

AN ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH VOWEL
PRONUNCIATION FACED BY 10TH GRADERS OF SMA NEGERI 2
KUNINGAN

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan dalam pengucapan vokal bahasa Inggris yang dihadapi oleh siswa kelas X SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan, khususnya dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Fokus penelitian ini diarahkan pada dua aspek utama, yaitu jenis-jenis kesalahan pengucapan vokal, termasuk *monophthong*, *diphthong*, vokal panjang-pendek, dan *schwa*, serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi terjadinya kesalahan tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan teori Analisis Kesalahan (Corder, 1967), data dikumpulkan melalui rekaman audio presentasi kelompok, transkripsi lisan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur yang dilakukan secara langsung pada tanggal 24 November 2025 pukul 14.00 di SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan pengucapan paling sering terjadi pada *diphthong* seperti /eɪ/, /aɪ/, dan /aʊ/, yang sering disederhanakan menjadi vokal tunggal sesuai pola fonologis Indonesia. Kesalahan juga terjadi pada vokal panjang-pendek dan *schwa*, yang sering diganti dengan vokal penuh karena tidak adanya pengurangan vokal dalam bahasa ibu siswa. Dari hasil wawancara, diidentifikasi bahwa faktor utama kesalahan pengucapan berasal dari interferensi bahasa pertama (Indonesia dan Sunda), kebiasaan membaca berdasarkan ejaan, paparan minimal terhadap bahasa Inggris yang autentik, kurangnya latihan fonetik, dan hambatan afektif seperti kurangnya kepercayaan diri dan rasa takut membuat kesalahan. Temuan penelitian ini diharapkan dapat membantu guru bahasa Inggris mengidentifikasi kesulitan pengucapan vokal yang umum dan mengembangkan strategi pengajaran pengucapan yang lebih terarah, terutama di kelas bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) pada tingkat sekolah menengah atas.

Kata kunci: Pengucapan; Bahasa Ibu; Berbicara; Huruf Vokal; EFL

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the difficulties in English vowel pronunciation faced by tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The focus of the study is directed at two main aspects, namely the types of vowel pronunciation errors including monophthongs, diphthongs, long-short vowels, and schwa and the factors that influence the occurrence of these errors. Using a qualitative approach based on the theory of Error Analysis (Corder, 1967), data were collected through audio recordings of group presentations, oral transcriptions, and semi-structured interviews conducted in person on November 24, 2025, at 2:00 PM at SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan. The results showed that mispronunciation most often occurred in diphthongs such as /eɪ/, /aɪ/, and /aʊ/, which are often simplified into single vowels according to Indonesian phonological patterns. Errors also occurred in long-short vowels and schwa, which are often replaced with full vowels due to the absence of vowel reduction in the students' mother tongue. From the interview results, it was

identified that the main factors of pronunciation errors came from first language interference (Indonesian and Sundanese), reading habits based on spelling, minimal exposure to authentic English, lack of phonetic practice, and affective barriers such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. The findings of this study are expected to help English teachers identify common vowel pronunciation difficulties and develop more targeted pronunciation teaching strategies, especially in EFL classrooms at the senior high school level.

Keywords: Pronunciation; First Language; Speaking; Vowels; EFL

INTRODUCTION

Writing is not the only aspect of the English language. It also has speaking skills. Pronunciation is one of the most distinctive features of speaking. It is seen as critical in communication since it has a significant impact on whether or not communication proceeds smoothly. If someone possesses excellent pronunciation abilities, the delivery of the message in communication goes well since it will be easily understood by their counterparts, and vice versa.

In a country that treats English as a foreign language, such as Indonesia, this has become one of the most common challenges encountered by its learners. Someone who is not an English native speaker and speaks with a different accent will pronounce certain English words differently (Sundari et al., 2023). According to Fitria (2024) mispronunciations among Indonesian learners are typically caused by phonological differences between the Indonesian and English languages. English has more vocal sounds, diphthongs, and consonant groups that are not found in Indonesian. As a result, some words may be difficult to pronounce. Local dialect and language also contribute to the variation of English pronunciation in Indonesia.

Understanding and addressing mispronunciation is essential for improving learners' speaking skills and confidence. Research on the patterns and causes of mispronunciation among Indonesian learners might assist teachers in developing a more effective learning method, incorporating phonetic training, and expanding the activities of listening and speaking. As a result, learners may achieve clearer, more natural pronunciation that is easier to understand in English communication.

