

## Họ từ trong các bài hát tiếng Anh cho trẻ em

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### TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu bàn về các họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi trong các bài hát tiếng Anh cho trẻ em. Mục đích chính của nghiên cứu là khảo sát, làm rõ và sử dụng các họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi xuất hiện trong 1.000 bài hát tiếng Anh cho trẻ em. Từ đó, những ai quan tâm đến chủ đề này sẽ có cái nhìn tổng quát về những họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi xuất hiện phổ biến nhất và ít phổ biến nhất trong các bài hát tiếng Anh cho trẻ em. Để đạt được mục đích đã đề ra, chúng tôi sử dụng kết hợp nhiều phương pháp nghiên cứu. Cụ thể, phương pháp định lượng được sử dụng để nhận dạng và tính số lần xuất hiện của họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi. Đồng thời, nghiên cứu cũng dựa vào phương pháp định tính nhằm phân tích một vài đặc điểm tiêu biểu của họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi. Qua quá trình nghiên cứu, chúng tôi nhận ra rằng các họ từ loại II phổ biến hơn nhiều so với các họ từ loại I. Về mặt ý nghĩa giảng dạy, chúng tôi đã tỉ mỉ thiết kế ba bộ sản phẩm phục vụ việc dạy họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi cho trẻ em.

**Keywords:** Họ từ bắt đầu bằng nguyên âm đôi, tần suất, các bài hát tiếng Anh cho trẻ em.

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# Phonograms in English songs for children

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## ABSTRACT

The study is about diphthong phonograms in English songs for children. The main goal of the study is to investigate, clarify and exploit diphthong phonograms in 1.000 English songs for children so that those interested in this topic will have an overall view of the most and least common diphthong phonograms in English songs for children. With this end in mind, the researchers adopt a mixed-method approach. To be more specific, qualitative method is employed to identify and calculate the occurrences of diphthong phonograms. At the same time, the study also resorts to quantitative method, which enables the researchers to analyze some typical characteristics of surveyed diphthong phonograms. The final results unfold that closing phonograms (Type II) are far more common than centring phonograms (Type I). Regarding pedagogical significance, three sets of products have been carefully designed for teaching diphthong phonograms for children.

**Key words:** *Diphthong phonograms, frequency, English songs for children.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the important skills children need to familiarize with and master when they learn a new language. In general, there are three main goals of early reading instructions: automatic word recognition, comprehension of the text and development of a love of literature and a desire to read.

The first goal means that to become a skilled reader, children must be able to identify words quickly and easily. To do so, they have to be proficient at decoding words. Decoding words involves converting the printed word into spoken language. A reader decodes a word by sounding it out, using context clues, using structural analysis, or recognizing word by sight. In order to sound out words, a reader must

be able to associate a specific spelling with a specific sound. Teaching phonograms is one of the approaches that help learners of English especially children identify and decode quickly letter-sound patterns.

There are several reasons why we choose phonograms for our study:

Firstly, a large number of new readers both children and adults find it easier to divide words into onsets and rimes rather than individual letters and sounds. This is partly true due to the fact that according to Fromkin, Blair, and Collins <sup>1</sup> suggest that “*Children do not learn a language by storing all the words and all the sentences in some giant mental dictionary*” and “*Children must therefore construct the ‘rules’ that permit them to use their language*

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creatively”. Therefore, teaching phonograms and related word families offer an alternative to traditional synthetic phonics programs in which beginners are expected to sound out or decode new words they encounter in a letter-by-letter fashion. Researches over the last 45 years have demonstrated that children are more successful at breaking apart the onset and rime in a word (d-ay) than in breaking the word into individual phonemes (d-a-y) or breaking it in another place (such as da-y).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Blevins<sup>3</sup> states that “Approximately 84% of English words are phonetically regular.” Besides, one of the significant values of phonograms is that they are reliable and generalizable. Therefore, it is extremely useful to teach the most common sound-spelling relationships in English for readers. By learning a phonogram such as *-ake*, they can generate a number of primary-level words such as *bake, cake, hake, lake, make, shake, snake, take, and wake*.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Phonograms

2.1.1. Definition

Blevins<sup>3</sup> defines “A phonogram is a letter (or series of letters) that stands for a sound, syllable, or series of sounds without reference to meaning. For example, the phonogram *-ay* contains two letters and stands for the /eɪ/ sound. It can be found in words such as *say, may* and *day*”.

