

## **Triphthong Pronunciation Errors: An Analysis of English Education Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A crucial component of learning English is pronunciation, which is necessary for efficient and transparent communication. Students frequently struggle, nevertheless, especially when it comes to complicated vowel sounds like triphthongs (/aʊə/, /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /oʊə/, /ɔɪə/). This study is to analyze the types and causes of triphthong pronunciation errors among English education students at Universitas Negeri Makassar. By identifying the common mistakes, it is able to understand the influence of first language interference, motivation, and learning exposure on pronunciation accuracy to provide insights into effective teaching strategies to improve students' phonetic competence, enhance pronunciation instruction, and support clearer communication in English as a result. Ten students who have trouble pronouncing triphthongs are used as the study's sample, and it uses a qualitative approach using a case study design. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data, and Miles and Huberman's narrative data analysis (1994), which includes data gathering, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, was used to evaluate the data. According to the findings, (1) the most frequent mistakes were substitution, omission, and distortion; and (2) the interference of students' native tongues and the appearance of their learning attitude, demotivation, and age as contributing factors to having a good pronunciation for the triphthong sounds. This study advances our knowledge of pronunciation difficulties and offers suggestions for enhancing pronunciation instruction in English classes.

**Keywords:** Pronunciation; Triphthong; Error Analysis; English Education

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pronunciation is crucial in English learning, as it can help students learn English more easily. It is considerable that pronunciation forces the students to listen to the speaker more carefully and focus on how they make the right sounds when speaking. By listening to how natural sentences sound, the students will be more likely to create their own sentences (Harmer, 2010). It makes sense that pronunciation is essential for intelligibility. If the students cannot pronounce words correctly, their listeners will not be able to understand what is being said. No matter what accent is used, the

most important thing is pronunciation (Eliza, 2021; and Yo'Ichiyeva, 2024). In the context of communication, pronunciation refers to the way words are pronounced, involving the proper use of intonation, tone, stress, and rhythm to ensure that the intended message is conveyed clearly (Kelly, 2000). Both intonation and tone of voice can alter a sentence's meaning, emphasize a sentence's major idea, and convey the speaker's tone, such as whether they are joyful, sad, furious, or hesitant. Stress helps establish the rhythm of the language and facilitates the comprehension of spoken English words by determining the vocal sound of syllables pronounced with a high pitch, length, or loudness. The cadence of language produced by the emphasis of words and phrases is known as rhythm, and it can help with pronunciation in English. Therefore, word pronunciation is crucial for the students to have a clear and effective interpersonal communication in order to avoid misunderstanding of messages delivered in their utterances.

Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings, even if a single word only is pronounced incorrectly (Kelly, 2000). It is obviously saying that being an English education student in university can be a difficult time for some students, especially when it comes to pronunciation. English can be complicated, with a wide variety of sounds comprising into vowels and consonants and the sounds rules accomplished that may not always make sense for them as non-native speakers of English in particular. Consequently, the errors are even more pronounced and speaking difficulties are often experienced. Therefore, English education students should become familiar with phonetic symbols and practice using them to ensure accurate word pronunciation. To pronounce words correctly, they need to understand and read phonetic symbols, often found in dictionaries or specialized phonetics dictionaries. This skill enables them to pronounce words, sentences, and paragraphs accurately in English, enhancing their overall communication abilities.

However, the researchers' experiences for teaching English education students, pronouncing triphthongs such as /aʊə/, /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /oʊə/, and /ɔɪə/ often presents a significant challenge. These complex vowel sounds require a seamless transition between three different vowel qualities within a single syllable, making them difficult as non-native speakers to master. Unlike simpler vowel sounds, triphthongs demand precise articulation and smooth gliding from one vowel to another without inserting unintended pauses or distortions. This intricate process frequently leads students to make pronunciation errors, including substitution, omission, and distortion, which negatively impact their spoken English. Therefore, this study is essential in identifying the specific types of triphthong pronunciation errors among English education students and understanding the underlying causes. By analyzing these difficulties, the research aims to develop targeted teaching strategies that enhance pronunciation instruction, helping students improve their phonetic accuracy and overall spoken English proficiency. Addressing these challenges will ultimately lead to clearer communication and greater confidence in using English in various contexts.

