience with *tajwid* supported their awareness of sound articulation. This aligns with findings that articulatory training can positively influence L2 pronunciation development (Abalkheel & Al Toreegi, 2025). In contrast, some participants reported minimal reliance on L1, particularly after becoming familiar with specific English accents, suggesting a reduced dependence on L1 phonological systems (Kakeru Yazawa et al., 2024).

Interestingly, a few participants perceived L1 as having a facilitative role, especially in the early stages of learning, depending on exposure and sound type. This supports the view that L1 can function as both a constraint and a resource in L2 learning (Heritage & Montle, 2022). Additionally, a discrepancy was observed between participants' actual pronunciation performance and their self-perception, indicating limited phonological awareness.

Overall, the findings suggest that L1 exerts a dynamic influence on students' pronunciation of English fricative sounds. While it contributes to certain pronunciation variations, particularly for unfamiliar sounds, it is not the sole determining factor. Other factors, including exposure to English, articulatory practice, and phonological awareness, play a substantial role in shaping pronunciation ability

Discussion

The findings of this study support previous research indicating that pronunciation difficulty in L2 is strongly influenced by the absence of equivalent sounds in the learners' first language. The difficulty in producing /θ/ and /ð/, particularly in final positions, aligns with findings by Agustina et al. (2023) and Sabbu et al. (2025), which highlight the challenges Indonesian learners face with dental fricatives. The substitution of /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/ reflects L1 interference, as these sounds are not present in the Indonesian phonological system.

This pattern can be explained through the Speech Learning Model Revised (SLM-r), which posits that learners assimilate unfamiliar L2 sounds into existing L1 categories through equivalence classification (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Since /θ/ and /ð/ are perceived as similar to /t/ and /d/, learners tend to substitute them, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation. This finding is also consistent with studies by Yulianti et al. (2021) and Aryanika (2024), which report similar substitution patterns among Indonesian learners.

The difficulty in producing /ʒ/ further supports the role of phonological distance in L2 acquisition. As noted by Chen and van de Weijer (2022), sounds that are more distant from the learners' L1 are more difficult to acquire. The absence of /ʒ/ in the Indonesian phonological system leads to unstable pronunciation and multiple substitution patterns. From the perspective of Generative Phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968), these variations indicate incomplete or unstable underlying representations of the target sound.

In contrast, the relatively accurate production of /v/ suggests that sounds with partial or similar equivalents in the L1 are easier to acquire. However, the substitution of /v/ with /f/ in initial positions indicates difficulty in controlling voicing, which is consistent with articulatory phonetics theory (Fromkin et al., 2018; Roach, 2009). This suggests that pronunciation challenges are not only influenced by phonological differences but also by articulatory control.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that L1 influence is not the sole determinant of pronunciation ability. The variation observed across participants indicates that factors such as exposure to English, articulatory practice, and phonological awareness play a significant role. This supports the Perceptual Assimilation Model for L2 (PAM-L2), which suggests that learners' perception of L2 sounds evolves with increased exposure (Best & Tyler, 2007; Nam, 2025). The reduction of L1 influence among some participants also aligns with the notion that increased input can facilitate the development of new phonetic categories (Flege, 2022; Derwing & Munro, 2021).

Additionally, the discrepancy between students' actual pronunciation performance and their self-perception highlights the importance of phonological awareness. As noted by Darcy (2018), accurate pronunciation depends not only on articulatory ability but also on perceptual sensitivity. Learners who are unable to distinguish between similar sounds may not recognize their own pronunciation errors.

Overall, the findings confirm that students' pronunciation of English fricative sounds is shaped by a complex interaction of L1 influence, phonological position, articulatory factors, and learning experience. While some sounds are acquired with relative ease, others remain challenging due to the absence of corresponding phonemes in the learners' first language and limited exposure to accurate pronunciation models.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that students' ability to pronounce English fricative sounds varies across sound types and phonological positions. While /θ/, /ð/, and /v/ were generally produced with acceptable accuracy in initial and medial positions, greater inconsistency was observed in final positions. Among the target sounds, /ʒ/ emerged as the most difficult, particularly in final contexts, whereas /v/ was the most consistently produced.

Pronunciation variation was mainly reflected in substitution patterns, indicating reliance on more familiar sounds. However, the influence of the first language (L1) was not uniformly dominant, as pronunciation performance was also shaped by exposure, articulatory practice, and phonological awareness. Additionally, a mismatch between actual performance and self-perception suggests limited awareness of pronunciation accuracy.

Overall, pronunciation ability is influenced by a combination of phonological, articulatory, and experiential factors, highlighting the need for focused practice and increased awareness in learning English pronunciation.

Suggestions

Students are encouraged to increase their exposure to English and practice problematic sounds, particularly those absent in their first language, such as /θ/, /ð/, and /ʒ/, while developing awareness of similar sound contrasts. Lecturers should provide targeted instruction on difficult sounds through explicit articulation guidance, repetition, and the use of audio-visual media. Future research is recommended to involve a broader range of participants and explore additional factors influencing pronunciation, as well as to apply mixed-method approaches for more comprehensive analysis.

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