Difficulties in Pronouncing English Diphthongs amongst Saudi University Students at AL-Baha University in Saudi Arabia

Ibrahim Abaker1

Abstract

This case study investigates pronunciation problems (PP) in English diphthong sounds (DS) among Saudi EFL students in Alagig, at AL-Baha University, in Saudi Arabia. The researcher seeks to answer four research questions about English diphthongs and English sounds, which are attached below. The main task of this study is to narrow the gap between pronunciation problems in pronouncing English diphthong sounds. The populations of this paper were fifteen students, reaching levels seven and eight. The researcher used the Descriptive Statistical Method, and the data was collected by oral recorded tests. The data was analysed by (SPSS) program. The collected data had been identified, classified by type, evaluated, and described and arrived at the following results: Saudi university students encountered problems in pronouncing words containing English centring diphthong sounds ending in /ɪə/sounds. Also, students faced difficulties in pronouncing English diphthong words ending in /ʊə/ sounds. They struggled to pronounce English closing diphthong words ending in /aɪ/ sound. Further, Saudi students had problems pronouncing closing diphthong sounds ending in /əʊ/ sounds. The recommendations of this study are (1) Students need to check the correct pronunciation of English words containing centring diphthong sounds ending in /ɪə/ sounds; (2) University students want more concentration on pronouncing English words containing centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/ sounds; (3) They require more practice pronouncing English centring diphthongs ending in /aɪ/ sound; (4) Also, they demand to consult their dictionaries of more correct and accurate pronunciation of English closing diphthong sounds ending in /əʊ/ sounds.

Keywords: Diphthong sound, pronunciation problem, first language, second language, English as a Foreign language.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is crucial for the communication of correct messages in conversations in English as a foreign language (EFL). Furthermore, correct pronunciation requires extensive practice on the part of Saudi university students who are learning EFL. Saudi EFL students encounter numerous pronunciation problems when pronouncing English diphthongs, including mispronouncing English diphthongs in their general speech, particularly when the words contain centring and closing English diphthongs.

The researcher aimed to investigate the problems entailed in the correct pronunciation of English words that contain diphthongs in the students' conversations, as problems with pronunciation affect many Saudi university students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at AL-Baha University in Alagig. The main research aim was to correct the students' mistakes by focusing on the perfect pronunciation of English diphthongs. The second aim was to encourage students to put more effort into pronouncing English words that contain diphthongs correctly. The further aim was to compensate for the deficiency of other studies about pronunciation problems.

Four research questions (RQs) were addressed in this study:

1 Department of Foreign Languages Faculty of Arts and Humanities. AL-Baha University. Saudi Arabia. Email: Iaahmed@bu.edu.sa

RQ1. Do Saudi students pronounce English centring diphthongs that end in /ɪə/ correctly?

RQ2. Do they pronounce English centring diphthongs that end in /ʊə/ accurately?

RQ3. Do students pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /aɪ/ correctly?

RQ4. Do they pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /əʊ/ accurately?

The researcher aimed to test the following hypotheses:

1. Saudi students pronounce English centring diphthongs that end in /ɪə/ correctly.

2. The students pronounce English centring diphthongs that end in /ʊə/ accurately.

3. They pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /aɪ/ sound correctly.

4. Saudi students pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /əʊ/ accurately.

2. Literature review

While teaching at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the researcher observed that many students had difficulty in pronouncing English words that contained diphthongs correctly. Thus, the researcher aimed to observe their problems and difficulties when pronouncing English words containing diphthongs.

Learners of EFL in Saudi Arabia encounter many problems, one of which is mispronunciation. Although there are many reasons for this problem, one of the main reasons is the differences between the Arabic language as a first language (L1) and the English language as a second language (L2) due to their diverse sound systems and pronunciation differences. The production of certain sounds differs in the two languages, and pronunciation mistakes have an effect on word meaning and conveying the correct message. Other problems include phonological, lexical and production errors, as well as the production of sound quality in terms of rhythm, intonation and syllables (Hassan Al-Ahdal et al., 2015).

Saudi EFL university students experience tremendous difficulty in pronouncing words that contain diphthongs. As an area of study and investigation, pronunciation includes many factors, issues are ongoing, and pronunciation has received little consideration. (Hewing, 2004, p. 11). In addition, the mastery of listening and speaking skills influences pronunciation in EFL and plays an important role in understanding and mastering it (Burger & Spencer, 2000, p. 91).

The influence of the L1 is the most important factor in pronunciation problems due to its influence on learning. This leads students to make pronunciation mistakes, particularly when pronouncing English diphthongs (Yiing, 2011).

As the focus of this study is on English diphthongs, the researcher will first define the terms phonetics, diphthongs and pronunciation. According to Roach (1992, p. 81), phonetics is the scientific study of human speech sounds, it deals with how human speech sound is produced and how this sound is used in spoken language. How human[s] can record speech sounds with written symbols, and how the hearer realises different sounds. The researcher defined phonetics as a field of science that examines speech processes, including how speech sounds are generated, perceived and analysed from both an acoustic and a physiological viewpoint. The term 'diphthong' comes from the Greek language and means 'having two sounds'. The three fundamental English diphthongs are centring [ə], closing [ɪ] and closing [ʊ] sounds.

