

An Analysis of Students' Pronunciation Errors of English Dental Fricative at Universitas Dharmas Indonesia

Sindi Puji Lestari^{1,*}, Martiya Nurni Khairita², Riyadi Saputra³

^{1,2,3}English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Universitas Dharmas Indonesia ;

Sindipujilestari8@gmail.com¹, tiyakhairita@gmail.com², riyadisaputra732@ymail.com³

* Korespondensi: e-mail: tiyakhairita@gmail.com

Diterima: 16 Mei 2026 ; Review: 16 Juni 2026; Disetujui: 16 Juli 2026

Cara sitasi: Asmaryadi, A. I., Susilawati, W. O., & Yanti, N. R. (2026). Pengembangan E-LKPD Berbasis Multisensori Menggunakan Liveworksheet Pada Pembelajaran IPAS di Kelas IV SDN 25 Pulau Punjung. *Journal of Vocational Education and Information Technology*, 7(1), 227-232.

Abstract: This study aimed to identify the types of pronunciation errors and the factors causing errors in producing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ among students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Dharmas Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed involving ten fourth-semester students as the participants. The data were collected through classroom observation, audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis procedures consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that substitution was the only type of pronunciation error identified. The voiceless dental fricative /θ/ was consistently substituted with /t/, while the voiced dental fricative /ð/ was substituted with /d/. No omission or distortion errors were found. The interview results indicated that the errors were influenced by first language interference, difficulties in tongue placement, limited pronunciation practice and exposure, preference for familiar sounds, and the tendency to prioritize fluency over pronunciation accuracy during conversation. The findings are expected to provide useful implications for English lecturers and students in improving pronunciation instruction, particularly in teaching English dental fricative sounds.

Keywords: pronunciation errors, dental fricative, substitutio, English conversation, EFL learners

1. Introduction

English plays an important role in international communication, education, science, and technology. As a foreign language in Indonesia, English is taught from secondary school to higher education with the expectation that students will be able to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms. Among the four language skills, speaking is considered one of the most essential because it enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, and interact with others. However, successful spoken communication depends not only on vocabulary and grammar but also on accurate pronunciation. Incorrect pronunciation may reduce intelligibility and lead to misunderstanding during communication.

Pronunciation is an important component of speaking because it affects how listeners understand spoken messages. According to [1], intelligible pronunciation is more important than achieving a native-like accent because clear pronunciation allows speakers to communicate their ideas successfully. Likewise, [2], explain that pronunciation instruction should receive adequate

attention in English language teaching since pronunciation contributes significantly to communicative competence. Therefore, pronunciation should be considered an essential aspect of English language learning, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Despite its importance, pronunciation remains one of the most challenging aspects of English learning for Indonesian students. One of the primary reasons is the substantial difference between the English and Indonesian sound systems. English contains several consonant sounds that do not exist in Indonesian, causing learners to rely on the phonological system of their first language when producing English words. This first-language interference frequently results in pronunciation errors, particularly when students encounter unfamiliar consonant sounds. Consequently, learners often substitute unfamiliar English sounds with sounds that are more familiar and easier to articulate.

Pronunciation errors can be analyzed through the framework of error analysis, which helps researchers identify the forms and causes of learners' language difficulties. Error analysis provides valuable information about learners' language development and highlights areas that require instructional improvement. Similar findings were reported by [3], who emphasized that error analysis is an effective approach for identifying learners' recurring language errors and understanding the factors contributing to those errors. Therefore, analyzing pronunciation errors can provide useful insights into students' difficulties in producing English dental fricative sounds accurately.

Among the English consonant sounds, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are considered particularly difficult for Indonesian EFL learners. These sounds are produced by placing the tongue between the upper and lower teeth while allowing air to pass continuously through a narrow opening. Since these sounds do not exist in the Indonesian phonological system, students commonly replace /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/. Such substitutions frequently occur in English words such as think, thank, this, they, mother, and brother. Although these substitutions often do not completely prevent communication, they reduce pronunciation accuracy and may affect the clarity of spoken interaction.

Previous studies have consistently reported that English dental fricatives are problematic for EFL learners. [4] found that university students frequently substituted the English dental fricative sounds with alveolar consonants because of first-language influence. Similarly, [5] reported that English Department students experienced persistent difficulties in producing /θ/ and /ð/ accurately. Furthermore, Kafryawan (2023) revealed that Indonesian EFL learners consistently produced substitution errors when pronouncing English dental fricatives, while [6] emphasized that psychological factors, including lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, also contributed to students' pronunciation difficulties.

