

Bakalářská práce

Using Audio Exercises to Train Czech EFL Learners in Recognising Words Containing the Monophthong /ɜ:/

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Autor práce:

Bc. Ivona Baťková

Vedoucí práce:

Mgr. Nicola Karásková, M.A.
Katedra anglického jazyka

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Bc. Ivona Baťková

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The aim of this Bachelor's Thesis is to focus on the problem which Czech EFL learners have with the monophthong /ɜ:/, by reviewing the specialist literature and by collecting data by means of a purpose-designed diagnostic test.

Based on these findings, a set of spoken-to-written exercises will be created and implemented. Data will be collected on the participants' performances at each stage of the cycle, using the e-learning platform Moodle. These will be analysed and evaluated in the light of the goals of the research project.

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Vedoucí práce:

Mgr. Nicola Karásková, M.A.

Katedra anglického jazyka

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L.S.

prof. RNDr. Jan Pícek, CSc.
děkan

Mgr. Zénó Vernyik, Ph.D.
garant studijního programu

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ANOTACE A KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá využitím audio cvičení ke zlepšení schopnosti českých studentů EFL rozeznávat slova obsahující jednohlasé /ɜ:/, konkrétně studentů prvního ročníku na Technické univerzitě v Liberci, kde se začali připravovat na budoucí učitelské povolání. Diagnostický test odhalil, že studenti obecně nemají problém se sluchovým rozlišováním zvuku /ɜ:/. Test skládající se z 50 otázek primárně obsahujících izolovaná slova v minimálních párech a z 10 slov ve větách byl zadán v rámci kurzu fonetiky a fonologie LI1BE pro studenty 1. ročníku na Technické univerzitě v Liberci v akademickém roce 2022/2023. Následně byla připravena a realizována série cvičení integrovaných do 60 minutové lekce na platformě Moodle, která byla doplněna o dotazník. Cílem lekce bylo pomoci studentům rozpoznat shodu mezi grafémy a fonémem /ɜ:/. Vyhodnocení ukázalo, že čeští studenti EFL vykazují relativně málo chyb v rozlišení cíleného fonému, jak dokládají výsledky diagnostického testu a lekce. Více než polovina studentů se v dotazníku vyjádřila, že předtím neznali konkrétní kombinaci písmen, které vedou k fonému /ɜ:/, a ocenili lekci za zlepšení jejich výslovnosti a porozumění anglickému jazyku.

Audio cvičení, shoda grafémů a fonémů, kombinace písmen, monoftong, grafém, hláska, zvuk, samohláska, /ɜ:/.

ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

This bachelor's thesis deals with the use of audio exercises to improve the ability of Czech EFL students to recognize words containing the monophthong /ɜ:/. The test subjects were undergraduate students in their first year at the Technical University of Liberec preparing for their future teaching profession. A diagnostic test revealed that students generally do not struggle with auditory discrimination of the sound /ɜ:/. The test, comprising 50 questions, primarily featuring isolated words in minimal pairs and 10 questions featuring words within sentences, was administered during the LIIBE phonetics and phonology course for first-year undergraduate students at the Technical University of Liberec in the 2022/2023 academic year. Subsequently, a series of exercises integrated into a 60-minute lesson was developed and implemented on the Moodle platform along with a survey. The objective of the lesson was to help students recognize the correspondence between graphemes and the phoneme /ɜ:/. The assessment indicated that Czech EFL students exhibit relatively few errors in distinguishing the targeted phoneme, as evidenced in the diagnostic test and lesson results. In the follow-up questionnaire, over half of the students expressed that they were previously unaware of the specific letter combinations producing the phoneme /ɜ:/ and appreciated the lesson for improving their comprehension of the letter combinations leading to the sound /ɜ:/.

Audio exercises, grapheme and phoneme correspondence, letter combination monophthong, grapheme, phoneme, sound, vowel, /ɜ:/.

LIST OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	5
Anotace a klíčová slova	6
Abstract and Keywords.....	7
List of Contents.....	8
List of Figures	9
List of Tables	11
List of Abbreviations	12
INTRODUCTION	13
1 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
1.1 Importance of Phonemes	17
1.2 Grapheme and Phoneme Correspondence	18
1.3 Phonics Teaching.....	19
1.4 Vocal "Vowel" Sounds.....	20
1.4.1 Monophthongs and Their Articulation.....	21
1.4.2 Czech versus English Vowel Sounds.....	24
1.5 The phoneme /3:/	25
1.6 Difficulties for Czech EFL learners with /3:/.....	28
1.7 Contrasted Phonemes.....	30
2 ACTION RESEARCH.....	32
2.1 The Main Aim of the Research.....	32
2.2 Research Methods.....	33
2.3 A Diagnostic Test	35
2.3.1 A Diagnostic Test: A List of Minimal Pairs /3:/	37
2.3.2 Results - Findings and Analysis.....	39
2.4 The Lesson on the Phoneme /3:/	41
2.4.1 The Lesson Structure	43
2.4.2 Lists of Recorded Words for the Lesson.....	51
2.4.3 Lesson Results - Findings	57
2.5 A Questionnaire for the Students.....	59
2.5.1 Questionnaire Results	60
3 CONCLUSION	69
References.....	73
Appendices.....	79

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Parameters for describing English monophthongs.....	23
Figure 2: The articulation of the phoneme /ɜ:/.....	25
Figure 3. Variants of /ɜ:/	27
Figure 4. Spelling of /ɜ:/	29
Figure 5. An example from a diagnostic test 1	36
Figure 6. An example from a diagnostic test 2	36
Figure 7: An example from a diagnostic test 3	36
Figure 8. The diagnostic test success rate, Isolated words	40
Figure 9. The diagnostic test success rate, Sentences.....	40
Figure 10. 1st part, Lesson, Introduction	44
Figure 11. 2nd part, Lesson, Questions 01 - 40	44
Figure 12. 3rd part, Lesson, Questions 41 - 62.....	45
Figure 13. 4th part, Lesson, Questions 63 - 84.....	45
Figure 14. 5th part, Lesson, Questions 85 - 104	46
Figure 15. 6th part, Lesson, Questions 105 - 128.....	46
Figure 16: 6th part - Lesson, Questions 105 - 128.....	47
Figure 17. 7th part, Lesson, Explanation of the phoneme /ɜ:/	47
Figure 18. 8th part - Lesson, Questions 129 - 158.....	48
Figure 19. 9th part, Lesson, Letter combination and additional information.....	49
Figure 20. 9th part, Lesson, Letter combination and additional information.....	50
Figure 21. 10th part, Lesson, more practice - Tongue twisters.....	51
Figure 22. Lesson results, Success rate in percentage of lesson parts	58
Figure 23. A sample of a questionnaire	60

Figure 24. Chart to the question "Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English? "	61
Figure 25. Chart to the question: "Did you have the standard English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks? "	62
Figure 26. Chart to the question "Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbook? "	63
Figure 27. Chart to the question "Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you? "	64
Figure 28. Chart to the question "If 'yes' to the previous question, who (or 'what') explained the sounds and symbols to you? "	65
Figure 29. Chart to the question "Do you consider teaching phonemic symbols important? "	66
Figure 30. Chart to the question "Were you aware of the letter combination leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before doing the exercises? "	67

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Czech pure vowels	22
Table 2. Examples of reduced /ɜ/ and of long /ɜ:/ in pairs.....	26
Table 3. A list of recorded minimal pairs used in the diagnostic test.....	37
Table 4. A list of 10 sentences with minimal pairs used in the diagnostic test	39
Table 5. A list of letter combinations leading to /ɜ:/.....	48
Table 6. A List of recorded words for questions 01 – 40	51
Table 7. A List of recorded words for questions 41 - 63	52
Table 8. A List of recorded words for questions 63 - 84	53
Table 9. A List of recorded words for questions 85 - 104	54
Table 10. A List of recorded words for questions 105 - 128	54
Table 11. A List of recorded words for questions 129 - 158	55
Table 12. An extra list of words	57

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC English – Received Pronunciation (RP)

EFL - English as a Foreign Language

FF UK – Philosophical Faculty at Charles University (Filosofická fakulta University Karlovy)

LI1BE – a Linguistics I: Phonetics and Morphology course at the TUL in the winter semester of the first year

LI2BE – a Linguistics II: Phonetics and Morphology course at the TUL in the summer semester of the first year

RP – Received Pronunciation

TUL – the Technical University of Liberec

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is Using Audio Exercises to train Czech EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students to recognise words containing the monophthong /ɜ:/. The pronunciation of the /ɜ:/ sound may seem straightforward, but I realised that I also used to struggle with certain words containing this phoneme. Despite being subconsciously aware of its connection with the letter <r>, I did not know why it was pronounced as /ɜ:/. Reflecting on my experience when I was learning English at school, I recall my confusion regarding why *purple* should be pronounced as /'pɜ:.pəl/. In my teaching practice, I have noticed that students sometimes have difficulty pronouncing elementary words such as *word*, *world*, *purple*, or *hurt*. This led me to contemplate the underlying issue with this particular phoneme, sparking various questions in my mind such as: Do we not hear /ɜ:/?

To shed light on the questions raised about the monophthong /ɜ:/, the first step was to create an inventory of basic but potentially confusing words, such as *worm* and *warm* and assess students' familiarity with the sound /ɜ:/ as well as their ability to distinguish between the words based solely on auditory perception. Thus, a diagnostic test was prepared based on words in minimal pairs following the most frequent letter combination, considering three primary questions that my research aims to address.

The following outlines the main research questions examined in this thesis:

1. What mistakes do Czech students make in recognising pronunciation, and spelling the respective words (minimal pairs) when one of the words in a minimal pair contains the sound /ɜ:/?

2. Can audio exercises train Czech EFL learners to match the pronunciation and spelling of minimal pairs containing the long vowel /ɜ:/?

3. To what extent were the students aware of the letter combinations leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before the lesson on this phoneme?

If the issue is not related to auditory discrimination or articulation, where does the problem really lie? This question served as the cornerstone for the following development. Given my deepened understanding of the subject matter and the analysis As part of the diagnostic test, I developed multiple sets of exercises and corresponding explanatory segments specifically tailored to a 60-minute lesson. All are aimed at achieving the specified learning objectives, such as distinguishing the monophthong /ɜ:/. Additionally, a questionnaire was created to gather individual insights from the participants.

This research project collected data from a diagnostic test, lesson results, and a questionnaire. The diagnostic test was administered to first-year Czech students at the Technical University of Liberec (TUL) in the 2022/23 academic year, at the end of the LIIBE course's winter semester. Based on the literature review results and the diagnostic test, a lesson on the sound /ɜ:/ was developed to deliver the full understanding in context.

This study aims to investigate the monophthong /ɜ:/ by exploring the effectiveness of audio exercises and the awareness of specific letter combinations among Czech EFL learners. The findings of this research may offer valuable insights into English language learning in the Czech context and contribute to the development of targeted instructional approaches. Prior to this, I will introduce the methods employed for the analysis, and in the theoretical section, I will cover terms relevant to the thesis topic such as grapheme

and phoneme correspondence, phonemic awareness, phonics teaching, vowels and the phoneme /ɜ:/.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of phonetics and phonology, a wealth of research is dedicated to the study of phonemes. Google Scholar returns over 300,000 results for "phonetics and phonology" and over 630,000 for "English phonemes" (accessed July 3, 2024). In the specific context of the Czech environment, numerous academic works have addressed the challenges related to Czech pronunciation, focusing on specific phonemes, for example, "Difficulties of Czech Students with English Pronunciation" (Lavička 2021) or "The Most Frequent Errors in English Pronunciation Made by Czech Students" (Cihlářová 2009). After examining various source materials, it has been observed that other sounds have been identified than the phoneme /ɜ:/ as particularly problematic for Czech learners, for example /æ/ or /ə/. (Lavička 2021, 10-11; Cihlářová 2009, 37-41) While conducting a review of the literature, I found a scarcity of materials focusing solely on the phoneme /ɜ:/.

I encountered a piece of work titled "The NURSE Vowel /ɜ:/ in African Accents of English: A Focus on the Emerging Trends in Nigerian English" by Carol Anyagwa which provides an in-depth analysis of this phoneme in the Nigerian English context. (Anyagwa 2013) However, I did not succeed in finding any thorough studies on the phoneme /ɜ:/ in the Czech environment.

Nonetheless, in relation to Czech EFL learners, it seems that only Karásková (2016) delves into the depth of this phoneme, highlighting that pronunciation challenges stem from letter combinations and differences in pronunciation in the Czech environment.

Skaličková, Karásková and Melen mention the letter combination forming the sound /ɜ:/. (Skaličková 1998, 96; Karásková 2016, 22; Melen 2010, 21)

Based on the literature findings, it may seem that Czech EFL learners do not usually find the phoneme /ɜ:/ challenging as there are no difficulties in its pronunciation. However, in classrooms, as previously mentioned, occasional mispronunciations of certain words, such as early by Czech EFL learners, still appear instead of /'ɜ:.li/. Sometimes, /'i:.li/ is heard or words like *curse* /kɜ:s/ and *course* /kɔ:s/, which are often mispronounced.

1.1 IMPORTANCE OF PHONEMES

The significance of comprehending phonemes is evident in the context of minimal pairs such as *warm* /wɔ:m/ and *worm* /wɜ:m/. A single phoneme distinguishes the two words, resulting in a complete shift in meaning. *Warm* conveys a pleasant temperature, while *worm* refers to a thin, long and small animal with a soft body without legs or bones. This illustrates the fundamental importance of each phoneme in communication.

"The phonetic specifications of the sounds (or phones) heard in speech, it was realized, contain far more detail than is needed to identify the way languages make contrasts in meaning. The notion of the phoneme allowed linguists to group together sets of phonetically similar phones as variants, or 'members', of the same underlying unit. The phones were said to be realizations of the phonemes, and the variants were referred to as allophones of the phonemes..." (Crystal 2008, 361)

In linguistics, it is crucial to recognize that each language possesses its own distinct phonemic system, and the quantity of phonemes can vary significantly. (Cruttenden 2008, 100) For instance, in the context of British English, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) chart, based on Received Pronunciation (RP), acknowledges forty-four unique phonemes. (Fonetický ústav FF UK: IPA Transcription of English, 2024) In comparison, according to the New Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Czech Language online, the Czech

language has thirty-nine phonemes, thirteen vocalic and twenty-six consonantal forms. (Palková 2017. Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny: Fonémy češtiny. Online.)

1.2 GRAPHEME AND PHONEME CORRESPONDENCE

Understanding graphemes is essential for grasping the writing system of a language. While phonemes represent the sounds of a language, graphemes are visual representations used in writing. A grapheme may be a single letter or a combination of letters that represents a phoneme. For example, the word *worm* consists of four letters (w, o, r, m) but three graphemes <w-or-m>, representing the phonemes /w-ɜ:-m/. As can be seen in the example, graphemes play an important role in the visual representation of language in writing systems.

It is important to note that a single phoneme may be represented by various graphemes, while a single grapheme may also represent multiple phonemes. Rogers states that letters, the segmental symbols of the alphabetic writing system, should not be interchanged with graphemes. (Rogers 2005, 14) In linguistics, letter combinations refer to the joining of letters to create a unified sound. For instance, the letter combination <ur> produces the unified sound in words such as *fur* /fɜ:r/.

When discussing grapheme and phoneme correspondence, an issue of phonemic awareness might arise. So, is phonemic awareness important?

According to the USA National Reading Panel report on phonemic awareness (2000) learning phonemic awareness is crucial for many students in developing reading skills. There are lots of ways to do this, like figuring out the sounds in words, breaking words into sounds, blending sounds together to make words, taking sounds out of words, and changing the beginnings and ends of words.

1.3 PHONICS TEACHING

Phonemic awareness is closely linked to teaching phonics, which is quite commonly taught in the English educational environment (School News Network 2023; Chew 2018; Gov.uk 2023). Teaching phonics may also be essential for EFL learners as it can significantly aid students, especially those who struggle with a different language orthography.

On this topic, Pavlík and Bojo discuss that "It has been shown in many works that in languages with shallow orthographies (such as Croatian, Turkish, Czech, or Slovak), word recognition is based mostly on the prelexical assemblage of graphemes (defined as single-letter or multi-letter units) which tend to be in a one-to-one correspondence with phonemes. As a result, beginning readers find it relatively easy to learn to read in such transparent orthographies." They add that in comparison, in languages with deep orthographies, for example, English, in which the correspondence is not consistent, and therefore readers need to have a different approach to recognising words as complete units such as syllables, meaningful word parts, et cetera. (2023, 24-25)

Before the year 2000 England started considering how to improve reading abilities. Chew on the phonic development in England from 1998 to 2018 summarises that "The first UK government effort to raise the profile of phonics in England was in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) introduced in 1998." and states that whole-word and whole-language approaches had dominated, and their influence did not disappear overnight, leading to chaotic progress from then on. (Chew 2018)

Currently, the British Government aims to provide all children with a strong foundation as they progress through school, fostering the habit of reading extensively and regularly for both pleasure and information while supporting phonics teaching, as we can

read in the Guidance on Choosing a Phonics teaching programme. Furthermore, the importance of selecting an effective phonics programme is emphasised. (Gov.uk 2023)

Also, in the report of The National Reading Panel from the year 2000, the importance of systematic phonics is emphasised, too. Systematic phonics instruction focuses on helping children gain knowledge of the alphabetic system and its use in decoding new words, as well as accurately and automatically recognizing familiar words. Understanding how letters correspond to phonemes and larger word subunits is crucial for assisting beginning readers in sounding out word segments and blending these parts to form recognizable words. Alphabetic knowledge is essential for figuring out new words through analogy and aiding beginners in remembering words they have previously read. Knowing letter-sound relations also improves children's accuracy in predicting words from context. (2000, 2-90)

Not only in anglophone countries are phonics and phonemic awareness considered important but also "The Malaysian Ministry of Education (2011) English Standardized Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) strongly recommends the use of phonics when teaching students (aged between 7 and 12 years) critical literacy skills." (Siik, Hawkins 2013, 52)

1.4 VOCAL "VOWEL" SOUNDS

The phoneme /ɜ:/ represents a vowel sound, which is one of the two primary categories used to classify speech sounds. Vowels are defined as vocalic phonemes, tones that are distinguished by a certain pitch. (Urbanová 1998, 30) When producing vowels, the airstream from our lungs is not blocked, the vocal tract is open, and the vocal cords vibrate.

Cruttenden says that in many foreign learners' first language, there are only five vowels, for example, in Spanish or Japanese. (Cruttenden 2008, 100) In Czech there are five short and five long vowels in pairs and three diphthongs (Palková 2017. Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny: Fonémy češtiny. Online).

As in other languages, the number of vowels might be lower than in the English language, which has a more complex vowel system, and for this reason, there are expected difficulties during English language acquisition, especially where the vowels are closest within the vowel space like in these groups: /i:,ɪ/, /e,æ,ʌ/, /ɔ:,ɑ:,ɒ/, /ʊ,u:/. (Cruttenden 2008, 104)

When discussing vowels, it is also important for a teacher to note that the acquisition of vowels by native learners happens very early. Cruttenden says: "A striking fact about children's acquisition of their first language is that the vowel system, even one as complicated as that of English, is complete far earlier than the consonant system. In most children, the full range of vowel phonemes is being produced by the age of two and a half years (2;5) and in many cases earlier." (Cruttenden 2008, 100)

1.4.1 Monophthongs and Their Articulation

Monophthongs refer to a single vowel sound and are often called pure vowels. Melen notes that "Vowels are formed by moving the tongue upwards or downwards, alongside forwards or backwards, and concurrently by shaping (rounding) lips and by different angles of the jaw at the same time." (2010, 12) Single vowel production does not require changing the position of the mouth as it is with diphthongs where the sound quality changes.

