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EFL Students' Pronunciation in Indonesia and Thailand: Exploring Differences and Errors

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ABSTRACT

Studies comparing language proficiency and errors in pronunciation are mostly an under-researched area in EFL environments. The present study intends to explain the differences and errors in pronunciation found among the students from Indonesia and Thailand. This quantitative study employed comparative design. The participants were sixty-two public secondary schools in Indonesia and Thailand. The research instruments used were pronunciation tests and close-ended questionnaires. Data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analyses. The results showed that there was a significant difference in English pronunciation between the two groups of students, Indonesian and Thai. The Indonesian students made erroneous pronunciations of vowels /a:/, /æ/, /ɔ:/, /ɜ:/, /aʊ/, and the consonants /ʃ/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/. Contrary to this, the Thai learners could not pronounce correctly the vowels sound /a:/, /æ/, /i:/, /ɒ/, /ɜ:/, /əʊ/, /ʊə/, /ɔɪ/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and the consonants /d/, /g/, /p/, /r/, /ʃ/, /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/. Language exposure, the learners' native language, language anxiety, and phonological knowledge were identified as major factors influencing pronunciation errors. The findings point out that the Indonesian and Thai students produce different patterns of English pronunciation errors linguistically and non-linguistically influenced.

Keywords: differences; EFL student, errors; phonological interference; pronunciation

INTRODUCTION

In this current era, English is the official language of almost 70 sovereign countries. Three hundred seventy-five million people are native English speakers, while over 750 million people use English as a second language, and a smaller number of use English as a foreign language (Rao, 2019). English is taught in schools in Indonesia and Thailand as a foreign language. In Indonesia, English has been made a crucial subject from the elementary school level to facilitate the learning of the English language. On the other hand, the primary schools in Thailand nowadays conduct science, math, and physical education classes in English (Peerachachayanee, 2022).

In the context of ASEAN integration, English is getting increasingly important as the working language for education, mobility, and regional cooperation. The ASEAN Economic Community and the increasing number of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs are recent factors that have played a major role in making English a functional language in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Macaro et al., 2018). These changes are primarily going to put a higher demand on students' language abilities

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including, among others, correct pronunciation, which is one of the factors that affect intelligibility in intercultural communication (Bashori, et al., 2024). Furthermore, even though there is a growing regional interest in this area, the number of comparative studies that have been conducted to compare the pronunciation patterns of ASEAN learners is still limited. Indonesian and Thai secondary school students are being the only two groups under the contrasting conditions of having different historical, sociolinguistic, and educational backgrounds (Idrus, 2025; Novika, 2025).

Moreover, Indonesia and Thailand have very different language policies, curriculum orientations and levels of English exposure. While Indonesia has a foreign-language curriculum that gives priority to communicative competence, Thailand has come to use bilingual and EMI programs in primary education but still has learners who have problems with the basics of phonology (Jenkins, 2020; Liao et al., 2025). These dissimilarities underscore the necessity of studying both segmental (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental (stress, rhythm, intonation) features to ascertain how learners' linguistic backgrounds and learning environments impact their pronunciation. A more precise interpretation of these theoretical constructs is also necessary for pinpointing the research gap that is characterized by the lack of empirical, cross-country comparisons that depict differences between Indonesian and Thai learners in terms of error patterns and the factors influencing them. Hence, the current research is aimed at providing a comparative view and justifying its importance for EFL pedagogy in Southeast Asia which in turn will help in the expansion of the existing knowledge.

Pronunciation is one of the most important elements that determine the overall English language proficiency and the ability to communicate effectively. For non-native speakers, pronouncing words correctly might be especially difficult because of the different sounds in their phonological systems and English. To illustrate, Indonesian and Thai students have great difficulties because their languages do not have some important English consonants which cause them to have specific problems with pronunciation (Alfarina & Hartono, 2025). Moreover, besides those differences in languages, pronunciation is also a result of social, cultural, and individual factors such as motivation, anxiety, and exposure to the English language. Geographic, social, historical, and individual traits are among the factors that cause differences in pronunciation (Adeline, 2020). Identification of these factors is a prerequisite for the development of effective teaching strategies that consider the needs of individual students and assist them in improving their pronunciation in a foreign language context (Susanto, et al., 2024).

