A Qualitative Study on the English Accent Pronunciation of Indonesian Native Speakers

Nafsiatul Salviya[1], Raudhatul Islam[2]
[1,2]Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, East Java - Indonesia
Email: [1]nafsiyatulsalfiyah@gmail.com, [2]raudhatulislam@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the influence of local accent on English pronunciation among English Department students. In the context of Indonesia, which is rich in regional language diversity, local accents often affect the pronunciation of English vocabulary, especially on sounds that are not found in the speakers' native language. This challenge is important to note, given that proper pronunciation greatly affects the ability to communicate in English. To investigate this, the research method used was a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of recorded speaking tasks and in-depth interviews. This study involved 30 students who came from various regional backgrounds. The results revealed that most students were still affected by regional accents, such as the pronunciation of the phoneme $/\theta/$ into $/t/$ or $/s/$, as well as intonation patterns that were not in accordance with English standards. For example, the word "think" is often pronounced as "tink" or "sink". These findings indicate the need for a more intensive phonetic approach in teaching speaking in English classes, as well as the development of teaching materials that are more responsive to the diversity of local accents. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of English curriculum and teaching methods in Indonesia.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh aksen lokal terhadap pelafalan bahasa Inggris di kalangan mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Dalam konteks Indonesia yang kaya akan keanekaragaman bahasa daerah, aksen lokal sering kali mempengaruhi pelafalan kosakata bahasa Inggris, terutama pada bunyi-bunyi yang tidak ditemukan dalam bahasa ibu penutur. Tantangan ini penting untuk diperhatikan, mengingat pelafalan yang tepat sangat mempengaruhi kemampuan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Untuk menyelidiki hal tersebut, metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa rekaman tugas berbicara dan wawancara mendalam. Penelitian ini melibatkan 30 mahasiswa yang berasal dari berbagai

latar belakang daerah. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa masih terpengaruh oleh aksen daerah, seperti pelafalan fonem /θ/ menjadi /t/ atau /s/, serta pola intonasi yang tidak sesuai dengan standar bahasa Inggris. Sebagai contoh, kata "think" sering diucapkan sebagai "tink" atau "sink". Temuan ini mengindikasikan perlunya pendekatan fonetik yang lebih intensif dalam pengajaran berbicara di kelas bahasa Inggris, serta pengembangan bahan ajar yang lebih responsif terhadap keragaman aksen lokal. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan kurikulum dan metode pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning refers to formal language acquisition that requires a teacher, while language acquisition refers to language acquisition that occurs naturally and informally since childhood (Putri & Mahardika, 2024). Language is one of the tools used to communicate in the form of speech, writing or signs based on a symbol system, Language is also a communication system that includes listening, speaking, reading and writing (Djokaho & Azizah, 2024). Language is not just a means of communication, but also a reflection of one's cultural and social identity. In a multilingual and multicultural country like Indonesia, language diversity presents both richness and challenges in communication practices. Among the various aspects of language, pronunciation plays an important role in determining the extent to which a speaker can be understood, especially in the use of a foreign language such as English.

Students in the English Education department come from various regions with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as Madura, Java, Bengkulu, and Bugis. This difference brings richness to class dynamics but also brings its own challenges to the process of learning English, especially in the aspect of pronunciation. In daily learning practices, researchers found that many students experienced obstacles in pronouncing English words correctly, especially when asked to speak in academic forums or when making presentations (Fitriana & Agustian, 2025). Pronunciation errors, such as "think" becoming "tink," or

inappropriate word stress on words such as "record," often occur and can affect the effectiveness of their communication in class.

differences in regional language backgrounds cause significant variations in the English pronunciation of university students in various universities in Indonesia (Kosasih, 2021). This situation shows that the influence of local accents is not only a technical challenge but also has an impact on students' confidence in using English actively. Some students even seemed reluctant to speak for fear of pronunciation mistakes. This is an important concern, given that good speaking and pronunciation skills are needed in the academic and professional world. Therefore, the study of the influence of local accents on student pronunciation is very relevant and important to be studied more deeply hat pronunciation learning strategies in higher education can be more tailored to the needs and real conditions of students.

A language cannot be separated from pronunciation (Susanto & Saehu, n.d.). In the process of learning English, pronunciation was often a major challenge, especially for learners whose native language has a different phonological structure (Tsang, 2025). Local accents, which are formed from phonetic habits in local languages, often affected the way students pronounce words in English. Additionally, given the influence of native-speaker in ELT (Funada, 2025) English pronunciation standards often refer to native speaker models such as British English or American English, which indirectly puts non-native speakers - including Indonesian students - in a position of having to adjust to phonetic patterns that are different from their native language. These mistakes, though common, can hinder effectived communication and lead to misunderstandings or a lack of confidence in using the language (Anggara et al., 2025). This makes local accent a factor that cannot be ignored in the pronunciation learning process, as it can affect perception, clarity, and acceptance in English communication. This phenomenon was common in higher education settings, where English is not only taught as a course, but also used as a means of academic expression.

