

Pronunciation Errors of Letter “G” in English Language Made by Saudi Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The primary goal of the present study is to identify the problematic areas in the pronunciation of the letter “g” in English written words made by Saudi female learners of English as a foreign language, and the reasons for the weakness associated with mispronunciation of English written words which contain this letter. The population of the study was the female students (90 students) and their English language teachers (12 teachers) at the Qassim University during the academic year (2014-2015). There were two types of instruments used in this study. The first was a pronunciation test for the student participants in order to investigate the problematic areas of pronouncing “g” in different environments in different words; and the second a questionnaire for the teacher participants to provide comprehensive data about the causes of these errors of pronouncing “g” committed by EFL female students at Qassim University. Ninety female students were included for the pronunciation test and 12 teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire. Simple percentage was used for analyzing the data of recording words (pronunciation test). Results of the students’ recording words revealed that the participants mispronounced “g” before nasals (68%). According to the results of the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire suggested many factors that can cause difficulties for students in terms of pronouncing “g” in English written words. According to them, these difficulties are concerned with reading difficulties, nonstandard spellings, letters that follow “g” (many of them may become combinations), loan words, orthography (no correspondence between the English alphabets and their sounds). The researcher offers recommendations that might help teachers and students to overcome and reduce these mispronunciations of this letter in English written words.

Keywords: pronunciation problems, orthography, pronunciation errors of “g”, soft ‘g’, hard ‘g’, Saudi EFL learners

1. Introduction

Every language has a rule for combining sound segments to make meaningful words. Children adopt these sound rules through listening followed by trial and error. Later they develop a linguistic competence through which they recognize and produce meaningful sounds (Ahmad, 2011).

English as foreign language (EFL) learners often mispronounce words, pronouncing them incorrectly or in some way other than how they are intended to be pronounced. Although some words do have a bit of variety in their pronunciation, (that is having more than one pronunciation), there are definite ways to say words imperfectly. Some of the likely reasons for mispronunciation (i.e., spelling difficulties) are that English spelling is more complex due to the fact that the English writing system is far from ideal (i.e., inadequacy of letter-sound and sound-letter correspondences) (Wolfram & Johnson, 1982). In English and other languages, there are many words that, if spoken phonetically—or the way they are written—then they would be mispronounced. The word “*rough*”, for example, might be written as “*ruff*” if it were to be written as it is pronounced.

2. Purpose of the Study

The primary concern of the researcher of the present study is to identify the problematic areas in the pronunciation of the letter “g” in English written words made by Saudi female learners of English as a foreign language. It also aims to provide some suggestions to raise the learner’s awareness of their improvement and confidence in pronouncing the English written words which have the letter “g” in them. The researcher offer recommendations that might help teachers and students to overcome and reduce these mispronunciations of this

letter in English written words.

3. Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the different sounds of pronouncing the letter “g” in English written words and the reasons for the weakness associated with mispronunciation of English written words which contain these letters. Thus, the study sought answers to these questions:

- 1). What are the problematic areas in pronouncing the letter “g” in English written words?
- 2). According to the English teachers: what are the causes of the students’ weakness in pronouncing English written words that contain the letter “g” in them?

4. Literature Review

Pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learners’ communicative competence as well as performance. Limited pronunciation skills can decrease learners’ self-confidence, restrict social interactions, and negatively affect estimations of a speaker’s credibility and abilities (Gilakjani, 2012). Many learners of English language have major difficulties with English pronunciation even after years of learning the language (Fraser, 2000). Davis (1999) stated that an area of concern and one of the top priorities of EFL/ESL students after completing elementary English courses is pronunciation. Gilakjani (2011, p. 1) further stated that “Despite the fact that acquiring pronunciation is so difficult, in many ESL/EFL classrooms, teaching pronunciation is granted the least attention.

4.1 Factors Affecting EFL/ESL Learners’ English Pronunciation

In this section, the researcher mentions some of the important factors that affect the learning of pronunciation as cited in Gilakjani (2011, 2012) and Liu (2011). They are as follows:

a. Motivation: It refers to the “internal derive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action” (Harmer, 1983). Research has found that having a personal or professional goal for learning English can influence the need and desire for native-like pronunciation (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Bernaus, Masgoret, Gardner, & Reyes, 2004; Gatbonton et al., 2005). In their study on adult acquisition of English, Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) concluded that adults could become highly proficient, even native-like, speakers of second languages, especially if motivated to do so.

b. Mother Tongue Influence: Avery & Ehrlich (1992) claim that the sound pattern of the learner’s first language is transferred into the second language and is likely to cause foreign accents. The mispronunciations of words by nonnative speakers reflect the influence of the sounds, rules, stress, and intonation of their native language. They point out that the sound system of the native language can influence the learners’ pronunciation of a target language in at least three ways. First, when there is a sound in the target language, which is absent from the learners’ native sound inventory, or vice versa, learners may not be able to produce or even perceive the sound(s). Second, when the rules of combining sounds into words (i.e., phonotactic constraints/rules) are different in the learners’ mother tongue from those of the target language, they cause problems for learners because these rules are language specific as they vary from one language to another. Thirdly, since the rhythm and melody of a language determine its patterns of stress and intonation, learners may transfer these patterns into the target language.

According to Liu (2011), it is widely observed that foreign language learners might make different types of errors in their communication. Researchers have sought to identify the sources of interlanguage (IL) pronunciation errors, which might contribute greatly to the improvement of pronunciation (Stockman & Pluut, 1992). Flege & Davidian (1984) examined the English pronunciation of some adult Polish, Spanish, and Chinese speakers, suggesting that both developmental processes and transfer processes might influence adult L2 speech production.