Pronunciation errors have attracted many researchers to explore (Al-Hamzi et al., 2021; Anam, 2018). Errors in pronunciation are related to segmental and suprasegmental aspects which are influenced by linguistics, psychology, and cognition (Shak, et al., 2016). Although many studies have investigated pronunciation errors in EFL setting, only a few focus on comparing errors in two different settings (Hamzah et al., 2017; Muna, 2015; Rafael, 2019). Concerning the problem explained, this study attempts to answer the following research objectives: 1) to examine whether there is any significant difference in pronunciation between Indonesian and Thai students; 2) to identify the pronunciation errors are made by Indonesian and Thai students; 3) to analyze the factors influence pronunciation errors made by Indonesian and Thai students.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative approach. Quantitative research aims to examine the theories by examining the relation between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design used in this research was comparative design because this study compared two issues in different settings. The researcher conducted this study at two public secondary schools in fall

semester. The Indonesian school was located on Jalan Magelang 7, Purworejo, Central Java, Indonesia and the Thai school was in Ban Thung, Koh Lanta District, Krabi, Thailand. The research participants were sixty-two secondary school students in Indonesia and Thailand.

The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to reduce data bias. Simple random sampling is a method of sampling that gives each member of the population an equal probability of being selected for the sample (Kothari, 2004). A total of thirty-one test results from Indonesian and Thai students were used by the researcher as research samples. Data were collected through pronunciation tests and close-response questionnaires. Pronunciation tests containing forty-four words and twenty sentences were used to assess students' pronunciation and to find significant differences between two groups of students. Also, the pronunciation tests were utilized to identify vowel and consonant errors among students. The validity of the instruments was tested before their distribution to the respondents. Furthermore, the questionnaires consisting of ten statements were utilized to analyze factors influencing pronunciation errors. The influencing factors consisted of language exposure, learners' native language, and language anxiety and phonological knowledge. The questionnaires employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1).

Prior to data collection, informed consents were obtained from all respondents. The researcher employed pronunciation test where all students were asked to read and pronounce the words. The test was conducted in online mode for one hour. Furthermore, the students were administered to fill out online questionnaires through Google Form.

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential analysis through SPSS 23 program. The student voice recordings of the pronunciation test were assessed through a five-aspect scoring rubric. Afterwards, pronunciation errors concerning vowels and consonants were calculated to find students' differences and errors. Also, the responses from the questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed using a descriptive statistic to calculate the frequency and percentage of each item.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

COMPARISON OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION BETWEEN INDONESIAN AND THAI STUDENTS

The researcher took pronunciation test outcomes from Indonesian and Thai students who were in the second year of senior high school. Segmental aspects (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental aspects (word stress, sentence stress, and intonation) were all analyzed. A scoring rubric was used to carry out the assessment. Each of the five different aspects could get a maximum score of 5 points, which makes up a total of 25 points. However, since the scale value that the research employed is 100, the total score is multiplied by 4.

Based on the provided data, it is evident that the cumulative score of Indonesian students was 2296. The maximum score was 96, and the minimum score was 40. Meanwhile, the sum of the Thai students' scores was 1932, with a maximum score of 80 and a minimum score of 40. After describing the data, the researcher analyzed the data using statistical calculations.

TABLE 1. Descriptive and inferential analyses of students' pronunciation results

Groups	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Indonesian students	74.62	15.69	3.59	0.63
Thai students	62.25	11.44		

This research employed two stages of analysis. The data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analyses. The researcher used the independent sample t-test to test hypotheses using SPSS. The T-test of Independent Sample examines the comparison hypothesis of two independent samples when the data type is interval or ratio (Rao, 2009). The independent sample t-test is employed when the two sample groups are unrelated.

The hypothesis test results showed a significance of 0.001. A significant difference occurs when the p-value is <0.05. If the p-value>0.05, there is no significant difference between the means of the two samples (Field, 2017).

LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION ERRORS ON VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

To address the second research question, which is about English pronunciation errors made by Indonesian and Thai students, the researcher analyzed students' voice recordings. This study's analysis of pronunciation errors focused on identifying errors involving vowels and consonants.

