# SCHWA OR UNSTRESSED VOWEL SOUND IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY ITEMS FROM SURAH AL-BAQARAH OF THE HOLY QURAN

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| *Article History*<br>*Received: May 2024*<br>*Revised: July 2024*<br>*Published: October 2024*<br><br>*Keywords*<br>*Phonetics;*<br>*Phonology;*<br>*Schwa;*<br>*Vocabulary items;* | *The schwa sound [ə] in the English language remains challenging and it appears to be overlooked by EFL learners. In practice, the word 'submit' is mispronounced by English learners: /sʌbˈmɪt/, instead of /səbˈmɪt/. Some studies have discussed schwa but their data sources were not the Holy Quran. Hence, this article investigated the schwa sound in English vocabulary items collected from the Holy Quran and represented by the letters 'o' and 'u' as in 'polite' and 'submit'. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the researchers collected 97 vocabulary items containing schwa sounds taken from surah Al-Baqarah verses 1-286. The results indicate that the schwa term that represents the unstressed syllable can be renewed with the terms proposed in this study such as 'astressed' and 'disaccented'. In addition, to maintain the schwa term, a change of its pronunciation is proposed becoming /ʃwə/ and not /ʃwaː/. Most of the written vowels 'o' and 'u' are pronounced in a strong form, and unstressed vowels 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a schwa. The appearance of unstressed schwa in the vowels 'o' and 'u' is not determined by its location whether it is in the first or second syllable. Schwa could appear anywhere as long as he was not stressed. Schwa was not found in stressed syllables. Lastly, all -ion [ən] and -ous [əs] suffixes must be pronounced with a schwa. The results imply that EFL learners ought to consult an excellent dictionary to ensure correct pronunciation. Future researchers are expected to examine further patterns of a schwa sound in English vocabulary items to assist EFL learners in improving their pronunciation.* |

## INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation might be problematic and challenging in some circumstances and such pronunciation is a crucial aspect of achieving speaking fluency. Faraj (2023, p. 344) mentions that "pronunciation is an important element in learning English." Rismayati (2021) exemplifies the distinction of double vowels in English pronunciation, "most people believe that double 'o' letters meet in a word, the output sound is /uː/ or /ʊ/. For example, in the word 'wood' the output sound is /wʊd/, and the word 'school' is /skuːl/. However, in the word 'blood' the output sound is /blʌd/." English also has the same written pair of words with different meanings and pronunciation (homograph) which might confuse non-native English speakers. The word *present* for the example. *Present* referring to a noun is pronounced as /ˈpreznt/ whereas *present* referring to a verb is pronounced as /prɪˈzent/. Another problematic aspect, schwa, the sound [ə], is considered an important issue that must be addressed to improve EFL learners' pronunciation competence (Shahid, Shabbir, & Aslam, 2023) because [ə] sound is considered a default vowel sound (Kapranov, 2021) and "schwa has been somewhat neglected in studies of spontaneous speech" (Tasker, 2020, p.2). Although schwa is often omitted or

neglected, the schwa omission does not affect the intended meaning of the word (Demirezen, 2021).

Young and Messum (2022, pp. 1-2) define Schwa "articulated as a minimal, reduced, vowel-type sound, and in other contexts it is not actively articulated and is instead no more than an incidental noise that occurs when the speaker passes from one consonant to another one". The symbol /ə/ commonly represents Schwa, however, Gvilava and Rusadze (2023) represent schwa with the symbol /q/. Schwa is sometimes not owned by some languages, for example, Muna, a tribal language in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Speakers tend to omit sounds to avoid mispronouncing schwa which does not exist in Muna (Indrayani & Nugraha, 2020; Riaz, 2021). Furthermore, the [ə] sound is considered the most problematic sound used by learners (Amalia, 2012). This issue mostly happens to those whose first language is not English. However, the inclusion of schwa vowels in complex syllables and the absence of word stress may impact high-level L2 pronunciation skills (Suzukida & Saito, 2022). Kapranov (2021) outlines the factors that cause schwa errors, including schwa pronunciation that is not well-reflected in the English orthographic system and EFL learners' low understanding of schwa's phonetic and phonological properties.

Studies on schwa in English have been done by many researchers towards various EFL learners from different backgrounds. First, Kapranov (2021) in his study on Norwegian EFL learners found several types of schwa-related errors related to the results of post-hoc procedures involving schwa substitutions for /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, /ɑ:/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/; schwa substitutions for /ɒ/, /æ/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/ indicated participants' problems with sentence stress in English; schwa substitutions for /e/ and /ɑ:/ were predicted to be due to the influence of English orthography. The study highlights the importance of allocating more resources in the phrase and sentence stress teaching and learning. Second, Sugiura (2016) researches the impact of quick repetition of auditory words on L2 pronunciation enhancement of English schwa by Japanese EFL learners. Third, Shahid et al. (2023) delve deeper into Pakistani EFL learners' understanding and struggles in learning the schwa sound in English. Shahid et al.'s research highlights that non-native English speakers cannot speak exactly like native English speakers, despite great efforts to match the native English speakers' English pronunciation. Fourth, Abu Guba et al. (2023) investigated the production of vowel reduction in the context of Arabic-Jordanian English speakers by comparing two groups of speakers with intermediate and advanced English proficiency with a control group of native English speakers. The study found significant durational differences between Arabic and native English speakers, with Arabic speakers producing longer vowels and native speakers producing shorter vowels. However, in this context, the advanced Arabic and English-speaking group was deemed to have failed to produce native-like English schwas. Fifth, Gómez-Lacabex et al. (2022) investigated the impact of "production-based" and "perception-based" training procedures on English lexical schwa production by young Spanish learners in an EFL classroom. The results showed significant efficacy of guided pronunciation training in developing schwa production skills influenced by learners' orosensory awareness, self-perception, and self-feedback.

