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ENGLISH DIPHTHONGS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTION: A PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract:

Certain English sounds are absent from Indonesian, making pronating English diphthongs challenging for certain students. It is challenging for students to pronounce English diphthongs correctly due to various internal and external factors, including their ignorance of when to pronounce them based on their type and position. The researchers attempt to examine how difficult it is for the students and how they perceive English diphthongs based on the issue they are facing. This study's objectives are the most challenging diphthongs pronounced by students, the most difficult diphthong position, and the degree to which students struggle with pronouncing English diphthong sounds. The design of this study is quantitative and descriptive. Forty-two students comprise the study's sample, and their answers to an oral exam and questionnaire are used to gather data. The researchers found 97 errors in the closing type and 191 in the centering type of diphthongs uttered by the students. The most challenging position of diphthongs in their pronunciation is the centering position (*eə*, *ɪə*, *ʊə*). In addition, five factors are becoming the reason for students' difficulty in pronouncing English diphthong sounds. They are (1) the students have less confidence while pronouncing words, (2) each student has different and limited skills, (3) the lack of motivation from the students causes difficulties in the teaching and learning process, (4) the family environment is very influential in the language development of the students, and (5) the social environment is also one of the influences in the language development of the students. The implication of this study can be in the field of linguistics and education, for example, phonological theories and pedagogical strategies.

Keywords: English Diphthongs; Learning perception; Phonological Analysis

Abstrak:

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Firghy et al. (2024)

Bunyi-bunyi tertentu dalam bahasa Inggris tidak terdapat dalam bahasa Indonesia, sehingga menyulitkan mahasiswa tertentu untuk melafalkan diftong bahasa Inggris. Sulit bagi mahasiswa untuk melafalkan bunyi diftong bahasa Inggris dengan benar karena berbagai faktor internal dan eksternal, termasuk ketidaktahuan mahasiswa mengenai kapan harus melafalkan diftong berdasarkan jenis dan posisinya. Para peneliti mencoba untuk meneliti seberapa sulit bagi mahasiswa dan bagaimana mereka memandang diftong bahasa Inggris berdasarkan masalah yang mereka hadapi. Diftong yang paling menantang diucapkan oleh mahasiswa, posisi diftong yang paling sulit, dan sejauh mana mahasiswa kesulitan dalam mengucapkan bunyi diftong bahasa Inggris adalah tujuan dari penelitian ini. Desain penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif kuantitatif. Sebanyak 42 mahasiswa menjadi sampel penelitian ini, dan jawaban mereka terhadap ujian lisan dan kuesioner digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Para peneliti menemukan 97 kesalahan dalam diftong tipe closing dan 191 kesalahan dalam diftong tipe centering yang diucapkan oleh para mahasiswa. Posisi diftong yang paling sulit dalam pengucapannya adalah posisi di tengah (eə, ɪə, ʊə). Selain itu, ada lima faktor yang menjadi penyebab kesulitan mahasiswa dalam melafalkan bunyi diftong bahasa Inggris. Faktor-faktor tersebut adalah (1) mahasiswa kurang percaya diri dalam mengucapkan kata, (2) setiap mahasiswa memiliki kemampuan yang berbeda dan terbatas, (3) kurangnya motivasi dari mahasiswa menyebabkan kesulitan dalam proses belajar mengajar, (4) lingkungan keluarga sangat berpengaruh dalam perkembangan bahasa mahasiswa, dan (5) lingkungan pergaulan juga menjadi salah satu pengaruh dalam perkembangan bahasa mahasiswa. Implikasi dari penelitian ini dapat di bidang linguistik dan pendidikan, misalnya teori-teori fonologi dan strategi pedagogi.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Fonologi, Diftong Bahasa Inggris, Persepsi Pembelajaran

INTRODUCTION

Students find it difficult to pronounce words correctly in English, but this is because they have varying abilities, particularly when it comes to pronouncing words that contain diphthongs. According to Donal (2016), Indonesian students typically have more difficulty pronouncing diphthongs (aʊ) than they do diphthongs [ɔɪ]. Pratiwi & Indrayani (2021) explains that four students mispronounced the diphthongs (eɪ), (ɛə), (ʊə), and (aɪ); three students had trouble pronouncing the diphthong (aʊ); and two students mispronounced the diphthong (oo). Haris et al. (2023) say that the students' problems pronouncing diphthongs were caused by six factors, including the influence of mother tongue, lack of knowledge of diphthong materials, seldom practice, difficulty to memorize diphthong sounds, fossilization, and lack of motivation. Donal (2016) and Pratiwi & Indrayani (2021) claimed that the diphthong (aʊ) sound is the most challenging to pronounce, which highlights the similarities between the two in terms of students' struggles with pronunciation. They both concluded that the students' unfamiliarity with English was the reason for the error or difficulty. Donal (2016) and Haris et al. (2023) agree that factors that make it difficult to pronounce English diphthongs cause internal factors.

