JOURNAL LA EDUSCI

VOL. 06, ISSUE 04 (629-650), 2025
DOI: 10.37899/journallaedusci.v6i4.2565

EFL Learners' Attitudes Toward Native-Like English Pronunciation Versus Intelligibility: A Study of Undergraduate Students

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Article Info

Article history:
Received 15 August 2025
Received in revised form 4 September 2025
Accepted 27 September 2022

Keywords:
Attitudes
Intelligibility
Native-like Pronunciation

Abstract

As English becomes increasingly global, particularly in Islamic university contexts, understanding students' pronunciation goals is crucial for designing effective and culturally responsive instruction. This study explores the attitudes of English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung toward native-like English pronunciation versus intelligibility. This study aims to examine students' beliefs, preferences, and challenges related to English pronunciation, focusing on their aspirations to sound native-like versus their practical need for intelligibility. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals involving purposively selected participants from various academic years. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and perspectives within the data. The findings reveal ten major themes: students' admiration for native-like pronunciation, prioritization of intelligibility, cultural and religious identity influence, pronunciation anxiety, exposure to diverse English accents, and the lack of explicit pronunciation instruction. While some students aspire to speak like native speakers for prestige or professionalism, most prioritize clear communication over accent imitation. Many students also desire to preserve their cultural identity and value intelligibility in real-life contexts such as classrooms and job interviews. The study highlights the importance of acknowledging learners' identities, goals, and the role of English as a global lingua franca. These insights suggest the need for more inclusive, identity-affirming pronunciation pedagogy that balances clarity with cultural respect in EFL settings, particularly within Islamic higher education.

Introduction

English is becoming more important for communication in academic and professional life. Because of that, English pronunciation gets more attention in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially in universities. In Islamic universities, English is important for international programs and academic progress. So, students need to improve their pronunciation to speak clearly and communicate better. Good pronunciation helps students perform well in class, interact with others from different cultures, and prepare for future jobs (Almusharraf, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). Many researchers agree that clear pronunciation is necessary for formal and informal communication. Students who feel confident in their pronunciation usually participate more in class and feel more motivated to study (Sardegna et al., 2017).However, pronunciation is still difficult for many students to learn English. The problems often appear in both segmental features (like sounds of letters) and suprasegmental features (such as intonation and stress), which are very important to speak clearly (Elmahdi & Khan, 2015; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021). These problems happen because the sound system of English differs from the students' first language (Naser & Hamzah, 2018). As a result, students

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

may say words incorrectly, and other people may not understand them. Because of this, teachers need to use teaching methods that match the students' culture and real needs.

To learn pronunciation well, students must understand both the technical and social aspects. Segmental parts mean the correct pronunciation of small sounds or phonemes. Suprasegmental means the rhythm and melody of speech that shows meaning and emotion (Shabani & Alipoor, 2017). While it is important to say each word correctly, speaking naturally and fluently is important for good communication (Riadil & Yosintha, 2021). One important point in teaching pronunciation is the difference between speaking like a native speaker and speaking enough to be understood. Some students want to speak like Americans or British people, but others only want to be understood by others. In today's global world, understanding is more important than copying native accents (Tale', 2023). This is even more important in Islamic universities, where students' goals can be influenced by their culture and religion (Assalamah et al., 2024).

The way people think about pronunciation is changing. English is now used as a common language between non-native speakers. So, perfect native pronunciation is not always needed. The focus is now on being clear when talking to others (Tsunemoto & McDonough, 2020; Couper,2021; Zou et al., 2021). In Islamic universities, students' thoughts about pronunciation are shaped by their culture, religion, and academic dreams (Alhassan, 2017). Many students prefer to speak rather than sound like native speakers. This shows their wish to keep their identity while communicating well. Students' beliefs about pronunciation can affect how active they are in learning. Research shows that students with good attitudes about pronunciation study more and speak better in class (Sardegna et al., 2017; Bin-Hady & Hazaea, 2022). In Islamic universities their religion and culture also influence how they think about English accents and pronunciation.

Some research finds that many EFL students like American or British accents, but they care more about being understood in international situations (Shehzad et al., 2022; Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024). This shows that students want to speak well but also think practically. Still, there are many problems, such as fear of mispronouncing, different teaching methods, and not enough examples of various English accents (Lim, 2016; Tiwari, 2023; Lehrer, 2023). There is also confusion about the goals and results of pronunciation classes. In Islamic universities, culture and pronunciation often connect. Students may have to choose between sounding like native speakers or keeping their own culture and religion (Altoeriqi, 2020). So, teaching should support students' identities and help them communicate clearly.

Teachers play a crucial role in helping students improve their pronunciation. However, studies show that many teachers don't receive enough training or support from their institutions (Kholis, 2021; Rana et al., 2022; Deaton et al., 2022). Even though some teachers feel confident, they face problems like a lack of time and unclear goals, which make teaching pronunciation harder (Abker, 2020). Although many studies talk about pronunciation, most use big data and numbers. They do not look deeply into students' real experiences (Nhat & Hoang, 2024). This is a problem, especially in special contexts like Islamic universities, where students' culture and religion affect how they learn.

