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BOOSTING PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AND PRACTICE IN THE *ESO* CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The teaching and practicing of pronunciation in *ESO*'s English classrooms have been subject to rejection and lack of appropriate consideration for many years. Labeled as “the poor relation of the English language teaching world” (Brown, 1991), “the orphan” (Gilbert, 2010) or “the Cinderella of English Language Teaching” (Underhill, 2013), pronunciation has been mostly locked away and out of sight in neglect, mainly reduced to boring drilling methods, in many cases due to teachers' almost non-existent training and knowledge of English phonology, leading to uncertainty about exactly what should be taught and how. In recent years, however, the growing academic interest for intelligibility and effective communication skills has brought back pronunciation and its importance to the language teaching scenario.

The lack of positive attitude and pronunciation awareness of English teachers, their lack of training, resources and support in English phonology, as well as frequent, contextualized pronunciation practice for their students were some of the surprising results after an eight-week observation period at an *ESO* school in north Tenerife. The feedback obtained from the students during that period of time undoubtedly indicated a real need for a change in teachers, students, and textbooks' vision of pronunciation teaching, practice, and integration into English lesson plans. The main purpose of this study is to provide English teachers with some useful strategies that they could use to effectively integrate pronunciation into their English classes and thus improve their students' oral communication skills.

Keywords: pronunciation, awareness, intelligibility, communication, contextualized practice, English classroom.

RESUMEN

La enseñanza y práctica de la pronunciación en las aulas de clase de inglés de la *ESO* han estado sujetas al rechazo y a la falta de una justa consideración por muchos años. Catalogada como “la subordinada del mundo de la enseñanza del idioma inglés” (Brown, 1991), “la huérfana” (Gilbert (2010) o “la Cenicienta de la enseñanza del idioma inglés” (Underhill, 2013), la pronunciación ha estado apartada y abandonada principalmente por críticas a sus aburridos métodos de práctica y, en muchos casos, a la falta de formación y a un conocimiento casi inexistente de la fonología inglesa por parte de los profesores, lo cual deriva en una incertidumbre en lo que se debería enseñar y cómo enseñarlo. En los últimos años, sin embargo, el creciente interés académico por la inteligibilidad y las destrezas comunicativas efectivas ha traído de vuelta a la pronunciación y su importancia al escenario de la enseñanza de idiomas.

La falta de actitud y conciencia en la pronunciación por parte de los profesores de inglés, su carencia de entrenamiento, recursos y apoyo en la fonología inglesa, así como también la falta de práctica frecuente y contextualizada de la pronunciación por parte de sus estudiantes fueron algunos de los sorprendentes resultados después un período de ocho semanas de observación en un instituto de *ESO* en el norte de Tenerife. La retroinformación obtenida de los estudiantes durante ese período de tiempo indicó, sin lugar a dudas, la necesidad real de un cambio en la visión que profesores, alumnos y libros de texto tienen de la enseñanza, práctica e integración de la pronunciación en las planificaciones de las clases de inglés. El principal propósito de este estudio es proveer a los profesores de inglés de algunas estrategias útiles que puedan usar de manera efectiva en sus clases de inglés y, de esa manera, mejorar las destrezas comunicativas de sus alumnos.

Palabras Clave: pronunciación, conciencia, inteligibilidad, comunicación, práctica contextualizada, aula de clase de inglés.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been a well-known fact for many years that secondary schools in Spain have given more relevance and attention to the teaching of writing and reading as compared to the development of oral communication skills (speaking and listening), especially in the *Bachillerato* level. This is due in part to students' requirement to pass the pre-university *EBAU* English test which focuses on assessing their reading and writing skills including grammar and vocabulary. However, a couple of decades ago, there has been a developing tendency to incorporate the teaching of speaking and listening in order to achieve efficient communicative competence in English through the simultaneous work with the other closely-connected, basic skills. Teachers should then elaborate classroom activities to help students perceive the interrelationships between reading, writing, speaking and listening, hence improving their communicative skills towards the achievement of the ultimate goal: the linguistic competence, one of the key competences to be worked on according to the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

The CEF provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.

Bartolí (2005) acknowledges that the CEF clearly distinguishes between speech pronunciation (phonological competence) and written text pronunciation (orthoepic competence). However, almost all the proposals to develop pronunciation skills aim at improving the orthoepic competence, and a reference to the objectives of pronunciation is not included. She later confirms that the CEF's contents on pronunciation are adequate, but they do not include integrating pronunciation proposals in a communicative classroom.

Since 2013, the Organic Law on the Improvement of the Quality of Education (Spain's *LOMCE*) represents the country's latest educational reform framework and the application platform of Europe's CEF guidelines.

Narrowing down to the Canary Islands territory, it is the *Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias* who elaborates the First Foreign Language curriculum, in which it is clearly stated that the linguistic communication competence (LC) will be thoroughly developed in both the *ESO* and *Bachillerato* levels. Students are meant to use their phonological knowledge, among other sociolinguistic aspects learned during their language teaching sessions. Following CEF's guidelines, they are also supposed to be trained in developing the six different dimensions of the linguistic component of the competence, that is to say: lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographical and orthoepic.

Having the linguistic competence development in mind, speaking turns out to be one of the main productive skills to be developed, provided that it is practiced as much as possible from the early levels of the learning process. The teacher should speak English in class all the time, to let students become familiar with the accent, rhythm, intonation and other phonological aspects of English. As they start producing oral language in the classroom they are going to feel confident in that new language as they gradually improve their vocabulary through spoken interaction and other productive and receptive activities. They will eventually enjoy being able to communicate with other people in the new language. However, if there are poor intelligibility and poor listening comprehension, students might feel socially inhibited and frustrated in their ability to cope and communicate effectively in an English-speaking environment.

If both teachers and students are aware of the importance of teaching and practicing good English pronunciation while speaking for proper effective communication, then we are most likely to have a teaching/learning successful process in our classrooms as students are able to produce the phonological features of speech well enough to be understood. However, if the opposite occurs, if teachers are not prepared or hesitant to teach pronunciation, if they

spend more time on things like grammar and textbook exercises, then they might be losing the track of CEF's language for communication goal. On the other hand, if students are also missing the basic knowledge and practice of English pronunciation, they may most likely be making pronunciation mistakes unconsciously, compromising, if not corrected, the intelligibility and understanding of the message being communicated.

In relation to the hypothetical situation mentioned above, I had a similar perception when I was observing both English teachers and students during my teaching practicum at an *ESO* school in Los Realejos, Tenerife. I noticed that English teachers were not sufficiently well trained when it came to mastering pronunciation teaching. There were some mispronunciation cases of their own, they were not correcting students' obvious, repetitive mistakes, they did not dedicate any frequent time to teaching and practicing the basic pronunciation concepts to help correct some of their students' mistakes and improve their pronunciation. Due to the reality mentioned above, students were unaware of some relevant English pronunciation facts dealing with vowel and consonant sounds, especially the pronunciation of Spanish non-existent consonant sounds as well as the mandatory pronunciation of final consonant sounds.

The goal of my study is to raise awareness among *ESO* English teachers about the importance of teaching and practicing pronunciation in their classrooms. I will show my perception of what the most popular, effective, integrating and innovative activities are so that teachers add a bit of pronunciation to spice up their classes and provide students with the necessary skills to communicate orally in an intelligible way in English.

In the first part of this study, I will provide an overview of the theoretical framework on which it is based to illustrate the different approaches to teaching pronunciation along the years and the most recent, new trends. In a second part, I will refer to the most common pronunciation difficulties of native speakers of Spanish in contrast with my observations of *ESO* students of English during my teaching practicum. In the third part, I will focus on how to integrate pronunciation in the English classroom including the use of phonetic symbols and their contribution to pronunciation teaching. Finally, I will present the

results of a questionnaire given to my students during the practicum in which it is clearly demonstrated that students indeed like pronunciation activities done live in the classroom and show a generalized positive attitude towards their teachers frequently incorporating these types of activities in their English classes.

2. METHODS AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING ESL PRONUNCIATION

Approaches to teaching English pronunciation have evolved significantly over the past several decades. Those approaches have noticeably gone from one methodological approach to another, which are often reflected on the findings of research from applied linguistics theorists. What is clear is that the role of pronunciation in the language classroom has been subject to the trends in teaching methods. Now, what different methods have been used until recent years? What have those teaching methods been all concerned with? Before answering these questions, a quick flashback in history may help in contrasting the main differences.

Rodriguez & Leiva, (n.d.) wrote an article based on the history and logic of different methods and approaches related to pronunciation teaching. They start their article going back to 1530 mentioning John Palsgrave, who made a comparative analysis between English and French, moving forward in time until 1867 when Alexander Melville Bell publishes a book based on phonetic transcriptions.

In those years, early studies on pronunciation showed an academic interpretation but lacked a didactic one. It was necessary then to “focus pronunciation study towards its learning” (Rodriguez & Leiva, n.d.). Later, the grammar-translation method and the reading approach considered pronunciation teaching as irrelevant, leaving it “largely underrepresented in teachers’ lesson plans” (Farrelly, 2018, p. 2).

In the early 1900s, two main approaches took the stage in the teaching of pronunciation: the intuitive-imitative approach and the analytic-linguistic approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 2). The intuitive-imitative approach focuses on students’ “ability to listen and to imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language (...) without the intervention of any explicit information” (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 2). In the analytic-linguistic approach “the

prominence of an explicit intervention of pronunciation pedagogy in language acquisition is stressed” (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p. 984). Two different philosophies: one makes students learn pronunciation without focusing on its form, the other makes them consciously pay attention to the sounds and rhythm of the target language. In any case, those approaches were actually related since “the analytic-linguistic approach was developed to complement the intuitive-imitative one instead of replacing it” (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 2).

During the late 1960s, 1970s, and into the early 1980s, researchers questioned the role that pronunciation was given in the language classroom. An emerging concern at that time was that “pronunciation could not be taught explicitly, and therefore it was removed from many language programs or given a very cursory role” (Farrelly, 2018, p. 2).

The audiolingual method then gave way to the cognitive approach favoring grammar and vocabulary versus pronunciation, since “it was assumed that native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved (...) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words” (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010 p. 985).

As Celce-Murcia (1996) argues, Gattegno collaborated with his “Silent Way” method in which students focused on the sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet or explicit linguistic information. Through the use of sound-color charts, word charts, and color rods, its main focus was on the accuracy of the sounds and structure of the target language from the very beginning.

Farrelly (2018) states that during that time there was still a focus on repetition, imitation, and accuracy, but “students were taught to analyze the language using models, symbols (e.g., the international phonetic alphabet [IPA]), and charts that demonstrate the place and manner of the articulation of English sounds” (p. 2).

The goal was to raise students' awareness of pronunciation issues and to train them to self-assess through analysis. "The important role of exposure to authentic target language through extensive listening to target language input also became evident (...) which demonstrated that students' ability to perceive phonological features of the language enhanced their ability to produce the same features" (Farrelly, 2018, p. 3).

Research on pronunciation in the 1970s resulted in a new vision that would have an impact on the direction of pronunciation teaching and research into the 1980s and 1990s. The communicative approach (CLT) emerged in the 1980s promoting the teaching of pronunciation through activities with meaningful outcome, practicing its usage in real-life simulations with communicative purpose. It was indeed an effective way to develop language for communication. Intelligibility became relevant since it affects communication, and therefore improving pronunciation became once again a prioritized learning goal for teachers and students. However, and as Farrelly (2018) states in her paper "unlike the earlier, unrealistic goals of attaining native-speaker standards in pronunciation, pronunciation goals within the communicative approach were to develop pronunciation skills to the extent that communication would not be impeded by an unintelligible accent" (p. 2).

Jones (1997) also praises the CLT since it "fully addresses the communicative, psychological and sociological dimensions of pronunciation" (p. 109).

Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010) talk about the "new directions approach" (p. 985) with new thoughts from other fields like drama, psychology and speech pathology along with the use of instructional technology in the teaching of pronunciation.

And Farrelly (2018) closes her paper with quite an interesting perception on current approaches to English pronunciation teaching:

“(...) Consequent studies in those communicative approach days significantly impacted pronunciation teaching. First, learners were not viewed as parts of groups, but rather as individuals with unique language-learning needs, goals, and expectations. Another important development was a change in perspective from viewing language as a tool for linguistic competence to viewing it as one necessary for communicative competence. These developments combined with studies of English as an international language (EIL), which demands that teaching pronunciation consider the learners and the learners’ intended uses of the language. Current approaches for teaching pronunciation reflect these historical trends, as they target structures effectively while providing learners with opportunities to use language in meaningful ways, so as to increase intelligibility and promote communicative competence” (p. 3).