Several experts have highlighted the importance of phonology in foreign language learning, such as according to Kelly (2000), pronunciation plays a crucial role in understanding, and significant vowel mispronunciation can lead to communication breakdowns. Similarly, Yates (2016) emphasizes that English has a much richer vowel system than Indonesian. English has short vowels such as /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /e/, long vowels such as /i:/, /u:/, /ɑ:/, diphthongs such as /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /oʊ/, and the schwa /ə/, which is very productive in weak syllables. In contrast, Indonesian only has primary vowel sounds (/a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, /o/) without long-short distinctions or complex diphthongs. Because of this significant difference in the vowel system, Indonesian learners often have difficulty distinguishing sound contrasts such as /ɪ/ vs. /i:/, /æ/ vs. /æ/. /e/ vs. /ɛ/, /ʌ/ vs. /ɑ:/, as well as in pronouncing diphthongs like /eɪ/ and /aʊ/. Schwa /ə/ is also often mispronounced because this sound does not exist in Indonesian.

Several previous researchers have examined English pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners, both in Indonesia and internationally. Nafi'a et al. (2025) highlighted high school students' challenges in pronouncing the diphthongs /aʊ/ and /aɪ/, and found a tendency for students to simplify diphthongs into monophthongs and replace the target sound with a more familiar vowel in their first language. The study attributed these errors to mother tongue interference, limited exposure to native speakers, and a lack of systematic phonetic training. These findings align with those of Octaviani et al. (2024), who showed that regional language variations such as Sundanese, Batak, Javanese, and Betawi contribute to errors in vowels, consonants, word stress, and intonation; through

pronunciation tests and phonetic transcriptions, their study emphasized the need for more targeted learning to overcome the influence of local dialects. In a broader context, Saito (2021) examined the development of second language speech learning and found that phonetic-based corrective feedback, especially explicit and perception-oriented, is more effective when students have a strong phonetic foundation, while individual factors such as motivation and learning experience also influence pronunciation improvement. Furthermore, Ningsih et al. (2024) identified common errors in the pronunciation of the diphthongs /eɪ/, /aɪ/, and /aʊ/ at SMA Negeri 14 Maros, which were caused by L1 interference, false imitation, lack of motivation, and limited phonetic practice. International research by Quoc et al. (2021) also emphasized the importance of using a variety of pronunciation teaching techniques including visual, auditory, tactile, drama, and audio feedback approaches to improve students' intelligibility, although teachers often face time constraints and difficulties integrating pronunciation learning into the overall language classroom. However, these studies have not specifically examined the difficulties in pronouncing vowels, both monophthongs and diphthongs, in grade X students at SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan. Because each school has different learning characteristics and language backgrounds, the purpose of this study is to map the types of vowel errors and their causal factors specifically in the context of pronunciation teaching at the high school level.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates the following research questions:

1. What types of vowel mispronunciation are commonly produced by the 10th graders of SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan when speaking English?
2. What factors contribute to the students' vowel mispronunciation in English pronunciation?

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach based on the Error Analysis (EA) theory developed by Stephen Pit Corder (1967).

Corder explains that EA focuses on actual errors made by language learners, rather than simply predicted errors, with the aim of identifying, classifying, and explaining these types of errors and understanding the cognitive processes behind them. This approach allows researchers to analyze in detail the types of vowel mispronunciations made by students and the factors causing them based on authentic data from their language performance.

The research respondents were 33 students of class X.7 of SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan. The sampling technique used purposive sampling because this class was carrying out a presentation assignment that produced relevant speech data for analysis. Students were divided into six groups, each tasked with finding announcement and invitation materials, then presenting them in class to produce naturalistic data according to the needs of error analysis.

The research instrument used in this study included 20 minutes audio recordings of group presentations as the primary data source to identify naturally occurring vowel pronunciation errors during speaking activities. The recordings were then transcribed orally for further analysis using Error Analysis steps. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was also used to explore the factors that caused mispronunciation. The interviews were conducted in person on November 24, 2025, at 2:00 PM at SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan, allowing researchers to obtain more accurate and contextual answers based on students' perceptions and experiences.

The research began by recording the entire presentation process, including announcements and invitations, from six groups. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim. Next, the research followed the error analysis steps according to Corder (1967), namely:

1. Identifying errors: finding vowel pronunciation errors in the data;
2. Describing errors: classifying the types of errors (substitution, distortion, simplification of diphthongs, etc.);

- Explaining errors: explaining the causes of errors through triangulation of recorded data and interviews.