According to the researcher, producing a diphthong entails the action of moving one sound to another easily, without stopping and without effort or noise, to pronounce two sounds as one. A diphthong is a combination of two vowels: the first vowel indicates where the position of the tongue starts, and the second indicates where the ending position is. English includes three major diphthongs: centring ending in [ə], closing ending in [ɪ] and closing ending in [ʊ]. See Figure1 for the English diphthong sounds.

Figure 1. English Diphthong Sounds

Furthermore, a diphthong is a vowel sound which is produced via an intentional glide from one vowel position to another vowel position in a single breath (Ramelan, 1999, p. 59). In addition, Ogden (2009, p. 64) stated that 'diphthongs are monosyllabic vowels with two distinct points, one at the beginning and one at the end. Most dialects of English have many diphthongs. Moreover, as Munro and Derwing (1995, pp. 289-306) stated, 'a diphthong is defined as a vowel sound in which there is an intentional glide made from one vowel position to another vowel position, and which is produced in one single impulse of breathing'.

According to phonetics, a diphthong is a vowel sound that can be identified based on its place of articulation. A diphthong is a term which is used to describe a vowel when there is a single identifiable move in quality when uttering a syllable, as in the following words: beer, time, and loud (Crystal, 2008). In addition, Hakim (2012) described good pronunciation as a fundamental skill and stated that, when learning the English language. According to Novarita (2017), pronunciation is how a language expresses a word or sound; it is the most crucial aspect of learning a language, along with language abilities; variations in pronunciation will impact the meaning of a word, while Hornby (2005, p.1164) stated that "pronunciation is the method in which language or a certain way that [a] person pronounce[s] the word[s] of a language, particularly in speaking. A bit different is the way of pronouncing words that may have different meanings. In addition, Nunan (2003, p. 113) said that "pronunciation is the way specific sounds are produced by the speaker of a language during their speaking, and perceived by the listener, to be able to understand each other in different situations, or certain conversation[s]', while Manser (1991, p. 330) defined pronunciation as "how people pronounce another language [s]". Pronunciation also refers to how people speak foreign languages and may pose difficulties for language learners.

2.1 English centring diphthongs ending in /ɪə/

English-centring diphthongs that end in /ɪə/ are produced when the tongue situation is central and moves from /ɪ/ to the precise location of the vowel /ə/. The lips are neutral but gradually become rounded. The upper and lower jaws first narrow and then expand. A few examples of words with diphthongs are here, tier, pier, hear, cheer, near, ear, deer, clear, appear, ear, beer, fear and furious. Examples are provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2. English centring diphthongs ending in /ɪə/

/ɪə/

beer

hear

steer
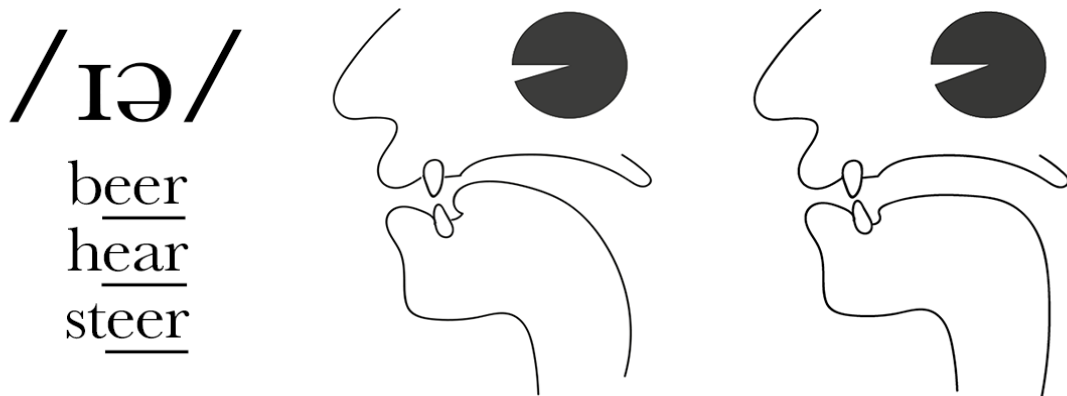
2.2 English centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/

To produce English centring diphthongs that end in /ʊə/, the tongue moves from /ʊ/ towards the vowel /ə/ from the back half close position. The lips move from being loosely rounded to becoming moderate. The jaws are moderate at first and gradually expand (see Figure 3). Examples of words that contain diphthongs are secure, manicure, mature, poor, your, pure, sure, remedy, lure, moored and tour.

Figure 3. English centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/

/ʊə/

pure

moor

tour

## 2.3 English closing diphthongs ending in /ai/

To produce English closing diphthongs that end in /a/, the tongue begins in the open central position and moves towards the vowel /i/ to create the /ai/ diphthong. During pronunciation, the lip position shifts from neutral to spread. The position of the jaw starts to widen and continues to do so. Height, cry, eye, pie, tide, kite, fine, July, decide, buy, like, sight, pride, kind and rhyme are examples of words that contain centring diphthongs. See figure. 4 below for more illustration.