Based on the needs outlined, this research focuses on students' pronunciation errors in vowel triphthongs, building upon previous studies in the field. Eliza (2021)

identified common errors such as malformation (84.51% of total items) and omission (14.9% of total items) in triphthong pronunciation among students. These errors were attributed to interlingual transfer influenced by students' native languages, and intralingual transfer reflecting incomplete understanding of English phonetic rules. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) highlighted the impact of native language interference on triphthong pronunciation, while Garcia and Nguyen (2018) explored effective instructional methods to mitigate the errors among ESL learners. These studies collectively underscore the complexity and significance of addressing pronunciation challenges in triphthongs within educational settings. This is why studying triphthong pronunciation is so crucial; it helps EFL students communicate more naturally and effectively in addition to fixing technical pronunciation errors. If students are not taught and rehearsed correctly, these mispronunciations can hinder understanding and even change the meaning of what they are trying to say (Kelly, 2000; and Harmer, 2010). The results of these studies suggest that phonetic training, exposure to real English speech, and improved understanding of related speech should be given more weight in English language instruction. The students can grow more confidence when speaking English, make fewer mistakes, and improve their pronunciation with the right approach.

However, the development of globalization will result in a distinct interpretation of pronunciation faults. Students that begin their education using an online system will have a different mindset after completing the offline learning process, particularly in light of the current pandemic. Students' pronunciation-related factors and effects will undoubtedly vary. Thus, the purpose of this study is to seek forth if anything new about the pronunciation mistakes of triphthongs made by the students having both online and offline classroom interaction at English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar. In addition, it is important to note that some English education students may find it difficult to pronounce certain sounds, particularly triphthongs. Therefore, this study captures the interest of the researchers to look into the types of English triphthong sounds, and the reasons why students of English education mispronounce them.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Previous Related Studies**

English triphthongs are like attempting to balance three spinning plates at once; if a student makes one mistake, the whole thing falls apart. It can be difficult for many EFL students to retain all three vowel sounds in a single phrase. They frequently simplify the sound, removing or changing one of the components to make it simpler to speak, rather than smoothly switching between vowels. According to a survey done by Riska (2023) at IKIP PGRI Pontianak, students reported that the most difficult triphthongs were /aɪə/ and /aʊə/. Many students might pronounce "fire" as /faɪə/, or "hour" (/aʊə/) as "aʊr," instead. Due to the lack of equivalent vowel combinations in their home tongue, this pattern implies that students automatically convert triphthongs to diphthongs or monophthongs. In addition, the study identified

inadequate speaking and listening practice as well as a lack of exposure to natural English speech as major contributors to these pronunciation problems.

Similar issues were found in a study conducted by Eliza (2021) which focused on senior-year students who had been studying English for years. Even at this advanced level, many still struggled with triphthongs, especially when speaking at a natural pace. Using Surface Structure Taxonomy, researchers found that malformation was the most common mistake—students often altered the structure of the triphthong, making it easier to pronounce but less accurate. For example, instead of pronouncing "liar" as /laɪə/, students would say "lia", effectively reducing the triphthong. This research highlights an important issue: even experienced EFL learners often fail to fully adopt English phonetics, particularly when those sounds do not exist in their native language.

The University of Baghdad adopted a different strategy, looking into whether or not gender contributed to pronunciation mistakes (Shaymaa & Rezaqallah, 2021). The study discovered that whereas male students tended to mispronounce phrases in a way that changed their meaning (category altering), female students were more likely to simplify triphthongs (smoothing). Saying "know" in a way that sounds more like "now" deceptively alters the meaning of the word. The study also discovered that pupils had trouble with connected communication, especially when it came to joining words. Many pupils made their speech sound artificial by omitting transition sounds like /j/ or /w/ or by halting awkwardly in between phrases instead of mixing sounds naturally.

Despite their disparate approaches, the three studies all highlight the same fundamental problem: triphthongs are among the most difficult pronunciation problems for EFL learners. These recurring mistakes are caused by a variety of factors, including the influence of their mother tongue, a lack of consistent speaking and listening practice, and issues with connected speech. It is considerably more difficult for learners to understand proper articulation of triphthongs because they are not often pronounced clearly in regular English discussions. This is why studying triphthong pronunciation is so crucial; it helps EFL students communicate more naturally and effectively in addition to fixing technical pronunciation errors.

### **Definition of Triphthong**

Triphthongs are complex vowel sounds that involve a sequence of three vowel qualities articulated within a single syllable. This phonetic phenomenon requires a smooth and seamless glide from one vowel to the next, creating a fluid sound. According to O'Connor (1980), triphthongs are "vowel sequences but less difficult than consonant sequences; when one vowel (or diphthong) follows another, each one should be pronounced quite normally, but with a smooth glide between them". Wells (1982) further elaborates on the phonetic nature of triphthongs, describing them as "a term used in the phonetic classification of vowel sounds on the basis of their manner of articulation: it refers to a type of vowel where there are two noticeable

changes in quality during a syllable, as in a common pronunciation of English fire and tower /faɪə/ and /taʊə/. This definition highlights the characteristic shifts in vowel quality that occur within a triphthong, making it distinct from simpler vowel sounds.

