



**AN INVESTIGATION OF PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES AMONG FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM**

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**ABSTRAK**

Pengucapan memegang peranan penting dalam penyiapan profesional calon guru bahasa Inggris, karena mahasiswa calon guru dituntut tidak hanya mampu berkomunikasi secara jelas, tetapi juga menjadi model pengucapan yang benar bagi peserta didiknya kelak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesulitan pengucapan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa tahun pertama Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, dengan berfokus pada pola kesalahan segmental dan suprasegmental, kecemasan terkait pengucapan, serta faktor-faktor yang melatarbelakangi kesulitan tersebut. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif metode campuran (*mixed-methods*) melalui strategi triangulasi konkuren, data dikumpulkan dari sepuluh mahasiswa tahun pertama melalui tes pengucapan, angket tertutup, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan pengucapan bersifat multidimensional dan tidak hanya terbatas pada masalah artikulasi. Kesalahan konsonan (37,6%) dan vokal (30,3%) merupakan jenis kesalahan yang paling sering ditemukan, terutama pada bunyi frikatif dental (/θ/, /ð/) dan kontras vokal /i/-/i:/, pola yang sejalan dengan revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) dan Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM). Kesalahan tekanan kata dan intonasi kalimat, meskipun lebih jarang muncul, diperparah oleh rendahnya kesadaran partisipan terhadap aspek-aspek tersebut, yang mencerminkan kurangnya perhatian pembelajaran terhadap unsur suprasegmental sebelumnya. Selain itu, kecemasan terkait pengucapan juga muncul sebagai faktor yang signifikan, ditandai dengan rasa gugup dan perilaku menghindar saat berkomunikasi lisan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi pengucapan calon guru bahasa Inggris berkembang melalui interaksi antara transfer fonologis bahasa pertama, pengalaman pembelajaran, dan kesiapan afektif. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar pembelajaran pengucapan dalam program pendidikan guru bahasa Inggris secara eksplisit membahas unsur segmental maupun suprasegmental, serta menciptakan lingkungan berbicara yang suportif dan rendah kecemasan guna memperkuat kejelasan ucapan dan kepercayaan diri komunikatif mahasiswa.

**Kata kunci:** *Kesulitan Pengucapan, Kesalahan Segmental dan Suprasegmental, Kecemasan Berbicara.*

**ABSTRACT**

Pronunciation plays a central role in the professional preparation of English teachers, as pre-service teachers are expected not only to communicate intelligibly but also to model accurate spoken English for their future students. This study investigated the pronunciation difficulties experienced by first-year students in an English Education Study Program, focusing on segmental and suprasegmental error patterns, pronunciation-related anxiety, and the factors underlying these difficulties. Employing a descriptive mixed-methods design with a concurrent triangulation strategy, data were collected from ten first-year students through a pronunciation test, a closed-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that pronunciation difficulties were multidimensional rather than confined to articulation alone.



Consonant errors (37.6%) and vowel errors (30.3%) were the most frequent, particularly involving dental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/) and the /i/–/i:/ vowel contrast, patterns consistent with the revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) and the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM). Word stress and sentence intonation errors, though less frequent, were compounded by participants' limited awareness of these features, reflecting insufficient prior instructional attention to suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. In addition, pronunciation-related anxiety emerged as a significant factor, with participants reporting nervousness and avoidance behavior during oral communication. These results indicate that pronunciation competence among pre-service English teachers develops through the interaction of first-language phonological transfer, instructional experience, and affective readiness. The study recommends that pronunciation instruction in English teacher education programs explicitly address both segmental and suprasegmental features while fostering supportive, low-anxiety speaking environments to strengthen learners' intelligibility and communicative confidence.