Interviews were conducted after the initial analysis to determine the reasons why students frequently mispronounce words, such as mother tongue interference, lack of listening exposure, or unfamiliarity with phonetic symbols.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques combined with EA procedures. Vowel pronunciation errors were identified and grouped based on vowel categories (monophthongs, diphthongs, long vowels, short vowels, and schwa) and error patterns. Interview data were analyzed to identify themes

that caused mispronunciation. All findings were then linked to Error Analysis theory to produce a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive processes and factors influencing pronunciation errors of grade X.7 students of SMA Negeri 2 Kuningan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

After analyzing the audio transcript of Class X.7's presentation in SMAN 2 Kuningan, the results revealed some intriguing facts on the research issue. The table below presents a summary of the analysis results, which will be discussed further in this section.

Table 1. Learners' Vowel Mispronunciation Analysis

Word	Right Pronunciation	Learner's Pronunciation	Analysis	Frequency
Diphthong Vowel Mispronunciation				
Date	/deɪt/	/det/	The diphthong /eɪ/ is converted to a monophthong /e/.	5.7%
Great	/ɡreɪt/	/ɡrɪt/	The vowel /eɪ/ is shortened to /ɪ/.	1.9%
Via	/'vaɪə/	/vɪʌ/	Diphthong /aɪ/ is not present; the learner reads the word's spelling.	1.9%
Invite	/ɪn'vaɪt/	/ɪnvɪt/	The diphthong /aɪ/ is pronounced as /i/ according to its spelling.	7.6%
Wear	/eə/	/wɪr/	Vowel /eə/ is shortened to /ɪ/.	1.9%
Example	/ɪɡ'zæmpəl/	/eksʌmpəl/	The vowel /æ/ is changed to /ʌ/, following Indonesian phoneme.	3.8%
Direct	/daɪ'rekt/	/dɪrek/	The /aɪ/ sound is transformed to /ɪ/, which sounds like it is pronounced in Indonesian.	3.8%
About	/ə'baʊt/	/ʌboʊt/	Vowel /aʊ/ is incorrectly pronounced as /oʊ/.	1.9%
Five	/faɪv/	/fev/	The /aɪ/ sound is converted to /e/.	1.9%

Found	/faʊnd/	/fon/	The sound /o/ appears to modify the vowel /aʊ/.	1.9%
Late	/leit/	/let/	The sound /eɪ/ is reduced into a simple /e/ sound.	1.9%
Total				34.2%
Monophthong Vowel Mispronunciation				
Debate	/di'bet/	/debʌt/	The vowel /e/ is deleted and replaced with /ʌ/ to match the spelling of the word. The correct pronunciation of /e/ is /ɪ/.	3.8%
Example	/ɪg'zæmpəl/	/eksʌmpəl/	The first vowel, /ɪ/, is pronounced as /e/.	3.8%
Sincerely	/sɪn'sɪrəli/	/sɪnsərəli/	The first /ɪ/ becomes /aɪ/, and the second /ɪ/ is pronounced /ə/.	3.8%
Guest	/gest/	/goes/	Despite the fact that the vowel /ʊ/ should be silent, the learner continues to speak it.	3.8%
Come	/kʌm/	/kom/	The /ʌ/ sound is transformed into /o/.	3.8%
Such	/sʌtʃ/	/sətʃ/	The vowel /ʌ/ is replaced by /ə/ sound.	1.9%
English	/'ɪŋɡlɪʃ/	/'eŋɡlɪʃ/	Vowel /ɪ/ is mispronounced as /e/.	7.6%
Done	/dʌn/	/don/	The sound /o/ is used incorrectly to replace the sound /ʌ/.	5.7%
Monday	/'mʌndeɪ/	/'mondeɪ/	/ʌ/ sound is replaced by /o/.	1.9%
Since	/sɪns/	/sɪns/	The vowel /ɪ/ is removed and instead is changed into /aɪ/ sound.	1.9%
Total				38%
Long-Short Vowel Mispronunciation				
Purpose	/'pɜ:rpəs/	/'pɜrpos/	Vowel /ɜ:/ becomes /ʊ/, while vowel /ə/ becomes /o/.	1.9%
Person	/'pɜ:rsən/	/'pɜrson/	The student pronounced the long vowel /ɜ:/ as a short /ə/.	1.9%

