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Text-based approach to teach English diphthongs

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Abstract

Spoken communication demands the students' intelligible pronunciation of English speech sounds since unintelligible pronunciation hampers successful communication. However, English speech sounds pronunciation is problematic for many EFL learners even after years of learning English. The pronunciation problem is more complex when the speech sounds occur in a text. This is because, in an English class, the focus of pronunciation practice is usually on isolated words, phrases and sentences. Thus, they find difficulties when they must apply the words, phrases, and sentences in a text. This study focused on teaching English diphthongs using text-based approach. It investigated how text-based teaching can enhance the EFL students' mastery to pronounce English diphthongs in a text. This study is an experimental design, comparing two groups of students' pronunciation competence taught with genre/text-based approach and conventional approach. The research result revealed the effectiveness of text-based teaching since there was a significant difference in the students' competence taught with text-based teaching and that taught with the conventional method. Drilling techniques which were also applied played a vital role in the pronunciation practice. Based on the conclusion above, it is recommended that English teachers apply text-based approach and drilling techniques as an alternative strategy to teach English diphthongs.

Keywords: *Text-based approach; drilling techniques, English diphthongs, texts*

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of learning the English language is to communicate in English, spoken and written. Communicating is exchanging meaning. When people speak meaningfully they produce a text, and when they write meaningfully they also produce a text. Thus, communicating is producing a text.

A text makes sense to someone who knows the language. It is a complete unit of language (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) (Kress, 1993). Speech sounds are also parts of a text that should be taught to EFL students in a text because language is realized in a text, not as isolated sounds or words or sentences (Thornbury, 2005).

This study focused on teaching English speech sounds employing text-based approach. The reasons are that, based on our experience, English pronunciation is problematic for many EFL learners and most English teachers teach English pronunciation on isolated words, phrases or sentences. Published materials to teach pronunciation typically provide uncontextualised examples involving sentence-level practice (Burns, 2006). Teachers need to

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teach English pronunciation contextually due to its vital role to teach spoken language. Correct pronunciation supports better communication.

Some factors causing pronunciation problems for Indonesian students are among others (1) some English speech sounds are strange for the students because they do not exist in the Indonesian language, (2) English spellings do not represent speech sounds consistent, (3) sometimes a letter is mute, (4) similar sounds may have different letters, (4) wrong pronunciation may result in a different meaning. These complexities cause English pronunciation difficult for EFL students.

Spoken communication demands the students' intelligible pronunciation of English speech sounds since unintelligible pronunciation hampers successful communication (Li, 2016). However, English speech sounds pronunciation is problematic for many EFL learners because of the inconsistent system of English spelling.

The pronunciation problem is more complex when the speech sounds occur in a text because the speech sounds assimilate with the neighboring speech sounds in the text (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2010). However, teaching pronunciation usually does not occur in texts. The focus of pronunciation practice is on isolated words, phrases and sentences. This can cause problems when the students should apply what they have learned in real communication because communication occurs in a text, not on isolated words, phrases, or sentences.

The matters above inspired the researchers to explore teaching English speech sounds pronunciation using text-based approach. Text-Based Approach (TBA) introduces spoken cycle and written cycle teaching to develop listening, speaking, reading, writing skills (Agustien, 2020). Listening and speaking skills develop spoken communication while reading and writing skills develop written communication. Pronunciation is a sub-skill to develop students' spoken communication skills.

Some previous studies on pronunciation are as follows. A study on teaching English pronunciation in India revealed effective methods and techniques to enhance the students' English pronunciation. The researchers recommended 'drilling and minimal pair' techniques for they gradually give the students an insight into the English sound system and support the development of spontaneous speaking. Listening and reading activities were used to enhance the students' receptive and productive skills. Listening comprehension exercises developed their ability in recognizing English speech sounds and accents. In reading exercises, they read aloud to pronounce the words correctly. In the process of learning, the students' pronunciation should be recorded for future purposes, e.g. the students can recheck their progress (Priya & NS, 2020).

A study on the effect of multimodal input to improve the native English speakers to perceive Japanese vowels revealed that seeing lip movement during training significantly helped the learners to perceive the vowels of the target language (Hirata & Kelly, 2010).

