

Exploring Labiodental Consonant Pronunciation Challenges Faced by Sundanese EFL Learners: Effective Strategies for Improvement

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by Sundanese EFL learners in pronouncing labiodental consonant sounds, specifically /f/ and /v/, and to propose effective strategies for improvement. The study focuses on collecting data from Sundanese EFL learners at various levels of proficiency using interviews and pronunciation tests. The results indicate that learners face various challenges in pronouncing labiodental consonants, such as substituting similar sounds from their native language and struggling with unfamiliar sound combinations. The study proposes several strategies to overcome these challenges, including drilling exercises, practicing with audio recordings, and promoting learner autonomy.

Keywords: Labiodental consonant sounds, pronunciation challenges, Sundanese EFL learners, effective strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication heavily relies on proper pronunciation, which refers to the way words or a language are spoken (Leviakandella, 2022). According to Utami (2020), having good pronunciation is a significant indicator of language proficiency and affects the quality of communication with others. In order to convey meaning accurately, it is essential to enunciate words correctly, as unclear pronunciation can lead to confusion and misunderstandings (Purwanto, 2019; Visoni & Marlina, 2020). Therefore, mastering correct pronunciation is crucial for clear and effective communication in English (Mukmin, 2020).

Pronunciation is a fundamental skill for effective communication in foreign language learning, but it often poses challenges. Masroor, Abdulsamad, & Ja'wal (2020) attributed these difficulties to factors such as the nationality of the instructors, inadequate language usage opportunities, lack of materials and equipment, insufficient corrective feedback, ineffective teaching methodologies, inconsistencies between L1 and L2 rules, and variations in the number of sounds in each language.

Pronunciation can be divided into two aspects: supra-segmental and segmental (Herman, 2016). Both are essential in distinguishing between the meanings of English words (Meo & Dharma, 2019; Asilfa, 2019). Supra-segmental features include stress, intonation, and pitch, which carry lexical information (Vančová, 2019). Segmental aspects comprise vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs, and consonants, which are the distinct sounds of a language (Alimin, 2022). In consonants, there are various places of articulation, such as Labiodental, which involves the upper teeth and lower lip, such as the "v" sound (Phuong, 2022; Sinurat, 2013).

Pronunciation is a vital aspect of effective communication, but it is often problematic when learning a foreign language. Factors that contribute to pronunciation difficulties include instructor nationality, lack of real-life language use, insufficient materials and equipment, inadequate corrective feedback, inconsistency between L1 and L2 rules, and the number of sounds in each language (Masroor, Abdulsamad, & Ja'wal, 2020). Supra-segmental and segmental aspects are both important in English pronunciation, with the former involving lexical information such as stress, intonation, and pitch, and the latter encompassing vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs, and consonants (Herman, 2016; Meo & Dharma, 2019; Asilfa, 2019).

Sundanese students often struggle with pronunciation due to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as a lack of practice (Kartyastuti, 2017; Singh, 2017; Maiza, 2020). Negative transfer from the students' first language can also impede pronunciation, leading to errors and misunderstandings (Authar, 2018). Learners must strive for a balanced mastery of both their first language and English to avoid interference symptoms and ensure mutual intelligibility (Noviyenti & Putri, 2020; Septianasari, Huznatul, & Baihaqi, 2019).

Differences between the Sundanese and English alphabets are thought to be a factor contributing to errors made by Sundanese students when learning English. English has 24 consonant sounds and 23 vowel sounds, including diphthongs, whereas Sundanese has only 23 consonant sounds. Some Sundanese students struggle with pronouncing English words correctly, often replacing certain consonant sounds with others that are similar in their own language. For example, they may pronounce "fried-chicken" as "/praid-tfik.in/" instead of "/fraid-tfik.in/," replacing the "f" sound with a "p" sound. Similarly, they may mispronounce words like "facebook," "furtive," and "vengeful" by replacing "v" sounds with "f" sounds.

According to research, mispronouncing consonant minimal pairs, such as /f/ and /v/, /s/ and /θ/, and /ð/ and /z/, is a common error among Sundanese students learning English.