Further	/'fɜ:rdəʔ/	/fʌðəʔ/	/ɜ:/ becomes /ʌ/ due to spelling and articulation limitations.	1.9%
Student	/'stju:dənt/	/stʌdənt/	Vowel /u:/ is transformed to /ʌ/.	7.6%
Important	/ɪm'pɔ:rtənt/	/ɪmpɔ:tən/	The long vowel /ɔ:/ is shortened to /o/.	1.9%
Regards	/rɪ'gɑ:rdz/	/rɪgret /	The long /ɑ:/ is incorrectly pronounced as /e/, making the word sound like 'regret'.	1.9%
Feature	/'fi:tʃəʔ/	/'fju:tʃəʔ/	The vowel /i:/ is pronounced /u:/, as in the word 'future'.	3.8%
Greeting	/'gri:tɪŋ/	/gretɪŋ/	The long vowel /i:/ is eliminated and replaced with /e/ sound.	1.9%
Theme	/θi:m/	/dem/	The long vowel /i:/ is converted into a short /e/ sound.	1.9%
Total				24.7%
Schwa Vowel Mispronunciation				
About	/ə'baʊt/	/ʌbaʊt/	Vowel /ə/ is altered to sound like /ʌ/.	1.9%
Purpose	/'pɜ:rpəs/	/pɔrpos/	The vowel /ə/ is converted into /o/.	1.9%
Person	/'pɜ:rsən/	/pərsən/	The vowel /ə/ is altered into /o/, like with the word "purpose" previously.	1.9%
Relevant	/'reləvənt/	/relepen/	The vowel /ə/ is converted twice into the complete vowel /e/.	1.9%
Total				7.6%

Discussion

A. Types of Vowel Mispronunciation

According to the data analysis, mispronunciations by Class X.7 learners followed various consistent patterns, particularly for vowel sounds that do not conform to the English standard pronunciation. In general, most of the learners sounded like they were transferring sound patterns from Indonesian, which sounds more stable and does not distinguish between short and long vowels, or even diphthongs. As a result, the sounds are simplified and English vowel sounds are substituted for more closely related Indonesian vowels.

1. Diphthongs Mispronunciation

According to the data, diphthongs are the second most common mispronunciation among students, accounting for approximately 34.2%. The most prevalent mispronunciation occurred in diphthong vowels such as /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /aʊ/, and /oʊ/. Learners frequently transformed English diphthongs into monophthongs /e/, /i/, or /o/, which are consistent with Indonesian phonology, which lacks diphthongs and double vowels. Examples are:

- Date → det (/eɪ/ → /e/).
- Great → grit (/eɪ/ → /i/).
- Invite → invit (/aɪ/ → /i/).
- Via → via (/aɪ/ → /i/ depending on spelling).
- About → about (missing /aʊ/).
- Found → fon (/aʊ/ → /o/).
- Five → fêv (/aɪ/ to /e/).

These errors demonstrated that learners are still unable to distinguish between vowel motion which is typical for diphthongs. They create single vowel sounds that are more stable, as is typical of Indonesian, resulting in a simpler sound.

2. Monophthongs Mispronunciation

Monophthongs were the most commonly mispronounced vowel, accounting for around 38% of the

total. In single vowels (monophthongs), learners frequently modified vowels that do not exist in Indonesian like /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ʌ/, and /ʊ/ to vowels that are similar in Indonesian like /a/, /e/, or /o/. Examples are:

- Come – kom (/ʌ/ → /o/).
- Guest – goes (/e/ → /oɛ/o/).
- Example – eksampəl (/ɪ/ → /e/).

These monophthongs occurred because some English vowels do not have a direct equivalent in Indonesian. Learners tend to make vowel sounds that are easy and familiar.

3. Long-Short Vowels Mispronunciation

Long-vowel

mispronunciation was identified as the third most common, accounting for around 24.7%. Indonesian vowels are not differentiated depending on duration. Long vowels, such as /i:/, /u:/, or /ɑ:/, are reduced to short vowels or converted into another vowel. Examples are:

- Greeting → greting (/i:/ → /i/).
- Student → staden (/u:/ → /a/ or short /u/).
- Theme → tim/dém (/i:/ → /i/).
- Important → importén (/ɔ:/ → short /o/).

These errors demonstrate that students still do not comprehend how vowel duration impacts meaning and pronunciation accuracy in English. They believed that all vowels had the same duration, hence they did not construct vowel extensions.

4. Schwa Mispronunciation (/ə/)

Schwa is the most common vowel sound in English, however there is no Indonesian equivalent. It trains learners to pronounce all vowels fully, rather than reducing them to /ə/. According to the data, this form of vowel mispronunciation

occurs the least, at approximately 7.6%. Examples include:

- a. Important → importén (/ə/ → /e/).
- b. Sincerely → sainsereli (/ə/ → /e/).
- c. The word "purpose" is pronounced as /əs/ and /os/.
- d. Person → person (/ər/ → /er/ or /o/).
- e. Fader: /ə/ → /e/ or /a/.

Learners demonstrated a hyperarticulation tendency, which involves pronouncing each vowel based on the spelling of the word. The absence of schwa in Indonesian phonology exacerbated these errors. The schwa is particularly important since it appears on unstressed syllables.