A study on the difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs by Indonesian students found out that English diphthong [au] was the most difficult for Indonesian students. The mother tongue interference is the main cause of the difficulty (Donal, 2016).

A study on teaching English pronunciation in Indonesia revealed the teachers' perception of the teaching priorities for Indonesian EFL learners. The research result suggested that the teachers give more priority to segmental features than on suprasegmental features (Moedjito, 2008).

This current study adapted the previous findings in teaching English speech sounds pronunciation. This study accommodated the effective techniques, the difficulties, and the recommended priorities offered by the previous studies. The difference is that this current study also explored the effectiveness of text-based approach to teaching English speech sounds.

To maximize the study, the researchers focused on English diphthongs, how text-based teaching can enhance the EFL students' mastery to pronounce English diphthongs in texts.

Based on the background above, the research questions of this study can be formulated below.

- 1) How can text-based approach develop the EFL students' competence in pronouncing English diphthongs?
- 2) To what extent can text-based approach develop the EFL students' competence in pronouncing English diphthongs?

Thus, the purposes of this study are:

- 1) To find out the reasons why text-based approach can develop the EFL students' competence in pronouncing English diphthongs.
- 2) To find out to what extent text-based approach can develop the EFL students' competence in pronouncing English diphthongs.

Theoretically, this study can develop the English teaching methodology. Practically, this study can develop the practice of teaching English pronunciation to EFL students.

English diphthongs

English diphthongs are vowels with special features. A diphthong is represented by two vowels; during its production, there is movement from one vowel position to another vowel position. Although represented by two symbols, a diphthong is produced as one syllable. The first vowel of a diphthong is more sonorous than the second vowel, therefore; an English diphthong is called a falling diphthong (Roach, 2009).

English has closing and centering diphthongs. Here are the English diphthongs with their keywords:

Table 1. English diphthongs	
Diphthongs	Keywords
[eɪ]	late, race, lake, hate
[aɪ]	ride, mine, white, file
[ɔɪ]	soil, boil, joint, coin
[oʊ]	code, coast, tone, rode
[aʊ]	allow, about, now, how
[ɪə]	here, real, dear, fear

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[ɛə]	care, hair, bare, rare
[ʊə]	sure, tour, pure, fewer

Teaching English speech sounds

Being aware of correct pronunciation is important for EFL students because it affects the intelligibility of their speech. However, the phenomena show that even after years of studying English, many EFL students face problems in pronouncing English speech sounds (Priya & NS, 2020).

Teaching articulatory phonetics, how to produce English speech sounds by our vocal organs is important. Knowing and practicing to produce the target language speech sounds will impact the accurate pronunciation, then; will impact the intelligible speech. The knowledge of the speech sound production will be in vain without drilling practice.

To enhance students' pronunciation skills, teachers need to provide various activities; one of them is drilling practice. In teaching pronunciation, drilling serves as a vital technique. A study on the intuitive-imitative approach to teaching pronunciation revealed the effectiveness of the drilling practice (Tsuraya, 2020).

Drilling refers to the audio-lingual method to train pronunciation. The materials for pronunciation practice class should include drilling and ear training; also include homophones and homographs (Datko, 2013). Teachers should employ choral and individual drilling practices. The latter enables the teacher to analyze the individual result after the drilling practice. To avoid boredom, a teacher can apply various types of drilling such as repetition, substitution, chain.

Teaching minimal pairs is useful to make the students aware of how important correct pronunciation is. This helps them to identify different pronunciations of similar words. A study of minimal pair drilling technique showed that it can attract and activate the learners

Genre/Text-based approach to teach spoken language

Genre-based approach or text-based approach is a teaching approach to expose students to the target language genres or texts, how the language occurs contextually (Luu, 2011) (Hyland, 2004). The phases of genre-based teaching are (1) Building knowledge of the field, (2) Modeling of a text, (3) Joint construction of a text, (4) Independent construction of a text. The genre-based cycle covers the written cycle and spoken cycle. The latter is to develop the spoken language. This section discusses the spoken cycle.