### Examples of Triphthongs

Triphthongs in English can be perceived as combinations of five common diphthongs with an additional schwa (/ə/) sound at the end. The following are examples of triphthongs and their respective components:

- a. /eɪ/ + /ə/ = /eɪə/ as in layer, player
- b. /aɪ/ + /ə/ = /aɪə/ as in hire, fire
- c. /ɔɪ/ + /ə/ = /ɔɪə/ as in loyal, royal
- d. /əʊ/ + /ə/ = /əʊə/ as in lower, mower
- e. /aʊ/ + /ə/ = /aʊə/ as in power, hour

Despite the structured formation, there is ongoing debate among linguists regarding whether sequences such as /eɪə/, /aɪə/, /ɔɪə/, /əʊə/, and /aʊə/ should be categorized as a diphthong followed by a schwa or as distinct triphthongs. Generally, English phonology tends to classify /aɪə/ and /aʊə/ in words like fire and hour as triphthongs. Complicating the classification further is the phenomenon known as "leveling" or "reduction," where the middle or final element of the triphthong may be simplified. For instance, a triphthong might be leveled to a diphthong [aɪ] or realized as a long vowel [a:]. In certain varieties of English, including Welsh English, triphthongs may be pronounced with a linking /j/ or /w/, leading to realizations like [faɪ.jə] in fire.

### Types of Error in pronunciation

In the field of phonology and language learning, several theories classify different types of pronunciation errors in English. One of the most widely recognized classifications is SODA Theory comprising substitution, omission, distortion, addition (Lennon, 1991). This classification is widely used in phonetic error analysis to identify and understand common pronunciation mistakes. Substitution: replacing one sound with another that is easier or more familiar to the speaker. For example, replacing /θ/ in *think* with /t/, making it sound like *tink*; Omission: Leaving out certain sounds in a word, often occurring when a sound is difficult to pronounce. An example is pronouncing *friend* as *frien*; Distortion: Producing a sound incorrectly so that it deviates from the standard pronunciation but is not replaced by another phoneme. This can make speech sound unclear or unnatural, and Addition: Inserting an extra sound that does not belong in the word, such as pronouncing *blue* as *buh-lue*. One specific area where error analysis is particularly valuable is in the pronunciation of triphthongs, which are complex vowel sounds involving a sequence of three vowel qualities articulated within a single syllable. Given the intricate nature of triphthongs, learners often struggle with producing a smooth and seamless glide between the vowel sounds, leading to frequent pronunciation errors.

### **Factors affecting English pronunciation**

Some researchers have investigated several factors that affect the process of learning pronunciation. These factors, automatically, give the influence to the learners' ability to pronounce the words correctly and intelligibly. The factors are as follows:

a. Attitude

Elliot (1995) found that students' attitudes towards acquiring native-like pronunciation are crucial. Students who care more about pronunciation tend to perform better outcomes.

b. Motivation

Motivation is a key factor in language learning. Studies by Marinova-Todd et al. (2000), Masgoret & Gardner (2003), Bernaus et al. (2004), and Gathbonton et al. (2005) show that having personal or professional goals for learning English can lead to better pronunciation.

c. Mother Tongue Interference

Avery and Ehrlich (1992) explain that the rules and patterns of a student's native language can transfer to their second language, causing foreign accents. This is a common experience for all foreign language learners.

d. Age

Younger learners, especially those who start before age 6, are more likely to achieve native-like pronunciation. Nation and Newton (2009) note that starting to learn a language after age 12 often results in a noticeable accent. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) adds that adults generally find it harder to achieve native-like pronunciation compared to children.

The process of learning pronunciation is influenced by several key factors: attitude, motivation, mother tongue influence, and age. Positive attitudes and strong motivation are essential for achieving better pronunciation, as they encourage learners to engage more deeply with the target language. The influence of the mother tongue can lead to foreign accents, while younger learners are generally more successful in acquiring native-like pronunciation due to the reduced impact of their first language. Understanding these factors can help educators develop more effective strategies for teaching pronunciation.

### **Characteristics of Good Pronunciation**

Pronouncing words correctly in English can be learned or taught using a variety of techniques. From elementary school to senior high school, one of the approaches students are most familiar with is repetition. However, another effective approach for teaching or learning English pronunciation is reflective practice, which involves eight meetings. According to Mathew et al. (2017), reflective practice is the capacity to think back on a single activity in order to engage in ongoing learning. This approach is favored by participants as a better learning strategy compared to traditional repetition.