In British English (RP/BBC English), the language features twelve monophthong vowels, seven diphthongs and five triphthongs. As noted by Melen, the phonetic

characteristics of these sounds are influenced by their surrounding phonetic environment, leading to variations in pronunciation. For instance, the sound /ɪ/ in the word *coin* is pronounced differently compared to its pronunciation in the word *oil*, exhibiting variations in height and distinctness. He rationalises that overlooking these minor dissimilarities leads to the agreement on twelve monophthongs in RP English. (2010, 12)

In the Czech language, there are only ten pure vowels. (Skaličková 1998, 79) Based on the information given by "Fonetický ústav FF UK" (2024) and Encyklopedický slovník češtiny online (2024) a table was prepared to introduce the ten Czech pure vowels:

Table 1. Czech pure vowels

IPA Symbol	In Czech	Example of a Czech word
/ɪ/	i	kino (cinema)
/i:/	í/ý	vír (vortex), výt (Eagle owl)
/ɛ/	e	pes (dog)
/ɛ:/	é	léto (summer)
/a/	a	malý (small)
/a:/	á	vzdálený (distant)
/o/	o	molo (jetty)
/o:/	ó	tón (tone)
/u/	u	sud (barrel)
/u:/	ú, ů	důl (mine)

(based on the information from Fonetický ústav FF UK 2024 and Encyklopedický slovník češtiny online 2024)

There are also three diphthongs in the Czech language, which are /ou/, /au/, and /ɛu/.

The twelve pure vowels in RP English are /i:/, /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /u:/, /e/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/

and /ɒ/. The eight diphthongs are /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/ and /ɔɪ/. The five triphthongs are /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /əʊə/, /aʊə/, /ɔɪə/. "These vowels may be placed in the vowel quadrilateral (based on the cardinal vowel diagram by Daniel Jones) as shown in the chart below. "

(Stephen 2018)

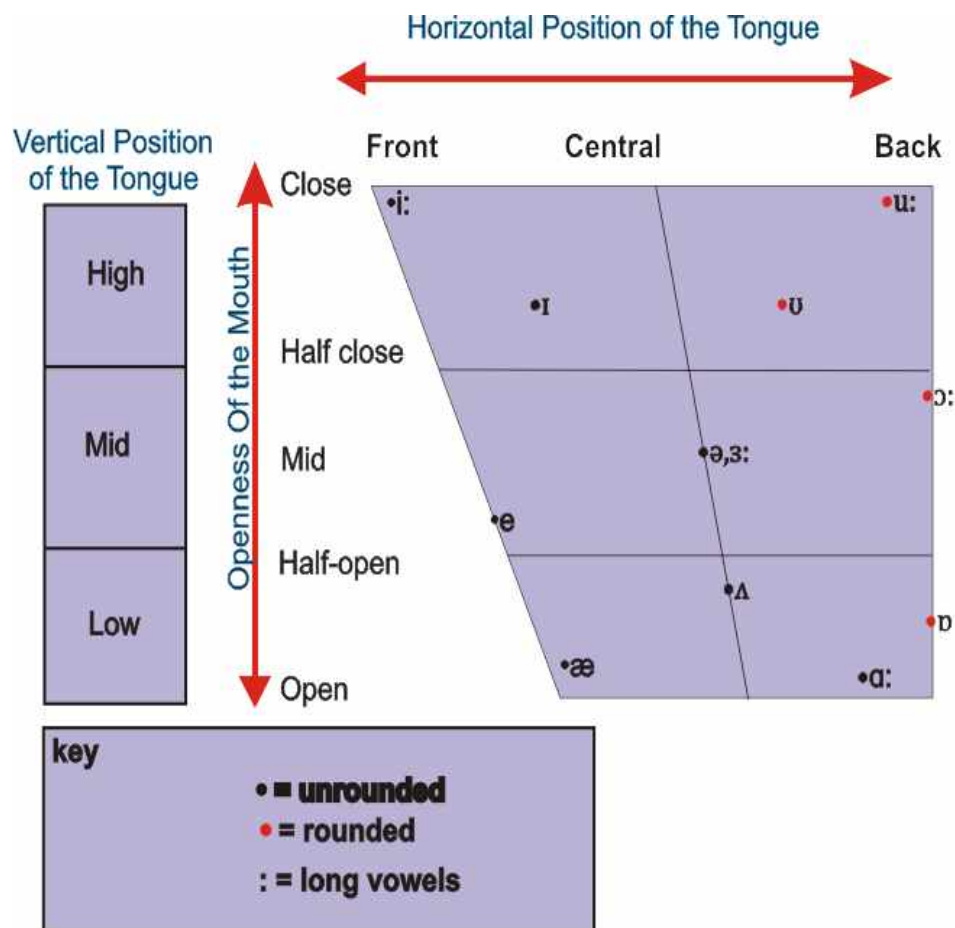


Figure 1. Parameters for describing English monophthongs (Stephen 2018)

In phonetics, the distinguishing features of vowel sounds encompass several dimensions, such as the tongue's position, frontness or backness, lip quality or rounding, and tenseness. These features are essential in classifying vowels, especially monophthongs, based on articulatory differences.

Remembering these factors before learning English is essential for Czech EFL learners, as there are differences between Czech and English vowel articulation. " In Czech, the tip of the tongue is almost always in contact with the mouth's lower teeth,

gums, or soft parts. In English, this is never the case; the tongue tip is free, directed upwards, and rarely touches the floor of the mouth. The tongue must be moved away from the lower incisors from its resting position. Only then can we begin to articulate any English sound." (Melen 2010, 15) Also, it is worth noting that the characteristics of vowel sounds can vary significantly between different dialects.

1.4.2 Czech versus English Vowel Sounds

As previously discussed, British English consists of twelve pure vowel sounds. When studying vowels, students usually encounter the fundamental division of vowels into short and long sounds. However, it is advisable to look at this division differently and consider not only the length in terms of Czech short and long vowels but also other aspects.

Melen comments that length and articulation play integral roles in the realm of vowels. Unlike Czech, English vowels do not exhibit a fundamental contrast between short and long vowels. In English, the predominant distinguishing factor for vowels lies in their precise articulation rather than their length. The relative nature of a vowel's length contributes to its variation in different contexts. The categorisation of vowels into short and long assumes a similar contextual comparison, as demonstrated by words such as *beat* and *bit* or *bead* and *bid*. (2010, 12-15)

He is also in agreement with Karásková (2016, 3-38) as he states that "The relative length of English vowels does not fit into the structure of the Czech vocal system, in Czech, there are ten simple vowels (a, e, i, o, u, á, é, í, ó, ú) ..." (Melen 2010, 13)

1.5 THE PHONEME /ɜ:/

The target of this thesis is the phoneme /ɜ:/, one of the pure vowel phonemes known as the NURSE vowel /ɜ:/, sometimes introduced informally as "the hesitation sound" (Roach 2009, 17). It is an open-mid, central, unrounded vowel, often classified as a long vowel.

Long vowels commonly manifest in stressed syllables, exhibiting prolonged duration and typically entailing alterations in tongue height, shape, position, and lip posture as compared to short vowels. Cruttenden, in agreement with Roach, notes: "Only in the case of /ɜ:/-/ə/ can there be said to exist an opposition solely of length and even in this case it has to be stated that /ə/ occurs only in unaccented syllables, whereas /ɜ:/ can occur in syllables carrying primary or secondary accent." (Cruttenden 2008, 95; Roach 2009, 16)

As we can see in the Figure below, to produce this vowel, our tongue is quite low in a flat position and in the centre of the mouth while our lips are stretched out a bit but relaxed and not rounded. In contrast with Czech /ě/, we can feel tension in our throats.

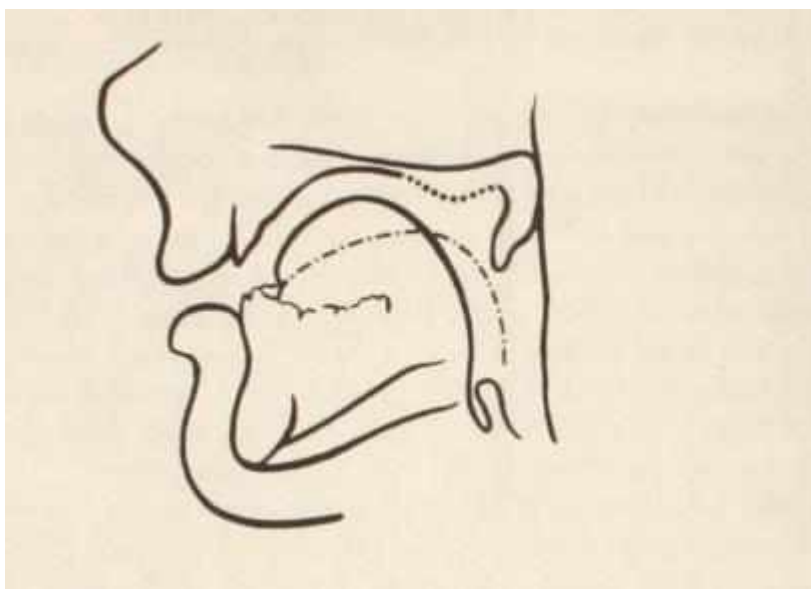


Figure 2: The articulation of the phoneme /ɜ:/ (Skaličková 1998, 96)

A few English words start with this sound, like *early*, *earn*, *irk*, and end with this sound, such as *occur* or *fur*. According to Pavlík, this monophthong appears in all positions in words. (2000, 70)

Although /ɜ:/ is classified as a long vowel sound, there can be a slightly reduced form. Cruttenden gives examples of reduced /ɜ/ and of long /ɜ:/ pairs them to notice the difference (2008, 129):

Table 2. Examples of reduced /ɜ/ and of long /ɜ:/ in pairs

/ɜ:/	[ɜ]
curd	Curt
heard	Hurt
surge	Search
purrs	Purse
Thursday	Thirsty
serve	Surf

(adapted from Cruttenden 2008, 129, and turned into a table)

Cruttenden states that /ɜ:/ as in *learn* /lɜ:n/ is often given in contrast with schwa /ə/ as in *bottom* /'bɒt. əm/ and explains that the sound /ɜ:/ is distinct from all other vowel sounds. Since it is the only emphasised vowel in the central area, there is a lot of variation in how it is pronounced, ranging from close/mid to open/mid. Variants of /ɜ:/ are to be shown in Figure 3. The phonetic quality of the long vowel /ɜ:/ often aligns closely with that of the schwa sound /ə/ when the sole difference lies in their length. The long vowel /ɜ:/ frequently occurs in accented syllables, whereas the schwa /ə/ is typically found in unaccented syllables, potentially indicating that these two vowels could be considered as allophones of the same phoneme, with one being accented and the other

unaccented. /ɜ:/ as in *learn* /lɜ:n/ is often given in contrast with schwa /ə/ as in *bottom* /'bɒt.əm/. Yet there are specific instances where /ɜ:/ cannot be reduced to /ə/, such as in the minimal pair of *foreword* /'fɔ:.wɜ:d/ and *forward* /'fɔ:.wəd/ or there is not a reduced form of *turn* /tɜ:n/. However, it is important to be aware of the presence of weakened alternatives to /ɜ:/, as observed in words like *her*, *sir*, and *were*. (2008, 130)

Cruttenden adds: "In most cases /ɜ:/ is derived from an earlier sequence of vowel plus /r/ and in General American and in south-west England this shows up in r-colouring of this vowel, often symbolized as [r]." (2008, 130)

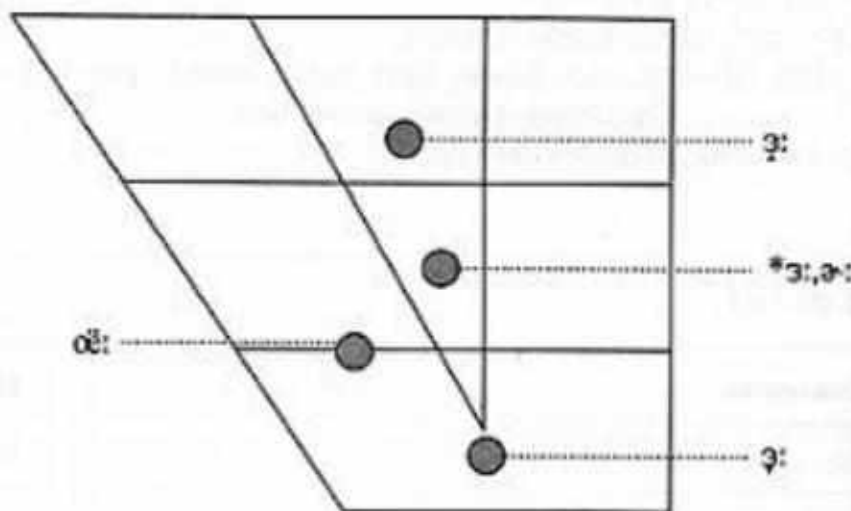


Figure 22. Variants of /ɜ:/.

Figure 3. Variants of /ɜ:/ (Cruttenden 2008, 130)

For an EFL teacher, paying attention to developments in the English language might be necessary. For instance, Cruttenden discusses the ongoing changes in the English language that have occurred over the past 70 years but have not been uniformly accepted by all speakers. Some of these changes have nearly completed and involve pronunciations that are now typical among the vast majority of speakers of General RP. And he adds,

"The diphthong /eə/ is realised monophthongally as /ɜ:/, e.g. *fare* and *tear* as [fɜ:] and [tɜ:]." (2008, 80) In dictionaries, for example, in the Cambridge Dictionary, the transcription given is still the one with the diphthong /feər/ or /teər/, despite this fact. (Dictionary, Cambridge 2024)

1.6 DIFFICULTIES FOR CZECH EFL LEARNERS WITH /ɜ:/'

If it is not for auditory discrimination and articulation, what causes the problem to Czech EFL learners with the phoneme /ɜ:/'?

Melen, Skaličková and Karásková agree that in Czech there is no exact equivalent sound for the phoneme /ɜ:/. (Melen 2010, 20; Skaličková 1998, 96; Karásková 2016, 22). Among these three individuals, Karásková delves more deeply into the challenges Czech EFL learners face regarding this particular phoneme. She also asserts that Czechs generally do not encounter challenges with this phoneme and identifies the problem lying more "in understanding when to articulate /ɜ:/' as is often represented by two graphemes, the second being <r>. Particularly confusing are words beginning with <wor> such as *work*, *worse*, *world*. In one Czech commercial for the electronics retailer Electroworld customers are encouraged to buy online at ['elektrovort], where the English would be [e'lektrɔ 'wɜ:ld]." (2016, 22-23)

Karásková shows that Czech speakers struggle with English words that are spelt differently from how they are pronounced; specifically, <ur> would be pronounced as [a:r] or [e]. Also, some EFL learners might have problems with the combination of <ir> that should be pronounced as the phoneme /ɜ:/. (2016, 22-23)

The /ɜ:/' bears similarity to the schwa sound /ə/, but it is of longer duration. Care must be taken to avoid sounds similar to the German /ö/. Czech EFL learners might find the following letter combinations helpful in producing this sound: <er>, <ir>, <ur>, <yr>,

<ear>, <or>, and, exceptionally, <our>. (Skaličková 1998, 96) There are even more exceptions, such as colonel /'kɜ:.nəl/ as shown in the lesson, or another example could be *milieu* /mi:l'jɜ:/.

Moreover, a word containing the /ɜ:/ sound can be shortened when influenced by a following voiceless consonant. For instance, we observe a reduction in the word *hurt* when it is followed by the voiceless consonant <t>, and its long form is evident in the word *heard* when the voiced consonant <d> follows. (Melen 2010, 20-21) Figure 4 shows the spellings of the /ɜ:/ sound presented in Cruttenden (2008, 129).

Spellings of /ɜ:/			
	Examples	TF	LF
er,err	her, serve, err, perfect, serve	39%	54%
ur,urr	turn, church, nurse, purr, cursor, fur, burn, urge, curt, hurt, surge, purse, Thursday, curl	24%	24%
ir,irr	sir, bird, first, girl, thirsty	18%	11%
yr,yrr	myrtle, myrrh		
w + or	word, world, work, worse, worst, worth	4%	17%
ear	earth, heard, search, earl	8%	4%
our	journey, courtesy, scourge		
Note	colonel, milieu		

Figure 4. Spelling of /ɜ:/ (Cruttenden 2008, 129)

O'Connor comments /ɜ:/ might sound "rather vague and indistinct to the foreign learner", and he gives the advice to "keep your teeth quite close together and do not round your lips at all - smile when you say it." (1980, 82)

Furthermore, he discusses the challenges that foreign speakers may encounter with this particular phoneme. He points out that foreign speakers may replace this phoneme with a similar sound from their native language that includes lip rounding, yet it does not resemble any other English vowel. Additionally, they may substitute the /ɜ:/ phoneme

with /ɑ:/, potentially leading to confusion, as observed in words such as *hurt* and *heart* (1980, 82).

Roach also states that many learners find the phoneme /ɜ:/ difficult to imitate. (2009, 17) According to Melen, it is not feasible to compare Czech and English pairs of words for this particular sound because there is no sound equivalent in Czech. (2010, 21)

1.7 CONTRASTED PHONEMES

For the purposes of this work, the students were given the words in contrast with a word differing in one phoneme. This is called a minimal pair, as only one phoneme differs.

In books such as "Ship and Sheep", an intermediate pronunciation course by Ann Baker (2006, 43), the sound /ɜ:/ is only contrasted with the phoneme /ɔ:/. However, I chose the following five phonemes to show the contrast as they are frequently used and because I had noticed that EFL learners often struggle with the pronunciation within their range, not only with the /ɔ:/. I deliberately stuck to these five sounds to avoid overwhelming students with too much information right from the start. My goal was to gradually help students understand the /ɜ:/ phoneme. Later in the lesson, more contrast information was added.

Here are some examples of a few words in minimal pairs that might be mispronounced:

1. /ɔ:/ in contrast with /ɜ:/ as in *walk* and *work*
2. /æ/ in contrast with /ɜ:/ as in *fan* and *fern*
3. /ʌ/ in contrast with /ɜ:/ as in *hut* and *hurt*

4. /e/ in contrast with /ɜ:/ as in *peck* and *perk*
5. /ɑ:/ in contrast with /ɜ:/ as in *bath* and *birth*

The complete lists of minimal pairs used in this work are in Chapter 1.10 and Chapter 2.4.2.

2 ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is a research method designed to both explore and address a problem simultaneously. As the name implies, it involves conducting research and implementing actions concurrently. This term was introduced in 1944 by Kurt Lewin, a professor at MIT. Known for its interactive nature, action research is frequently utilised in the social sciences, especially within educational environments. It is particularly favoured by educators as a structured form of inquiry, emphasising reflection and effectively connecting theoretical concepts with practical applications. Participatory action research stresses the importance of involving community members in the research process and empowering those directly impacted by the research outcomes. (Scribbr 2024)

In this approach, participants act as co-researchers, with their lived experiences playing a crucial role in shaping the research. This thesis was developed as part of the Phonetics and Morphology courses LI1BE and LI2BE in the 2022/23 academic year. This segment was specifically designed for the course participants who were embarking on their journey to become teachers and had just started their phonetics course. It provided a valuable opportunity to create a lesson on the phoneme /ɜ:/ that could also benefit future students in subsequent years.

2.1 THE MAIN AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The main aim of the research was to use audio exercises to train Czech EFL learners in recognizing words containing the monophthong /ɜ:/. The goal was to help students who might not have been aware of the importance of the spelling context to recognize words that are pronounced with the phoneme /ɜ:/. Based on the literature and my teaching

experience, I created an outline of different phases with the main goal of preparing a self-study lesson that would help the participants better understand this particular sound.