Liu (2011) investigated the factors influencing pronunciation accuracy of Chinese adult foreign language learners. His study shows that the mispronunciation of the randomly chosen target sounds mainly results from L1 negative transfer.

Ahmed (2011) stated that when students learn a second or foreign language, they face some overlaps because of the very different phoneme systems of both languages. Therefore, when they try to speak a second language, they produce the sounds which are closest to the sounds and also exist in their mother tongue. For example, most Arab speakers pronounce the words *play* and *cheap* as *blay* and *sheeb*. This kind of pronunciation problem creates a big hindrance in the process of communication amongst speakers.

In order to see the influence of L1 on the acquisition of the L2 pronunciation, Barros (2003) identifies and

analyzes the difficulties encountered by Arabic speakers when pronouncing English consonants. The participants were a group of Arabic speakers came from different Arab countries with different colloquial Arabic backgrounds. All participants were in contact with the target language group and culture after the age of puberty for at least four years. The results show that eight English consonants, namely, /ŋ/, /p/, /v/, /d/, /l/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/, and /r/ are identified as problematic ones for Arabic speakers. The author also finds that interference of L1 seems to be the major factor contributing to pronunciation problems that might differ from one Arabic speaker to another, depending on the colloquial variety of Arabic they use.

So, Errors in pronunciation of any non-native speaker of any language is mostly impeded by the influence of mother tongue. However, the Arabic and English phonological systems vary extensively, not only in the range of sounds used, but also in the relative importance of vowels and consonants in expressing meaning. While English has 22 vowels and diphthongs to 24 consonants, Arabic has only eight vowels and diphthongs to 32 consonants.

4.2 The Importance of Developing EFL Learners' English Pronunciation

The process of learning English is interconnected. This means that each area of the language that is being taught helps improve other aspect of the language.

Pronunciation and listening comprehension are linked together by a unified system within which individual sounds are systematically related. Students need this sense of a system in order to make sense of the separate pieces (Gilbert, 1984).

If the students' English pronunciation skills are improved, clearly their listening skills and speaking skills become more refined. Spelling skills are also improved when the knowledge of English pronunciation has been increased (Varasarin, 2007).

Harper (2004) observes that beginners have the most difficulty in learning a new sound system, and that good pronunciation helps students to communicate effectively in classroom activities. The student will be more confident if his pronunciation is excellent. Thus, good pronunciation will help develop effective interaction in the classroom.

The student needs to know that improving pronunciation may have greater significance and importance as it supports some aspects like listening comprehension, spelling, reading, and grammar (Wong, 1993).

4.3 Problematic English Sounds for EFL Learners

Many studies have been conducted on sounds that native speakers of particular languages may find problematic in learning English as second or foreign language. For example, speakers of Japanese may have difficulty producing /l/ and /r/ sounds; speakers of Spanish may have difficulty distinguishing between /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ sounds, Arabic speakers may have difficulties in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds, such as /p/, /v/, /tʃ/, /z/ and /ŋ/, Thai speakers may have difficulty producing /v/, /ð/, /θ/, /z/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /z/, /dʒ/.

Though some studies have been conducted in the field of pronunciation and focused on vowel pronunciation, phonological analysis of English phonotactics, English phonetics and orthography, consonant clusters, stress intonation, patterns in spelling mistakes, and intonation analysis etc, not previous studies have been conducted on the different sounds of the letter "g" in English written words.

4.4 Influence of English Spelling on Pronunciation

While there are no similarities between the Arabic and English writing systems, Arabic spelling within its own system is simple and virtually phonetic. Letters stand directly for their sounds. Arabic speakers attempt, therefore, to pronounce English words using the same phonetic methodology. Add to this the salience of consonants in Arabic and you get severe pronunciation problems caused by the influence of the written form: "istobbid" for *stopped* (the "p" sound does not exist in Arabic) "forigen" for *foreign* (Khan, 2008).

Stageberge (1977) mentioned that people with spelling difficulties have found that English's writing system is far from ideal. English spelling is more complex, a deep orthography, because it attempts to represent the 40+ phonemes of the spoken language with an alphabet composed of only 26 letters (and no diacritics). As a result, two letters are often fused together into groups that represent distinct sounds, referred to as digraphs. For example, *t* and *h* placed side by side are used represent either /θ/ or /ð/; also *c* and *h* represent either /k/, /ʃ/ or /tʃ/, *g* and *h* represent /g/, /f/, or /Ø/. The word orthography refers to the rules for writing a language, such as conventions of spelling and punctuation. In an alphabetic script, such as English, this definition also includes its grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) correspondence. A few illustrations will reveal this inadequacy of letter-sound and sound-letter correspondences. The letter "G" of the alphabet also represents at least five phonemes, as shown by this series: *regime* /ʒ/, *energy* /dʒ/, *group* /g/, *cough* /f/, *night*, and *sign* /Ø/.

The evaluation of how well the English orthographic system matches English phonology is depended upon the analysis of English phonology with which it is being compared. For example, Chomsky & Hall (1991) concluded that English orthography “comes close to being an optimal orthographic system for English.”

