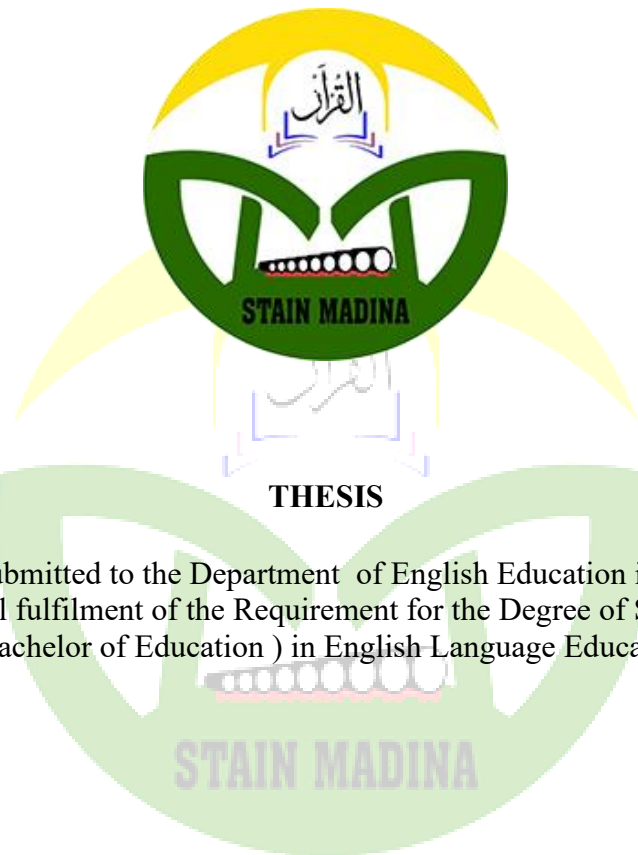


**THE ABILITY AND CHALLENGES IN PRONOUNCING FRICATIVE
SOUNDS AMONG THE SECOND SEMESTER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
STUDENTS AT STAIN MANDAILING NATAL**



THESIS

Submitted to the Department of English Education in a
Partial fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Strata I
(Bachelor of Education) in English Language Education

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION
STATE COLLEGE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES
MANDAILING NATAL
2026**

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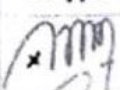
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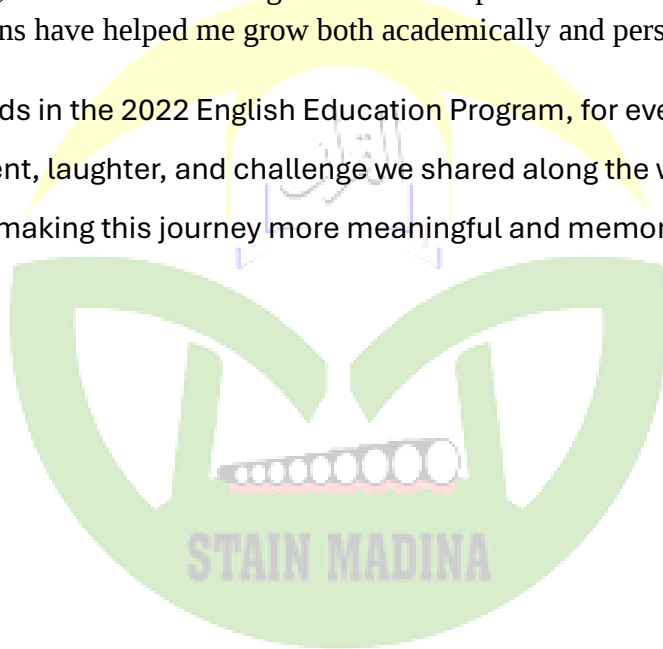
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

- My beloved parents, whose endless love, prayers, sacrifices, and support have been my greatest source of strength throughout this journey. No words could ever fully express my gratitude for everything you have done for me. This achievement is a reflection of your love and prayers.
- My beloved siblings, Asla Alayya, Akmal Akram, and Aqil Al-Majid, for always being there with your love, encouragement, and support. Thank you for being an important part of my journey and for always believing in me.
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All my friends in the 2022 English Education Program, for every moment, encouragement, laughter, and challenge we shared along the way. Thank you for making this journey more meaningful and memorable



MOTTO

“Allah SWT, tidak mengatakan hidup ini mudah, tetapi Allah SWT, berjanji bahwa sesungguhnya bersama kesulitan ada kemudahan.”