In previous research, they discussed students' mistakes in pronouncing diphthongs and factors that influenced students in pronouncing diphthongs. The difference with previous research is that Donal (2016) and Pratiwi & Indrayani (2021) only focused on students'

Firghy et al. (2024)

mistakes in pronouncing the diphthongs. In this research, the researcher analyzed the students' mistakes based on the types and positions of diphthongs in words. Donal (2016) and Haris et al. (2023) see factors that influenced students in pronouncing diphthongs by internal factors. Meanwhile, in this research, the researchers used external and internal factors. The novelty of this research is that diphthongs have a type and position in each word. Apart from internal factors, external factors can influence students' pronunciation of diphthongs.

In this research, contributions are made to linguistics and the development of teaching methods. In linguistics, a richer understanding of changes in phonology and variations in diphthongs in English is needed. Meanwhile, for the development of teaching methods, it is crucial to provide a new perspective on the diphthong teaching method in English language learning and help develop teaching strategies that are more appropriate to student needs.

Sound has a significant role in language because it can transmit information or utterances through oral and nasal cavities (Ohala, 1983; Boersma, 1998; Dellwo et al., 2007). Therefore, pronouncing the words to be expressed dramatically influences how people speak. Bruder (1976), Huwari et al. (2015), and Hussien et al. (2020) assume that pronouncing words correctly involves a set of phonetic habits. There is a distinctive pronunciation for every sound. It comprises a language's specific vowels and consonants (segments). There are two pronunciation features in English: supra-segmental and segmental (Lasi, 2020; Saito, 2011). Supra-segmental features refer to stress, pitch, and link (Mirgani Ali Ahmed et al., 2022). Sahatsathatsana (2017) points out that suprasegmentals are units that govern more than one sound in an utterance, which includes stress (word and sentence stress), intonation, and connected speech (assimilation, elision, linking, and intrusion), while segmental features are also known as speech sound. Speech sounds are produced through the movement of the lips and tongue during verbal communication and are used to form words and sentences (Smith, 2009). Speech sounds are classified into vowels and consonants (Phatak & Allen, 2007). Rustipa (2009) describes speech sounds of a language are classified into vowels (pure vowels and diphthongs) and consonants. It means that vowels and consonants belong to speech sounds based on the differences in their function and ways of production.

In this study, students had difficulty pronouncing diphthong words, which were divided into the types and positions of diphthongs in the word. By gaining students' perceptions of diphthongs, which are influenced by theoretical expectations, students can

Firghy et al. (2024)

contribute to learning methods and teaching learning strategies that are tailored to students' abilities. Students' perceptions of diphthongs can be subjective, and their interpretations may vary. Some students may have different linguistic backgrounds or accents that influence their perception, making it challenging to generalize findings. From the explanation above, the researchers raise the research questions as follows:

1. What is the most challenging type of diphthongs for the students to pronounce?
2. What is the most challenging position for students with diphthongs?
3. Why is it difficult for the students to pronounce English diphthong sounds?

METHOD

Design

The researchers used a quantitative descriptive method, meaning independent variables. The quantitative descriptive method was used to know students' mistakes in diphthongs uttered by the students at Tadulako University. In addition, this research aims to identify and evaluate the research problem and derive the research findings.

Participant

The population of this research was the third semester of the English Education Department of Tadulako University. There are six parallel classes, and the total student number is 248. The researchers chose the third semester to be the population because the students had passed the linguistics subject. The researchers utilized purposive sampling to gather the sample needed to assess the impact of implementing online learning in that particular class. The researchers used a sample of 42 students from a single class, class B.

Instrument:

The instruments used in this research are oral tests and questionnaires. The first instrument is the oral test. It consists of 23 words. The students did the oral test according to the instructions from the researchers. The oral test answers the first and the second research questions. The second instrument is a questionnaire. To collect the data, the researchers used a Likert scale to measure attitudes and opinions and determine the frequency. According to Nemoto and Beglar (2014), the Likert scale is a psychometric tool that allows respondents to select from various categories to express their ideas, attitudes, or feelings regarding a specific

topic. Therefore, the Likert scale is significant for collecting data for the third research question.