**Keywords:** *Pronunciation Difficulties, Segmental and Suprasegmental Errors, Pronunciation Anxiety.*

## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation difficulties continue to be reported across diverse EFL settings despite increased attention to communicative language teaching. Empirical evidence from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa indicates that learners consistently struggle to produce English sounds that are absent from their first-language phonological systems. These difficulties frequently affect speech intelligibility and oral communication, highlighting pronunciation as a persistent pedagogical concern rather than merely an isolated linguistic issue (Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021; Bin Hadjah & Hamzah, 2023). The reconceptualization of pronunciation has also influenced how pronunciation ability is assessed and taught. Contemporary pronunciation pedagogy no longer focuses exclusively on the accurate articulation of isolated consonants and vowels. Instead, assessment frameworks increasingly recognize pronunciation as a multidimensional construct encompassing both segmental features, including individual consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental features, such as stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation. This multidimensional perspective is also supported by recent reviews emphasizing that contemporary pronunciation instruction prioritizes intelligibility by integrating segmental and suprasegmental features within meaningful communication rather than teaching isolated phonetic forms (Pennington, 2021; Galante & Piccardo, 2022). These dimensions jointly determine speech intelligibility because successful communication depends not only on producing individual sounds accurately but also on organizing speech prosodically in ways that facilitate listener comprehension (Celce-Murcia et al., 2025). Consequently, pronunciation instruction has evolved from repetitive sound imitation toward communicative practice that integrates pronunciation with meaningful spoken interaction.

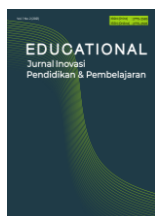
The importance of pronunciation becomes even more evident in English teacher education, where oral proficiency extends beyond individual communicative ability. Pre-service English teachers are expected not only to convey ideas clearly but also to provide appropriate pronunciation models for the learners they will eventually teach. Their spoken language influences classroom interaction, shapes students' exposure to English, and contributes to the effectiveness of language instruction. Furthermore, current pronunciation research argues that teacher education should explicitly prepare future teachers to develop learners' intelligibility through systematic pronunciation instruction and assessment that addresses both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of speech (Pennington, 2021; Gordon,

2021). For these reasons, teacher education programs are expected to cultivate pronunciation competence that encompasses both segmental features, such as consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental features, including stress, rhythm, and intonation. Insufficient mastery of these aspects may reduce the clarity of classroom communication and unintentionally reinforce inaccurate pronunciation patterns among future learners (Celce-Murcia et al., 2025).

Research has further demonstrated that explicit pronunciation instruction produces significantly greater learning gains than incidental exposure alone. Teaching approaches that combine phonetic explanation, perception training, guided production, communicative practice, and constructive corrective feedback enable learners to develop more accurate and intelligible speech. Recent evidence also indicates that pronunciation instruction in university EFL settings is gradually shifting from an exclusive emphasis on native-like production toward developing learners' intelligibility through communicative and context-sensitive teaching practices. This pedagogical orientation encourages teachers to integrate pronunciation into meaningful classroom communication rather than treating it as an isolated linguistic component (Almusharraf, 2024). Beyond instructional variables, affective factors also play a significant role in shaping pronunciation outcomes. Numerous studies have shown that learners who experience pronunciation-related anxiety as accent anxiety, referring to learners' concerns about how their pronunciation is perceived and evaluated by others. Such anxiety has been shown to influence learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and participation in oral interaction (Xue & Noels, 2025).

Evidence from the Indonesian EFL context reflects many of these international findings while highlighting challenges that are specific to Indonesian learners. Evidence from the local context further strengthens these findings. A recent study conducted at Pohuwato University reported that English Education students generally demonstrated positive cognitive and behavioral attitudes toward learning English pronunciation and recognized its importance for successful communication. Nevertheless, many participants continued to experience anxiety and limited confidence when engaging in pronunciation-related activities, indicating that positive attitudes alone do not necessarily result in accurate pronunciation performance (Moonti & Laonga, 2026). This finding suggests that learners' favorable perceptions of pronunciation learning should be complemented by a clearer understanding of the specific pronunciation difficulties they encounter. In additionally, evidence from various EFL contexts demonstrates that pronunciation difficulties remain one of the most persistent challenges among university students. Similar pronunciation patterns have been identified in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2024), Nigeria (Jatau et al., 2024), and Türkiye (Saka & Merc, 2021), indicating that unfamiliar English phonemes and limited pronunciation practice continue to impede learners' oral communication across different educational settings.