2.1.2. Classification

Depending on the vowel sound (peak) of a phonogram, we have three main types of phonograms: monophthong phonograms (or phonograms starting with a monophthong), diphthong phonograms (phonograms starting with a diphthong) or triphthong phonograms (phonograms starting with a triphthong).

Since the focus of our study is diphthong phonograms, we will move on to give a detailed classification of them. In fact, there are two main types of diphthong phonograms: centring phonograms - those starting with diphthongs ending in /ə/ (Type I) and closing phonograms - those starting with diphthongs ending in /ɪ/ and the ones ending in /ʊ/ (Type II).

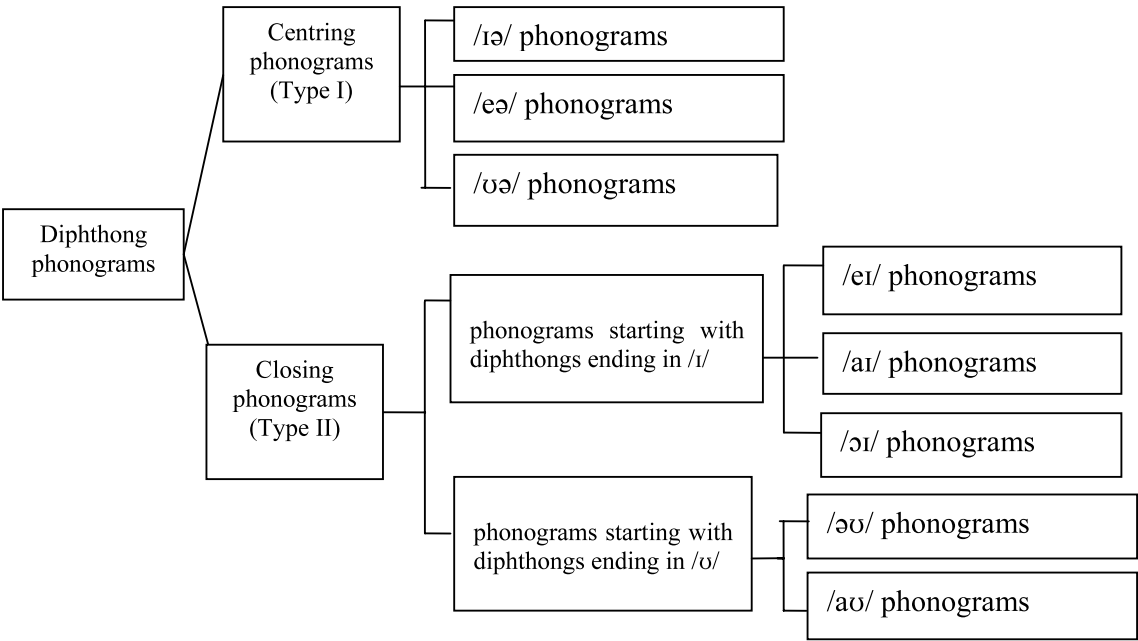


Figure 1. Two main types of diphthong phonograms

After diphthong phonograms are classified into two main types, they will be put into sub-types based on their coda including phonograms

ending with no coda, phonograms ending with a single consonant sound and phonograms ending with a consonant cluster.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

Firstly, 1.000 English songs for children were randomly chosen from formally published CDs and authentic websites. After the initial investigation, we found out 300 English songs, which had diphthong phonograms. The remaining 700 songs are not discussed because they either contain monophthong phonograms or contain no phonograms.

3.2. Data analysis

In order to calculate the exact frequency of diphthong phonograms in English songs for children, we listened to each song carefully as well as using the lyrics to check out the spelling. The raw calculation was put into the computer as the input. With the help of Microsoft Excel, the frequencies and percentages were exactly represented and shown through tables, figures and graphs.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results of diphthong phonograms

After thoroughly investigating 1.000 English

songs for children, we have found 300 songs containing 42 diphthong phonograms, which constitute 213 words. The frequency of each type of phonograms was calculated and shown in the following tables.