Data collecting technique:

The researchers used two steps to collect the data. The first step was an oral test, and the second was a questionnaire.

1).Oral Test.

The words and transcriptions for the test were taken from the Cambridge Dictionary and created by the researchers. The actions are as follows: First, the researchers described the test's instructions. Second, the students pronounced the words aloud as the researchers recorded their voices and noted any mistakes the students made. The researchers then examined the gathered data.

2).Questionnaire Test.

The researchers designed the questionnaire test based on Kwary's theory (2006), cited by Donal (2016). The steps are as follows: First, the researchers found several theories about students' difficulty pronouncing diphthongs. Second, the researchers listed the factors that make it difficult to pronounce English diphthongs. Then, design statements based on the factors through Fishbone. Next, the researchers designed the form to address the difficulty of pronouncing diphthongs. Then, the researchers shared links using Google Forms with the 15 students. Next, the researchers checked the validity of the statements using the SPSS program. Last, the researchers revised the questionnaire based on the validity result and re-shared the link with the students selected as the sample. In designing the questionnaire, the researchers used Fishbone because Fishbone is a tool that can completely describe all the contributing factors to a problem. Coccia (2017) mentions that a fishbone diagram is a graphical tool that displays the various factors contributing to a specific frequency or phenomenon. The researchers employed Fishbone to identify and determine the difficulty of pronouncing English diphthongs.

Data analysis technique:

Data analysis is crucial for obtaining essential conclusions from research data. Data aided the researchers' findings from the research questions. The methods for data analysis involve a few different tasks. Inter-rater reliability was not achieved when the researchers created the test and questionnaire for internal or private use only.

1).Analyzing the Oral Test.

The researchers first heard the students' responses from the record. Second, the researchers noted the students' pronunciation errors in English diphthongs. Subsequently, the researchers compiled a list of the students' errors. Then, the researchers determined which type of diphthongs the students found more challenging to pronounce. Finally, to determine which position of diphthongs was the most difficult, the researchers calculated the number of times students mispronounced the sounds.

2).Analyzing the questionnaire.

First, the researchers saw the answer from each variable. Second, the researchers analyzed the responses from all of the samples and analyzed them using the SPSS program. Last, the researchers found the most dominant variable based on the answer from the sample, which helped the researchers answer research question number three.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of the data are based on the result of the analysis data. It consists of three parts to answer the three research questions.

1. The difficult types of diphthongs in students' pronunciation

In this section, the researchers explain the findings of types of diphthongs in students' pronunciation by pronouncing 23 words. There are two types that they have to pronounce. From the words pronounced by the students, the researchers identified types of diphthongs produced by the students.

From the total frequency of types of diphthongs, the researchers attempt to explain in detail based on the words pronounced by the students.

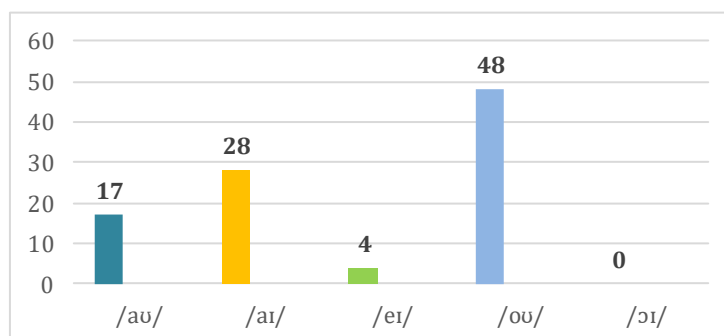


Figure 1 The difficult type of closing diphthongs

There are five closing diphthongs, such as /aʊ/, /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /oʊ/, and /ɔɪ/. Figure 1 shows that the researchers found the frequency of students' difficulty in closing diphthongs pronunciation test. Seventeen students mispronounced diphthongs /aʊ/, 28 students for diphthongs /aɪ/, four students for diphthongs /eɪ/, 48 students mispronounced diphthongs /oʊ/. Furthermore, for the diphthong /ɔɪ/, no students mispronounced the word that the researchers provided. Therefore, there are 97 mistakes in closing diphthongs that the students mispronounced.