Recent Indonesian studies consistently indicate that pronunciation errors predominantly involve English sounds that are absent from the Indonesian phonological inventory. Dental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/), consonant clusters, and several vowel contrasts remain problematic for many university students. These pronunciation errors have been associated with first-language phonological transfer, limited oral exposure, and insufficient opportunities for explicit pronunciation practice (Ristati et al., 2024; Dyani et al., 2025; Listyani et al., 2024; Arfiyanti et al., 2026; Yulianti et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian context, pronunciation difficulties have been consistently reported among university students. Recent studies reveal that learners experience persistent challenges in producing English fricatives, vowel contrasts, consonant clusters, and other unfamiliar phonemes. Such pronunciation errors are commonly associated



with first-language phonological transfer and limited opportunities for explicit pronunciation practice (Sayogie & Adbaka, 2022; Luthfianda et al., 2024; Purnama et al., 2023).

However, recent Indonesian studies suggest that phonological differences alone cannot fully explain learners' pronunciation performance. Limited exposure to authentic spoken English, insufficient opportunities for regular pronunciation practice, and instructional approaches that provide minimal explicit pronunciation training have all been identified as additional contributors to learners' difficulties. These findings suggest that pronunciation development results from the interaction of linguistic characteristics, classroom experiences, and learning opportunities rather than from first-language interference in isolation (Arfiyanti et al., 2026).

This multidimensional perspective is further reinforced by recent literature reviews conducted in the Indonesian context. Existing evidence consistently indicates that pronunciation difficulties emerge through the combined influence of phonological transfer, instructional practices, and learners' learning experiences. Consequently, improving learners' pronunciation requires instructional approaches that address both the linguistic demands of English pronunciation and the educational conditions under which pronunciation is learned. Such findings provide an important foundation for examining pronunciation difficulties from a more comprehensive perspective that incorporates linguistic, pedagogical, and affective

Although pronunciation has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years, existing research has primarily examined isolated aspects of the phenomenon. Many studies have concentrated on identifying segmental pronunciation errors, whereas others have focused on instructional approaches or learners' psychological responses to speaking English. While these studies have generated valuable insights, they often investigate linguistic, pedagogical, and affective dimensions independently. As a result, current understanding of pronunciation development remains fragmented, providing only a partial explanation of why learners continue to experience pronunciation difficulties despite years of English instruction.

Against this background, this study investigates the pronunciation difficulties experienced by first-year students enrolled in English Education Study Program. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation difficulties demonstrated by the participants, examine their perceptions of pronunciation-related anxiety, and explore the factors that contribute to these difficulties. By integrating phonological, pedagogical, and affective perspectives within a single investigation, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of pronunciation development among beginning pre-service English teachers and to generate empirical evidence that can support the improvement of pronunciation instruction in English teacher education programs.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research adopted a descriptive mixed-methods design built around a concurrent triangulation strategy, chosen to build a rounded picture of the pronunciation difficulties experienced by the participants. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time and then brought together during interpretation. The quantitative strand tracked how often pronunciation errors occurred and how they were distributed, along with participants' self-reported pronunciation anxiety, while the qualitative strand delved into participants' own experiences and views regarding what was driving their pronunciation difficulties. Combining these two strands allowed the data to be cross-checked against one another, strengthening the overall credibility of the findings.



## **Participants**

The study involved ten first-year students from the English Education Study Program, enrolled during the 2025/2026 academic year. Each of them had already completed at least one semester of Basic Speaking coursework before data collection began. A purposive sampling strategy was used, since the research specifically required students who had already received some initial pronunciation instruction and could therefore illustrate the pronunciation patterns typical of the early stage of English teacher preparation. Given the relatively small number of participants, this study was designed to produce a detailed descriptive account rather than results that could be statistically generalized. The findings, therefore, should be understood as a description of pronunciation difficulties specific to this educational setting.