In the context of linguistics in general, several studies discuss the existence of schwa in English. First, Aalders and Ernestus (2015) study the realization of /p,t/ after schwa in casual American English. The results of the study indicate that Schwa's absence does not affect VOT (Voice Onset Time) and also the duration of Schwa when present. This shows that the reduction process affecting vowels need not change the realization of consonants. Second, Ambalegin (2021) employs phonological analysis to investigate English vowel sounds as a central phenomenon represented by letters descriptively and qualitatively. This study produces the results of the English vowel pronunciation positioned as a closed syllable that extends /a:/, /o:/, /ɛ:/ and produces schwa, as well as in diphthongs, double semi-vowels do not do triphthongs, letters i, u, w and y produce a triphthong when combined with a vowel. Third, Park (2024)

discusses the theory of schwa absorption in English, where the existing theory refers to the deletion of unstressed pretonic vowels (schwa) in fast and/or casual speech, in the contrary, several experimental studies show that schwa deletion is not a deletion process, but the result of the increased overlap of speech movements, and that vowels are compressed to the point of being covered by neighbouring consonants. Fourth, Napoli and Clopper (2024) investigate the English schwa variation based on the type of words; content and function word pairs. This study reveals that word-initial and phrase-initial schwas are both targeted and have different acoustic targets, indicating different representations in function and content words.

Considering the term schwa has been used for a long time, the researchers intend to renew this unstressed syllable term. The researchers consider that the term 'schwa' which is transcribed as /ʃwɑː/ is irrelevant because it contains no [ə]. The researchers opine that the old term that starts the term schwa is more suitable because sheva is transcribed as /ʃəˈvɑː/ (Wise, 1957) and contains a semivowel [ə]. The researchers intend to propose a new term for the 'schwa' depending on the prefixing in morphological theory. Morphology takes the role of the study of word structure or word formation and the rule (Fromkin et al., 2018; Rahayu, 2021) by considering or not considering the [ə] occurrence in its term. The main thing to hold is that 'schwa' is an unstressed syllable. Therefore, the researchers make some modifications to the schwa term itself and the unstressed term through morphological processes.

The researchers considered that many Indonesian EFL learners are unaware of the existence of the weak vowel form [ə] sound in pronouncing English words. Especially for the English vocabulary items in which the vocal "o" and "u" are intended to be pronounced as [ə]. The word 'submit' for example, is commonly pronounced as /sʌbˈmɪt/ or /sɑbˈmɪt/. They are more likely to use the strong vowel [ʌ], [ɑ], or [ɛː] to pronounce the word instead of using schwa. A study by Kapranov (2021) and Kearns (2020) shows that students more often substitute schwa into /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, /ɑː/, and /ɛː/ sounds. It is in line with Indriani (2001) that the schwa sound is closely similar to the sound [ʌ] and [ɛː] in some circumstances. Reflecting on the various issues that arise due to the existence and use of schwa in English, as well as the absence of research using the holy Koran as a data source, the researchers of this study explore English vocabulary items in which the letter 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a vowel sound [ə] that appeared in the surah Al-Baqarah of the holy Koran. By learning schwa, EFL learners are expected to improve their phonological awareness to perform better speaking skills, especially in terms of pronunciation fluency like native-English speakers. Students' difficulty in pronouncing schwa in monosyllabic words makes this research potentially helpful by providing a vocabulary collection containing schwa to simplify the process (Utami, 2020). Based on the research background, the researchers formulate two questions underlying this study, namely:
1. what better term can replace 'schwa'?
2. what English vocabulary items with letters 'o' and 'u' are pronounced [ə] in the Al-Baqarah letter verses 1-286?

## RESEARCH METHOD
### Research Design
This research aims to explore English vocabulary items in which the letter 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a vowel sound [ə] that appeared in the surah Al-Baqarah of the holy Koran, specifically in the aspect of proposing the renewing the *schwa* name and collecting English vocabulary items based on the research questions underlying this study. Therefore the basic theory of 'Schwa is an unstressed syllable' (Indriani, 2001; Kuo & Weismer, 2016; Lacabex & Gallardo-del-Puerto, 2020; Wise, 1957) led the data analysis of this study. Referring to the first research question, the researchers employed a morphological analysis to construct a new term to replace schwa and narrated by connecting the analysis process with the theories. To support this, Booij (2015) explains that "Morphology is the subdiscipline of linguistics that deals with

the internal structure of words." Addressing the second research question, the researchers used descriptive qualitative research specifically using phonetic transcription analysis since the data taken were in the form of vocabulary items and phonetic transcriptions. Qualitative research is holistic research on a particular object to investigate a social phenomenon that occurred holistically (Jaya, 2020). Descriptive research is the type of research that describes a particular phenomenon as clearly as possible without giving any threats to the object observed (Kountur, 2003). Wells (2006) explains that phonetic transcription uses phonetic symbols to represent speech sounds from the impressive to the systematic, and includes digraphs, diphthongs, affricates, as well as phonotypical transcriptions for various purposes. Therefore, referring to Jaya (2020), Kountur (2003), and Wells (2006), the approach used involves examining phonetic transcriptions of words to gain insight into pronunciation patterns, phonological variation, and other linguistic features, which are then interpreted and described narratively.

**Data Source**

This research involved library research and online sources as the main source. Document-based or text-based research is a study of written documents including textbooks, newspapers, magazines, letters, movies, journals, articles, and so forth (Jaya, 2020). The English translation of surah Al-Baqarah became the data source in this study since it has the most verses, totalling 286 verses, compared to any other letters in the Holy Quran. Thus, surah Al-Baqarah is an excellent and rich data source containing lexical items with a schwa sound.

English vocabulary items in which the vocal 'o' and 'u' are intended to be pronounced as [ə] were the data expected for this study. The researchers took the vocabulary items expected from an English translation of Quran surah Al-Baqarah verses 1 up to 286. Ninety-seven words plus two additional findings were discovered to be observed in this study. The vocabulary items found were classified depending on the position or order of the letters 'o' and 'u' in the word. Subsequently, the vocabulary items required were transcribed through the online dictionary, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com. For the special findings about the suffix found in the data, the researchers used the help of the Longman online dictionary because its schwa transcription was visible in the suffix transcription.