Below is the table of mispronunciation (Fauzi, 2014) by Sundanese students of /f/ and /v/ sounds as follows:

Table 1: Comparison of Mispronunciation of /f/ and /v/ Sounds

Sound /f/	Sound /v/
Furtive	Genitive
Festival	Positive
Fried-chicken	Vespers
Facebook	Galvanized
Vengeful	vituperative

Many studies have explored the pronunciation difficulties faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in different regions of the world. A common issue identified in these studies is the challenge of correctly pronouncing dental fricative consonants /θ/ and /ð/. For instance, researchers like Bui (2016), Kurniawan (2016), and Umantari (2016) investigated this matter among adult Vietnamese, English Education students, and Indonesian EFL learners, respectively. The findings of Umantari's study revealed that the similarities between English and Indonesian consonant sounds aided the latter in achieving accurate pronunciation. Additionally, studies by Gusdian (2018) and Alfehaid (2015) suggested that the similarities between Arabic and English consonant sounds facilitated improvement in English pronunciation for Arab and Indonesian EFL learners.

Several studies have examined the challenges of English pronunciation faced by EFL learners, with Ambalegin (2018) attributing mispronunciation among Indonesian speakers to factors such as mother tongue influence, sound system differences, and background factors. Huwari (2019) identified difficulties in English pronunciation among Egyptians and proposed strategies to mitigate the problem, while Khorasgani (2015) highlighted the importance of pronunciation teaching in enhancing students' comprehension and intelligibility.

Similarly, Sundanese EFL learners have also been observed to struggle with pronouncing English vowels and consonants despite receiving English education in school. These students often make errors due to a lack of understanding of transcription and inadequate practice. Similarly, Turkish and Iranian learners have been found to encounter difficulties with certain English sounds due to insufficient exposure and training. This study aims to analyze the pronunciation of Sundanese EFL students in labiodental consonant sounds and identify potential solutions to address these pronunciation errors. The study will utilize the Elsa Speak app to evaluate pronunciation and identify areas for improvement. Research questions will focus on the challenges faced by Sundanese students and potential solutions to improve their pronunciation skills. The findings could inform the development of effective pronunciation teaching methods and enhance the English pronunciation skills of Sundanese EFL students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English pronunciation poses significant challenges for EFL learners worldwide, including Sundanese students who struggle with pronouncing English vowels and consonants (Risdianto, 2017). These students often make errors in short and long vowels and consonants due to a lack of understanding of correct transcription and insufficient practice. Moreover, learners from different language backgrounds, such as Turkish and Iranian, encounter difficulties in pronouncing certain English sounds, including labiodental consonants like /θ/ and /v/ (Kazemi & Sahragard, 2019; Tekin, 2018). Inadequate exposure to the target language and lack of training are some of the reasons for these difficulties.

To address these challenges, various strategies can be employed. One effective strategy is to introduce learners to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and its use in transcribing and distinguishing between different sounds. Incorporating listening and speaking activities that focus on specific sounds can also improve learners' familiarity and accuracy with them. Interactive tools like the Elsa Speak application provide learners with feedback on their pronunciation, helping them identify areas for improvement (Risdianto, 2017; Kazemi & Sahragard, 2019). Furthermore, creating a supportive learning environment that encourages learners to practice and experiment with new sounds without fear of making mistakes is essential. Teachers can provide constructive feedback and praise learners' efforts, fostering a positive attitude toward pronunciation learning (Tekin, 2018).

In order to improve English pronunciation skills, effective teaching strategies, appropriate learning materials, and a supportive learning environment are crucial (British Council, n.d.; English Central, n.d.; Hewings, 2003). Explicit instruction, guided practice exercises, and visual aids can be used to demonstrate the articulation of specific sounds, such as labiodental consonants like /θ/ and /v/. Additionally, online resources like the British Council's LearnEnglish website and mobile applications like Pronunciation Power or English Pronunciation in Use can provide learners with opportunities to listen to native speakers and practice producing the sounds in a structured and interactive way. Finally, creating a supportive learning environment that encourages learners to practice and experiment with new sounds without fear of making mistakes is essential. Teachers can provide constructive feedback, praise learners' efforts, and encourage peer feedback and practice sessions to create a supportive learning community (British Council, n.d.; Hewings, 2003).