3. “GLOBAL ENGLISH” IMPLICATIONS ON ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TEACHING

3.1. The concept of “Global English”

The term “Global English” is being used increasingly nowadays. It is a term that demonstrates that English is spoken in every part of the world, both among speakers within a particular country who share a first language, and across speakers from different countries or different first languages.

English is no longer spoken only by its native speakers in the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and by those who learn English in order to communicate with native speakers (NS). It is also spoken among non-native speakers (NNS) within countries like India, the Philippines and Singapore and internationally among non-native speakers (NNS) from a wide range of countries throughout the world.

In her 2002 article, Jennifer Jenkins highlighted the term “Global English”, relating it to the unquestionable fact that nowadays the English language is spoken by millions of people worldwide to the extent that there are more second language speakers of English than native ones.

Considering the latter as a striking reality, Jennifer Jenkins wonders what should occur when it comes to teaching and practicing English pronunciation. Should L2 students aim at acquiring an L1 native-like speech or should they simply become intelligible to L1 and other L2 speakers? Jenkins steps in with her views and studies on the intelligibility of English as an International Language (EIL) and proposes what is known as the Lingua Franca Core (LFC).

3.2. EIL and its implications for pronunciation

The emergence of so many different “varieties” of international English spoken by nearly 1.5 billion people has caused a number of linguists to question

the use of native speaker pronunciation models in the teaching of English. Their argument is that native speaker accents are not necessarily the most intelligible or appropriate accents when a non-native speaker is communicating with another non-native speaker.

In her opinion, as one of those linguists who are in favor of EIL's intelligible pronunciation, Jenkins (2002, May 3) argues that "we need to identify which pronunciation features are crucial for mutual understanding when a non-native speaker of English talks to another non-native speaker and which are not at all important. These are often not the same features that are crucial and unimportant for a native speaker of English."

EIL and its intelligibility have led to a sociolinguistic shift in the use of English and it has turned out to be the main goal observed in an international context. Jenkins (2014) underestimates both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) where non-native speakers' goal is to communicate with native speakers. EIL, on the other hand, follows a more realistic approach with non-native speakers interacting mostly with other non-native speakers, allowing their social identity while helping them achieve mutual intelligibility.

Considering intelligibility as the prime objective to achieve among international learners of English in an international context, linguists and researchers have started to question the real role of traditional models of English pronunciation, like Britain's Received Pronunciation (RP) English or American English. Jenkins (2014) has analyzed and discussed that subject and she disregards a native model of pronunciation stating that if non-native speakers try to acquire a native accent, not many can actually achieve it and they may even become less intelligible to other speakers.

If English language learners' eventual goal is to communicate efficiently, then the nativeness principle loses relevance over the intelligibility principle, even to the extent of Jenkins allowing some kind of L1 phonological transfer. As Jenkins (2014, p. 99) argues "speakers of different first languages vary their pronunciation under the influence of their L1 phonology". She further considers identifying a phonological core on which speakers can rely, since she believes

that we cannot disregard these natural processes. Her proposal is based on “an understanding of the process of phonological transfer and its effects, and the extent which it is realistic to expect speakers to replace transferred items with other forms” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 99).

L2 learners with their L1 accents can still be understood in English if they rely on elements that ensure intelligibility in their speech. As Jenkins (2014) adds “It is both unrealistic and unreasonable to expect learners to relinquish (or ‘reduce’, as it is often expressed) such transfer (...). Such attempts to rid learners of the total sum of their L1 phonological transfer tend to fail miserably” (p. 123).

Jenkins’ phonological core proposal is, therefore, an EIL-inspired attempt to reduce the phonological task for the majority of learners and to focus on pedagogic attention on the essential items in terms of intelligible pronunciation. She proudly states that “this kind of prioritizing seems to me not only to be far more relevant to EIL communication but also to be far more realistic in its likelihood of meeting with classroom success” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 123).

3.3. The Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

Jennifer Jenkins gathered both miscommunication-based and accommodation-based data from interactions among non-native speakers of English in order to establish which aspects of pronunciation cause intelligibility problems when English is spoken as an International Language (EIL). The aim of her research was to find out which features of British/American English pronunciation are essential for intelligible pronunciation, and which are not. In doing so, she was able to put together a pronunciation core, the Lingua Franca Core¹. Some of the features of her proposed LFC are labeled as core and non-core features. That classification provides evidence as to the likely development of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) pronunciation.

¹ See Appendix 12.3 for a complete chart on Jennifer Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

Her Lingua Franca Core findings represent a proposed pronunciation guide for teachers of English. This indicates that the guide is intended for lingua franca interactions, not interactions between a native and non-native speaker of English. Spicer (2011, April 19) points out that “the proposal recognizes the rights of non-native speakers to their own legitimate regional accents rather than regarding deviation from NS pronunciation norms as ‘error’”.

According to Jenkins (2014), the main features of the Lingua Franca Core are:

- ❖ Segmental categories (consonants, vowels, nuclear stress) (pp. 136-146):
 - All the consonants are important except for ‘*th*’ sounds as in ‘*thin*’ and ‘*this*’.
 - Consonant clusters are important at the beginning and in the middle of words. For example, the cluster in the word ‘*string*’ cannot be simplified to ‘*sting*’ or ‘*tring*’ and remain intelligible.
 - The contrast between long and short vowels (vowel quantity) is important. For example, the difference between the vowel sounds in ‘*sit*’ and ‘*seat*’.
- ❖ Suprasegmental categories (weak forms, other features of connected speech, rhythm, word stress, intonation) (pp. 146-156):
 - Nuclear (or tonic) stress is also essential. This is the stress on the most important word (or syllable) in a group of words. For example, there is a difference in meaning between ‘*My son uses a computer*’ which is a neutral statement of fact and ‘*My SON uses a computer*’, where there is an added meaning (such as that another person known to the speaker and listener does not use a computer).”
- ❖ Articulatory settings (holistic factors: tension differences, tongue shape, articulators’ pressure, lip, cheek & jaw posture and movement) (pp. 156-158)

Jenkins (2014), also contrasts her previously mentioned LFC features with many other items which are regularly taught in English pronunciation courses but which do not appear to be essential for intelligibility in EIL interactions. Those are:

- The ‘*th*’ sounds (see segmental categories above).
- Vowel quality, that is, the difference between vowel sounds where length is not involved, e.g. a German speaker may pronounce the ‘*e*’ in the word ‘*chess*’ more like an ‘*a*’ as in the word ‘*cat*’.
- Weak forms such as the words ‘*to*’, ‘*of*’ and ‘*from*’ whose vowels are often pronounced as *schwa* instead of with their full quality.
- Other features of connected speech such as assimilation (where the final sound of a word alters to make it more like the first sound of the next word, so that, e.g. ‘*red paint*’ becomes ‘*reb paint*’).
- Word stress.
- Pitch movement.
- Stress timing.

All the previous features mentioned above are said to be important for a native speaker-listener either because they aid intelligibility or because they are thought to make an accent more appropriate.

Zoghbor’s pronunciation targets for teaching EFL and ELF

Jennifer Jenkins’ research was focused on identifying which features of native speaker (NS) pronunciation targets obstruct intelligibility for a non-native speaker (NNS) listener from a different L1, i.e. in ELF communication. Her findings were summed up in a table that Wafa Zoghbor later recreated in his 2011 research paper.

Zoghbor (2011, p. 285)’s *Table 1* below lists in column B the generally agreed pronunciation targets for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL):

#	A	B	C	D
	Aspects of pronunciation	EFL targets	Influence on intelligibility	ELF targets
1	The consonantal inventory	All sounds	√ but not all	All sounds except /θ/ and /ð/
		RP non-rhotic /r/ GA rhotic /r/	√ but not all	Rhotic /r/ only
		RP intervocalic [t] GA intervocalic [t]	√ but not all	Intervocalic [t] only
2	Phonetic requirements	Rarely specified	√ but not all	Aspiration after /p/, /t/, and /k/. Appropriate vowel length before fortis/lenis consonants.
3	Consonant cluster	All word positions	√ but not all	Word initially, word medially
4	Vowel quantity	Long-short contrast	√	Long-short contrast
5	Vowel quality	Close to RP or GA	X	L2 (consistent) regional qualities.
6	Weak forms	Essential	X	Unhelpful to intelligibility
7	Features of connected speech	All	X	Inconsequential or unhelpful
8	Stress-timed rhythm	Important	X	Does not exist
9	Word stress	Critical	X	Unnecessary / can reduce flexibility
10	Nuclear (tonic) stress	Important	√	Critical

Table 1: Pronunciation targets for teaching EFL and ELF - Modified from Jenkins 2005:147

Column C above indicates which of the phonological features of the traditional EFL syllabus should/should not cause a breakdown (unintelligibility) in communication and, accordingly, column D details the features of the LFC.

3.4 Criticism and limitations of Jenkins' LFC

So far it seems to be very clear that Jennifer Jenkins' research and results confirm that intelligibility should be considered by phoneticians as the main objective to achieve when it comes to English pronunciation teaching. However, establishing a consensus among those phoneticians and other linguists does not seem to be around the corner.

Some teachers also remain skeptical about the teachability of LFC. One comment that has emerged so far is a belief that ELF pronunciation stands little chance of being adopted even by teachers who understand the concept unless it is validated by their own experience, legitimized through inclusion in teaching materials such as recordings and dictionaries, and taught in teacher education programs (Jenkins, 2014).

Ketabi & Saeb (2015) remarked that LFC is "theoretically-accepted but not-yet-implemented" (p. 187). Another critic, Zoghbor (2011), points out that

the shortage of ELF textbooks might be a major obstacle against implementing the LFC syllabus. Some experts have suggested the same native speaker-based textbook can be used with necessary modifications on its pronunciation exercises according to their relevance to the LFC. Implementing a syllabus based on the LFC does not simply include an inventory of phonemes, but involves the “methodology” and overall practice in the classroom (Zoghbor, 2011, p. 287).

LFC has been described as a “standard”, a “variety”, or a “model”. In spite of all those labels on Jenkins’ LFC, it is important to notice that she does not conceive LFC as any of the above, but rather as an efficient guide for teachers and learners to know what to focus on productively so as for being understood internationally. As she argues, that guide “leaves them free to make choices, and use L1 varietal features if preferred” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 131).

She has also agreed that “further research into the intelligibility of pronunciation in interactions between NNSs from different L1s is needed before the Lingua Franca Core can be considered definitive, and the core will probably require some adjusting and fine-tuning in the process” (Jenkins, 2005, p. 143).

In a final optimistic statement of her own, Jenkins admits that “the fact that it is not yet possible to teach ELF does not mean, however, that there should not be a change in mindset in the meantime” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 200).

In my personal understanding of the LFC topic, while phoneticians, linguists, and experts meet and arrive at a consensus about the implementation (or not) of LFC, intelligibility-aware English teachers on their own might start making “LFC adaptations” based on the nature of their classrooms and students, establishing a proper communicative approach, a balanced incorporation of segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation, all of that in a context-bound framework where NNSs can work and interact more fluently with both NSs and other NNSs of the English language. Only then, it would be possible to admit that there is some Jenkins-inspired methodology running in schools’ curriculum.

3.5 Implications on English pronunciation teaching

Jennifer Jenkins' experience on Global English topics and on the research and development of her worldwide-famous Lingua Franca Core (LFC) has given her the necessary credibility to stand up and defend her views on intelligibility as the main goal English teachers should focus on when planning to teach English pronunciation.

The status of non-native teachers is deeply related to the goal of pronunciation practice. If that goal is to make students develop a good non-native accent with the key elements of LFC, then those non-native teachers are as legitimately able as native counterparts. According to Jenkins (2014, p. 92), those non-native teachers "could even become perfect teachers" since they are bilingual fluent speakers, their interlanguage meets all essential LFC's elements, and consequently, they are internationally intelligible. Those "perfect teachers" also happen to share their students' L1, which allows them to use their language as a model since it contains the regional features of English as L2.