2.4 Closing English diphthongs ending in /əʊ/

The final English diphthong is /əʊ/. The diphthong /ə/ begins in the rear half close position, and the tongue glides in the direction of the vowel /əʊ/. The lips transition from being rounded to becoming neutral. The jaws are moderate at first and slowly expand.

Some words that contain English diphthongs are proposal, toast, toe, go, slow, no, so, loan, though, globe, show, coast, bow, sow, load and boat. See figure.4 below.

Figure. 4 Closing English diphthongs ending in /əʊ/
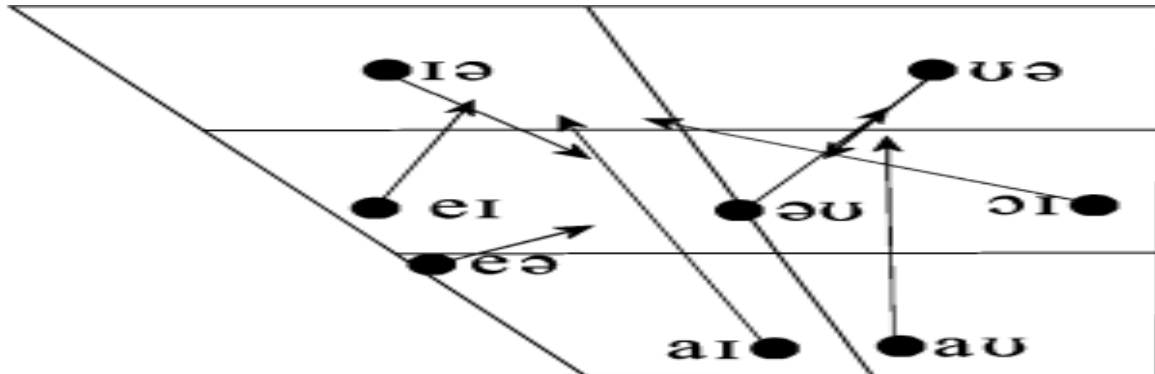
2.5 Previous studies about pronouncing English diphthongs

In many countries, numerous studies of EFL students' problems when pronouncing English diphthongs have been conducted. The following are only a few of the local and worldwide studies of EFL or L2 learners' problems when pronouncing English diphthongs.

Aljabr (2023) conducted research in Saudi Arabia using the quantitative method. The data collection tool was pronunciation tests for diphthongs. The results revealed that the student's abilities were generally not low, as most of the participants had good results; however, these EFL students still made frequent errors when pronouncing diphthongs. The diphthongs that they typically pronounced incorrectly were [ʊə] (18 words), [eə] (11 words), [əʊ] (10 words), [ɔɪ] (eight words), [ɪə] (seven words), [aɪ] and [aʊ] (five words). The diphthong that the students mispronounced least frequently was [eɪ] (three words).

Paikar and Hameed's (2015) study was also conducted in Saudi Arabia. Some students and teachers from two Saudi Arabian institutions' English departments participated in the study. Several techniques, including questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations of students' presentations, were used to collect the primary data from the students and their teachers. The study provided several recommendations for resources that could assist Saudi learners of English to improve their pronunciation.

Saadah and Ardi's (2020) study conducted in Indonesia used objective sampling to select 25 students with diverse backgrounds as the study sample. Pronunciation tests were used to gather the data, which were then assessed using a formula and a rubric score. The results of this study demonstrated that the students' proficiency when pronouncing diphthongs could be divided into four categories: fair (60%), good (24%), bad (12%) and very good (2%). Moreover, it can be said that there are eight different types of errors when pronouncing diphthongs, each having a different outcome based on the student's abilities. Therefore, learners need more practice to attain greater proficiency when pronouncing diphthongs.

The data for Danal's (2016) study, conducted in Indonesia, were obtained via a recorded diphthong pronunciation test involving 25 participants. The results showed that the most difficult English diphthong was the [aʊ] sound. The factors that caused the students to have difficulty in pronouncing English diphthongs were L1 interference, the lack of knowledge of the English sound system and the unsuccessful use of borrowed English words.

Hang (2009) employed an experimental approach (microphone and recorder) in his research in China and found that learners of L2 English should focus on the importance of pronunciation to acquire the language effectively. The factors that impacted how

Chinese students pronounced English included the learners' ages, attitudes, psychological makeup, and prior pronunciation instruction. The learners' limited understanding of phonology and phonetics significantly hindered their ability to acquire correct English pronunciation. However, by highlighting the differences between the Chinese and English phonological systems, learners may become more conscious of these distinctions and be able to pronounce words correctly. Pronunciation can be improved by imitating, speaking, listening, and reading aloud.

Indrawati and Puspani's (2021) study, which was conducted in Indonesia examined the ability of the students in the English department at Udayana University's Faculty of Humanities to pronounce English diphthongs. This study used quantitative data to support the qualitative descriptive results. Fifty new and fifty sixth-semester students were randomly selected to participate in the research. A list of English words containing diphthongs and questionnaires were used as the study instruments. The data were collected via recordings, described descriptively and qualitatively, and presented both officially and informally.