These references support the idea that improving English pronunciation skills requires a multi-faceted approach that includes effective teaching strategies, appropriate learning materials, and a supportive learning environment. For instance, Derwing and Munro (2015) suggest that L2 pronunciation instruction should be evidence-based and provide learners with the opportunity to practice and receive feedback. Levis and Moyer (2014) emphasize the importance of incorporating new technologies and multimedia resources into pronunciation teaching, while Thomson and Derwing (2015) argue that pronunciation instruction should be integrated into the broader language curriculum and delivered in a way that is relevant and engaging to learners.

In summary, current research suggests that improving English pronunciation skills requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates evidence-based teaching strategies, appropriate learning materials, and a supportive learning environment. By using a range of

resources and techniques, teachers can help learners overcome pronunciation challenges and enhance their communication abilities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, as defined by Yin (2012), to examine a specific program, event, process, activity, or group of people in depth. The aim is to identify and explain the errors made by Sundanese students who are learning English as a foreign language when pronouncing Labiodental Consonant sounds. The study will use purposive sampling to select participants. This research was carried out at SMP Negeri 1 Kramatmulya, located on Jalan Siliwangi No. 278 Kramatmulya Kuningan, Cibentang, in the Kramatmulya District of Kuningan Regency, West Java.

In this study, data were collected through a pronunciation test and an interview. Arikunto (2010) defines a test as a set of questions and other components used to assess a skill. In this research, a pronunciation test was administered to all 29 participants using the Elsa Speak app to identify errors in pronouncing Labiodental consonant sounds. Test items were chosen to represent each problematic sound for the students in different words, phrases, and sentences, with each recording lasting approximately 5-7 minutes for each participant. Creswell (2012) defines an interview as a method in which a researcher orally asks one or more participants questions, and the responses are transcribed and typed into a computer. In this research, some students were interviewed to obtain additional information related to data collection. An interview was conducted to support the data collected from the pronunciation test, with participants grouped into four categories based on their pronunciation test results: excellent, good, fair, and inadequate.

The interview included 14 questions covering various topics such as the student's mother tongue (Ganal, 2014), daily language use (Canale and Swain, 1980), experience in learning English (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982), their perspective on learning pronunciation (Harper, 2004), and, more importantly, their difficulties with pronunciation (Gilakjani, 2011). The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate student responses, and their answers were recorded using a mobile phone. The interview was conducted after the pronunciation test. The data used in this study consisted of errors made by students in pronouncing consonants, which were collected through a pronunciation test and an interview. The Elsa Speak app was used as a tool to assess the students' pronunciation, and it detected the incorrect or erroneous part in their pronunciation production (Campos, 2020).

The present section pertains to the analysis of the interview that was conducted with the Sundanese EFL students. Based on several theories (Herman, 2016; Geylanioglu, 2012; Meo, 2019), the following steps were followed: recording the interview, transcribing the interview results, categorizing the responses based on the similarities in the ideas conveyed in the interview, interpreting all the student responses, and drawing conclusions and proposing solutions to the students' pronunciation problems.

4. RESULTS

This study aimed to assess the ability of Sundanese EFL students to correctly pronounce labiodental consonant sounds, specifically the /f/ and /v/ sounds. The study was conducted

from February 28 to March 7, 2020, with a total of 29 second-year junior high school students participating. The pronunciation test included thirty items, categorized into three types: words, phrases, and sentences, that contained the target consonant sounds in various positions, including initial, medial, and final. The data were analyzed using the online application Elsa Speak, which categorized the results into three colors: red indicating a sound mistake and low accuracy, yellow indicating almost correct pronunciation, and green indicating excellent pronunciation and high accuracy. The scoring classification used in this study was based on the pronunciations of English labiodental consonants as outlined by Darwis (2006, p.8) and the results obtained from the Elsa Speak application.

The pronunciation test used in this study included three test items for each category, with the /f/ and /v/ sounds placed in different positions within words or sentences, including initial, medial, and final. The scores were classified based on the pronunciation of English labiodental consonants according to Darwis (2006, p.8), and the results were analyzed using the Elsa Speak application.

