

# The Influence of Serawainese Dialect Context on English Pronunciation (A Descriptive Qualitative Research at The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade of SMP Negeri 34 Seluma)

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## Abstract

This study examines how eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma pronounce English in relation to the Serawai dialect. The study was conducted because students with Serawai as their mother tongue often encounter difficulties in pronouncing several English sounds that are absent in their local dialect. The objectives of this research are to identify which aspects of English pronunciation are most affected by the Serawai dialect and to analyze the factors contributing to these difficulties. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, pronunciation tests, and interviews. The findings revealed that the Serawai dialect strongly influences students' pronunciation, especially in consonant sounds such as /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/, as well as vowel and diphthong sounds such as /ə/, /ɜ:/, /æ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, and /ʊə/. In addition, the study found four major factors contributing to students' difficulties: mother tongue interference, lack of pronunciation practice, limited learning methods, and low confidence in speaking English. These findings indicate that pronunciation problems are not caused solely by dialectal influence but also by pedagogical and affective factors. Therefore, teachers are expected to provide more focused pronunciation training, supported by varied methods and consistent practice, to help students overcome these challenges.

**Keywords:** *dialect influence, negative transfer, phonology, pronunciation, Serawai dialect*

## Introduction

Language serves as a fundamental medium of communication that enables humans to share thoughts, feelings, and knowledge across different social and cultural backgrounds. Indonesia, as a multilingual nation, possesses hundreds of local languages and dialects that coexist alongside Bahasa Indonesia and foreign languages such as English. One of these local dialects is the Serawai dialect, predominantly spoken by the people of Seluma and southern Bengkulu. Although it holds cultural and historical significance for its speakers, this dialect presents phonological patterns that differ significantly from English, thereby influencing the acquisition of English pronunciation skills among learners. In second language acquisition (SLA), this phenomenon is known as negative transfer, wherein linguistic habits of a first language (L1) interfere with the production of sounds in a second language (L2) (Yang, 2022). This study is grounded in the observation that eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma often mispronounce several English sounds due to the influence of their mother tongue, which affects their oral communication skills and overall English proficiency.

The background of the problem lies in the persistent difficulties these students face in producing English phonemes that do not exist in the Serawai dialect. Previous studies have established that such interference often occurs in multilingual contexts where the phonological systems of L1 and L2 differ markedly (Kabir et al., 2010; Maulina & Wennyta, 2021). For example, consonant sounds such as /v/, /θ/, /ð/, and fricatives like /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ in English are frequently replaced with their closest equivalents in Serawai. Similarly, several English vowels, including /æ/, /ɜ:/, and diphthongs such as /əʊ/, /eə/, and /ʊə/, are either substituted or simplified. This leads to recurrent pronunciation errors, such as pronouncing *think* as *tink* or *avoid* as *əpɔɪd*. Such errors hinder not only intelligibility but also the learners' confidence, often resulting in communication anxiety and reduced classroom participation (Hajar & Rahman, 2022).

The issue is exacerbated by the sociolinguistic environment in Seluma, where the Serawai dialect dominates daily interactions both at home and in the community. According to Nelu et al. (2021), students exposed predominantly to their mother tongue outside the classroom tend to retain native phonological patterns, making it harder for them to acquire the target language's sound system. This aligns with the Speech Learning Model (SLM) proposed by Flege (1995), which posits that L2 learners rely on pre-existing phonetic categories from their L1 when encountering unfamiliar sounds in the target language. Consequently, Serawai-speaking students perceive English phonemes through the lens of their dialect, resulting in systematic pronunciation deviations.

Empirical data collected through preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma further highlight this challenge. Interviews with English teachers revealed that approximately 68% of eighth-grade students frequently mispronounced English words due to dialectal influence. Classroom observations supported these findings, indicating consistent errors in consonant substitution, omission of final sounds, and misplacement of stress. National statistics also echo these local findings; a report by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2023) indicates that only about 35% of students in rural areas, including Bengkulu, achieve pronunciation proficiency comparable to international standards, compared to 60% in urban regions. This disparity suggests that dialectal background and limited access to pronunciation-focused pedagogy significantly impact learners' oral performance.