Table 2. The number and occurrences of diphthong phonograms in English songs for children

	Number of phonograms	Occurrences
Type I	4	57
Type II	38	2066
Total	42	2123

The table points out that in terms of the number of phonograms and their occurrence, the significant differences between the two types of diphthong phonograms are easy to be recognized. The number of Type II phonograms is approximately ten times higher than that of Type I (38 and 4 phonograms respectively). It is interesting to see that Type II phonograms occur far more frequently than Type I, with 97,32% and 2,68% respectively.

Table 3. Frequency of 42 diphthong phonograms in English songs for children

No.	Phonograms	Occurrences	Frequency	No.	Phonograms	Occurrences	Frequency
1	-eigh /eɪ/	2	0,09%	22	-ile /aɪl/	18	0,85%
2	-ope /əʊp/	2	0,09%	23	-ive /aɪv/	21	0,99%
3	-ange /eɪndʒ/	3	0,14%	24	-old /əʊld/	23	1,08%
4	-ind /aɪnd/	3	0,14%	25	-ife /aɪf/	27	1,27%
5	-are /eə/	4	0,19%	26	-ouse /aʊs/	30	1,41%
6	-ild /aɪld/	4	0,19%	27	-ine /aɪn/	31	1,46%
7	-ise /aɪz/	4	0,19%	28	-ear /ɪə/	32	1,51%
8	-oad /əʊd/	4	0,19%	29	-ound /aʊnd/	33	1,55%
9	-owl /aʊl/	4	0,19%	30	-ide /aɪd/	37	1,74%
10	-ave /eɪv/	6	0,28%	31	-oy /ɔɪ/	50	2,36%
11	-ime /aɪm/	6	0,28%	32	-ike /aɪk/	60	2,83%
12	-ose /əʊz/	6	0,28%	33	-ame /eɪm/	73	3,44%
13	-ere /eə/	8	0,38%	34	-own /aʊn/	84	3,96%
14	-ain /eɪn/	8	0,38%	35	-out /aʊt/	85	4,00%
15	-ice /aɪs/	11	0,52%	36	-ow /aʊ/	85	4,00%
16	-ite /aɪt/	11	0,52%	37	-o /əʊ/	132	6,22%
17	-ate /eɪt/	12	0,57%	38	-ow /əʊ/	144	6,78%
18	-air /eə/	13	0,61%	39	-ake /eɪk/	149	7,02%
19	-oat /əʊt/	16	0,75%	40	-ight /aɪt/	183	8,62%
20	-ail /eɪl/	17	0,80%	41	-y /aɪ/	299	14,08%
21	-ace /eɪs/	18	0,85%	42	-ay /eɪ/	365	17,20%

There are 20 most common diphthong phonograms occurring more than 20 times in 300 English songs for children. Among them, there is only one centring phonogram (-ear /ɪə/).

It is obvious that -ay /eɪ/ is the most common diphthong phonogram in 300 English songs for children, accounting for 17,20%, followed by -y /aɪ/ and -ight /aɪt/, with 14,08% and 8,62% respectively. The next three most common diphthong phonograms are -ake /eɪk/ (7,02%), -ow /əʊ/ (6,78%) and -o /əʊ/ (6,22%).

*“I took a walk to town one day  
And me a cat along the way.  
What do you think that cat did say?  
“Meow, meow, meow.”  
(‘I took a walk’ - Wee sing for baby)*

In contrast, there are nine least common diphthong phonograms occurring less than 4 times. They are -eigh /eɪ/, -ope /əʊp/, -ange /eɪndʒ/, -ind /aɪnd/, -are /eə/, -ild /aɪld/, -ise /aɪz/, -oad /əʊd/, and -owl /aʊl/.

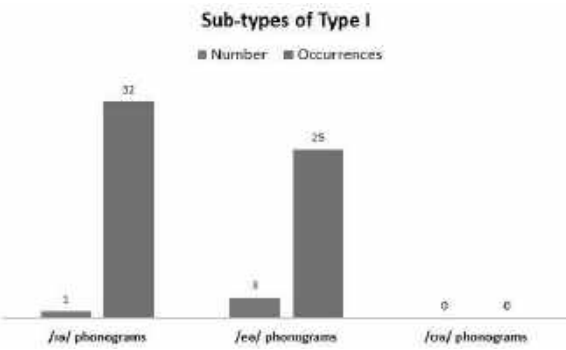
Another thing, which draws our attention, is that there are two diphthong phonograms with the same spelling *ow*. Although both -ow /aʊ/ and -ow /əʊ/ are considered common diphthong phonograms, the latter is 1.5 times as common as the former. We also found out 11 phonograms with the same pronunciation but different spelling. As usual, most of them belong to closing phonograms (Type II).

