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## Pronunciation Error of English Silent Letters by Unklab Nursing Students

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Abstract	This research was aimed at discovering the kinds of pronunciation errors made by the nursing students of Universitas Klabat in Pre Intermediate 1 class of 2025/2026 academic year. It is a descriptive quantitative method by involving 20 students from the total population of 40. Pronunciation test and interview were used as the research instruments. In this research, the researcher used 10 sentences for students to read. Every sentence has its specific English word with silent letter which became the target word to find out if the student could read them well. Every silent letter will only appear once in every sentence and the students were not allowed to repeat their pronunciations. The results of the research clearly showed that the students were preconditioned to make two kinds of errors, which are pre-systematic errors and systematic errors. The pre-systematic errors occurred more frequently than the other one. The highest errors made by the students were silent letters "l" (e.g. talk) and "p" (e.g. pneumonia) where numbers of errors for both letters were 30 (50%) out of 60 errors. The conclusion could be that the students faced difficulties when pronouncing words that are normally rare in use in their daily English practices and also because the students do not have good skills.
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Keywords	Nursing, Pronunciation, Error, Silent Letter
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## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is the method by which a person articulates words in a manner that is accepted and understood by the people in a specific language community. It is seen as a key skill, signifying the level of mastery of English. According to Gilakjani (2012), "pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language acquisition as it directly impacts a learner's ability to communicate effectively". In fact, many people tend to judge English competence primarily based on an individual's pronunciation skills rather than other

linguistic abilities. Consequently, fluency and accurate pronunciation are often equated with successful language mastery.<sup>1</sup>

In the current era of globalization and modernization, mastering English is crucial, as the language acts as a primary tool for communication and interaction worldwide. As people from diverse backgrounds, languages, and cultures increasingly interact, a shared international language becomes essential for building relationships. While the traditional goal of pronunciation learning, as noted by Kenworthy (1987), was to achieve a native-like accent, many learners still face challenges. These include difficulty in understanding the native speakers speaking at natural speeds and with various accents, as well as their own speaking issues related to phonetics and phonology. Learners often default to pronouncing English based on the phonetic rules of their native language.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking English, Indonesian learners often carry over the phonetic rules of their native language. The phonological systems of English and Indonesian differ in several aspects. As noted by Pallawa (2013), Indonesians experience difficulties in pronouncing English words because many English phonological rules do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia. For instance, English words that end with the consonant clusters [l] and [p], such as scalp, pulp, and help, differ from Indonesian word structures, where similar clusters are divided into separate syllables, as in al-pa, pul-pen, and tel-pon. Consequently, Indonesian speakers often struggle to pronounce such clusters correctly and tend to insert a schwa [ə] sound between [l] and [p]. This reflects the influence of Indonesian phonological limitations when pronouncing English words.

A common issue in English pronunciation is the presence of silent letters: they are letters that appear in the spelling but are not pronounced. Podhaizer (1998) describes silent letters as letters that are written but not sounded.<sup>3</sup> As a result, learners frequently experience confusion when encountering words with silent letters. Even those familiar with silent letter rules may still make pronunciation errors, either through misunderstanding or inconsistent application of these rules. According to Brown (2007), an error refers to a noticeable deviation from the grammar or phonological norms of native speakers, reflecting learners' interlanguage competence.<sup>4</sup>

This phenomenon is also observed among students in the Nursing Faculty of Universitas Klabat that take the General English Subject. Pronunciation is an essential skill for them,

<sup>1</sup> Gilakjani, A. P. (2012). "A match or mismatch between learning styles of the learners and teaching styles of the teachers". *Modern Education and Computer Science*. 11: 51-60.

<sup>2</sup> Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English pronunciation*. New York: Longman Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Podhaizer, M. (2001). *Painless spelling*. New York: Baron's Educational Series.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

as they are expected to communicate clearly and effectively, especially when they will end up as nurses who would be working both in Indonesian's hospital and overseas. Pronunciation plays crucial role in mastering a new language because it determines how words are sounded and understood. Inaccurate pronunciation could lead to misunderstanding and misconception between speakers and listeners, which defines the essence of developing proper pronunciation skills.