This study wants to explore how students in Islamic universities feel about learning pronunciation. Using qualitative research, the study will focus on their beliefs, challenges, and what they expect from their teachers. This will help improve pronunciation teaching to fit these students' real needs and culture (Anh, 2023; Panjaitan & Christina, 2025; Zhou & Wu, 2023).

This research also adds to the theory by showing the importance of respecting students' cultural background in pronunciation teaching. Teachers should understand students' goals, whether

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

clear, sound, native-like, or to keep their identity, and support them in the classroom (Tale', 2023; Dörnyei & Mentzelopoulos, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2021). It is important to avoid using the same method for all students and allow them to grow their pronunciation while respecting their culture. Knowing how EFL students think about pronunciation is crucial to designing good and inclusive teaching methods. As English becomes more global, pronunciation teaching must match the students' language needs and identity (Ardini et al., 2024; Tiwari, 2023). By listening to students' voices in Islamic universities, this research aims to improve teaching practices that support clear speaking, strong participation, and student confidence.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative method. This method is suitable because it helps to better understand the opinions and feelings of EFL students about pronunciation goals. It gives a deep understanding of how the students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung think about speaking like native speakers or just speaking clearly. Creswell said that the qualitative method is good for studying complex things in real situations (Creswell, 2013). It helps researchers get important information about people's experiences.

The research design of this study is descriptive qualitative. It helps to describe students' beliefs and feelings about pronunciation in English learning. This kind of design is useful to explain "how" and "why" students have certain opinions, and it does not use numbers or statistics like quantitative research. The population in this study is students from the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. They are chosen because they are learning English, and pronunciation is important in their studies. The sample includes students from different years, so the researcher can collect many different views and experiences.

This study uses purposive sampling. This means the researcher chooses students who can provide useful information about the research topic. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher wants to find participants who match the research purpose. In this study, the students are chosen based on their English level and motivation, whether they want to speak like a native or just speak clearly. This kind of sample helps collect various ideas, but keeps them related to the research goal. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. This kind of interview gives the researcher the chance to ask some main questions, but the researcher can also ask other questions to get more explanation. This helps to understand more about what students think about pronunciation (Creswell, 2013). Besides interviews, the students will also write reflective journals. These journals will show their thoughts and experiences about pronunciation during the research period.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is very important. Lincoln and Guba said there are four main parts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015). Therefore this study emphasize the trustworthiness through 1) credibility by checking the results with the participants to see if they agree with the findings; 2) Transferability by giving full details about the students and their situation, so readers can decide if the results apply to other cases; 3) Dependability by writing the steps of the research clearly, so other researchers can repeat it; 4) Confirmability by trying to be honest and reflect on personal opinions or bias, so the results are more objective.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This method is good for finding common ideas or themes from the interview answers. It helps to show what experiences are similar among the students and what is different. The data will be coded step by step. The codes will come from what the participants say, not from theory. This helps to give a real picture of their opinions.

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

Also, the researcher will use reflexive thematic analysis, which means thinking carefully about their role in understanding and explaining the data.

Results and Discussion

This qualitative research explored English Education students' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences at UIN Raden Intan Lampung regarding native-like English pronunciation versus intelligibility. Data were collected from 20 participants through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, and then analyzed thematically. Ten overarching themes emerged, each highlighting different ways students perceive pronunciation in relation to language learning, cultural identity, and communication goals.

Perception of Native-like Pronunciation

Many participants expressed admiration for native-like pronunciation, associating it with prestige, fluency, and academic respect. P7 explained,

"I think sounding like a native speaker opens doors; people will take me more seriously in an academic setting." Similarly, P3 commented, "If I can speak like British people, it shows my skill and I will be respected." For P12, native-like speech was an aspiration since childhood, saying, "I always try to copy how actors speak in American movies because I feel it makes my English more beautiful." P5 added, "When I sound like a native, my friends in class sometimes ask me to help them in pronunciation." However, some participants, like P9, questioned this preference, stating, "I don't need to be exactly like a native. I just want to be clear and confident."

As the responses correctly observe, native-like pronunciation does serve as an indicator of perceived competence and social capital, but that explanation requires an unpacking of assumptions, implications, and blind spots therein that is more critical. To begin with, the practice of treating the so-called native-like pronunciation as unqualified normality conceals the ideological character of that norm: it favors certain accents (usually those of high-status nations and social classes) and is thus liable to reproduce social disparity and discrimination based on accent. Second, binary opposition between prestige and communicative strategies is too clean - in reality, the aims of learners have been influenced by overlapping pressures (employment markets, migration conditions, identity work, and institutional hiring methods) and thus one individual learner can be aiming both intelligibility in everyday interaction and a prestigious accent in professional mobility. Third, a great deal of research and classroom practice confounds accent with total competence and does not consider that intelligibility, pragmatic competence and lexical/grammatical knowledge can be much more important to achievement than phonetic nativeness. Methodologically, much of the data is based on self-reports or small and non-representative samples and thus may overstate the extent or consistency of these preferences. In practice, accent reduction can be given superiority over communicative competence and culturally responsive pedagogy. The more defensible position would be to preempt intelligibility and functional objectives, to acknowledge agency in learners who choose how they wish to sound and to challenge the social formations that presuppose certain accents to be entry gate to opportunity - and to design assessment and classroom practices that evaluates and educates what, in fact, learners can do to communicate and gain social mobility.