However, this claim must be seen in light of their analysis of English phonology, in which some of the underlying systematic phonemes are never realized in the surface phonetics of English. An item such as *right* is given an underlying representation like //rixɪt//, *courage* //koræge//, and *giraffe* //giræffe//, despite the fact that their actual productions as [raɪt], [kəɪrɪdʒ], and [dʒərəʃ] are quite distant from this underlying form. These and others from Chomsky & Hall seem some that exaggerated because they are difficult to justify in terms of native speakers’ demonstrated knowledge of English phonology. But these represent basis for discover ring deeper regularities in English spelling; e.g., *b* and *g* in *bomb*, *comb*, *sign* and *malign* as related to *bombard*, *crumble*, *signal*, *malignant*, [b] and [g] actually appear on the surface (Wolfram & Johnson, 1982, p. 200).

According to Wolfram & Johnson (1982), surrounding graphic symbols are also important. For example, “gh” at the beginning of a word represents /g/ as in *ghost*, *ghetto*, or *ghoul*, but elsewhere it has a different phonological value (compare, for example, *tough* and *thought*). It is apparent, then, that patterns of graphemic distribution-including combinations of graphemes, sequencing, and positioning within larger units- are necessary considerations in determining the regular correspondence of English orthographic symbols.

The confused and irregular spelling of English offers poor guidance as to its pronunciation, and the resulting errors are called “problems of spelling pronunciation” by Lado (1957), the sources of which may be traceable to one of two possible causes: “One possibility is that the same symbol might represent two different sounds in the two languages. In such a case the student tends to transfer the native language symbolization to the foreign language...The other possibility of spelling interference with pronunciation arises with inconsistencies in the spelling of the foreign language. The symbol which in one word represents the one sound turns out to represent a different sound in another word. The student mispronounces the word by assuming that the symbol represents the same sound in both cases.” (p. 20) The third possibility of these spelling pronunciation problems, which Lado does not mention, can be due to the “silent-letters” (i.e., *b* in *debt* /det/, *k* in *know* /nəʊ/) in English.

In conclusion, we concur with Celce-Murcia (2005) that while in dealing with pronunciation difficulties/ errors, which are specifically due to orthographic interference, phonemic transcription “is a useful tool not only for teachers in teaching pronunciation but for creating some psychological distance between the English sound system and the writing system. Such separation helps both in teaching pronunciation and in presenting the correspondences between the English writing system and the English sound system. It is also useful for presenting some of the conventions of English spelling, which has many rules that are based in part on sounds”. (p. 270)

4.5 Previous Research and Studies

Many researchers have conducted their studies on the mistakes committed by Arab learners while learning English as a second or foreign language, such as Kharmā & Hajjaj (1989), Avery & Ehrlich (1992), Tushyeh (1996), Binturki (2008), and Ahmad (2011) and some others. The results of these studies revealed that Arabic learners of English are hardly able to pronounce certain consonant sounds correctly.

For example, the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/, the palato-alveolar affricates /tʃ/, palato-alveolar fricatives /ʒ/ and labio-dental fricatives /v/ do not have counterparts in the Arabic consonantal system and are not normally realised by Saudi students, consequently these are often replaced by the sounds /b/, /f/, /dʒ/, and /f/ respectively.

The alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ are not the cause of major obstacles, but they are pronounced by Saudi students as inter-dental, rather than alveolar plosives. They have observed that the velar nasal /ŋ/, which is a single consonant represented in English writing by two letters (-ng), is also mispronounced by many Saudi students.

As a result, they pronounce the word (heating = /hi:tiŋ/) as /hi:ti-n-g/, (visiting = /visitiŋ/) as /visiti-n-g/ etc. They also maintained that Arabic learners of English have many problems when dealing with English vowels, since English has a different number of vowels. In vowels, two types of difficulty are identified. First, certain diphthongs are replaced by other sounds due to L1 interference for example, /eə/ → /eɪ/; /ʊə/ → /u:/: /ɪə/ → /ɪ:/: and /əʊ/ → /ɔ:/. Second, the distinction between certain pairs of vowels as in /ɪ/ and /e/ as in *sit* and *set*; /ʌ/ and /ʊ/ as in *luck* and *lock*; /əʊ/ and /ɔ:/: as in *coat* and *caught*.

In English, consonant clusters are sequences of two or more consonants at the beginning (as in *splash*) or end (as in *test*) of syllable (Verma & Krishnaswamy, 1996, p. 39; Balasabramanian, 2000, p. 117; Roach, 2004, p. 71). Arabic, on the other hand, does not permit initial consonant clusters at all. In the syllable-final position, Arabic permits consonant clusters, but these clusters can be made up of two consonants. Here some examples of the

final consonant clusters are permissible in Arabic: /-sb//hizb/; /-lb//qalb/; /-rb//karb/; /-bt //sabt/.

Wahba (1998) focuses his study on problems encountered by Egyptian learners of English as a second language and concludes that certain phonological errors made are related to stress and intonation. These errors are interlingual ones; attributed to phonological differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic.

In his study, Bayraktaroğlu (2006) investigates the pronunciation difficulties of Turkish learners of English. The result of his study shows that the sources of pronunciation errors are mainly due to differences of one-to-one letter-sound correspondence in the orthographies of L1 and L2 rather than the differences in the sound systems. From what has been found in Bayraktaroğlu's (2006) study about the sources of such pronunciation errors, we may say that while interference from the Turkish sound system and its orthographic representation plays the major role, it is not the only interfering factor. Interference from Turkish was plainly obvious in most errors but there was also interference between the newly learned English sounds in combination with the general learning strategies.

In addition, AbuSeileek (2007) asserted that "Arabic speaking learners of English have difficulty in producing stress patterns. While stress in Arabic is predictable, stress in English is not."

Moreover, Maniruzzaman (2008) studied the major linguistic problems and possible solutions in learning EFL by Bengali learners. He discovered that most of the linguistic problems that are encountered by EFL Bengali learners are due to the differences between the two languages in terms of phonology.