This participatory research project was structured into distinct stages: the preparation of words, a diagnostic test, a lesson, and a questionnaire. Based on the results of the diagnostic tests and the gathered information, a lesson was developed and carried out with a focus on the phoneme /ɜ:/. Following the lesson, students were given a questionnaire to encourage independent reflection on their knowledge and views, as well as to assess their perception of the importance of phonemes in the learning process and to evaluate the phonics lesson they had completed.

Overall, the project aimed to enhance the students' phonetic awareness and improve their pronunciation skills through targeted audio exercises and self-reflection.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

In my study of auditory discrimination, there were four phases of research.

During the initial phase (Chapter 2.3.1), a list of words and minimal pairs containing the phoneme /ɜ:/ was compiled. This initial list consisted of words in minimal pairs and was supplemented with simple sentences that incorporated these words in a natural context. To ensure accuracy, the paired words and sentences were recorded by Mgr. Nicola S. Karásková, M.A, a British English native speaker and my thesis supervisor.

In the second phase (Chapter 2.3), an online diagnostic test was created using the Moodle platform. Moodle is a free and open-source learning management system, allowing students to access the test at any time during a specified period, thereby having full control over their learning experience. The aim of the diagnostic test was to

investigate the challenges encountered by Czech EFL learners in distinguishing the monophthong /ɜ:/. The hypothesis was that these learners would not encounter significant difficulties, and the test sought to either confirm or refute this assumption. The voice recordings provided by Mgr. Nicola S. Karásková; M.A. were segmented into individual words.

In the third phase (Chapter 2.4), a lesson on the phoneme /ɜ:/ was designed based on the diagnostic test and literature findings. This lesson, which was the primary focus of the research, aimed at helping undergraduate students differentiate the sound /ɜ:/ and gain a deeper understanding of this phoneme. It was also created on the Moodle platform for easy access. Since the lesson was not confined to the classroom, students could study and review exercises at their own pace based on their individual needs and preferences during a specified period.

In the fourth phase, a supplementary questionnaire comprising nine questions was developed to complement the lesson on the phoneme /ɜ:/ as an integral component of the lesson. Not all students who took the lesson completed the questionnaire, but enough data was gathered. The findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.5.1.

Both the diagnostic test and the lesson were intended for first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the course LI1BE and later in LI2BE, training to be teachers, whose first language is not English. As they will serve as role models for their own learners, the awareness of phoneme-grapheme correspondence and letter combinations is considered essential.

In the subsequent term, my supervisor asked me to deliver the lesson to support the students who commenced their studies in 2023. The lesson was made available to them in the winter semester of 2023. I incorporated the findings into Appendix 3.

2.3 A DIAGNOSTIC TEST

The assessment aimed to explore how well undergraduate students at the Pedagogical Faculty of the Technical University of Liberec in the Czech Republic can distinguish the phoneme /ɜ:/. The main objective was to answer the question, "What mistakes do Czech students make in recognising pronunciation and spelling the respective words (minimal pairs) when one of the words in a minimal pair contains the sound /ɜ:/?" This question formed the crux of my action research. I wanted to determine if the students were able to distinguish between similar sounds without relying on minimal pairs, which could provide more instructive insights.

Based on my and my colleagues' teaching experience and information from the literature, I assumed that the students would not have a problem distinguishing this sound in auditory form. The literature does not indicate that /ɜ:/ is problematic for Czech EFL learners.

To test this assumption, the words were shuffled and not presented as minimal pairs during the assessment. In Figures 5 to 7, tasks are shown as they were followed in one of the diagnostic tests, and it is evident that the words are mixed. An option, "I am not sure," was included in case the students did not know which word they heard.

By conducting this assessment, I hoped to gain deeper insights into the specific challenges Czech students face in auditory discrimination and to identify any patterns in their mistakes.

Úloha 3
Správně
Bodů 1,00 / 1,00
Úloha s vlajčičkou
Upravit úlohu

a. I am not sure.
b. bust
c. burst ✓

Vaše odpověď je správná.
Správná odpověď je: burst.

Figure 5. An example from a diagnostic test

Úloha 4
Nesprávně
Bodů 0,00 / 1,00
Úloha s vlajčičkou
Upravit úlohu

a. hurl
b. I am not sure.
c. hull ✗

Vaše odpověď je chybná.
Správná odpověď je: hurl.

Figure 6. An example from a diagnostic test

Úloha 5
Správně
Bodů 1,00 / 1,00
Úloha s vlajčičkou
Upravit úlohu

a. ban ✓
b. burn
c. I am not sure.

Vaše odpověď je správná.
Správná odpověď je: ban.

Figure 7: An example from a diagnostic test

There were 86 recordings, including 50 isolated words and 36 sentences. However, only 60 recordings were used for the diagnostic test. Ultimately, I decided to include just 10 sentences. This decision was influenced by the challenge of finding suitable sentences with nearly identical words that differed only by a specific phoneme while maintaining the sequence of words in minimal pairs, as in Task 1 - 50. After evaluating the results, I concluded that adding more sentences would be beneficial and provide further valuable information for future research.

This diagnostic test was developed in the Moodle environment at the Technical University for students to use online. Voice recordings, provided by a British native

speaker, were divided into individual words and subsequently integrated into the Moodle platform.

Test participants were undergraduate students of the Department of English at TUL in their first year who enrolled in the LIIBE course. Testing took place in the winter semester of the academic year 2022/23.

2.3.1 A Diagnostic Test: A List of Minimal Pairs and Sentences with the Phoneme /ɜ:/

To conduct the diagnostic test, I began by assembling a list of words in minimal pairs, focusing on a specific phoneme, namely /ɜ:/. The list consisted of fifty words in minimal pairs, as shown in Table 3. Some words appear more than once. The graphemes leading to /ɜ:/ are highlighted in red for a better overview.

Table 3. A list of recorded minimal pairs used in the diagnostic test

10 words contrasting /æ /and /ɜ:/			
1. tan	/tæn/	2. turn	/tɜ:n/
3. ban	/bæn/	4. burn	/bɜ:n/
5. fan	/fæn/	6. fern	/fɜ:n/
7. cat	/kæt/	8. cut	/kɜ:t/
9. hat	/hæt/	10. hurt	/hɜ:t/
10 words contrasting /ʌ/ and /ɜ:/			
11. bust	/bʌst/	12. burst	/bɜ:st/
13. hut	/hʌt/	14. hurt	/hɜ:t/
15. hull	/hʌl/	16. hurl	/hɜ:l/
17. fun	/fʌn/	18. fern	/fɜ:n/
19. gull	/gʌl/	20. girl	/gɜ:l/

10 words contrasting /e/ and /ɜ:/			
21. ten	/ten/	22. turn	/tɜ:n/
23. edge	/edʒ/	24. urge	/ɜ:dʒ/
25. head	/hed/	26. heard	/hɜ:d/
27. peck	/pek/	28. perk	/pɜ:k/
29. debt	/det/	30. dirt	/dɜ:t/
10 words contrasting /ɔ:/ and /ɜ:/			
31. hoard	/hɔ:d/	32. heard	/hɜ:d/
33. ward	/wɔ:d/	34. word	/wɜ:d/
35. walk	/wɔ:k/	36. work	/wɜ:k/
37. Nurse	/nɔ:s/	38. nurse	/nɜ:s/
39. horse	/hɔ:s/	40. hearse	/hɜ:s/
10 words contrasting /ɑ:/ and /ɜ:/			
41. bath	/bɑ:θ/	42. berth	/bɜ:θ/
43. far	/fɑ:/	44. fir	/'fɜ:/
45. hard	/hɑ:d/	46. heard	/hɜ:d/
47. heart	/hɑ:t/	48. hurt	/hɜ:t/
49. cart	/kɑ:t/	50. curt	/kɜ:t/

(created by the author)

In the final analysis, only ten sentences shown in Table 4 were utilised to keep the diagnostic test length manageable, even though a full list of all recorded sentences is enclosed in Appendix 2. This decision was also influenced by the challenge of finding appropriate words in sentences that would be nearly identical, differing only in terms of a specific phoneme, and following the sequence of the individual words in minimal pairs above.

In Table 4, the sentences in column 1 contain a word in a minimal pair with the word in column 2, following the same pattern as in the previous set of exercises above.

The focus was to distinguish the phoneme in a larger context - a sentence. The contrasted words in Table 4 are highlighted in blue for better recognition.

Table 4. A list of 10 sentences with minimal pairs used in the diagnostic test

1. It's a nice tan .	2. It's a nice turn .
3. That's blood .	4. That's blurred .
5. It's the fast rule.	6. It's the first rule.
7. Look at it, Ben .	8. Look at it burn .
9. It's a " torn " sign.	10. It's a " turn " sign.

(created by the author)

2.3.2 Results - Findings and Analysis

All the students completed the diagnostic test with minimal instances of skipped answers. I checked regularly to ensure completeness, and the very few unanswered items were attributed to oversight and considered unintentional errors.

91 participants took part in the diagnostic test, with two excluded because their submissions lacked answers completely. Thus, 89 participants were counted in the evaluation.

Out of the 5,340 responses, 5,254 were correct, which is 98 per cent. Only 86 answers were incorrect. Additionally, 37 responses included the phrase "I am not sure," and 14 questions were skipped. The data presented in the following column charts has been converted into percentages for clarity and better visualisation of the results.

The data depicted in the charts show that participants encountered minimal difficulty distinguishing the /ɜ:/ sound from the other five monophthongs (see Figures 8 and 9).

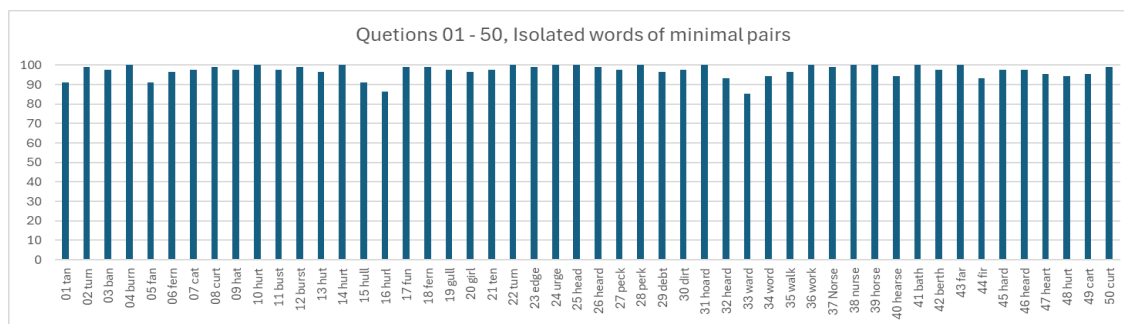


Figure 8. The diagnostic test success rate in percentage, minimal pairs, isolated words 1-50

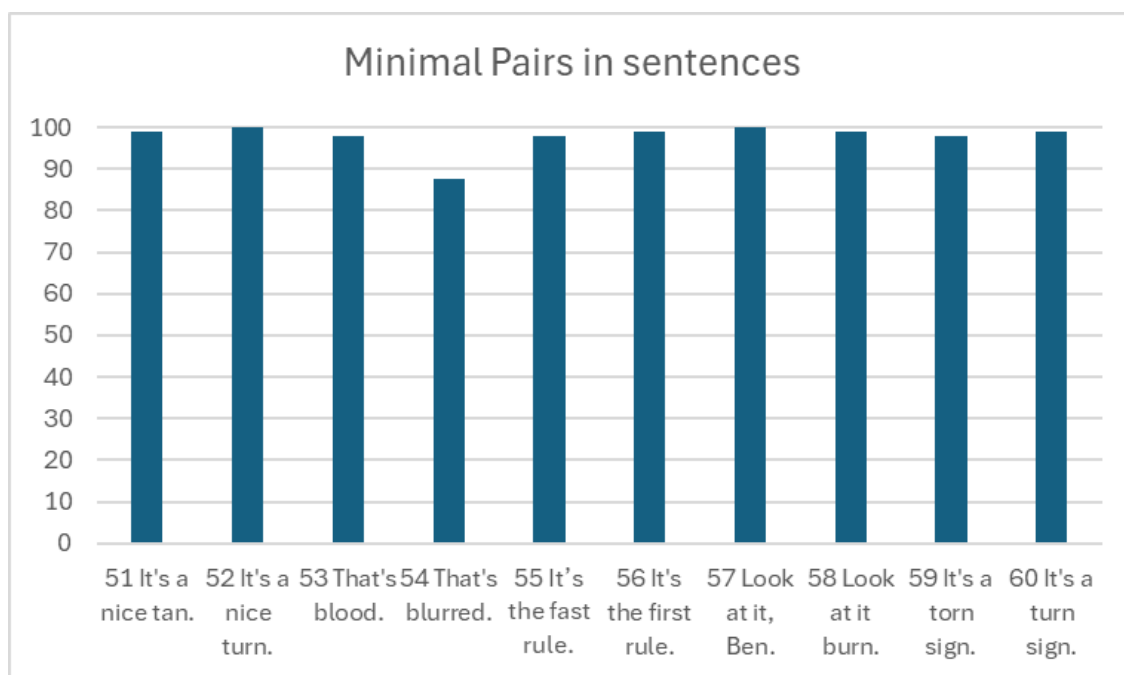


Figure 9. The diagnostic test success rate in percentage, minimal pairs in sentences 51 - 60

This finding is consistent not only for isolated words but also for words within sentences. There were only a few slightly problematic words, specifically *tan* /tæn/, *fan* /fæn/, *hull* /hʌl/ , *hurl* /hɜ:l/, *ward* /wɔ:d/ and *blurred* /blɜ:d/. Notably, among the words observed, only two contain the phoneme /ɜ:/. Several reasons might explain why students have difficulty distinguishing this phoneme. Firstly, it could stem from a lack of comprehension of the word's meaning. Another factor might be their unawareness of the letter combination leading to /ɜ:/, or they might have difficulty with other phonemes besides /ɜ:/. It is important to mention that this hypothesis is mine;

however, it is informed by the work of Pavlik and Bojo on shallow and deep orthographies. (2023, 24-25) Their research highlights potential challenges faced by EFL learners coming from shallow orthographic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the responses clearly show no significant issues with auditory discrimination related to the specific phoneme in question.

The positive results indicate that Czech EFL learners were largely successful in distinguishing the /ɜ:/ sound, demonstrating their strong auditory discrimination skills. Given the excellent results of the diagnostic test regarding the differentiation of this sound, I began to consider other potential sources of difficulty associated with this particular phoneme. Consequently, I started developing a lesson plan aimed at exposing students to various words to enhance their understanding of pronunciation and to identify specific letter combinations that correspond with /ɜ:/.

2.4 THE LESSON ON THE PHONEME /ɜ:/

The lesson in question, as previously indicated was developed based on the observation and assumption that students generally do not encounter difficulties in distinguishing between /ɜ:/ and the respective monophthongs. However, based on my own and my fellow teachers' teaching experience, I assumed that a lack of understanding of the letter combinations leading to /ɜ:/ may be the reason why some EFL learners mispronounce /ɜ:/ words. In designing the lesson, I took into consideration the various ways in which students receive and process information, including visual, typographic and auditory methods. I aimed to incorporate all these aspects to cater to different types of learners, even though it might result in a longer and more laborious lesson.

Given that the primary objective of this thesis is to use audio exercises to instruct Czech EFL learners in the identification of words containing the monophthong /ɜ:/, the lesson preparation began.

In the initial stages, I developed a lesson comprising three parts. Upon reflection, I deemed it necessary to enhance the lesson by incorporating additional sets of exercises and informational parts to ensure its comprehensiveness. This whole process of structuring and preparing the lesson also involved some research, including viewing numerous instructional videos (BBC Learning English 2013; English Language Club 2014; Lean English Pronunciation 2023) and assimilating various educational resources available online (PRA English 2021; Shepherd 2021; Underhill and Adrian 2013).

My tutor, Mgr. Nicola S. Karásková, M.A, asked me to inform the participants that this phoneme might be tested in both the credit tests and oral exams of the LI1BE or LI2BE course. I also encouraged students to revisit the lesson as many times as necessary to ensure full comprehension; however, no one took advantage of this option. As some people have problems with the Moodle platform technology, I suspected there might be some technical problems, so I, therefore, remained available to assist them with submitting the lesson via my email address. There were a few students who struggled, mostly with the test submission or skipped the questionnaire.

Overall, the lesson was designed to be thorough and accommodating, ensuring that students could grasp the nuances of the /ɜ:/ phoneme and apply this understanding in their future studies and assessments. The lesson was successfully repeated for a second group of students during the winter semester in their LI1BE course for phoneme practice, demonstrating its effectiveness as teaching material. The positive results and feedback from this repetition are illustrated in the output graphs provided in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

2.4.1 The Lesson Structure

The lesson was divided into ten subparts, out of which four were introductory or explanatory parts and six of them were special sets of exercises prepared on the Moodle platform for easy access to be completed within their Phonetics and Morphology Course LI1BE. On Moodle "The Lesson activity allows teachers to create 'branching' exercises where students are presented with content and then, depending on their responses, are directed to specific pages. The content may be text or multimedia." (Moodle 2024) The complete lesson is enclosed in Appendix 6. The lists of recorded and used words are in Chapter 2.4.2.

2.4.1.1 1st part, Introduction

The lesson was divided into ten parts, four of which were introductory or explanatory and six of which were special sets of exercises.

At the start of the lesson, I delivered an introduction to the phoneme and outlined the objective of the lesson, which was to direct the students' attention to the specific phoneme /ɜ:/ and its corresponding spelling patterns in order to avoid mispronunciation of commonly challenging words such as *curse* or *worm*. Another aim was mentioned that the lesson is also to enhance the students' accuracy in English pronunciation. Two freely available YouTube videos were included: a video introducing the phoneme /ɜ:/ and a video with a tongue twister. *A warm worm walks to work* focusing on the contrast between /ɜ:/ and /ɔ:/. (BBC Learning English. "English Pronunciation: Long Vowel - /ɜ:/ - 'nurse', 'stir' and 'learn'." 2013; Shepherd 2021)

THE LONG VOWEL /ɜ:/

This is a lesson on the phoneme /ɜ:/. Afterwards, complete the set of exercises.
 The goal of this lesson is to draw your attention to this phoneme and its spelling patterns so that you will not mispronounce "typically problematic" words such as *curse* /kɜ:s/ or *worm* /wɜ:m/. In short, the aim is to help you improve the accuracy of your English pronunciation.
 (This phoneme appears in some Credit Test questions. There may also be a question on this long vowel in the L128E oral exam).

You will be able to see your results immediately. You will also be able to re-attempt this exercise as many times as you like.
 This work is also part of my bachelor's thesis. I would like to thank you in advance for your participation.
 If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact **Ivona Batková** (ivona.batkova@tul.cz).

Figure 10. 1st part, Lesson, Introduction, Moodle

To gradually challenge the learners, I incorporated more difficult words into the lesson, believing this would help them progress to broader knowledge in a gradual and effective manner. Some words repeat several times in different sets.

2.4.1.2 2nd part, Questions 01 - 40

In the first set of the exercises, 40 words were used to form minimal pairs. These pairs were presented to students, who were required to choose the word they heard with a third option "I don't know", replicating the process of a diagnostic test. The objective of this phase was to present the words in a minimal pair and have them heard sequentially, enabling participants to discern the distinctions between them.

The screenshot displays two Moodle questions, labeled 'Question 1' and 'Question 2'. Each question is titled 'Which word do you hear?' and includes a media player for audio playback. The audio player shows a progress bar and a volume icon. Below the audio player, there are three radio button options: 'a. burnt', 'b. bent', and 'c. I am not sure'. A 'Check' button is located at the bottom of each question's interface. The questions are marked as 'Not complete' and 'Marked out of 1.00'.