## **Research Instruments**

Three complementary instruments generated the data for this study: a pronunciation test, a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The pronunciation test served to pinpoint the segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation difficulties present among participants. To this end, each participant individually read aloud a set of forty English words along with two short passages, both built around sounds long recognized as troublesome for Indonesian EFL learners. Consonants /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, and /ŋ/ were targeted, together with the vowel contrasts /i:/–/ɪ/ and /æ/–/ʌ/; word stress and sentence intonation were assessed as well. A quiet classroom hosted every reading session, conducted one participant at a time, and a smartphone voice recorder captured the audio at a quality sufficient for later phonetic transcription and analysis.

A twenty-item closed-ended questionnaire was administered alongside the pronunciation test to probe how participants perceived their own pronunciation difficulties and any associated anxiety. Responses ran along a four-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), and the items were organized into three dimensions: difficulties with segmental pronunciation, difficulties with suprasegmental pronunciation, and pronunciation-related anxiety and confidence. Once the pronunciation test and questionnaire were complete, semi-structured interviews with all ten participants followed, offering a deeper reading of the quantitative results. Eight open-ended questions made up the interview guide, covering participants' prior pronunciation-learning experiences, the difficulties they perceived, their classroom experiences, their confidence in speaking English, and the factors they considered responsible for shaping their pronunciation development. Roughly 20 to 30 minutes were needed for each interview, all of which were audio-recorded after participants gave their informed consent. Taken together, the three instruments made methodological triangulation possible, letting pronunciation difficulties be examined through both objective performance measures and participants' own perspectives.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

This study involved minimal educational risk. Participants provided written informed consent prior to participation, and all procedures adhered to the institutional guidelines concerning voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Data were gathered across four consecutive steps. First, each participant completed the pronunciation test on their own, with every spoken response audio recorded. Second, participants filled out the pronunciation questionnaire during a classroom session lasting about twenty minutes. Third, individual semi-structured interviews were carried out to gain a richer understanding of participants' pronunciation experiences and the factors shaping their performance. Finally, both the

pronunciation recordings and the interview recordings were transcribed in preparation for analysis.

### Data Analysis

Phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) formed the basis for analyzing the pronunciation recordings. Each participant's recording was transcribed first; the resulting transcription was then set against the corresponding standard English pronunciation so that pronunciation errors could be identified. Four categories captured these errors: consonant errors, vowel errors, word-stress errors, and sentence-intonation errors. Once classification was complete, error frequencies within each category were tallied and converted to percentages, revealing which pronunciation difficulties occurred most often among participants. Dominant error patterns across the ten participants could thus be pinpointed through this quantitative procedure.

Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and percentage distributions were computed for the questionnaire across its three dimensions: segmental pronunciation difficulties, suprasegmental pronunciation difficulties, and pronunciation-related anxiety and confidence. Standard guidelines for interpreting Likert-scale data then guided the interpretation of these results, which described how participants perceived their own pronunciation difficulties and speaking anxiety. Every interview recording was transcribed verbatim and read through repeatedly so that familiarity with the data could be built. Meaningful units were subsequently coded, and these codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting recurring themes tied to pronunciation difficulties and the factors behind them. The qualitative findings were finally read together with the results of the pronunciation test and questionnaire, achieving methodological triangulation and yielding a fuller account of participants' pronunciation difficulties.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This study involved 10 first-year English Education students as participants, selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion of having completed at least one semester of Basic Speaking or Phonetics coursework. All 10 participants took part in the pronunciation test and the questionnaire, and all 10 were also interviewed individually to explore their pronunciation experiences in greater depth.