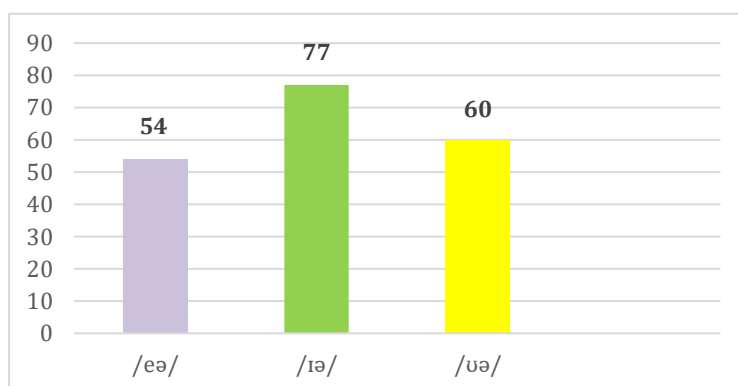


Figure 2 The difficult type of centering diphthongs

Figure 2 illustrates the frequency of students' difficulty in centering diphthongs pronunciation tests. The figure is divided into 3 bars. The researchers found the most challenging diphthong with the highest percentage, diphthong /ɪə/, with 77 diphthongs. On the other hand, diphthong /ʊə/ is the second highest, with 60 mistakes in students' answers. The diphthong /eə/ had a total number of 54 incorrect answers. Overall, the total frequency of mistakes in centering diphthongs is 191.

Table 1 Frequency of the difficult types of diphthongs

Types of Diphthongs	Diphthongs					Total Frequency
	aʊ	aɪ	eɪ	oʊ	ɔɪ	
Closing Diphthongs						97

Firghy et al. (2024)

Centering Diphthongs	eə	ɪə	ʊə	191
Total				288

Table 1 shows that the researchers found the total frequency of the types of diphthongs in students' pronunciation. From the table, the researchers can answer the first question about the most challenging type of diphthongs for the students to pronounce. As a result, the researchers can conclude that centering diphthongs are the most difficult to pronounce, totalling 191.

2. The most difficult position of diphthongs in students' pronunciation

There are three positions of diphthongs. The researchers provide some figures about the problematic positions of diphthongs in students' pronunciation.

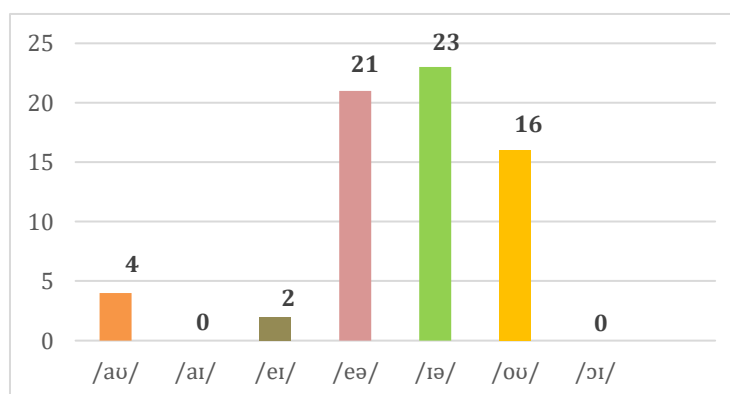


Figure 3 The difficult diphthongs in initial position

Figure 3 is about the problematic diphthongs in an initial position. The figure is divided into 7 bars because one diphthong never occurs in an initial position, which is /ʊə/. The researchers found the most challenging diphthong in the initial position is diphthong /ɪə/ with a total frequency of 23. Two diphthongs are easier to pronounce. They are diphthongs /aɪ/ and /ɔɪ/.

Next, the researchers provide the difficult diphthongs in the medial position in Figure 4. It provides information about the frequency of students' difficulty in pronouncing English diphthongs in medial positions. Compared to the initial position, the medial position has eight diphthongs, and the students can easily pronounce diphthong /ɔɪ/ and /eɪ/, while diphthong /aɪ/ becomes the most challenging position for the students to pronounce. The total mistake that occurs in this diphthong is 29.