B. Factors Contribute to the Students' Vowel Mispronunciation

According to the findings of the interview, English vowel mispronunciation by students in class X.7 resulted from a combination of several linguistic and non-linguistic variables. The findings are similar with Ningsih et al.'s (2024) prior work, which identified linguistic interference as one of the factors.

1. L1 Interference as the Primary Factor

The large amounts of the students said that Indonesian and Sundanese accents influenced their speaking. Many students stated that they are accustomed to a consistent Indonesian vowel pattern, therefore when confronted with a broad range of English vowels (/e/ vs /i/, /ɔ/ vs /u:/), they tend to read according to spelling. Learner 29 stated the following (which was translated into English by the researchers):

"Yes, it become hard for me to pronounce words or sentences in English because I grew up using Indonesian." (Learner 29, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

These findings clarified why mispronunciations such as feature → future, invite → invit, direct → direct, and purpose → purpose occur. Learners reflected vowel sounds according to L1, not English phonology.

2. Lack of Exposure and Practice with Pronunciation Outside of Class

The data revealed that the majority of students primarily practice their pronunciation when learning English at school and are not regularly exposed to English speaking output. Learner 21 stated the following (which was translated into English by the researchers):

"Only during the subject in class." (Learner 21, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

According to the interview results, learners who said their pronunciation skills are better are the ones who regularly watch movies, listen to music, play games, or frequently communicate in English outside of class, as revealed by learners 12 and 23 as follows (translated into English by the researchers).

"Because it is easy... Things that can help me achieve better English pronunciation are watching Hollywood movies and listening to English songs." (Learner 12, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

"It is not difficult, but if there are unfamiliar and complex words, it can be challenging. Furthermore, it is simple to pronounce. I frequently watch movies with English subtitles to improve my pronunciation." (Learner 23, Kuningan, Interview, 24th November, 2025)

3. Low Confidence and Strong Affective Filter

Emotional elements played an important influence. Many

students stated that they are afraid of making mistakes while pronouncing words, are embarrassed if they are mocked, or are generally unconfident when speaking in front of others. Learners 5, 20, and 31 stated the following (which the researchers translated into English):

"I felt that sometimes when I stood in front of other people." (Learner 5, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

"I am embarrassed to be judged by the ones who are already" pro "." (Learner 20, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

"Yes. When pronouncing English words in front of others, I am uneasy and terrified of making mistakes. (Learner 31, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

Because of the high rates of affective filtering, learners were unwilling to try new sounds, therefore they continued to read based on spelling rather than pronunciation.

4. Limited Practice and Focus on Pronunciation in Class

Some students reported that teachers rarely provide pronunciation instruction, or only provide basic practice such as reading books or copying the teacher's speech. Learner 16 stated the following (which was translated into English by the researchers):

"Not often, the practice would be like the teacher pronounce an English word and we imitate it until it sounds right." (Learner 16, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

"The challenging ones are the vowel combinations /u/ and /e/. (Learner 25, Kuningan, Interview, November 24th, 2025)

This explains mispronunciations such as further → fader, guest → gues,

wear → wir, and example → eksampel.

CONCLUSION

This study explored into the factors that contributed to vowel mispronunciation among class X students at SMAN 2 Kuningan. The investigation revealed that these vowel mispronunciations are caused by a complex combination of linguistic, affective, and pedagogical factors. The most important aspect is L1 interference, in which learners employ Indonesian and Sundanese vowel patterns when pronouncing English words. This pattern results in a systemic mistake, particularly for English vowel sounds that do not exist in their L1's phonological system.

Furthermore, learners demonstrated a high reliance on spelling (orthographic dependence). As a result, individuals frequently speak words according to their spelling rather than their correct pronunciation. The low level of phonological awareness is further aggravated by inadequate exposure to actual English knowledge, causing learners to struggle to distinguish between similar vowel sounds. Affective elements such as embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence also undermine learners' confidence in practicing, resulting in the persistence of mispronunciation. On the other hand, learning practice in class continues to lack a constant and substantial percentage for practicing pronunciation, resulting in uneven growth of learners' pronunciations.

Overall, vowel mispronunciation among X learners of SMAN 2 Kuningan was influenced by linguistic limitations, restricted input, affective barriers, and a lack of pedagogical emphasis on pronunciation. These findings emphasized the importance of more systematic pronunciation practice, increasing exposure to English speaking material, and implementing learning activities that boost learners' confidence. A comprehensive approach to these elements can help learners improve their pronunciation accuracy and overall speaking proficiency.

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