TABLE 3. Indonesian students' phoneme errors

	V	Words	Correct Pronunciation	Common Errors	C	Words	Correct Pronunciation	Common Errors
Indonesian Students	/aː/	rather	ˈraːðər	reðər	/d/	address	ˈəˌdres	atres
	/æ/	alcohol	ˈælkəhɔːl	alkɔːhɔːl	/g/	begin	bɪˈgɪn	bɪkɪn
	/iː/	heathen	ˈhiːðən	hedən	/p/	compress	kəmˈpres	kəmres
	/ɔː/	August	ɔːˈgʌst	augus	/ʃ/	English	ˈɪŋlɪʃ	ɪŋlɪs
	/ʊ/	woman	ˈwʊmən	wɔːmən	/θ/	thingking	ˈθɪŋkɪŋ	tɪŋkɪŋ
	/ɒ/	offer	ˈɒfər	aufər	/ð/	although	ˌɔːlˈðoʊ	aːltog
	/ɜː/	worthy	ˈwɜːrði	wɔːrti	/j/	Europe	ˈjʊrəp	europ
	/eɪ/	nation	ˈneɪʃən	nation	/ʒ/	decision	dɪˈsɪʒən	dɪsɪʃən
	/əʊ/	sofa	ˈsəʊfə	sofa	/tʃ/	kitchen	ˈkɪʧən	kɪʃən
	/ʊə/	insecure	ˌɪnsɪˈkjʊə	ɪnsɪkjur	/dʒ/	general	ˈʤenərəl	genəral
	/aɪ/	divide	dɪˈvaɪd	dɪvɪd				
	/aʊ/	anyhow	ˈeniˌhaʊ	enihoʊ				
	/ɪə/	appear	əˈpɪə	əpər				
	/eə/	careful	ˈkeəfl	kerful				

TABLE 4. Thai students' phoneme errors

Thai Students	/aː/	rather	ˈraːðər	reðər	/d/	address	ˈəˌdres	əndres
	/æ/	alcohol	ˈælkəhɔːl	akɔːhɔːl	/f/	office	ˈɔːfəs	ɔːwəs
	/e/	jealous	ˈʤeləs	ʃelɔːŋ	/g/	begin	bɪˈgɪn	bɪkʰaɪn
	/iː/	heathen	ˈhiːðən	henten	/k/	country	ˈkʌntriː	kʰʌntiː
	/ə/	among	əˈmʌŋ	əmɔːŋ	/l/	believe	bɪˈliːv	bɪwiːv
	/uː/	improve	ɪmˈpruːv	ɪmpɔːw	/ŋ/	hungry	ˈhʌŋgriː	hʌngriː
	/ɒ/	offer	ˈɒfər	oʊwa	/p/	compress	kəmˈpres	komfɪs
	/ɜː/	worthy	ˈwɜːrði	wɔːʧi	/r/	relation	rɪˈleɪʃn	lɪˈleɪʃn
	/əʊ/	sofa	ˈsəʊfə	soʊfa	/s/	stupid	ˈstuːpɪd	tuːpɪd
	/ʊə/	insecure	ˌɪnsɪˈkjʊə	ɪnsekea	/ʃ/	English	ˈɪŋlɪʃ	ɪŋlɪt
	/ɔɪ/	employ	emˈplɔɪ	empɔl	/t/	teller	ˈtelər	tʰewə
	/ɪə/	appear	əˈpɪə	empe	/θ/	thinking	ˈθɪŋkɪŋ	ˈtʰɪŋkɪt
	/eə/	careful	ˈkeəfl	kewl	/ð/	although	ˌɔːlˈðoʊ	ɔːltog
					/v/	very	ˈveriː	weriː
					/j/	Europe	ˈjʊrəp	europ
					/z/	amazing	əˈmeɪzɪŋ	ameɪʃɪŋ
					/ʒ/	decision	dɪˈsɪʒən	desɪʃən
					/tʃ/	kitchen	ˈkɪʧən	kɪʃən

The researcher analyzed phoneme errors that Indonesian and Thai students frequently made. After identifying errors in vowels and consonants, the researcher counted the number of errors in each phoneme. The number of errors was calculated to determine the frequency of students' errors on certain phonemes.

TABLE 5. Frequency of students' phoneme errors

	Vowels	Frequency	Consonants	Frequency
Indonesian Students	/aː/	18	/d/	7
	/æ/	25	/g/	12
	/iː/	14	/p/	3
	/ɔː/	15	/ʃ/	28
	/ʊ/	8	/θ/	26
	/ɒ/	6	/ð/	29
	/ɜː/	18	/j/	13
	/eɪ/	4	/ʒ/	27
	/əʊ/	11	/tʃ/	9
	/ʊə/	6	/dʒ/	5
	/aɪ/	10		
	/aʊ/	17		
	/ɪə/	12		
	/eə/	10		
Thai Students	/aː/	23	/d/	18
	/æ/	27	/f/	5
	/e/	13	/g/	16
	/iː/	16	/k/	3
	/ə/	11	/l/	2
	/uː/	14	/ŋ/	9
	/ɒ/	26	/p/	22
	/ɜː/	27	/r/	19
	/əʊ/	20	/s/	7
	/ʊə/	28	/ʃ/	21
	/ɔɪ/	15	/t/	2
	/ɪə/	16	/θ/	30
	/eə/	16	/ð/	23
			/v/	28
			/j/	9
			/z/	16
			/ʒ/	27
			/tʃ/	29