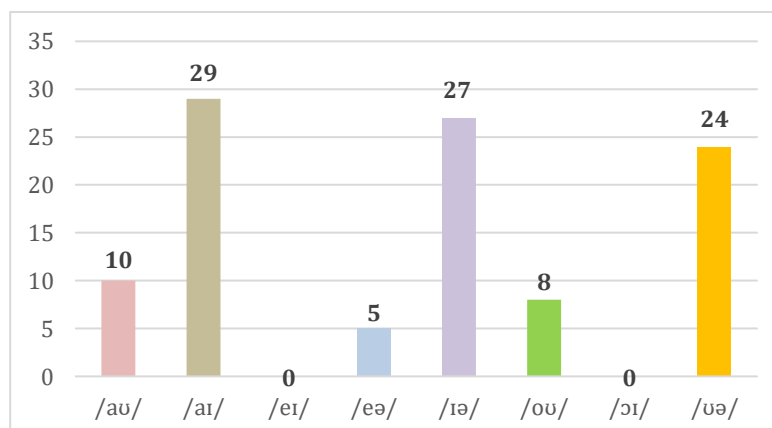
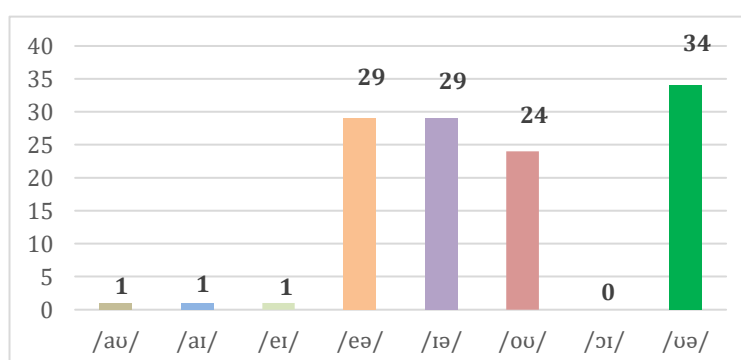
**Figure 4 The difficult diphthongs in medial position****Figure 5 The difficult diphthongs in final position**

Figure 5 shows the problematic position of diphthongs in students' pronunciation. The final position has eight diphthongs that can occur in the ultimate one. The easiest diphthong pronounced by the students effortlessly is diphthong /ɔɪ/, and diphthongs /au/, /ai/, and /ei/ can be categorized as the second easiest ones to pronounce. The diphthong that becomes the most difficult for the students to pronounce is /ʊə/, with a total frequency of 34 mistakes.

Table 2 Frequency of the most difficult position of diphthongs

Position	Of								Total
Diphthongs	Diphthongs								
Initial	au	ai	ei	eə	ɪə	ou	ɔɪ	-	66
Medial	au	ai	ei	eə	ɪə	ou	ɔɪ	ʊə	103
Final	au	ai	ei	eə	ɪə	ou	ɔɪ	ʊə	119
total									288

After analyzing the data, the researchers found 288 mistakes in any position of the diphthong. Based on the findings, the researchers can sum up that the most challenging

position of diphthongs in students' pronunciation is the final position, with a total frequency of 119. In contrast, the most accessible position of diphthongs is the initial position, with a total frequency of 66.

3, Students' difficulty in pronouncing English diphthong sounds

Table 3 (in appendices) draws valid questionnaire statements about the factors influencing the students' understanding of English diphthong sounds. The researchers used the SPSS program to test the validity of statements. Based on the table, there are five variables consisting of 25 statements out of 60 statements. The researchers can answer the question number three using that table. In conclusion, the researchers provide figures and a table about the factors that influence students' understanding of English diphthong sounds below:

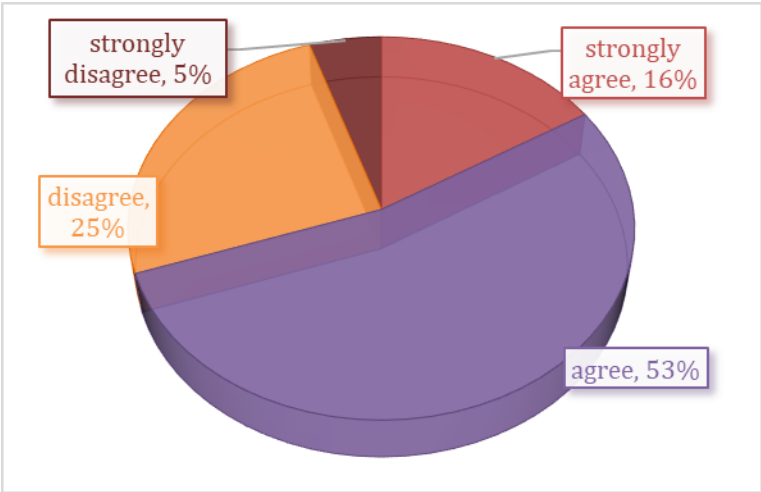


Figure 6 The percentage of students answer in variable 1

The data in Table 4 and Figure 6 show the students' answer in variable one, which is that *the students have less confidence while pronouncing words*. Variable one consists of two opposing statements. The researchers provided negative statements to know students' understanding of English diphthong sounds. There are 16% (40) of students who chose strongly agree, 53% (132) of students who chose to agree, 25% (61) who chose to disagree, and 5% (14) who chose *strongly disagree*. In addition, the first variable becomes one factor that influences the students in pronouncing English diphthong sounds.