**Data Gathering Instrument and Analysis**

In constructing the new term of schwa to discuss the first question, the researchers used the morphological process precisely the affixation process. The changing of a stem to adjust the meaning to a particular context is a definition of a morphological process (Matthews, 1991). Some possible prefixes and suffixes were collected by the researchers to construct the possible new terms. After that, the researchers tried to formulate new possible terms using a table as the analysis instrument (see Table 1). Since schwa refers to an unstressed syllable, therefore the word *unstressed* was modified.

Table
Possible Morphemes to Modify 'Unstressed'

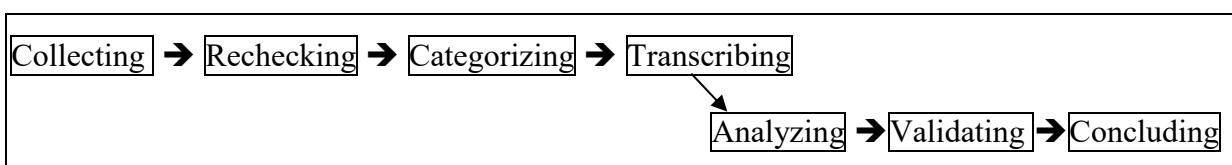| Original ver. | P 1 | P 2 |
|---|---|---|
| un- (prefix) | | |
| stress | | |
| -ed (suffix) | | |
| New form | | |

Note: P stands for Possibility



Figure 1. Data analysis procedure (Jaya, 2020)

To answer the second research question, the researchers adopted Jaya's (2020) analysis data procedure as seen in Figure 1. First, the data were gathered through the data gathering instrument (See Table 2). The data referred to in this study was vocabulary items and their transcription. The online *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* were used to get the phonetic transcription of the vocabulary items collected.

Table 2
Data gathering instrument to answer the second research question

| No. | Words | Oxford Dict. transcription | Strong form | Verse | Line | u and o order |
|-----|-------|---------------------------|-------------|-------|------|---------------|
| 1. | | | | | | |
| Etc. | | | | | | |

Second, the data were rechecked based on the clarity, completeness, and the occurrence. The same vocabulary items might appear more than once, therefore, the same items were omitted. The third is coding data by identifying and classifying all the aspects of the data variables observed. In this context, the data were coded based on the position of the 'o' and 'u' letters in the word. The code used the ordinal numbers 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so forth. The fourth step was categorizing the data to the main research table (tabulation process) based on the code. The fifth step covered data validation. Data validation in this study covered checking and rechecking the data collection and analysis. Despite that, phonetic data transcription from a dictionary is considered valid. Sixth, the data were described by using tables and graphs to understand the research samples to generate conclusions. It is also in line with the Glaser and Strauss (1967) theory in doing the research by first gathering the data, second categorizing the data, and third analyzing the data. In analyzing the data, the researchers compared the data found with the commonly used vocabulary items to enrich the vocabulary collection and to show the difference in pronunciation of the letter 'o' and 'u' in the words. Furthermore, the findings were also connected with the theories related to schwa.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### Research Findings
### *Better term to replace schwa*

As stated previously, two questions were formulated in this article. In the following, the answers were discussed. **First, what better term can replace 'schwa'?** To answer this first research question about the new term of schwa, the researchers used the basic theory that *schwa is unstressed syllables*. Therefore, the researchers modified the word 'unstressed' which was closely suitable to represent the schwa to form the new term of schwa. The word 'unstressed' could be separated into three morphemes 'un-', 'stress', and '-ed'. Table 3 shows the possibility of the chosen morphemes:

Table 3
Possible Morphemes to Modify 'Unstressed'

| Original ver. | P 1 | P 2 |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| un- | a- | dis- |
| stress | stress | accent |
| -ed | -ed | -ed |
| New form | **astressed** | **disaccented** |

Note: P stands for Possibility

Morpheme or prefix 'un-' has a meaning that reverses the meaning of the verb. Here, it means the reverse meaning of the verb 'stress', therefore, 'un + stress' meaning 'not stress'. The suffix '-ed' is used to form the past tense and past participle of regular verbs. Therefore, the word 'stress + ed' has a meaning that is emphasized. The meaning of unstressed was that it was not emphasized. The researchers looked for similar morphemes to the prefix 'un-', root 'stress', and maintained the suffix '-ed'.

Based on Table 3, the researchers divided the findings into three types of morphemes, namely the prefix 'un-', root 'stress', and suffix '-ed'. The similar prefix *un-* found were prefixes *a-* and *dis-* referring to the meaning of *not* or negative. For the root *stress,* it was considered comparable and identical with the noun *accent* since it closely indicated the way a person pronouncing a word. The suffix *-ed* was maintained since it was used to passivize the noun formed to form an adjective.

### *English vocabulary items with letters 'o' and 'u' pronounced [ə]*
Second, **what English vocabulary items with letters 'o' and 'u' are pronounced [ə] in the Al-Baqarah letter verses 1-286?**
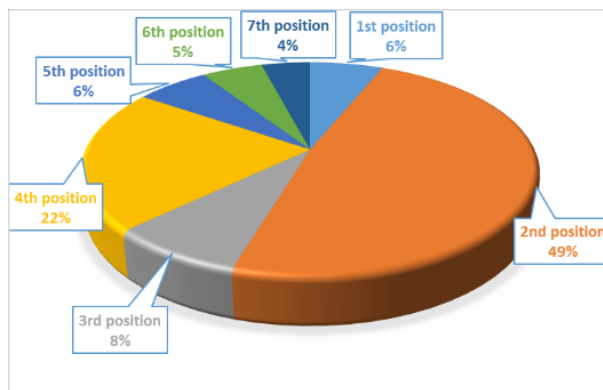


Figure 2. Data Distribution

Figure 2 shows the data distribution of 97 vocabulary items found in Surah Al-Baqarah. The term "1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th position" referred to where the letter 'o' and 'u' positioned in the word. They indicated the categories of the data analysis.