In building knowledge of the field, the teacher clarifies the grammar, vocabulary, etc., and activates the student's previous knowledge. This stage prepares the students to meet the new knowledge, the new texts.

In the stage of modeling, the teacher exposes students to an audio text. Audio text here can be in the forms of dialog or monolog, i.e. transactional, interpersonal, chants, or functional text. Here, the students can develop their listening skills and perceive English pronunciation. The learning activities can highlight the aspects of pronunciation, intonation, expressions (Agustien, 2020).

In the stage of joint construction, the learning activities are aimed at developing the students' speaking skills, including the pronunciation micro skill. The students learn to converse with the correct pronunciation.

After the joint construction, the students will independently construct a text. At this stage, hopefully, the students will perform their speeches with intelligible pronunciation.

METHOD

Research Design

This study is an experimental design, comparing two groups of students' pronunciation competence taught with genre-based approach and conventional approach. The null hypothesis of this study is: there is no pronunciation competence difference between the students taught with text-based approach and those taught with the conventional approach.

Research participants

Two groups of 'Pronunciation practice' classes participated in this study; each group consisted of 15 students. One group played a role as a control group, while the other played a role as an experimental group. They were the first semester students of the English Study Program, aged 15 -17 years old.

Research Procedure

In this covid-19 pandemic, the research was done online, from the pretest, the treatment, and the posttest.

1. Pre test

To know the initial competence of the research participants' English speech sounds, a pre-test was administered. They read 20 English words, recorded the reading practice, and sent the recording to the researchers. The score obtained by each participant was: the number of correct pronunciations X 0.5.

2. Treatment

The Experimental and the treatment groups got different treatments.

a. Experimental group

The teacher taught the experimental group using text-based approach with the following stages: (1) Building the context, (2) Modeling, (3) Joint construction, (4) Independent construction.

b. Control group

The teacher taught the control group using conventional method with the following stage: (1) Explicit teaching, (2) Practice

3. Post-test

In the end, both groups did a post-test by reading texts containing the English diphthongs, recording the reading practice, and sent the recording to the teacher. The score obtained by each participant was by calculating the number of the correct pronunciation of the words containing diphthongs compared with the total numbers of words containing diphthongs in the texts.

4. Comparing the average scores of the experimental and control groups

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This aims at knowing the different level of the average score between the students of the experimental group and that of the control group.

Data Analysis

T-test analysis was applied to find out the competence difference between the experimental group and the control group; whether the difference was significant or not.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average scores of the pretest revealed that initially, both groups had equal competence, i.e. the experimental group: 42.5, the control group: 43.5. In the post-test, both groups read texts containing English diphthongs [eɪ], [oʊ], [aɪ], [aʊ], [ɪə], [ɛə], [ʊə], [ɔɪ]. Here are examples of texts read by the students:

The Eyes and Voice of a House

The brown house looked dark in the night. An owl hooted somewhere nearby. John had doubts about anyone living in such an old building. He began to walk past it, when he heard a loud shout. The boy thought about running, but what if someone was in trouble? That was no shout of joy. The voice sounded scared. Surely help was needed. Should he go get an adult to join him? No. He had to act fast. Listen. Bang! Another noise. John climbed the stairs to the front door and began to knock. No answer. When he began to knock a second time, there was a cry from an open window above. John stepped back and tried to see who was there. He saw a pair of yellow eyes in the window. They belonged to a big black cat. Did the cat need help? No. Didn't they say all cats have nine lives? So when John heard a man angrily shout, "Go away!" he did just that. He did not need to find out who lived in that old house.