Figure 11. 2nd part, Lesson, Questions 01 - 40, Moodle

2.4.1.3 3rd part, Questions 41 - 62

In the second part, a set of 20 tasks was developed without the "I am not sure." alternative. Instead, images were incorporated alongside the words and minimal pairs to enhance the clarity of word meanings and facilitate better memorization through visualisation.

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear:

STORE



STIR




Figure 12. 3rd part, Lesson, Questions 41 - 62, Moodle

2.4.1.4 4th part, Questions 63-84

In the third set of 22 exercises, the participants were shown a word and then had to decide if the word given was what they had heard choosing the option true or false. This variant of the exercise was created to be more challenging than the matching in the previous sets of exercises.

The word you hear is "curd". True or false?

true

false

Check

The word you hear is "cord". True or false?

true

false

Check

Figure 13. 4th part, Lesson, Questions 63 - 84, Moodle

2.4.1.5 5th part, Questions 85 - 104

In the fourth section of the lesson, students were tasked with writing the word they had heard. Again, the 20 words were put in minimal pairs to follow the previous pattern and to let the learners practise the difference between the words in both pronunciation and spelling.

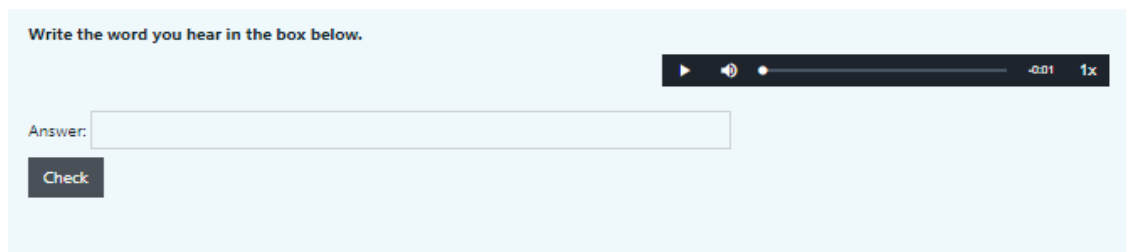


Figure 14. 5th part, Lesson, Questions 85 - 104, Moodle

2.4.1.6 6th part, Questions 105 - 128

In this fifth section, there were a total of 24 words, the majority of which were presented as minimal pairs. Examples of minimal pairs included *horde*, *hard*, and *heard*, but also words such as *Murphy* and *early*, which do not form minimal pairs but are frequently mispronounced. The task was to choose the correct phonemic transcription based on the listening.

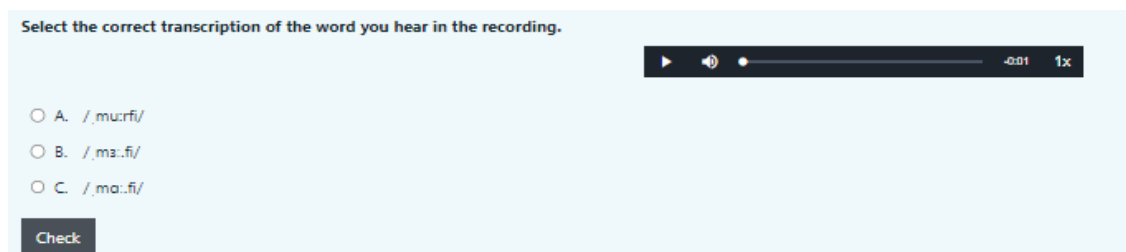


Figure 15. 6th part, Lesson, Questions 105 - 128, Moodle

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.

○ A. /hɑ:d/

○ B. /hs:d/

○ C. /hɑ:d/

Check

Figure 16: 6th part - Lesson, Questions 105 - 128, Moodle

2.4.1.7 7th part, Explanation of the phoneme /ɜ:/

After this, I added an explanation of the phoneme /ɜ:/ and supplemented it with a video to help students practise the pronunciation of individual words. The students were encouraged to pronounce the words out loud and record themselves.

This lesson is prepared for the purpose of recognising the phoneme /ɜ:/ in words based on their phonetic environment.

What is the monophthong /ɜ:/?

One of the pure vowel sounds is the /ɜ:/ sound. It is an open-mid, central, unrounded vowel. To produce this vowel, our tongue is quite low in a flat position and in the centre of the mouth while our lips are stretched out a bit, but relaxed and not rounded. Not many words in English start or end with this sound but there are a few like *early*, *earn*, *irish*, and at the end of *occur* /ə'kʌr/.

Watch the following video about the phoneme /ɜ:/ and practise saying the words aloud.

Figure 17. 7th part, Lesson, Explanation of the phoneme /ɜ:/, Moodle

Subsequently, I explained that the upcoming exercises would help them recognize /ɜ:/ based on the letter combination.

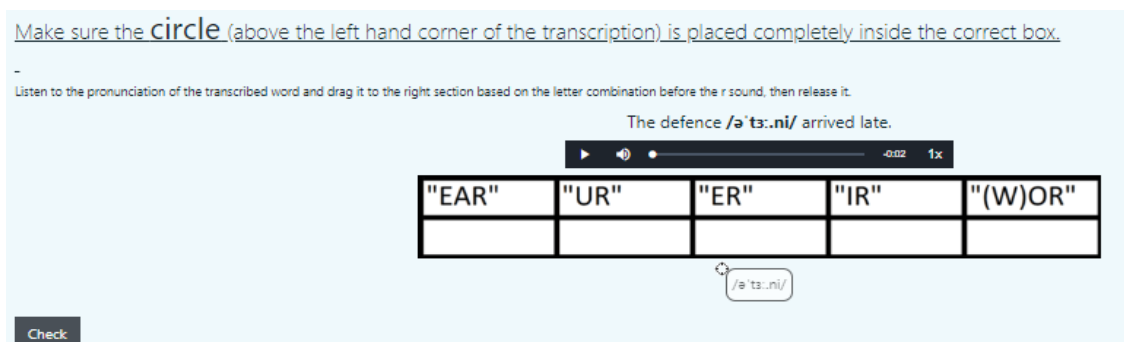
2.4.1.8 8th part, Questions 129 - 158

In the sixth section, the participants were presented with five sets of letter combinations leading to the phoneme /ɜ:/ and 30 words. Each word in phonemic transcription was incorporated into a sentence, and a recording of the word was provided. The students were tasked to place the phonemically transcribed word into the corresponding column. They received the instructions that the circle should be completely inside the drop zone.

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

The defence /ə'tɜː.ni/ arrived late.



Check

Figure 18. 8th part - Lesson, Questions 129 - 158, Moodle

2.4.1.9 9th part, Letter combination and additional information

In the penultimate part of the lesson, I suggested the participants had probably concluded that the sound /ɜː/ appears before the letter <r> and that there is a simple tip on how to identify it depending on a phonetic context - a letter combination and I displayed the letter combinations with words as examples and showed other combinations resulting in the phoneme /ɜː/ such as <our> as in *journalist* /dʒɜː.nə.lɪst/ or *courtesy* /kɜː.təsi/, <eur> as in *entrepreneur* /ɒn.trəprənɜː/ and <yr> as in *myrtle* /mɜː.təl/, *myrrh* /mɜːr/. For the shown letter combinations see Table 5 below.

Table 5. A list of letter combinations leading to /ɜː/

<ear>	learn	/lɜːn/
<ir>	firm	/fɜːm/
<ur>	curtain	/'kɜː.tən/
<er>	refer	/rɪ'fɜːr/
<or>	word	/wɜːd/
<our>	journalist	/dʒɜː.nə.lɪst/
<eur>	entrepreneur	/ɒn.trəprənɜː/
<yr>	myrtle	/mɜː.təl/

(created by the author)

There are also other letter combinations. Look at the other letter combinations, listen to the recording and practise saying it aloud. You can also see the word transcribed.

"OU"

journalist /dʒɜː.nəl.ɪst/

▶ 🔊 ⏪ ⏩ -0:01 1x

courtesy /kɜː.tə.si/

▶ 🔊 ⏪ ⏩ -0:01 1x

"EU"

entrepreneur /ˌɒn.tre.prəˈnɜːz/

▶ 🔊 ⏪ ⏩ -0:02 1x

By now you have probably concluded, that the sound /ɜː/ appears before the letter "r" and that there is a simple tip how to identify it depending on a phonetic context - a letter combination:

EAR learn, pearl
 IR firm, first
 UR curtain, urge
 ER germ, refer
 OR word, work

"YR" combination leading to /ɜː/ sound:

YR myrtle /ˈmɜː.təl/, myrrh /mɜːr/

The combination "OUR" and "EUR" leading to /ɜː/ sound:

OUR journalist, courtesy
 EUR entrepreneur, connoisseur

Figure 19. 9th part, Lesson, Letter combination and additional information, Moodle

The learners were also instructed to be cautioned of a spelling anomaly with the word *colonel* /'kɜː.nəl/ meaning an officer of high rank in the army and the word *kernel* /'kɜː.nəl/ which could be the whole seed of the maize plant, or a softer, usually edible part of a nut, seed, or fruit stone contained within its shell; or the central part of something. And I explained that the word colonel is a homophone to the word kernel as they sound the same /'kɜː.nəl/, but have a different spelling and meaning. And I gave them more examples of homophones containing the vowel /ɜː/, for example, /bɜːθ/ for *birth* - *berth*, /ɜːn/ for *earn* - *urn*, /'fɜːr/ for *fir* - *fur*, /hɜːd/ for *heard* - *herd* and /tɜːn/ for *tern* - *turn*.

There is a spelling anomaly with the word colonel

“OL”

colonel /'kɔː.nəl/ = an officer of high rank in the army

kernel /'kɜː.nəl/ = the whole seed of the maize plant, a softer, usually edible part of a nut, seed, or fruit stone contained within its shell; the central part of something

The word *colonel* is a homophone to the word *kernel*. They sound the same /'kɜː.nəl/, but have a different spelling and meaning, therefore they are called homophones.

There are more homophones containing the vowel /ɜː/.
For example:

/bɜːθ/	birth - berth,
/ɜːn/	earn - urn,
/'fɜːt/	fir - fur,
/hɜːd/	heard - herd,
/'tɜːn/	tern - turn.

Figure 20. 9th part, Lesson, Letter combination and additional information, Moodle

At last, information was given that not always the letter combination shown has to be the /ɜː/ sound and it would be advisable to check the phonemic transcription in a dictionary and, for instance, *beard* /bɪəd/, *direct* /daɪ'rekt/, *bury* /'ber.i/, *serial* /'sɪə.ri.əl/, *lord* /lɔːd/. They were also notified to be aware of the strong and weak forms of certain words in pronunciation, specifically in the word *were*, where the strong form is /wɜː/ but the short form is /wə/ or the word *her* with a strong form /hɜː/ in contrast with the short form /hə/.

2.4.1.10 10th part, More Practice and a Questionnaire

In the tenth and final part, participants were given the option to engage in supplementary practice involving tongue twisters and songs, with an emphasis on the specific phoneme under study. Furthermore, they were asked to complete a questionnaire (Chapter 2.5).

Examples of tongue twisters with the phoneme /ɜː/ (Pra English 2021):

1. Birdie, birdie in the sky laid a turdie in my eye. If cows could fly,
I'd have a cow in my eye.
2. A turbot's not a burbot, for a turbot's a butt, but a burbot's not.

3. Three tree turtles took turns talking tongue twisters. If three tree turtles took turns talking tongue twisters, where's the twisters the three tree turtles talked?

Lastly, some essential practice before you earn your two points towards the Credit Test!
 Note: In the Credit Test there are transcription tasks where the word contains the phoneme /ɜ:/. In addition, you may be asked about this vowel in the Oral Exam

1) Watch this lesson on /ɜ:/ which includes some practice and a quiz at the end.
https://british.com/public/british_library/lesson_details.php?id=31

2) Say these tongue twisters to practise the sound /ɜ:/:



Figure 21. 10th part, Lesson, more practice - Tongue twisters (Pra English 2021)

2.4.2 Lists of Recorded Words for the Lesson

In the below subchapters lists of recorded and used words are shown with highlighted letter combinations leading to the phoneme /ɜ:/ in red.

2.4.2.1 A List of Words for Questions 01-40

In the initial section of the lesson, students were required to determine the correct word from a pair of minimal pairs—40 words altogether. They were presented with two options, and they chose the word they heard. If uncertain, they might have selected the "I am not sure" option.

Table 6. A List of recorded words for questions 01 – 40

1. bent	/bent/	2. burnt	/bɜ:nt/
3. Ben	/ben/	4. burn	/bɜ:n/
5. best	/best/	6. burst	/bɜ:st/

7. edge	/edʒ/	8. ur ge	/ɜːdʒ/
9. fest	/fest/	10. f irst	/fɜːst/
11. kennel	/kenəl/	12. k ernel	/kɜːnəl/
13. bust	/bʌst/	14. b urst	/bɜːst/
15. heart	/hɑːt/	16. h urt	/hɜːt/
17. farm	/fɑːm/	18. f irm	/fɜːm/
19. card	/kɑːd/	20. c urd	/kɜːd/
21. guard	/gɑːd/	22. g ird	/gɜːd/
23. sarge	/sɑːdʒ/	24. s urge	/sɜːdʒ/
25. tarp	/tɑːrps/	26. t urps	/tɜːps/
27. pall	/pɔːl/	28. p earl	/pɜːl/
29. sport	/spɔːt/	30. s purt	/spɜːt/
31. forth	/fɔːθ/	32. f irth	/fɜːθ/
33. gnawed	/nɔːd/	34. n erd	/nɜːd/
35. gourd	/gɔːd/	36. g ird	/gɜːd/
37. assorted	/ə'sɔːtɪd/	38. a sserted	/ə'sɜːtɪd/
39. hull	/hʌl/	40. h url	/hɜːl/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.2 A List of Words for Questions 41-63

During the latter section, specifically questions 41-63, students were presented with visuals accompanied by corresponding vocabulary and an audio recording. They were tasked with selecting the appropriate image and written word based on their interpretation of the recording. There were 22 words.

Table 7. A List of recorded words for questions 41 - 63

1. course	/kɔːs/	2. c urse	/kɜːs/
3. gull	/gʌl/	4. g irl	/gɜːl/
5. store	/stɔː/	6. s tir	/stɜː/

7. guard	/gɑ:d/	8. gird	/gɜ:d/
9. sport	/spɔ:t/	10. spurt	/spɜ:t/
11. warm	/wɔ:m/	12. worm	/wɜ:m/
13. bust	/bʌst/	14. burst	/bɜ:st/
15. edge	/edʒ/	16. urge	/ɜ:dʒ/
17. kennel	/'ken.əl/	18. kernel	/kɜ:nəl/
19. heart	/hɑ:t/	20. hurt	/hɜ:t/
21. pall	/pɔ:l/	22. pearl	/pɜ:l/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.3 A List of Words for Questions 63 - 84

In the next section, questions 63 - 84, participants were presented with a word and then determined whether they had heard the word based on the recording.

Table 8. A List of recorded words for questions 63 - 84

1. cord	/kɔ:d/	2. curd	/kɜ:d/
3. guard	/gɑ:d/	4. gird	/gɜ:d/
5. sarge	/sɑ:dʒ/	6. surge	/sɜ:dʒ/
7. sport	/spɔ:t/	8. spurt	/spɜ:t/
9. gnawed	/nɔ:d/	10. nerd	/nɜ:d/
11. assorted	/ə'sɔ:tɪd/	12. asserted	/ə'sɜ:tɪd/
13. cause	/kɔ:z/	14. curse	/kɜ:s/
15. warm	/wɔ:m/	16. worm	/wɜ:m/
17. edge	/edʒ/	18. urge	/ɜ:dʒ/
19. pall	/pɔ:l/	20. pearl	/pɜ:l/
21. best	/best/	22. burst	/bɜ:st/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.4 A List of Words for Questions 85 - 104

In questions 85 - 104, students were tasked with writing the word they heard.

Table 9. A List of recorded words for questions 85 - 104

1. tan	/tæn/	2. turn	/tɜ:n/
3. far	/fɑ:r/	4. fir	/fɜ:r/
5. pass	/pɑ:s/	6. purse	/pɜ:s/
7. debt	/det/	8. dirt	/dɜ:t/
9. course	/kɔ:s/	10. curse	/kɜ:s/
11. store	/stɔ:/	12. stir	/stɜ:/
13. all	/ɔ:l/	14. earl	/ɜ:l/
15. horde	/hɔ:d/	16. heard	/hɜ:d/
17. war	/wɔ:r/	18. were (strong form)	/wɜ:r/
19. warm	/wɔ:m/	20. worm	/wɜ:m/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.5 A List of Words for Questions 105 - 128

For questions 105 - 128, students needed to match the recording they heard with the correct phonemic transcription.

Table 10. A List of recorded words for questions 105 - 128

1. Murph <u>y</u>	/'mɜ:fi/
2. h <u>ur</u> t	/hɜ:t/
3. h <u>ea</u> rt	/hɑ:t/
4. w <u>or</u> m	/wɜ:m/
5. w <u>ar</u> m	/wɔ:m/
6. <u>ea</u> rl	/ɜ:l/
7. p <u>ea</u> rl	/pɜ:l/

8. ur ge	/ɜːdʒ/
9. ed ge	/edʒ/
10. fir m	/fɜːm/
11. gir l	/gɜːl/
12. gull	/gʌl/
13. gir d	/gɜːd/
14. guard	/gɑːd/
15. hear d	/hɜːd/
16. hard	/hɑːd/
17. horde	/hɔːd/
18. stir	/stɜː/
19. store	/stɔː/
20. cur se	/kɜːs/
21. course	/kɔːs/
22. ear ly	/'ɜː.li/
23. lear n	/lɜːn/
24. lean	/liːn/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.6 A List of Words for Questions 129 - 158

In questions 129 - 158, the participants were presented with five sets of letter combinations leading to the phoneme /ɜː/. Each word in phonemic transcription was incorporated into a sentence, and a recording of the word was provided. Their objective was to correctly place the phonemically transcribed word into the corresponding column.

Table 11. A List of recorded words for questions 129 - 158

1. ear ly	/'ɜː.li/
2. ear n	/ɜːn/
3. hear d	/hɜːd/

4. learn	/lɜ:n/
5. earl	/ɜ:l/
6. pearl	/pɜ:l/
7. Thursday	/'θɜ:z.deɪ/
8. murder	/'mɜ:.dər/
9. curly	/'kɜ:.li/
10. urban	/'ɜ:.bən/
11. purpose	/'pɜ:.pəs/
12. survey	/'sɜ:.veɪ/
13. determine	/dɪ'tɜ:.mɪn/
14. person	/'pɜ:.sən/
15. herb	/hɜ:b/
16. dessert	/dɪ'zɜ:t/
17. certify	/'sɜ:.tɪ.faɪ/
18. university	/'ju:.nɪ'vɜ:.sə.ti/
19. fir	/'fɜ:r/
20. circuit	/'sɜ:.kɪt/
21. virtual	/'vɜ:.tʃu.əl/
22. virtue	/'vɜ:.tʃu:/
23. birthday	/'bɜ:θ.deɪ/
24. confirm	/kən'fɜ:m/
25. worm	/wɜ:m/
26. world	/wɜ:ld/
27. worth	/wɜ:θ/
28. worse	/wɜ:s/
29. word	/wɜ:d/
30. attorney	/ə'tɜ:.ni/

(created by the author)

2.4.2.7 An Extra List of Words

In the final part of the lesson, extra words were recorded to show different letter combinations and a spelling anomaly with the word colonel, a short and a long-form of *herself*.