Additionally, many research conducted in other universities suggested that pronunciation issues did occur among students, even though they have reach intermediate level. For example: a study by Utama (2018) highlighted various types of errors related to silent letters, which were primarily influenced by the students' native language, while a study by Salwa's (2017) showed that students frequently mispronounced certain sounds, with the most common interlingual pronunciation error being the [θ] sound. Similarly, Alqunayeer (2016) found that the most frequent mispronunciation occurred with the letter "g.", while a study by Ayumi (2018) discovered that more students were able to correctly pronounce words with silent letters than those who mispronounced them.<sup>5</sup>

Given these findings, the researchers saw the need to examine the types of errors in pronouncing silent letters made by the nursing students in Universitas Klabat. The research question was: what types of pronunciation errors do nursing students in the Pre Elementary 1 Class make when dealing with English silent letters? This study aims to provide valuable insights for students and support English lecturers in improving the effectiveness of teaching English silent letters.

## METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative method. According to Sugiyono (2009), this method uses numbers as the main data with statistical analysis to obtain the final result. The research was carried out in the English Class of Pre Intermediate 1 Parallel G where most of the students are from the Nursing Faculty of Universitas Klabat. The research samples were students in the Nursing Faculty in semester 1 and 3. In total, the population of the students in this class were 40, and 20 students were used as the research sample. As defined by Arikunto (2010), a population consists of all elements that share certain characteristics of interest.<sup>6</sup>

To identify the types of pronunciation errors made when pronouncing words with silent letters, the researcher used a pronunciation test and interviews as instruments. Arikunto

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<sup>5</sup> Utama, T. T. (2018). *Error analysis of silent letters "H" and "W" in English words by non-English department students*". Undergraduate Thesis. Yogyakarta : Sanata Dharma University

<sup>6</sup> Arikunto, S (2010). *Peosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik*. Jakarta: RINEKA CIPTA.

(2010) defines that “an instrument is a tool used by researchers to gather data”. The pronunciation test included English words containing silent letters. The words with English silent letters used in this pronunciation test are as followed: Doubt, Muscle, Wednesday, Foreign, Honest, Knife, Talk, Receipt, Pneumonia, Whistle.

The students were asked to pronounce the words by reading some short sentences containing the English words in target, as follows:

1. He has no **doubt** concerning the realization of the major project to be done in the coming years.
2. After practicing intense physical trainings, the participants of the game started to suffer issues with their **muscle** as this was the first time for them to do all the movements.
3. The next program will be held on **Wednesday** evening as agreed by all members of the committee.
4. All **foreign** players will have to register their names before joining the competition as required by the event organizer.
5. Being **honest** is not a choice but it has been the lifestyle of the students in this school since many years ago.
6. Parents must put away the **knife** when letting the children playing nearby the kitchen.
7. In the eastern culture, young people are asked to **talk** in polite way when being in the same room with the older one.
8. The business office will only cover the insurance claims when the **receipt** was handed within two weeks before the due date.
9. **Pneumonia** is a kind of internal disease that can only be cured if the patient consumes medicines on regular basis for 3 months.
10. The judge will close the case if the **whistle** blower does not show up to tell the truth of the crime act.

To ensure the validity of the instruments, expert judgment was applied. For data collection, the Otter Voice Meeting Notes application was used to record and transcribe students’ speech. The collected data were then analyzed using a specified formula.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of students' pronunciation error revealed the number and types of errors made by them. According to the above data, students made both pre-systematic and systematic errors, with pre-systematic errors being more frequent. A total of 20 pre-systematic errors were recorded, compared to 10 systematic errors, indicating that the most common type of error was pre-systematic. From the overall data (200 pronunciation instances), 60 errors were successfully identified. The most frequent pronunciation mistakes occurred in words containing the silent letters "l" and "p", each accounting for 15 errors, representing 50% of the total errors in those categories.