(<https://englishwithjennifer.wordpress.com/2011/02/20/a-timely-text-an-activity-for-diphthongs/>)

James Doyle and the boilermakers' strike

Old gentleman : I say! What's all that frightful noise?
Boy : It's the boilermakers from Tyneside. They're on strike. I'm on the way to join them.
Old gentleman : You a boilermaker?
Boy : Me? No, I slave for United Alloys. But I'll add my voice to anyone fighting for his rights.
Old gentleman : Wait! Why are they striking this time?
Boy : A rise in wages mainly – and overtime for nights.
Old gentleman : Why don't they use their brains? A rise in pay means rising prices and greater inflation. What's the point? Who gains?
Boy : That's blackmail, mate. There's high unemployment in Tyneside and the employers exploit the situation. They pay a high trained boilermaker starvation wages. It's a disgrace.
Old gentleman : What's your name?
Boy : James Doyle. I come from a line from fighters. My aunt Jane chained herself to the railings in 1809. She was quite famous.
Old gentleman : I shall be highly approved if you tie yourself to mine!
(<https://www2.vobs.at/ludscherpdp/20files/Pronunciation%20exercises.pdf>)

The score of the post-test was based on the student's accuracy in pronouncing 120 words containing diphthongs [eɪ], [oʊ], [aɪ], [aʊ], [ɪə], [ɛə], [ʊə], [ɔɪ], which were displayed in the texts read by the students. The data of the study were the students' post-test scores. Here is the list of the scores of the experimental and control groups.

Table 2. Students' competence in pronouncing English diphthongs

Experimental group		Control group	
Students	Score	Students	Score
1	63	1	60
2	70	2	62

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3	72	3	65
4	64	4	61
5	75	5	67
6	73	6	62
7	64	7	70
8	71	8	61
9	74	9	62
10	76	10	64
11	80	11	56
12	71	12	66
13	72	13	63
14	76	14	61
15	73	15	65
Average	71.6	Average	63

The criterion used to determine the student's competence level in pronouncing English diphthongs is as follows:

Table 3. The criterion of competence level

Scores	Level of competence
80 - 100	Excellent
65 - 79	Good
50 - 64	Fair
0- 49	Poor

The findings above show that the experimental group's ability in pronouncing English diphthong is good, while the control group's ability is fair.

Based on the calculation, the t score is 5.676, bigger than the t score of the t table at the level of significance .01, which is 2.264. This means that the null hypothesis 'There is no pronunciation competence difference between the students taught with text-based approach and those taught with the conventional approach' is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between the students' competence taught with text-based approach and the students' competence taught with the conventional approach.

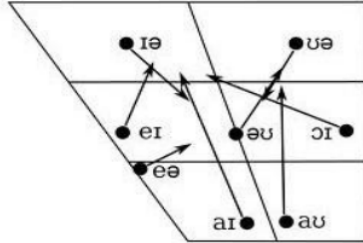
Text-based approach to improve the EFL students' competence to produce diphthongs in texts

Students' activities and learning experiences

In this pandemic situation, the Pronunciation practice class was implemented online, using synchronous and asynchronous modes. Our institution provides Learning Management System (LMS) or Moodle with various platforms such as 'Scorm', 'Google meet', 'Forum', 'Chatting', 'Quiz', 'Assignment'.

For the 'Build the context' stage, the teacher who was one of the researchers used the Google-meet platform, to explain the learning outcome, the way to produce the diphthongs. Using the diphthong diagram, she defined the diphthongs.

Figure 1. Diphthong diagram



Source: (<https://www.google.com/search?q=diphthong+diagram&oeq=diphthong+diagram&aqs=chrome..69j57j0i22i30.10322j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>)

Drilling was done here; the students imitated and responded to various pronunciation drills. Technical terms were also introduced and explained in this stage.

In the 'Modeling' stage, the materials exposed to the experimental and control groups were different. The materials exposed to the experimental group were meaningful texts containing the diphthongs taught. The texts could be monologs, dialogs, poetry, chants, short stories, even songs. Using 'text-to-speech' software, the texts were filled with native speakers' voices, thus; they became audio texts. Then, they were uploaded to the 'Scorm' platform in the LMS.

Different from the experimental group, the materials exposed to the control group were loose words, phrases, and sentences. These materials were also filled with a native speaker's voices using 'text-to-speech' software.

Drilling practices and videos of tutorials about the diphthongs followed the materials. Phonetic writing was also taught to the students. And difficulties encountered by the students were also clarified.