Intelligibility as Priority

Several students valued clear communication over native-like imitation. P1 stated,

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

> "*People don't need to understand me perfectly; they just need to get the point." P14 shared, "When I focus too much on accent, I forget the grammar and vocabulary I want to use." P6 explained, "My uncle works in tourism; he speaks English with a strong accent but can make foreign guests understand him. That is enough." P18 added, "It is better to speak clearly and slowly than try to be fast and sound native but be misunderstood." Meanwhile, P11 noted, "Sometimes copying the accent makes my speech less natural."*

Such a reading highlights a pragmatic turn in the direction of learners but also runs the risk of simplifying the matter by making intelligibility a completely neutral and universally adequate aim. Although the effectiveness of communication is central, the presumption that intelligibility will solve the needs of learners ignores the disparate social processes through which English will be used. In globalized settings, as an example, intelligibility is not necessary to protect the speakers against being evaluated in terms of professionalism, education level, or social background, since some accents still have symbolic capital that affects employment opportunities and hiring. Further, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been criticized as placing too little emphasis on how power, identity, and ideology intersect language use, despite also paying attention to functional competence. A learner can attain intelligibility and yet feel excluded or coerced to imitate an ideal accent in any professional or educational field. Thus, although intelligibility is both pedagogically natural and psychologically motivating, teachers should not present it as the only goal. A more subtle perspective would combine the emphasis of CLT on communication with critical attention to lingistic hierarchies, training learners to operate in the world where intelligibility is privileged and - or even more importantly, eclipsed by - accent based biases.

Cultural Influences on Pronunciation Goals

Pronunciation choices were often influenced by participants' cultural identities. P4 stated,

> *"In my culture, we respect our language and our identity; we don't have to sound like a foreigner to be good at English." P16 expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "I want to keep my Lampungnese identity even when I speak English." P20 explained, "If I remove my accent completely, I feel like I am pretending to be someone else." P8 linked pronunciation to heritage pride: "We should be proud of our accent, because it shows where we are from." On the other hand, P2 mentioned, "I can respect my culture but still improve my pronunciation."*

This reflection is well justified in recognizing that pronunciation has social and identity aspects but it could use a more critical examination of the issues at play. Although students might think embracing a foreign accent as a possible loss to their cultural authenticity, this framing can easily lead to the romanticization of roots and undervaluation of the fluidity of identity in the multilingual setting. There is no fixed identity other, as with most learners, accent change is not a matter of abandoning the heritage as much as it is a matter of tactical handling of multiple identities in different contexts, which sociolinguists refer to as identity performance. Moreover, the studies on World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) actually do offer legitimacy to local accents, but the theoretical legitimacy fails to be reflected in the social or institutional legitimacy. Some so-called neutral or prestige accents remain overvalued in most of the international labor markets and educational institutions, irrespective of the validity of local forms. In this way, students might want to fight the pressure to adopt foreign accents, but they are limited by structural inequalities that place a greater value on one accent than on the other. A fairer reading then is that pronunciation training is not only the business of individual

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

preference or cultural allegiance but a compromise in unequal structures of power, wherein students always weigh intelligibility, career mobility, and the expression of identity.

Pronunciation Anxiety and Social Pressure

Fear of making mistakes was a recurring theme. P10 admitted,

> *"When I mispronounce a word, I feel embarrassed, which makes me hesitant to speak." P7 shared, "In high school, my friends laughed when I spoke English, so now I am careful." P5 noted, "If the teacher asks me to read, I practice silently first so I don't make mistakes." P15 said, "I sometimes avoid answering questions because I'm afraid my pronunciation will be wrong." Similarly, P19 recalled, "Once my classmate corrected my pronunciation in front of everyone; after that, I became less confident."*

The latter is an observation that encapsulates the cyclicality of pronunciation anxiety, but requires a more aggressive approach towards highlighting the larger forces that perpetuates these anxieties. Although it is true that classroom relationships and previous experiences influence the level of comfort that the learners experience, anxiety is not only a psychological barrier on an individual level, it is an outcome of structural hierarchies of language, where some accents are stigmatized and others glorified. The fear of being wrong expressed by learners in most situations reflects an internalised linguistic insecurity which is reinforced by teacher corrections which overemphasise on accuracy or peer judgement or stereotypes in society that conflate accent with intelligence and competence. The paradox is that instructional methods with a limited range of error-fixing can, in fact, increase this anxiety and decrease the desire to communicate, which is exactly the environment that hinders improvement. The concept of a supportive environment, moreover, needs to be deconstructed: it does not merely imply encouragement but also a development of critical awareness of linguistic diversity, naturalization of different accents, and explicit challenge of deficit-based attitudes. Without such an important layer, the concept could be shrunk down to a generic demand of safe spaces. A more powerful extrapolation of these results is that teachers must engineer pedagogical approaches that simultaneously reduce affective threats and take direct action against the ideology underlying accent-related stigma, thus not only facilitating but also enabling and enhancing engagement in the pronunciation learning process.