In his study, Al-Shuaibi (2009) focuses on the phonology of phonotactics, and he finds that learners have difficulty in pronouncing English initial consonant clusters having three members and final consonant clusters of three and four members. He showed some processes involved in the pronunciation of these clusters, namely—reduction, substitution and deletion. In all the following English monosyllabic words, the onset consists of three consonants; actually, such combinations pose difficulties for Arab learners of English as their native dialect does not allow clusters of the type CCC initially. As a result, they insert the high front short vowel /i/ which declusterizes the clusters to ease their pronunciation. What can be inferred here is that insertion is a rule governed process as ESL/EFL insert the above vowel after the first member of the consonant cluster: /sɪbl/ / *splash*, /sɪbl:n/ / *spleen*, and /sɪkr:n/ / *screen*. E. M. Al-Saidat (2010) conducted his study of English phonotactics to discover the types of pronunciation problems Arab learners encounter while learning English as a second language. In his study, the researcher investigated what types of declusterization processes are found in their interlanguage and what the sources of such processes are. The researcher, in this study, showed that Arab learners of English unintentionally insert an anaptyctic vowel in the onset as well as in the coda of certain

English syllables. This study also demonstrated that the major reason for declusterization processes is the mother tongue influence.

Na'ama (2011) mentioned that English consonant clusters are the most difficult aspects in pronunciation that Hodeidah University students face. His study analyzed the errors made by Yemeni/ Hodeidah University students. They make many errors in the English clusters. They repeatedly made errors in this difficult type of pronunciation work. The students asked to read certain words that include two-initial-consonant clusters like *play*, three-initial-consonant clusters as in *spread*; two final consonant clusters as in *wicked*; and three and four-final consonant clusters as in *next*, *sixths*. Thus, there are many examples given to them that illustrate these errors, which are common with them, e.g., "*spread*", "*splendid*", "*play*", "*next*", "*tests*", "*asked*"...etc.

They usually tend to follow the strategy of Epenthesis in English clusters; it is the insertion of a vowel or consonant segment within an existing string or cluster reduction; they pronounce these words as in the following manners: *spired*/, /*spilendid*/, /*pilei*/, /*nekist*/, and so on. The result findings of his study show that the most serious errors made by Yemeni university students occurred in three and fourfinal- consonant clusters. These two types are usually nil in Arabic segmental features.

Accordingly, they shift to use the common system in their mother tongue to the target language, i.e., English. Another cause beyond making such errors in English consonant clusters is the lack of using teaching aids. In addition, incompetent instructors affect their students' pronunciation. Accordingly, these serious difficulties may result in the mispronunciation of the Yemeni university students in English consonant clusters.

Through their study, Ahmad & Nazim (2013) intend to know the teachers' opinion regarding the errors Saudi EFL learners face while pronouncing English consonant sounds. According to the data, which they collected from the teachers, the students generally encounter errors while pronouncing some consonant sounds like /p/, /d/, /v/, /f/, /z/, /ŋ/ etc .

From the previous review, one can see that there have been many studies that have investigated the causes of

EFL/ESL English sound problems. However, none of these studies specifically aimed to investigate the different sounds of the two letters “c” and “g” in English written words. The current study focuses on problems of spelling pronunciation of the letter “g” by Saudi female students who have passed their secondary school and have enrolled in Bachelors in English language program at Qassim University.

5. Methodology

This research is a quantitative in nature, designed to identify the problematic areas in the pronunciation of the letter “g” in English written words made by Saudi female learners of English as a foreign language. The population of the study was the female students (90 students) and their English language teachers (12 teachers) at the Qassim University during the academic year (2014-2015). There were two types of instruments used in this study. The first was a pronunciation test for the student participants in order to investigate the problematic areas of pronouncing “g” in different environments in different words; and the second a questionnaire for the teacher participants to provide comprehensive data about the causes of these errors of pronouncing “g” committed by EFL female students at Qassim University. Ninety female students were included for the pronunciation test and 12 teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire. Simple percentage was used for analyzing the data of recording words (pronunciation test).

6. Data Interpretation and Results

The study was carried out through two stages: the pronunciation test for “g” and the questionnaire.

6.1 Results of the Pronunciation Test

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of the data obtained from the participants pronunciations of the letter “g” in different positions in different words. Ninety female students in the graduate level at Qassim University were included for the pronunciation test. Each participant was asked to pronounce the words individually in a quiet office while the pronunciation was recorded. For the pronunciation test, fifteen words were included for the test of “g” pronunciations in different environment. The data were statistically analyzed in terms of percentage for the correct and incorrect pronunciation of the words individually and then for the rank for the difficult pronunciation (under which environment these letters are mispronounced; i.e., the letters that followed “g”). The pronunciation test aimed to investigate the problematic areas of pronouncing “g” in different environments in different words. Thus, it sought answers to the first research question:

What are the problematic areas in pronouncing the letter “g” in English written words?

The researcher illustrated the students’ pronunciation recording words in tables. The tables show the general results obtained after analyzing the data. The recorded words are listed in the first column and the researcher put a line under the letter (g) that she intended to analyze (in terms of how the participants pronounce them). The second column refers to the phonetic symbol of participation that was found to be wrongly pronounced by the students. The third and fourth column refer to the number of participants who pronounced the word correctly and incorrectly respectively. Finally, the last two columns show the total percentage of correct and incorrect pronunciation of the letter “g” which was found in the sample. The students’ recordings frequency occurrence will be illustrated later in following tables.

First Research Question (Q1): What are the problematic areas in pronouncing the letter “g” in English written words?