The assignments for the experimental group were (1) finding a text containing diphthongs, read and recorded the reading practice, and submitted the recording to the 'Assignment' platform; (2) using the 'Chatting' platform, the students worked in groups to create a spoken text. While the assignments for the control group were (1) finding a list of sentences containing diphthongs, read and recorded the reading practice, and submitted the recording to the 'Assignment' platform; (2) using the 'Chatting' platform, the students worked in groups to write a list of sentences containing diphthongs. Feedback, questions, and answers related to the assignments were implemented through the 'Forum' platform.

From the explanation above, it is clear that both groups have different learning experiences. The center of the experimental group class activities is texts, while the center of the control group class activities is a list of sentences.

The difficulties encountered by the students

The research findings show that the experimental group is more capable of pronouncing English diphthongs. The control group did more mistakes in the pronunciation. The interview with 5 students of the control group revealed that they could pronounce the diphthongs accurately in individual words, in individual sentences, but they often mispronounced the diphthongs found in

texts. These findings indicate that the learning experiences affect the capability.

The learning experiences of the control group students who were taught with text-based approach are: (1) being exposed to texts, (2) identifying diphthongs in texts, (3) being drilled with texts, and (4) producing diphthongs in texts. Meanwhile, the learning experiences of the control group students who were taught with a conventional method are: (1) being exposed to loose words, phrases, sentences, (2) identifying diphthongs in words, phrases, sentences, (3) being drilled with words, phrases, sentences, and (4) producing diphthongs in words, phrases, sentences.

The more experiences of the experimental group in working with texts gave them a deeper understanding of the English diphthongs. On the other hand, the fewer experiences of the control group in working with texts gave them less understanding about the English diphthongs. This is the rationale why the experimental group achieves a higher score than the control group.

The data analysis revealed that the students found difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs which do not exist in the Indonesian language [ɪə], [ʊə], [eɪ], [ɛə] and [oʊ]. This is in line with Brown's idea stating that the source of errors is the native language which is called inter-language interference (Brown, 2000). This finding is different from Donal's study revealing that English diphthong [au] was the most difficult for Indonesian students (Donal, 2016).

The errors committed by the students can be classified into omission and substitution errors. Omission errors are errors of deleting a diphthong element while substitution errors are errors of replacing a diphthong with the other sound (Crystal, 2003). Here are examples of omission and substitution errors committed by the students.

Table 4. Students' pronunciation of the diphthong [ɪə]

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	near	[nɪə]	[nɪ]
2	here	[hɪə]	[hɪ]
3	dear	[dɪə]	[dɪ]
4	fear	[fɪə]	[fɪ]
5	real	[rɪəl]	[rɪl]

Table 5. Students' pronunciation of the diphthong [ʊə]

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	sure	[ʃʊə]	[ʃʊ]
2	cure	[kjʊə]	[kjʊ]
3	cruel	[kruəl]	[krol]
4	pure	[pjʊə]	[pjʊ]
5	tour	[tuə]	[tʊ]

Table 6. Students' pronunciation of the diphthong [ɛə]

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	bare	[beə]	[bɛ]
2	rare	[reə]	[rɛ]
3	stair	[steə]	[stɛ]
4	their	[ðeə]	[ðɛ]

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5	scare	[skeə]	[ske]
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Table 7. Students' pronunciation of the diphthong [eɪ]

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	late	[leɪt]	[lit]
2	they	[ðeɪ]	[ðɪ]
3	main	[meɪn]	[mɪn]
4	wage	[weɪdʒ]	[widʒ]
5	slave	[sleɪv]	[slɪv]

Table 8. Students' pronunciation of the diphthong [oʊ]

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	open	[oʊpən]	[ʊpən]
2	window	[wɪndəʊw]	[wɪndəw]
3	yellow	[jeloo]	[yelo]
4	so	[soʊ]	[sɔ]
5	old	[oʊld]	[uld]

The tables above display the examples of omission errors in which the students omitted one sound element of the diphthongs. Thus, they pronounced them as pure vowels. Below are examples of substitution errors.