**Table 4.** Phonograms with the same pronunciation but different spelling

TYPE I	TYPE II
-are /eə/	-ain /eɪn/
-ere /eə/	-ine /aɪn/
-air /eə/	
	-ite /aɪt/
	-ight /aɪt/
	-o /əʊ/
	-ow /əʊ/
	-ay /eɪ/
	-eigh /eɪ/

Above are our very general findings about diphthong phonograms in 300 English songs for children. The following sections will supply us with a detailed analysis of each type of diphthong phonograms in the songs analyzed.

4.2. Results of centring phonograms (Type I)



**Figure 1.** The number and occurrences of centring phonograms in English songs for children

As can be seen from Figure 1, there are no /ʊə/ phonograms, so /eə/ and /ɪə/ phonograms are two sub-types of centring phonograms appearing in 300 English songs for children. Taking a deep look at these two sub-types, we find out an interesting thing. Despite the fact that /eə/ phonograms have three times as many phonograms as /ɪə/ phonograms (3 and 1 phonogram respectively), the latter occur more frequently than the former in English songs for children, with 32 and 25 times respectively.

Now, we will move on to discuss the frequency of patterns for /ɪə/ phonograms and /eə/ phonograms in terms of their coda.

The statistics from Table 5 on page 6 shows that in terms of coda, all of centring phonograms end with no coda. These phonograms are often closed by a letter *r*, which is silent in RP. This characteristics is similar to a conclusion stated by Payne.<sup>4</sup> “Since /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/ frequently occur in words with a silent *r*, it is convenient to consider that *r* forms part of the spelling of the vowel sound”.

Out of four centring phonograms, -ear /ɪə/ is the most common (32 times), which is much higher than all the three /eə/ phonograms combined (25 times).

*There's no rival we can **fear**  
Hear us shout and **hear** us cheer.*

*(‘We're going to win’ -  
learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org)*

Regarding patterns for /eə/ phonograms,  
-air /eə/ occurs the most frequently (13 times).

*Stretch your neck  
Brush your **hair**  
Straighten your shoulders  
Sit on your **chair**.*

*(‘What are you doing?’ - Let's chant -  
Let's sing book 2)*

*Shoe a little horse,  
Shoe a little **mare**,  
But let the little bony  
Go **bare, bare, bare**.*

*(‘Shoe a little horse’ - Wee sing for Baby)*

In terms of orthography, we recognize that the vowel sounds /ɪə/ and /eə/ are realized by a single vowel letter<sup>a</sup> when the next consonant letter is **r** which is followed by a final silent **e**<sup>b</sup> (as can be seen in -are and -ere) or realized by a vowel digraph<sup>c</sup> followed by an **r** (as can be seen in -ear and -air).

### 4.3. Results of closing phonograms (Type II)

As presented in Figure 2, there tends to be a close relation between the number and the occurrence of closing phonograms. It is irrefutable that the number of phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ɪ/ is approximately twice as much as that of phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/ (25 and 13 phonograms respectively). The same thing happens when it comes to the occurrences of these two sub-types. In other words, the former accounts for nearly two-thirds of the total occurrence of all closing phonograms.

<sup>a</sup> One of the letters **a, e, i, o, u** or **y**.

<sup>b</sup> It is called so since there is no sound standing for ending in it. It is here just to help readers know the vowel sound before is a long one.

<sup>c</sup> A vowel digraph is the use of two letters (usually two vowel letters) for a single vowel sound.

It is obvious that /aɪ/ phonograms make up the largest number of closing phonograms in particular and of all diphthong phonograms in general, with 14 phonograms. Therefore, it goes without saying that /aɪ/ phonograms are ranked first in terms of occurrence (715 times), followed by /eɪ/ phonograms (653 times). Each of these two phonograms occurs more frequently than all phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/ combined (648 times).