In response to these issues, this research is designed to investigate two core problems: (1) which aspects of English pronunciation are most affected by the Serawai dialect, and (2) what factors contribute to these difficulties. The study specifically focuses on eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma, as they represent a transitional stage in SLA where foundational phonological patterns are still malleable but already influenced by years of dialect use. By narrowing the scope to this demographic, the research seeks to provide targeted insights into both phonetic and pedagogical challenges.

The objectives of the research are twofold: first, to identify the particular English phonemes, stress patterns, and intonation features that are significantly influenced by the Serawai dialect; and second, to analyze the social, psychological, and pedagogical factors that exacerbate these pronunciation difficulties. Understanding these dimensions is essential for developing effective instructional strategies that accommodate students' linguistic backgrounds.

The significance of the study extends to several stakeholders. Theoretically, it contributes to the fields of phonology and sociolinguistics by offering empirical evidence of dialectal interference in SLA within the Indonesian context. Practically, it benefits teachers by equipping them with knowledge about common pronunciation barriers faced

by Serawai-speaking students, enabling them to design more targeted teaching methods, such as phonetic drills, audio-visual aids, and corrective feedback strategies. For students, the study raises awareness of how their dialect influences their speech production, encouraging them to focus on error correction and active practice. Schools may also use these findings to enhance their English language curriculum with a stronger emphasis on pronunciation skills, while future researchers can draw on this study as a reference for exploring similar issues in other dialectal regions.

In line with these aims, several key terms are clarified. Serawai dialect refers to the local variety of language spoken predominantly in southern Bengkulu, characterized by distinctive phonetic features that differ from both standard Bahasa Indonesia and English. English pronunciation denotes the ability to articulate English sounds including vowels, consonants, stress, intonation, and rhythm in a manner that is comprehensible to native and non-native speakers. Dialectal influence refers to the transfer of phonological and articulatory patterns from a speaker's mother tongue into their second language, which often leads to systematic deviations from the standard pronunciation norms of the target language.

By situating the study within well-established linguistic theories namely Flege's Speech Learning Model (1995), Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990)—the research underscores that pronunciation challenges arise not solely from phonetic differences but also from limited exposure to authentic English input and insufficient metalinguistic awareness. These frameworks collectively explain why Serawai-speaking students substitute or omit certain English sounds and how increased input and awareness could mitigate such errors.

Ultimately, this chapter underscores the importance of addressing pronunciation barriers rooted in dialectal interference. By identifying specific challenges and their underlying causes, the research aims to inform pedagogical practices that enhance students' pronunciation accuracy, build their communicative confidence, and improve their overall English proficiency. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for future curriculum development that acknowledges the interplay between linguistic diversity and foreign language acquisition in Indonesia.

## Method

This chapter explains the methodological framework used in the study entitled "The Influence of Serawainese Dialect Context on English Pronunciation". The methodology was designed to answer the research problems and achieve the objectives by describing the research design, setting and participants, sources of data, data collection instruments and techniques, research procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Each component is explained in detail to ensure that the study is transparent and replicable.

The research employed a descriptive qualitative design because the aim was to investigate and describe the influence of the Serawai dialect on students' English pronunciation as it naturally occurred in the classroom context. According to Creswell (2018), descriptive qualitative research is appropriate for exploring social and linguistic phenomena without the need for statistical hypothesis testing, as it focuses on providing rich, detailed descriptions of events or behaviors. This design allowed the researcher to capture authentic speech patterns of the students and explore the extent to which their mother tongue interfered with the target language. By using this approach, the study was able to analyze the types of phonological errors and to identify other contributing factors, such as students' exposure to English and their affective responses to speaking activities.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma, a public junior high school in Seluma Regency, Bengkulu Province. This site was chosen because most of its students come from Serawai-speaking households, which makes it an ideal environment to observe dialectal influence on English pronunciation. The participants were eighth-grade students in the academic year 2024/2025 who were already receiving formal English instruction. The researcher applied purposive sampling to select students who actively used the Serawai dialect at home. A total of 30 students participated in the pronunciation performance test and were observed during regular English lessons. From these participants, five students showing consistent pronunciation difficulties were selected for in-depth interviews to gain more insight into individual challenges. In addition, two English teachers were interviewed to provide information about teaching strategies and common pronunciation issues faced by their students.

The data in this study came from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data included students' recorded pronunciation performances, observation field notes, and transcripts of semi-structured interviews conducted with students and teachers. These primary data provided direct evidence of how the Serawai dialect shaped students' English pronunciation patterns. The secondary data consisted of relevant documents such as school profiles, lesson plans, demographic information of students, and previous research findings, which served to support and contextualize the primary data.