Firghy et al. (2024)

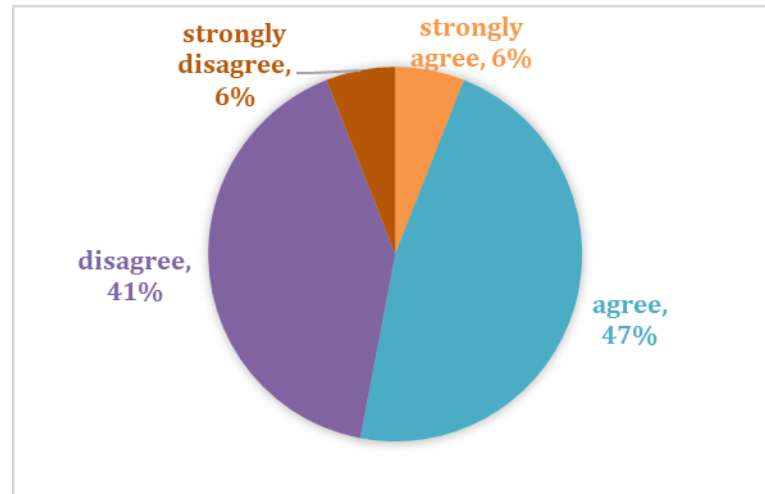


Figure 7 The percentage of students answer in variable 2

Table 5 and Figure 7 illustrate variable two, which is about *students having different and limited skills*. Based on the data in Figure 7, there is 53% of students who are classified as agreeing with the statement, divided into 47% (104) *agree* and 6% (14) *strongly agree*, while there is 47% is divided into 41% (91) *disagree* and 6% (13) *strongly disagree*. As a result, the statements in variable two turn into the factors influencing the students in pronouncing English diphthong sounds.

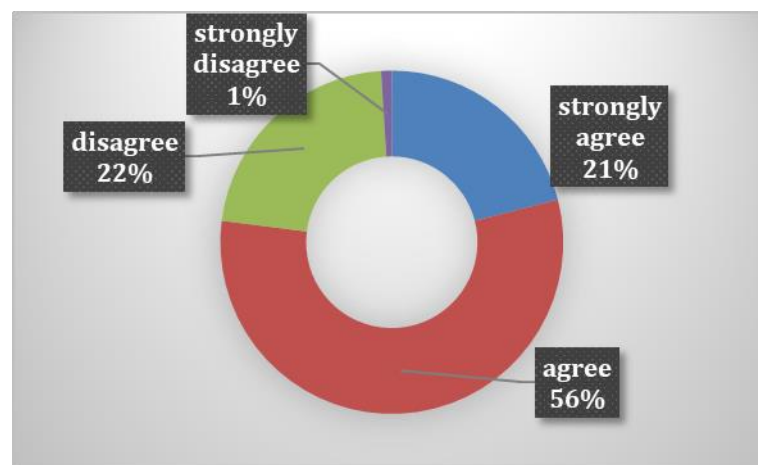


Figure 8 The percentage of students answer in variable 3

The data in Table 6 and Figure 8 provide information about variable three: the lack of motivation in the students causes *difficulties in the teaching and learning process*. The data shows that the students *agree* with the statements more than the students *disagree*. There, 77% chose to *agree*, 21% (23) chose to strongly agree, and 56% (63) chose to *agree*. Meanwhile, 23% of students chose to *disagree*, 22% (24) chose to *disagree*, and 1% (1) chose

strongly disagree. In conclusion, each statement in variable three becomes the factor that influences the students in pronouncing English diphthong sounds.