*My native country, thee  
Land of the noble free  
Thy name I love  
I love thy rocks and rills  
Thy woods and templed hills  
My heart with rapture thrills  
Like that above  
Our father's god to thee  
Author of liberty  
To thee we sing  
Long may our land be **bright**  
With freedom's holy **light**  
Protect us by thy **might**  
Great god, out king  
(‘America’ - Wee sing America)*

a) Phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ɪ/

From Figure 2, we can see that /aɪ/ phonograms are the most popular among the three sub-types of phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ɪ/ in terms not only of the number but also of the occurrences of phonograms. Likewise, the second position belongs to /eɪ/ phonograms. However, when we compare these two sub-types, we realize that while /aɪ/ phonograms have four phonograms more than /eɪ/ phonograms, the gap between them is quite small, only 4% in terms of their occurrences. /ɔɪ/ phonograms come third.

Table 5. Distribution of /ɪə/ and /eə/ phonograms in terms of their coda

		Ending with no coda		Ending with a single consonant sound	Ending with a consonant cluster
		Phonograms	Occurrences		
Type I	/ɪə/ phonograms	-ear /ɪə/	32	0	0
	/eə/ phonograms	-air /eə/	13	0	0
		-are /eə/	8		
		-ere /eə/	4		

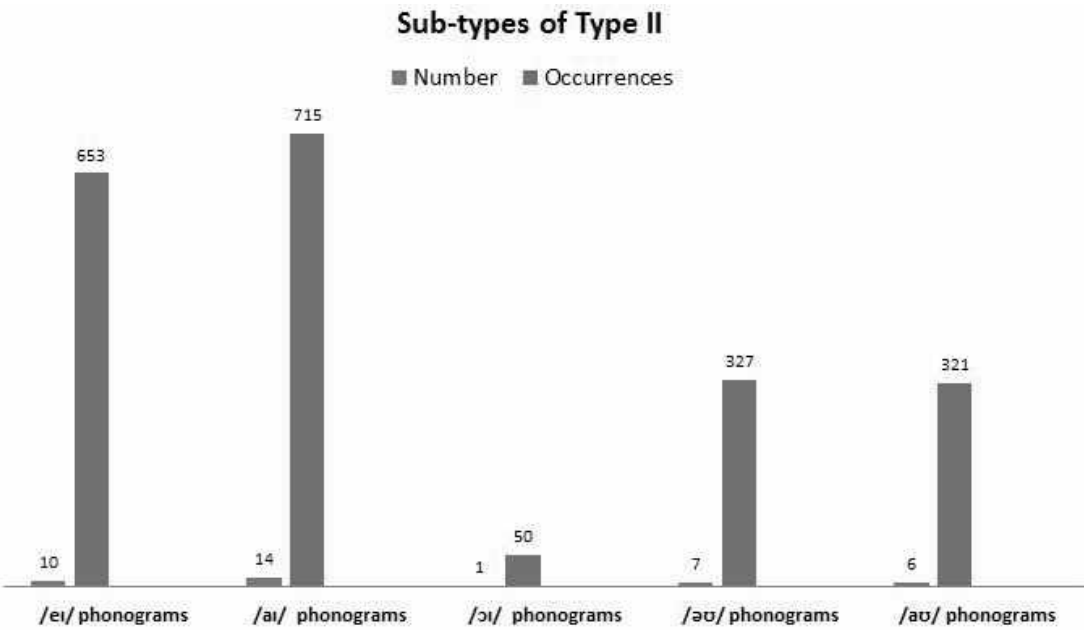


Figure 2. The number and occurrences of sub-types of closing phonograms in 300 English songs for children

Table 6. The number and occurrences /eɪ/ phonograms in 300 English songs for children

/eɪ / phonograms	Number of phonograms	Phonograms	Occurrences	Total
Ending with no coda	2 (20%)	-ay /eɪ/ -eigh /eɪ/	365 2	367 (56,2%)
Ending with a single consonant sound	7 (70%)	-ace /eɪs/ -ake /eɪk/ -ame /eɪm/ -ate /eɪt/ -ave /eɪv/ -ail /eɪn/ -ain /eɪn/	18 149 73 12 6 17 8	283 (43,34%)
Ending with a consonant cluster	1 (10%)	-ange /eɪndʒ/	3	3 (0,46%)
Total		10		653 (100%)

In terms of coda, /eɪ/ phonograms can end with no coda, a single consonant sound or a consonant cluster. However, the number and occurrences of each /eɪ/ phonogram in terms of their coda are significantly different.