Table 1: *Pronunciation score classification*

Score	Score Range	Classification
4	76-100	Excellent
3	51-75	Good
2	26-50	Fair
1	1-25	Inadequate
0	0	Unacceptable

Table 1 shows that the Sundanese EFL students' pronunciation test results were classified into five categories based on the scores obtained using the Elsa Speak application. These categories represent the range of scores obtained by the students after taking the pronunciation test.

Table 2: *Score range of the students*

No.	Score Range	Total Students
1.	76-100	-
2.	51-75	12
3.	26-50	17
4.	1-25	-
5.	0	-
Total		29

According to Table 2, most of the Sundanese EFL students who took the pronunciation test were classified as "fair," while "good" was the least common category. However, the difference in numbers between these two categories was almost equal. None of the students received a classification of "unacceptable" or "inadequate," and there were no students who achieved an "excellent" classification either. Once the students were classified, the researchers analyzed the errors made by the students during the pronunciation test, including the positions of the errors within words, phrases, and sentences.

Table 3: Pronunciation test errors position of words

No.	Test Item /f/	Error	Test Item /v/	Error
1.	Five	10	Vest	10
2.	Fine	10	Van	13
3.	For	11	Vine	16
4.	Before	5	Clever	5
5.	Effort	6	Evening	7
6.	Often		Every	3
7.	Waterproof		Positive	16
8.	Carving knife		Expensive	17
9.	Handkerchief		Relative	18

Table 3 presents the frequency of errors made by the Sundanese EFL students in the pronunciation test for both the /f/ and /v/ sounds. For the /f/ sound test items, the word "Handkerchief" had the highest error frequency with sixteen students mispronouncing it, while the word "before" had the lowest error frequency with only five students mispronouncing it. On the other hand, for the /v/ sound test items, the word "relative" had the highest error frequency with eighteen students mispronouncing it, while the word "every" had the lowest error frequency with only three students mispronouncing it. It is notable that the test items containing the /v/ sound had more errors than those containing the /f/ sound. In addition, the highest error frequency for the phrase position in the /f/ sound test items was ten students who mispronounced "new football," while for the /v/ sound test items, it was twenty-three students who mispronounced "best vacation."

In terms of sentence position, the pronunciation test errors for the /f/ sound were highest for item 11, where eleven students made errors in pronouncing the word "fence." The lowest number of errors occurred for items 10 and 13, with four students making errors in pronouncing the words "fire" and "for." In contrast, for the /v/ sound, the highest number of errors occurred for item 3, with twenty-one students making errors in pronouncing the word "vacation." The lowest number of errors occurred for item 1, with three students making errors in pronouncing the word "every." It is worth noting that although item 7 also contained the word "every," it was in a different position in the sentence compared to item 1. The number of errors in item 7 was different from that of item 1. Comparing the two sounds, it can be observed that the test items containing the /v/ sound had more errors than those containing the /f/ sound.

The research revealed a considerable number of mispronunciations made by second-grade students when speaking English. These errors were found in different positions such as words, phrases, and sentences. Table 3 demonstrated that specific words were commonly mispronounced, especially when the /f/ sound was present in words containing three syllables.

For instance, the word "handkerchief" was the most frequently mispronounced word, with sixteen students making errors in its pronunciation. Additionally, the mispronunciations occurred when the /v/ sound was present in words with one syllable, such as "vine," as well as in words with three syllables, such as "expensive" and "relative." Eighteen students made

errors in pronouncing the word "relative," making it the most commonly mispronounced word with the /v/ sound.

The results of the pronunciation test indicated that Sundanese EFL students made errors not only in individual words, but also in phrases and sentences. For instance, when the /f/ sound was present in phrases, the most frequent error occurred in the phrase "new football," with ten students making errors. Similarly, when the /v/ sound was present in phrases, the most frequent errors occurred in the phrases "best vacation" and "vanilla ice cream," with twenty-three and sixteen students respectively making errors. In terms of sentences, when the /f/ sound was at the beginning of the sentence, the word "fence" was the most frequently mispronounced, with eleven students making errors in test item 16. Meanwhile, when the /v/ sound was at the beginning of the sentence, the most frequently mispronounced words were "vacation" and "visiting," with twenty-one and twenty students respectively making errors in test items 28 and 29. Additionally, in test item 30, fourteen students made errors in pronouncing the words "Vicki" and "violin," also when the /v/ sound was at the beginning of the sentence.