Table 4
'o' and 'o' in the First Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | Oxford dict. transcription | Strong form | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | obedience | /əˈ**biː**diəns/ | N/A | 43 |
| 2 | obey | /əˈ**beɪ**/ | N/A | 45 |
| 3 | of | /əv/ | /ɒv/ | 1 |
| 4 | opponent | /əˈ**pəʊ**nənt/ | N/A | 204 |
| 5 | originator | /əˈ**rɪ**dʒɪneɪtə(r)/ | N/A | 117 |
| 6 | upon | /əˈ**pɒ**n/ | N/A | 40 |

*Note: "(r) is used to indicate where the sound /r/ is pronounced in American English and some other regional varieties of English. In a standard British accent, (r) is only pronounced if it occurs at the end of a word which is followed by another word starting with a vowel sound" (Spencer, 2017).

Table 4 shows the first position of the letters 'o' and 'u' in English vocabulary items. There were 6 vocabulary items found in the data and transcribed using the *Oxford* online dictionary. From the data, it was seen that all the words were stressed in the second syllable as bolded in the table. The data above indicated that the vocabulary items were *obedience, obey, of, opponent, originator,* and *upon*. Those are common vocabularies that most people use in daily conversation and the bible or translated Al-Quran or other holy books and literature. In comparison, some other vocabulary items such as organization /ˌɔːɡənaɪˈ**zeɪ**ʃn/, urban /ˈ**ɜː**bən/, opportunity /ˌɒpəˈ**tju**ːnəti/, opposition, operator /ˈ**ɒ**pəreɪtə(r)/, obstacle /ˈ**ɒ**bstəkl/, and octopus /ˈ**ɒ**ktəpəs/, the first 'o' and 'u' letter were not pronounced or transcribed as [ə]. However, the word 'of' had an exception. It could be pronounced /əv/ and /ɒv/ depending on how strongly it

was intended to be pronounced. Speakers could use the weak form /ə/ as an example, a noun phrase 'a cup **of** tea' might be pronounced as /ə ˈkʌp **əv** ˈtiː/.

Table 5
'o' and 'u' in the Second Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | Transcription | Strong form | Source (verse) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | but | /bət/ | /bʌt/ | 19 |
| 2 | combined | /kəmˈ**baɪ**nd/ | N/A | 161 |
| 3 | command | /kəˈ**mɑː**nd/ | N/A | 99 |
| 4 | commanded | /kəˈ**mɑː**ndɪd/ | N/A | 68 |
| 5 | commands | /kəˈ**mɑː**ndz/ | N/A | 67 |
| 6 | commercial | /kəˈ**mɜː**ʃl/ | N/A | 282 |
| 7 | commit | /kəˈ**mɪt**/ | N/A | 61 |
| 8 | community | /kəˈ**mju**ːnəti/ | N/A | 213 |
| 9 | complete | /kəmˈ**pli**ːt/ | N/A | 150 |
| 10 | compulsion | /kəmˈ**pʌl**ʃn/ | N/A | 256 |
| 11 | conceal | /kənˈ**si**ːl/ | N/A | 42 |
| 12 | concealing | /kənˈ**si**ːlɪŋ/ | N/A | 33 |
| 13 | concerned | /kənˈ**sɜ**ːnd/ | N/A | 182 |
| 14 | concerning | /kənˈ**sɜ**ːnɪŋ/ | N/A | 23 |
| 15 | condition | /kənˈ**dɪ**ʃn/ | N/A | 68 |
| 16 | confirming | /kənˈ**fɜ**ːmɪŋ/ | N/A | 41 |
| 17 | connection | /kəˈ**nek**ʃn/ | N/A | 190 |
| 18 | consigned | /kənˈ**saɪ**nd/ | N/A | 85 |
| 19 | contentment | /kənˈ**ten**tmənt/ | N/A | 126 |
| 20 | convenient | /kənˈ**vi**ːniənt/ | N/A | 282 |
| 21 | corruptly | /kəˈ**rʌp**tli/ | N/A | 60 |
| 22 | dominion | /dəˈ**mɪ**njən/ | N/A | 107 |
| 23 | for | /fə(r)/ | /fɔː(r)/ | 50 |
| 24 | forbid | /fəˈ**bɪd**/ | N/A | 83 |
| 25 | forbidden | /fəˈ**bɪd**n/ | N/A | 2 |
| 26 | forever | /fərˈ**ev**ə(r)/ | N/A | 39 |
| 27 | forgave | /fəˈ**geɪ**v/ | N/A | 52 |
| 28 | forget | /fəˈ**get**/ | N/A | 44 |
| 29 | forgive | /fəˈ**gɪ**v/ | N/A | 58 |
| 30 | forgiveness | /fəˈ**gɪ**vnəs/ | N/A | 199 |
| 31 | mosquito | /məˈ**ski**ːtəʊ/, /mɒˈ**ski**ːtəʊ/ | N/A | 26 |
| 32 | Muhammad | /məˈ**hæ**mɪd/ | N/A | 6 |
| 33 | submission | /səbˈ**mɪ**ʃn/ | N/A | 45 |
| 34 | submissive | /səbˈ**mɪ**sɪv/ | N/A | 128 |
| 35 | submit | /səbˈ**mɪt**/ | N/A | 43 |
| 36 | succeeding | /səkˈ**si**ːdɪŋ/ | N/A | 66 |
| 37 | successful | /səkˈ**se**sfl/ | N/A | 5 |
| 38 | succession | /səkˈ**se**ʃn/ | N/A | 87 |
| 39 | suffice | /səˈ**faɪ**s/ | N/A | 137 |
| 40 | sufficient | /səˈ**fɪ**ʃnt/ | N/A | 115 |
| 41 | supported | /səˈ**pɔ**ːtɪd/ | N/A | 87 |
| 42 | supporter | /səˈ**pɔ**ːtə(r)/ | N/A | 23 |
| 43 | surrender | /səˈ**ren**də(r)/ | N/A | 116 |
| 44 | surrounded | /səˈ**raʊ**ndɪd/ | N/A | 81 |
| 45 | to | /tə/ | /tuː/ | 40 |
| 46 | together | /təˈ**ge**ðə(r)/ | N/A | 19 |
| 47 | towards | /təˈ**wɔ**ːdz/ | N/A | 29 |

Table 5 shows the second position of the letters 'o' and 'u' in English vocabulary items. It was seen in the data that all the words found were stressed in the second syllable as bolded in the table except for the words 'to', 'for', and 'but' because they had only one syllable. However, the words 'to', 'for', and 'but' had exceptions. The word 'to' could be pronounced

as /tə/ or /tuː/. It depended on how strongly those words were pronounced. In the case that the word 'to' was emphasized, the long u: as in the /tuː/ might be used. Meanwhile the 'to' was not emphasized, the schwa /tə/ is recommended to use to make the pronunciation sound better. Another example was the word 'must' which was transcribed as /məst/ for the weak form and /mʌst/ for the strong form of its transcription. Therefore, this generalized rule also could be used for the words 'for', 'but', and 'must'.