Although previous studies have investigated pronunciation errors involving English dental fricatives, most of them examined pronunciation through controlled activities such as word lists, reading passages, or pronunciation tests. Only a limited number of studies have investigated how students pronounce dental fricative sounds during spontaneous English conversation, where learners naturally focus on expressing meaning rather than monitoring pronunciation accuracy. Consequently, studies examining pronunciation errors in authentic conversational contexts remain limited.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at the English Education Study Program of Universitas Dharma Indonesia, fourth-semester students still experienced considerable difficulty in producing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ during conversation. Most students tended to substitute these sounds with the Indonesian consonants /t/ and /d/, indicating that the pronunciation difficulties persisted even after they had completed several English language courses. This phenomenon suggests the need for a more comprehensive analysis of the types of pronunciation errors and the factors contributing to those errors in authentic speaking situations.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of pronunciation errors produced by fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Dharma Indonesia when pronouncing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ in conversation and to analyze the factors causing those pronunciation errors. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of English pronunciation teaching, particularly in improving students' ability to produce English dental fricative sounds accurately during real communication.

2. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to identify the types of pronunciation errors and the factors causing the errors in producing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing and interpreting students' pronunciation errors as they naturally occurred during English conversation. The study was conducted at the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Dharma Indonesia.

The participants of this study were ten fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program. They were selected using purposive sampling because they had completed pronunciation and speaking courses and were identified as students who still experienced difficulties in producing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/. Their experiences and pronunciation performance were considered relevant to the objectives of this study.

The data were collected through classroom observation, audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation was conducted to identify students' pronunciation behavior during English conversation activities. Audio recordings were used to obtain accurate pronunciation data and to enable repeated phonetic analysis of students' utterances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants' perceptions and to identify the factors contributing to their pronunciation errors. Documentation, including recording files and supporting research documents, was used to complement the primary data.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by an audio recorder, interview guidelines, and pronunciation assessment rubrics. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by [7] and [8], consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the analysis, students' pronunciation errors were identified and classified based on error analysis theory into substitution, omission, and distortion. Furthermore, the interview data were analyzed to identify the linguistic and non-linguistic factors contributing to the occurrence of pronunciation errors. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing the results obtained from classroom observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Types of Pronunciation Errors

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews involving ten fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Dharma Indonesia. Data from the three instruments were analyzed through triangulation to identify the types of pronunciation errors produced by the participants when pronouncing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ during conversation.

The analysis revealed that substitution was the only pronunciation error identified among the participants. The voiceless dental fricative /θ/ was consistently substituted with the voiceless alveolar stop /t/, while the voiced dental fricative /ð/ was consistently substituted with the voiced alveolar stop /d/. No omission or distortion errors were identified throughout

the observation, audio recording analysis, and interview sessions. This finding indicates that the participants attempted to pronounce all target words but replaced unfamiliar sounds with consonants that were more familiar in their first language.

Table 1. Distribution of Pronunciation Errors

Error Type	Number of Participants	Percentage
Substitution	10	100%
Omission	0	0%
Distortion	0	0%

Table 1 demonstrates that substitution occurred in all participants, representing 100% of the collected data. The absence of omission and distortion errors suggests that the participants did not avoid producing the target words or articulate them unclearly. Instead, they consistently replaced the English dental fricative sounds with consonants that are more familiar within the Indonesian phonological system. Representative examples identified from the audio recordings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Representative Example of Substitution Errors

Participant	Target Word	Correct Pronunciation	Student's Pronunciation	Error Identified
S1	Think	/θɪŋk/	/tɪŋk/	/θ/ - /t/
S2	Thank	/θæŋk/	/tæŋk/	/θ/ - /t/
S3	They	/ðeɪ/	/deɪ/	/ð/ - /d/
S4	That	/ðæt/	/tæt/	/ð/ - /d/
S5	There	/ðer/	/taer/	/ð/ - /d/
S6	Thursday	/θɜːrzdɪ/	/tɜːrzdɪ/	/θ/ - /t/
S7	Mother	/ˈmʌðər/	/mʌdər/	/ð/ - /d/
S8	Father	/ˈfɑːðər/	/fɑːdər/	/ð/ - /d/
S9	Think	/θɪŋk/	/tɪŋk/	/θ/ - /t/
S10	Brother	/ˈbrʌðər/	/ˈbrʌdər/	/ð/ - /d/

The examples in Table 2 clearly illustrate that the participants consistently substituted /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/. These pronunciation patterns appeared repeatedly across different participants and different lexical items, indicating that the errors were systematic rather than accidental.

3.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that substitution was the dominant and only pronunciation error produced by the participants. This pronunciation pattern reflects the influence of the Indonesian phonological system, in which the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are absent. Consequently, the participants relied on the closest consonant sounds available in their first language, namely /t/ and /d/. Such substitutions enabled them to maintain the flow of conversation, although the pronunciation deviated from the standard English pronunciation.

This finding is consistent with [4], who reported that university students frequently substituted English dental fricatives with alveolar consonants because similar sounds do not exist in their native language. Likewise, [9] found that Indonesian EFL learners commonly replaced /θ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/, indicating that first-language interference remains one of the major causes of pronunciation errors among EFL learners.