(Q.S Al-Insyirah: 5-6)

“Ketika kamu Ikhlas menerima semua kekecewaan hidup, maka ALLAH akan membayar tuntas kekecewaanmu dengan beribu-ribu kebaikan.”

(Ali Bin Abi Thalib)

“It was not easy, but it was worth every struggle.”

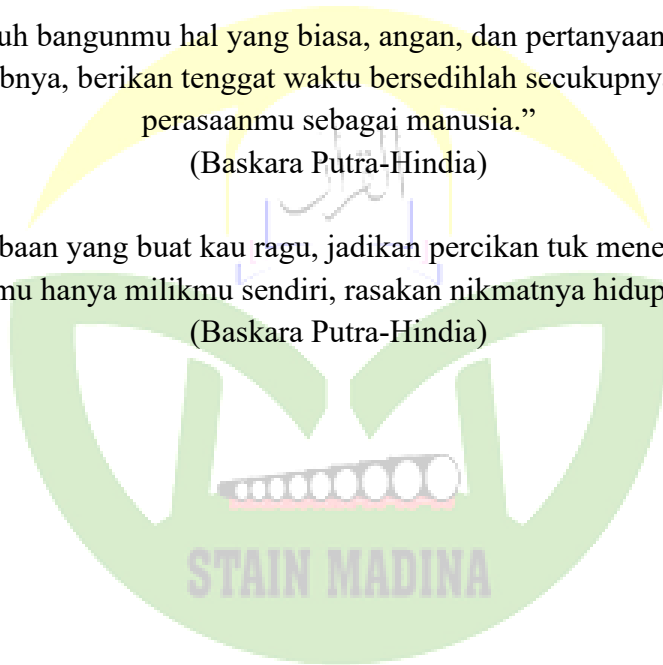
-Laila Saqila Putri (Researcher)

“Semua jatuh bangunmu hal yang biasa, angan, dan pertanyaan waktu yang menjawabnya, berikan tenggat waktu bersedihlah secukupnya, rayakan perasaanmu sebagai manusia.”

(Baskara Putra-Hindia)

“Berbagai cobaan yang buat kau ragu, jadikan percikan tuk menempa tekadmu, jalan hidupmu hanya milikmu sendiri, rasakan nikmatnya hidupmu hari ini.”

(Baskara Putra-Hindia)



ABSTRACT

Laila Saqila Putri, 2026. *‘ The Ability And Challenges In Pronouncing Fricatives Among The Second semester English Department Students At Stain Mandailing Natal’*

Pronouncing English fricative sounds accurately can be challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly when the target sounds differ from those familiar in their first language. This study aimed to investigate the pronunciation ability and challenges experienced by second-semester students of the English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal in pronouncing English fricative sounds. This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. The participants consisted of 25 second-semester students who met the predetermined criteria. Data were collected through a pronunciation test and a questionnaire. The pronunciation test consisted of 24 words representing eight English fricative consonants: /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/, with each sound presented in initial, medial, and final positions. The questionnaire consisted of 13 statements covering four indicators: Articulatory Difficulty, First Language Interference, Lack of Practice, and Low Confidence. The findings revealed an overall pronunciation accuracy of 61.83%, categorized as Fair. The /s/ sound obtained the highest accuracy (84%), while /ʒ/ obtained the lowest (29.33%). The questionnaire produced an overall mean score of 3.59, categorized as High. First Language Interference was the dominant challenge (3.97), followed by Articulatory Difficulty (3.76), Lack of Practice (3.45), and Low Confidence (3.16).

Keywords: English fricative sounds, pronunciation ability, pronunciation challenges, first language interference, English Department.

ABSTRAK

Laila Saqila Putri, 2026. *“Kemampuan dan Tantangan dalam Pengucapan Bunyi Frikatif pada Mahasiswa Semester Kedua Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di STAIN Mandailing Natal.”*