Table 9. Examples of substitution errors

No.	Words	Intended pronunciation	Students' pronunciation
1	away	[əweɪ]	[əwai]
2	say	[seɪ]	[sai]
3	raise	[reɪz]	[raiz]
4	cow	[kaʊ]	[kɔ]
5	sound	[saʊnd]	[sɔnd]

In the examples above, the students substituted the diphthong [eɪ] with other diphthongs that exists in the Indonesian language [ai]. And they also substituted the diphthong [aʊ] with a similar pure vowel [ɔ] that exists in the Indonesian language.

The omission and substitution errors above are classified as interlingual errors that are caused by the first language transfer. It strengthens Warsono's study concluding that the native language transfer does exist in the English interlanguage of the Indonesian student learning English, but this does not diminish the student's achievement towards the target language (Warsono, 2016).

The effectiveness of text-based approach provided with drilling techniques to teach diphthongs

The research result revealed the effectiveness of text-based teaching since there was a significant difference in the students' competence taught with text-based teaching and that taught with the conventional method. However, text-based teaching itself could not succeed the teaching unless it was supplemented with drilling techniques.

Drilling the students was carried out from the very beginning in a synchronous mode. The students listened to a model and imitated the model. Here the students recognized an utterance, then produced the utterances they

listened to. Using drilling techniques, the teacher introduced accurate pronunciation besides she also trained the movement of the speech organs. A study on vowel production revealed that seeing lip movement during training significantly helped the learners to perceive the vowels of the target language (Hirata & Kelly, 2010). The teacher drilled the students chorally and individually. Firstly, the students repeated the model collectively then every student repeated it individually. Individual drilling was used to check every student's pronunciation.

Besides repetition drilling, minimal pair drilling was also carried out. Minimal pair is a pair of words that differ only in one sound but have a different meaning. Thus, the words have quite similar sounds but they mean differently. Minimal pair drilling is useful to make the students aware of how important correct pronunciation is. This helps them to identify different pronunciations of similar words (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Drilling techniques derive from the audio-lingual method, based on linguistic theory and behavioral psychology. It states that pronunciation practice should include drilling and ear training. It is meant for habit formation (Alemi & Tavakoli, 2016).

Other activities that supported the students' competence are doing contrastive phonological analysis. The teacher and the students contrasted the English and Indonesian diphthongs to find out the differences and the similarities. These activities made them aware that English and Indonesian diphthongs are different. A literature study revealed that contrastive analysis was useful in phonology since first language transfer more occurs in phonology and contrastive analysis is likely the most predictive at phonology (Rahimpour & Dovaise, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Text-based approach is effective for teaching English diphthongs for Indonesian students learning English. Being exposed to the diphthongs in texts, the students have more experiences to work with texts such as (1) identifying the words containing diphthongs in texts, (2) being drilled with texts, (3) producing a text using words containing diphthongs, (4) transcribing texts. These experiences make them have more understanding about the English diphthongs. Then, they have more competence in producing the diphthongs in texts.

The English diphthongs that are problematic for Indonesian students are [ɪə], [ʊə], [eɪ], [ɛə] and [oʊ], namely the English diphthongs that do not exist in the Indonesian language. The types of errors committed by the students are omission and substitution errors. Omission errors are errors of deleting a diphthong element while substitution errors are errors of replacing a diphthong with the other sound. The omitting errors made are by pronouncing [ɪə], [ʊə], [eɪ], [ɛə] and [oʊ] with pure vowels [i:], [u:], [ɪ], [ɛ] and [ʊ]. The substitution errors made are by replacing [aʊ] and [eɪ] with [ə] and [aɪ]. These omission and substitution errors are classified as interlingual errors that are caused by the Indonesian language transfer.

Drilling techniques are indispensable in teaching pronunciation. To avoid boredom, drilling techniques should be varied such as repetition and minimal pairs. Drilling is meant for habit formation and is used to train the movement

of the speech organs. Minimal pair drilling is useful to make the students aware of how important correct pronunciation is because mispronunciation will elicit different meanings. This helps them to identify different pronunciations of similar words. A contrastive phonological analysis is also useful to make the students aware that English and Indonesian diphthongs are different.

Based on the conclusion above, it is recommended that English teachers apply text-based approach and drilling techniques as an alternative strategy to teach English diphthongs.

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