To collect comprehensive and valid data, the researcher used several instruments and techniques. The first instrument was a pronunciation performance test, in which students were asked to read aloud a list of English words, phrases, and sentences that contained phonemes commonly mispronounced by Serawai speakers, such as /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /æ/, /əʊ/, and /ɪə/. Their performances were digitally recorded to enable detailed phonetic transcription and subsequent analysis. The second technique was classroom observation, which involved taking structured field notes on students' spontaneous pronunciation during speaking activities and recording the type of feedback provided by the teacher. The third instrument was interview guidelines for semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward pronunciation learning and the influence of the Serawai dialect. Lastly, documentation techniques were used to collect supporting materials such as lesson plans and school records. The use of various instruments ensured data triangulation, which, as noted by Patton (2015), enhances the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings.

The research followed several procedural steps. During the preparation stage, the researcher obtained permission from the school principal and English teachers, prepared all instruments, and scheduled the data collection sessions. The data collection stage included conducting classroom observations, administering the pronunciation test to the selected students, recording their performances, and carrying out interviews. Once the data were gathered, they were organized systematically into transcripts, observation notes, and coded recordings. To validate the findings, the researcher conducted member checking with participants and compared the results across different data sources to ensure accuracy.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher identified and focused on pronunciation errors related to dialectal interference, such as substituting /θ/ with /t/ or /v/ with /p/, misplacing stress, and omitting final consonants.

In the data display stage, the findings were organized into descriptive narratives and tables to show patterns of errors. The final step involved drawing conclusions and interpreting the results based on theoretical frameworks such as Flege's Speech Learning Model (1995), Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990), which helped explain how phonetic transfer, limited input, and lack of awareness contributed to students' pronunciation challenges.

To ensure trustworthiness, the research applied the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of instruments, and member checking with students and teachers. Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the research setting and participants. Dependability was maintained by documenting every step of the research process as an audit trail, while confirmability was achieved by minimizing researcher bias and keeping the analysis grounded in the data.

Ethical considerations were also prioritized throughout the research process. The researcher obtained formal consent from the school administration and informed consent from the students and their parents. The identities of all participants were kept confidential, and all audio recordings were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

In conclusion, the research methodology employed in this study provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of the Serawai dialect on English pronunciation among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma. By integrating pronunciation tests, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzing them qualitatively, the study successfully captured the interplay between linguistic factors and the learning environment that shaped students' pronunciation performance.

## Results

The research investigated the influence of the Serawai dialect on the English pronunciation of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 34 Seluma. Data were collected through a pronunciation performance test, classroom observation, voice recording with phonetic transcription, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that the Serawai dialect strongly shapes students' articulation of several English sounds and that the challenges are distributed across three main phonological domains: consonants, vowels, and diphthongs.

### 1. Dominant areas of interference.

Analysis of 39 problematic lexical items shows that consonant sounds were the most affected (18 items), followed by diphthongs (13 items) and vowels (8 items). Consonant errors primarily involved sounds /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/. These sounds do not naturally occur or are not contrastive in the Serawai phonemic inventory; consequently, students replaced them with the closest sounds from their L1—for instance, /v/ → /f or p/, /θ/ → /t/, and /ð/ → /d/.

#### a. Consonant-level examples.

Words such as *five*, *very*, *have*, and *evening* were frequently realized with [f] or [p] instead of [v], producing forms like *faif* or *paif*. Dental fricatives were substituted: *three* /θri:/ became *tri*, and *this* /ðɪs/ became *dis*. The palato-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ were often replaced by /s/ or /z/, e.g., *she* → *si*, *television* → *televisen*.

**b. Vowel-level interference.**

Students struggled with English central and low vowels absent in their L1. The schwa /ə/ and open-front /æ/ were often approximated by [a] or [e], while /ɜ:/ tended to be shortened or centralized. This produced forms such as *teacher* → *ticer* [ti:cer] and *man* → *men* [men].

**c. Diphthong-level interference.**

English diphthongs /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, and /ʊə/ were usually simplified to monophthongs, reflecting the monophthongal tendency of Serawai phonology. For example, *go* /gəʊ/ was rendered [go], *ear* /ɪə/ → [ia], and *tour* /tʊə/ → [tu].