Mengucapkan bunyi frikatif bahasa Inggris secara akurat dapat menjadi tantangan bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), terutama ketika bunyi target tersebut berbeda dari bunyi yang familiar dalam bahasa pertama mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemampuan pengucapan dan tantangan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa semester kedua Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di STAIN Mandailing Natal dalam mengucapkan bunyi frikatif bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 25 mahasiswa semester kedua yang memenuhi kriteria yang telah ditentukan. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes pengucapan dan kuesioner. Tes pengucapan terdiri dari 24 kata yang mewakili delapan konsonan frikatif bahasa Inggris, yaitu /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, dan /ʒ/, dengan setiap bunyi disajikan pada posisi awal, tengah, dan akhir kata. Kuesioner terdiri dari 13 pernyataan yang mencakup empat indikator, yaitu Kesulitan Artikulasi, Interferensi Bahasa Pertama, Kurangnya Latihan, dan Kepercayaan Diri yang Rendah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat akurasi pengucapan secara keseluruhan adalah 61,83% dan dikategorikan sebagai Cukup (Fair). Bunyi /s/ memperoleh tingkat akurasi tertinggi, yaitu 84%, sedangkan bunyi /ʒ/ memperoleh tingkat akurasi terendah, yaitu 29,33%. Hasil kuesioner menunjukkan nilai rata-rata keseluruhan sebesar 3,59 yang dikategorikan Tinggi. Interferensi Bahasa Pertama menjadi tantangan yang paling dominan dengan nilai rata-rata 3,97, diikuti oleh Kesulitan Artikulasi sebesar 3,76, Kurangnya Latihan sebesar 3,45, dan Kepercayaan Diri yang Rendah sebesar 3,16.

Kata Kunci: bunyi frikatif bahasa Inggris, kemampuan pengucapan, tantangan pengucapan, interferensi bahasa pertama, Program Studi Bahasa Inggris

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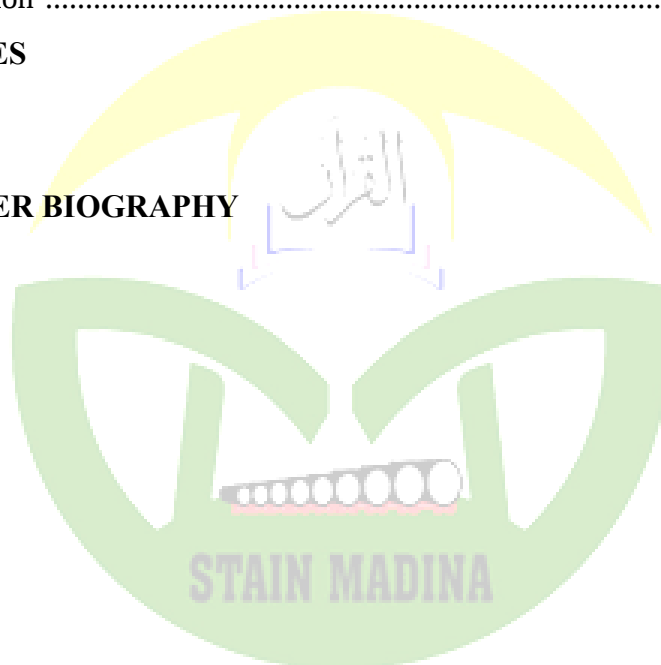
Panyabungan, August 2026

Laila Saqila Putri
NIM 22130021

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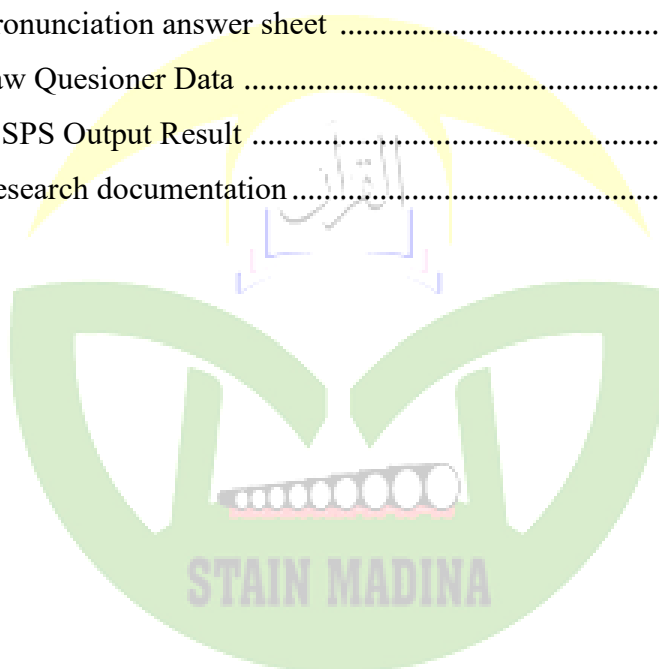


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the study

English has become an international language that plays a significant role in global communication, education, and academic contexts. In learning English, pronunciation is considered one of the essential components of speaking skills because it enables learners to convey meaning clearly and to be understood by others. Pronunciation competence influences how spoken messages are perceived and understood, often more significantly than grammatical accuracy Reskiawan et al. (2026). According to Brown (2014), pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of language learning that directly influences learners' communicative competence. Similarly, Derwing & Munro (2015) state that pronunciation accuracy is important because it helps learners produce English sounds correctly and avoid pronunciation errors.

However, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), pronunciation remains one of the most challenging aspects for learners. This difficulty arises because English has a sound system that is significantly different from Indonesian. As stated by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), pronunciation problems often occur due to unfamiliar sound features, limited exposure to authentic input, and lack of practice. As a result, many Indonesian learners experience difficulties in producing English sounds accurately, especially sounds that do not exist in their first language. Indonesian learners tend to rely heavily on their first language sound system when producing English sounds, a phenomenon commonly explained through the theory of first language interference Reskiawan et al. (2026).

In this study, the researcher focuses on the second semester students of English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal. The selection of the second semester students is based on several considerations. First, they are at the initial stage of their academic journey in the English Education program, where they are still developing their foundational English skills, including

pronunciation. According to Gerald (2016), early-stage learners require proper pronunciation guidance because incorrect pronunciation habits may become continue if not their future pronunciation development if not addressed early. As state by Haris et al. (2023) learning pronunciation at first year student is problem usually find it in early stage. Second, based on preliminary observation, these students show noticeable variation in their pronunciation ability, which makes them suitable subjects for describing both challenges and ability. Third, the second semester students are chosen because they represent a specific and clearly defined group, which helps avoid ambiguity in determining the research participants and ensures consistency throughout the study.

One of the pronunciation aspects that frequently causes difficulty for EFL learners is English fricative consonant sounds. Fricative sounds are produced by forcing air through a narrow passage in the vocal tract, creating friction Roach (2016). English fricative consonants include /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/. These sounds are important components of English pronunciation because they occur frequently in spoken communication and require accurate production to ensure effective communication. However, students whose first language is Mandailing often experience difficulties in producing these sounds accurately because several English fricative sounds are absent or articulated differently in the Mandailing sound system. Some English fricatives have no direct equivalents in Mandailing language, while others differ in their articulatory features, leading learners to substitute unfamiliar sounds with more familiar ones from their first language (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010). For non-native English speakers, phonological errors posed a serious problem, especially for those from Indonesia, where the local language's phonological structure is very different from English's (Finda Marelita & Iftanti, 2024).

Several previous studies have investigated students' difficulties in pronouncing English fricative consonant sounds in EFL contexts. For instance, Maysarah et al. (2023) found that students' ability in pronouncing English fricative consonants was categorized as fairly good; however,

significant difficulties were still found in sounds such as /f/, /θ/, and /z/. Similarly, Virgiyanti et al. (2025) reported that students frequently made errors in pronouncing interdental and alveolar fricative sounds, particularly /θ/, /ð/, and /z/.

In addition, Situmeang & Lubis (2020) revealed that students' pronunciation problems were strongly influenced by first language interference, especially in producing dental fricative sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/. Furthermore, Ristati et al. (2024) emphasized that voiced fricative sounds tend to be more difficult for Indonesian learners due to the absence of these sounds in their native phonological system. These findings indicate that English fricative consonant sounds remain a major challenge for EFL learners in Indonesia.

However, most of these studies primarily focus on identifying students' difficulties using qualitative approaches or are conducted in different institutional contexts. Only a limited number of studies provide a quantitative descriptive analysis that examines both students' ability and their challenges simultaneously, particularly among beginner-level university students. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by providing a quantitative description of both aspects among the second semester students of STAIN Mandailing Natal.

Based on a preliminary investigation conducted by the researcher on December 10, 2025, among the second semester students of the English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal, several pronunciation problems related to English fricatives were identified. The preliminary assessment was carried out informally by asking students to read a list of English words containing English fricatives. The activity aimed to obtain an initial picture of students' pronunciation performance before conducting the research.

The results indicated that many students experienced difficulties in accurately pronouncing several English fricatives. For example, the dental fricative /θ/ in words such as “think” and “thank” was frequently pronounced as /t/, while the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in words such as “this” and “those”

was often pronounced as /d/. Similar difficulties were found in the pronunciation of other fricative sounds, including /v/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/, which were often substituted with sounds that are more familiar to the students' first language sound system.

These initial findings suggest that differences between the English and Mandailing phonological systems may influence students' pronunciation of English fricatives. As a result, students tend to rely on the sound patterns of their first language when pronouncing unfamiliar English sounds, which may affect the accuracy of their pronunciation.

Moreover, the preliminary investigation also revealed that students faced non-linguistic challenges. Many students showed hesitation when asked to pronounce words, spoke with low confidence, and were afraid of making mistakes. Some students read the words slowly and repeatedly before pronouncing them, while others avoided speaking altogether. This suggests that pronunciation difficulties are not only caused by articulatory problems but also influenced by affective factors such as lack of confidence and limited practice, as explained by (Brown, 2014).