Reflective practice's strength lies in the intentional reflection on experience, as mere experience does not always entail learning. As Florez (1998) asserts, students' ability to succeed in English pronunciation may be impacted by their past experiences with pronunciation. Therefore, having a wealth of English language expertise will help students become proficient in pronouncing words correctly. Experience serves as the cornerstone of learning, as significant personal experiences can be a powerful driver of learning (Andresen, et al., 1993). Reflective practice can enhance these characteristics by allowing students to review and refine their pronunciation through thoughtful consideration of their experiences. By reflecting on their pronunciation practice, students can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance their clarity, consistency, and overall fluency in English.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This research used a qualitative method with a case study approach describing the main issue of the triphthong sounds mispronunciation covering the types of the errors and their causes among English Education students. The subjects were English Language Education students at, faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, consisting of 10 students taken as research samples deliberately because they experienced challenges in mastering the pronunciation of triphthong sounds based on previous academic records. The selection of ten participants in this study was based on their demonstrated difficulties in pronouncing English triphthongs, as identified in their academic records and previous assessments. These students represent a sample of English Education students at Universitas Negeri Makassar who struggle with triphthong pronunciation, making them suitable subjects for an in-depth analysis of pronunciation errors. Their selection ensures a focused investigation into the types of errors commonly made and the underlying causes. Additionally, the participants' varied linguistic backgrounds and learning experiences provide a representative perspective on the challenges faced by EFL learners, allowing for more comprehensive insights into effective pronunciation instruction.

### **Research Instrument**

The research aimed at analyzing the pronunciation errors of triphthongs made by English education students at Universitas Negeri Makassar. To achieve this objective, a well -semi structured interview was developed to collect relevant data systematically. The instrument development involved several key steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected described in the following lines.

#### **1. Semi-structured interview guide**

The primary instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. This guide was designed to gather in-depth qualitative data on students' pronunciation errors and their underlying causes.

## **2. Pronunciation task**

To complement the qualitative data from interviews, a pronunciation task was developed. This task required students to read aloud a list of words and sentences containing various triphthong sounds. The task aimed to provide tangible evidence of pronunciation errors for detailed analysis. The development processes are described below:

- a. Words and sentences were carefully selected to include a comprehensive range of triphthong sounds (/aʊə/, /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /oʊə/, /ɔɪə/). These were chosen based on their frequency and relevance in English usage.
- b. Clear instructions were provided to students on how to complete the task. Each student's pronunciation was recorded in a quiet environment to ensure high-quality audio for subsequent analysis.

## **3. Error analysis framework**

An error analysis framework was developed to systematically categorize and interpret the pronunciation errors identified from the recorded tasks. This framework was based on established linguistic principles and previous studies on pronunciation errors. The development processes are in the following lines:

- a. Errors were categorized into types such as substitution, omission, and distortion using the frameworks used by Eliza (2021) and Smith et al. (2019).
- b. A detailed coding scheme was created to guide the analysis of audio recordings. This scheme included specific criteria for identifying and classifying each type of error.

## **Data Analysis**

Data processing is a crucial step in research as it involves transforming raw data into meaningful and interpretable results. This study on the pronunciation errors of triphthongs the data processing techniques included transcription, coding, error categorization, and thematic analysis. Firstly, data processing was transcribing the recorded interviews and pronunciation tasks. Transcription involves converting audio recordings into written text, which is essential for detailed analysis. This process required careful listening and attention to detail to capture every word and sound accurately. Secondly, coding involves organizing the data into categories and themes that are relevant to the research questions. This technique helps in identifying patterns and drawing meaningful conclusions from the data. Thirdly, for the pronunciation task data, a specific error analysis framework was used to categorize the types of pronunciation errors made by the students. This framework was based on established linguistic principles and aimed to systematically identify and classify errors. Finally, thematic analysis was used to analyzed the qualitative data from the interviews involving identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It helps in understanding the underlying reasons behind the pronunciation errors and the factors influencing them. Therefore, this study used Miles and



Hubermann (1994) narrative data analysis consisting of four aspects, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the result of data analysis showing the answer the two research questions addressed, that is the types of triphthong pronunciation errors and the causes of the errors. The findings of these two questions are described in the following lines.

### Types of errors in pronouncing triphthongs

The result of pronunciation task revealed that the most common errors identified were substitution, omission, and distortion. The description of these errors is in the following lines.