In this case, it could be generalized that the letters 'o' and 'u' which were positioned in the second letter were pronounced schwa [ə] due to the unstressed syllable. Some common vocabulary items used in the table covered *complete, forget, forbidden*, and *supporter*. Other common vocabulary used which were not mentioned in the data included convenient /kənˈviːniənt/, conclude /kənˈkluːd/, confuse /kənˈfjuːz/, police /pəˈliːs/, and position /pəˈzɪʃn/. These additional vocabulary items the letter 'o' and 'u' located in the second order also had stress on the second syllable and unstressed schwa at the first syllable.

Table 6
'o' and 'u' in the Third Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Word | Transcription | Strong form | Source (verse) |
|-----|------|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | from | /frəm/ | /frɒm/ | 2 |
| 2 | produce | /prəˈdjuːs/ | N/A | 111 |
| 3 | prohibited | /prəˈhɪbɪtɪd/ | N/A | 194 |
| 4 | protect | /prəˈtekt/ | N/A | 255 |
| 5 | protector | /prəˈtektə(r)/ | N/A | 107 |
| 6 | provided | /prəˈvaɪdɪd/ | N/A | 3 |
| 7 | provision | /prəˈvɪʒn/ | N/A | 22 |
| 8 | usury | /ˈjuːʒəri/ | N/A | 275 |

Table 6 shows the third 'o' and 'u' position in English vocabulary items in the Al-Baqarah letter. Three things were discussed in this section. The first one is about the word 'from'. Similar to the 'to', 'but', and 'for' terms in the previous, 'from' had two versions of its British transcription. /frəm/ belonged to the weak form of 'from' and /frɒm/ to its strong form.

The second, the third positioned 'o' and 'u' was pronounced as schwa because it was unstressed at the first syllable as in the **pro**duce /prəˈdjuːs/ when 'pro' was unstressed. [p] and [r] were consonants and [ə] was a semivowel. This also occurred in the common terms used such as **pro**mote /prəˈməʊt/, **prof**essor /prəˈfesə(r)/, **pro**cedure /prəˈsiːdʒə(r)/, and **pro**pose /prəˈpəʊz/. The 'pro-' was not pronounced as schwa if it was stressed as in the word problem /ˈprɒbləm/, therefore, [ɒ] is used.

The third was about 'usury' /ˈjuːʒəri/ that the stress located in the first syllable. The first 'u' in the first syllable was stressed while the second 'u' is unstressed, therefore schwa existed. The researchers assumed that this might happen because the palatal approximant [j] sound was voiced and side-by-side with the long vowel u [u:], therefore, to reduce the energy in speaking these words, the voiceless [s] was pronounced with the schwa [ə].

Table 7
'o' and 'u' in the fourth position in surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | OALD transcription | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | abrogate | /ˈæbrəgeɪt/ | 106 |
| 2 | admonition | /ˌædməˈnɪʃn/ | 232 |
| 3 | alcoholic | /ˌælkəˈhɒlɪk/ | 219 |
| 4 | arrogant | /ˈærəgənt/ | 87 |
| 5 | canopy | /ˈkænəpi/ | 22 |
| 6 | disobedient | /ˌdɪsəˈbiːdiənt/ | 26 |
| 7 | disobeyed | /ˌdɪsəˈbeɪd/ | 61 |
| 8 | effort | /ˈefət/ | 205 |

| No. | Words | OALD transcription | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 9 | error | /ˈerə(r)/ | 286 |
| 10 | hypocrite | /ˈhɪpəkrɪt/ | 8 |
| 11 | ignorant | /ˈɪɡnərənt/ | 67 |
| 12 | injury | /ˈɪndʒəri/ | 263 |
| 13 | innocent | /ˈɪnəsnt/ | 54 |
| 14 | into | /ˈɪntə/ | 286 |
| 15 | invocation | /ˌɪnvəˈkeɪʃn/ | 114 |
| 16 | onion | /ˈʌnjən/ | 61 |
| 17 | opposition | /ˌɒpəˈzɪʃn/ | 137 |
| 18 | recognised | /ˈrekəɡnaɪzd/ | 89 |
| 19 | recompense | /ˈrekəmpens/ | 4 |
| 20 | reconciliation | /ˌrekənsɪliˈeɪʃn/ | 228 |
| 21 | resurrection | /ˌrezəˈrekʃn/ | 4 |

The data above represented the existence of the schwa sound in the fourth positioned 'o' or 'u' letter in English vocabulary items found in the Al-Baqarah letter. The bolded transcription indicated the stress. To compare the data found, the researchers added some additional vocabulary items chosen depending on the position of the 'o' and 'u' order such as remote /rɪˈməʊt/ and majority /məˈdʒɒrəti/. The stressed vowel sounds used to include [æ], [iː], [e], [ɪ], [ɒ] and [ʌ]. It turned out that diphthongs [eɪ] and [əʊ] were also used in stressed syllables of the data found. In accordance with the theory that schwa is an unstressed part in a particular word, all the data showed that the schwa represented the written letters 'o' and 'u' were unstressed wherever the syllable position was.