Moreover, English is currently used as a local content subject in the Indonesian education system (Islam, 2023a), with diverse community backgrounds, the intensity of encounters between languages is increasing. Students are often used

Indonesian Language as a means to bridge communication with individuals from different racial or ethnic backgrounds and especially used local languages in the context of their local knowledge (Syakur et al., 2024). The heterogeneous condition of society causes the emergence of variations in a language used in communication (Setiawati et al., n.d.). The English Education Department Program was required to produce graduated who are proficient in both oral and written English. However, many students still experience difficulties in pronunciation due to the influence of inherent regional accents (Xie et al., 2025). For example, the phoneme /θ/ in the word think is often pronounced as /t/ or /s/, which can hinder the listener's understanding. Such pronunciation errors can impact the effectiveness of communication, as well as affect students' academic and professional performance.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the influence of local accents on English pronunciation among English Education Department students (Sari & Kurniawan, 2025). Although many studies have addressed the challenges of English pronunciation by non-native speakers, there is still a lack of research that specifically investigates the influence of Indonesian local accents on the pronunciation of certain phonemes, especially in the academic context of university students. Moreover, most of the existing studies tend to focus on pronunciation errors in general without considering the diverse local accent backgrounds among Indonesian learners. Therefore, this study offers a more contextualized and specific approach by highlighting the variety of regional accents in Indonesia. By identifying pronunciation patterns influenced by regional accents, this study is expected to contribute to more effective pronunciation teaching methods in higher education.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative case study approach. This approach was chosen because it provides space for researchers to understand in depth the phenomenon of the influence of local accents on English pronunciation in university students. Case studies allow for holistic exploration of context, especially in complex situations that are tied to real conditions (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This research was conducted at the English Education Department of Zainul Hasan Genggong Islamic University. This location was selected due to the diverse regional backgrounds of its students—such as from Java, Madura, Bogor, and Bengkulu, each of which has different local accent characteristics. This condition creates a heterogeneous linguistic environment and allows researchers to observe real variations in English pronunciation influenced by regional accent interference (Butarbutar & Ekarina, 2025). Thus, this location is considered relevant and representative to explore the phenomenon of the influence of local accents on students' pronunciation skills in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

The participants in this study were sixth-semester students who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria include the diversity of local accent backgrounds, experience in taking pronunciation courses, and readiness to be actively involved in the research process. This technique was chosen to ensure that the data obtained were relevant to the research objectives. Data were collected through three main techniques, namely observation, semi-structured interviews, and pronunciation tests. Observations were conducted in the speaking classroom to identify pronunciation errors in live communication.

Semi-structured interviews explored several important aspects, including students' awareness of the pronunciation challenges they experienced, the influence of local accents on the pronunciation of certain sounds, emotional responses such as nervousness or lack of confidence, and the efforts or strategies they made to improve their pronunciation. These topics were organized based on common problems encountered during classroom observations and aimed to understand the linguistic and psychological factors that influence pronunciation difficulties. The pronunciation test was given in the form of a list of words and sentences containing certain phonemes such as $/\theta/$, $/\eth/$, and $/v/$, which are known to be susceptible to being affected by local accents

Research instruments included classroom observation checklists, interview guides, and pronunciation test word lists. The observation sheet was developed

based on indicators of common pronunciation errors in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners (Lubis et al., 2025). The interview guide was developed based on a flexible thematic approach to allow respondents to express their experiences freely. Meanwhile, the word list was compiled by considering critical phonemes that often undergo changes due to mother tongue transfer.

Data analysis was conducted using triangulation of sources and methods to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and pronunciation tests were analysed by comparing and linking each finding to explore the tendency of emerging pronunciation patterns. The analysis process followed the steps of thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. To ensure data validity, cross-checking techniques between sources and member checking with participants were carried out as an effort to verify and confirm the data that had been analysed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The influence of local accent on English pronunciation is a widely recognized phenomenon in second language acquisition research (Hasanah et al., 2024). Phonological transfer from first language (L1) to second language (L2) often results in pronunciation patterns that differ from standard English. In the context of English learners in Indonesia, local languages have different phonetic characteristics that unconsciously affect English articulation, especially in formal speaking activities such as class discussions and presentations.