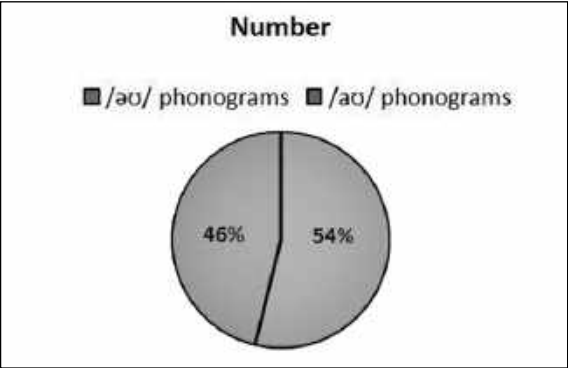
It is easy to recognize the big difference between /eɪ/ phonograms ending with no coda and those ending with a single consonant sound. To be more specific, while the former has only two phonograms constituting nearly 57% of the total occurrences of /eɪ/ phonograms, the latter has seven phonograms accounting for over 45% of the total occurrences. This trend shows that the high number of phonograms does not necessarily mean that these phonograms occur frequently.

As usual, phonograms ending with a consonant cluster are the least common with only one phonogram (-ange /eɪndʒ/) which occurs 3 times, appearing in only one song called “Old Texas”.

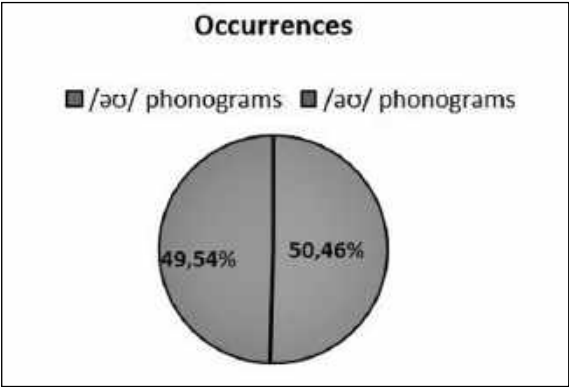
*They’ve plowed and fenced my cattle range  
And the people there are all so strange.  
(‘Old Texas’ - Wee sing America)*

b) Phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/

As can be seen from the two pie charts below, there is no remarkable gap between /əʊ/ and /aʊ/ phonograms in terms of the number and occurrences of each sub-type. To be more specific, the former has one phonogram more than the latter (7 and 6 phonograms respectively). However, their occurrences are almost the same.



**Figure 2.** The number of phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/



**Figure 3.** The occurrences of phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/

Now, we will move on to discuss phonograms starting with diphthongs ending in /ʊ/ in terms of their coda.

From Table 7, we can deduce some conclusions. First of all, there are seven /əʊ/ phonograms ending with no coda, a single consonant sound or a consonant cluster. Moreover, it is easy to recognize that there is no correlation between the number and occurrences of /əʊ/ phonograms ending with no coda and those ending with a single consonant sound. More than half of the number of /əʊ/ phonograms end with a consonant sound, but their occurrences are slightly higher than the only one /əʊ/ phonograms ending with a consonant cluster (28 and 23 times respectively). In contrast, two /əʊ/ phonograms ending with no coda account for nearly 85% of the total occurrences of /əʊ/ phonograms.

The most common /əʊ/ phonogram is –ow /əʊ/, followed by –o /əʊ/, with 144 and 112 times respectively. The least common phonogram is -ope /əʊp/, which appears two times in only one song “Old Texas”.