3. Methodology

The statistical analytical method was employed in this study; the data were obtained using an oral recorded test and were analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) programme.

3.1. Methods

The current paper attempts to explore the difficulties of correct pronunciation of some Saudi students. The researcher used the Descriptive Statistical Method and the data were collected by one means of data collection: oral recorded tests.

3.2. Instrumentation

The researcher used a simple instrument to collect the data from the students, namely a recorded oral test. The recorded exam consisted of 20 words containing English centring and closing diphthongs. Appendix (1) includes a sample of these words. In their conversations, the students were instructed to pronounce words that contained diphthongs. The researcher then reviewed the results and adopted an appropriate method to investigate the English diphthongs that were produced.

3.3. Participants

The participants in this study were 15 Saudi EFL university students who were majoring in English at the Department of Foreign Languages (levels seven and eight) at AL-Baha University in Alagig, Saudi Arabia. Their ages ranged from twenty to twenty-three years old. All the students spoke the Arabic language as their (L1) and English language as their (L2).

3.4. Procedure

In this study, Saudi university students were asked to pay attention to the test's guidelines. The students were given instructions regarding how to pronounce four different sets of English words that contained diphthongs; each group consisted of five words. The first group included centring diphthongs that ended in the /ɪə/ sound. The second group consisted of centring diphthongs that ended in the /ʊə/ sound, while the third group contained closing diphthongs that ended in the /aɪ/ sound. The fourth category focused on diphthongs that ended in the /əʊ/ sound. The researcher then graded the students' outcomes and analysed the data using the SPSS programme.

3.5. Data analysis

The data for this study were collected from 15 students who had attained levels seven and eight during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Alagig. The data were collected using a recorded test and were analysed using the SPSS programme. The data collection results were as follows:

3.5.1 English Centring Diphthongs Ending in /ɪə/

For the centring diphthong /ɪə/, five words containing the diphthong were examined: beer, tear, tire, fierce and pier. The word beer produced 60% correct and 40% incorrect answers. For the word tear, 35% of the answers were correct and 65.5% were incorrect. The third word, tier, produced 55% of the correct answers and 45% of the incorrect answers. For the word fierce, there were 20% correct and 80% incorrect answers, while the last word, pier, produced 80% correct and 20% incorrect answers. See Table 1 and Figure 5 for more details.

Table 1. Five words containing centring diphthongs that ended in /ɪə/ were examined

Test	beer		tear		tire		fierce		pier	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Correct	12	60%	7	35%	11	55%	4	20%	16	80%
Wrong	8	40%	13	65%	9	45%	16	80%	4	20%
Total	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100
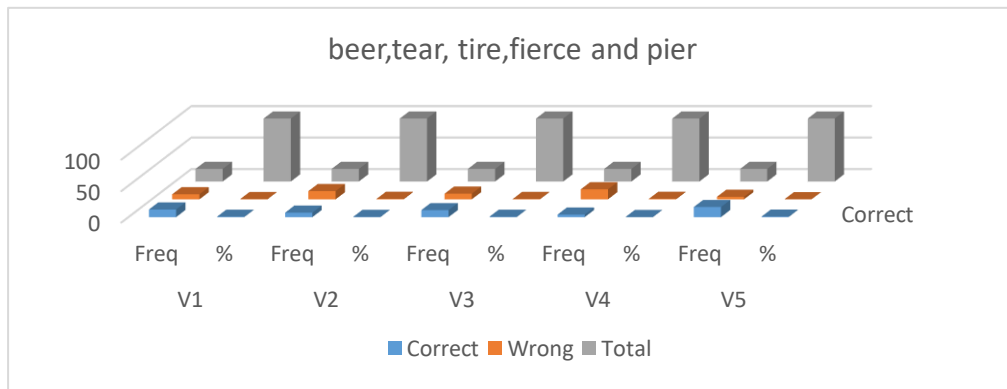
**Figure 5. Five words containing centring diphthongs ending in /ɪə/ were examined**

3.5.2 English Centring Diphthongs Ending in /ʊə/

For the centring diphthong /ʊə/, five words containing the diphthong sound were tested: pure, lure, moored, manicure and tour. The results for the centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/ revealed that the word pure scored 10% correct and 90% incorrect answers. The word lure produced 45% accurate and 55% inaccurate answers, while the third word, moored, resulted in 50% for both correct and incorrect answers. The word manicure produced 70% correct and 30% incorrect answers, while the last word, tour, received 55% correct answers and 45% incorrect answers. See Table 2 and Figure 6 for more details.