These problems are important to be studied because incorrect pronunciation can affect students' communication skills. If these difficulties are not addressed at an early stage, they may become permanent and hinder students' development as English learners and future English teachers. As stated by Derwing & Munro (2015), improving pronunciation is essential to ensure effective communication and to avoid misunderstanding in spoken interaction.

In addition, although the population of this study consists of all second semester students of the English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal, the participants are selected using purposive sampling. The participants are chosen based on several considerations, namely their willingness to participate in the research, their availability during the data collection period, and their presence in the Panyabungan area during the semester break. This sampling technique is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to obtain

participants who meet the criteria relevant to the objectives of the study while considering the practical limitations of data collection. By involving selected second semester students, this study is expected to provide a clear and contextual description of students' ability and challenges in pronouncing fricatives.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to describe the ability and the challenges of the second semester students in pronouncing fricatives. By presenting empirical data on students' pronunciation performance and the challenges they face, this research is expected to contribute to improving pronunciation teaching strategies, especially at the early stage of English language learning in higher education.

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the problems identified in this research are as follows:

1. Most of students the second semester of English Department students have difficulty in pronouncing English fricatives accurately.
2. Students have difficulty pronouncing several English fricatives, including /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/.
3. Students tend to substitute English fricatives with similar sounds from their first language, such as pronouncing /θ/ as /t/ and /ð/ as /d/.
4. Students show hesitation and lack confidence when pronouncing English words containing fricatives.
5. There are noticeable variations in students' ability in pronouncing English fricative consonant sounds ranging from minimal to severe difficulty among the second semester students.

C. Limitation of the Problems

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was limited to 25 participants out of a population of 39 second semester students at STAIN Mandailing Natal. This small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings to other populations or institutions.

Second, this study was conducted at a single institution (STAIN Mandailing Natal), which means the findings may not represent the experiences of students in other higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Third, the data were collected using a pronunciation test and a self-reported questionnaire. While the pronunciation test provided objective data, students may have experienced test anxiety that affected their performance. Similarly, questionnaire responses may be influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may have provided answers they perceived as favorable.

Fourth, this study employed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at one point in time. As a result, the findings reflect students' ability and challenges at a specific moment and do not capture changes over time.

Fifth, this study focused exclusively on eight English fricative consonant sounds (/f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/). Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other pronunciation aspects such as vowels, diphthongs, stress, intonation, or other consonant sounds.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the pronunciation ability and challenges of EFL learners in the context of STAIN Mandailing Natal and contributes to the growing body of research on English fricative pronunciation in Indonesia.

D. Formulation of the Problem

1. How is the ability of the second semester of the English Department students at STAIN Mandailing Natal in pronouncing Fricative sounds?
2. What challenges are faced by the second semester students of English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal in pronouncing fricative sounds?

E. Objectives of the Study

1. To measure the ability of the second semester students of English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal in pronouncing fricative sounds.
2. To identify the challenges faced by the second semester students of English Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal in pronouncing fricative sounds.

F. Significance of the Study

1. For English Teacher

This study is expected to provide information about students' ability and their challenges in pronouncing English fricatives. The findings of this research can help lecturers design more effective pronunciation teaching strategies, especially in teaching difficult sounds such as /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/ for beginner-level students.

2. For the Students

This study is expected to help students become more aware of their difficulties in pronouncing English fricatives. By understanding their challenges and current ability, students can improve their pronunciation skills and increase their confidence in speaking English.

3. For Future Researchers

This study is expected to be a reference for future researchers who are interested in pronunciation studies, particularly in English fricatives. It can also provide insight for further research using different methods, participants, or research designs. Future researcher may examine the relationship between specific L1 background and specific fricative errors.

G. Definition of Operational variables

1. Students' Ability

Students' ability refers to the students' capability in pronouncing English fricatives accurately. In this study, ability is measured based on students' pronunciation performance using a pronunciation test, focusing on accuracy.

2. Students' Challenges

Students' challenges refer to the difficulties experienced by the second semester students in pronouncing English fricatives. In this study, these challenges include articulatory difficulty, first language interference, lack of pronunciation practice, and low confidence, which are measured through a questionnaire.

3. **Pronunciation**

Pronunciation refers to the way in which English sounds are produced by the students, especially in terms of articulating consonant sounds correctly and clearly

4. **English Fricatives**

English fricatives are consonant sounds produced by forcing air through a narrow passage in the vocal tract, creating friction. In this study, the sounds are /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/