When it comes to intelligibility, students should be given choice, and English teachers should make a smart and fair decision at applying some Jenkins-based LFC methodology in their classrooms. When students are learning English so that they can use it in international contexts with other non-native speakers from different first languages, they should be given the choice of acquiring a pronunciation that is more relevant to EIL intelligibility than traditional pronunciation syllabuses offer. Up to now, the goal of pronunciation teaching has been to enable students to acquire an accent that is as close as possible to that of a native speaker. For EIL communication, though, that is not the most intelligible accent and some of the non-core items may even make them less intelligible to another non-native speaker. To make language communication socially appropriate, and group identity something to feel proud of, intelligibility should be a goal to be achieved in language classrooms. Those teachers who are aware of the relevance of EIL communication should consider making changes in their lesson plans.

Finally, students should be given plenty of exposure in their pronunciation classrooms to other non-native accents of English so that they can understand them easily even if a speaker has not yet managed to acquire the core features. For EIL, this is much more important than having classroom exposure to native speaker accents.

4. MAIN PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES FACED BY NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS

When teaching and learning a new language both teachers and students should be aware of the many differences between native L1 and target L2. Teachers should have at least a good, average knowledge of L2's phonology. Students in their initial L2 learning sessions should be told and trained on its main phonological features. It would be a continuous, long job towards gaining confidence in the new language and eventually towards reaching Jenkins' ideal intelligibility.

In this chapter, I provide a description of the main pronunciation difficulties that Spanish-speaking students of English usually deal with when exposed to learning the language. Brief comments made by cited language researchers will be adequately attached to show their views, especially those from Jennifer Jenkins referred to intelligibility.

4.1. Brief phonological contrast²

While the Spanish and English consonant systems show many similarities, the vowel systems and sentence stress are very different, and these can cause great difficulty for Spanish-speaking learners of English. European Spanish speakers, in particular, find English pronunciation harder than speakers of most other European languages.

Some common features of the pronunciation typical of Spanish speakers of English are:

- Difficulty in recognizing and using English vowels.
- Strong devoicing of final voiced consonants.
- Even sentence rhythm, without the typical prominences of English, making understanding difficult for English listeners.

² Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

- A narrower range of pitch (in European speakers), producing a bored effect.

In English, there is no consistency between letters and sounds. Spanish speakers, as Brunori (2006) states, have the habit of identifying one particular letter -a, for instance- with one particular sound /a/, and that habit is deeply ingrained in Spanish speakers' minds. Most of the time, however, that assumption is wrong in English. He also refers to the puzzling, counter-intuitive pair *wonder/wander*. Also, the diphthongs in *bow* and *row* can be pronounced as /ou/ or /au/, with completely different meanings, and the vowel letters i, o, ou, u and e in words like *bird*, *word*, *journal*, *occur* or *person* always result in the same sound, /ɜ:/, despite the differences in the spelling.

4.2. Vowels (Segmentals)³

Spanish has five pure vowels and five diphthongs. Vowel length is not a distinctive feature. Consequently, learners find difficulty in differentiating between English vowels, especially where length is a part of the difference. Typically, at least two English vowels share the “phonetic space” occupied by one Spanish vowel, so one-to-one correspondences are practically impossible.

Brunori (2016) remarks that whereas in Spanish the five vowel letters -a, e, i, o, u- are pronounced as five vowel sounds, in English the same number of letters produce twelve different sounds. So, in English, there are three types of [a] sound, two types of [i], two types of [o], etc.

1. /i:/ and /ɪ/ correspond to Spanish /i/, so *seat* and *sit*, *sheep* and *ship*, etc. are confused.
2. /ɑ:/, /æ/ and /ʌ/ correspond to Spanish /a/, so words such as *cart*, *cat*, and *cut* are confused in perception, though *cart* as produced by a Spanish speaker usually has an intruded flapped /r/, i.e. /kart/.

³ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

3. /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/ correspond to Spanish /o/, so *caught* and *cot*, etc. are confused.
4. /u:/ and /ʊ/ correspond to Spanish /u/, so pairs like *pool* and *pull* are confused.
5. English /ɜ:/ and /ə/ have no similarity to Spanish vowels. /ə/ is normally replaced by the strong pronunciation of the written vowel, so /abaut/ for *about*, etc. /ɜ:/ is replaced by /i/ or /e/ plus flapped /r/, so /birt/ for *bird*; /bert/ for *Bert*, etc.

/ə/ is the most frequent sound in English and the only one which has a proper name: *schwa*. According to Brunori (2016), it is exactly the same as /ɜ:/ except for two key differences: 1. It is short (very short). 2. It is never stressed (while /ɜ:/ is almost always stressed).

/ə/ sound is produced in the same way as /ɜ:/, but keeping it short and unstressed. Almost every vowel or combination of vowels can produce the /ə/ sound. Actually, vowel sounds tend to turn into /ə/ when they are not stressed: a (*about*), e (*weather*), i (*pencil*), o (*doctor*), u (*surprise*), ai (*certain*), io (*cushion*), ou (*famous*), ea (*noticeable*), etc.

6. As for diphthongs, there are four that are similar in English and Spanish (except that the second element in Spanish tends to be stronger than in English): /aʊ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/ and /ɔɪ/. These diphthongs are not difficult for Spanish-speaking learners. English /əʊ/, however, is often not distinguished from /ɔ:/, so for example *coat* and *caught* (as well as *cot*) are confused.

In her LFC guide, Jenkins (2014) gives more relevance to vowel quantity than quality. If we want to follow her guide to intelligibility, we should pay special attention to their production of long and short vowels, and provide corresponding activities aiming at their correct pronunciation.

4.3. Consonants (Segmentals)⁴

p	b	f	v	θ	ð	t	d
s	z	ʃ	ʒ	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
m	n	ŋ	l	r	j	w	h

Figure 1. Consonant phonemes (Swan, M. & Smith, B., 2001, p. 92).

Shaded phonemes have equivalents or near equivalents in Spanish, and are perceived and articulated without serious difficulty, though even here there are some complications. Unshaded phonemes cause problems (Figure 1).

1. Initial voiceless plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/) are not aspirated as in English, so they often sound like /b/, /d/, /g/ to English ears.

Jenkins (2014) recommends aspiration of word initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /k/ (pin /p^hin/, tin /t^hin/, kin /k^hin/) for intelligibility purposes.

2. Word-final voiced plosives are rare in Spanish; learners tend to use /t/ for final /d/, /k/ for final /g/, and /p/ for final /b/.

Other voiced word-final consonants also tend to be strongly devoiced, so 'rish' or 'rich' for *ridge*; /beiθ/ for *bathe*, etc.

3. Spanish has the same three nasal phonemes as English, i.e. /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/, but their assimilation to the surrounding phonetic context differs from English, so for example /aɪŋɡoɪŋ/ is common for *I'm going*.

In Spanish, /n/ or /ŋ/ tends to replace /m/ in final position, so for example 'drean' or 'dreang' for *dream*. Final /n/ in Spanish is not always very distinct, and may be absorbed into a nasalized vowel and/or pronounced more like /ŋ/.

⁴ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

In Spanish, /k/ does not follow /ŋ/ at the end of a word, so *sing* is pronounced for both *sing* and *sink*, etc.

4. Spanish speakers tend to give *b*, *d* and *g* their mother tongue values, which vary according to context. These are quite similar to English initially, but between vowels they are softer continuous sounds, not stops: /b/ is more like /v/, /d/ like /ð/, and /g/ not exactly like any English sound. This can make learners' pronunciation of words like *robin*, *habit*, *ladder*, *reading*, *bigger* or *again* somewhat difficult for a native speaker to understand.
5. In Spanish, /z/ does not exist; learners use /s/ for /z/, so *pence* for both *pence* and *pens*, *lacy* for both *lacy* and *lazy*, etc. Moreover, the European Spanish pronunciation of /s/ often approaches /ʃ/, causing confusion between pairs like *see* and *she*.
6. Spanish only has one sound in the area of /b/ and /v/ (pronounced intervocalically as a bilabial fricative or continuant); hence confusion between pairs like *bowels* and *vowels*.
7. Of the English phonemes /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/, European Spanish only has /tʃ/, with obvious consequences for learners. Confusion is common between words such as *sheep*, *cheap* and *jeep*; *pleasure* may be pronounced as 'pletcher', 'plesher' or 'plessen', and so on.
8. Spanish /r/ is flapped and is normally pronounced in all positions; this carries over into English.

Final /r/ should be pronounced as American English speakers do according to Jenkins (2014).

9. The nearest Spanish sound to English /h/ is a velar fricative like the *ch* in Scottish *loch* or German *Bach* (but written *j* or *g*). This often replaces English /h/. The sound is somewhat less harsh in American Spanish.

10. Spanish speakers often pronounce English /j/ (as in *yes*) rather like /dʒ/, leading, with devoicing, to confusion between *you*, *chew*, *Jew* and *year*, *cheer*, *jeer*, etc.
11. Spanish speakers may pronounce /w/ rather like /b/ between vowels, e.g. /ari balker/ for Harry Walker. Before a vowel, /w/ may be pronounced as /gw/ or /g/: /gwud/ or /gud/ for *would*.

Jenkins (2014), in her LFC guide, speaks about the importance of all consonant sounds for intelligibility purposes, except for /θ/ and /ð/ (*thin*, *then*), which can be replaced by /f/ and /v/).

4.4. Consonant clusters (Segmentals)⁵

Consonant clusters are in general less frequent in Spanish than in English, so that learners have difficulty perceiving and producing English clusters. Typical simplifications:

‘*espres*’ for *express*

‘*istan*’ for *instant*

‘*brefas*’ for *breakfast*

‘*tes*’ for *test* and *text*

win for *win* and *wind*

when for both *when* and *went*

can for both *can* and *can’t*

cars for *cars*, *carts* and *cards*, etc.

kick for *kicked*; *grab* for *grabbed*

Some learners reduce final consonants still further producing, e.g., ‘*fru sala*’ for *fresh fruit salad*.

⁵ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

Note that /s/ plus another consonant, as in *Spain*, *skeptic*, *stop*, never occurs at the beginning of a word in Spanish, so it is very common to hear 'Espain', 'esceptic', 'estop', etc.

Jenkins' LFC guide mentions that there should be no omission of consonants in word-initial clusters (promise, string). There might be a possibility for omission in medial and final clusters only according to inner circle English rules (*facts* = *fax*, *bands* = *bans*).

4.5. Influence of spelling on pronunciation

1. Spelling and pronunciation are very closely (and simply) related in Spanish, so beginning learners tend to pronounce English words letter by letter. Some examples are:
 - *asked*: pronounced 'asket'
 - *break*: *e* and *a* pronounced separately
 - *answer*: *w* and *r* pronounced
 - *friend*: *i* and *e* pronounced separately (but *d* dropped)
 - *chocolate*: second *o* and final *e* pronounced
2. Flapped /r/ is generally pronounced where written, so it intrudes before consonants (as in *learn*, *farm*) and for Spanish speakers also at the ends of words (as in *four*, *bar*). Furthermore, in Spanish double *r* is rolled, and this habit carries over.
3. /ə/ does not exist in Spanish, so unstressed syllables are pronounced with the written vowel:
 - *teacher* /'tɪfər/
 - *interested* /inte'restet/
 - *photograph* /'fotograf/
 - *photography* /fo'tografi/

4. In European Spanish double *l* is generally pronounced rather like the *lli* in ‘million’; Latin American pronunciations include /j/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/. Beginners may carry these pronunciations over into English.
5. In Spanish, the letter *j* corresponds to a voiceless velar fricative. This sometimes leads speakers to pronounce, e.g. *jam* in a way that sounds more like *ham* to English ears.

4.6. Rhythm and stress (Suprasegmentals)⁶

Spanish is a syllable-timed language. In general, all syllables take about the same length of time to pronounce (though extra length may be used for emphasis); to an English ear, there is therefore not a great difference in prominence between stressed and unstressed syllables. In English, on the other hand, stressed syllables tend to carry pitch change and to be pronounced more distinctly, while unstressed syllables are reduced and often pronounced with a neutral vowel /ə/ or /ɪ/.

Since content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are stressed in English, they are therefore relatively prominent as compared with the unstressed grammatical words (articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs). So, the stress and rhythm of an English sentence give a lot of acoustic clues to structure and meaning. When Spanish speakers pronounce an English sentence with even stress and rhythm, these clues are missing, and English listeners find it difficult to understand because they cannot so easily decode the structure. (For example, in *Ann is older than Joe*, *is* and *than* may be as prominent as *old*.)

⁶ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

Spanish learners find variable stress intractable, and they cannot usually either recognize or produce the difference in English expressions like:

the black bird

the blackbird

the green house

the greenhouse

Contrastive stress is also a problem. It is a problem for recognition, and in production one gets:

- *With sugar or without sugar?*
- *Mary didn't come but John, yes.*

i.e. the last word is more heavily stressed than the contrasting word.