Table 2. Five words containing centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/ were examined

Test	pure		lure		moored		manicure		tour	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Correct	2	10%	9	45%	10	50%	14	70%	11	55%
Wrong	18	90%	11	55%	10	50%	6	30%	9	45%
Total	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100

Figure 6. Five words containing centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/ were examined
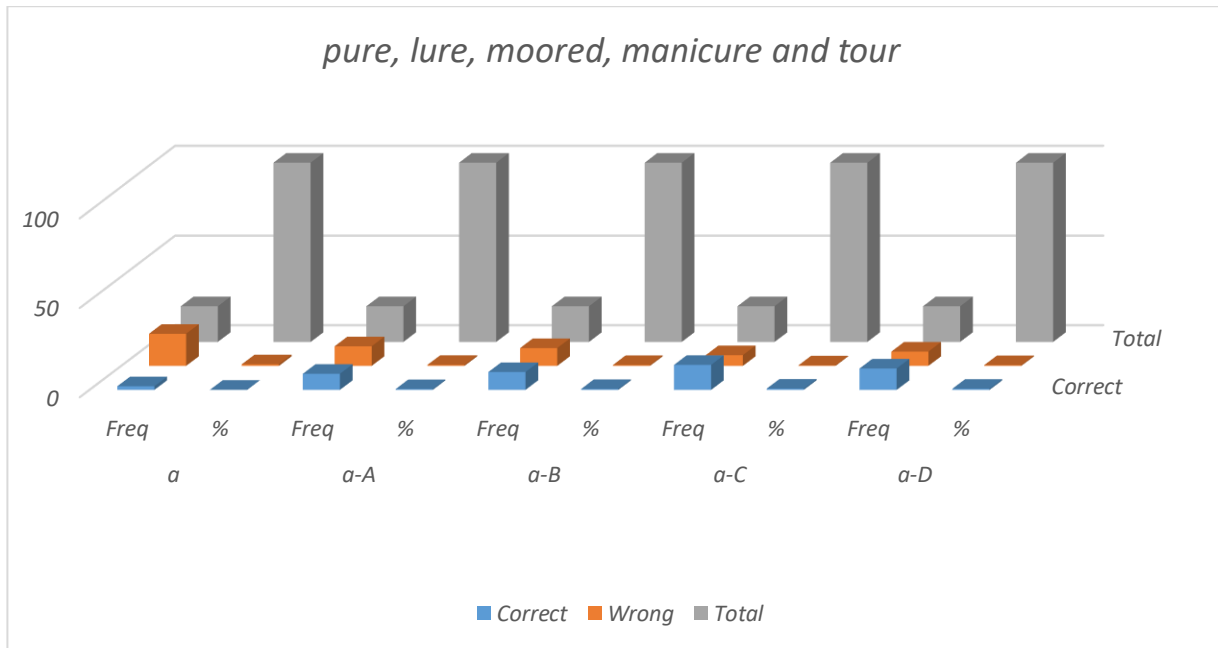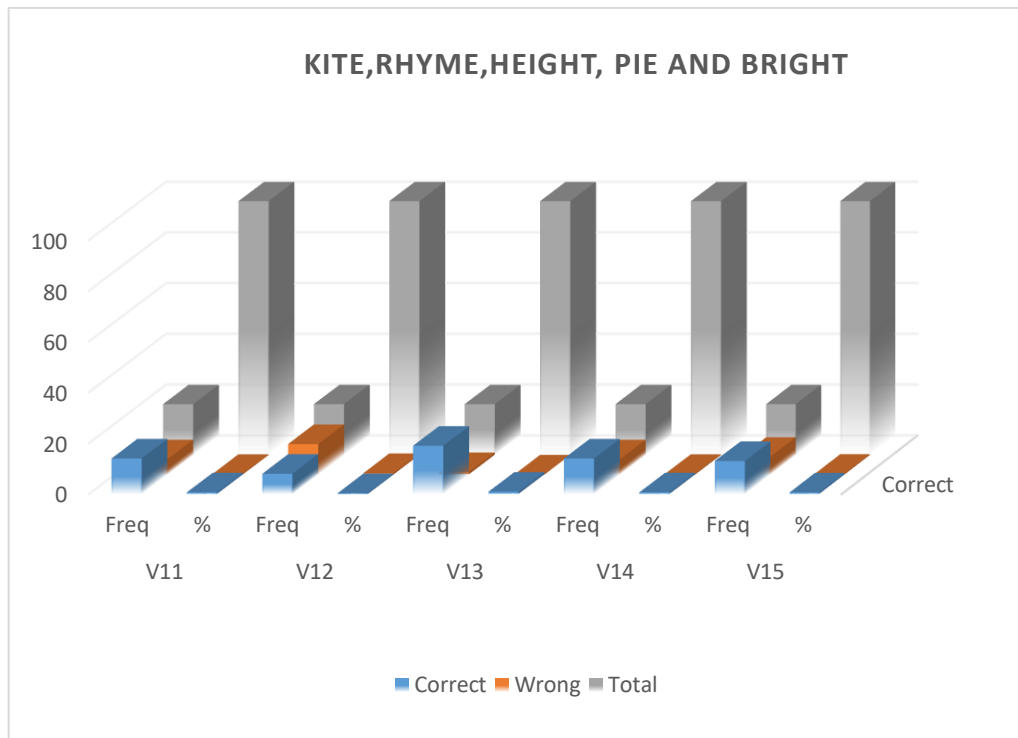

3.5.3 English Closing Diphthong Ending in /aɪ/

Concerning the closing diphthong /aɪ/, five words containing the sound were examined: kite, rhyme, pie and bright. The word kite produced 55% correct and 45% inaccurate answers. The word rhyme produced 40% correct and 60% incorrect answers, while the word height scored 95% correct and 05% incorrect answers, and the word pie generated 55% correct and 45% incorrect answers. The word right produced 55% correct and 45% incorrect answers. See Table 3 and Figure 7 for more information.