### Pronunciation Test Results

Each of the 10 participants read aloud 40 target words and two short passages, producing a total of 400 word-level pronunciation instances for analysis. Recordings were transcribed using IPA and compared against the target pronunciation. Table 1 presents the distribution of error types across the four categories tested.

**Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Pronunciation Errors by Category**

| Error Category     | Number of Errors | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Consonant errors   | 41               | 37.6           |
| Vowel errors       | 33               | 30.3           |
| Word stress errors | 22               | 20.2           |

|                            |            |              |
|----------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Sentence intonation errors | 13         | 11.9         |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>109</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Overall, the findings indicate that segmental pronunciation errors were more prevalent than suprasegmental errors. Consonant substitutions constituted the largest proportion of pronunciation problems, suggesting that English consonants absent from the Indonesian phonological inventory remain particularly difficult for beginning EFL learners. These findings demonstrate that pronunciation difficulties are systematic rather than incidental and therefore require explicit instructional attention. A closer look at individual performance shows that error frequency varied considerably among the 10 participants, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Number of Pronunciation Errors per Participant**

| Participant | Consonant Errors | Vowel Errors | Stress Errors | Intonation Errors | Total |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|-------|
| S1          | 5                | 4            | 3             | 1                 | 13    |
| S2          | 3                | 2            | 1             | 1                 | 7     |
| S3          | 6                | 5            | 3             | 2                 | 16    |
| S4          | 2                | 2            | 1             | 0                 | 5     |
| S5          | 5                | 4            | 2             | 2                 | 13    |
| S6          | 4                | 3            | 2             | 1                 | 10    |
| S7          | 3                | 3            | 2             | 1                 | 9     |
| S8          | 6                | 4            | 3             | 2                 | 15    |
| S9          | 3                | 2            | 2             | 1                 | 8     |
| S10         | 4                | 4            | 3             | 2                 | 13    |

Table 2 shows that Participant S4 produced the fewest total errors (5), while Participant S3 produced the most (16). This spread suggests that pronunciation difficulty was not uniform across the group, even though all participants shared a similar academic starting point. The interview findings complement the pronunciation test results by revealing learners' perceptions of the causes of their pronunciation difficulties. Most participants attributed their problems to limited exposure to spoken English, insufficient pronunciation practice, and low confidence when speaking English. This suggests that pronunciation difficulties are influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' learning experiences. Table 3 lists the phonemes most frequently mispronounced across the 10 participants.

**Table 3. Most Frequently Mispronounced Phonemes Across Participants**

| Phoneme           | Example Word        | Common Substitution | Participants Affected (of 10) |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| /θ/               | <i>think</i>        | [t]                 | 8                             |
| /ð/               | <i>this</i>         | [d]                 | 7                             |
| /æ/               | <i>cat</i>          | [ε]                 | 6                             |
| /ɪ/–/i:/ contrast | <i>ship / sheep</i> | merged as [ɪ]       | 6                             |

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**Table 5. Themes Emerging from Student Interviews**

| Theme                       | Participants Expressing This Theme | Example Excerpt                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| First-language interference | 7 of 10                            | "I know the /θ/ sound is different, but my mouth just goes to t automatically." (S3)                             |
| Limited prior instruction   | 8 of 10                            | "In senior high school, we never really practiced saying words out loud—it was all reading and grammar." (S7)    |
| Performance anxiety         | 6 of 10                            | "I get nervous speaking in front of the class, so sometimes I just say it quietly and hope no one notices." (S9) |

Most participants (8 of 10) reported limited prior pronunciation instruction before entering university, and most (7 of 10) were consciously aware that certain English sounds do not exist in their first language, even when they could not always correct the resulting error. Performance anxiety was reported by more than half of the participants (6 of 10) as a factor that made them reluctant to speak clearly or ask for correction in class. Across the three data sources collected from the 10 participants, a consistent pattern emerged: (1) consonant and vowel errors were the most frequent and observable type of pronunciation difficulty, though error frequency varied noticeably between individuals (Table 2); (2) participants were more consciously aware of segmental difficulty and anxiety than of suprasegmental errors; and (3) participants themselves attributed their difficulties primarily to first-language interference and limited prior instruction, compounded by performance anxiety. This finding corroborates Yulianti et al. (2025), who reported that Indonesian EFL learners frequently substitute English dental fricatives with familiar Indonesian consonants because these sounds are absent from the Indonesian phonological inventory. Overall, findings from the pronunciation test, questionnaire, and interviews consistently indicate that pronunciation difficulties among the participants extend beyond inaccurate sound production to include instructional and psychological dimensions. This integrated pattern forms the basis for the following discussion.