4.7. Intonation (Suprasegmentals)⁷

European Spanish tends to use a narrower pitch range than English, and emphatic stress is expressed in extra length rather than in extra pitch variation. Thus, some speakers may sound unenthusiastic or bored to English ears.

In English the intonation nucleus can fall on any stressed syllable in the sentence, depending on what is being emphasized. By contrast, in Spanish the nucleus falls on the last stressed syllable in the sentence. (If an element is to be stressed, the freer word order allows it to move to the end.) Thus, learners can approximate to *John painted the walls* (as an answer to the question *What did John do?*). However, they find great difficulty in producing (and even recognizing) the pattern *John painted the walls* (as an answer to the question *Who painted the walls?*).

For some linguists and phoneticians, suprasegmental features of English are important and suggest their teaching along with the segmental ones. However, according to Jenkins (2014) and her LFC guide, suprasegmental features operate largely at a subconscious level (...) weak forms are generally

⁷ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

unteachable. “So why focus in the classroom on a feature whose quality is precisely the result of speakers not focusing on it?” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 147).

As regards rhythm, Jenkins claims that its teaching is “unnatural”. It is an “idealized version of L1 English speech (...) only to very short snatches of authentic speech” (2014, p. 149).

Intonation’s pitch movement is “so subjective that it is unteachable in the classroom” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 151). She even claims that “a failure of the intonation system seldom leads to communication problems” (2014, p. 153).

It is clear that Jenkins’ views on suprasegmentals lead to an almost total disregard. Some other linguists give them a better punctuation. In the end, teachers should be aware of both segmentals and suprasegmental features of English and how their students are dealing with them. Intelligibility should be the goal according to Jenkins, and more attention should be put on segmental features. However, rhythm, stress and intonation could also be an important part of students’ language production, and it should be up to the English teacher within the scenario of his own classroom to determine whether or not those features could be worked on.

After all, it would not hurt at all if we added some rhythm and intonation to our students’ interactions as they seek to communicate intelligibly.

5. INTEGRATING PRONUNCIATION TEACHING AND PRACTICE IN THE ESO CLASSROOMS

There seems to be a consensus among several linguists and researchers about the assumed attitude of English teachers when they are confronted with the need or obligation to teach pronunciation to their students in the classroom. From reluctance to neglect, from lack of resources to lack of knowledge, from negative attitudes to “time-consuming” excuses, one way or another, it is not common to witness an English teacher who has been effectively and regularly implementing pronunciation-related exercises and activities in his/her lesson plans. It seems to be, in fact, an international reality that includes Spain. Bartolí (2005) describes the national reality as follows:

(...) los docentes no saben cómo integrar la enseñanza de la pronunciación en el enfoque comunicativo o en el más reciente enfoque por tareas, porque, por un lado, carecen de materiales ya que no ha habido propuestas de integración de la pronunciación en estos enfoques y por otro, los manuales y actividades existentes no desligan pronunciación de corrección fonética y por tanto, su integración en la clase comunicativa es imposible y sólo puede presentarse como un anexo o apéndice que no guarda ninguna relación con el desarrollo, contenido y enfoque de las clases. (Bartolí, 2005, p. 3).

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996) imply that things might get a little worse if they only relied on the curriculum or in English teaching textbook materials:

English teachers must balance the needs of their students within a somewhat fixed curriculum. If this is the case, pronunciation is not always explicitly included even in a speaking course, and teachers need to find ways to integrate pronunciation into existing curriculum and textbook materials (Celce-Murcia et al. p. 381).

If that teaching scenario remains true to this date, I can come up with a few arguments for teachers not focusing on pronunciation. It would represent a lot of time and effort to study, design, test and incorporate pronunciation exercises and activities in their classrooms. That might sound as an excuse, though. I personally consider that English teachers should have a positive, creative, innovative, and committed attitude towards the improvement of their teaching methodologies according to their students' needs. And that includes showing concern about their development of communicative skills where pronunciation plays an important role. If we work, or are intending to work in Spain, we cannot forget that students' linguistic competence should be one of our goals, even if we agree or disagree with Jennifer Jenkins' views and thoughts about intelligibility mentioned in this study.

Nonetheless, English teachers do agree that pronunciation is an important component of an ESL, EFL, or ELF curriculum, and most of them tend to believe that the pronunciation instruction that they incorporate into their lesson plans can be effective. Are they right? Are they indeed integrating pronunciation effectively?

"Pronunciation in the Classroom: The Overlooked Essential" is a book edited by Tamara Jones in 2005 packed with practical ideas for the classroom, containing 12 chapters written by prominent people in the professional and academic pronunciation field. I went through its contents, and the main message of the book is that the incorporation of pronunciation into lesson plans could be a simple job while guiding teachers through different strategies to integrate both segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation into the classroom.

The following is an adapted table that summarizes and briefly describes effective alternatives for pronunciation integration in the English classroom, according to the experts in Jones (2005):

Integrating Pronunciation with Vocabulary Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taylor and Thompson's Color Vowel Chart, and Gilbert's Prosody Pyramid.
Anchoring Academic Vocabulary With a "Hard-Hitting" Haptic Pronunciation Teaching Technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haptic Pronunciation Technique, an innovative and easy-to-use method involving movement and touch for integrating pronunciation with vocabulary development. Rhythm Fight Club (RFC), a simple, yet powerful kinesthetic technique making pronunciation learning memorable, fun and is simple to implement on the part of the teacher
Integrating Pronunciation into Listening/Speaking Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By raising teachers' awareness of the value of prominence and falling intonation in speaking activities and attempt to reduce teachers' anxiety with an easy-to-follow system which exploits familiar topics for controlled and less-controlled pronunciation practice.
Pronunciation, Thought Grouping, and General Listening Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching prominent and non-prominent syllables alike. Awareness-raising topics for teacher-learner discussions in different contexts.
Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation, and Communicative Listening Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching towards pragmatics: the importance of implicational intonation in the teaching of listening. (e.g. <i>My boss said he'd fixed all the problems</i> and <i>My boss said he'd fixed all the problems.</i>)
Taking the Fear Factor Out of Integrating Pronunciation and Beginning Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including stress into the teaching of common grammatical forms such as tenses, reminding the use of traditional pronunciation techniques, such as choral repetition, body movement and focused listening.
The Pronunciation- Reading Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of bottom-up pronunciation strategies for helping learners with the reading process in English by implementing activities such as minimal pairs, fly swatter Games, jazz chants, songs, and rhymes.
Integrating Pronunciation with Spelling and Punctuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awakening students to sound-spelling correspondences such as spellings and pronunciations which are permissible and impossible in English, silent letters, homophones and the pronunciation of words borrowed from other languages.

I must clarify that the contents of the previous chart represent my selection of favorites based on the ultimate likelihood of *ESO* classroom application. For complete, detailed viewing and explanation of those and further ideas for pronunciation integration, the reading of Jones (2005) would certainly provide additional options and suggestions to use in our classrooms.

Yolanda Calvo (2016) is another English pronunciation expert who recently wrote a list of ten tips for teaching pronunciation to high school (Spain's *ESO*) students. Among her very thoughtful tips published in Balearic Islands' *APABAL MAGAZINE*, she recommends integrating pronunciation into daily lessons as much as possible. She points out that one of the reasons why less time is commonly spent on pronunciation tasks is because teaching that oral skill is considered time-consuming, requiring more time and dedication.

Calvo (2016, p. 44) further argues that specific pronunciation activities do not necessarily have to be very long; a lot of pronunciation work can be integrated into other activities, such as vocabulary, listening or grammar tasks. Thus, it is important to teach pronunciation in an integrated way in our everyday lessons.

She later admits that teaching pronunciation in an integrated way may seem difficult to begin with, since "most general EFL obligatory and post-obligatory secondary textbooks tend to present pronunciation in isolated tables that stand out from other sections" (Calvo, 2016, p. 44). In spite of that fact, Calvo (2016) states that a teacher can focus on pronunciation in nearly every type of task. She lists a few examples:

1) In a 'fill in the gaps' grammar task, in which students have to insert the correct past tense of regular verbs, the teacher could save a few moments for explaining/reminding them that *-ed* endings in English can be pronounced in three different ways, depending on the ending sound in the base form.

2) When teaching idioms such as "*dig in your heels*", "*hang in there*", "*blew me away*", "*knee-high to a grasshopper*", "*bear with a sore head*" or "*spill the beans*", the teacher may ask students for the homophones of *heel*,

there, blew, high, bear and bean. Students could also be asked to say minimal pairs for some of the words *there: share, fare, fair, dare, rare, pair, bear,* etc.

It is my contention that pronunciation may very well be integrated into our lesson plans without too much trouble. The task does not have to be difficult to achieve, especially if we try to contextualize those pronunciation tasks through meaningful and useful activities while promoting and developing the acquisition of other skills besides speaking, such as reading, writing and listening into connected speech.

In the end, helping our students achieve their pronunciation intelligibility should represent our best contribution towards their eventual goal: linguistic competence. In the following section, I discuss the usefulness of using a phonemic chart in the classroom in order to facilitate the teaching of pronunciation, and in subsection 7.4, I provide myself an example of how a pronunciation activity can be effectively integrated into an English class.

6. PHONEMIC CHARTS IN THE *ESO* CLASSROOMS

A phonemic chart is a set of symbols that represent all the sounds in spoken English. It could give us a good idea of what any word will sound like without needing to hear it.

There are many versions of the chart for the most common varieties of spoken English, but the most famous chart in regular use nowadays was created by Adrian Underhill (2010), based on his working years on teaching pronunciation.

6.1 Phonemic charts as lists

Phonemic charts are useful for English teachers in the words of Stanton (2002, March 5) who indicates that English spelling is not a reliable guide to pronunciation because:

- Some letters have more than one sound.
- Sometimes letters are not pronounced at all.
- The same sound may be represented by different letters.
- Sometimes syllables indicated by the spelling are not pronounced at all.

Stanton (2002, March 5) continues to praise phonemic charts as she mentions five good reasons for students to know them:

- Students can use dictionaries effectively, having the word in phonemic symbols right before its meaning.
- They can become independent learners by finding out and writing down the correct the pronunciation of a word without the teacher's assistance.
- Phonemic charts and their symbols are a good visual aid, helping students realize the differences and similarities in pronunciation between two words.

- Phonemic symbols, arranged in a chart, become a learning resource for pronunciation, just as dictionaries do for vocabulary, and grammar books for grammar.
- They represent a map of English sounds, a constant reminder of those 44 phonemic symbols, and how their different sounds come together to make language and communication possible.

Brunori (2016), in his blog, also favors the use of phonemic charts. He states that “if we need to talk about sounds, we cannot use just letters. We need an alphabet that reflects the whole variety of sounds. Fortunately, we have phonemic symbols (...)” He continues to say that their use only provides advantages: “they are clear, accurate and, most importantly, very easy to learn” (Brunori, 2016).

Meldrum (2004, January 19) also encourages their use, especially with young learners, since “if we start educating learners from a young age they will be more comfortable with phonemic script and see the benefits of it when they are older and more self-aware learners”.

She invites teachers to incorporate their use in the classroom in spite of the common rejection due to lack of familiarity with the sounds and symbols, difficulty, or even students’ resistance to work with them. She even suggests a few activities to be carried out and educate young students in charts’ usage and benefits:

- “*Phoneme race*”: a team activity in which one student runs to the teacher, he/she is given a card with a specific word, returns to the team and quickly discuss and selects the corresponding phoneme to the word in the card.
- “*Wall charts*”: for students to practice adding new words to the corresponding posters previously placed on the classroom walls with phonemic symbols and examples.
- “*Chinese whisper*”: an all-students activity where they sit in a circle passing a teacher’s whispered sound around until it reaches the last student in the circle who has to reproduce the same starting sound correctly (Meldrum, 2004, January 19).

Up to this point, it seems like the integration of phonemic charts and symbols in our classrooms is nothing but beneficial to our students. However, we should also pay attention to what other authors and specialists have said as regards this topic, and how differently they understand and view those benefits.

6.2 Phonemic charts as mental maps

Underhill (2010), already mentioned above as the author of one of the most commonly used phonemic charts (Figure 2), joins the discussion with convincing evidence that goes beyond the visions of those who favor the use of charts in their classrooms.