6.1.1 A Soft “g” Pronounced as /ʒ/ or /dʒ/

When the “g” is followed by “e, i, or y”, it has a *soft /dʒ/* sound as in *gender/dʒendə(r)/*, *origin /vɹɪdʒɪn/* and *energy /enədʒi/*; in a number of French loanwords, soft “g” is /ʒ/ (Shemesh & Waller, 2011). Table 1 shows the pronunciation of the letter “g” in these environments by the student participants.

Table 1. Participants’ pronunciation of “g” before “e, i, and y”

Word	Phonetic symbol of participation, mispronunciation speech	No. of participants which pronounce the word:		Percentage of:	
		Correctly	Incorrectly	Correct pronunciation	Mispronunciation
Wage	/g/=47	43	47*	48%	52%
Origin	/g/=37	53	37	59%	41%
Gym	/g/=47	43	47*	48%	52%

Table 1 shows the statistical analysis of the participants’ pronunciations of the soft “g” as /ʒ/ or /dʒ/ in terms of

percentage in some words. It shows that 43 students out of 90 (48%) pronounced the soft “g” as /dʒ/ in the word *wage* correctly because they follow the rule, when “g” followed by *e, i* or *y*, it has a soft sound /ʒ/ or /dʒ/; while 47 students out of 90 (52%) mispronounced it as /g/ in the same word.

Table 1 also shows that 53 students out of 90 (59%) pronounced the letter “g” as /dʒ/ in the word *origin* correctly, whereas 37 out of 90 students (41%) mispronounced it as /g/ in the same word.

The table also shows that the soft “g” in the word *gym* was pronounced as /dʒ/ correctly by 43 students (48%), while 47 students out of 90 (52%) mispronounced “g” as /g/ in the same word.

6.1.2 A Hard “g” Pronounced as /g/

While the soft “g” pronunciation occurs before “*e, i, and y*”, the hard “g” pronunciation occurs elsewhere except in the letter combinations “*ng*”, “*gg*”, “*dge*”, and “*gh*” which have their own pronunciation rules. In other words, the “g” is pronounced *hard* /g/ when it is followed by *a, o, u* (as in *game* /geɪm/, *golf* /gɒlf/, and *regular* /ˈregjələ(r)/) or *consonants* (as in *green* /ɡriːn/) except the letter combinations “*ng*”, “*gg*”, “*dge*”, and “*gh*” which have distinct pronunciation rules (Shemesh & Waller, 2011). Table 2 shows the pronunciation of the letter “g” in these environments by the student participants.

Table 2. Participants’ pronunciation of “g” before “a, o, u and consonants”

Word	Phonetic symbol of participation, mispronunciation speech	No. of participants which pronounce the word:		Percentage of:	
		Correctly	Incorrectly	Correct pronunciation	Mispronunciation
Engage	/ʒ/=46, /Ø/=1	43	47*	48%	52%
argument	/ʒ/=22, /Ø/=1	67	23	74%	26%
malignant	/ʒ/=15, /Ø/=14	61	29	68%	32%

Table 2 discusses the statistical analysis of the participants’ pronunciations of the hard “g” as /g/ in terms of percentage in some words. Table 2 shows that 43 students out of 90 (48%) pronounced the hard “g” as /g/ correctly in the word *engage* because they follow the rule, when the hard “g” followed by *a, o, u* and *consonant*, it pronounced /g/; while 47 students (52%) mispronounced it (46 students mispronounced it as /ʒ/ and one student as /Ø/).

Table 2 also shows that 67 students out of 90 (74%) pronounced the hard “g” as /g/ in the word *argument* correctly as they follow the rule correctly; while 23 out of 90 students (26%) mispronounced it as /ʒ/ by 22 students and /Ø/ by one student.

This table also shows that 61 students out of 90 (68%) pronounced the hard “g” correctly as /g/ in the word *malignant*, whereas 29 students out of 90 (32%) mispronounced it as /ʒ/ and /Ø/ (15 students mispronounced “g” as /ʒ/ and 14 students mispronounced it as /Ø/).

6.1.3 Letter Combinations: “ng”, “nge”, “gg”, and “gh”

A number of two-letter combinations or digraphs follow their own pronunciation patterns and, as such, may not follow the *hard/soft* distinction of “g”. For example, “*ng*” often represents /ŋ/ (as in *ring* /rɪŋ/), and /ŋg/ (as in *finger* /fɪŋgə(r)/). So, almost any “g” that follows “n” is pronounced *hard* (as in *anger* /ˈæŋgə(r)/) and forming a digraph with the “n”; but there are exceptions where the “g” does not form such a digraph, and is pronounced *soft* after all (as in *danger* /deɪŋdʒə(r)/). The trigraph “*nge*” represents /ndʒ/, as in *orange* /ˈɒrɪndʒ/ unless it is formed through adding a suffix to a root word ending in “*ng*” such as *singer* /sɪŋgə(r)/. Similarly, “*gg*” may represent /g/ (as in *dagger* /ˈdæɡə(r)/) but may also represent /gdʒ/ or /dʒ/ (as in *suggest* /sədʒest/). Almost any “g” that follows another “g” is pronounced *hard*, even before “*e, i* or *y*”, but there are exceptions where the “*gg*” is pronounced *soft* after all.