The data showed that Indonesian learners tend to pronounce the vowel /aː/, /æ/, /ɔː/, /ɜː/, /aʊ/ and the consonant /ʃ/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/ incorrectly. Meanwhile, the vowel /aː/, /æ/, /iː/, /ɒ/, /ɜː/, /əʊ/, /ʊə/, /ɔɪ/, /ɪə/, /eə/ and the consonant /d/, /g/, /p/, /r/, /ʃ/, /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/ were frequently mispronounced by Thai students.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PRONUNCIATION ERRORS

The indicators that impact students' pronunciation consist of the interference of the mother tongue, phonological language, language exposure, and language anxiety. The researcher constructed a questionnaire of 10 statement items based on the indicators. The questionnaire was closed-ended questions. A total of 62 respondents filled out the questionnaire with a total of ten items. A Likert scale which consisted of *strongly agree* (5), *agree* (4), *neutral* (3), *disagree* (2), and *strongly disagree* (1), was used as the questionnaire response model.

TABLE 6. Questionnaire responses

No	Statements	Responses				
		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	My native language significantly impacts my English pronunciation	30	34	8	0	0

2	The accent and dialect of my native language affect my ability to imitate English accent and intonation	23	32	7	0	0
3	I have a good understanding of English pronunciation	2	12	31	14	3
4	My understanding of English vowels and consonants enables me to prevent pronunciation errors	9	32	18	3	0
5	My comprehension of English accent and intonation improves my pronunciation accuracy	12	34	15	1	0
6	I primarily use my native language for communication due to the lack of English speakers in my environment	31	27	4	0	0
7	My English pronunciation is affected by the limited chances to converse with native speakers or individuals with good pronunciation	17	36	9	0	0
8	Limited access to English audio materials or pronunciation resources impacts my English pronunciation	15	34	13	0	0
9	I am less confident in speaking English	24	20	11	6	1
10	I am obstructed by insecurity or fear of making mistakes when speaking English	21	27	12	2	0

Furthermore, the researcher calculated each statement item's percentage, mean value, and standard deviation. The percentage of each item was calculated using the $P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$ formula. Each item's mean value and standard deviation were calculated by frequency analysis using SPSS 23.

TABLE 7. The percentage of questionnaire responses

No	Statements	Percentage	
		IS	TS
1	My native language significantly impacts my English pronunciation	80%	87.7%
2	The accent and dialect of my native language affect my ability to imitate English accent and intonation	83.9%	86.4%
3	I have a good understanding of English pronunciation	59.4%	58%
4	My understanding of English vowels and consonants enables me to prevent pronunciation errors	76.8%	73.5%
5	My comprehension of English accent and intonation improves my pronunciation accuracy	80.6%	76%
6	I primarily use my native language for communication due to the lack of English speakers in my environment	92.2%	85.2%
7	My English pronunciation is affected by the limited chances to converse with native speakers or individuals with good pronunciation	82.6%	82.6%
8	Limited access to English audio materials or pronunciation resources impacts my English pronunciation	84.5%	76.8%
9	I am less confident in speaking English	81.9%	76.8%
10	I am obstructed by insecurity or fear of making mistakes when speaking English	82.6%	80.6%

TABLE 8. The mean value of each indicator

No	Indicators	Items	Mean Values
1	The interference of the mother tongue	My native language significantly impacts my English pronunciation	4.19
		The accent and dialect of my native language affect my ability to imitate English accent and intonation	4.26
2	Phonological knowledge	I have a good understanding of English pronunciation	2.94
		My understanding of English vowels and consonants enables me to prevent pronunciation errors	3.76
		My comprehension of English accent and intonation improves my pronunciation accuracy	3.92
3	Language exposure	I primarily use my native language for communication due to the lack of English speakers in my environment	4.44

		My English pronunciation is affected by the limited chances to converse with native speakers or individuals with good pronunciation	4.13
		Limited access to English audio materials or pronunciation resources impacts my English pronunciation	4.03
		I am less confident in speaking English	3.97
4	Language anxiety	I am obstructed by insecurity or fear of making mistakes when speaking English	4.08

Some factors, such as the interference of the mother tongue, phonological knowledge, language exposure, and language anxiety, can lead to pronunciation problems. The researcher employed a questionnaire to determine which factors most significantly affect students' pronunciation errors. Based on the analysis of the four factors that influence pronunciation errors, language exposure has the greatest influence on language exposure. Followed by the interference of the mother tongue, language anxiety, and phonological knowledge.