Exposure to English Varieties

Students with exposure to multiple English accents developed more flexible attitudes toward pronunciation. P3 observed,

> *"When I met people from different countries, it showed me that English doesn't have just one way to sound." P18 noted, "I follow YouTubers from India, the Philippines, and the UK, and they all speak differently." P13 stated, "In online games, I talk with people from many countries. At first, I was confused, but now I can understand them better." P9 reflected, "Hearing many accents makes me realize I don't have to be perfect to communicate." P11 added, "It made me respect all kinds of English, not only American or British."*

This account demonstrates the importance of exposure to diversity in accents, but it runs the risk of exaggerating its influences otherwise. Although exposure to a variety of English accents can certainly make sound listening more flexible and normalize variation, there is no guarantee that exposure will lead to a decrease in insecurity and increase in acceptability. Students can continue to internalize hierarchies of good/bad English, particularly when institutional values, exams, or media images still favor one standard accent or prestige accent. Furthermore, the positive impact of listening practice can be achieved only when the exposure is high-quality

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

and purposeful: when exposed to a variety of accents passively, students can strengthen their stereotypes, but when actively involved in pedagogical activities like critical discussion of language ideologies or strategies of communication, learners can develop a more positive attitude towards diversity. A second aspect that should not be overlooked is that the awareness of the worldwide plurality of the English language can have a dual effect - it can help students of English to realize that their voices are valuable, but it can also make them more aware of the exclusionary nature of practices in the situations which do not tolerate diversity. A stronger consequence, then, is that the introduction to the diversity of accents must be combined with explicit pedagogic of critique, which allows the learner not only to modify their listening skills, but also to oppose the social and institutional processes that still marginalize some forms of speaking.

Perceived Practicality of Intelligibility

Participants repeatedly emphasized that being understood was more important than accent perfection. P2 explained,

> *"If I translate my thoughts into English and people understand me, that's enough." P12 said, "In my future job, I think clarity will be more important than accent." P15 noted, "I once spoke with a native speaker who said my accent was different but my meaning was clear—that made me happy." P19 stated, "I don't want to spend too much time on accent if it stops me from learning other skills." P7 added, "Clear English is better than fancy English that no one understands."*

Framing these views as functional and efficiency-oriented is insightful, but it risks narrowing the discussion of pronunciation to purely utilitarian terms. While efficiency and functionality are undeniably important in professional and intercultural settings, this perspective can unintentionally reinforce neoliberal logics that treat language learning primarily as a tool for employability, productivity, and smooth transactions. Such a framing sidelines the affective, identity-related, and political dimensions of pronunciation, reducing speech to an instrument rather than acknowledging it as part of self-expression and social belonging. Moreover, efficiency-based approaches often assume that communication breakdowns are best solved by speaker adjustment, overlooking the listener's responsibility and the role of mutual accommodation in intercultural exchanges. In practice, professional communication is not just about clarity and speed but also about building rapport, negotiating power relations, and projecting credibility all of which are influenced by accent ideologies as much as by intelligibility. Thus, while the functional orientation has practical value, a more comprehensive perspective would situate it alongside critical awareness of how professional norms privilege certain ways of speaking, and how intercultural communication requires not only efficiency but also empathy, adaptability, and recognition of linguistic diversity.

Influence of Teachers and Instructional Practices

Students' goals were partly shaped by their teachers' expectations. P1 shared,

> *"My teacher always told us to speak clearly, not like in the movies." P8 recounted, "In one class, the lecturer encouraged us to sound British, and I liked the challenge." P4 explained, "Sometimes the teacher corrects me until I sound exactly like them, but it makes me feel like I lose my style." P13 noted, "I feel confident when the teacher praises my clear speaking." Meanwhile, P17 said, "Some teachers do not focus on pronunciation at all, so I don't know if I am improving."*

This is the right interpolation of the influence of teaching style but it can be further extended by questioning the underlying pedagogical and ideological suppositions in play. Although

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helpful, clarity-based teaching also promotes confidence, but even the meaning of the term clarity is not neutral, as it is influenced by hegemonic standards of intelligibility that tend to favor some accents over others. Unless approached critically, even the well-meaning methods can quietly contribute to the notion that certain types of speech are more justified than the rest. Conversely, prescriptive models that require adherence to a native-like norm not only reinforce disengagement but also continue to encourage deficit perceptions of learners, which code their current repertoires as incorrect instead of appreciating the linguistic resources they contain. Also, motivation and self-perception are not simply teacher-conditioned; they are also impacted by the larger society, testing policies, and media images of good English. The analysis may underestimate these external forces by simply giving too much weight to the style used in the classroom. A stronger description would then place the instructional strategies in the broader ecology of language ideologies and understand supportive pedagogy not only as anxiety-reduction, but also as legitimization of different accents, encouragement of agency in students, and a direct attack on the hierarchies that shape how students view their own voices.