- exaggerate, ~ed, ~es, ~ing, ~ings, ~ion, , ~ions
- suggest, ~ed, ~ible, ~ing, ~ings, ~ion, , ~ion, , ~ive, , ~iveness, ~s
- veggies, ~y

Other letter combinations that do not follow the paradigm include “*gh*”. In English, “*gh*” historically represented [x] (the voiceless velar fricative, as in the Scottish Gaelic word *Loch*), and still does in *lough* and certain other Hiberno-English words, especially proper nouns. In the dominate dialects of modern English, “*gh*” is usually either silent or pronounced /f/. When “*gh*” occurs at the beginning of a word, it is pronounced /g/ as in *ghost*, *ghastly*, *ghoul*, *ghetto*, *ghee*, etc. Therefore, the combination “*gh*” has three sounds /f/ (as in *laugh*), /Ø/

(as in *though*), and /g/ (as in *ghost*). Few attempts have been made to simplify the spelling of words containing “gh” except in American spelling as /f/ in *laugh* /la:f/ and /Ø/ in *though* /ðəʊ/; and all they have said is that it depends on the history of the words; how they first came into the language (www.bbc.co.uk).

Table 3. Participants’ pronunciation of the letter combinations “ng”, “gg” and “gh”

Word	Phonetic symbol of participation, mispronunciation speech	No. of participants which pronounce the word:		Percentage of:	
		Correctly	Incorrectly	Correct pronunciation	Mispronunciation
Anger	/ʒ/=38	52	38	58%	42%
suggest	/g/=55, /gg/=1	34	56*	38%	62%
trigger	/dʒ/=13	77	13	86%	14%
Rough	/Ø/=45, /g/=17, /gh/=8, /ʒ/=2, /f/=1	16	74*	18%	82%
daughter	/g/=24, /gh/=9, /f/=6, /ʒ/=4, /f/=1	46	44	51%	49%
Ghost	/ʒ/=8, /Ø/=5, /gh/=2, /ʒh/=2, /f/=1	72	18	80%	20%

Table 3 shows the statistical analysis of the participants’ pronunciations of the letter combinations “ng”, “gg” and “gh” in some words in terms of percentage.

This table shows that 52 students out of 90 (58%) pronounced the combination “ng” as /ŋg/ correctly in the word *anger*; whereas 38 students out of 90 (42%) mispronounced it in the same word as /ʒ/.

The table also shows that 34 students out of 90 (38%) pronounced the letter combination “gg” correctly as /dʒ/ in the word *suggest*. However, 56 students out of 90 (62%) mispronounced it as /g/ and /gg/ (55 students mispronounced it as /g/ and one student mispronounced it as two separated sounds /g/g/). A closer look at this table, it shows that most students (86%) pronounced this letter combination “gg” correctly in the word *trigger* as /g/. However, there are 13 students (14%) mispronounced it as /dʒ/.

Table 3 also presents the statistical analysis of the participant pronunciations of “gh” in terms of percentage in some words. It explains that 16 students out of 90 (18%) pronounced “gh” as /f/ correctly in the word *rough*; whereas 74 students out of 90 (82%) mispronounce it in the same word as /Ø/ by 45 students, /g/ by 17 students, /ʒ/ by two students, and there is one student mispronounced it as /f/ and eight students mispronounced “gh” as a two separated sounds /g/ /h/ (/rʌgh/). The table also shows that 46 students out of 90 (51%) pronounce “gh” as /Ø/ correctly in the word *daughter*. However 44 students (49) mispronounce it (as /g/ by 24 students, /f/ by 6 students, /ʒ/ by 4 students, /f/ by one student, and there are 9 students mispronounced “gh” in the same word (daughter) as two separated sounds /g/ /h/ (/dɔ:tghə/). The table also shows that 72 students out of 90 (80%) pronounced “gh” as /g/ correctly in the word *ghost* because they realized that when “gh” occurs at the beginning of a word, it is pronounced /g/. However, 18 students (20%) mispronounced it as /ʒ/ by 8 students, /Ø/ by 5 students, /f/ by one student, and there are a number of students mispronounced “gh” in the word *ghost* as two separated sounds /g/ /h/ (/ghəʊst/) by two students and as /ʒ/ /h/ (/ʒhəʊst/) by two students.

6.1.4 “g” at the End of the Word Is Pronounced Hard as /g/

When suffixes are added to words ending with a *hard* or *soft* “g” (such as *-ed*, *-ing*, *-er*, *-est*, *-ism*, *-ist*, *-edness*, *-ish(ness)*, *-ily*, *-iness*, *-ier*, *-iest*, *-ingly*, *-edly*, and *-ishly*), the sound is normally maintained. Sometimes, the normal rules of spelling changes before suffixes can help signal whether the *hard* or *soft* sound is intended.

For example, as an accidental byproduct of the rule that doubles consonants in this situation after a short vowel, a double “gg” will normally indicate the *hard* pronunciation (e.g., *bagged* is pronounced /'bægd/, not as /'bædzd/).

There are occasional exceptions where alternations between the *hard* and *soft* sound occur before different suffixes. Examples are *analogous* (hard) vs. *analogy* (soft); similarly, *prodigal* with *prodigy*. These are generally cases where the entire word, including the suffix, has been imported from Latin, and the general Romance-language pattern of *soft* “g” before front vowels, but *hard* “g” otherwise, is preserved.

Sometimes a silent letter is added to help indicate pronunciation. For example, a silent “e” usually indicates the *soft* pronunciation, as in *change*; this may be maintained before a suffix to indicate this pronunciation (as in

changeable), despite the rule that usually drops this letter. In this situation, the “e” usually serves a marking function that helps to indicate that the “g” immediately before it is *soft*. Examples include *image*, *management*, and *pigeon*. Such a silent “e” also indicates that the vowel before “g” is a historic long vowel, as in *rage*, *oblige*, and *range*. When adding one of the above suffixes, this silent “e” is often dropped and the *soft* pronunciation remains. While “dge” commonly indicates a *soft* pronunciation, American spelling conventions drop the silent “e” in a number of words like *judgment* and *abridgment* while retaining the *soft* pronunciation (www.wikipedia.org).