### Discussion

This study aimed to identify the kinds of pronunciation errors made by Nursing Students of Pre Intermediate 1 Parallel G in Universitas Klabat, particularly in relation to English silent letters. As cited by Corder in Ellis (1994), errors are classified into three categories: pre-systematic, systematic, and post-systematic. A pre-systematic error appears when learners cannot explain why they used a certain form; a systematic error occurs when learners understand the rule but are unable to correct the mistake; while a post-systematic error appears when learners know the rule and can correct the error.<sup>7</sup>

The findings of this research show similarities with other related studies in this field of research. All studies revealed that students mostly produced two types of errors: pre-systematic and systematic, with pre-systematic being the most dominant. This supports the idea of all the researches' conclusion that every word that contain silent letters has its unique features, leading students to pronounce them differently depending on their phonological knowledge. In addition, the influence of their mother tongue and phonotactic restrictions contributed to the pronunciation errors.

The highest error rate was recorded for silent letters "l" and "p," reaching 50% from the entire errors. Out of the 200 data points, 60 errors were identified. The most frequent mistakes were found in silent letters "l" and "p," with 30 errors, corresponding to 50%. A major difference between this study and previous research is that earlier studies also highlighted the factors causing the errors, while this research focused mainly on error types. Based on the data, the researchers found that many students tend to make pronunciation errors in many silent letters. When the researchers interviewed the students individually to clarify these errors, it was revealed that most of them were unaware of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition (Oxford Applied Linguistics)*. Philadelphia: Oxford University Press.

mistakes they had made. Furthermore, they are lacked of the ability to evaluate and correct their own pronunciation. The second type of mistake identified was systematic errors. These pronunciation errors occurred among students who already understood the rules of language and phonological symbols but still made mistakes when applying them in practice. Although they were aware of the pronunciation rules, they were often unable to evaluate or correct their errors.

In this research, students made various mistakes when pronouncing English words with silent letters. For example, they said "talk" as /tolk/ instead of the correct /tok/, they also said "pneumonia" as /pneumonia/, but the correct way is /numonia/. All these mistakes were mostly occurred because the students did not have enough knowledge and proper skills in pronunciation, and it is considered as pre systematic error. However, when the students were asked to repeat their pronunciation, they could almost successfully correct their mistakes. But since the test had its specific rule where the students could only say each sentence once, and they could not repeat it, their mistake still remained. Because of this, they could not fix their mistakes during the test. Later, the students were told to use dictionary or online dictionary to help them say the words correctly.

In this research, the researcher also found that even though many students knew the correct pronunciation, they still made mistakes. It happened because they were used to say the words in the wrong way without being corrected by the listeners in other occasions. The results showed that students understood the rules, but sometimes they still pronounced the words incorrectly. This research stands side by side with other previous researches, for example one that has been conducted by Utama (2018). In his research he concluded that there are three types of pronunciation mistakes: pre-systematic, systematic, and post-systematic. Students made different mistakes depending on how much they knew about the English sounds, and how accustomed they were to the words.<sup>8</sup>

Some students made systematic mistakes, but they knew when they were wrong and worked the best they could to fix them. This is called post-systematic error. It happens when students know the correct way to say a word, but do not always use it. Sometimes, they stop and try to correct themselves. But in this test, they were not allowed to repeat, so they could not fix their errors during the test. They only understood the rule after the test was finished. To sum up, in this research, just as many other related researches, students often made both pre-systematic and systematic errors, but the most common mistake was

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<sup>8</sup> Salwa, S. (2017). *An Analysis of interlingual errors in English pronunciation made by the fifth semester students of English education study program At Uin Raden Fatah Palembang. Undergraduate thesis.* Islamic State Palembang: University Raden Fatah.

pre-systematic as it was influenced by their preexisting knowledge and skill about the English words and their past experience related to the words.

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