## Discussion

### Segmental Pronunciation Difficulties and First-Language Phonological Transfer

The analysis indicates that the pronunciation problems encountered by first-year students in the English Education program cannot be attributed exclusively to phonological differences between English and Indonesian. Rather than originating from a single source, these difficulties appear to result from the combined influence of linguistic characteristics, instructional experiences, and affective conditions. Evidence gathered from the pronunciation test, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews consistently demonstrates that learners' pronunciation performance is shaped not only by their limited control of English speech sounds but also by inadequate opportunities for pronunciation practice and the presence of pronunciation-related anxiety. This finding supports recent research suggesting that successful pronunciation development in a second language depends on the interaction of linguistic knowledge, effective instructional support, and sustained oral practice (Arfiyanti et al., 2026; Yulianti et al., 2025).

The quantitative results further show that errors involving consonants and vowels occurred considerably more often than those related to suprasegmental features. This pattern suggests that segmental pronunciation continues to represent the greatest obstacle for Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language. Comparable findings were reported by Yulianti et al. (2025), who observed that Indonesian learners frequently struggle to pronounce English phonemes that are absent from their native-language sound system. The persistence of these errors can be interpreted through the Revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r), which explains that unfamiliar second-language sounds are generally perceived and produced by referring to the phonetic categories already established in the learners' first language. Consequently, English sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, and /ɪ/ are commonly assimilated into the closest Indonesian phonetic categories, leading to predictable and systematic pronunciation errors instead of random inaccuracies. The predominance of dental fricative errors observed in this study is also consistent with Ristati et al. (2024) and Dyani et al. (2025), who found that Indonesian university students frequently replace /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/. Likewise, Jimola (2022) reported that segmental pronunciation errors remain the most persistent challenge among EFL learners because unfamiliar English phonemes are commonly assimilated into first-language phonological categories.

The predominance of fricative pronunciation errors identified in this study corroborates previous findings among Indonesian university students. Earlier investigations (Luthfianda et al., 2024; Sayogie & Adbaka, 2022) have consistently shown that English fricatives remain difficult because these phonemes are either absent or function differently within Indonesian phonological systems, leading learners to substitute them with more familiar consonants. Difficulties in distinguishing English vowel contrasts have likewise been reported among Acehnese-Indonesian bilingual learners, indicating that vowel perception and production remain closely related to learners' first-language phonological systems (Masykar et al., 2022). Although the participants shared relatively similar educational backgrounds, the frequency of their pronunciation errors varied substantially. This variation suggests that pronunciation development is also influenced by learner-related variables, including motivation, learning strategies, exposure to spoken English, and willingness to engage in pronunciation practice. Therefore, pronunciation ability should be viewed as the outcome of multiple interacting factors rather than as a consequence of first-language transfer alone.

### Suprasegmental Difficulties and Instructional Factors

Although errors involving suprasegmental features were less frequent than segmental errors, their educational significance should not be underestimated because prosodic features, particularly word stress and sentence intonation, play a fundamental role in ensuring speech intelligibility and comprehensibility. The pronunciation test revealed recurring inaccuracies in these prosodic elements, while responses to the questionnaire suggested that participants possessed only a moderate level of awareness of such errors. This mismatch indicates that learners tend to recognize pronunciation problems at the individual sound level more readily than those associated with stress and intonation. Such a pattern reinforces previous evidence that explicit instruction focusing on rhythm, stress, and intonation contributes substantially to improving learners' spoken intelligibility and overall communicative effectiveness. Consequently, suprasegmental instruction should be regarded as an integral component of pronunciation teaching rather than as a supplementary aspect of language learning (Pennington, 2021).