Crane & Yeager (1981) give us some certain pairs of words in English like *sign/signature* and *malign/malignant* that exhibit a regular alternation in their phonetic representations: [g] is present in the second member of the pairs but absent in the first member. To express the relatedness of words such as *sign* and *signature*, we could claim that the underlying representation of the segment in all such pairs is /g/ and that a rule operates to delete /g/ before syllable-final nasals. The rule (/g/ is deleted before syllable-final nasal) would appear formally as: /g/ / Ø /
 __ [+ nasal]##

→

(the arrow indicates the change and reads as “becomes” or “is changed to”; the underscore __ indicates the environment bar where the /g/ occurs within the string of items represented by the environment; ## refers to the word boundary).

Notice that this rule also helps to describe such alternations as *phlegm/phlegmatic* and *paradigm/paradigmatic*.

This phonological rule of English tells English speakers to delete the /g/ when it occurs in given environments. This is a /g/-deletion rule, which says, a /g/ is deleted when it occurs before final nasal consonant. Given this rule, the phonemic representation of the bases in the words mentioned above includes a phonemic /g/, which is deleted by the regular rule if a suffix is not added. This is true for most of the cases, but there are some derivatives (usually with such suffixes as *-ment*, *-ing*, *-er* and *-ed* attached), such as *assignment*, *signing finger*, *designed*, *signed*, in which /g/ is deleted, though it does not occur before a final nasal consonant.

Table 4. Participants’ pronunciation of “g” before nasals and when suffixes attached to them

Word	Phonetic symbol of participation, mispronunciation speech	No. of participants which pronounce the word:		Percentage of:	
		Correctly	Incorrectly	Correct pronunciation	Mispronunciation
Malign	/g/=61, /ʒ/=14	15	75*	17%	83%
Malign(ant)	/ʒ/=15, /Ø/=14	61	29	68%	32%
Assign(ment)	/g/=62, /ʒ/=17	11	79*	12%	88%

Table 4 shows the statistical analysis of the participants’ pronunciations of “g” before nasals in terms of percentage. The table shows that 15 students out of 90 (17%) pronounced “g” as silent correctly in the word *malign* because they follow the rule that “g” is deleted before syllable-final nasal. However, 75 students out of 90 (83%) mispronounced “g” in the same word as /g/ by 61 students and as /ʒ/ by 14 students.

This table also presents the percentages of the correct and incorrect pronunciations of the “g” before nasals when it is attached with suffixes. There are 68% of the students pronounced “g” correctly as /g/ in the word *malignant*, while there are 32% of them mispronounced “g” by deleting it or pronounced it as /ʒ/. A close look at the table, we find that most students (88%) mispronounced “g” at the word *assignment* as /g/ and /ʒ/; whereas there are a little number of students (12%) pronounced “g” in the same word correctly.

6.1.5 Summary of the Pronunciation Errors of “g”

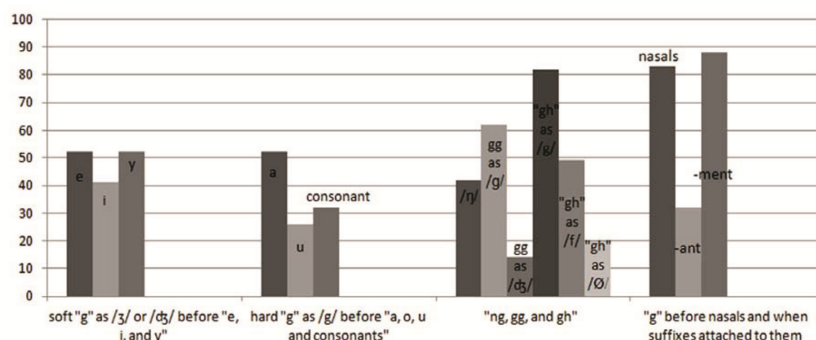


Figure 1. A summary of mispronounced “g” in each different positions (sounds) of pronouncing

In the following table, the researcher orders the sound errors committed by the students when they are pronouncing “g” in English words.

Table 5. Difficulty rank for participants’ pronunciation of “g” in written words

Rank	Different sounds of pronouncing “g” in English written words	Percentage of Errors
1	“g” before nasals.	68%
2	soft “g” as /ʒ/ or /dʒ/ before “e, i, and y”.	49%
3	letter combinations “ng”, “gg”, and “gh”.	45%
4	hard “g” as /g/ before “a, o, u and consonants”.	37%

6.2 Results of the Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to provide comprehensive data about the causes of these errors of pronouncing “g” committed by EFL female students at Qassim University. In this study, 12 teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire in order to answer the third research question.

Second Research Question: According to the English teachers: what are the causes of the students’ weakness in pronouncing English written words that contain the letter “g”?

The English teachers who participated in this study provided (from their point of view) many causes of the weakness with regard to pronunciation “g” in English written words. Most of them stated that EFL students often mispronounce English written words that contain the letter “g”, pronouncing them incorrectly or in some other way other than how they are intended to be pronounced.

Two teachers believed that students mispronounced these letters because of reading difficulties. Reading is a complex task that involves translating abstract symbols, or letters, into meaningful sounds and patterns that have meaning outside themselves. EFL students often have difficulties with reading English words especially that have the letter “g”. When this happens, they also can have trouble correctly pronouncing these words they are attempting to read. Even if they know the meaning behind the word, they may not be able to pronounce it the right way.