Need for Explicit Pronunciation Instruction

Many participants expressed a desire for more targeted pronunciation training. P6 stated,

> *"We need more classes focused just on pronunciation, not only as part of speaking practice." P14 explained, "I want to learn about stress and intonation, not just individual words." P9 said, "Sometimes the teacher corrects my pronunciation, but I forget it because we don't practice enough." P18 noted, "I like when we use recordings to practice; it helps me compare my voice to a model." P11 added, "I think pronunciation practice should be every week."*

This observation points to a general disconnect between the importance given to pronunciation in the minds of learners and the poor focus it is given in instructional contexts, but it also needs a more critical approach. This may not, per se, solve the concerns that students may have when the instructional strategy remains narrowly based on the correction of errors or unachievable native-like models. The demand of a structured approach must be put into question: structured in relation to what ends, and in accordance with whom? To the extent that structure implies working towards standardised norms, the risk is recreating linguistic hierarchies and neglecting communicative realities that students experience in different English-speaking environments. More than that, the concern is not just the amount of instruction but the quality thereof, namely whether practice is incorporated in a meaningfully way into communicative activities, whether it leads to intelligibility and listening flexibility, and whether it will give the students the power to make informed decisions regarding their own pronunciation objectives. A more powerful conclusion is that the instructional design should be able to balance systematic practice and critical awareness so that the extra time devoted to pronunciation should not reproduce the prevailing ideologies and instead should bring to life not only communicative competence but the agency of the learners as well.

Awareness of Global English (EIL/ELF)

Some students demonstrated growing awareness of English as an international language. P2 remarked,

> *"If we are going to use English with people from different cultures, we need to accept that accents will be different, and that's okay." P5 said, "In my internship, I spoke with a Malaysian businessman, and his accent was very different but I understood him." P10 noted, "Not all English speakers are from America or Britain; the world is bigger than that." P17 explained, "Learning that English is used by many countries made me*

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

less worried about my own accent." P19 added, "I now think communication is more important than accent rules."

This insight is valuable, but it would benefit from a more critical unpacking of the complexities surrounding English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). While exposure to these frameworks can indeed encourage self-acceptance and legitimize non-native varieties, it is not guaranteed that learners will internalize these perspectives in practice. Institutional pressures, assessment standards, and societal ideologies often continue to privilege native-like models, which can dilute or even contradict the liberatory potential of EIL/ELF pedagogy. Moreover, celebrating "diversity of English" without addressing the structural inequalities behind accent discrimination risks producing a superficial pluralism that acknowledges difference but leaves power hierarchies intact. There is also the danger of oversimplification: students may equate ELF/EIL with "anything goes," without grasping the strategic negotiation, adaptability, and listener responsibility required in real intercultural encounters. Therefore, while EIL/ELF exposure is a promising step toward broadening perspectives, it should be embedded in a critical pedagogical framework that not only validates diverse Englishes but also equips learners to navigate contexts where such diversity may still be marginalized. This way, self-acceptance is paired with critical agency rather than passive tolerance.

Identity and Language Ownership

For some participants, pronunciation was tied to self-expression. P8 said,

"I want my pronunciation to reflect who I am, not just copy someone else." P12 explained, "My accent is part of my personality; changing it completely would feel strange." P16 stated, "I think English belongs to everyone who speaks it, not only natives." P20 shared, "I can improve without losing my identity." P4 reflected, "Keeping my accent reminds me of my roots."

These views align with the notion of "language ownership," where English learners see themselves as legitimate users of the language regardless of accent. Such a stance can enhance learner autonomy and confidence.

Table 1. Themes and Interpretive Insights on Learners' Perceptions of English Pronunciation and Identity

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Quotes	Interpretive Commentary
1. Perception of Native-like Pronunciation	• Prestige and aspiration • Media influence	"Sounding like a native is like a dream for me." "I love how they speak in Hollywood movies. It's so fluent."	Native-like pronunciation is often idealized and associated with social mobility and success. The media strongly influences this aspiration.
2. Prioritization of Intelligibility	• Communicative efficiency • Everyday use	"I just want to be understood clearly." "No need to be perfect, just make sense."	Many learners show a practical shift from accent imitation to communicative clarity, valuing