This study explored pronunciation tendencies among six participants from diverse regional backgrounds: Bengkulu, Bogor, Madura, and Java. Observations during classroom activities and informal conversations revealed consistent pronunciation issues influenced by local dialects. The table below summarizes the pronunciation characteristics found in each participant:

Table 1: Pronunciation Issues Based on Regional Background

Participant code	Region	Observed Pronunciation Tendencies	Example words
S1	Bengkulu	Final consonants are often dropped	"want" → "wan"; "cold" → "col"
S2	Bogor	Monophthongization, weak stress pattern	"about" → "abaut"; "today" → "tudey"
S3	Madura	The [th] sound becomes [t]; hard intonation	"think" → "tink"; "thirty" → "tirti"
S4	East Java	Final consonant omitted; stress misplacement	"doctor" → "doktor"; "record" → "rekord"
S5	Madura	Strong local accent maintained during English speaking	"this" → "dis"; "though" → "dough"
S6	Central Java	Overuse of flat intonation; /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/.	"sure" → "sur"; "decision" → "decission"

This finding was reinforced by the participants' reflections during the interview sessions. For example, S1 (Bengkulu) admitted to often omitting final sounds unintentionally, especially when speaking quickly. S3 (Madura) noted difficulty pronouncing "think" correctly due to automatic tongue movements. Participants from Java (S4 and S6) acknowledged problems with stress and intonation, which they found difficult to control during formal speaking tasks.

These observations suggest that the influence of regional phonology remains strong even among students who have undergone formal pronunciation training. The persistence of such patterns suggests that pronunciation challenges are not just technical errors, but also reflect deep-rooted habits formed by one's linguistic background. The higher a person's level of language mastery, the better the use of the language in communication (Islam, 2023b).

This finding is consistent with previous research. (Jorge Arias & Torres Herrera, 2024) found that a strong L1 accent often inhibits accurate phoneme production among EFL learners (Awwali et al., 2024). Noted the same problem in students from Eastern Indonesia, where interdental and labiodental sounds are particularly problematic as they do not exist in the mother tongue phonetic system.

Moreover, the challenges identified in this study support the concept of first language phonology transfer, where L1 phonology rules are unconsciously applied to L2 utterances. (Mairano et al., 2025) emphasize that pronunciation is not only a linguistic skill but also a reflection of socio-linguistic identity. (Jiang et al., 2024) further argue that segmental and suprasegmental features of regional dialects significantly shape the English speech patterns of Indonesian learners.

The lack of attention to phonological awareness in university curricula may be a contributing factor. Many English programs focus more on grammar and reading skills rather than oral production. As a result, even after completing a pronunciation course, students may continue to struggle with persistent errors related to regional accent disorders. This is not only a pedagogical issue but also a confidence issue for students who feel anxious or embarrassed when corrected or ridiculed by peers, as reported by some participants.

Overall, these findings suggest an urgent need for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to teaching pronunciation in EFL settings. Language teachers should be aware of the influence of regional accents and provide targeted feedback that helps students gradually adjust their speech without neglecting their linguistic identity.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine how regional background affects students' English pronunciation in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. As explained in the background section, pronunciation remains a significant challenge for English language learners in Indonesia, largely due to phonological interference from their mother tongue. This research highlights this by studying students from different regions such as Bengkulu, Bogor, Madura, and Java who have local dialects with different phonetic systems.

Through qualitative methods involving classroom observations, informal discussions, and in-depth interviews, this study reveals that students' regional dialects greatly influence their English pronunciation. This influence appears in the

form of tendencies such as omitting final consonants, misplacing word stress, changing sounds between teeth, and flat intonation. The participants' original voices included in the interview sessions showed that most students were aware of these difficulties, but they had limited strategies to overcome them.

The table summarizing the phonetic trends of each region clearly shows the specific pronunciation challenges of each dialect. These findings reinforce the theories of first language (L1) transfer and social-phonetic influence, which suggest that pronunciation instruction should be sensitive to students' regional backgrounds. Instead of lumping all learners together with the same phonetic approach, EFL teaching should include phonetic training that recognizes dialectal variations and targets specific pronunciation problems.

As a practical recommendation, English teachers are advised to conduct a preliminary diagnosis of students' pronunciation errors caused by mother tongue influences, then provide relevant corrective feedback with examples from regional dialects. Teachers can also enrich learning by listening to various English accents as well as modelling appropriate pronunciation for frequently mispronounced sounds.

This study has limitations, including a relatively small sample size and limited coverage of only a few regions in Indonesia. In addition, the data obtained relied heavily on participant reports and qualitative observations, which may contain elements of subjectivity.

Future research is expected to expand the coverage area and types of dialects studied, as well as test the effectiveness of phonetic learning interventions in helping students overcome pronunciation disorders due to the influence of L1 through phonetic training strategies and structured corrective feedback.

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