In addition, about half of the teachers agree that nonstandard spellings are another reason for mispronunciation of “g” in English written words. They said that, in English, there are many words that if spoken phonetically or the way they are written- then they would be mispronounced. This means that there is no correspondence between the English alphabets and their sounds. The word “rough”, for example, might be written as “ruff” if it were to be written as it is pronounced. The English language is a complex language and, thus, has variant spellings of words that, in some cases, also change over time. Linguistic factors such as these make mispronunciation of “g” in words a common occurrence.

One of the teachers said, “The letters after “g” in English words cause the different pronunciation, and many of them become letter combinations. As a result, many English written words are not pronounced as you might expect.”

In addition, two teachers mentioned another reason for the students’ weakness in pronouncing “g” in English

words. They stated that the loan words that came into English vocabulary tended to be spelled according to their languages spelling conventions, which were very different from English spelling conventions. So, English standards tend to maintain old spellings that represent the original pronunciation of a word, even if the pronunciation has changed. This is why we have a “gh” in *cough*, *though*, *bought*, etc. Even worse, sometimes, English words are spelled in a way that is supposed to reflect etymology, even if the etymology is wrong. This is why we have a “g” in *gnome*. Thus, words borrowed from other languages into English tend to keep their spelling from the source language, even if the pronunciation goes against English rules.

7. Major Findings and Recommendations

According to the results of the students’ recording words and in view of the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire, along with the researcher’s viewpoint, the following conclusions have been reached:

Q.1 What are the problematic areas in pronouncing the letter “g” in English written words?

The results indicate that the students are generally weak in pronouncing soft “g” when it is followed by the vowel “e” and “y”; 52% of the students pronounced “g” before “e” wrongly, and also 52% mispronounced “g” when it is followed by “y”.

Moreover, most of the students (52%) mispronounced hard “g” before the vowel “a”.

The findings show that the students face difficulties in pronouncing the letter combinations “gh”. They fail to pronounce it correctly. As for the word *rough*, only sixteen students (out of 90) pronounced the combination “gh” correctly as /f/. It is thought that this was escorted to the students’ overgeneralization (to pronounce “gh” as /Ø/ anywhere). In addition, the double “gg” in the word *suggest* were found to be highly mispronounced by the students (62%).

The results also demonstrate that most students have difficulty in pronouncing “g” when it occurs before syllable-final nasals. The “g” in the word *malign* was found to be highly mispronounced by the students (83%). Moreover, the students pronounced the “g” correctly in the word *malignant*, but 88% of the students fail to pronounce it in the word *assignment* because they did not recognize if the /g/ before syllable-final nasal is deleted or not when a suffix is added.

The results suggest many factors that can cause difficulties for students in terms of pronouncing “g” in English written words. According to them, these difficulties are concerned with reading difficulties, nonstandard spellings, letters that follow “g” (many of them may become combinations), loan words, orthography (no correspondence between the English alphabets and their sounds).

To conclude, EFL students are expected to find difficulties in reading words such as:

- *gym*, *argument* where the letter “g” represents different sounds.
- *rough*, *ghost*, *daughter* where a combination of letters “gh” represents one single sound.
- *gnome*, *daughter*, *malign*, *naughty*, *slaughter* where some letters have no sound at all.

Based on the findings of the research, some suggestions are given below which may help teachers and students in reducing student difficulties in pronouncing the letters “g” in English written words.

Pronunciation teaching is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Thus, it is recommended that foreign language teachers must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes.

1) Teachers should encourage their students to use the dictionary of phonetics system for improving pronunciation. If the teacher teaches the students how to transcribe words by using phonetic symbols, students become autonomous to some extent in that they may look up their monolingual dictionaries when not knowing how to pronounce a word in the target language. There should be a systematic practice of IPA symbols.

2) The teacher should give proper attention to the students and their special needs and problems. The teacher should also conduct a students’ needs analysis regarding pronunciation. According to the needs of the learners, the teacher should develop some appropriate materials and strategies to present in the class to reduce the learners’ problem.

3) The learners should be given a basic knowledge of the rules of pronouncing “g”, especially for primary school because they may fossilize in the future and we cannot correct these errors. In general, the learners should be given a basic knowledge of sound system of English, phonetics and phonology, IPA symbols, etc. If the learners have phonetic and phonological awareness of English, they will be able to guide themselves towards correct pronunciation of a particular sound or word.

- 4) Teachers have to explain and train their students how to pronounce “g” in English written words as soft or hard, how to pronounce the combinations “gh”, “ng” and “gg”.
- 5) Teachers have to design pronunciation drills that handle some common pronunciation difficulties of soft and hard “g” especially those exception words that do not follow their general rules.
- 6) Ministry of Education should recognize that their graduated students are generally weak with regard to pronunciation of “g” in English written words. Hence, the Ministry is responsible for solving this problem and developing English pronunciation in the school curriculums.

8. Conclusion

The current study has investigated the pronunciation errors of the letter “G” of English written words made by graduate level EFL Saudi female students at Qassim University. This research provides practical recommendations for developing English pronunciation in Saudi schools. Further research should be undertaken in order to develop teaching English as a foreign language. The following are examples of suggested further research:

- 1) The same study could be conducted within intermediate and secondary schools.
- 2) The same study can be done in other regions to compare the results of this study and the results of other studies.
- 3) Research is needed to investigate the reasons for weakness in pronunciation/sounds of other English letters.

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