Table 8
'o' and 'u' in the Fifth Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | OALD transcription | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | consummate | /ˈkɒnsəmeɪt/ | 235 |
| 2 | ransom | /ˈrænsəm/ | 196 |
| 3 | reckoning | /ˈrekənɪŋ/ | 202 |
| 4 | sinfully | /ˈsɪnfəli/ | 188 |
| 5 | victory | /ˈvɪktəri/ | 89 |
| 6 | wisdom | /ˈwɪzdəm/ | 129 |

Table 8 shows the fifth positioned 'o' and 'u' vocabulary items found in the data. The highlighted part in the transcription indicated that it was stressed. These seven data showed a coincidental pattern where all the first syllable was stressed and the second was unstressed. To prove that this pattern was non-coincidental, the researchers found other similar vocabulary items. Those were measure /ˈmeʒə(r)/, culture /ˈkʌltʃə(r)/, century /ˈsentʃəri/, venture /ˈventʃə(r)/, capture /ˈkæptʃə(r)/, circuit /ˈsɜːkɪt/, leisure /ˈleʒə(r)/, formula /ˈfɔːmjələ/, mixture /ˈmɪkstʃə(r)/, campus /ˈkæmpəs/, author /ˈɔːθə(r)/, common /ˈkɒmən/, and an American fortune /ˈfɔːtʃuːn/ (BrE) /ˈfɔːrtʃən/ (AmE). The stress on the second syllable schwa occurred at the first syllable as found in the words produce /prəˈdjuːs/ and conduct /kənˈdʌkt/. However, schwa did not always be found in the fifth positioned 'o' and 'u' in English vocabulary as discovered in the words dispute /dɪˈspjuːt//ˈdɪspjuːt/ and disgust /dɪsˈɡʌst/.

Table 9
'o' and 'u' in the Sixth Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | OALD transcription | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | ceremony | /ˈserəməni/ | 196 |
| 2 | creator | /kriˈeɪtə(r)/ | 54 |
| 3 | creature | /ˈkriːtʃə(r)/ | 164 |
| 4 | kingdom | /ˈkɪŋdəm/ | 247 |

| 5 | pleasure | /ˈpleʒə(r)/ | 35 |

Table 9 shows the sixth positioned 'o' and 'u' in English vocabulary items found in the Al-Baqarah letter. Five vocabulary items were found with various syllable counts in this section including two, three, and four-syllable words. Since the researchers considered that these five vocabulary items were not adequate, therefore, additional random words which belong to the sixth positioned 'o' and 'u' were added as follows; maximum /ˈmæksɪməm/, premium /ˈpriːmiəm/, headquarters /ˌhedˈkwɔːtəz/, abandoned /əˈbændənd/, diagnostic /ˌdaɪəgˈnɒstɪk/, technology /tekˈnɒlədʒi/, develop /dɪˈveləp/. Highlighted sounds indicated the stressed syllable position. The stressed vowel sounds were found in the data including [e], [iː], [ɪ], [æ], [ɔː], and [ɒ]. Not only vowel sounds, but diphthong [eɪ] also appeared in the stressed syllable of the word 'creator' which was transcribed as /kriˈeɪtə(r)/. All vocabulary items clearly depicted the schwa position that was always unstressed despite the number of syllables that existed. However, the 'o' and 'u' sounds were unpronounced schwa like in the word diagnostic transcribed as /ˌdaɪəgˈnɒstɪk/. Here, the schwa occurred in the second syllable, however, it represented the letter 'a' not 'o' or even 'u'.

Table 10
'o' and 'u' in the Seventh Position in Surah Al-Baqarah

| No. | Words | OALD transcription | Source (verse) |
|-----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1 | difficult | /ˈdɪfɪkəlt/ | 185 |
| 2 | difficulty | /ˈdɪfɪkəlti/ | 184 |
| 3 | scripture | /ˈskrɪptʃə(r)/ | 42 |
| 4 | testimony | /ˈtestɪməni/ | 140 |

Table 10 shows the seventh positioned 'o' and 'u' vocal letters in English vocabulary items found as the data. Since there were only four data found, therefore, some random vocabulary with the same characteristic that the 'o' and 'u' were located in the seventh letter order in a word, such as synchronic /sɪŋˈkrɒnɪk/, furniture /ˈfɜːnɪtʃə(r)/, adventure /ədˈventʃə(r)/, configure /kənˈfɪgə(r)/, and enclosure /ɪnˈkləʊʒə(r)/. The bolded part in the transcription indicated the stressed syllable. The three-syllable vocabulary items had the stress on the first syllable including difficult and furniture, therefore, the unstressed schwa was located at the third syllable. The second positioned stressed syllable of the three-syllable words had the schwa on the first syllable as shown in the words adventure and configure. However, there were some exceptions in the word synchronic which had no schwa, and the word enclosure which had stressed on the second syllable and unstressed on the third syllable. The two-syllable word might have the stress on the first syllable and schwa on the second syllable like in the word scripture which was transcribed as /ˈskrɪptʃə(r)/. Lastly, the four-syllable vocabulary items showed that they had stressed on the first syllable and schwa on the third syllable as shown in the difficulty /ˈdɪfɪkəlti/ and testimony/ˈtestɪməni/.

Table 11
Other Findings of the Schwa in Suffixes –ion and –ous

| No. | Words | Suffix | Oxford dict. trans. | Longman dict. trans. | Source |
|-----|-------|--------|---------------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | admonition | ion | /ˌædməˈnɪʃn/ | /ˌædməˈnɪʃən/ | 232 |
| 2 | compulsion | ion | /kəmˈpʌlʃn/ | /kəmˈpʌlʃən/ | 256 |
| 3 | connection | ion | /kəˈnekʃn/ | /kəˈnekʃən/ | 190 |
| 4 | invocation | ion | /ˌɪnvəˈkeɪʃn/ | /ˌɪnvəˈkeɪʃən/ | 129 |
| 5 | opposition | ion | /ˌɒpəˈzɪʃn/ | /ˌɒpəˈzɪʃən/ | 176 |
| 6 | rebellious | ous | /rɪˈbeljəs/ | /rɪˈbeljəs/ | 26 |
| 7 | reconciliation | ion | /ˌrekənsɪliˈeɪʃn/ | /ˌrekənsɪliˈeɪʃən/ | 228 |
| 8 | resurrection | ion | /ˌrezəˈrekʃn/ | /ˌrezəˈrekʃən/ | 4 |
| 9 | righteous | ous | /ˈraɪtʃəs/ | /ˈraɪtʃəs/ | 62 |

| No. | Words | Suffix | Oxford dict. trans. | Longman dict. trans. | Source |
|-----|-------|--------|---------------------|----------------------|--------|
| 10 | submission | ion | /səbˈmɪʃn/ | /səbˈmɪʃən/ | 132 |
| 11 | succession | ion | /səkˈseʃn/ | /səkˈseʃən/ | 87 |

\*Note: grey highlighted indicates that the data have not been shown in the previous data.