More than a simple, hollow guide or lists of symbols, he sells his phonemic chart as a mental map that “provides a map, mental scaffolding and more: (...) it is a map with a geography, containing embedded information on WHERE & HOW sounds are made. And it is a MAP not a LIST of phonemes” (Underhill, 2010, September 28).

As a mental map, his chart gives a cognitive/mental understanding of “the territory and the journey”, showing the relationship of the parts to each other and to the whole. It also offers “a worktable, an experimenter’s bench on which sounds can be worked out, exercised, compared, played with, recognized, confused, put into sequences and words, taken apart again...” (Underhill, 2010, September 28).

ɪ	I	ʊ	u:	Iə	eɪ	ɔ:	ʌ
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ	
p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Figure 2. Phonemic chart as a mental map (Underhill, 2010).

He continues to add that pronunciation has been isolated because there is both “a need for a mental map” and “a need for physicality”. Pronunciation is the physical aspect of language; thus, physicality means connecting with the muscles that make the differences we want:

My first task with my new learners is to help them to connect with the muscles that make the pronunciation difference, to locate the internal buttons that trigger the muscle movements. At the beginning I help them find FOUR buttons which enable them to get around the mouth and find new positions of articulation. These are:

- Tongue (forward and back)
- Lips (spread/back and rounded/forward)
- Jaw + tongue (up and down)
- Voice (on or off) (Underhill, 2010, September 28).

He suggests that by using a mental map and by making pronunciation physical, teachers can make it purposeful and engaging, laying the foundation for integrated learning.

6.3 Criticism

There are also a few authors that question the real need and usage of phonemic charts in our classrooms. One of them is Bartolí (2005) who believes that we should focus on teaching pronunciation, which is integrated and focuses on speech rather than teaching phonetics, which is isolated and focuses on sounds.

She disagrees with teaching phonetics because it is partly based on writing (phonetic transcription) and not necessarily in oral production. As she states, *“Los alumnos no necesitan estudiar los sonidos de la LE ni hacer transcripciones, sino saber pronunciar en esa lengua”* (Bartolí, 2005, p. 7).

She finally adds that *“Teniendo en cuenta que la pronunciación es la materialización de la lengua, la práctica de las destrezas orales debería realizarse con un soporte exclusivamente oral”* (p. 7).

I personally disagree with Bartolí’s comment on students not needing to study the FL sounds. It turns out that there are new sounds in the target language that do not exist in their mother tongue, plus the alphabet which we use to write the FL (English) has 26 letters and 44 sounds. Inevitably, English spelling is not a reliable guide to pronunciation and it turns mandatory to spend some time in our classrooms to illustrate that phonetic reality to later work on the phonological features leading to confidence in their pronunciation and intelligibility in their communication.

6.4 Closing remarks

Teachers who choose to incorporate phonemic charts in their classrooms must be aware of their contents and appropriate application. They might consider memorizing and intimately get to know the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) layout for themselves so that they can use it in the classroom.

I would not introduce the entire phonetic alphabet to students and require them to memorize it. It is time-consuming to introduce and to master. Also, many students would feel intimidated by such a weird-looking chart, and they would most likely reject it while saying it is boring.

A better option is to introduce the phonemic chart gradually in the increments that teachers believe are useful for particular groups of students. That way students would not be required to learn or memorize the entire chart, but only those pieces of it to help resolve pronunciation questions, issues, or confusion. For example: use the chart to display specific vowel sounds that may cause students difficulty, or for those consonant sounds that have great similarity.

At some point, it would be both ideal and beneficial to let them know that phonemic charts are extensively used in most dictionaries, so they can gain

awareness in their importance, while they develop the autonomous learner competence.

Students should have some exposure to the IPA and the phonemic charts. Either poster-printed classroom versions, or interactive online versions are available (Figure 3). However, it is important not to introduce too much at one time to prevent from having overwhelmed students. The suggested approach is to teach no more than two or three sounds at a time, and most importantly, to create contextualized and meaningful activities around the target sounds so that students learn to connect the sounds and the symbols. The idea, in the end, is that teachers are able to use connected speech while covering both segmental and suprasegmental features in the teaching of pronunciation.

single vowels				diphthongs			
ɪ	i:	ʊ	u:	eɪ	ɔɪ	aɪ	
sh <u>i</u> p	sheep	bo <u>o</u> k	shoo <u>t</u>	wa <u>i</u> t	co <u>i</u> n	li <u>k</u> e	
e	ɜ:	ə	ɔ:	eə	ɪə	ʊə	
le <u>f</u> t	he <u>r</u>	tea <u>ch</u> er	do <u>o</u> r	ha <u>i</u> r	he <u>r</u> e	to <u>u</u> rist	
æ	ʌ	ɒ	ɑ:	əʊ	aʊ	/	
h <u>a</u> t	u <u>p</u>	o <u>n</u>	fa <u>r</u>	sho <u>w</u>	mo <u>u</u> th		
unvoiced consonants							
p	f	θ	t	s	ʃ	tʃ	k
pea	free	th <u>i</u> ng	tr <u>e</u> e	s <u>e</u> e	sh <u>ee</u> p	ch <u>ee</u> se	co <u>i</u> n
voiced consonants							
b	v	ð	d	z	ʒ	dʒ	g
bo <u>a</u> t	vi <u>d</u> eo	th <u>i</u> s	do <u>g</u>	zo <u>o</u>	televis <u>i</u> on	jo <u>k</u> e	go
m	n	ŋ	h	w	l	r	j
mo <u>u</u> se	no <u>w</u>	th <u>i</u> ng	ho <u>p</u> e	w <u>e</u>	lo <u>v</u> e	ru <u>n</u>	yo <u>u</u>

Figure 3. An adapted, interactive phonemic chart (Phonemic Chart Keyboard, n.d.).

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1. Class observation and selection of pronunciation difficulties

As part of this Master's teaching practicum, I had the chance to be an English trainee teacher at IES Realejos in the north of Tenerife for eight weeks (21st March to 18th May 2018). The first two weeks were devoted to observations of the school's organization, infrastructure, and geographical/social aspects. Some good time was also spent at observing and interacting with the school community: teachers, staff members, and students.

However, the main focus of that period was centered on observing my tutor's classes and her performance as she taught four different levels of English to students of 1^o ESO, 4^o ESO, 1^o PMAR and 1^o FPB. I was supposed to pick one of her groups to later plan and teach actual English classes for at least five weeks until the end of the practicum. I chose my tutor's 4^o ESO-C group. It was a decision based on the nature of the students in that group, their disciplined and respectful attitude towards the classes and their teacher, the reduced number of students (only 17 teenagers), plus the personal, suggested recommendation coming directly from my tutor herself.

The other groups, though, were not bad choices at all, especially the two 1^o ESOs (A & D). They were larger groups of around 30 students each, aged 12 to 13, with a behavior and attitude proper for their age. However, in an unexpected twist of circumstances, I ended up observing pronunciation difficulties in those two 1^o ESO groups that eventually led me to consider them for my studying, designing and applying of an activity that was intended to bring awareness towards the pronunciation of final English consonant sounds, critical for correct communication, using vocabulary, plural nouns, the past tense of regular verbs, and so on.

7.2. Questionnaire to the English teaching staff

While observing my tutor's English classes and her management with her students' pronunciation difficulties, it came to my mind that it could be interesting to find out what her other teaching colleagues were doing in their respective classrooms. Their answers were most likely to provide good, additional information on what other approaches, procedures, and activities they usually implement in their classrooms to tackle mispronunciation.

Due to the lack of time on my side during the last week of my teaching practicum at IES Realejos, and also due to the fact that the English teachers were considerably and understandably busy dealing with final exams, students' grading, etc., I could only plan for a one-question-only questionnaire.

The question I asked was: *"How do you work pronunciation with your students in your classes?"*

Five teachers collaborated with the questionnaire and the transcripts of their answers are located and discussed in chapter 8.

7.3. Analysis and results of student's textbook pronunciation exercises and activities



Figure 4. ©2012.
Burlington Books.

IES Realejos (my practicum school) and the English Department had an agreement with a couple of publishers. The book they were using for 1º ESO courses during the 2017-2018 school year was *ACTION! ESO 1* from Burlington Books (Figure 4).

Surprisingly, there was no dedicated section to pronunciation information and activities within any of the 10 units of the Student's textbook. Their focus was set on working the commonly-known basic skills (Figure 5):

UNIT	VOCABULARY	READING	GRAMMAR
INTRODUCTION page 4	Family, Geographical features Weather, Animals Parts of the body Places, Sports, Clothes, Food ▶ Interview your partner		to be, have got There is / There are Present Simple Present Continuous ▶ Ask / Answer questions

LISTENING	SPEAKING	WRITING	Culture Magazine	BASIC COMPETENCES*
	▶ Formal and informal introductions Classroom language			1 3 4 5 7 8

Figure 5. ©2012. Action! ESO 1. Burlington Books.

It was obvious that the editors and publishers of the *Action! ESO 1* series do not provide proper relevance to pronunciation-related exercises and activities, and they simply place a little, brief, isolated reference highlighted in orange to the final pages of the student's book, preventing any possible integration with the other skills (Figure 6).

2 STOP AND THINK! Phrasal verbs have got a different meaning from the verb alone. Look at these phrasal verbs related to the environment.

pick up • clean up • throw out • cut down
use up

What does the main verb mean?
What does the phrasal verb mean?

Pronunciation: Final Consonant Sounds, page 134

3 Copy and complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in Exercise 1.

Figure 6. ©2012. Action! ESO 1. Burlington Books.

7.4. Design and implementation of a pronunciation activity

Before planning anything, I knew very well that I did not want to give 1^o ESO students a complete, intensive, adult-oriented introduction to English pronunciation. First of all, the teaching of phonetics in most cases might result in a boring experience for the students unless there is some adaptation in contents considering both students' age, level, needs, previous knowledge, etc.

Instead, I wanted to provide a brief, basic, level-oriented, easy-to-understand first activity with comments in their own language, with a sort of game-ending second activity consisting of a tongue twister.

To make that first activity quite innovative at least in its implementation, I decided to use *Microsoft PowerPoint*. It turns out to be really handy as the most suitable tool to display the activity over the overhead screen projector in the classroom (Figure 7).



Figure 7.

I thought that teachers don't usually provide pronunciation activities, either theory or practice, in the form of a presentation. At least, there was no other teacher in the school doing so. Actually, teachers rely on whatever it is shown in the textbooks usually without any further research and/or adaptation to make the activity quite interesting, colorful, dynamic and productive in a joyful fashion.

I chose to start it with a factual comparison of Spanish final sounds (Figure 8) versus English final sounds (Figure 9) providing various examples with clear pictures to illustrate the contrasts. I have always considered during all my years of previous and long teaching experience that students get a big chunk of the basics of a language, in this case, its pronunciation, when we provide an introductory, level-adapted, basic, and short comparison of target L2 with native L1, especially in those early classes when they are getting in contact and familiarizing with the new language. In any case, any comparison that they are told should not be presented in an oral way only. The teacher should provide visual, written, interactive activities, and wrap up with students' involvement and production in the target language, demonstrating they have understood, assimilated and acquired the necessary skills, in this case, the pronunciation skills.

Here is a screen capture of the introductory Spanish part:

Spanish Pronunciation

- In Spanish, the most common final consonant sounds are:

libros /'libros/

lápiz /'lapiz/

ilusión /ilusɪ'on/

stop /s'top/

pintar /pin'tar/

ciudad /ciu'dad/

carnaval /carna'val/

reloj /re'loh/

Figure 8.

And next, a capture of a slide of the English pronunciation counterpart:

can
/'kæn/



can't
/'kænt/



Figure 9.

Choosing the sample English words to demonstrate the pronunciation fact was not any difficult. I chose 10 monosyllable words beginning with the letters “c” followed by an “a” plus the key final consonant/s to highlight and give proof of the English phonological rule forcing the final pronunciation of those consonant sounds (Figure 10).

