

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter consist of background of the study, research questions, the objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation.

1.1. Background of the Study

In many Indonesian elementary schools, students begin learning English at an early age, pronunciation especially vowel production, remains one of the most persistent challenges. Young learners may recognise words and understand basic grammar, but producing English vowels accurately demands skills that ordinary classroom exposure does not always develop. English has a wider and more complex vowel system than Indonesian or Madurese, so children often replace unfamiliar vowels with the closest sounds available in their first language. Over time, these habits affect their intelligibility and confidence in speaking. This situation shows that pronunciation problems among young EFL learners are not simply a matter of “knowing the word,” but rather a deeper phonetic issue that needs more focused attention.

Because pronunciation difficulties often occur at the level of articulation and acoustic detail, analysing learners’ sounds through a phonetic and acoustic approach becomes important. Listening alone may not reveal small shifts in vowel quality, such as centralisation, shortened duration, or altered formant patterns that make a word sound unclear. Tools like Praat help capture these details by showing how learners actually produce sounds in terms of frequency, intensity, and duration. Several recent studies in Indonesia have used Praat to examine vowel production and have consistently found measurable differences between learners’ speech and target English vowels, such as reduced vowel space or inconsistent diphthong quality (e.g., Widya, 2020; Nurpahmi, 2023). These findings suggest that combining phonetic transcription with acoustic measurement can give a more accurate explanation of why certain vowel errors occur and how they affect comprehensibility.

This study focuses on students enrolled in the English Class Program at SDI Al-Munawwarah Madura. This group is important to examine because they receive more structured English instruction than typical elementary classrooms, yet their pronunciation development has not been documented in detail. Although additional learning hours may provide more exposure, young learners are still influenced by the phonology of their first language, especially in a bilingual region like Madura, where both Indonesian and Madurese shape children's speech patterns. Previous research on pronunciation errors mostly examines junior high, senior high, or university students. For example, journal of "An Analysis of Students' Pronunciation Errors" (Maiza, 2020) reported persistent difficulties in English vowels among high-school learners. Second, journal entitled "An Analysis of Pronunciation Errors Produced by Indonesian Learners of English: A Case Study of English Department Students of Trunodjoyo University" (Khoirunnisa & Misnadin, 2022) found that university students often substituted unfamiliar vowels with Indonesian-like sounds. The third previous study is a journal entitled "Analysis of Students Phonological Errors in Pronouncing Vowel Sounds a Case Study of English Learners in Indonesia" (Lubis et al., 2024) showed that diphthongs such as [ɔʊ] and [aɪ] were frequently mispronounced by secondary learners. Although useful, these studies do not represent younger learners who are still developing phonological awareness. This gap makes it necessary to investigate how elementary students in a structured English program actually produce English vowels.

To guide this analysis, the study uses two complementary theoretical perspectives. Kenworthy's (1987) Error Analysis framework helps classify the types of vowel deviations produced by learners, such as substitutions or additions that alter the intended sound. Meanwhile, the principles of Acoustic Phonetics from Ladefoged and Johnson (2015) provide a scientific basis for examining measurable aspects of pronunciation, including formant frequencies and vowel duration. Using both approaches allows the study to describe the errors clearly and also explain how they appear acoustically. In other words, the theories help the research move beyond merely identifying "wrong vowels" toward

understanding the nature of those errors and how they can be addressed in teaching. Together, these perspectives make it possible to produce a detailed and practical description of students' vowel pronunciation in the English Class Program at SDI Al-Munawwarah.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are divided into two questions, which are:

1. What types of pronunciation errors do students in the English Class Program at SDI Al-Munawwarah Madura make in pronouncing English words?
2. What are the acoustic features of students' English pronunciation as analyzed using *Praat* software?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

To answer the research questions, the purpose of this study is divided into two answer, those are:

1. To identify the types of pronunciation errors made by the students in the English Class Program at SDI Al-Munawwarah Madura in pronouncing selected English words.
2. To analyze the acoustic features of students' English pronunciation using *Praat* software.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study is important because it contributes to a deeper understanding of vowel pronunciation problems among young EFL learners, an area that has not been explored as much as studies on older learners. Most pronunciation research focuses on secondary school or university students, while detailed phonetic studies on elementary learners especially involving acoustic analysis remain limited. Recent work in pronunciation teaching shows that early exposure to accurate vowel models supports children's phonological development and improves later speaking fluency (Himmayati & Triyoko, 2024). However,

many teachers still rely on listening-based judgments, which often miss subtle vowel shifts that influence intelligibility. By incorporating error analysis together with acoustic measurements such as formants and duration, this study provides objective evidence of how young learners produce English vowels, filling a theoretical gap in the understanding of their phonological development in an EFL setting. In this way, the study strengthens the theoretical link between early pronunciation acquisition and the role of phonetic detail in developing clear and intelligible speech.

Practically, the findings of this research will be useful for English teachers, curriculum designers, and future researchers who seek to improve pronunciation instruction for young learners. By identifying which vowels are most frequently mispronounced and showing how these errors appear acoustically, teachers can design more focused instructional activities rather than relying on general pronunciation practice. Visual feedback from Praat, for instance, can help students see the difference between their vowel production and the target, making vowel learning more concrete and interactive. Research on young learners has shown that phonics-based and phonetic-focused instruction can significantly improve pronunciation accuracy when supported with clear models and explicit teaching (Gumelar & Lestari, 2024). Therefore, the practical contribution of this study lies not only in describing the learners' difficulties but also in offering evidence-based insights that can help improve instructional strategies, classroom materials, and future research on vowel pronunciation in elementary-level EFL contexts.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

This study focuses specifically on the pronunciation of English monophthong vowels produced by students in the English Class Program at SDI Al-Munawwarah, Madura. The analysis investigates the types of vowel deviations learners produce, such as inaccurate vowel quality, reduced vowel clarity, and inappropriate vowel length. The explanations of these deviations will use acoustic evidence. The study applies Kenworthy's (1987) perspective on pronunciation difficulties to describe the nature of vowel errors, while the Acoustic Phonetics

framework by Ladefoged and Johnson (2015) guides the measurement of formant frequencies (F1 and F2) and vowel duration through Praat. By combining these two approaches, the study aims to give a clear description of how monophthong vowels are produced by young learners and how their productions differ from the expected English targets.

This research is limited to analyzing 10 selected English words containing monophthong vowels, produced by 12 sixth grades students from SDI Al-Munawwarah. The restricted number of participants and words is intended to maintain recording consistency and allow for detailed phonetic and acoustic interpretation. The word list focuses solely on monophthongs that Indonesian and Madurese learners frequently struggle with, such as /i:/, /ɪ/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /a/, /ɒ/, /ɔ/, /ʌ/, /u/, and /ʊ/. Because of this limited scope, the findings represent only the pronunciation patterns of the selected students and cannot be generalized to all elementary learners. However, the results still offer valuable insight into how young learners in a structured English program produce English monophthongs and where their pronunciation challenges typically occur.