Table 12. An extra list of words

journalist	/'dʒɜː.nəl.ɪst/
courtesy	/'kɜː.tə.si/
entrepreneur	/,ɒn.trə.prə'niːr/
kernel/spelling anomaly colonel	/'kɜː.nəl/

2.4.3 Lesson Results - Findings

The lesson on this phoneme was not originally intended to have the lesson results evaluated but rather to provide students with the opportunity to understand how specific combinations of letters lead to the phoneme /ɜː/. It also aimed to make students aware of homophones and that not every combination of the letters shown results in /ɜː/. However, I converted the outputs into a chart to identify if certain parts of the lesson were more challenging than others.

In the spring of 2023, a total of 62 attempts were made, of which 11 were submitted without being completed. These figures align with the 51 responses received from the questionnaire administered during the same period. The lesson results were remarkably positive, matching well with the diagnostic test results, indicating a strong understanding and successful application of the phoneme /ɜː/ by the students as can be seen in Figure 22. To see the diagnostic test results, see Figures 8 and 9.

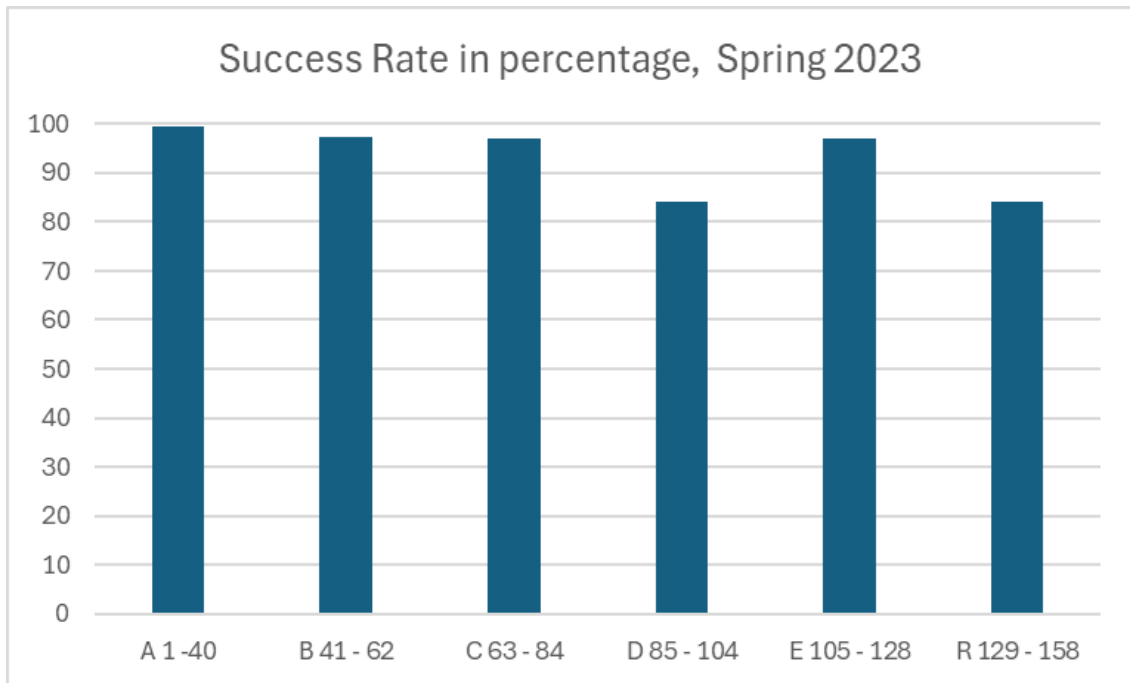


Figure 22. Lesson results, Success rate in percentage of lesson parts

It is important to note that the lesson was highly instructive, with the primary goal being to provide guidance to the students and facilitate their understanding of the letter combinations that lead to a specific phoneme.

The lesson had no time limit, allowing participants to spend as much time as they needed. Unfortunately, many students did not submit their work initially, necessitating multiple reminder emails and careful tracking of submissions. This process was extremely time-consuming and posed significant challenges due to the large number of participants.

In conclusion, the lesson effectively achieved its objective by clarifying the letter combinations for the majority of students who were previously unfamiliar with them. The questionnaire findings proved this, as the positive feedback from the students demonstrated the success of the lesson.

2.5 A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDENTS

To supplement our understanding of phonemes and their initial encounters by students, a questionnaire via Google Forms was designed. This questionnaire complemented the lesson for LI2BE students during the spring of 2023. The administration took place as part of the LI2BE course in the spring semester of 2023, with 51 students participating.

To analyse the results, the responses were consolidated into an Excel table, and charts were prepared. There are two types of charts evaluating the findings: charts when the Y-Axis shows a number of answers and pie charts show the percentage for better recognition. In the survey, certain queries provided respondents with a single-answer option, while other questions were presented as multiple-choice with an additional option for their own response. Some questions allowed participants to answer in their own words. Students were reassured that writing in flawless English or using complete sentences was not mandatory. The primary objective was to elicit information from them, even if it was not articulated in perfect English.

The questionnaire comprised nine inquiries and was completed by a total of 51 participants. It is important to mention that all students who participated in the lesson completed the questionnaire.

Overall, the questionnaire provided valuable insights and effectively supplemented the phonics lesson, helping us better understand the students' initial encounters with phonemes. Figure 23 below shows a sample of the questionnaire; for a complete questionnaire, see Appendix 5.

Questionnaire - TUL LI1BE/LI2BE STUDENTS 2023

This questionnaire is to find out if you ever came across the phonemic symbols before your university studies and where.

Thank you very much indeed for participating and helping me with my research. If you have any questions, please contact me at: ivona.batkova@tul.cz

1. Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English? *
 - primary school (1st-5th grade)
 - elementary school (6th-9th grade)
 - higher secondary school
 - Technical University in Liberec
 - dictionaries
 - Jiné: _____
2. Did you have the standard* English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks? *
(* The ones we use in the LI1BE and LI2BE course).
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - Jiné: _____
3. Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbooks? *
 - /s/
 - /ɔ:/
 - /æ/
 - /N/
 - /e/
 - Jiné: _____
4. Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you? *
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - Jiné: _____
5. If "yes" to the previous question, who (or "what") explained the sounds and symbols to you?
 - Teacher at school.
 - Your "private" teacher.
 - Youtube or other educational videos.
 - Jiné: _____

1/2

Figure 23. A Sample of a questionnaire

2.5.1 Questionnaire Results

Now I will delve into analysing each question in detail and examine the answers they have provided.

2.5.1.1 Question 1: Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English?

The initial question centred on the location where the phonemes were encountered. Furthermore, an insight into the age at which this occurred was gained, not just the location, due to the context. In retrospect, it would have been preferable to select

a singular response rather than providing multiple answers. Nonetheless, it was imperative to include the supplementary category containing additional responses, as not everything listed in the offered choice might be included.

The chart below shows that 11 respondents had their first encounter with phonemes in primary school, 13 in elementary school, 13 in higher secondary, 15 at Technical University, and 7 respondents came in contact with the phonemes in a dictionary. There is also the supplementary category, which was the 'others' option, that allowed respondents to provide their own answers. Among the relatively few responses in this category, the following emerged as the first choice: "previous university"; "kindergarten".

Almost one-quarter of the students stated that they encountered the phonemes only at university and not in previous studies.

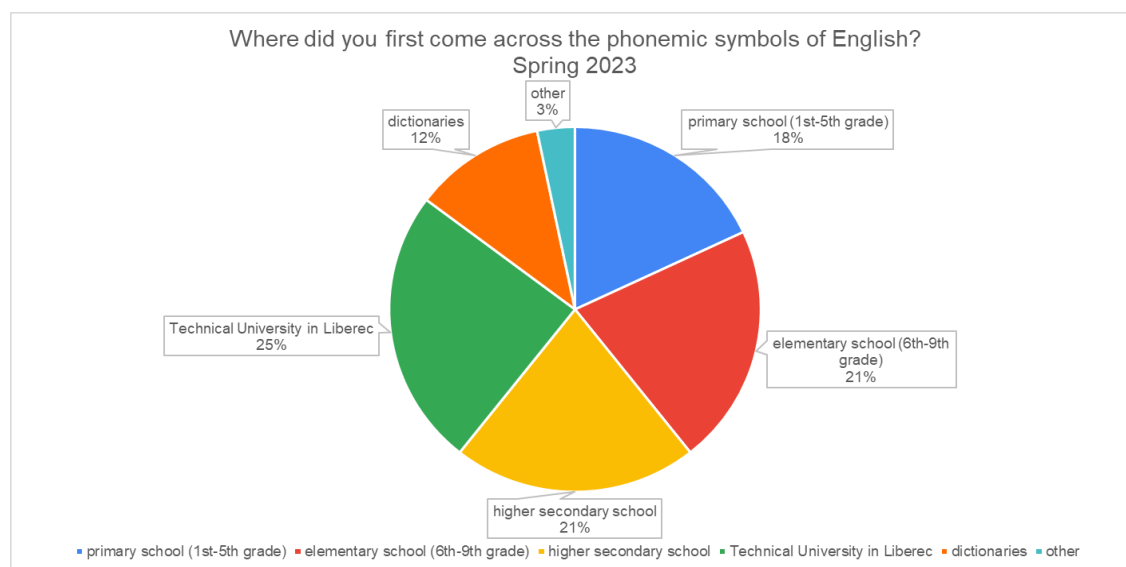


Figure 24. Answers to "Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English?" in percentage

2.5.1.2 Question 2: Did you have the standard* English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks?

In the second question, the objective was to determine whether they utilised textbooks containing phonemes - symbols that were taught in the first year at the

university in the courses LI1BE and LI2BE. 78 per cent of the students replied that they had phonemic symbols in the schoolbook, and 18 per cent of them did not. There were two minor answers, i.e. "I am not sure.", "I don't remember". They were choosing from the answers "yes", "no" and their own answer "other", of which there were only two of them.

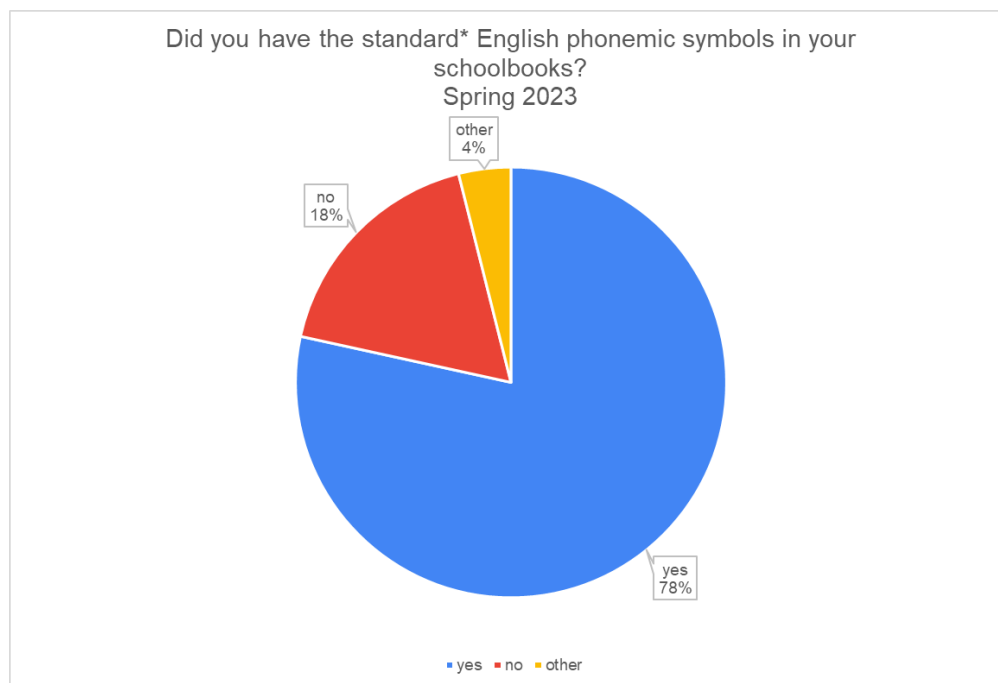


Figure 25. Chart to the question: "Did you have the standard English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks?" in percentage

2.5.1.3 Question 3: Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbook?

In considering the question, it is important to note that some students were unable to recall whether they had encountered specific phonemic symbols in English language textbooks. All of the listed symbols received a similar response regarding their occurrence in textbooks, with most students reporting some level of exposure to the symbols. Among the "other," 3 respondents answered in the negative, while 6 stated that they could not recall at all. This question may, for the reason of relevancy, not be taken as part of

scientific research but might lead to greater awareness of phonemic symbols and discussion if phonemic symbols belong to English classes at Czech schools.

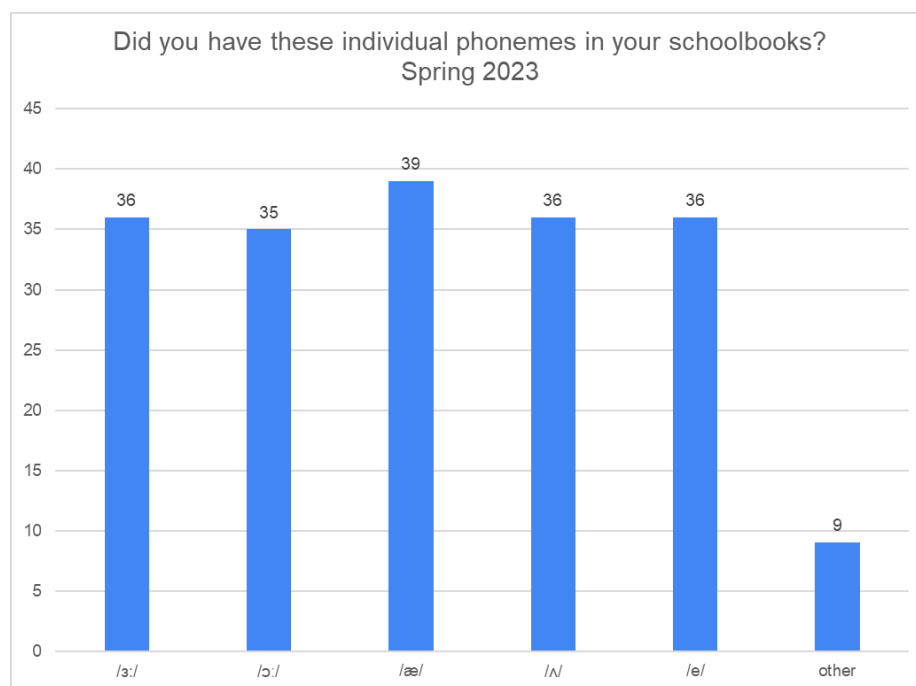


Figure 26. A column chart to the question "Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbook?", Y-Axis: number of answers

2.5.1.4 Question 4: Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you?

In this question, students could choose only one answer: "yes", "no", or "other". The focus was on discovering whether the students had received explanations about phonemes. Although the majority of the students had access to phonemes in the textbook, responses showed that only 23 out of 51 received explanations about them. All of them answered yes or no.

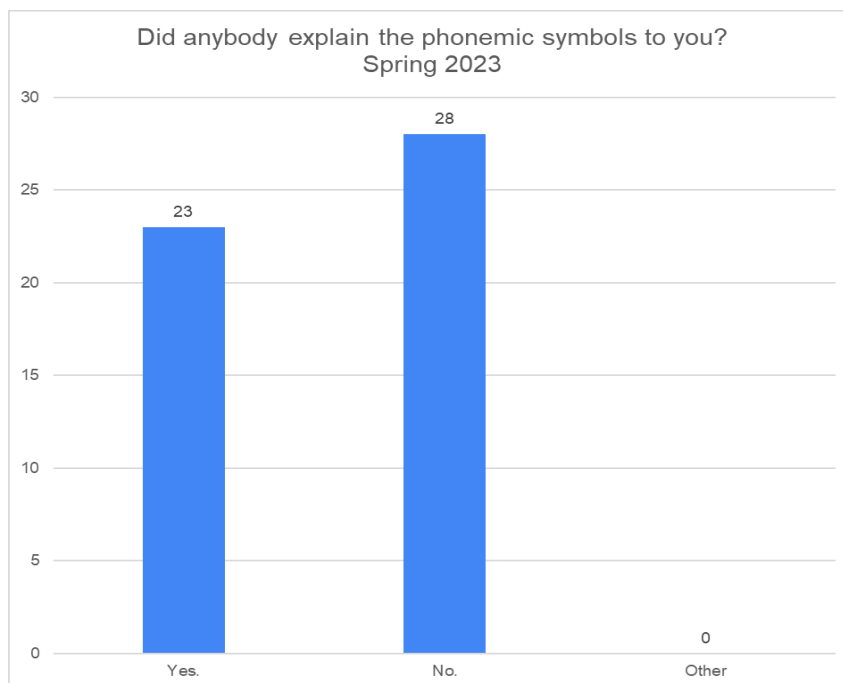


Figure 27. Chart to the question "Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you?", Y-Axis: number of answers

2.5.1.5 Question 5: If "yes" to the previous question, who (or "what") explained the sounds and symbols to you?

Some respondents replied with more than one answer, and one skipped the question as it was not a mandatory one. According to the data, the majority of respondents, specifically 20 indicated that their understanding of phonemes was elucidated by a teacher at school. This was followed by only 5 participants mentioning YouTube or other educational videos; 2 credited their "private" teacher, and 2 cited other sources. Among the latter, Mgr. Nicola S. Karásková, M.A at the university was the other source.

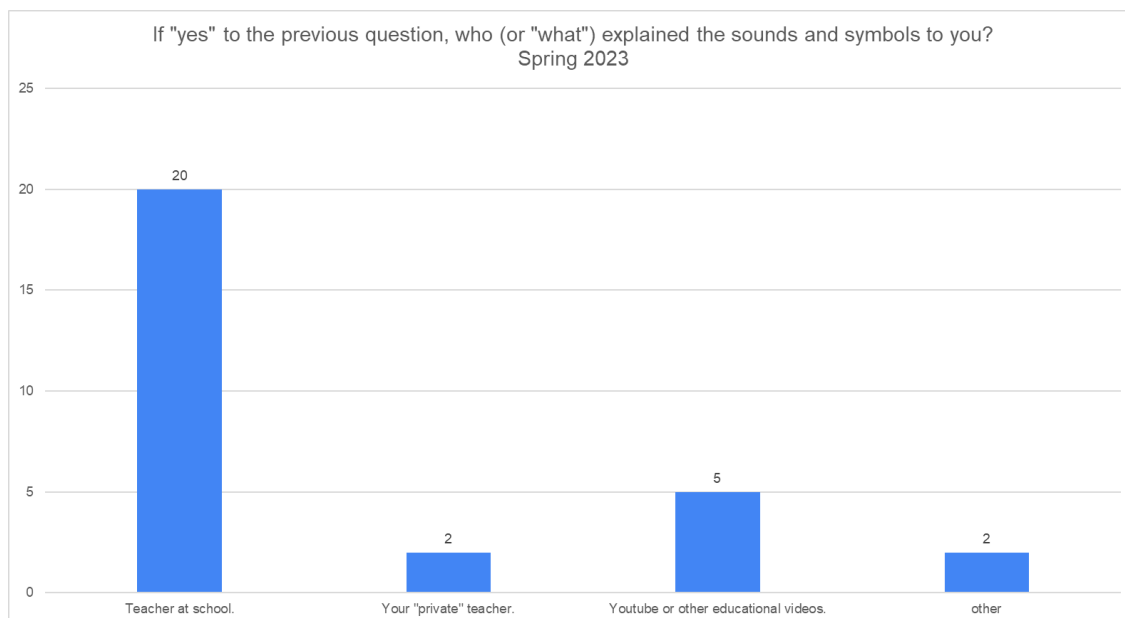


Figure 28. Chart to the question "If 'yes' to the previous question, who (or 'what') explained the sounds and symbols to you?" Y-Axis: number of answers

2.5.1.6 Question 6: Do you consider teaching phonemic symbols important?

In the sixth inquiry, the primary aim was to ascertain the perception of first-year English language students at the Technical University of Liberec regarding the significance of learning phonemic symbols in EFL education on a scale of 1-5, where 1 meant not important at all and 5 showed very important.