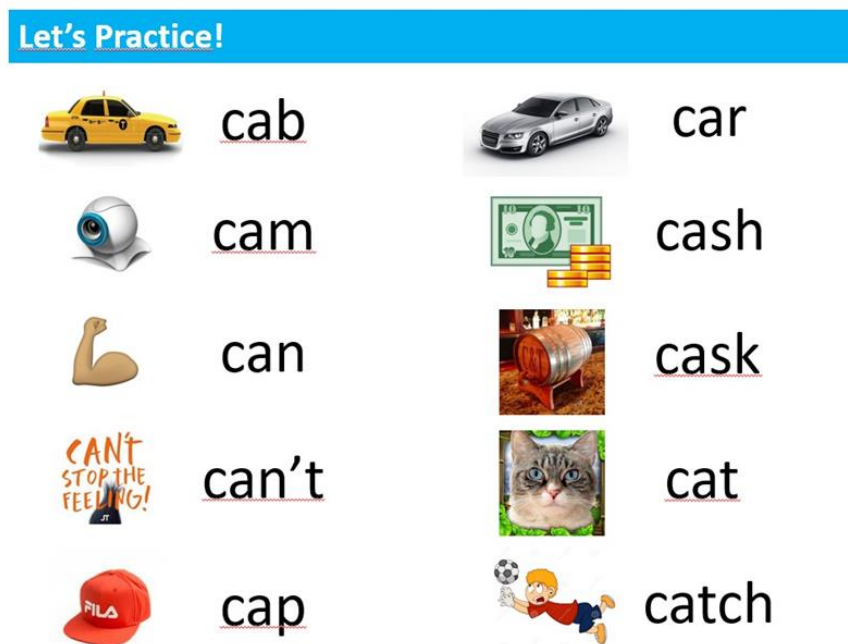


Figure 10.

My pedagogical goal, as mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study, was to bring awareness towards some relevant English pronunciation facts dealing with vowel and consonant sounds, Spanish non-existent vowel and consonant sounds as well as the mandatory, appropriate pronunciation of final consonant sounds.

At the same time, and although I was not intending to mention the topic to my 1º ESO groups, I was also dealing with one phonological issue that was mentioned in chapter 4 as one of the major difficulties in pronunciation for native speakers of Spanish: devoicing. Strong devoicing is regular among students of English and, as Brunori (2016) points out, it occurs when voiced consonants which have a voiceless counterpart tend to lose their voicing when they are placed at the end of words and followed by a silence or pause.

That loss of voicing could be partial or total, but sometimes it is very noticeable. Brunori (2016) provides an example comparing two sentences:

I'm worried about my bag. (devoicing occurring due to voiced /g/)

I'm worried about my back. (no devoicing: voiceless /k/ sound)

Another goal worth mentioning is that I wanted to demonstrate that implementing pronunciation activities in *ESO's* English classes was not going to be a waste of time. Actually, I wanted to prove that students might even feel interested in learning about those pronunciation peculiarities of the English language observed after comparing it with Spanish.

The activity turned out to be quite interesting to both 1^o *ESO* groups. It could be demonstrated by their attention to the presentation, to the information I was providing, and to the pronunciation emphasis I was making especially on the final English sounds. The results I was getting live in the classroom were fascinating, as the students were actively and interestingly participating in repetitions both individually and in a chorus.

The next step in my teaching activity was to switch from theory-practice mode into theory-game mode. I am aware of the need for students to experience minutes of entertainment, relaxation and fun in the classroom. It is like oxygen to breathe, it is like a contained and monitored explosion of energy very demanded and natural from teenagers. They should always have some time a week to watch videos, movies, short documentaries; to listen to songs, short stories; and to play games, hopefully educational games.

As part of my pronunciation activity, I thought of a tongue twister as my “game-activity”. It is one valid tool teachers may count on to motivate their students to practice with pronunciation in a very funny, competitive and educational way.

Tongue twisters usually contrast two similar sounds in frequent, consecutive words to force the speaker into facing some difficulties while making similar sounds one after the other. As students try to say the text aloud or even compete to say its verses faster, they face more problems and their tongues “twist” until they make unrecognizable sounds, or they simply get all

messed up and have to stop and laugh while group laughter invades the whole classroom.

A brief introduction of the minimal pairs involved in the tongue twister is mandatory before the actual activity so that they can learn, check, correct, practice and reinforce their pronunciation of those key sounds. The following is the example I chose and implemented in class (Figure 11):

BEFORE THE TONGUE TWISTER, LET'S COMPARE...

MINIMAL PAIRS **/s/** AND **/ʃ/**

COLUMN 1... /s/	COLUMN 2... /ʃ/
c	she
sea	she
seat	sheet
see	she
sock	shock
save	shave
seal	she'll
so	show
sort	short

Figure 11.

And finally, it was time for the actual tongue twister. “*She sells sea shells by the sea shore*” represents a famous, worldwide twister. I chose that one not only because of its fame but also because it included the /ʃ/ sound as in *she* which does not exist in Spanish. Therefore, the activity also represents a valid diagnostic, testing and correcting tool for the teacher who should be especially interested in the students’ production of those new English sounds and how they are dealing with them.

I played the YouTube video of the selected tongue twister (Figure 12), and let it play until the end since it was recorded in a way that students had their paced time to repeat the phrases as instructed. I monitored the progress and made a few



Figure 12.

necessary pauses to make sure all the students were participating. Also, I had to correct the pronunciation of certain students who were facing difficulties, especially with the production of the /ʃ/ sound.

7.5. Design and implementation of a questionnaire to the students

The best, fastest and most effective way to test the success of any strategy designed by any teacher is through the use of a questionnaire given to his/her students in the form of a rubric. Students would hopefully provide honest answers and feedback based on their feelings and experiences while participating in the classroom activity. In my own case, I created a type of rubric-questionnaire with six questions (five multiple-choice and one optional, individual, written text answer).

The questionnaire was administered to both 1^o ESO groups on 14th May 2018, right after the end of the tongue twister activity. The overall nature of the multiple-choice questions was aimed at determining the quality of the activities, both the sounds contrasts and the tongue twister. They had to consider my performance, the presentation quality, the real benefits of those types of pronunciation activities.

The questionnaire students used to express their opinions and thoughts is available in Appendix 12.1.

8. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

8.1. Class observation results and pronunciation difficulties

As I began observing my tutor's classes with both her 1º ESO groups, I was focusing on how she was dealing with her students' pronunciation issues, and at the same time, the nature of those pronunciation issues. It was obvious at first sight that, overall, she was doing a good job at teaching. When it came to pronunciation mistakes made by her students, she mostly showed a positive attitude towards making necessary corrections.

However, it was clear to me that she did not correct all of the mistakes that the students were making, although she did correct the most significant ones. I also noticed that she had some mispronunciations herself, like in the word *recipe* that she pronounced as /re'si:p/ instead of /'resipi/.

A few days later, I found out that she did not plan any special activities dealing with pronunciation, especially after being aware that several students were making the same mistakes in pronunciation.

There was no dedicated time, at least once a week, for pronunciation-related activities in which students participated and practiced. She was used to correcting pronunciation mistakes along the way. She did correct most of her students' mistakes orally, though, but she never wrote the phonemic transcription next to the troubled words on the whiteboard. I never asked her why, but I had the impression that she did not master the IPA/phonemic chart as well as to use it for corrections.

I remember I raised my hand and helped her a few times with some difficult-to-pronounce words as I noticed that a student was making the same type of mistake over and over or when several students were making the same mistake, and she was not noticing anything wrong.

There was a time when she was teaching her 4º ESO-C group before I started teaching my own classes, and some of her students were noticeably making mistakes while pronouncing the final ending sounds for the past tense

of regular verbs (-ed endings). As I realized the students were making that type of mistake and there was no immediate correction, compromising the eventual intelligibility of communication, I stepped forward and kindly asked her to let me teach her students a little “flash class” on the past tense of regular verbs and their pronunciation. She politely agreed and I had the chance to teach my first, unplanned, quick, mini-class on a very important and relevant aspect of English pronunciation.

I could also notice that unless it was indicated on the student’s textbook, or if it was part of the online, interactive textbook activity sequence, she either went through those pronunciation exercises asking students’ participation or she played the recording in which the pronunciation exercises were drilled asking for students’ choral repetitions.

The nature of most mistakes made by the students at that 1º ESO level had to do with their lack of knowledge and/or practice of the English sounds in both vowels and consonants. Also, an obvious tendency to pronounce the English words as if they were speaking their native Spanish language was also evident. In that same context, students were also making mistakes as they mispronounced the final sounds of words, like for instance, plurals with final /s/ (pets) or final /z/ (cars); negative forms of *to be* ending with /t/ (isn’t); possessive apostrophe ’s (Peter’s) or most frequently when pronouncing words ending in consonant sounds that are not pronounced at all in their native L1. Words like *cap*, *wish*, *match*, *George*, *big*, *fork*, *give*, and others where it is mandatory to make the final consonant sound at the end of the word.

8.2. Results of the questionnaire to the English teaching staff

As pointed out in the previous chapter, I could only plan for a one-question-only questionnaire.

The question I asked the staff was: “*How do you work pronunciation with your students in your classes?*”

Teacher 1: *“Yo la pronunciación la trabajo escuchando y repitiendo.”*

It is obvious that Teacher 1 was not either extensive or informative about her role in her student’s pronunciation. She only seems to have students listen and repeat vocabulary with no other type of activity or exercise of her own.

Teacher 2: *“Cuando escuchamos los textos, pido leer y si pronuncian alguna palabra mal, cuando terminan las escribo en la pizarra y le pido q las repitan. En cuanto a las palabras q les resultan más difíciles de pronunciar vemos vídeos y tb incido en la unión de palabras y omisión de consonantes.”*

Teacher 2 shows that she does care about pronunciation in her classes. She picks those problematic words, writes them down and asks for students’ repetition. She even uses videos and teaches some pronunciation rules as connected speech and ellision.

Teacher 3: *“Yo lo trabajo más o menos igual que María. No dedico una clase a la pronunciación sino q la corrijo y practico según sale en los textos. A veces sigo las actividades q vienen en los libros de texto al respecto en cada unidad si me parecen útiles. Uso las canciones para repetir y aprender pronunciación, unión de palabras y fluidez.”*

This other teacher says she does something similar to the previous one, however, she admits that she relies on the textbook for pronunciation practice if she finds the activities useful. It is not clear, though, that she can detect any issues on her own and provide appropriate practice. She deserves some credit anyway since she uses songs in her classroom.

Teacher 4: *“Creo q todas utilizamos más o menos los mismos métodos. Yo hago mucho hincapié en la pronunciación del pasado de los verbos irregulares y*

corrección de errores de una misma vocal o diptongo con diferente pronunciación, grupos de consonantes (ght, gh, th, etc.) y además ir ayudándoles a interpretar la transcripción fonética.”

Making emphasis on the past tense of regular verbs pronunciation is not anything bad from Teacher 4. Hopefully, she also emphasizes the widely common pronunciation mistake of regular past tense verbs. (*worked* pronounced as /'wɜ:kəd/ instead of /'wɜ:kt/). She seems to be the only teacher that works the phonetic alphabet with her students.

8.3. Tongue Twister results

A lot of laughter and a good time was evident as all students showed they loved the activity. They were listening to each other repeating the tongue twister as they tried faster and faster until it was almost impossible to produce an audible speech that was clear and understandable.

The activity finished with a great feeling of satisfaction on my side and with an obvious sign of excitement, joy and fun on the students' side.

8.4. Results of the questionnaire to the students

The questionnaire to the target students reached the following results:



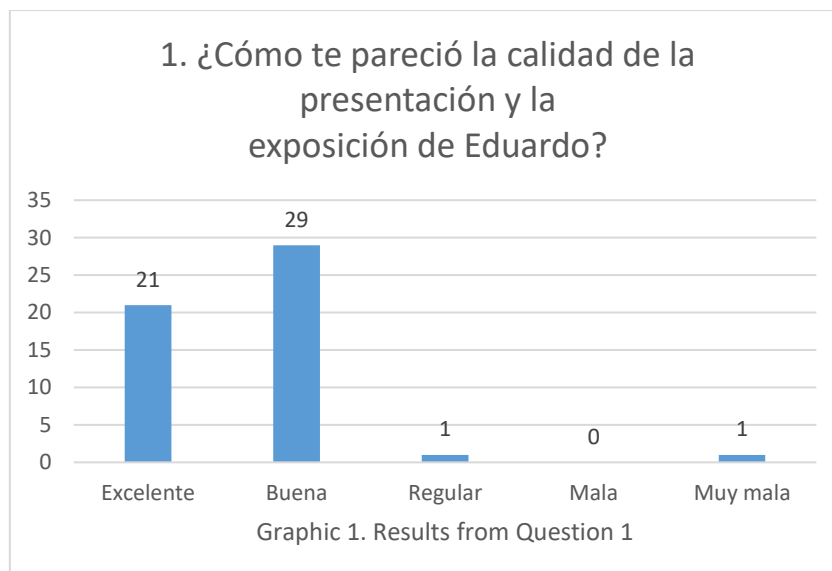
1º ESO-A *Luci Martín*
1º ESO-D *Eduardo García*

CUESTIONARIO PARA EL ESTUDIANTE DESPUÉS DE REALIZADA LA ACTIVIDAD DE PRONUNCIACIÓN

Este cuestionario es anónimo. No es necesario que escribas tu nombre. Gracias.