*“We’re gonna do my favorite thing  
Oh, how i love to go camping.  
Going camping, feels so good.  
Camping, here in the woods.  
Camping makes me sing.  
Oh, how I love to go camping.”*

*(‘Camping’ - Những bài hát tiếng Anh  
hay nhất cho trẻ em 2)*



*“If you’re happy and you know it  
Never be afraid to show it”  
(‘If you are happy’ - Sing a song of ABC)*

*“I will take my horse, I will take my rope  
And hit the trail upon the lope”  
(‘Old Texas’ - Wee sing America)*

Table 7. The number and occurrences /əʊ/ phonograms in 300 English songs for children

/əʊ/ phonograms	Number of phonograms	Phonograms	Occurrences	Total
Ending with no coda	2 (28,57%)	-o /əʊ/ -ow /əʊ/	132 144	276 (84,40%)
Ending with a single consonant sound	4 (57,14%)	-oad /əʊd/ -oat /əʊt/ -ope /əʊp/ -ose /əʊz/	4 16 2 6	28 (8,56%)
Ending with a consonant cluster	1 (14,29%)	-old /əʊld/	23	23 (7,04%)
Total		7		327 (100%)

Table 8. The number and occurrences /aʊ/ phonograms in 300 English songs for children

/aʊ/ phonograms	Number of phonograms	Phonograms	Occurrences	Total
Ending with no coda	1 (16,67%)	-ow /aʊ/	85	85 (26,48%)
Ending with a single consonant sound	4 (66,66%)	-ouse /aʊs/ -out /aʊt/ -owl /aʊl/ -own /aʊn/	30 85 4 84	203 (63,24%)
Ending with a consonant cluster	1 (16,67%)	-ound /aʊnd/	33	33 (10,28%)
Total		6		321 (100%)

It is clear from the table that there are six /aʊ/ phonograms, which can end with no coda, a single consonant, sound or a consonant cluster. There is a correlation between the number and occurrences of these three sub-types. /aʊ/ phonograms ending with a single consonant sound make up nearly two-thirds of the number and the total occurrences of /aʊ/ phonograms. The second position falls to /aʊ/ phonograms ending with no coda and as usual, those ending with a consonant cluster take the last position in terms of the number and occurrences.

The two most common /aʊ/ phonograms

are –ow /əʊ/ and -out /aʊt/ with the same occurrences (85 times). –own /aʊn/ is also considered a common phonogram with 84 times. The vast majority of /aʊ/ phonograms occur more than 30 times, with the exception of -owl /aʊl/ (4 times), which is also the least common /aʊ/ phonogram.

*Bow, wow, wow.  
Whose dog are thou?  
Little Tommy Tinker’s dog.  
Bow, wow, wow.  
(‘Bow, wow, wow’ - Wee sing Mother Goose)*

*Whenever we go out  
The people always shout  
"John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt"  
Da-da-da-da-da*

*(‘John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt’ - Những bài hát tiếng Anh hay nhất dành cho trẻ em)*

*Different shapes make different things  
Up and down and round round rings  
Turn me up and turn me down  
Mix and match and make a crown.  
(‘Shape Song’ - Sing a song of ABC)*

## 5. CONCLUSION

Phonograms have always been a great tool to teach English letter-sound relationships or phonics to young learners. Besides, songs are widely considered as an effective way to facilitate the English teaching process. After thorough investigation, the most significant finding is that closing phonograms (Type II) are far more common than centring phonograms (Type I). Out of 20 most common diphthong phonograms, *-ay* /eɪ/ is the most common diphthong phonogram in 10.000 English songs for children, followed by *-y* /aɪ/, *-ight* /aɪt/, *-ake* /eɪk/ (7,02%), *-ow* /əʊ/ and *-o* /əʊ/. In contrast, there are nine least common diphthong phonograms occurring less than 4 times. They are *-eigh* /eɪ/, *-ope* /əʊp/, *-ange* /eɪndʒ/, *-ind* /aɪnd/, *-are* /eə/, *-ild* /aɪld/, *-ise* /aɪz/, *-oad* /əʊd/, and *-owl* /aʊl/.

In terms of coda, all of centring phonograms end with no coda while closing phonograms can end with no coda, with a single consonant sound or with a consonant cluster.

In terms of pedagogical significance, based on the data analysis, the researchers have produced three sets of products including a song book, a game book as well as karaoke files. All of these products can be used to facilitate the process of teaching diphthong phonograms for children through songs.

In this study, we have just investigated the types and frequency of phonograms starting with a diphthong. Therefore, the future research can continue to investigate phonograms starting with a triphthong. We are also aware of the fact that only one-syllable words were calculated in our research. Hence, the later research should include polysyllabic words to increase the number of songs and words employed to teach students to recognize diphthong phonograms.

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