It was revealed that the majority of respondents acknowledged some importance of acquiring knowledge about phonemes. 19 respondents selected 'very important', and 18 chose 'moderately important', while 12 individuals expressed a neutral stance. Owing to the precise total of 51 participants and an equal number of responses with no alternative choices, percentages were not computed. Out of the respondents, only 2 attributed low importance.

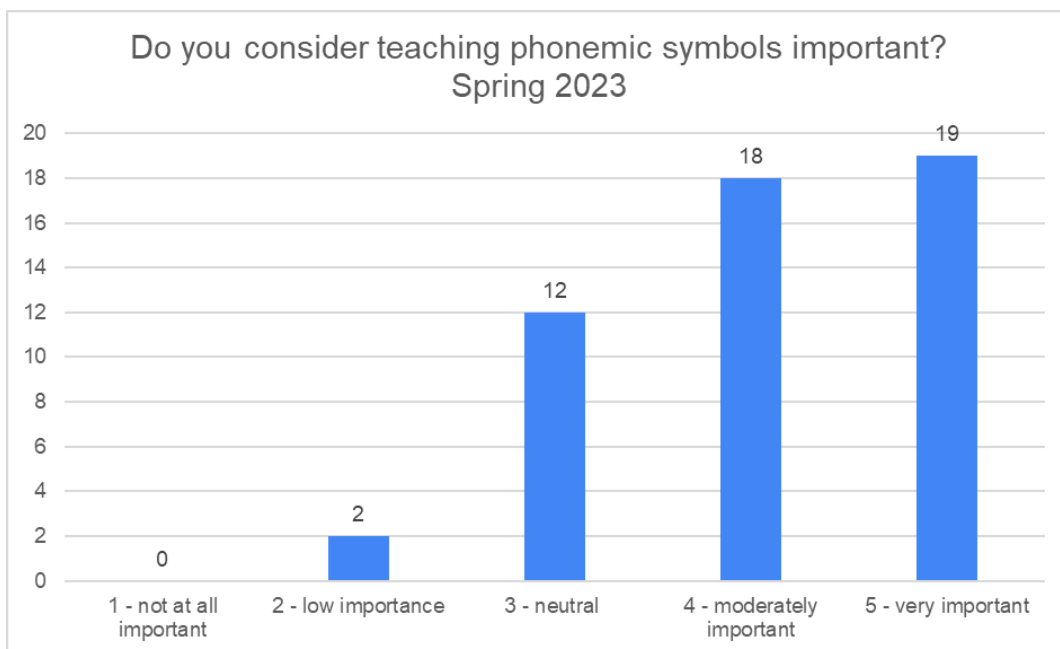


Figure 29. Chart to the question "Do you consider teaching phonemic symbols important?"
Y-Axis: number of answers

2.5.1.7 Question 7: If you consider teaching phonemic symbols important, please could you briefly explain why?

Many respondents emphasised the importance of teaching phonemic symbols for improving pronunciation, understanding and listening skills, while others argued that it may not be necessary as individuals can learn pronunciation through auditory means. Conversely, some pointed out that phonemic symbols are beneficial for individuals experiencing difficulty in perceiving certain sounds. It is important to note that while these responses could potentially provide avenues for further research, the primary objective of this thesis is not to delve extensively into the specifics of the students' answers. Rather, the focus remains on capturing the general consensus and understanding of their perspectives.

2.5.1.8 Question 8: Were you aware of the letter combination leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before doing the exercises?

The objective of this inquiry was to determine whether the students possessed knowledge of the letter combination resulting in the monophthong /ɜ:/ prior to the lesson on this phoneme. In addition, this is also one of the research questions. Survey participants could select only one response. Out of the respondents, 34 selected "I knew the pronunciation of certain words, but I didn't know about the letter combination." 16 indicated that they were familiar with the letter combination, while one participant expressed awareness in their own words, "I was aware of some of the combinations", which was categorised as other for the purposes of the analysis.

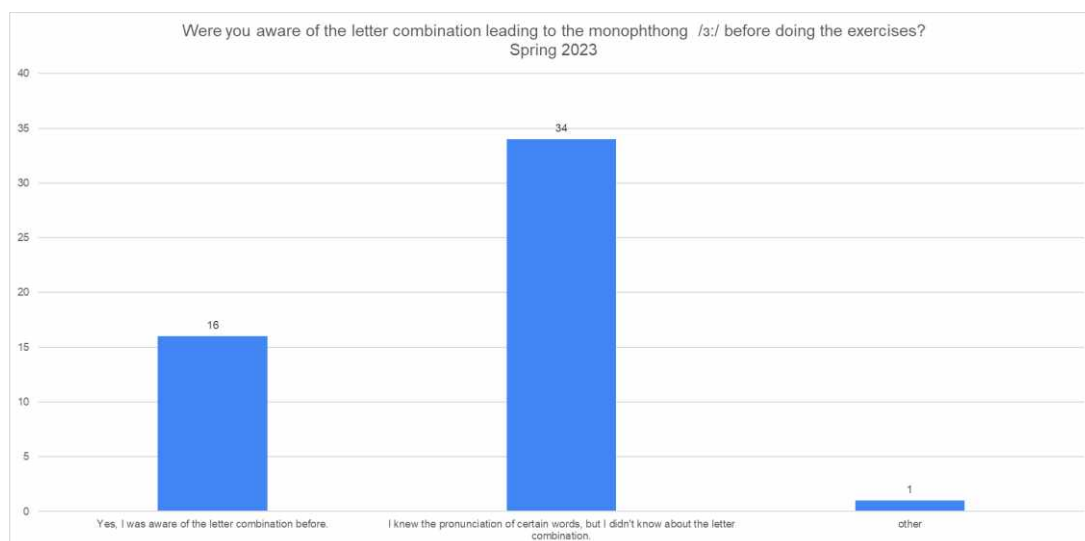


Figure 30. Chart to the question "Were you aware of the letter combination leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before doing the exercises?" in percentage

2.5.1.9 Question 9: Have the exercises and the lesson helped to clarify the usage of the monophthong /ɜ:/?

The students' responses regarding the helpfulness of the exercises were varied. All the students expressed that the exercises in the lesson were beneficial for practising pronunciation, enhancing understanding, and preparing for an upcoming exam.

A significant portion of the students conveyed also their appreciation for the exercises. Based on the response, it is evident that the lesson successfully achieved its objective. The aim of the lesson was to enhance the students' understanding of the phoneme /ɜ:/ and increase their awareness of letter combinations, both of which were evidently accomplished.

The questionnaire proved to be extremely valuable, providing direct responses from EFL learners and offering unique insights into the subject matter.

In my opinion, some of the topics touched on in this questionnaire could potentially lead to further research, particularly on the necessity of teaching phonemes and their significance for young English learners, similar to the importance of letter combinations.

3 CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the journey undertaken in this thesis, "Using Audio Exercises to Train Czech EFL Learners Words Containing the Monophthong /ɜ:/," the importance of the three research questions posed at the beginning becomes clear.

1. What mistakes do Czech students make in recognising pronunciation, and spelling the respective words (minimal pairs) when one of the words in a minimal pair contains the sound /ɜ:/?
2. Can audio exercises train Czech EFL learners to match the pronunciation and spelling of minimal pairs containing the long vowel /ɜ:/?
3. To what extent were the students aware of the letter combinations leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before the lesson on this phoneme?

These questions have not only guided the direction of this research but also revealed profound insights along the way.

To achieve these research goals, a diagnostic test and a lesson on the phoneme accessible on Moodle, and a questionnaire were employed. In chapter 2.3.2, the diagnostic test findings related to auditory discrimination of specific words are examined, addressing the primary question of this research: "What mistakes do Czech students make in recognizing pronunciation, and spelling the respective words (minimal pairs) when one of the words in a minimal pair contains the sound /ɜ:/?" with an assumption that EFL learners would have minor problems distinguishing this particular sound.

The findings indicate that most students had little difficulty distinguishing the sound /ɜ:/ when listening to a recording and selecting the correct word. This observation held true for both isolated words and words within sentences, with only a few words causing slight issues such as *tan* /tæn/, *fan* /fæn/, *hull* /hʌl/, *hurl* /hɜ:l/, *ward* /wɔ:d/, and *blurred*

/blɜ:d/. Thus, the assumption that EFL learners would have minor problems distinguishing the monophthong /ɜ:/ was confirmed by the results. The students seemed to have no issues hearing the phoneme /ɜ:/, aligning with what the literature suggested. Considering the fact that out of the six words listed above, only two of the words contained the phoneme /ɜ:/, it was speculated that pronunciation issues might be caused by confusing or substituting /ɜ:/ with another vowel sound. with another phoneme rather than /ɜ:/. Additionally, misunderstanding the word's meaning or not knowing the letter combination leading to /ɜ:/, particularly in the case of the words *blurred* or *hurl*, could also contribute to these issues.

In accordance with Adams's recommendations, I designed a lesson tailored to meet diverse perceptual styles by incorporating various instructional strategies such as images, writing words as they are heard, phonemic transcription, and matching phonemic sounds to letter combinations based on auditory cues. Adams emphasises the importance of adapting instructional materials and processes to the different learning modalities of students, stressing the need to cater to their unique learning preferences (1990, 49). This approach aimed to engage students effectively by addressing multiple sensory pathways, thereby improving their understanding of the /ɜ:/ phoneme.

The lesson was accessible on the Moodle platform which allowed the students to complete the lesson at their own pace. This lesson plan specifically aimed to deepen students' understanding of pronunciation and sharpen their recognition of specific letter combinations associated with the /ɜ:/ sound. The instructional focus was strategically placed on the /ɜ:/ sound and its spelling patterns, targeting a reduction in the mispronunciation of words such as *curse* /kɜ:s/ or *worm* /wɜ:m/, improving the accuracy of their English pronunciation.

This particular lesson proved useful to the second inquiry of this research, accompanied by a questionnaire, which posed the question, "Can audio exercises train Czech EFL learners to match the pronunciation and spelling of minimal pairs containing the long vowel /ɜ:/?" The review of the diagnostic test results, coupled with the outcomes of this lesson, reaffirmed the initial findings that there were no significant issues in auditory discrimination when students matched words with recordings. It appears that audio exercises were indeed effective in helping most students differentiate words featuring the phoneme /ɜ:/, as the majority found the lesson beneficial. The integration of diverse exercises, including the use of images, phonemic transcription, and activities emphasising grapheme-phoneme correspondence, seems to amplify participants' awareness of letter combinations. This approach may be particularly suitable for introducing this phonetic topic. These findings underscore the importance of employing varied and multimodal instructional techniques to bolster students' phonemic awareness and word discrimination skills, supporting the value of this tailored educational strategy.

To address the final research question, "To what extent were the students aware of the letter combinations leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before the lesson on this phoneme?" data gathered through the questionnaire revealed that 31 per cent of participants knew the letter combination prior to the lesson. Literature suggests that pronunciation guidelines for the phoneme /ɜ:/ are well-established, leading to an expectation that Czech EFL learners can use it without difficulty. However, findings indicate that merely knowing these guidelines or the articulation of /ɜ:/ might be not sufficient. Extra problems can arise if there is no recognition of the letter combinations associated with /ɜ:/, especially when encountering unfamiliar words or misleading Czech pronunciations.

Responses from participants suggest that pronunciation instruction may well be undervalued in the Czech educational system, contrasting with practices in countries like Great Britain, the United States, Malaysia, and Australia, where phonics and phoneme awareness are integral to English teaching. It is worth noting that the Australian government has spent over \$10 million on developing children's literacy skills through the support of phonics. (Australian Government Department of Education 2023) Teaching phonics or letter combinations might be useful also in Czech schools, especially since English lacks the shallow orthography of the Czech language, as Pavlík and Bojomen (2023, 24-25).

Overall, this research not only strengthened the students' understanding of the phoneme /ɜ:/ but also equipped these future educators with the tools to impart this knowledge to their own learners. By embracing diverse instructional strategies and recognizing the importance of phonemic and grapheme awareness, the teaching of English phonology/pronunciation can be enhanced to enable learners to navigate the complexities of English pronunciation with confidence.

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The Beatles. "Blackbird." *The Beatles (White Album)*, track 11. Produced by George Martin. Apple Records, 1968.

The Trashmen. "Surfin' Bird." *Surfin' Bird*, produced by Jack Bates. Garrett Records, 1963.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A Diagnostic Test

Appendix 2: A Full List of Recorded Sentences

Appendix 3: Lesson Results, Success Rate in Percentage, the Second Group Winter 2023

Appendix 4: Questionnaire Results, the Second Group Winter 2023

Appendix 5: A Questionnaire

Appendix 6: A Lesson on the Phoneme /ʒ:/

Appendix 1: Diagnostic test

Diagnostic Test: The Phoneme /ɜ:/

DIAGNOSTIC TEST 1

You will hear 60 recorded items. Click on the sound file.
For this test, play it **twice**.

If necessary, you may play the recording a second time but not more.
(If you play it more than twice you will not manage to finish the test).

Choose the correct answer from two options.
If you are not sure, click 'I am not sure'.

Time limit: 20 minutes.

Quiz 1
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. heat

b. hurt

Control Quiz

Quiz 2
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. fern

b. fan

Control Quiz

Quiz 3
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. It's a turn sign.

b. I am not sure.

c. It's a turn sign.

Control Quiz

Quiz 4
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. It's the first rule.

b. I am not sure.

c. It's the first rule.

Control Quiz

Quiz 5
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. cart

b. curt

c. I am not sure.

Control Quiz

Quiz 6
Neobolobolo
Rate level: 100
0/0/0
Upvote
Downvote

a. That's blurred.

b. That's blood.

c. I am not sure.

Control Quiz

Úloha 7
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. gulf

b. I am not sure.

c. girl

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 8
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. I am not sure.

b. edge

c. urge

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 9
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. fun

b. fun

c. I am not sure.

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 10
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. I am not sure

b. It's a turn sign.

c. It's a turn sign.

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 11
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. hurt

b. I am not sure.

c. hurt

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 12
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. work

b. I am not sure

c. walk

Zkontrolovat

Úloha 13
Nedostupné
Počet bodů: 1,00
Třída: 1. ročník
Upravit úlohu

0:00 / 1:00

a. edge

b. urge

c. I am not sure.

Zkontrolovat

Übung 14
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 14
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 15
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 15
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 16
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 16
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 17
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 17
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 18
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 18
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 19
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 19
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

Übung 20
Neuhochdeutsch
Punktezahl: 1,00
Übung 20
Hilfen
Lernen
Zurück
Zurück

a. cart
 b. cart
 c. I am not sure.
 Zurücklösen

a. I am not sure.
 b. tan
 c. tum
 Zurücklösen

a. bust
 b. I am not sure.
 c. bust
 Zurücklösen

a. I am not sure.
 b. heard
 c. head
 Zurücklösen

a. I am not sure.
 b. bum
 c. ban
 Zurücklösen

a. I am not sure.
 b. hat
 c. hurt
 Zurücklösen

a. fit
 b. far
 c. I am not sure.
 Zurücklösen

Ülesanne 21
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. weird

b. I am not sure

c. word

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 22
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. I am not sure

b. fir

c. far

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 23
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. peck

b. peek

c. I am not sure

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 24
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. Look at it burn.

b. Look at it, Ben.

c. I am not sure.

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 25
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. Look at it, Ben.

b. look at it burn.

c. I am not sure.

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 26
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. ward

b. wair

c. I am not sure.

Ziirakevad

Ülesanne 27
 Nõrkõrge
 Põhikooli
 1.00
 Ülesanne
 välistada
 ülesanne

401 1x

a. bath

b. I am not sure

c. berth

Ziirakevad

Übung 28
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. cart
 b. cat
 c. I am not sure.

Zurückloswerk

Übung 29
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. debt
 b. I am not sure.
 c. dirt

Zurückloswerk

Übung 30
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. quilt
 b. girl
 c. I am not sure.

Zurückloswerk

Übung 31
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. I am not sure.
 b. fern
 c. fun

Zurückloswerk

Übung 32
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. I am not sure.
 b. hat
 c. hurt

Zurückloswerk

Übung 33
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. fern
 b. I am not sure.
 c. fan

Zurückloswerk

Übung 34
Hörverständnis
Punktezahl: 1,00
11. Übung in 14:45:00
Lernaktivitäten

▶ ◀ • 0:01 / 1:00

a. park
 b. I am not sure
 c. perk

Zurückloswerk

Uloha 42
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. I am not sure.

b. hull

c. hull

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 43
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. bath

b. I am not sure.

c. bath

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 44
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. turn

b. tan

c. I am not sure.

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 45
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. hoarse

b. I am not sure.

c. horse

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 46
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. sum

b. tan

c. I am not sure.

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 47
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. hoard

b. heard

c. I am not sure.

Zkontrolovat

Uloha 48
Nedokončeno
Počet bodů z 1,00
Uložte a vydejte
Upravte otázku

0:00 / 1:00

a. out

b. I am not sure.

c. cat

Zkontrolovat

Question 55

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **primary** market?

- A. It is the first market for a security.
- B. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

Question 56

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **secondary** market?

- A. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- B. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

Question 57

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **tertiary** market?

- A. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- B. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

Question 58

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **quaternary** market?

- A. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- B. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

Question 59

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **quinary** market?

- A. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- B. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

Question 60

Which of the following is a characteristic of a **senary** market?

- A. It is the market for newly issued securities.
- B. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold.
- C. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.
- D. It is the market for securities that have been previously sold and are now being resold.

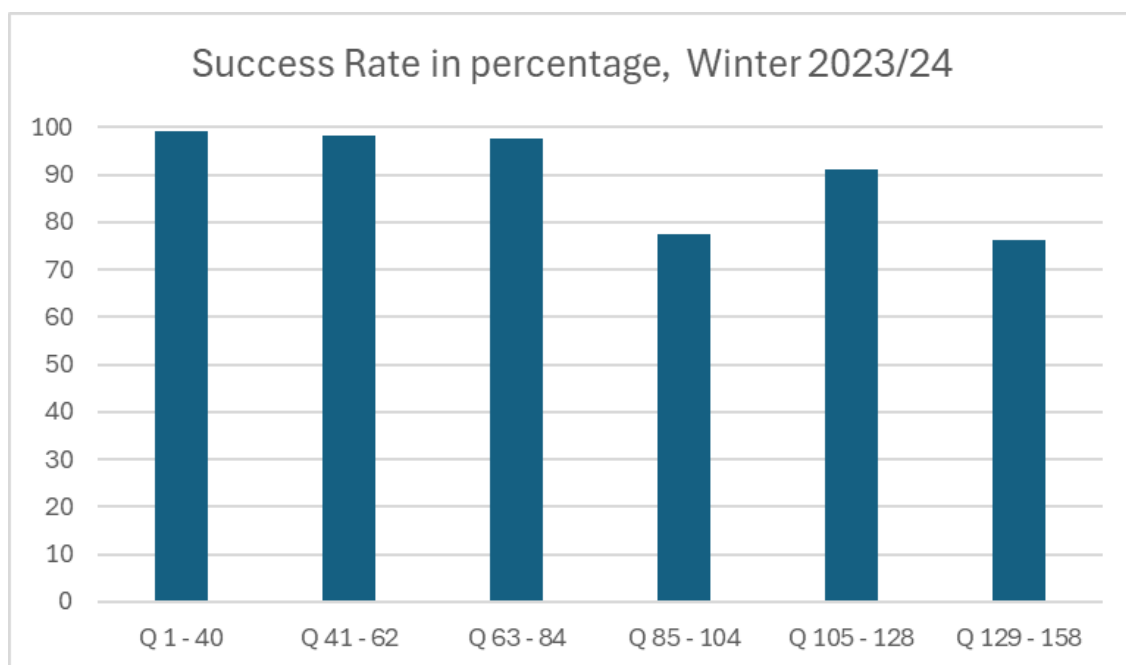
Appendix 2: A full list of recorded sentences

1. It's a nice tan .	2. It's a nice turn .
3. Look at that bun.	4. Look at the burn.
5. That's blood .	6. That's blurred .
7. Look at the cub.	8. Look at the kerb.
9. I'm not fussed.	10. I'm not first.
11. It's the fast rule.	12. It's the first rule.
13. Look at it, Ben .	14. Look at it burn .
15. It's a colourful bed.	16. It's a colourful bird.
17. It's the west wind.	18. It's the worst wind.
19. I read /red/ about the course.	20. I read /red/ about the course.
21. The sign says "torn".	22. The sign says "turn".
23. It's a " torn " sign.	24. It's a " turn " sign.
25. She's got four.	26. She's got fir.
27. I wouldn't like warm soup.	28. I wouldn't like worm soup.
29. He's a slow walker.	30. He's a slow worker.
31. The sound was hard.	32. The sound was heard.
33. The film's cast.	34. The film's cursed.
35. It's one of the parks.	36. It's one of the perks.