1) ¿Cómo te pareció la calidad de la presentación y la exposición de Eduardo?

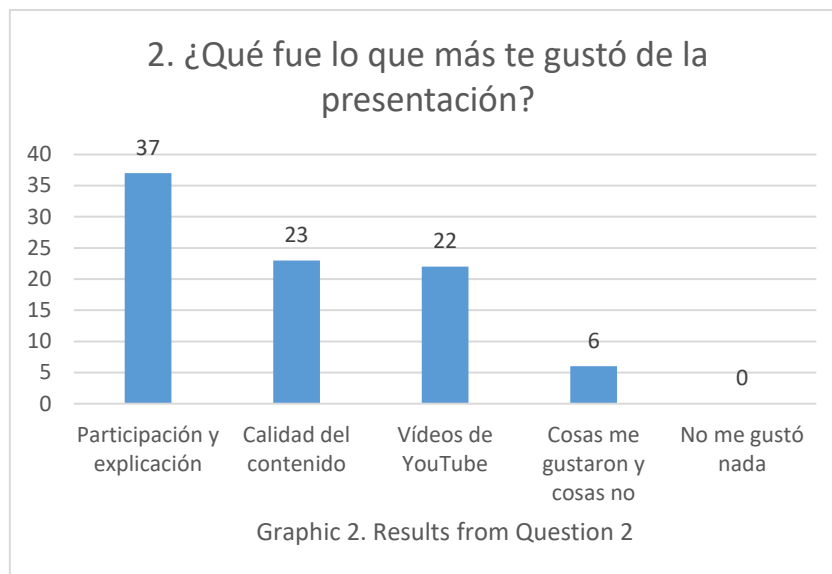
<i>Excelente</i> ☐	<i>Buena</i> ☐	<i>Regular</i> ☐	<i>Mala</i> ☐	<i>Muy mala</i> ☐
21 (40,4%)	29 (55,8%)	1 (1,9%)	0 (0%)	1 (1,9%)



The results from Graphic 1 showed that most of the students found the quality of the presentation either good or excellent. Proud feelings apart, I give more credit to the quality of the contents which truly caught the attention and interest of the students.

2) ¿Qué fue lo que más te gustó de la presentación? (*Puedes seleccionar más de una opción*)

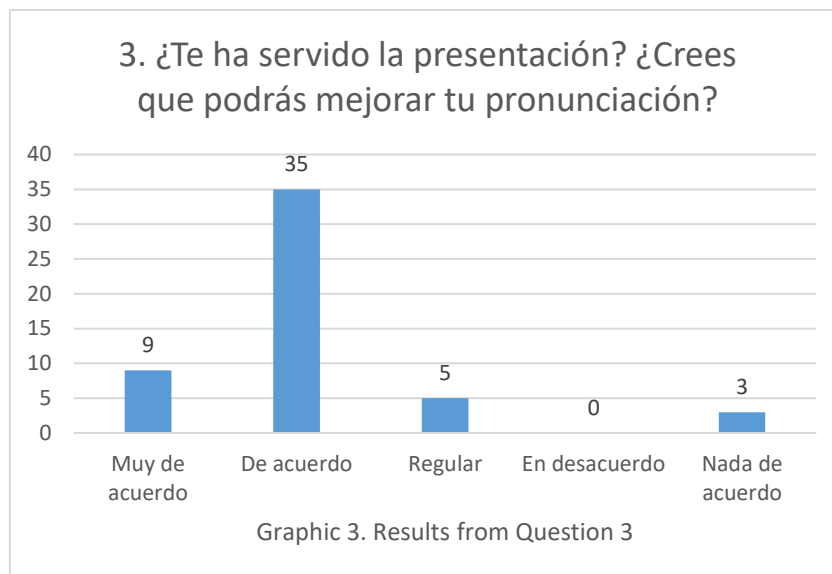
<i>La participación y explicación de Eduardo</i> ☐	<i>La calidad y el contenido del Power Point</i> ☐	<i>Los vídeos de YouTube que Eduardo mostró</i> ☐	<i>Hubo cosas que me gustaron y otras que no</i> ☐	<i>No me gustó nada de lo que vi</i> ☐
37 (71,1%)	23 (44,2%)	22 (42,3%)	6 (11,5%)	0 (0%)



Graphic 2 results again showed the students truly liked my presentation. The use of *Microsoft PowerPoint* and its slide transitions, effects and flexibility allowed for an interesting, eye-catching presentation where the teacher could include his target contents in a productive way. The online videos are one of the latest, most fashionable resources available for teachers. There are hundreds of pronunciation-themed videos that could help teachers reach their students in a valid alternative way.

3) ¿Te ha servido de algo la presentación de Eduardo? ¿Crees que ahora podrás mejorar tu pronunciación del inglés?

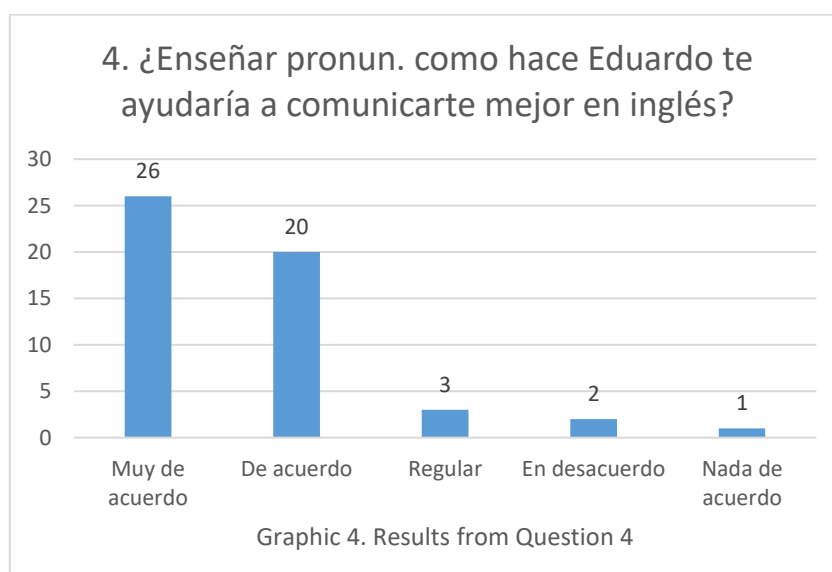
Muy de acuerdo ☐	De acuerdo ☐	Regular ☐	En desacuerdo ☐	Nada de acuerdo ☐
9 (17,3%)	35 (67,3%)	5 (9,6%)	0 (0%)	3 (5,8%)



Overwhelming results in Graphic 3 simply allow presuming that most of the students agreed that presentations similar to the one I created could lead them to improve their pronunciation if those presentations were to become implemented regularly in the classroom by their teachers.

- 4) ¿Crees que enseñar la pronunciación en el aula como lo ha hecho Eduardo (o de alguna otra manera similar) te ayudaría a mejorar tu propia pronunciación y a comunicarte mejor en inglés?

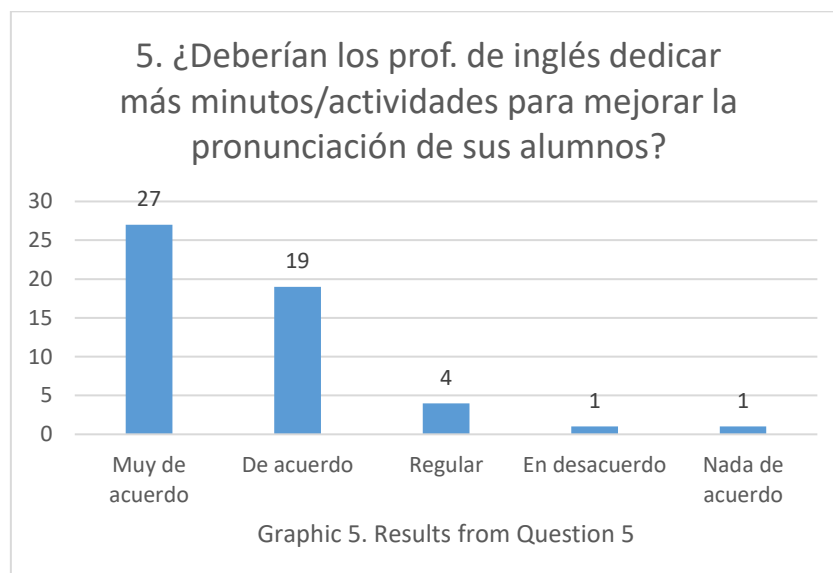
<i>Muy de acuerdo</i>	<i>De acuerdo</i>	<i>Regular</i>	<i>En desacuerdo</i>	<i>Nada de acuerdo</i>
26 (50,0%)	20 (38,5%)	3 (5,8%)	2 (3,8%)	1 (1,9%)



The results from Graphic 4 reveal that regardless of the teacher's name, it was the methodology used to teach 40-50 minutes of informal, level-adapted phonology what really made students think that there might be a big chance of improving pronunciation and eventually their communicative skills.

5) ¿Deberían los profesores de inglés dedicar más minutos/más actividades para mejorar la pronunciación de sus alumnos?

<i>Muy de acuerdo</i> ☐	<i>De acuerdo</i> ☐	<i>Regular</i> ☐	<i>En desacuerdo</i> ☐	<i>Nada de acuerdo</i> ☐
27 (51,9%)	19 (36,5%)	4 (7,7%)	1 (1,9%)	1 (1,9%)



Graphic 5 should be considered as a punch in the face of teachers who may not be properly working on their students' pronunciation or those who might not be even doing anything about it. The number of students in favor of a change of attitude from their teachers was close to 88%... A striking result with a message within.

6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

The optional final question offered the most interesting and surprising comments. Not all 52 students actually wrote their opinions in question #6, however, those who did (26 students or 50%), sent a clear message to English

teachers and coordinators about students demanding more pronunciation activities carried out by the school's teachers of English since they considered they could improve their knowledge of pronunciation and hence, improve their linguistic competence.

A selection of four of those opinions from the students is reproduced in the following image:

- 6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

A mi me ha gustado mucho la exposición de Eduardo, porque te ayuda a mejorar tu pronunciación y poder comunicarte mejor con las demás personas.

- 6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

A mí la verdad es que me gusta, además creo que será muy útil. Eduardo puso la cantidad perfecta de palabras para hacernos una idea y habló despacio y con calma para entenderlo.

- 6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

La actividad realizada me ha parecido bastante entretenida a la vez que útil y me gustaría que se repitiera una presentación del mismo tipo en clase.

- 6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

A mí esta actividad me ha parecido muy interesante ya que muchos de las palabras que sabíamos las pronunciaba mal, creo que deberíamos hacer más actividades de esto ya que la pronunciación es algo muy importante.

8.5. Limitations and proposals for improvement

8.5.1 Limitations

The most significant and unfortunate limitation I dealt with while I spent my time at the practicum in IES Los Realejos was that I ran out of time to put together all the necessary elements and resources to carry out an independent project in pronunciation teaching and practice.

I could successfully complete the early stages of the study during the observation of my tutor's classes, identifying both her performance and the students' in terms of pronunciation teaching and practice in the classroom. I think I observed and identified the most important issues taking place during the sessions, and I made my early proposal drafts to address those issues.

As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, I initially chose to do my practicum with my tutor's 4º ESO-C students. It was an excellent group of students. No question about it. However, I had already started working with them on their "social task" project called "*Saving our cities, what have you done for the environment today?*" aimed at raising awareness on protecting the environment in their communities. I spent a couple of weeks tutoring them on the guidelines and features of the project.

Besides the already assumed task, I had to also focus on planning my regular everyday classes, exercises, activities, teaching materials and resources to do a good job in the classroom.

At some point in those early weeks, I realized I had a better chance of successfully bringing a change in terms of pronunciation teaching and practice if I worked with 1º ESO groups instead of my current 4º ESO class. No discrimination at all, but the possible results of my proposal in pronunciation could end up being more beneficial to students in the early years of ESO than in higher levels of language learning.

Having started quite late in my pronunciation project design, I could not complete the application of proposed activities. A stage that could have proven

to be worthy, considering the answers provided by 1º *ESO* students to the initial activities that I implemented in the classroom.