**d. Extent of influence.**

Interview data revealed that many students admitted consciously relying on Serawai articulation habits when unsure about English sounds. Several confessed that they practiced pronunciation only during formal lessons, rarely continuing at home. This irregular exposure limited improvement over time.

## **2. Contributing factors.**

Four key factors were identified:

- 1) Mother-tongue interference: structural absence of certain English phonemes.
- 2) Lack of consistent practice: limited to in-class correction without follow-up drilling.
- 3) Limited instructional emphasis on pronunciation: teachers prioritised grammar and vocabulary over phonology, with minimal audio-visual or phonetic-based exercises.
- 4) Low self-confidence and high affective filter: students were anxious about speaking English aloud, which restricted opportunities for feedback and consolidation.

These findings show that pronunciation difficulties are a combined result of linguistic distance, pedagogical practice, and affective conditions, rather than dialect influence alone.

## **Discussion**

Based on the results of the research, the author found that students with a Serawai dialect background are still influenced by their local language in pronouncing certain aspects of English pronunciation, namely consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. The Serawai dialect has its own phonological system, which differs significantly from that of English.

The Serawai dialect contains a number of consonant and vowel phonemes that are not found in English. For example, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ in English do not exist in the Serawai dialect; therefore, students tend to replace them with /t/ and /d/. Likewise, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ are often indistinguishable to Serawai speakers, so words such as *five* may be pronounced as “paif” or “pive.”

These findings can be explained through the framework of language transfer theory. According to Odlin (1989), language transfer occurs when learners bring elements from their first language (L1) into their second language (L2), which can have either a positive or negative effect. In this study, most pronunciation difficulties indicate negative transfer, where the Serawai phonological system interferes with the production of English sounds. This aligns with Alfansyah et al. (2023), who argue in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis that structural differences between L1 and L2 are a major source of pronunciation errors. Similarly, Al-Shalabi (2021) emphasizes that learners often rely on

the articulation habits of their mother tongue when encountering unfamiliar sounds in the target language.

The case of Serawai students illustrates this theory clearly. For instance, substituting /θ/ with /t/ or /ð/ with /d/ reflects the absence of dental fricatives in the Serawai phonological system, prompting learners to use the nearest and most familiar sounds in their L1. Likewise, the difficulty in distinguishing /f/ and /v/ demonstrates that the Serawai dialect does not recognize this phonemic contrast, resulting in mispronunciations of words such as *very*, *have*, and *evening*. These findings support Hasyim et al. (2022), who state that “similar elements will be easy to learn, while different elements will be difficult.”

This negative transfer phenomenon is not exclusive to Serawai speakers. Similar patterns have been reported among speakers of other regional dialects, such as Javanese and Semendo, particularly in substituting English sounds absent from their native phonological systems (Niro Arif SAS et al., 2019). Therefore, the difficulties experienced by Serawai students reflect a broader pattern in second language acquisition, where L1 influence plays a crucial role in shaping learners' phonological performance.

According to Roach (2009), the English sound system consists of consonants such as /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, and /ð/; vowels such as /æ/, /ɪ/, /ʌ/, /ə/, and /ɔ:/; and diphthongs such as /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, and /aʊ/. This significant difference underscores the phonological gap between the Serawai dialect and English, leading to challenges in pronunciation.

Error analysis revealed that the highest number of errors occurred in consonants, followed by diphthongs and vowels. This indicates that Serawai students struggle most with consonants such as /f/ versus /v/ and /θ/ versus /ð/, which are absent in the Serawai system. For instance, south /sauθ/ is often pronounced as *saut* or *sot*, while *them* /ðem/ becomes *dem*.

The dominance of consonant errors can be explained by the fact that consonant systems exhibit greater cross-linguistic variation than vowel systems. Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996) note that consonants display more diverse places and manners of articulation, while vowels are relatively universal and thus easier to approximate. Ellis (1994) similarly points out that negative transfer is more likely when learners encounter sounds that are entirely absent from their L1. Consequently, consonants pose the greatest challenge for Serawai learners.

Another notable difference lies in word stress. In English, stress can change a word's meaning or function and is typically categorized into primary, secondary, and unstressed levels. However, Serawai dialect does not employ stress distinctions, leading students to pronounce all syllables evenly and struggle to place stress appropriately in English words.