Table 3. Five words containing closing diphthongs ending in /aɪ/ were examined

Test	kite		rhyme		height		Pie		bright	
	Frq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Correct	11	55%	8	40%	19	95%	11	55%	11	55%
Wrong	9	45%	12	60%	1	5%	9	45%	9	45%
Total	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100

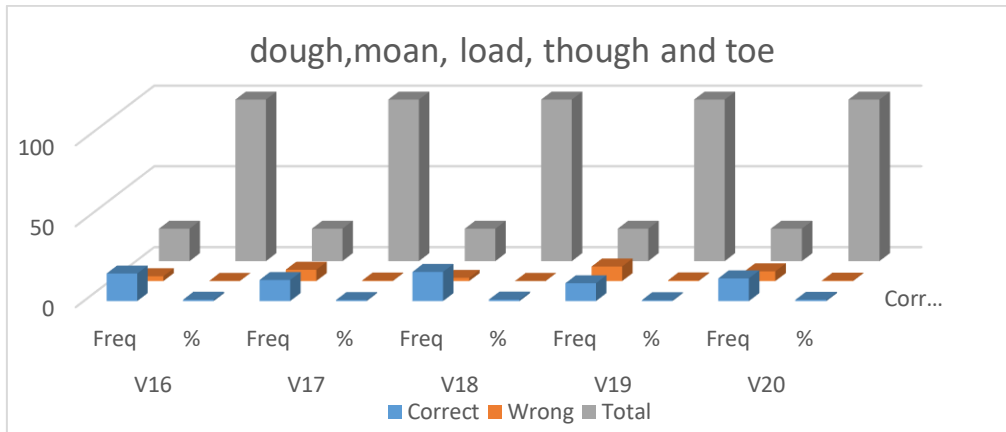**Figure 7. Five words containing closing diphthongs ending in /aɪ/ were examined**

3.5.4 English Closing Diphthongs Ending in /əʊ/.

Concerning the closing diphthong /əʊ/, five words containing the diphthong were tested: dough, moan, load, though and toe. The word dough produced 45% correct and 55% incorrect answers, while the word moan received 65% correct and 35% incorrect answers. The word load produced 90% correct and 10% incorrect answers, while the word though received 55% correct and 45% incorrect answers, and the word toe produced 55% correct and 45% incorrect answers. See Table 4 and Figure 8 for more information.

Table 4. Five words containing closing diphthongs ending in /əʊ/ were examined

Test	dough		moan		load		though		toe	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Correct	9	45%	13	65%	18	90%	11	55%	11	55%
Wrong	11	55%	7	35%	2	10%	9	45%	9	45%
Total	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100	20	100

Figure 8. Five words containing closing diphthongs ending in /əʊ/ were examined

dough, moan, load, though and toe

(Chart showing V16, V17, V18, V19, V20 with Freq and % categories; legend: Correct, Wrong, Total)

3.6. Results and Discussion

The majority of the centring diphthongs ended in /ɪə/ sounds. Based on the research findings, the Saudi students in Alagig were unable to achieve the desired mark (60%) for the test. The following were the final results: The first score reflects the percentages of correct answers and the second displays the percentages of incorrect answers. The words beer (60% and 40%), tear (35% and 65%), tire (55% and 45%), fierce (20% and 80%) and pier (80% and 20%) contained centring diphthongs. The general results showed that three centring diphthongs scored less than the percentage required to pass the test, which was 60%.

1. For the abovementioned centring diphthong [ɪə], some students pronounced the word deer [bɪə(r)] incorrectly. Some of them pronounced it as [de(r)] by changing the [ɪə] sound to the short vowel [e] or to [diːr] with a long vowel [iː]. Others pronounced it incorrectly as [b(r)]. There were three incorrect ways of pronouncing the diphthong [ɪə] in the word deer. Concerning the word tear [tɪə(r)], the students pronounced it incorrectly as [tɪr] with the short vowel [i] and [ter], also with the short vowel [e], and [teə(r)] instead of [tɪə(r)] as the centring diphthongs. For the word tire [tɪər], the students did not differentiate between long and short vowel sounds, and pronounced it with the short [e] and [i] instead of the centring diphthong [ɪə]. The students pronounced the word fierce [fɪəs] as the word fire [faɪəz] with a closing /aɪ/ instead of a centring [ɪə]. Concerning the last word, pier [pɪər], most of the students pronounced it correctly, although a few of them changed [ɪə] [Pɪər] to /ai/, as in [pai(r)]. In summary, the Saudi students experienced problems when pronouncing diphthongs in words that contained the centring diphthong [ɪə].