Appendix 3: Lesson results, the Success rate in percentage, the second group Winter 2023

The lesson was also given to the students who started their studies a year later as a practical part of the course LI1BE in the academic year 2023/2024. The students completed the questionnaire as well (see Appendix 5). The lesson results were also analysed.

When comparing the two charts from spring and winter 2023, the results for each part of the lesson are similar, indicating that the students are performing well overall. The challenge can still be seen with questions 85 to 104, when students write the words they hear, and questions 129 to 158, when they match the word they hear and see it in phonemic transcription with the appropriate letter combination.



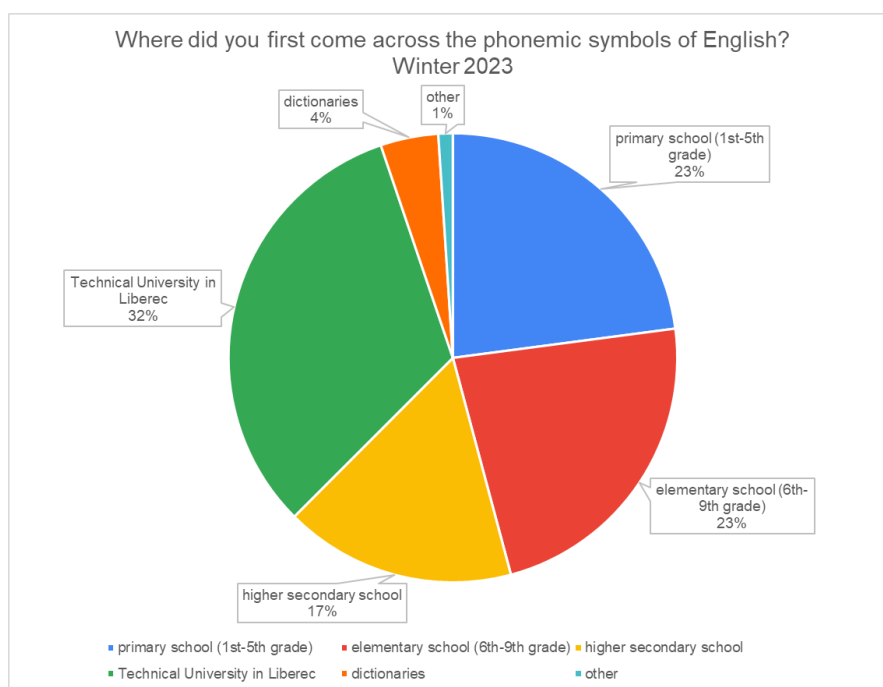
Appendix 4: Questionnaire Results, the second group Winter 2023

In the winter of 2023/24, a total of 121 attempts were submitted, out of which 26 were incomplete and therefore not counted into the results. However, only 85 responses were received for the questionnaire. I contacted each student who completed the lesson but did not fill out the questionnaire, requesting them to do so. Despite an increase in the number of completed questionnaires, the responses still remained lower in comparison to the total number of lesson participants as can be seen.

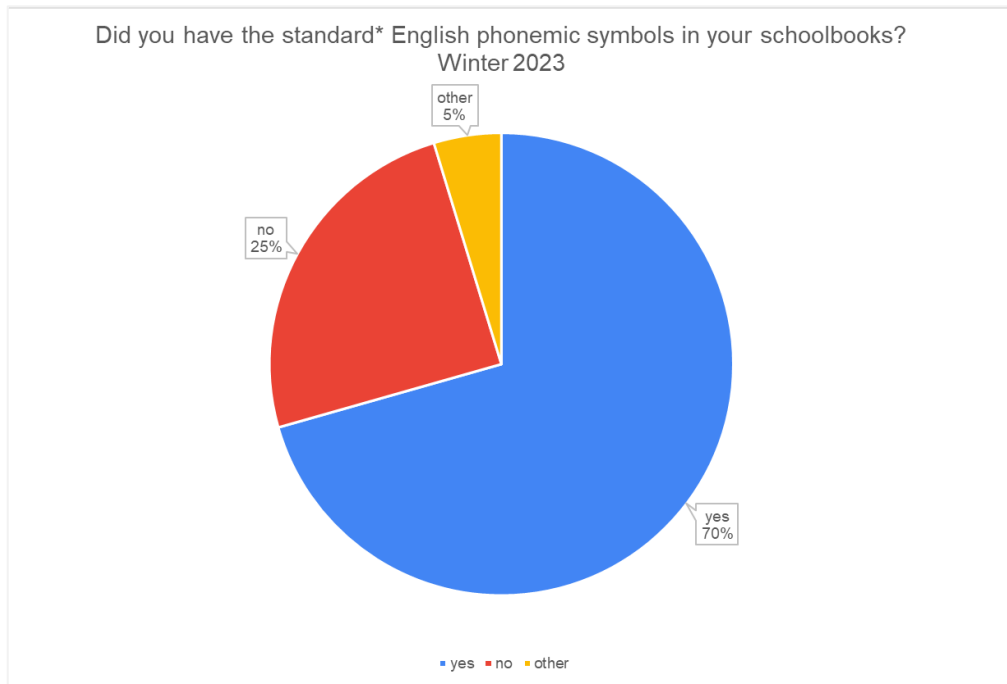
The results were very similar to those in Spring 2023. Nonetheless, two respondents indicated that the exercises were less useful to them, either because they were already familiar with pronunciation challenges or because one noted that he found the lesson tedious. Overall, the majority of them appreciated the lesson. A detailed list of their responses can be found in the appendix.

Below the results are shown in charts but without deeper analysis.

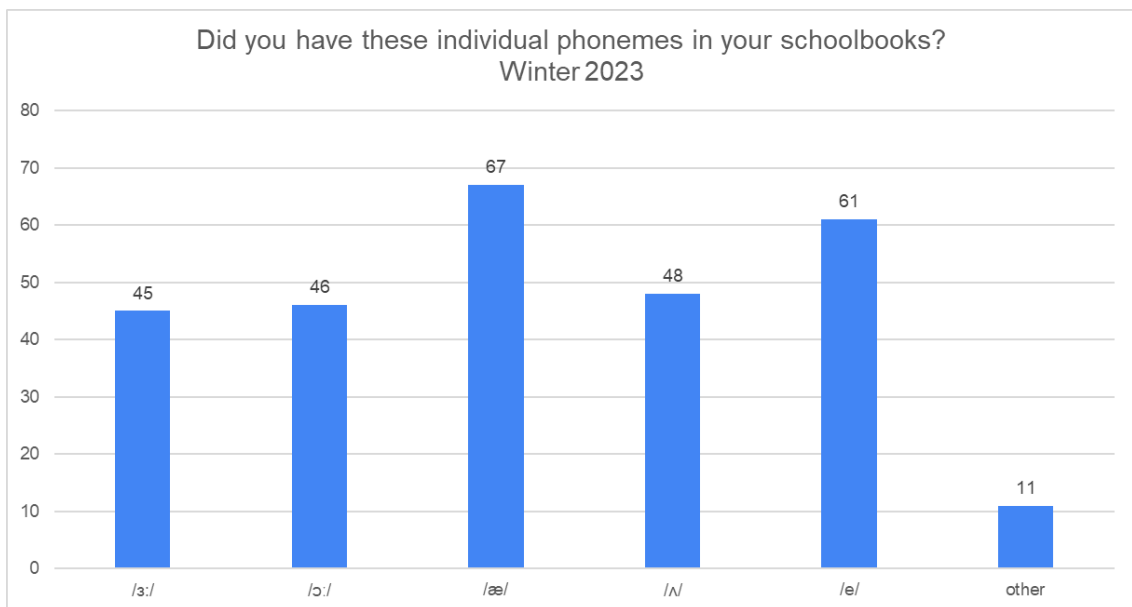
Question 1: Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English?



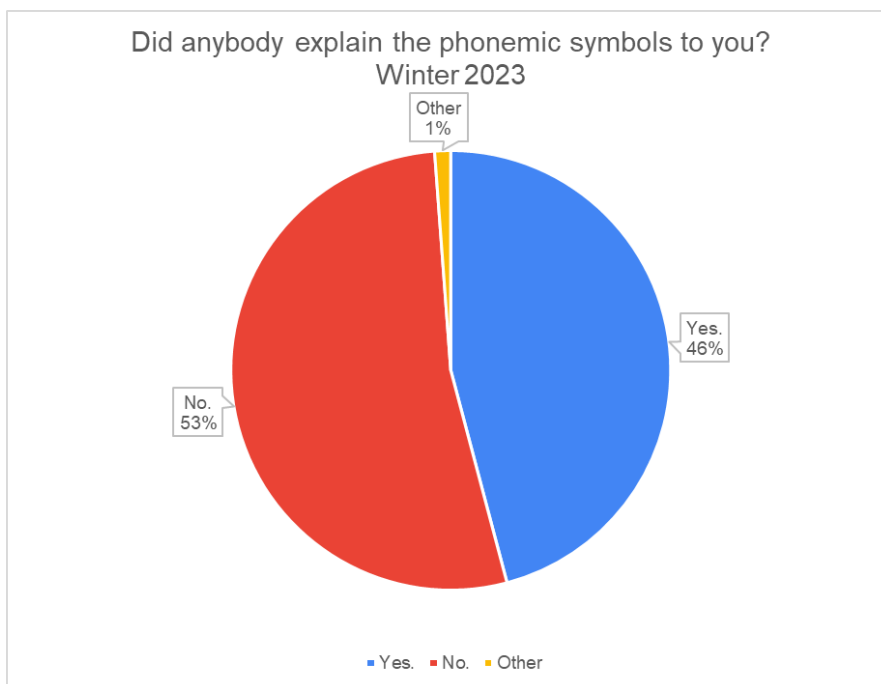
Question 2: Did you have the standard* English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks?



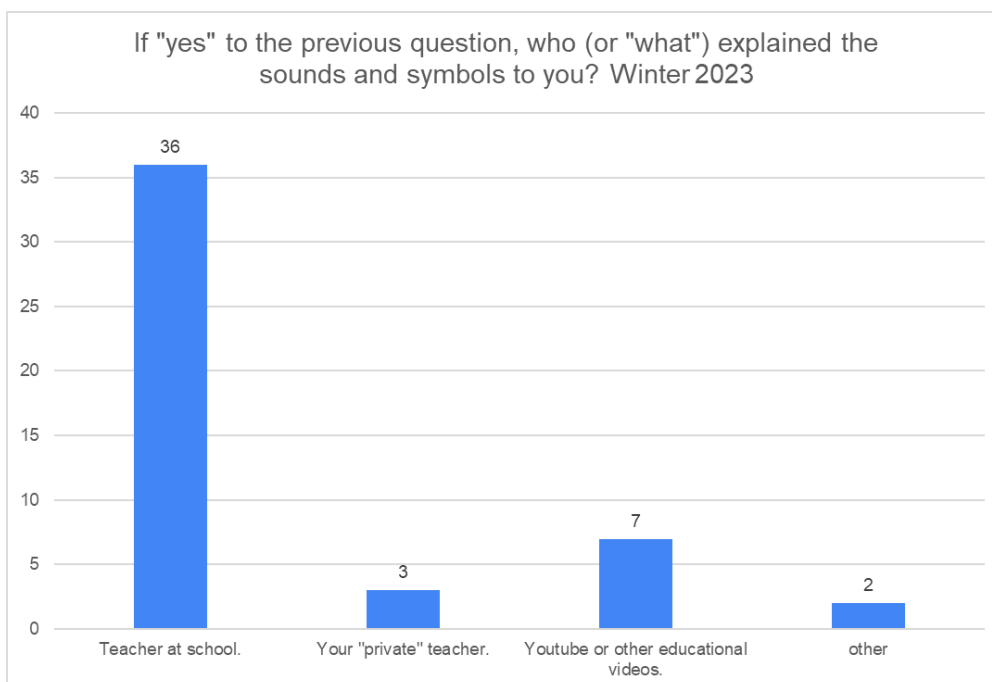
Question 3: Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbook?



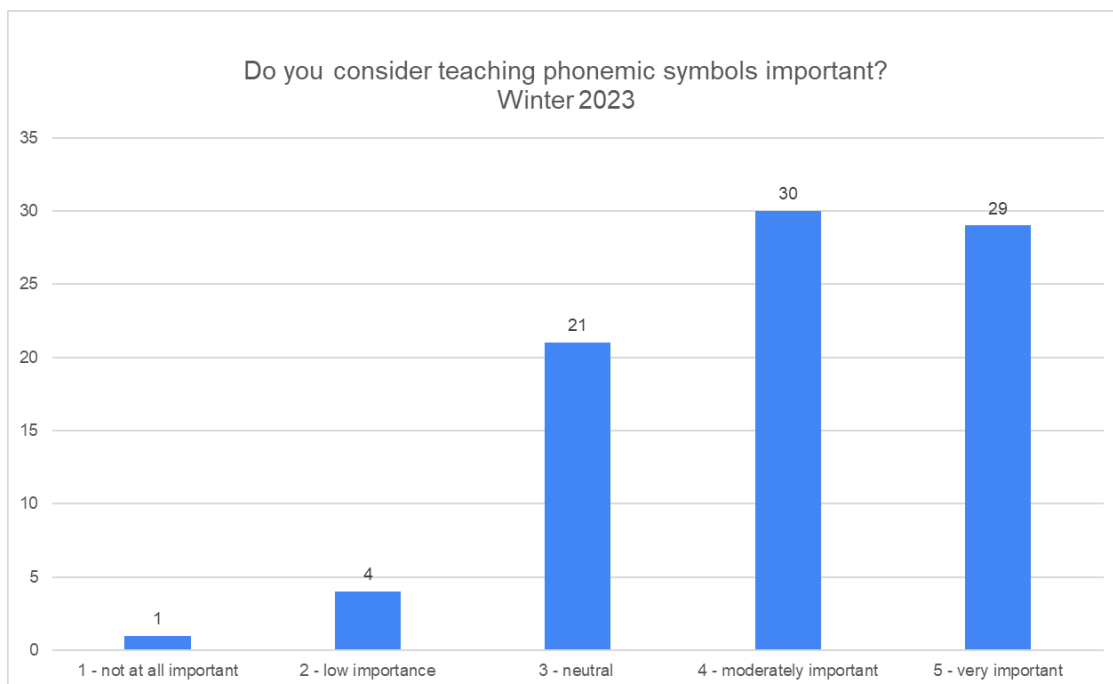
Question 4: Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you?



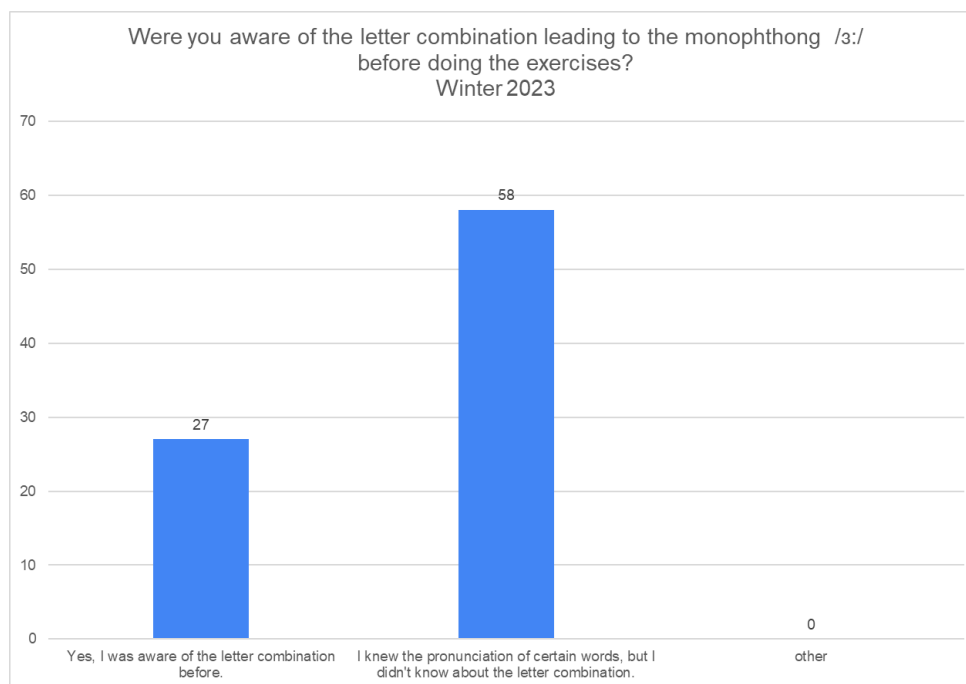
Question 5: If "yes" to the previous question, who (or "what") explained the sounds and symbols to you?



Question 6: Do you consider teaching phonemic symbols important?



Question 8: Were you aware of the letter combination leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before doing the exercises?



Results from questions 7 and 9 were very similar to those of the first group of students in Spring 2023.

Appendix 5: A Questionnaire

Questionnaire - TUL LI1BE/LI2BE STUDENTS 2023

Questionnaire - TUL LI1BE/LI2BE STUDENTS 2023

This questionnaire is to find out if you ever came across the phonemic symbols before your university studies and where.

Thank you very much indeed for participating and helping me with my research. If you have any questions, please contact me at: ivona.batkova@tul.cz

1. Where did you first come across the phonemic symbols of English? *
 - primary school (1st-5th grade)
 - elementary school (6th-9th grade)
 - higher secondary school
 - Technical University in Liberec
 - dictionaries
 - Jiné: _____

2. Did you have the standard* English phonemic symbols in your schoolbooks? *
 (* The ones we use in the LI1BE and LI2BE course).
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - Jiné: _____

3. Did you have these individual phonemes in your schoolbooks? *
 - /ɜ:/
 - /ɔ:/
 - /æ/
 - /ʌ/
 - /e/
 - Jiné: _____

4. Did anybody explain the phonemic symbols to you? *
 - Yes.
 - No.
 - Jiné: _____

5. If "yes" to the previous question, who (or "what") explained the sounds and symbols to you?
 - Teacher at school.
 - Your "private" teacher.
 - Youtube or other educational videos.
 - Jiné: _____

6. Do you consider teaching phonemic symbols important? *
On a scale of 1-5, select the importance of phonemic symbols in foreign language learning. 1 - not important at all
5 - very important

1 2 3 4 5

not i very important

7. If you consider teaching phonemic symbols important, please could you briefly explain why?
(You do not need to write in complete sentences and perfect English!)