The interview findings further revealed that the participants experienced difficulty positioning their tongues correctly when producing dental fricative sounds. Most participants admitted that they were unfamiliar with the articulatory process required to produce /θ/ and /ð/. In addition, they reported limited opportunities to practice English pronunciation outside

the classroom, causing them to rely on pronunciation habits influenced by Indonesian phonology. These findings support [2], who emphasize that accurate pronunciation requires both articulatory awareness and continuous pronunciation practice.

Another important finding is that the participants tended to prioritize fluency over pronunciation accuracy during conversation. Instead of monitoring the accuracy of each sound, they focused on delivering their ideas effectively. As a result, unfamiliar sounds were unconsciously replaced with easier consonants to maintain communication. This finding is in line with [1], who explains that language learners often sacrifice pronunciation accuracy in spontaneous communication to maintain fluency and interaction. The interview findings also revealed that several participants lacked confidence when producing unfamiliar English sounds during conversation. This condition may influence learners' willingness to pronounce target sounds accurately because they tend to avoid forms that they perceive as difficult. Similar findings were reported by [10], who found that lack of self-confidence was one of the factors affecting students' English speaking performance. Learners who feel less confident are more likely to rely on familiar language patterns rather than attempting unfamiliar forms during communication.

Unlike several previous studies that reported omission and distortion errors, this study identified only substitution errors. This difference may be related to the conversational context used in this research. During spontaneous interaction, the participants consistently attempted to pronounce every target word but relied on familiar consonants rather than omitting sounds. Therefore, substitution became the dominant pronunciation strategy employed by the participants.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the pronunciation difficulties experienced by the participants were influenced by both linguistic and non-linguistic factors, including first-language interference, limited articulatory awareness, lack of pronunciation practice, and the tendency to prioritize fluency during communication. These findings highlight the importance of providing more intensive pronunciation instruction, particularly in teaching English dental fricative sounds through communicative speaking activities that encourage both pronunciation accuracy and speaking fluency.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the types of pronunciation errors and the factors causing those errors in producing the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ among fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Dharma Indonesia. Based on the analysis of classroom observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews, the study found that substitution was the only type of pronunciation error produced by the participants. The voiceless dental fricative /θ/ was consistently substituted with the voiceless alveolar stop /t/, while the voiced dental fricative /ð/ was consistently substituted with the voiced alveolar stop /d/. No omission or distortion errors were identified during the study.

The findings also revealed that the pronunciation errors were influenced by several interrelated factors, including first language interference, difficulties in tongue placement when producing dental fricative sounds, limited pronunciation practice and exposure to spoken English, preference for familiar consonant sounds, and the tendency to prioritize speaking fluency over pronunciation accuracy during conversation. These factors contributed to the participants' consistent use of substitution as a pronunciation strategy in spontaneous communication.

The findings of this study imply that English pronunciation instruction should place greater emphasis on the articulation of English dental fricative sounds through regular pronunciation practice, explicit instruction on tongue placement, and communicative speaking activities that integrate pronunciation into meaningful interaction. Such instructional practices

are expected to improve students' pronunciation accuracy while maintaining their speaking fluency.

This study was limited to ten fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Dharma Indonesia and focused only on the English dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to involve a larger number of participants, investigate other English consonant or vowel sounds, or compare pronunciation performance across different educational levels to provide broader insights into English pronunciation learning among EFL learners.

Reference

- [1] H. D. Brown, "Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices.," 2010.
- [2] M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, and J. M. Goodwin, *Teaching pronunciation hardback with audio CDs (2): A course book and reference guide*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- [3] R. Saputra, "Students' Error Analysis in Writing Essay of English Language Teaching," *Dharmas Educ. J.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 252–260, 2023, doi: 10.56667/dejournal.v4i1.912.
- [4] R. Metruk, "Pronunciation of English Dental Fricatives by Slovak University EFL Students," vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 11–16, 2017, doi: 10.5539/ijel.v7n3p11.
- [5] D. Merrita, "PRONUNCIATION ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH CONSONANTS / θ / AND / ð / BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT," vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 26–44, 2021.
- [6] A. P. Dyani, N. N. Romadhoni, W. Indah, and M. Rohmana, "Analysis of Mispronunciation The Analysis of Mispronunciation The ' TH ' Sound by EFL Learners in University Level. 1–9.," pp. 1–9, 2025.
- [7] Jhon W. J. David Creswell, *research design*. 2023.
- [8] Sugiono, *metode penelitian kuantitatif kualitatif dan R&D*. 2023.
- [9] W. Kafryawan, "Wira Kafryawan," vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 92–102, 2023.
- [10] N. Martiya Nurni Khairita, Dodi Widia Nanda, "THE EFFECT OF USING THINK- PAIR-SHARE STRATEGY ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL AT EIGHT GRADE UPT SMPN 1 SITIUNG," vol. 10, no. September, 2024.