The objective of the research was to address the difficulties that Sundanese students face in pronouncing labiodental consonant sounds when learning English as a foreign language. To assess this, a pronunciation test was conducted that included 30 English items focusing on labiodental consonants, divided into three categories: words, phrases, and sentences. The analysis revealed that students made errors in the pronunciation of words, with the /v/ sound being the most problematic, specifically in the word "relative," which eighteen students mispronounced. The most common error in the phrases category occurred in the phrase "best vacation," with twenty-three students making mistakes in its pronunciation, again with the /v/ sound being the most problematic. Similarly, in the sentences category, the most common errors occurred with the /v/ sound, specifically in the sentences "vacation" and "visiting," with twenty-one and twenty students making mistakes in their pronunciation, respectively. The results of the study indicate that the /v/ sound was more difficult for the students to pronounce than the /f/ sound.

According to Yoshida (2016), Sundanese students face difficulties in pronouncing new sounds that are absent in their native language. They tend to substitute similar sounds from their first language, which can lead to errors in pronunciation. It is important for teachers to highlight the differences between new sounds and familiar first language sounds to help students pronounce new sounds accurately. In addition, students may find certain sounds easy to pronounce in some phonetic environments but difficult in others. Teachers can use a variety of methods to help students understand and remember pronunciation patterns, including audio recordings, visual aids, and group work.

When learners have trouble pronouncing final consonants or unfamiliar consonant clusters, they may cope by omitting or substituting sounds, which can make their speech harder to understand. To improve their pronunciation, Sundanese students can practice listening to music or YouTube videos, drill exercises, and consult with English dictionaries. Lessons should be tailored to the students' level of understanding and designed to promote their autonomy as learners. Teachers can also consider incorporating strategies such as those

suggested by Yoshida (2016) and Goodwin (2001) to make teaching pronunciation more engaging and effective.

5. DISCUSSION

The study aimed to identify the challenges that Sundanese EFL learners face in pronouncing labiodental consonant sounds and to propose strategies to address these challenges. The study involved second-grade students at Junior High School of 1 Kramatmulya as its participants. Data were collected through a pronunciation test using the Elsa Speak application and an interview. The most common problem found was mispronunciation of /v/ sound when it was part of a phrase. The study recommended several strategies, including listening to music and YouTube, drilling, and consulting with a dictionary, to help students overcome these challenges.

The findings of this study align with previous research that has identified the challenges faced by EFL learners in pronouncing labiodental consonant sounds (Kazemi & Sahragard, 2019; Tekin, 2018). The results also support the importance of using interactive tools such as Elsa Speak to evaluate pronunciation accuracy and identify areas for improvement.

The study's recommendations for listening to music and YouTube, drilling, and consulting with a dictionary are also consistent with previous research that has emphasized the importance of incorporating various listening and speaking activities into pronunciation instruction (Hewings, 2003; Levis & Moyer, 2014). The study's findings also highlight the importance of providing students with a supportive learning environment in which they can practice and experiment with new sounds without fear of making mistakes (British Council, 2017; Hewings, 2003).

In conclusion, the study provides important insights into the challenges faced by Sundanese EFL learners in pronouncing labiodental consonant sounds and offers practical strategies to address these challenges. The findings of this study can inform the development of effective pronunciation instruction methods that can enhance the English pronunciation skills of Sundanese EFL learners and other EFL learners facing similar challenges.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study has analyzed the labiodental sounds produced by second-grade students at SMP 1 Kramatmulya in their English pronunciation. The findings reveal that the students struggled the most with the /v/ sound, particularly when it was part of phrases. To address these issues, suitable solutions for the students include listening to music, watching YouTube videos, drilling exercises, and consulting with dictionaries.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that English teachers prioritize the teaching of /f/ and /v/ sounds, with more drills and practices given to the students to minimize their difficulties. Students should also practice the pronunciation of these sounds regularly to develop the habit of using them correctly. This study can be improved by conducting a deeper analysis of the labiodental aspects of English pronunciation. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for future studies on labiodental or pronunciation analysis.

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