8. Were you aware of the letter combination leading to the monophthong /ɜ:/ before doing the exercises? *

Yes, I was aware of the letter combination before.

I knew the pronunciation of certain words, but I didn't know about the letter combination.

Jiné: _____

9. Have the exercises and the lesson helped to clarify the usage of the monophthong /ɜ:/? Please briefly specify:
1. how, if they were helpful, and
2. why not, if they weren't helpful at all.

Appendix 6: A Lesson on the Phoneme /ɜ:/

A 60minute lesson on the monophthong /ɜ:/

THE LONG VOWEL /ɜ:/

This is a lesson on the phoneme /ɜ:/ with a set of exercises to practise.

This lesson aims to draw your attention to this phoneme and its spelling patterns so that you will not mispronounce "typically problematic" words such as *curse* /kɜ:s/ or *worm* /wɜ:m/. In short, the goal is to help you improve the accuracy of your English pronunciation.

(This phoneme may appear in some credit test questions and there may also be a question on this long vowel in the UZBE oral exam).

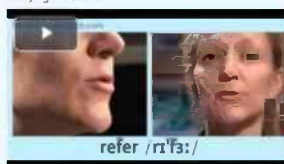
You will be able to see your results immediately and you can also re-attempt this lesson as many times as you like.

This work is a so part of my bachelor's thesis. I would like to **thank you** in advance for your participation.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact **Ivona Batkovičá** (ivona.batkovi@tul.cz).

View the following material first. It is essential.

1) Listen to the pronunciation of /ɜ:/ in the video and practise saying this sound.

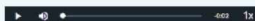


2) Listen to the tongue twister in the video and practise saying it aloud. After some practice, record yourself and then listen to the recording.



Question 1
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burnt
 b. bent
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 2
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burnt
 b. bent
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 3
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. kernel
- b. kennel
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 4
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. kernel
- b. kennel
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 5
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burn
- b. Ben
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 6
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burn
- b. Ben
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 7
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burst
- b. bust
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 8
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burst
- b. bust
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 9
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. hurt
- b. heart
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 10
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. hurt
- b. heart
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 11
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. firm
- b. farm
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 12
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. firm
- b. farm
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 13
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

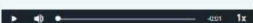


- a. curd
- b. card
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 14
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. curd
- b. card
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 15
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. gird
- b. guard
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 16
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. glid
- b. guard
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 17
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

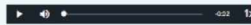


- a. surge
- b. sarge
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 18
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

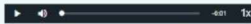


- a. surge
- b. sarge
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 19
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

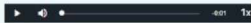


- a. turps
- b. tarp
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 20
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. turps
- b. tarp
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 21
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

a. pearl
 b. pall
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 22
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

a. pearl
 b. pall
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 23
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

a. spurt
 b. sport
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 24
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

a. spurt
 b. sport
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 25
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

a. nerd
 b. gnawed
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 26
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question


Which word do you hear?

a. nerd
 b. gnawed
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 27
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

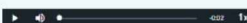


a. gird
 b. gourd
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 28
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?




a. gird
 b. gourd
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 29
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?




a. assorted
 b. asserted
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 30
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?




a. assorted
 b. asserted
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 31
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?




a. huff
 b. hull
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 32
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



a. huff
 b. hull
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 33
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?

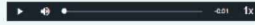


- a. burst
- b. best
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 34
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. burst
- b. best
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 35
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. first
- b. fest
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 36
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. first
- b. fest
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 37
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. urge
- b. edge
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 38
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. urge
- b. edge
- c. I am not sure

Check

Question 39
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. Firth
 b. forth
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 40
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Which word do you hear?



- a. Firth
 b. forth
 c. I am not sure

Check

Question 41
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear.



COURSE



CURSE



Check

Question 42
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear.



COURSE



CURSE



Source:

course - Course English Version.

course - Course Thank you to learn Goodman GafuMyUk Unpubsh.

Check

Question 43
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



GULL



GIRL



Check

Question 44
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



GIRL



GULL



Source:

girl - Thank you to Nohaan Ahmed 6w127G5A4M unplash.


gull - Thank you to Mark Thomas EGd6dR0cK unplash.

Check


Question 45
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

STIR



STORE




Check


Question 46
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

STORE



STIR




Source: <https://www.pinterest.com>
Site: <https://www.pinterest.com>

Check


Question 47
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

GRID



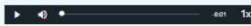
GUARD



Check

Question 48
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



GRID



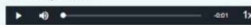
GUARD



Check

Question 49
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



SPORT



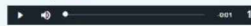
SPURT



Check

Question 50
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



SPURT



SPORT



Source:


spurt - Thank you to Pash on Pixabay

spurt - Thank you to Angelo Bazzani, wikimedia


Check

Question 51
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question


Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



WARM




WORM




Question 52
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question


Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



WARM




WORM




Question 53
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question


Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



BURST

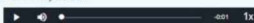


BUST



Question 54
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



BURST



BUST



Check

Question 55
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



URGE



EDGE



Check

Question 56
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



URGE



EDGE



Check

Question 57
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

KENNEL



KERNEL




Check


Question 58
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

KENNEL



KERNEL




Check


Question 59
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

HEART



HURT




Check


Question 60
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

HURT



HEART




Check


Question 61
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear

PEARL



PALL



Check

Question 62
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Listen to the recording and choose the picture that matches the word you hear



PALL



PEARL



Check

Question 63
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "card". True or false?



true

false

Check

Question 64
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "cord". True or false?



true

false

Check

Question 65
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "guard". True or false?



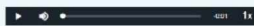
true

false

Check

Question 66
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "guard". True or false?




true

false

Check

Question 67
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "sarge". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 68
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "surge". True or false?

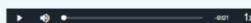


true
 false

Check

Question 69
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "sport". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 70
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "spurt". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 71
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "nerd". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 72
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "gnawed". True or false?

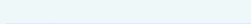


true
 false

Check

Question 73
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "asserted". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 74
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "asserted". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 75
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "course". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 76
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "course". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 77
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "warm". True or false?

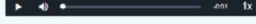


true
 false

Check

Question 78
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "warm". True or false?

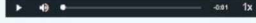


true
 false

Check

Question 79
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "edge". True or false?

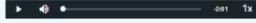


true
 false

Check

Question 80
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "edge". True or false?




true
 false

Check

Question 81
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "pearl". True or false?

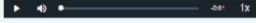


true
 false

Check

Question 82
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "pall". True or false?



true
 false

Check

Question 83
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "best". True or false?



- true
- false

Check

Question 84
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

The word you hear is "best". True or false?

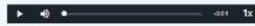


- true
- false

Check

Question 85
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.

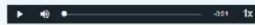


Answer:

Check

Question 86
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 87
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 88
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.

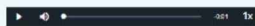


Answer:

Check

Question 89
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 90
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 91
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 92
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 93
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.

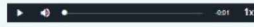


Answer:

Check

Question 94
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 95
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 96
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 97
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 98
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:

Check

Question 99
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

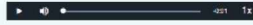
Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 100
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 101
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 102
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 103
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 104
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

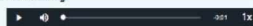
Write the word you hear in the box below.



Answer:
Check

Question 105
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.

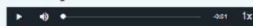


- A. /hʌt/
 B. /hɪt/
 C. /hɛt/

Check

Question 106
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



- A. /mɑːt/
 B. /mɜːt/
 C. /mɜːf/

Check

Question 107
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.

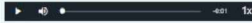


- A. /wɪm/
 B. /wɪm/
 C. /wɪm/

Check

Question 108
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.

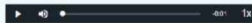


- A. /hɪt/
 B. /hɪt/
 C. /hɪt/

Check

Question 109
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



- A. /ɪl/
 B. /ɪl/
 C. /ɪl/

Check

Question 110
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.

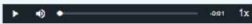


- A. /wɪm/
 B. /wɪm/
 C. /wɪm/

Check

Question 111
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



- A. /pɪl/
 B. /pɪl/
 C. /pɪl/

Check

Question 112
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



- A. /ɪdɪ/
 B. /ɪdɪ/
 C. /ɪdɪ/

Check

Question 113
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /eɪdʒ/
 B. /rædʒ/
 C. /ɜːdʒ/

Check

Question 114
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /bɪm/
 B. /bɪm/
 C. /bɪm/

Check

Question 115
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /gɪl/
 B. /gɪl/
 C. /gɪl/

Check

Question 116
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /gɪl/
 B. /gɪl/
 C. /gɪl/

Check

Question 117
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /gɪd/
 B. /gɪd/
 C. /gɪd/

Check

Question 118
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /gɪd/
 B. /gɪd/
 C. /gɪd/

Check

Question 119
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /hɒ d/
 B. /hɑ d/
 C. /hə d/

Check

Question 120
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /hɒ d/
 B. /hɑ d/
 C. /hə d/

Check

Question 121
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /stɔ r/
 B. /stɪ r/
 C. /stɔ t/

Check

Question 122
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /hɒ d/
 B. /hɑ d/
 C. /hə d/

Check

Question 123
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /stɔ r/
 B. /stɪ r/
 C. /stɔ r

Check

Question 124
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Add question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /kɔ s/
 B. /kɜ s/
 C. /kɔs/

Check

Question 125
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Exit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /ɪn sɪ/
 B. /ɒ sɪ/
 C. /æ sɪ/

Check

Question 126
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Exit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.




A. /i:ʃ/
 B. /ɪʃ/
 C. /e:ʃ/

Check

Question 127
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Exit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /i:ʃ/
 B. /ɪʃ/
 C. /æ:ʃ/

Check

Question 128
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Exit question

Select the correct transcription of the word you hear in the recording.



A. /ɪrɪ/
 B. /ɪr/
 C. /æ:ɪ/

Check

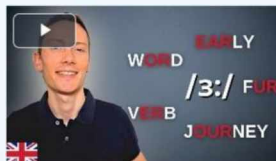
Introductory information

This lesson is prepared for the purpose of recognising the phoneme /ɜ:/ in words based on their phonetic environment.

What is the monophthong /ɜ:/?

One of the pure vowel sounds is the /ɜ:/ sound. It is an open-mid, central, unrounded vowel. To produce this vowel, our tongue is quite low in a flat position and in the centre of the mouth while our lips are stretched out a bit, but relaxed and not rounded. Not many words in English start or end with this sound but there are a few like *early*, *earn*, *irk*, and at the end of *occur* /ə'kʌr/.

Watch the following video about the phoneme /ɜ:/ and practise saying the words aloud.



We will look at some letter combinations that form the /ɜ:/ sound.
 This exercise shall enable you to recognise the monophthong /ɜ:/ based on the letter combinations. Practise the words by saying them aloud. **You can also record yourself!**
 Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it. The circle should be completely inside the drop zone.

Example:

There are many types of /ɜ:/n/



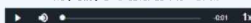
"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"
		/ɜ:/n/		

Quest 129
 Not complete
 Valued out of 100
 Flag question
 Edit
 Submit

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

The /ɜ:/ bird catches the worm.



"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"



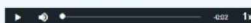
Check

Quest 130
 Not complete
 Valued out of 100
 Flag question
 Edit
 Submit

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

The defence /ɜ:/ arrived late.



"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"



Check

Question 131
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

We live in a changing /wɪld/

▶ ◀ ⏪ ⏩ 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /wɪld/

Check

Question 132
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

She /hɑ:d/ him cry.

▶ ◀ ⏪ ⏩ 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /hɑ:d/

Check

Question 133
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

"You shall not /mɑ: dɑ:/"

▶ ◀ ⏪ ⏩ 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /mɑ: dɑ:/

Check

Question 134
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

/s:ɪ/ Grey tea is a tea blend which has been flavoured with oil of bergamot.

▶ ◀ ⏪ ⏩ 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /s:ɪ/

Check

Question 135
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

Hopefully, the situation will not get /wɜ:s/.


"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

 /wɜ:s/

Check

Question 136
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

The abbreviation "TBT" stands for Throwback / θrɔ:deɪ/.


"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

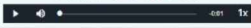
 /θrɔ:deɪ/

Check

Question 137
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

The best is to /bɛst/ it by heart.


"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

 /bɛst/

Check

Question 138
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

He has dark, /kɑ:lj/ hair.


"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

 /kɑ:lj/

Check

Question 139
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.
Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the /r/ sound, then release it.

He did it on /pɜː.pɒs/.

▶ ◀ • 0:01 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

○ /pɜː.pɒs/

Check

Question 140
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the /r/ sound, then release it.
In the game they simulate real life in a /vɜː.tʃu.əl/ world.

▶ ◀ • 0:01 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

○ /vɜː.tʃu.əl/

Check

Question 141
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the /r/ sound, then release it.
A /sɜː.vez/ was conducted to find out students' opinions.

▶ ◀ • 0:01 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

○ /sɜː.vez/

Check

Question 142
Not complete
Marked out of 1.00
Flag question
Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the /r/ sound, then release it.
I can /dɜː.tʃu.mən/ that.

▶ ◀ • 0:01 1x

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

○ /dɜː.tʃu.mən/

Check

Question 143
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

It is an aromatic /hɑ:bj/.

Audio player: [play] [stop] [rewind] [fast forward] [mute] [volume]

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

Draggable: /hɑ:bj/

Check

Question 144
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

It is /wɑ:θ/ remembering the transcription.

Audio player: [play] [stop] [rewind] [fast forward] [mute] [volume]

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

Draggable: /wɑ:θ/

Check

Question 145
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

I hereby /sɪ.ti.faɪz/ that the above information is true and correct.

Audio player: [play] [stop] [rewind] [fast forward] [mute] [volume]

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

Draggable: /sɪ.ti.faɪz/

Check

Question 146
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the circle (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

It is time you had a /wɜ:d/ with them.

Audio player: [play] [stop] [rewind] [fast forward] [mute] [volume]

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

Draggable: /wɜ:d/

Check

Question 147
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

A /fəʊ/ tree is a coniferous tree with upright cones.

▶ ◀ 🔊 🔍

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /fəʊ/

Check

Question 148
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

I studied at London /juː.nɪ vs. sɔː.ti/.

▶ ◀ 🔊 🔍

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /juː.nɪ vs. sɔː.ti/

Check

Question 149
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

They test new cars on a motor racing /sɜː.kɪt/.

▶ ◀ 🔊 🔍

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /sɜː.kɪt/

Check

Question 150
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

Mike is a people /pɪ.sən/.

▶ ◀ 🔊 🔍

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

◻ /pɪ.sən/

Check

Question 151
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

They /**ʌr**m/ their living from private teaching.

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

/ʌr m/

Check

Question 152
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

Happy /**hɜː**dɪz/!

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

/hɜː dɪz/

Check

Question 153
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

Please /**kən**ˈfɜːm/ your reservation in writing by Monday.

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

/kən ˈfɜː m/

Check

Question 154
 Not complete
 Marked out of 1.00
 Flag question
 Edit question

Make sure the **circle** (above the left hand corner of the transcription) is placed completely inside the correct box.

Listen to the pronunciation of the transcribed word and drag it to the right section based on the letter combination before the r sound, then release it.

A /**wɜː**m/ is a small animal with a long and soft body without bones.

"EAR"	"UR"	"ER"	"IR"	"(W)OR"

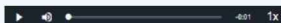
/wɜː m/

Check

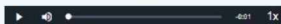
There are also other letter combinations. Look at the other letter combinations, listen to the recording and practise saying it aloud. You can also see the word transcribed.

"OU"

journalist /ˈdʒɑːnəlɪst/

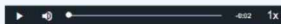


courtesy /ˈkɜːtəsi/



"EU"

entrepreneur /ˌɒn.tɹə.pɹəˈnɜːr/



By now you have probably concluded, that the sound /z/ appears before the letter "r" and that there is a simple tip how to identify it depending on a phonetic context - a letter combination:

EAR learn, pearl

IR firm, first

UR curtain, urge

ER germ, refer

OR would, work

"YR" combination leading to /z/ sound:

YR myrtle /ˈmɜː.təl/, myrrh /ˈmɜːr/

The combination "OUR" and "EUR" leading to /z/ sound:

OUR journalist, courtesy

EUR entrepreneur, connoisseur

There is a spelling anomaly with the word colonel

"OL"

colonel /ˈkɒl.nəl/ = an officer of high rank in the army

kernel /ˈkɜː.nəl/ = the whole seed of the maize plant, a softer, usually edible part of a nut, seed, or fruit stone contained within its shell; the central part of something



The word colonel is a homophone to the word kernel. They sound the same /ˈkɒl.nəl/, but have a different spelling and meaning, therefore they are called homophones

There are more homophones containing the vowel /ɜː/.

For example:

/bɜːθ/ birth - berth,

/ɜːn/ earn - urn,

/fɜːr/ fir - fur,

/hɜːd/ heard - herd,

/tɜːn/ tern - turn.

Be careful! The letter combinations given do not always have to be the /ɜː/ sound and it is advisable to check the phonemic transcription in a dictionary. Here are some examples:

beard /bɜːd/

direct /dɪrɪkt/

bury /berɪ/

serial /sɪəriəl/

herd /bɜːd/

Also, notice the strong and weak forms of certain words in pronunciation:

	strong form	weak form
were	/wɜː/	/wə/
her	/hɜː/	/hə/

her	/hɜː/	/hə/
-----	-------	------

Lastly, some essential practice before you earn your two points towards the Credit Test!

Note: in the Credit Test there are transcription tasks where the word contains the phoneme /ɜː/. In addition you may be asked about this vowel in the Oral Exam

1) Watch this lesson on /ɜː/ which includes some practice and a quiz at the end.

https://britlish.com/public/britlish_library/lesson_details.php?id=31

2) Say these tongue twisters to practise the sound /ɜː/:



For educational purposes, I recommend the songs listed below. Listen to the songs and practise by singing (or by listening out for) the sound /ɜː/:

Sherman, Richard M., and Robert B. Sherman. "It's a Small World." *It's a Small World*, Walt Disney Records, 1964.

The Beatles. "Blackbird." *The Beatles (White Album)*, track 11. Produced by George Martin. Apple Records, 1968.

The Trashmen. "Surfin' Bird." *Surfin' Bird*, produced by Jack Bates. Garrett Records, 1963.

Please fill out this questionnaire. Thank you!

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Additionally, all videos recommended in this lesson are freely available on YouTube and are used solely for educational purposes. This lesson is provided free of charge, with no financial profit made from its distribution.

References

BBC Learning English. "English Pronunciation: Long Vowel - /ɜː/ - 'nurse', 'stir' and 'learn'." Video, YouTube. July 19, 2013. Accessed January 30, 2023.

English Language Club. "English Vowel Sounds." Video, 8:32. YouTube. December 24, 2014. Accessed January 25, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwcBtpz3gco&ab_channel=EnglishLanguageClub.

Lean English Pronunciation. "How to Pronounce the /ɜː/ Sound in British English." Video, YouTube. January 27, 2023. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjPpbFKiCRc>.

PRA English. "Tongue Twisters: /ɜː/ Sound." Video, YouTube. June 30, 2021. Accessed January 30, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RZP_0mwXXY.

Shepherd, Jill. "Tongue Twisters, English Pronunciation Practice: A Warm Worm Walks to Work." Video. YouTube. May 11, 2021. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtFKccJPbU4>.

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The Beatles. "Blackbird." *The Beatles (White Album)*, track 11. Produced by George Martin. Apple Records, 1968.

The Trashmen. "Surfin' Bird." *Surfin' Bird*, produced by Jack Bates. Garrett Records, 1963.