While analyzing the data of this study, the researchers found that schwa did not only occur in the vocal letters 'o' and 'u' but also occurred in the words with the suffix –ion and also –ous. Exclusively, this section discussion employed an extra transcription from the online *Longman Dictionary* due to the hidden schwa in the suffix –ion and –ous in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* online. Theoretically, the suffix ion was used to modify a verb to be a noun. The noun 'connection' which was taken from the data as an example consisted of the verb 'connect' and is followed by the suffix '-ion'. From the data, it was seen that all the suffix -ion in the word should be pronounced as /ən/. To support this statement, some other examples of nouns consisting of the suffix –ion were taken such as creation /kriˈeɪʃn/ /kriˈeɪʃən/, decision /dɪˈsɪʒn/ /dɪˈsɪʒən/, location /ləʊˈkeɪʃn/ /ləʊˈkeɪʃən/, education /ˌedʒuˈkeɪʃn/ /ˌedjʊˈkeɪʃən/, attention /əˈtenʃn/ /əˈtenʃən/, information /ˌɪnfəˈmeɪʃn/ /ˌɪnfəˈmeɪʃən/, exposition /ˌekspəˈzɪʃn/ /ˌekspəˈzɪʃən/, adaptation /ˌædæpˈteɪʃn/ /ˌædæpˈteɪʃən/, corruption /kəˈrʌpʃn/ /kəˈrʌpʃən/, submission /səbˈmɪʃn/ /səbˈmɪʃən/. The underlined transcriptions were taken from the Longman online dictionary, while the highlighted part is the schwa sound that existed.

The suffix –ous took the role of modifying a noun to be an adjective that means 'full of something'. For example, the word dangerous consisted of the root words 'danger' and '-ous' which meant full of danger. There were two data taken from the Al-Baqarah letter that had a schwa in the suffix –ous. Therefore, to support the data, some other adjectives were taken as follows numerous /ˈnjuːmərəs/ /ˈnjuːmərəs/, dangerous /ˈdeɪndʒərəs/ /ˈdeɪndʒərəs/, famous /ˈfeɪməs/ /ˈfeɪməs/, mysterious /mɪˈstɪəriəs/ /mɪˈstɪəriəs/, continuous /kənˈtɪnjuəs/ /kənˈtɪnjuəs/, religious /rɪˈlɪdʒəs/ /rɪˈlɪdʒəs/, dangerous ˈdeɪndʒərəs /ˈdeɪndʒərəs/, anonymous /əˈnɒnɪməs/ /əˈnɒnɪməs/, hilarious /hɪˈleəriəs/ /hɪˈleəriəs/, nervous /ˈnɜːvəs/ /ˈnɜːvəs/, anxious /ˈæŋkʃəs/ /ˈæŋkʃəs/, curious /ˈkjʊəriəs/ /ˈkjʊəriəs/, conscious /ˈkɒnʃəs/ /ˈkɒnʃəs/. /. The underlined transcriptions were taken from the Longman online dictionary, while the highlighted part is the schwa sound that occurred in the adjectives found. All of the suffixes -ous were pronounced as schwa /-əs/.

## Discussion
### Better term to replace schwa

To answer the first research question, the researchers proposed two new terms to replace unstressed (referring to schwa), namely *astressed* and *disaccented.* The first possibility for the new form of schwa was astressed. It consisted of three morphemes as prefix 'a-', a verb 'stress', and suffix '-ed'. The prefix had some meanings including "on," "in," or "at" like in the word 'ashore' which meant at the shore, "in (such) manner" like in the word 'aloud' which meant in a loud manner, and 'a' means 'without'. However, Auni and Manan (2022) argued that the prefix *a-* can modify an adjective into an adverb. The verb 'stress' has the meaning of stressing something to give extra force to a word or syllable when saying it. Therefore, the word astressed meant the syllable was pronounced without any force.

The second possibility was 'disaccented'. It consisted of the prefix 'dis-', the verb 'accent', and the suffix '-ed'. The prefix '-dis' had a meaning in the converse of something or meaning 'not or none'. The verb 'accent' is meant to emphasize a part of something. The suffix '-ed' showed the past participle form of the word 'accent' so that it passivated the word 'accent'. In conclusion, the word 'disaccented' meant the particular part of the word was not emphasized.

Another possibility was to maintain the schwa name by changing its pronunciation. By using the pronunciation view, the word schwa is transcribed as /ʃwə/ not /ʃwɑː/. Compared to the /ʃwɑː/ transcription that consists of no [ə], the /ʃwə/ transcription is more relevant to refer

to its meaning. The reason is that the [ə] existence eases linguistics learners to remember that a schwa refers to the vowel sound [ə].  In conclusion, this research results in renewing the unstressed schwa term with *astressed* or *disaccented* terms and changing its pronunciation to /ʃwə/. The researchers modified the word *unstressed* referring to schwa since English most unstressed syllables contain schwa (Bruggeman, Yu, & Cutler, 2022).

### English vocabulary items with letters 'o' and 'u' pronounced [ə]

To answer the second research question, the researchers categorized the findings into seven classes based on the position of the letters 'o' and 'u' in the word. The letters 'o' and 'u' which were positioned in the first letter were pronounced weakly or using a semi-vowel [ə] because it was unstressed. The second position of the letters 'o' and 'u' in English vocabulary items was stressed in the second syllable. 'to', 'for', and 'but' were exceptions because they had only one syllable. The word 'to' could be pronounced as /tə/ or /tuː/, 'for' pronounced as /fɔː(r)/, and 'but' pronounced as /bʌt/. The schwa is pronounced neutrally, but some native speakers delete it due to its prestige (Carr, 1993). It is in line with Fromkin et al. (2018) that stress in English is indicated by placing an accent mark over stressed vowels.