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

			efficiency over perfection.
3. Cultural and Religious Identity	• Identity preservation • Religious worldview	"I don't need to change my voice to be good at English." "We can speak English in our own way, still respectful to our culture."	Learners are conscious of maintaining their cultural and religious identity while learning a global language.
4. Social Anxiety Related to Pronunciation	• Fear of judgment • Peer pressure	"I feel nervous when I speak because I might mispronounce something." "Others will laugh if I sound weird."	Anxiety inhibits speaking practice; fear of error creates emotional barriers to pronunciation development.
5. Exposure to English Varieties	• Awareness of global accents • Flexibility in perception	"I talked with a Nigerian teacher. His English was different, but I understood." "There's no one way to speak English."	Students develop a broader acceptance of World Englishes and recognize intelligibility as a shared goal across cultures.
6. Practical Benefits of Intelligibility	• Academic performance • Job readiness	"In a job interview, they just want to understand me." "As long as the lecturer gets what I say, it's okay."	Intelligibility is linked to real-life tasks, underscoring its value in academic and professional contexts.
7. 7. Teacher Influence and Pedagogy	• Native-model vs. intelligibility focus • Feedback approaches	"My teacher corrects us only if it's too hard to understand." "Some teachers want us to sound like Americans."	Educators have differing philosophies, influencing how students perceive pronunciation standards.
8. Lack of Explicit Pronunciation Training	• Limited curriculum support • Self-directed learning	"We don't have pronunciation class, just speaking." "I learn from YouTube because we	Students feel underprepared due to a lack of systematic instruction, turning to self-resources for improvement.

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

		don't practice much in class."	
9. Understanding of EIL/ELF	• Awareness of English diversity • Acceptance of variation	"We use English with people from Korea, Japan, and Middle East. Everyone sounds different."	Students are increasingly aligning with the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), appreciating functional use over form.
10. Pronunciation and Identity Ownership	• Authenticity • Personal expression	"I want to be myself in English, not a copy." "My accent shows who I am."	Learners view pronunciation not just as a skill but as a representation of self and cultural pride.

Table 2. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Interpretive Insights on Students' Pronunciation Goals and Identity in English Learning

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Quotes	Interpretive Commentary
Perception of Native-like Pronunciation	Aspiration for Native-like Fluency	"I think sounding like a native speaker opens doors; people will take me more seriously in an academic setting." "If I can sound like them, I feel more confident speaking in public." "Native-like pronunciation makes me feel professional, especially when I talk to lecturers or in interviews." "It's like a dream, people will respect me more if I sound fluent like a native."	Many students equate native-like pronunciation with social prestige, academic credibility, and professional opportunities. This aspiration is often fueled by exposure to Western media and admiration for fluent speakers. Their confidence grows when they feel their speech closely matches native norms, as they perceive it as a marker of linguistic competence and global readiness.
	Rejection of Full Native Accent	"I don't want to sound exactly like an American. I prefer to be understood rather than mimicking someone else's accent."	While some admire native-like fluency, others resist the idea of completely adopting a foreign accent. They value authenticity and prioritize clarity over imitation. For these students, preserving their own speech identity is more

ISSN 2721-0979 (Print), ISSN 2721-1258 (Online)

		"Sometimes, trying too hard to copy makes me sound unnatural." "I think my own accent is part of me, so I don't want to lose it." "Speaking clearly is better than forcing myself to sound like someone else."	important than achieving a flawless native-like sound. This reflects a balance between linguistic improvement and self-expression.
Intelligibility as Priority	Emphasis on Being Understood	"People don't need to understand me perfectly; they just need to get the point." "As long as my listener understands, I'm happy." "Fluency is good, but clarity is more important." "I just want people to get my message without confusion."	Many students view intelligibility as the ultimate communication goal. They see clear pronunciation as more practical and achievable than native-like fluency. This perspective is grounded in real-life communication needs, where the success of a conversation is measured by mutual understanding rather than accent perfection.
	Practical Benefits of Clear Speech	"Speaking clearly is easier than copying an accent." "When I focus on clarity, I can speak more confidently." "It saves time because I don't overthink pronunciation." "Clarity helps me in presentations and group work."	The emphasis on clarity also comes from its functional advantages. Students report feeling less anxious and more effective when prioritizing comprehensibility. They associate clear speech with confidence, better academic participation, and smoother interactions, especially in multilingual settings.
Cultural Influences on Pronunciation Goals	Pride in Local Identity	"In my culture, we respect our language and our identity; we don't have to sound like a foreigner to be good at English." "I'm proud of my accent because it shows where I come from."	Cultural pride shapes how students set their pronunciation goals. For some, retaining their local accent is a way of preserving identity and authenticity. This pride serves as a counterbalance to pressures for native-like speech, allowing them to embrace English as a

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		"I want to sound like myself, just better in English." "English is a tool; it doesn't change who I am."	communicative tool without losing their cultural roots.
	Accent as Cultural Signature	"My accent is like my fingerprint—it's unique to me." "When people hear me, they know I'm Indonesian, and that's okay." "I don't feel the need to erase my identity in English." "Keeping my accent makes me feel comfortable."	Students see their accent as a personal and cultural signature that makes them unique in global communication. Instead of perceiving it as a limitation, they frame it as a strength that differentiates them in an increasingly diverse English-speaking world.
Pronunciation Anxiety and Social Pressure	Fear of Mistakes	"When I mispronounce a word, I feel embarrassed, which makes me hesitant to speak." "Sometimes I just avoid speaking because I'm scared of making mistakes." "People laugh, and it makes me lose confidence." "I practice alone so nobody hears my mistakes."	Pronunciation errors often trigger anxiety and reluctance to speak. Students associate mistakes with social embarrassment, which can lead to reduced participation and missed learning opportunities. This fear-based avoidance can significantly slow their oral skill development.
	Peer and Teacher Judgment	"Some friends correct me in a way that makes me uncomfortable." "When the teacher imitates my pronunciation, it feels like mockery." "I feel pressure to sound right all the time in class."	Social and academic environments play a big role in shaping pronunciation confidence. Negative feedback, even when unintended, can heighten students' self-consciousness. Supportive, non-judgmental teaching practices are crucial to reduce anxiety and encourage active participation.