#### 1. Substitution

Substitution errors occurred frequently by replacing one triphthong sound with another one. For instance, the triphthong /aɪə/ in "fire" was often substituted with /eɪə/, resulting in mispronunciations like /feɪər/. Another case is the students pronounced the word of "player" (/eɪə/) with an exaggerated or incorrect stress pattern, distorting the vowel sequence. This suggests a confusion between similar vowel sequences and a lack of mastery over the subtle differences between them as seen in the following extract.

##### Extract 1 (KH, 25 July 2024)

*"Saya tidak terbiasa dengan pengucapannya, apa lagi kata yang baru saya tahu. Jadi kadang ada huruf yang salah saya ucapkan".* (I'm not used to the pronunciation, especially of words I just learned. So, sometimes there are letters that I pronounce wrong).

#### 2. Omission

Omission errors were also prevalent in which the students failed to pronounce one or more components of the triphthongs. An example is the word "power" (/aʊə/), often pronounced as /paʊ/, omitting the final schwa sound. This error indicates that students struggle with producing the continuous glide required for triphthongs as shown in the following extract.

##### Extract 2 (NB, 25 July 2024)

*"Masih pusing sama pengucapannya, susah dideteksi karena masih tidak familiar dengan suaranya apalagi kalau bicara cepat".* (I'm still dizzy with the pronunciation, it's hard to detect because I'm still not familiar with his voice, especially if he speaks fast).

### 3. Distortion

Distortion errors involved altering the quality of one or more vowel sounds in the triphthong, leading to pronunciations that deviated significantly from the standard, such the analysis of pronunciation tasks revealed several types of errors in the students' pronunciation of triphthongs. These findings highlight the complexity of triphthong pronunciation for learners and underscore the need for targeted pronunciation practice focusing on these specific vowel combinations.

Here is the following table summarizing the types of pronunciation errors found in this research:

| Types of Error      | Descriptions  | Examples  | Causes  |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Substitution</b> | Replacing the correct triphthong with another sound that is easier to pronounce.                    | <i>Fire</i> (/faɪə/) → <i>Feɪər</i>                                     | Confusion between similar vowel sequences, lack of phonetic mastery                     |
| <b>Omission</b>     | Leaving out one or more vowel components in a triphthong.   | <i>Power</i> (/aʊə/) → <i>Pav</i>                                       | Difficulty in producing a smooth vowel transition, unfamiliarity with triphthong sounds |
| <b>Distortion</b>   | Altering the pronunciation of one or more vowels in the triphthong, making it unclear or unnatural. | <i>Player</i> (/eɪə/) pronounced with incorrect stress or vowel quality | Incorrect stress patterns, influence of native language                                 |

The table above illustrates that pronunciation errors among students include substitution, omission, and distortion, all of which stem from limited phonetic understanding, native language interference, and a lack of practice in listening to and producing triphthong sounds naturally.

#### The Causes of triphthong pronunciation errors

The pronunciation of triphthongs in English is often a challenge for foreign-language learners. The interview data provided insights into the underlying causes of the triphthong pronunciation errors observed in the study. Based on the conducted interviews, several factors influencing this mispronunciation were identified including age, attitude, motivation, and the interference of the mother tongue. The influence of mother tongue is the predominant influencing factor of pronunciation errors among others in which many students reported that the vowel sounds in their native language did not closely correspond to English triphthongs, leading to difficulty in producing the correct sounds. The analysis of Factors Affecting Triphthong Pronunciation Difficulties is described as follows.

## 1. Age

Interview results indicate that age affects the ability to adapt speech organs to new sounds. The participants assumed that they find it easier to imitate and adjust pronunciation when they were growing up in their childhood compared to their age in adult. As students age, it becomes increasingly difficult to develop new pronunciation habits. This evidence can be seen in the following extracts.

### **Extract 4 (RA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Menurut saya, faktor usia dapat memengaruhi karena semakin muda seseorang maka semakin fleksibel organ bicaranya dalam menyesuaikan diri pada bunyi-bunyi”.* (In my opinion, age can be a factor because the younger a person is, the more flexible their speech organs are in adapting to sounds).

### **Extract 5 (AA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Menurut saya usia sangat berpengaruh karena semakin bertambahnya usia maka akan semakin sulit untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan bunyi baru, berbeda halnya dengan saat masih kanak-kanak”.* (In my opinion, age is very influential because as one gets older, it becomes increasingly difficult to adapt to new sounds, unlike when one is still a child).

### **Extract 6 (NM, 14 February 2025)**

*“Menurut saya usia bisa jadi faktor, karena kemampuan otak dan organ bicara untuk beradaptasi dengan bunyi baru biasanya berkurang”.* (In my opinion, age can be a factor because the brain's and speech organs' ability to adapt to new sounds usually decreases).