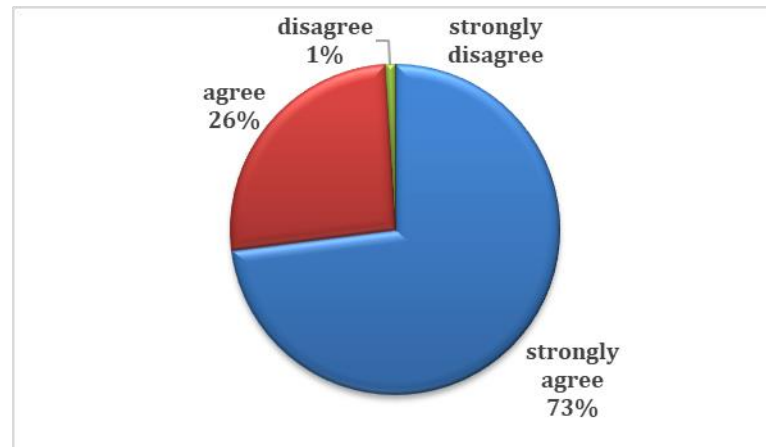


Figure 9 The percentage of students answer in variable 4

Variable four is that *the family environment influences the students' language development*. Table 7 and Figure 9 provide information about the frequency and percentages of students' answer based on the variable four. The data show that 73% (54) chose strongly agree and 1% (1) chose *disagree*. As a result, the factors influencing the family environment become why the students have difficulty pronouncing English diphthong sounds.

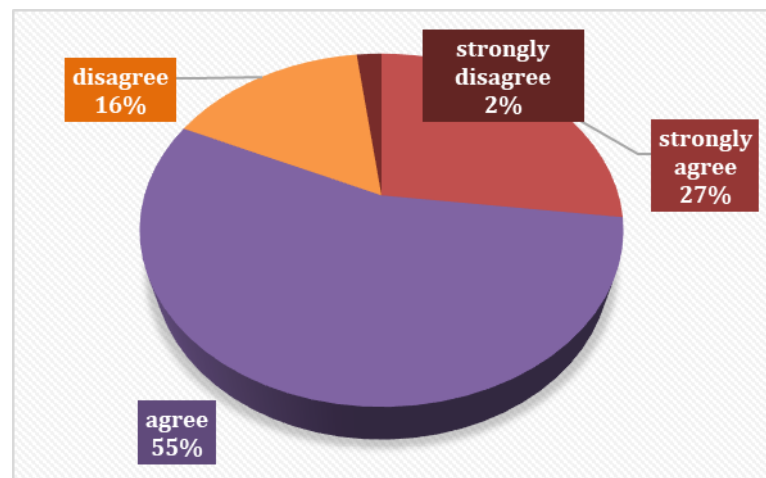


Figure 10 The percentage of students answer in variable 5

The last variable is *the social environment, which is also one of the influences on the student's language development*. Table 8 and Figure 10 are the frequency and percentages of students' answers in variable five. Both provide information about the students choosing 82% *agree*, divided into 27% (70) choosing *strongly agree*, and 55% (143) choosing to *agree*, while there is 18% choosing to *disagree*, divided into 16% (42) choosing to *disagree* and 2% (4)

choosing *strongly disagree*. On the other hand, the statements in variable five are acceptable as the factors influencing the students' pronunciation of English diphthong sounds.

Discussion

The researchers describe the findings related to the research questions: what is the most challenging type of diphthongs pronounced by the students, what is the most difficult position of diphthongs made by the students, and why is it difficult for the students to pronounce English diphthong sounds.

The finding for research question number one, about the most challenging type of diphthongs pronounced by the students, is also similar to the research conducted by Saadah and Ardi (2020). The finding showed that centering diphthongs are the most difficult sounds to pronounce. The researchers found another study with the same findings as those conducted by Dosia and Rido (2017). They found the centering diphthongs were the hardest to pronounce, and the closing diphthongs such as /aɪ/, /eɪ/, and /ɔɪ/ were the opposite. The researchers also found the contrast findings conducted by Donal (2016), who found that the problematic type of diphthongs in students' pronunciation is closing diphthongs, especially diphthong /aʊ/. Based on this study, it is difficult for the Indonesian students to pronounce the type of diphthongs correctly because the students mostly use American diphthongs in teaching and learning. In this class, the students are taught using an American rather than a British accent.

Based on the second research question about the most difficult position of diphthongs made by the students, the researchers found 288 mistakes in their pronunciation. The students find it difficult to pronounce English diphthongs based on position, which is divided into three positions, and the most difficult one is the final one. The researchers can conclude that the answer to research question number two becomes the novelty of this study because no study has been done on the problematic position of diphthongs pronounced by the students. While other researchers usually focus on the position of the articulators when pronouncing diphthongs, the researchers here concentrate on the position of diphthongs in words, whether initial, medial, or final. Because they are unsure when to pronounce each diphthong, Indonesian students find it challenging to pronounce English diphthongs correctly. This study emphasizes the vowels of monosyllabic words so that the students can pronounce them easily. This study is the first to distinguish between diphthong word types and positions. Diphthongs

were not categorized according to their type or location in words in earlier studies. As a result, this study is the first to address the types and positions of diphthongs in words.