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		"It's stressful when people expect you to speak perfectly."	
Exposure to English Varieties	Awareness of Multiple Accents	"When I met people from different countries, it showed me that English doesn't have just one way to sound." "Watching international YouTubers opened my eyes to different English accents." "I realized even native speakers sound different depending on where they are from." "Now I feel more confident with my own accent."	Exposure to diverse accents helps students broaden their perception of English. It challenges the notion of a single 'correct' accent and encourages them to accept variations as valid. This awareness can reduce the pressure to conform to native-like models and increase self-acceptance.
	Learning from Varieties	"I can pick words and expressions from different accents." "Hearing many styles helps me understand English better." "I try to mix what I like from each accent." "It improves my listening because I'm used to different sounds."	Listening to multiple English varieties enhances students' listening comprehension and pronunciation flexibility. It allows them to develop adaptive communication skills, making them more effective in international interactions.
Perceived Practicality of Intelligibility	Communication Over Perfection	"If I translate my thoughts into English and people understand me, that's enough." "I don't care if I sound perfect; I care if they get my meaning." "I focus on making my sentences clear."	Students emphasize functionality over perfectionism in pronunciation. They view English primarily as a tool for conveying ideas, not as a performance of linguistic mastery. This orientation aligns with practical communication needs in real-world scenarios.

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		"Perfect pronunciation is not my priority."	
	Efficiency of Effort	"It's less stressful when I don't aim for perfect pronunciation." "Focusing on meaning helps me speak more naturally." "I save energy for thinking about what to say instead of how to say it." "It makes conversations flow better."	A focus on intelligibility allows students to allocate mental resources more efficiently, reducing cognitive load during speech. This approach supports fluency and reduces performance anxiety, leading to more effective interactions.
Influence of Teachers and Instructional Practices	Supportive Guidance	"Our teacher encourages us to speak clearly and not worry too much about accent." "I feel more confident when my teacher praises my effort." "My teacher lets us speak in our own style." "Encouragement helps me improve."	Supportive teacher practices build student confidence and foster a safe learning environment. By focusing on clarity rather than native-like perfection, teachers empower students to speak more frequently and with less anxiety.
	Pressure to Conform	"Our teacher told us to sound more like them. I felt like I was losing my voice." "I get nervous when the teacher corrects every small mistake." "It feels like my accent is wrong." "Sometimes I don't want to speak because I'm afraid of correction."	Some instructional approaches inadvertently pressure students to conform to native norms, which can undermine self-confidence and discourage participation. Overcorrection and accent bias may alienate students and hinder their engagement.

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Need for Explicit Pronunciation Instruction	Desire for Dedicated Lessons	"We need more classes focused just on pronunciation." "It would help if we practiced pronunciation every week." "Speaking activities aren't enough to fix my pronunciation." "We need targeted training."	Students express a strong demand for explicit, structured pronunciation instruction. They recognize that general speaking activities do not provide sufficient focus on sound production, stress, and intonation, which are essential for improvement.
	Focused Skill Development	"Learning how to move my mouth for certain sounds helped me." "I want to learn stress and intonation patterns." "Phonetics lessons are useful but too short." "Detailed feedback would help a lot."	Students see pronunciation as a technical skill that benefits from targeted practice. They value detailed, constructive feedback and practical training in sound articulation, which can enhance both intelligibility and confidence.
Awareness of Global English (EIL/ELF)	Acceptance of Accent Diversity	"We need to accept that accents will be different, and that's okay." "English belongs to everyone, not just native speakers." "Different accents are part of English now." "We can still communicate even if we sound different."	Awareness of English as an International Language (EIL) encourages students to embrace accent diversity as a natural aspect of global communication. This acceptance fosters confidence and reduces anxiety over accent conformity.
	Global Communication Mindset	"I focus on being clear so anyone from any country can understand me." "Learning different accents helps me in online meetings." "It prepares me for international work." "Global English is more about	Students who adopt a global communication mindset prioritize mutual understanding over accent perfection. They aim to develop adaptable speaking and listening skills suited to multicultural and multilingual contexts.

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		connection than imitation."	
Identity and Language Ownership	Pronunciation as Self-Expression	"I want my pronunciation to reflect who I am." "It's part of my personality." "I don't want to erase my culture when I speak English." "My accent tells my story."	Students view pronunciation as an extension of personal identity. They resist pressures to conform entirely to external models, instead seeking a balance between clarity and authentic self-expression.
	Personal Connection to Speech	"When I speak in my own way, I feel comfortable." "I own my English, even if it's not perfect." "It's my voice, my choice." "Confidence comes from being myself."	Viewing English as their own language fosters a sense of ownership and agency. This perspective empowers students to embrace their unique speech patterns while still striving for effective communication.