The interview data further provide insight into the instructional experiences that may have contributed to these findings. Most participants reported receiving only limited pronunciation instruction before entering higher education. English learning at the primary and secondary levels was described as predominantly oriented toward grammar, vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension, whereas opportunities to develop spoken English and pronunciation skills were relatively scarce. These experiences are consistent with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2021), who argued that pronunciation continues to receive insufficient attention in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom despite its recognized importance for communicative competence. Comparable findings were reported by Nguyen et al. (2024), who observed that university students required more systematic pronunciation practice, particularly for consonant clusters, affricates, and nasal sounds. Their study suggests that explicit pronunciation instruction combined with repeated oral practice contributes to greater pronunciation accuracy and learner awareness.

Likewise, Arfiyanti et al. (2026) identified restricted opportunities for pronunciation practice, limited exposure to authentic spoken English, and inadequate instructional guidance as major contributors to pronunciation difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners. Taken together, these findings suggest that pronunciation teaching should extend beyond occasional corrective feedback. Instead, English teacher education programs need to adopt a more systematic instructional approach that explicitly integrates both segmental and suprasegmental features throughout the learning process. Taken together, these findings suggest that pronunciation teaching should extend beyond occasional corrective feedback. Instead, English teacher education programs need to adopt a more systematic instructional approach that explicitly integrates both segmental and suprasegmental features throughout the learning process, allowing pronunciation practice to occur in authentic communicative contexts rather than through isolated drills (Nguyen et al., 2021; Almusharraf, 2024).

### **Pronunciation-Related Anxiety and Oral Performance**

In addition to linguistic competence, the findings indicate that affective factors play a substantial role in shaping students' pronunciation performance. Results from the questionnaire revealed that pronunciation-related anxiety received the highest average score among the three dimensions examined. This pattern was further supported by the interview data, in which many participants described feeling nervous and lacking confidence when required to speak English in front of their classmates. These results imply that learners' emotional conditions influence not only their confidence but also their willingness to participate in oral communication and engage in pronunciation practice. Beyond linguistic challenges, pronunciation learning is also influenced by affective variables. Learners who experience high levels of pronunciation anxiety often avoid speaking opportunities, thereby reducing the amount of meaningful pronunciation practice they receive. Previous studies have demonstrated that pronunciation anxiety, linguistic self-confidence, and willingness to communicate are closely interconnected in shaping learners' oral performance (Saka & Merc, 2021; Xue & Noels, 2025).

As a result, anxious learners often avoid situations that require spoken interaction because they fear making pronunciation mistakes or being negatively judged by others. Similar tendencies were evident in the present study. During the interviews, several participants acknowledged that they deliberately lowered their voices, avoided using unfamiliar English vocabulary, or chose to remain silent when participating in classroom speaking activities. These behaviors indicate that anxiety may discourage learners from actively engaging in communicative practice, thereby limiting opportunities to improve their pronunciation. The



relationship between pronunciation anxiety and oral participation identified in this study also aligns with Saka and Merc (2021), who demonstrated that learners with stronger linguistic self-confidence were more willing to communicate in English, whereas low self-confidence reduced oral participation and pronunciation practice opportunities.

The findings further suggest that pronunciation difficulties and speaking anxiety are closely interconnected rather than functioning as separate issues. Limited oral practice caused by anxiety may contribute to the persistence of pronunciation errors, while repeated pronunciation difficulties can, in turn, reinforce learners' lack of confidence and increase their anxiety during speaking tasks. This reciprocal relationship creates a continuous cycle in which both factors negatively influence one another. Therefore, pronunciation difficulties should not be interpreted solely as a linguistic problem. Instead, they should also be understood from an affective perspective, emphasizing the importance of creating supportive classroom environments where learners feel comfortable practicing spoken English without fear of negative evaluation or criticism.