The researchers found five factors influencing students in pronouncing English diphthong sounds: 1. The students have less confidence while pronouncing words; 2. Each student has different and limited skills; 3. The lack of motivation from the students causes the difficulties in the teaching and learning process; 4. The family environment influences the student's language development; and 5. The social environment is also one of the influences on the student's language development. The five factors above can be categorized into internal and external factors. The findings were also supported by two researchers, Gilakjani (2016) and Maiza (2020), who said that the factors of students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthong sounds could be categorized into motivation and skill. The other three factors become the novelty of this study. They are less confident in their family environment and social environment.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

After conducting the research and data analysis, the researchers concluded that the most challenging type of diphthongs for the students to pronounce is centering diphthongs, especially in diphthong /ɪə/. The frequency of mistakes in diphthong /ɪə/ is 77. It means the students cannot pronounce diphthongs correctly, especially in diphthong /ɪə/. Moreover, the researchers also achieved the most challenging position of diphthongs for students is the final position, especially in diphthongs/ʊə/. The frequency of mistakes in diphthong /ʊə/ is 34. The data show that the students still face difficulty pronouncing English diphthong sounds due to internal and external factors. There are some reasons why the students find it difficult to pronounce English diphthong sounds: the students have less confidence while pronouncing words, each student has different and limited skills, and the lack of motivation from the students causes the difficulties in the teaching and learning process, the family environment is very influential in the language development of the students. The social environment is also one of the influences on the student's language development.

Limitation

Analyzing diphthongs produced by students may focus predominantly on their productive skills (speech production). However, it might be equally important to consider

Firghy et al. (2024)

their receptive skills (listening comprehension) to gain a comprehensive understanding of diphthong mastery. Students' perceptions of diphthongs can be subjective, and their interpretations may vary. Some students may have different linguistic backgrounds or accents that influence their perception.

Implication

The information and result of this research may be used as a reference for other researchers who intend to conduct further similar research related to the analysis of students' errors in pronouncing English diphthongs. Practically, this research is expected to give feedback to English lecturers. The feedback of this research is about the analysis of students' errors in pronouncing English diphthongs, which will be a breakthrough in developing the teaching and learning process of English subjects. For the students, it is expected to pronounce English diphthongs correctly. Having good pronunciation will help you improve your speaking and listening skills. Their English will be much better, and they will practice it correctly.

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Firghy et al. (2024)

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Appendices***Table 3 The valid statements in questionnaire***

Variable	Statements
1. The students have less confidence while pronouncing words.	(1) I feel very excited about pronouncing English words. (2) I feel less confident when pronouncing new words in English. (3) I participated in various pronunciation competencies, which made me more confident. (4) I know various consonants and vowels. (5) I know the various vowels. (6) I know what a diphthong is. (7) I pronounce the word late with /let/.
2. Each student has different and limited skills.	(8) I have pronunciation skills, especially in diphthongs. (9) I am proficient in communicating with my friends in English. (10) I have a good knowledge of pronunciation materials, especially segmental features. (11) The word niece does not contain diphthongs. (12) Diphthong has two types, centering diphthong and closing diphthong. (13) The position of diphthong in the word care is in the final position. (14) I need to be motivated by the people around me.
3. The lack of motivation from the students causes the difficulties in the teaching and learning process.	(15) I am motivated when the learning is active (16) I am overwhelmed when pronouncing words containing diphthongs.
4. The family environment is very influential in the students' language development.	(17) I need motivation from my parents. (18) My parents play a significant role in my education.

Firghy et al. (2024)

Variable	Statements
5. The social environment is also one of the influences on the students' language development.	(19) Lecturers who often give good feedback to students make students more active in learning. (20) I like lecturers who teach using an American accent. (21) My English pronunciation will improve if I have friends who speak English. (22) I like lecturers who teach English using a British accent. (23) I like lecturers who teach English using a British accent. (24) During the pronunciation class, I was introduced to various accents. (25) Monotonous accents are used by lecturers when learning pronunciation courses. (26) I got good pronunciation from my social environment.