## 2. Attitude

Confidence in speaking English plays a crucial role in triphthong pronunciation. Many participants reported fear of making mistakes, which prevented them from attempting to pronounce triphthongs correctly. A positive attitude and the willingness to try are essential to overcoming this challenge. The empirical evidence of this issue can be seen in the following extracts.

### **Extract 7 (NH, 14 February 2025)**

*“Kurang percaya diri bisa membuat ragu dalam melafalkan”.* (Less confidence can lead to hesitation in pronunciation).

### **Extract 8 (AA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Saya sering kali berpikir atau tidak percaya diri saat ingin membunyikan bunyi triphthong karena takut salah”.* (I often think or lack confidence when I want to pronounce the triphthong sound because I'm afraid of making a mistake).

### **Extract 9 (RA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Faktor sikap juga memengaruhi karena jika seseorang memiliki sikap percaya diri dalam belajar bahasa baru, mereka akan lebih terbuka untuk mencoba dan menyesuaikan cara mereka berbicara”.* (Attitude factors also influence because if

someone has a confident attitude in learning a new language, they will be more open to trying and adjusting their speaking style).

### 3. Motivation

Motivation is a key factor in successful triphthongs pronunciation. Some participants stated that a lack of motivation led them to avoid practicing and thus hindered their progress. On the other hand, those with strong motivation practiced more frequently and showed improvement in their pronunciation. The following extracts are the empirical evidences of this issue.

#### Extract 10 (AZ, 14 February 2025)

*“Saya memiliki motivasi yang tinggi untuk belajar tetapi ketika saya gagal membunyikan bunyi-bunyi thriphthong secara tidak langsung saya merasa kecewa kepada diri sendiri karena tidak tepat dalam membunyikan bunyi thriphthong”*. (I have a high motivation to learn, but when I fail to pronounce the triphthongs correctly, I indirectly feel disappointed in myself for not pronouncing the triphthongs accurately).

#### Extract 11 (FA, 14 February 2025)

*“Saya rasa faktor yang paling mempengaruhi saya yaitu kurangnya motivasi dalam belajar bahasa Inggris dan faktor kebiasaan, saya lebih suka untuk tidak bicara banyak”*. (I think the factors that most influence me are the lack of motivation in learning English and the habit factor; I prefer not to talk much).

#### Extract 12 (RA, 14 February 2025)

*“Motivasi juga berpengaruh karena motivasi yang kuat dapat mendorong seseorang untuk berlatih lebih banyak dan lebih berani mencoba bunyi yang sulit, termasuk triphthong”*. (Motivation also has an impact because strong motivation can encourage someone to practice more and be more daring in trying difficult sounds, including triphthongs).

### 4. The Interference of mother tongue

Diversity in phonetic systems between the mother tongue and English create difficulties in pronouncing triphthongs. Many participants substituted triphthongs with more familiar sounds from their native language. Additionally, accents and intonation patterns from their mother tongue also influenced their pronunciation. The following extracts are the empirical evidence of this issue.

#### Extract 13 (RA, 14 February 2025)

*“Faktor bahasa ibu dapat memengaruhi seseorang dalam membunyikan bunyi triphthong karena tidak terbiasa akan membunyikannya sehingga cenderung menggantikannya dengan bunyi yang lebih familiar dalam bahasa ibu”*. (The factor of the mother tongue can influence someone in pronouncing triphthongs because they are not accustomed to producing them, leading them to tend to replace them with sounds that are more familiar in their mother tongue).

**Extract 14 (NH, 14 February 2025)**

*“Faktor bahasa ibu juga menjadi salah satu kendala dalam menyebutkan bunyi” triphthong. Karena sebagian orang masih susah menyesuaikan pengucapan dalam bahasa Inggris”.* (The factor of the mother tongue also becomes one of the obstacles in pronouncing triphthongs. Because some people still find it difficult to adjust their pronunciation in English).

**Extract 15 (AA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Faktor bahasa ibu juga sangat berpengaruh bagi saya pribadi karena dalam bahasa ibu saya mungkin atau jarang ditemukan bunyi triphthong, sehingga lidah saya tidak terbiasa dengan peralihan bunyi atau suara yang cepat”.* (The factor of my mother tongue is also very influential for me personally because in my mother tongue, triphthong sounds are rarely or never found, so my tongue is not accustomed to the rapid transitions of sounds or voices.