2. With regard to the final results for the centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə/ sounds, the research results revealed that the Saudi students in Alagig failed to achieve the required mark of 60% on the test. In the results presented below, the first score indicates the percentage of correct answers, and the second shows the percentage of incorrect answers. The final results for the words were as follows: pure (10% and 90%), lure (45% and 55%), moored (50% for both correct and incorrect answers), manicure (70% and 30%) and tour (55% and 45%). In the general results, the words with the four centring diphthongs scored less than the percentage that was needed to pass the test, which was 60%. Thus, the students did not pass the test for words containing centring diphthongs ending in [ʊə]. For the diphthong [ɪə], some students pronounced the word pure [pjʊə(r)] incorrectly; that is, they pronounced it as [pur] with a short vowel [u], and some of them pronounced it as [puːr] [uː] with a long vowel and [puʊr] with a short vowel [ʊ] instead of the centring diphthong [ʊə]. They pronounced lure [ljʊər] as [lɔː(r)] with a long vowel [ɔː] instead of the closing diphthong [ʊə] and as [luːr] with a long vowel [uː], which was incorrect. Concerning the word moored [mʊər], half of the students pronounced it correctly and the other half pronounced it

incorrectly as [muːr] with the long vowel [uː] instead of the centring diphthong [ɪə]. Most of the students pronounced the word manicure correctly as [ˈmæn.ɪ.kjʊər], while the others pronounced it as [ˈmæn.ɪ.kjer] with the short vowel [e] instead of the closing diphthong [ʊə]. Concerning the last word in this group, tour [tʊə(r)], they pronounced it as [tɔː] and [tu;r] with the long vowels [ɔː] and [uː] instead of the centring diphthong [ɪə].

3. The general results for the closing diphthongs ending in /aɪ/. According to the research findings, the students failed to attain the required mark of 60% on the test. In the following results, the first score shows the percentage of correct answers and the second shows the percentage of incorrect answers: kite (55% and 45%), rhyme (40% and 60%), height (95% and 5%), pie (55% and 45%) and bright (55% and 45%). Overall, the students scored less for the words with four centring diphthongs than the percentage required to pass the test, which was 60%. Therefore, the students also failed the test in this category. Concerning the closing diphthong /aɪ/, some students pronounced the word kite [kaɪt] as [kat]. Some of them pronounced it as [kɪt] by first changing it to the short vowel [a] and then changing it to [i]. Other students also pronounced it incorrectly as [kite] with the long vowel [iː]. There were two incorrect ways of pronouncing the diphthong [ɪə] in the word rhyme [raɪm]; the students pronounced it as [rɪːm] with the long vowel [iː], and they also pronounced it as [rem] with the short vowel [e]. The students also pronounced the word height [haɪt] incorrectly as [hɪgt] and [hɪet]. Concerning the word pie [paɪ], the students did not differentiate between the long vowel [iː] and the short vowel sound [e], and pronounced the word with the long [piː] and the short [pe] instead of the closing diphthong [aɪ]. About the word bright [braɪt], the students pronounced it as [brɪgt], [ig] and [brɪət] due to focusing on /ɪə/ instead of on the closing diphthong /aɪ/. Most of the students pronounced the last word correctly, although a few of them changed [braɪ] to [bɪə(r)]. In conclusion, the Saudi students experienced problems pronouncing the diphthongs in words containing the closing diphthong [aɪ].

4. Concerning the centring diphthongs that ended in /əʊ/, the students' results indicated that they failed to attain the required 60% on the test. In the following results for this category, the first score shows the percentage of correct answers, and the second shows the percentage of incorrect answers: dough (45% and 55%), moan (65% and 35%), load (90% and 10%), though (55% and 45%) and toe (55% and 45%). The general results for the three closing diphthong words were less than the necessary % to pass the test, which was 60%. Therefore, students did not pass this test for this category. Concerning the diphthong /əʊ/, some students pronounced the word dough [dəʊ] incorrectly. Some of them pronounced [dəʊ] by changing it to [dɔːf] with the long vowels [ɔː] and [f]. Others pronounced it incorrectly as [duː] with a long [uː] instead of the closing /əʊ/. When pronouncing the word moan [məʊn], some students pronounced it as [muː] with the long vowel [u;] instead of the closing /əʊ/ sound and pronounced the word load [ləʊd] incorrectly as [lɔːd] with the long vowel [ɔː] instead of with the /əʊ/ sound. Concerning the word though [ðəʊ], the students did not differentiate between the voiced fricative [ð] and the voiceless [θ]. The last word was toe [təʊ], which some students pronounced as [tɔːy] with a long [ɔː] instead of /əʊ/. Another variation was [tuː] with a long [uː] instead of the closing /əʊ/. In summary, the Saudi students experienced problems when pronouncing words containing the closing diphthong [əʊ].

As was evident from the students' overall results, the Saudi students did not attain the required score of 60% for the words that contained centring or closing diphthongs in the test. The centring diphthongs /ɪə/ and /ʊə/ in English words were difficult for them to pronounce correctly, and they also had difficulty pronouncing the closing English diphthongs /aɪ/ and /əʊ/. Practising words that contained English diphthongs was not sufficient for them, and they did not consult their dictionaries to ensure correct pronunciation.