Indonesian learners achieved the highest score of 96 and the lowest score of 40. The average score of the Indonesian students was 74.06. The calculated standard deviation was 15.69275. In the case of Thai students, the highest score was 80, while the lowest score was 40. The average score of the Thai students was 62.32. The calculated standard deviation was 11.44374. Based on the analysis, the evaluator concluded that Indonesian learners were more proficient in English pronunciation than their Thai counterparts. This conclusion was also reached by some other researchers (Kalaldeh, 2016; Setiawan, 2016). Setiawan's research compared the English pronunciation of Javanese, Sundanese, Thai, and Thai-Malay students. The results indicate that the Thai and Thai-Malay students made a lot of mistakes, whereas the Sundanese and Javanese students made very few mistakes (Octaviana, 2019).

After comparing English pronunciation of Indonesian and Thai students, the researcher conducted an analysis of the students' pronunciation errors. This study focus was the vowel and consonant aspects of the sound. Table 3 presented the error frequency for each of the phonemes analyzed. From the table, it can be inferred that the vowel /aː/ was the most pronounced incorrectly by Indonesian students with a frequency of 18, followed by consonant /æ/ of frequency 25, vowel /ɔː/ frequency 15, vowel /ɜː/ frequency 18, glide /aʊ/ frequency 17, consonant /ʃ/ frequency 28, voiceless /θ/ frequency 26, voiced /ð/ frequency 29, and /ʒ/ frequency of 27. On the other hand, Thai students were found to be more prone to mispronouncing the vowels in the phoneme /aː/ occurring 23 times, /æ/ 27 times, /iː/ 16 times, /ɒ/ 26 times, /ɜː/ 27 times, /əʊ/ 20 times, /ʊə/ 28 times, /ɔɪ/ 15 times, /ɪə/ 16 times, /eə/ 16 times, consonant signals /d/ occurred 18 times, /g/ 16 times, /p/ 22 times, /r/ 19 times, /ʃ/ 21 times, /θ/ 30 times, /ð/ 23 times, /v/ 28 times, /z/ 16 times, /ʒ/ 27 times, and /tʃ/ 29 times. Students seem to be quite unsure when it comes to the pronunciation of vowel phonemes (Maiza, 2020; Pratiwi & Indrayani, 2021).

On the other hand, while pronouncing consonants, students are more likely to swap the English consonant sounds by sounds in their mother tongue, for example swapping /l/ with /w/, swapping /k/ with /kh/, swapping /v/ with /w/, and swapping /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/. The researcher also compared this study with others conducted previously. It was found that Thai speakers have a hard time with particular allophones such as /z/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /v/, /tʃ/, /b/, /dʒ/, /d/, /l/, /t/, /s/, /k/, and /b/. In a similar vein, Indonesian speakers encounter the same difficulty with sounds like /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /v/, /tʃ/, /z/, /dʒ/, /k/, /w/, and /g/ (Febrianto, 2021; Yusriati & Hasibuan, 2019).

It was also found that language exposure has the most significant impact, especially on statement 6. This factor is followed by the interference of the mother tongue, language anxiety, and phonological knowledge. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Sukarni et al., which states that students have limitations in learning correct pronunciation related to the infrequency of schools that recruit English native speakers. Therefore, students' pronunciation is influenced by lack of exposure. Other factors contributing to pronunciation errors include

the influence of the mother tongue, intralingual errors, learning strategy, and students' attitudes (Sukarni et al., 2020). In addition, many researchers explained that pronunciation errors are most often influenced by native language and social background factors (Febrianto, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicate a statistically significant difference in English pronunciation proficiency between Indonesian and Thai students. Indonesian students achieve better pronunciation than Thai students. The results also reveal that Thai students demonstrate higher pronunciation error than Indonesian students. The occurrence of pronunciation errors might be attributed to many variables. Several factors have been identified as influential in the occurrence of pronunciation errors, namely language exposure, interference from the mother tongue, language anxiety, and phonological understanding.

Based on these findings, English teachers should create effective learning instruction by considering learners' linguistic background and affective factors to minimize errors and enhance language proficiency. Also, learners are encouraged to develop their pronunciation problems awareness by constant practice, taking instructors' feedback, and listening to authentic English input like movies, podcasts, and chatting with fluent speakers. This research involved just two non-native student groups from two countries in South-East Asia and did not take into account the factors that might have affected the results. Future research may take into consideration differences of individual students in cognitive, affective, and psychological aspects.

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