Despite the fact that they face challenges due to the four previously described issues, the students look for ways to lessen or perhaps completely eradicate their pronunciation faults of English triphthongs. Based on interview findings, the four existing solutions can help overcome difficulties in pronouncing triphthongs: (a) **regular Practice:** repeating triphthong pronunciation consistently to familiarize speech organs as cited in the following extracts; (b) **listening and imitation:** using audio materials from native speakers to imitate correct pronunciation; (c) **boosting confidence:** eliminating the fear of making mistakes and being more willing to try correct pronunciation; and (d) **engaging in English conversations:** practicing speaking with peers or through media such as movies and songs to strengthen speaking skills. These solutions are clearly stated in the following extracts.

**Extract 16 (AA, 14 February 2025)**

*“Cara yang dapat ditempuh melalui solusi yang digunakan adalah terus berlatih dengan cara mendengarkan atau meniru video atau apapun itu yang memiliki banyak bunyi triphthong agar kemampuan dalam membunyikan bunyi triphthong menjadi lebih baik lagi. Dan yang paling penting adalah harus yakin, meningkatkan percaya diri, dan jangan pernah takut salah dalam mencoba hal baru”.* (The way to achieve this through the proposed solution is to continue practicing by listening to or imitating videos or anything that has a lot of triphthong sounds so that the ability to pronounce triphthongs becomes even better. And most importantly, you must be confident, boost your self-esteem, and never be afraid to make mistakes when trying something new).

**Extract 17 (HD, 14 February 2025)**

*“Belajar dengan giat dan rajin berlatih. Untuk itu, saya pribadi biasanya menonton film dan lagu berbahasa Inggris sekalian berlatih memahami bunyi dan penyebutan kata-kata yang terdapat dalam film atau lagu tersebut. Selain itu saya juga sering menonton podcast”.* (Study diligently and practice regularly. For that reason, I personally usually watch English-language movies and songs while practicing understanding the sounds and pronunciations of the words in those movies or songs. In addition, I also often watch podcasts).

Pronunciation errors are common among language learners, particularly in phonologically complex aspects such as triphthongs. Among these errors, three main types stand out: substitution, omission, and distortion (Lennon, 1991). Each type affects speech clarity and intelligibility, influencing effective communication. Firstly, substitution occurs when a speaker replaces a target sound with another that is easier to pronounce or more familiar. This often happens due to phonetic differences between a learner's first language and the target language. For example, an Indonesian speaker may substitute the English triphthong /aʊə/ in *power* with a diphthong, pronouncing it as /aʊ/ instead. This occurs because the Indonesian phonetic system lacks certain triphthong sounds, making them difficult to produce. Secondly, omission involves the deletion of one or more elements of a sound, often due to difficulty in articulation. In triphthongs, learners may omit a vowel sound, reducing a triphthong to a diphthong or even a monophthong. For instance, *fire* /faɪə/ may be pronounced as /faɪ/, omitting the final /ə/ sound. Omission errors usually occur when learners are unfamiliar with the pronunciation or when rapid speech leads to simplification. Finally, distortion happens when a learner produces a sound inaccurately but not as a completely different phoneme. This is often caused by incorrect tongue or lip placement, leading to unclear pronunciation. For example, a student attempting to say *player* /pleɪə/ might pronounce it with an unclear vowel transition, making it sound unnatural or difficult to understand. Therefore, understanding these errors allows lecturers to develop targeted strategies for pronunciation improvement, helping learners achieve clearer and more accurate speech.

The findings of this study align with previous research conducted by Eliza (2021) and Riska (2023), both of whom highlighted the complexity of triphthong pronunciation among EFL students. Eliza (2021) identified malformation and omission as the most frequent errors, attributing them to interlingual transfer and insufficient understanding of English phonetics. Similarly, Riska (2023) found that students often reduced triphthongs to diphthongs or monophthongs due to the absence of equivalent sounds in their native language. These studies reinforce the idea that pronunciation errors in triphthongs stem primarily from linguistic interference and a lack of exposure to natural English pronunciation. In addition, the present study supports these previous findings, revealing that substitution, omission, and distortion are the most common errors among English education students.

The data from the interviews highlight the interplay between cognitive, psychological, and linguistic factors in learning English triphthongs. It simply emphasizes the role of factors such as age, motivation, and attitude in influencing pronunciation accuracy. Younger learners generally exhibit better adaptability in speech production due to their more flexible articulatory organs, whereas older learners may struggle with habituated phonetic patterns from their first language (Nation and Newton; 2009). This finding aligns with research on second-language acquisition, which suggests that early exposure to new phonetic systems enhances the ability to produce non-native sounds accurately (Krashen, 1985). Psychological aspects, particularly confidence and motivation, strongly impact learners' success (Souisa, 2020; and Chand, 2021). Many participants reported that fear of making

mistakes led to avoidance behaviors, ultimately reinforcing their pronunciation difficulties. This indicates that self-perception plays a crucial role in language learning; those who believe they can improve are more likely to persist through challenges. Encouraging a growth mindset in which mistakes are seen as part of the learning process, could be beneficial in reducing anxiety and fostering better pronunciation outcomes.