The first hypothesis in this study was that the Saudi students pronounce English centring diphthongs that end in /ɪə/ correctly. Five words that contained centring diphthongs were examined in this study. The percentages for the correct answer for each word

were as follows: beer (60%), tear (35%), tire (55%), fierce (20%) and pier (80%). The students scored less than 60% when pronouncing the words tear, tire and fierce, and scored 60% or more for the two words beer and pier.

Overall, the students scored less than 60% for three words that had centring diphthongs. Thus, the findings supported the first research hypothesis.

The second hypothesis in this study was that the students pronounced English centring diphthongs that end in /ʊə/ accurately. The five words that contained centring diphthongs and were used to test this hypothesis were pure, lure, moored, manicure and tour.

The final correct results were as follows: pure (10%), lure (45%), moored (50%), manicure (70%) and tour (55%). Of the five closing diphthongs that were used to test this hypothesis, four of them scored less than 60%. These results prove that the second research hypothesis was correct.

The third hypothesis in this study was that they pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /aɪ/ sound correctly. Five closing diphthongs were used to test this hypothesis; four of them scored less than 60%, as follows: kite (55%), rhyme (40%), pie (55%) and bright (55%). The score for height was 95%.

The overall finding was that the students were unable to pronounce four words that contained diphthongs, namely kite, rhyme, pie and bright. The final results supported the validity of the third research hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis in this study was that Saudi students pronounce English closing diphthongs that end in /əʊ/ accurately. The five words with closing diphthongs that were examined were dough, moan, load, though and toe. The overall correct results for the words containing closing diphthongs were as follows: The word dough scored 45%, the word moan scored 65%, the word load scored 90%, the word though scored 55%, and the last word, toe, scored 55%.

The overall findings indicate that the words containing closing diphthongs (dough, though and toe) scored less than 60%. Thus, the results proved that the fourth research hypothesis was correct.

This study aimed to fill the gaps in the existing research on pronunciation issues by reviewing earlier studies that have addressed this topic, as well as to address some of the pronunciation problems that EFL students in Saudi Arabia have regarding English diphthongs.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, this study aimed to clarify the difficulties that Saudi university students encounter when pronouncing words that contain diphthongs. The students' pronunciation skills when pronouncing words containing diphthongs and the spelling of the written forms of the words were both factors in the pronunciation errors that the students made, in addition to the differences between their L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English). The findings in this study revealed deficiencies in their pronunciation of these sounds and that Saudi university students had difficulty pronouncing English diphthongs correctly. Furthermore, the findings provided answers to the RQs in this study.

Based on the results and conclusions of this research paper, the recommendations are as follows:

- Students need to check the correct pronunciation of English words that contain centring diphthongs ending in /ɪə / sounds;

- The students need to focus more on the pronunciation of English words that contain centring diphthongs ending in /ʊə / sounds;

- The students need more practice in pronouncing English closing diphthongs ending in /aɪ/ sounds;

- The students should consult their dictionaries to ensure the accurate pronunciation of English closing diphthong words that end in /əʊ/.

4.1 Suggestions for Further Research

The following suggestions are proposed for future research:

1. Future studies could investigate the amount of information about English diphthongs that is included in Saudi EFL curricula.

2. Future studies could compare and contrast diphthongs in Arabic and English to determine the differences and similarities.

REFERENCES

Burgess, J., and Spencer, S. (2000). Phonology and pronunciation in integrated language teaching and teacher education. *System, 28*(2), 191-215. https://doi: 10.1016/S0346-251X(00)00007-5.

Crystal, D. (2008). *Dictionary of Phonetics and Phonology*. London: Cambridge University Press. *Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hassan Al-Ahdal, A. A. M., Al-Hattami, A. A., Al-Awaid, S. A. A., and Al-Mashaqba, N. J. H. (2015). Pronunciation for the Arab learners of EFL: Planning for better outcomes. *English Language Teaching*, *8*(10), 100–106. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n10p100.

Hakim, M. (2012). An analysis of phonetics b, d, g, j, ʤ and ð into English pronunciation for Java students (A study on Java students at English Department on STAIN Bengkulu academic year 2011-2012). *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *2*, 245-256.

Hewings, M. (2004). Pronunciation Practice Activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*.

Hornby, A. S. (2005). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Manser, H. (1991). *The Macmillan Dictionary of English Spelling*. California: Macmillan.

Munro, M. J., and Derwing, T. M. (1995). Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-based Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*.

Novarita, N. (2017). The students' ability in pronouncing centring diphthongs of the beginner level students of English Genius Course Simpang Okus. *International Journal of Language Teaching and Education*, *1*(1), 16-25.

Nunan, D. (2003). Practical English Language Teaching (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Ogden, R. (2009). Introduction to English Phonology. *Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd*.

Ramelan. (1999). *English Phonetics*. Semarang: CV. IKIP Semarang Press.

Roach, P. (1992). Introducing Phonetics. London: London Penguin English Group.

Yiing, I., and K, C. (2011). An Analysis of Pronunciation Errors in English of Six UTAR Chinese Studies Undergraduates [Unpublished Manuscript]. *University of Tunko Abdul Rahman*.