Schwa in the letters 'o' and 'u' in the third position was difficult to generalise due to three reasons. First, the word 'from' case was like the 'to', 'but', and 'for' where *from* had two versions of transcriptions namely /frəm/ for the weak form and /frɒm/ for the strong form. Second, the vocabulary items found were pronounced as schwa because they were unstressed at the first syllable when 'pro' was unstressed. However, the syllable 'pro-' was not schwa when it was stressed as in the word problem /ˈprɒbləm/. Third, the word 'usury' /ˈjuːʒəri/ is stressed in the first syllable and unstressed in the second. This issue might occur because the palatal approximant [j] sound was voiced and side-by-side with the long vowel u [uː]; therefore, to reduce the energy in speaking these words, the voiceless [s] was pronounced with the schwa [ə].

The fourth position of the letters 'o' and 'u' pronounced as schwa were unstressed wherever the syllable position was. The fifth position of 'o' and 'u' in the vocabulary items' transcription were stressed. They had a coincidental pattern where all the first syllable was stressed and the second was unstressed. However, the assumption did not apply in the words dispute /dɪˈspjuːt//ˈdɪspjuːt/ and disgust /dɪsˈɡʌst/ where the 'u' in the second syllable were stressed. The sixth positioned 'o' and 'u' pronounced schwa were found with various syllables including two-, three-, and four-syllable words. All vocabulary items depicted the schwa position that was always unstressed despite the number of syllables that existed. However, the 'o' and 'u' sounds were unpronounced schwa like in the word diagnostic transcribed as /ˌdaɪəɡˈnɒstɪk/. Here, the schwa occurred in the second syllable, however, it represented the letter 'a' not 'o' or even 'u'.

The seventh positioned 'o' and 'u' vocal letters in English vocabulary items were found as the data. The three-syllable vocabulary items had the stress on the first syllable like in the words *difficult* and *furniture*, therefore, the unstressed schwa was located at the third syllable. The second positioned stressed syllable of the three-syllable words had the schwa on the first syllable as shown in the words *adventure* and *configure*. However, there were some exceptions in the word *synchronic* which had no schwa, and the word *enclosure* which had stressed on the second syllable and unstressed on the third syllable.  The two-syllable word might have stress on the first syllable and schwa on the second syllable like in the word *scripture*. Lastly, the four-syllable vocabulary items collected showed the stress on the first syllable and schwa on the third syllable as shown in the *difficulty* and *testimony*.

Schwa did not only occur in the vocal letters 'o' and 'u' but also occurred in the suffix –ion and also –ous. All the suffix -ion in the word should be pronounced as /ən/. Nababan, Ambarita, and Sitinjak (2023) explained the attachment of the suffix *-ion* into verbs can convert

a verb to a noun. The suffix –ous took the role of modifying a noun to be an adjective that means 'full of something'. For example, the word dangerous consisted of the root words 'danger' and '-ous' which meant full of danger. Pujastuti, Maharani, and Utami (2022) argued that suffixes *-y, -ful, -less, -ous, -ic, -ial*, and *-al* can modify a noun to be an adjective. The suffix -ous was pronounced as schwa /**-əs/.**

In conclusion, unstressed vowels 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a schwa, not determined by the syllable's location. It is in line with Kapranov (2021) that schwa may appear in the beginning, middle, and ending of a word's syllable. Schwa is not found in stressed syllables. All -ion [ən] and -ous [əs] suffixes must be pronounced with unstressed schwa. These results are different compared to other research which has been discussed in many studies. Recasens (2022) argued that full schwa, a short, variable, and low-intensity mid-central vowel, may occur in stressed languages and unreduced syllables in stressed languages, with increased variability in F1 and F2 dimensions. Gordon and Roettger (2017) elaborate that in some languages, only consonant length, but not vowel length, successfully identified stress levels. Syllable stress is a syllable that is perceived as more prominent because it has a longer length, more extreme pitch values, and/or (to a lesser extent) increased loudness than other surrounding syllables; also known as the (prosodic) accent (Abdulrahman & Ramamoorthy, 2021). Benyagoub and Bouahania (2020) advocated for a moraic approach in prosodic phonology, explaining epenthesis differences and Schwa Vowel deletion in specific morphological contexts, incorporating moraic structure and inflectional paradigm.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore English vocabulary items in which the letter 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a vowel sound [ə] that appeared in the surah Al-Baqarah of the holy Koran. Referring to the first research question on what better term can replace schwa, the answers cover two new proposed terms namely *astressed* and *disaccented* formed by a morphological processes by modifying the term *unstressed* referring to schwa. Additionally, to maintain the schwa term, a change of its pronunciation is proposed becoming /ʃwə/ and not /ʃwɑː/. The second question is about what English vocabulary items with letters 'o' and 'u' pronounced [ə] in the Al-Baqarah letter verses 1-286 are. The list of vocabulary items can be seen in the findings section of this article. Furthermore, to assist EFL learners in understanding the use of schwa in English, the researchers generate several conclusion. Firstly, although most of the written vowels 'o' and 'u' are pronounced in a strong form, unstressed vowels 'o' and 'u' are pronounced as a schwa. Secondly, the appearance of unstressed schwa in the vowels 'o' and 'u' is not determined by the syllable's location. Thirdly, schwa could appear anywhere if it was not stressed. Fourthly, schwa was not found in stressed syllables. Lastly, all -ion [ən] and -ous [əs] suffixes must be pronounced with unstressed schwa.

The results of this study provide examples of English vocabulary items containing schwa to EFL learners. Thus, it is expected that this study can increase students' schwa awareness in vowels that are not commonly pronounced as schwa. By using schwa appropriately, students' speaking skills are considered English-native-like speakers. Therefore, EFL learners ought to practice and recheck their pronunciation by consulting an English dictionary to improve their understanding of how to pronounce the word accurately. By the completion of this research, researchers recommend future researchers analyze more deeply the patterns of the schwa sound in English vocabulary items to ease future EFL learners to master the schwa or unstressed vowel sound.

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