This study finds that students have different views about pronunciation. Many students have their preferences, which shows that English is used in many ways today. Now, people think it is more important to be understood than to speak like a native speaker. This finding gives useful ideas for teaching pronunciation, especially in Islamic universities and other EFL situations.

First, students admire native-like pronunciation, but at the same time, they think intelligibility is more important. This means students feel confused sometimes. On one hand, they want to sound like native speakers because it looks good. On the other hand, they also know it is not easy or even necessary. This is also found by Buss, who said that students want to sound native but focus more on being understood (Buss, 2016). This study shows that students try to find a balance between their dreams and their real situations.

The focus on intelligibility agrees with Gilakjani & Sabouri (2020), who said being understood is the main goal in pronunciation learning. Students here also care more about being understood than speaking perfectly. This supports the idea that pronunciation teaching should help students communicate better. In a place like UIN Raden Intan Lampung, where students meet many English speakers, intelligibility is a more realistic and useful goal.

Cultural background also affects how students perceive pronunciation. Some students want to keep their culture while learning English, supporting Kholis's finding that teachers should respect students' culture in class (Kholis, 2021). How people speak is part of their identity. Forcing native-like speech might make students feel uncomfortable. So, pronunciation teaching must also respect what students believe and where they come from. Another important point concerns anxiety. Some students feel afraid to speak because they worry about their pronunciation. This is similar to the study by Hameed and Aslam, who found that pronunciation

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fear can stop students from speaking and learning well (Hameed & Aslam, 2015). Teachers should help students feel comfortable so they can speak freely and make mistakes without fear.

Many students also said they need more pronunciation practice. They think current classes do not give enough attention to it. Rajab also said that teaching pronunciation is important so students can speak better (Rajab, 2013). In this study, students wanted special pronunciation classes, not just small parts inside speaking lessons. If schools can give special classes, it will help students speak more clearly and confidently. Students are also becoming more aware of English as an International Language (EIL) and Lingua Franca (ELF). One student said that "accents will be different," showing that they accept many types of English pronunciation. This fits with Li, who said we should teach students that different accents are okay (Li, 2023). This thinking helps students feel more confident in their accent.The study also shows that pronunciation and identity are connected. Some students said their accent is part of who they are. Learning sounds is not just about learning them. So, teachers must support students in speaking in their way. Teachers should show that being clear and being yourself can go together.

From a teaching perspective, teachers need to help students speak clearly but also support those who still want to improve their accent. Teachers should not push students to sound native, but help them speak in a clear way that fits their goals. Teacher training should include learning about cultures, ELF, and how to teach pronunciation to different kinds of students.

This study tells students to focus more on communication than perfection. They should feel good about their accents if they can be understood. Success in pronunciation is not about copying but about speaking clearly and confidently. For people who make curriculum and education rules, they should add more ideas about ELF in English learning. This is important in Islamic universities where students meet people from many places. Teaching students to accept different accents, understand cultures, and keep their identity is important for real-life communication. Even though this study makes many good points, it also has limitations. The research was only conducted in one university, so we cannot say it is the same everywhere. Also, students gave their answers, which may not always be 100% true. Future researchers can study other universities and see how ideas change with time and work experience.

Conclusion

This study explained how English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung feel about pronunciation, especially between native-like pronunciation and intelligibility. The result showed that students have different ideas. Some students want to sound like native speakers because they think it sounds more professional and fluent. However, many students say understanding is more important than having a perfect accent. They want to speak clearly so people can understand them, especially in class or during job interviews. Culture and religion also influence their thinking. Some students said they want to keep their identity when speaking English. They believe their accent is part of who they are.

The study also found that many students feel nervous when speaking English because they are afraid to make mistakes in pronunciation. Some students said they did not get enough practice or support from their teachers. They also said that teachers sometimes gave different messages some teachers focused on clear speech, while others wanted them to sound like native speakers. Students are now more aware that English is used in many countries and has many accents. This shows that students are starting to accept English as an international language and focus more on communication than perfection.

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Based on the results, this study gives some suggestions. First, teachers must help students focus on clear pronunciation and not force them to sound like native speakers. Teachers should also make the classroom safe, where students are not afraid to speak and make mistakes. Teachers need to understand students' backgrounds and support them in speaking clearly and confidently. Second, curriculum developers should add special pronunciation lessons, not just as part of a speaking class. These lessons should include small sounds (like consonants and vowels) and bigger parts like intonation and stress. It is also good to teach students about different English accents worldwide. Third, it is important for the university to train teachers to teach pronunciation better and more inclusively. Lastly, it is a good idea for future researchers to do similar research in other universities to compare the results. They can also study how students' ideas about pronunciation change when they graduate or work in real lifes.

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