### **Pedagogical Implications for English Teacher Education**

The overall findings derived from the pronunciation test, questionnaire, and interview data indicate that pronunciation difficulties experienced by first-year English Education students are shaped by the combined effects of first-language phonological transfer, limited instructional experiences, and pronunciation-related anxiety. These interconnected factors suggest that pronunciation improvement cannot be achieved through isolated articulation exercises alone. Instead, effective pronunciation development requires a comprehensive instructional approach that simultaneously addresses learners' linguistic knowledge, classroom learning experiences, and emotional readiness to communicate. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies conducted in the Indonesian EFL context, which emphasize that explicit pronunciation instruction should be integrated with communicative learning activities to strengthen segmental accuracy, suprasegmental competence, and learners' confidence in speaking English (Arfiyanti et al., 2026; Yulianti et al., 2025).

Based on these findings, English teacher education programs should incorporate systematic pronunciation instruction that equally emphasizes segmental and suprasegmental features while providing learners with regular opportunities to engage in meaningful spoken communication. A variety of instructional practices, including guided oral reading, shadowing, peer feedback, self-recording, reflective pronunciation activities, and technology-assisted pronunciation training, have been reported to enhance pronunciation accuracy while simultaneously fostering learners' confidence and reducing speaking anxiety (Kostromitina & Kang, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). Recent evidence also suggests that online pronunciation instruction can increase learners' opportunities for individualized practice, immediate feedback, and repeated exposure to spoken English, thereby supporting both pronunciation accuracy and learner engagement (Dalman, 2025). These activities encourage continuous practice and provide learners with constructive feedback in supportive learning environments.

Recent evidence further indicates that learners perceive explicit pronunciation instruction as essential for improving both pronunciation accuracy and communicative confidence (Novika, 2025). Therefore, pronunciation teaching should combine phonetic instruction with regular communicative speaking activities, reflective practice, and constructive feedback. More importantly, pronunciation instruction should not be viewed solely as an effort to improve the technical production of English sounds. Within English teacher education, it also serves to develop communicative competence and professional self-confidence, both of



which are essential for future teachers. Since these students are preparing for careers as English educators, they are expected to demonstrate not only accurate pronunciation but also confidence in oral communication. Therefore, teacher education programs should position pronunciation training as an integral component of professional preparation, enabling prospective teachers to become effective linguistic models for the learners they will eventually teach.

## KESIMPULAN

This study investigated pronunciation difficulties and pronunciation-related anxiety among first-year students in an English Education Study Program. The findings reveal that learners experience persistent difficulties in producing English segmental and suprasegmental features, particularly consonants, vowels, word stress, and intonation. These pronunciation problems are influenced not only by first-language phonological transfer but also by limited pronunciation practice, insufficient exposure to authentic spoken English, and pronunciation-related anxiety. Consequently, pronunciation difficulties should be viewed as multidimensional challenges involving linguistic, instructional, and affective factors. The findings also demonstrate that pronunciation-related anxiety reduces learners' confidence and willingness to participate in oral communication. Fear of making pronunciation mistakes and receiving negative evaluation discourages learners from practicing English, which may further slow pronunciation development. These results highlight the importance of creating supportive classroom environments in which pronunciation errors are treated as a natural part of language learning rather than as failures.

Pedagogically, the study suggests that pronunciation instruction should become a more systematic component of English teacher education programs. Explicit instruction in both segmental and suprasegmental features should be integrated with communicative speaking activities, regular pronunciation practice, and constructive corrective feedback. Such an approach is expected to improve not only learners' pronunciation accuracy but also their confidence and communicative competence. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, investigate pronunciation development across different educational levels, and examine the effectiveness of technology-assisted pronunciation instruction or other innovative teaching approaches in improving learners' pronunciation performance and reducing pronunciation-related anxiety.

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