Moreover, the mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping learners' phonetic tendencies. The substitution of triphthongs with more familiar sounds indicates a natural linguistic transfer, which can either facilitate or hinder pronunciation learning. Learners from linguistic backgrounds that lack triphthongs often struggle with these sounds due to a lack of prior exposure. This phenomenon, known as phonetic interference, suggests that explicit instruction in articulatory settings and frequent listening practice with native speakers can help mitigate pronunciation challenges. Regarding to those abovementioned things, this present study has similar points with Eliza's (2021) and Riska's (2023) studies focused on linguistic factors, this study expands the discussion by considering psychological and educational influences on pronunciation learning. These insights highlight the need for targeted pronunciation training, increased exposure to native English speech, and practical phonetic exercises to help students overcome pronunciation difficulties and achieve greater fluency.

Furthermore, exposure to English through media, conversation practice, and targeted phonetic exercises emerged as key strategies for improving pronunciation (Wati & Rozimela, 2019; Huang, 2022; and Haerunnisa, 2021). Participants who engaged in active listening and imitation exercises reported more progress than those who relied solely on passive learning methods. This supports the notion that immersive and interactive learning experiences contribute significantly to mastering complex phonetic structures. Ultimately, the findings reinforce the idea that pronunciation difficulties in foreign-language learning are multifaceted, requiring an integrated approach that combines technical practice, psychological reinforcement, and linguistic awareness. Addressing these factors holistically can significantly enhance learners' ability to pronounce English triphthongs correctly.

Additionally, students cited limited exposure to native English speakers and authentic English pronunciation as a challenge. Those who had more opportunities to interact with native speakers or consume English media tended to have fewer pronunciation errors, suggesting that increased exposure to natural English speech can enhance pronunciation skills. Another critical factor was the lack of explicit phonetic training in their English education. Many students indicated that their courses focused more on grammar and vocabulary than on detailed pronunciation practice, contributing to persistent pronunciation errors. The students' attitudes and motivation levels also played a role in their pronunciation abilities (Marinova-Todd et al. 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Bernaus et al, 2004; Gatbonton et al, 2005; and Elliot, 1995). Those with a positive attitude towards learning English and strong motivation to achieve native-like pronunciation were more likely to practice

regularly and improve their skills, while students who viewed pronunciation as less important were more prone to making errors.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that students commonly made substitution, omission, and distortion errors when pronouncing triphthongs such as /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /oʊə/, /ɔɪə/, and /aʊə/. Substitution errors in which one triphthong sound was replaced by another, were the most frequent, indicating a significant challenge in distinguishing and producing the subtle differences between triphthongs. Omission errors, the students failed to articulate all components of the triphthong, highlighted difficulties in maintaining the necessary glides between vowels. Distortion errors involved incorrect stress patterns and vowel qualities, further emphasizing the complexity of triphthong pronunciation. Difficulties in pronouncing triphthongs in English are influenced by factors such as age, attitude, motivation, and the influence of the mother tongue. To overcome these challenges, consistent practice, confidence-building, and effective learning methods are essential. By implementing the right solutions, English learners can improve their triphthong pronunciation and enhance their overall speaking skills. Therefore, the findings of this study advances knowledge on triphthong pronunciation errors by providing a detailed analysis of the specific challenges faced by EFL students, particularly in substitution, omission, and distortion errors. By identifying the root causes—such as first language interference, lack of exposure to native pronunciation, and psychological factors like confidence and motivation. This research deepens our understanding of the complexities of triphthong pronunciation in English learning.

Additionally, the pedagogical implications of these findings emphasize the need for targeted pronunciation instruction, incorporating phonetic training, listening exercises with native speech models, and interactive speaking activities. Enhancing phonetic training, increasing exposure to native speakers, and incorporating interactive and engaging pronunciation practices are essential steps. Educators should focus on explicit phonetic instruction, including the use of phonetic transcription and minimal pair drills, to help students distinguish and produce triphthong sounds correctly. Furthermore, fostering a positive learning environment that encourages practice without fear of mistakes can improve students' confidence. Addressing these areas can significantly improve students' pronunciation skills, leading to clearer and more intelligible spoken English for students as an EFL learner. In short, the findings highlight the importance of a balanced language curriculum that gives equal emphasis to pronunciation alongside grammar and vocabulary, ultimately fostering better communication skills in English learners.

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