The findings of this study align with those of Debby Mulya and Januarius Mujiyanto (2018), who examined the influence of the Serawai Malay dialect on English pronunciation. They found that the Serawai dialect did not strongly affect most phonetic elements but that pronunciation errors often resulted from spelling interference and a lack of pronunciation practice. These results reinforce this study's conclusion that, beyond dialectal influence, insufficient practice and low learner confidence contribute significantly to pronunciation challenges.

Similarly, research by Niro Arif SAS et al. (2019) on the Semendo dialect in South Sumatra revealed that pronunciation errors were often attributed to a lack of practice and insufficient teacher support rather than dialectal interference alone. These findings highlight that challenges faced by students with a Serawai background stem from not only

linguistic factors but also pedagogical and psychological ones, including limited teaching methods, reduced focus on pronunciation in the classroom, and students' lack of self-confidence.

The implications for English language teaching are significant. Teachers should prioritize sounds that do not exist in the Serawai phonological system—such as /v/, /θ/, and /ð/—by providing intensive and repetitive practice to help students recognize and produce them correctly. Techniques such as minimal pair drills (e.g., fan–van, thin–tin) can enhance both listening discrimination and articulatory accuracy. Incorporating audio-visual media, such as phonetic learning videos or computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT) applications, can further support students in perceiving and imitating foreign sounds.

Moreover, drilling and repetition remain essential to build new pronunciation habits. Practice should extend beyond formal classroom sessions through project-based tasks, games, and group activities that encourage authentic oral use of English in relaxed environments. As Brown (2007) asserts, pronunciation is a critical component of oral communication and should not be overlooked, especially among L2 learners whose mother tongues exert strong phonological influence.

Beyond technical instruction, teachers must also focus on building students' confidence. A supportive classroom atmosphere, constructive feedback, and peer-correction opportunities can reduce anxiety and foster greater willingness to experiment with new sounds. This approach aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that anxiety and low self-esteem can inhibit language acquisition by preventing effective processing of linguistic input.

Drawing on Ellis's (1994) framework, this study highlights that students' pronunciation difficulties arise from an interplay of three dimensions: linguistic factors (L1 interference), instructional factors (limited pronunciation focus in teaching), and individual learner differences (low confidence and lack of practice). These interconnected elements collectively hinder the acquisition of accurate English pronunciation.

In conclusion, pronunciation errors among students with a Serawai dialect background result from the combined influence of four primary factors: mother-tongue interference, insufficient pronunciation practice, limited instructional emphasis, and low learner confidence. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, collaborative effort involving students, teachers, and educational policymakers.

Future research should explore targeted interventions—such as CAPT, communicative drilling techniques, and audio-visual learning tools—to evaluate their effectiveness in minimizing dialectal interference. Additionally, studies could broaden their scope to include learners from other dialect backgrounds in Bengkulu and Sumatra to determine whether similar pronunciation patterns persist across different local languages. Finally, further investigation into affective and motivational variables, such as confidence and language anxiety, would provide a more holistic understanding of how these factors impact pronunciation development.

By addressing both technical and psychological dimensions, future studies can contribute to more effective strategies for improving English pronunciation among learners from diverse dialectal backgrounds, ultimately supporting equitable language learning in multilingual contexts.

## Conclusion

Based on the result of the research, it can be concluded that there are some aspects of English pronunciation that are influenced by Serawai dialect as the students' mother tongue. Those aspects include consonant, vowel, and diphthong sounds. Serawai language and English have many differences in pronunciation system. As the mother tongue, Serawai dialect affects students' ability to pronounce English words, especially when they encounter sounds that are not found in Serawai language. In the consonant aspect, students have difficulties when pronouncing the sounds [v], [θ], [ð], [ʃ], and [ʒ]. While in the vowel aspect, they have difficulty in pronouncing the sounds [ə], [ɜ:], and [æ]. Meanwhile, in the diphthong aspect, the sounds [əʊ], [ɪə], [eə], and [ʊə] became an obstacle for most students. From the second research problem, it is known that there are a number of English words that students cannot pronounce well due to the influence of their mother tongue. Those words contain sounds that are not found in Serawai dialect. In addition, there are four main factors that cause students' difficulties in English pronunciation, namely mother tongue interference, lack of practice in English pronunciation, limited learning methods, and lack of confidence in speaking English.

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