8.5.2 Proposals for improvement

Based on my classroom observations during my practicum in IES Realejos, I can responsibly suggest a few teaching proposals towards the improvement of both pronunciation teaching and practice in the *ESO* English classrooms.

The first step has to be given by English teachers. They need to be honest with themselves and do a self-test of their knowledge of English phonetics, phonology, and techniques to teach pronunciation.

It all comes with attitude, positive attitude towards change and improvement. As professionals of education, we are committed to our students. We must recognize our flaws and weaknesses and do whatever is possible in our circumstances to improve our teaching performance, especially in English pronunciation.

Underhill (2010, September 28) writes a moving quote:

“I find a lot of teachers say their training did not leave them with a simple system for understanding cognitively with their mind and physically with their body, how and where sounds are made, and therefore how you change them. This is a pity since it is such a simple physical/bodily process, no more complex than a dance or a sport, that can bring vitality and motivation to learning. And language deprived of its physical aspect loses its integrity. We need pronunciation and the awareness it gives us for thinking, reading, remembering, writing, vocabulary never mind speaking!”.

I cannot prove it with numbers or statistics, but it is well-known in the *ESO/Bachillerato* school system that most English teachers are hesitant to include pronunciation in their classrooms because they are not experienced enough, or simply because they lack specialized training.

I cannot blame teachers, schools or the government for the reasons of such a reality. However, I can say that things may change if there is will to change.

Teachers' will to learn some phonetics and phonology must be one of the first things to check.

The school, the English department, should plan and organize short seminars, speeches, even informal meetings among English-teaching staff to share experiences, ideas, activities, and results.

The *Consejería de Educación* should also plan and organize professional development seminars or workshops aimed at English teachers to update and improve their methodologies in pronunciation teaching.

Universities and teachers' training centers must continue to include at least a year of phonetics and phonology in their curriculum for new teachers.

Back in the classroom, there are a few little things teachers could do. Post phonemic charts in the classroom for students to become familiar with their contents, their symbols, and illustrated examples.

Teachers should also encourage the regular use of English-English dictionaries during sessions, varied online educational resources available in both Windows® and Mac® platforms, as well as mobile apps from both Apple App Store® and Android Google Play Store® where hundreds of pronunciation-related apps are available for downloading and use in school (if allowed) or at home (Figure 13).

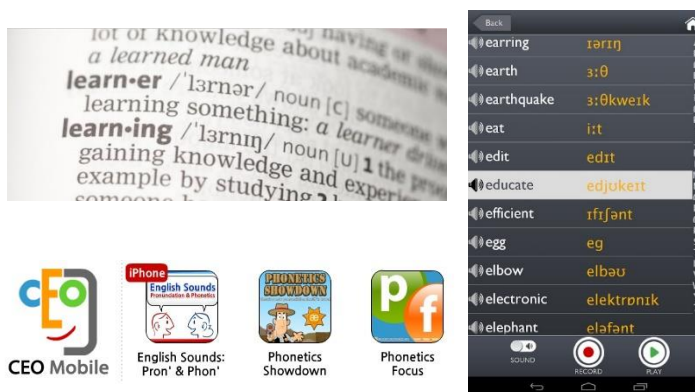


Figure 13. Dictionaries and other digital educational resources.

* Windows, Mac, Apple App Store, Google Play Store are all registered trademarks

Additionally, it is highly suggested the incorporation of as many sources of language, in many forms as possible: TV series, movies, videos, recordings, blogs, posters, books, etc. The power of entertaining activities such as listening to songs (and their lyrics), poems, tongue twisters, etc.

The main purpose is not only fostering the exposure to as much input in the target language as possible, but to familiarize the students with the culture of the language and its many varieties or accents so that they can develop their own accent, gain confidence in their outcome language and help us teachers in promoting intelligibility in communication as part of our students' road towards linguistic competence.

9. FURTHER STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE *ESO* STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION

In the previous chapter, I mentioned a few proposals aimed at helping to improve the teaching and practice of pronunciation in *ESO* English classrooms. They were mainly focusing on improving the teachers' knowledge of phonetics and phonology so that they could feel anxious-free and well-trained when given the task of tackling the teaching of pronunciation.

Now in this chapter, I want to offer a bird-eye view of other strategies, activities, and tips to be considered as possible alternatives for both teachers and students in the classroom.

9.1 Suggested strategies

- **Use songs**

Songs are used regularly by language teachers for many purposes such as grammar practice, listening comprehension, vocabulary enhancement and even as inspiration for writing exercises. It is a proven fact that songs can also be used to help students improve their pronunciation in English, especially the production of vowels and consonants sounds (segmentals) and the development of rhythm, stress, and intonation (suprasegmentals). Besides, music exposes learners to rich content, language, culture and tends to relax students and create a comfortable atmosphere.

Song lyrics are different from other kinds of texts because they are closely linked with rhythm. That makes them useful for teaching different pronunciation aspects naturally. All the features of connected speech, including reductions, can be identified easily and practiced using songs.

A sample exercise to be used after listening to the song could be the next one:

Vowels /i:/ and /ɪ/

Choose the pronunciation you hear from those given in parentheses.

Two (/wi:ks/ /wɪks/) away (/fi:lz/ /fɪlz/) like the whole world should've changed but I'm home now...

- **Use minimal pairs**

A “minimal pair” is a pair of words that vary by only a single sound, usually meaning sounds that may confuse English students, like the /f/ and /v/ in *fan* and *van*, or the /e/ and /ɪ/ in *desk* and *disk*.

Take a look again at the minimal pairs I used in my pronunciation presentation during my practicum on chapter 7, figure 11.

- **Use “Odd One Out”**

The purpose is to put similar words into groups of three, two with one sound, and one with a different (although similar) sound. For example:

meet, seat, sit (for vowels)

plays, pace, space (for consonants)

The selection of the odd word can be a reading exercise where students read the words to themselves out loud and identify the sounds in the written words, or a listening exercise, where the teacher reads the words and the students respond to the “odd” word.

Likewise, selected students could try reading the words aloud for others to identify the odd word, or they could work in pairs or small groups with one person pronouncing the words and the others indicating which is odd.

There are a number of different activities to run with these groups of words, depending on the ages and abilities of the students, and classroom arrangement.

- Ask students individually to read through the word groups and pick which words have different sounds.
 - Ask students to discuss the groups of words with a partner and decide which one is odd.
 - Divide the class into two teams, in two lines, and ask the person whose turn it is to choose the odd word as the teacher reads them out loud.
- **Encourage interactive phonemic chart activities**

Who said phonemic charts are boring? If we considered the interactive aid that *Cambridge English Online's Phonetics Focus* offers on their website (Figure 14), we could let our students have a good time while playing and learning with several interesting games related to the English phonetic chart. I chose, for example, “Half ‘n’ Half” as one of my favorites:



Figure 14. “Half ‘n’ Half”: one valid online web educational resource for teachers (Cambridge English Online, n.d.).

There are many more additional activities, interactive or not, that teachers might consider implementing in their classrooms. It all depends, as we may know, on a few variables like the level of the students, their needs in regards to pronunciation, etc. Again, it is up to the teacher's will to actually take advantage of those websites or external resources and make the difference in the improvement of students' pronunciation.

Here is a list of other activities to be considered:

- Minimal pairs bingo
- Minimal pairs math
- Run and grab
- Basketball
- Dictation
- Role-plays
- Fruit salad
- Chinese whispers
- Card games

9.2 Suggested tips

- **Reduce stress and anxiety**

Create a relaxed, spontaneous classroom atmosphere in which students feel comfortable and at ease with the people they are interacting. Teachers should provide students with specific and clear instructions on the activities they are expected to do, and correct mistakes without appearing to penalize them.

- **Let students know that making mistakes is OK**

We learn from mistakes. They won't be punished or neglected if they made a few or a lot of them in pronunciation. Show them we are there to correct their mistakes accordingly and appropriately.

When correcting students, we should consider the importance of doing so **after** they have finished speaking. To give them confidence in themselves, teachers should **not** interrupt them when they are expressing themselves, but they should give them feedback on their biggest mistakes at the end.

- **Motivate students**

Motivation is a matter of concern for both teachers and students. It has to do with the attitudes of both. It is an essential factor in a foreign language classroom, students need to feel encouraged to learn and use the language in different real-life situations. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation play a significant role in the students' learning process, however, teachers should emphasize in helping them discover their intrinsic self-motivation and the enjoyment of the activities carried out.

- **Explain the importance of English pronunciation to students**

Students need to learn that changing a single sound in a word may change its meaning. Depending on the context, pronouncing a word incorrectly may make it difficult for the listener to understand the message the speaker is trying to get across.

Give students examples of serious misunderstandings caused by mispronunciation so that they become aware of the importance of at least trying to pronounce in an intelligible way.

- **Integrate pronunciation into daily lessons as much as possible**

It is important to teach pronunciation in an integrated way in our everyday lessons. This may seem difficult to begin with since most general EFL obligatory and post-obligatory secondary textbooks tend to present pronunciation in isolated tables that stand out from other

sections; nevertheless, you can focus on pronunciation in nearly every type of task. For example: “Fill in the gaps” grammar task, ...students have to insert the correct past tense of regular verbs, we could save a few moments for explaining/reminding them that *-ed* endings in English can be pronounced in three different ways, depending on the ending sound in the base form.

- **Compare English to the sounds that exist in students’ native language**

Textbooks are normally full of tips and theoretical explanations on grammatical and/or lexical features. However, it is very rare in these teaching materials to find examples or pieces of advice that help students learn English pronunciation (Calvo, 2016). For this reason, whenever possible, try and compare English sounds to sounds in students’ native language. For example: /t/ is a dental sound in Spanish. To pronounce it, we place our tongue between our teeth. In English, this sound is not dental: it is alveolar. You have to place your tongue just behind your top teeth. Moreover, this sound is aspirated in English, meaning that you release air when you say it. This does not happen in Spanish.

- **Focus on correcting mistakes that are unintelligible and may cause misunderstandings**

It is impossible to correct every single pronunciation mistake our students make, but this does not mean you should avoid correcting all mistakes. It is important to especially focus on those errors that are unintelligible and may cause misunderstandings, e.g., pronouncing *comfortable* as /kɒmfɔr'teɪbəl/ instead of /'kɒmfətəbəl/.

- **Praise your students**

One of the main tasks of teachers is to correct their students' mistakes in order to help them learn. However, it is also important to praise students when they pronounce a difficult word correctly or speak intelligibly in a role-play or a debate, etc. Praising students is another way of helping their self-esteem and their confidence in the target language.

- **Vary the type of activity as much as possible**

Students will probably get bored if the pronunciation activities in every unit follow the same format. Try and introduce different types of activities: on one occasion, use debates; on another, role-plays or simulations; another day, use a song, then a game, etc. Nowadays, there are hundreds of authentic materials that can be used to teach English pronunciation in the classroom, including software programs, magazines and newspapers, games, songs, recipes, TV programs and so on.

- **Get students to speak as much as possible in class**

Take advantage of every chance you have of getting students to speak in the classroom. It is impossible for students to learn how to pronounce English if they do not actually produce oral language. For example: correct their grammar or vocabulary homework aloud; get them talking about their weekend, hobbies, and feelings on certain issues; express their opinions on a certain topic, etc. In other words, integrate pronunciation whenever you can in the classroom by emphasizing oral production as much as possible.

- **Include both explicit and implicit pronunciation tasks**

Apart from explicit tasks in which the main pronunciation aspect being practiced is obvious (e.g., the three ways in which past tense regular verbs are pronounced: final /t/; final /d/; or / d/), it is important to introduce tasks in which students are not aware that they are practicing the pronunciation of certain sounds. Types of implicit activities include using songs with a high number of words with a particular sound, or designing a role-play in which students are forced to frequently use certain words or expressions.

10. CONCLUSION

As cited in this study, authors like Brown (1991), Gilbert (2010) or Underhill (2013) recognized, under labels like “the poor relation”, “the orphan” or “the Cinderella”, the rejection, neglect, apathy and low attitude towards teaching English pronunciation.

English teachers need to assess themselves in their performance at teaching pronunciation. If they are not trained or experienced in phonetics and phonology, they should not step back and ignore pronunciation teaching. There are ways to acquire and update knowledge and methodologies. They should step out of their comfort zone, and have the responsibility and will to do better.

Boosting pronunciation in our classrooms is possible. It may not be easy or fast to achieve if changes need to be made. During my practicum, my observations, my teaching sessions, and the results I got from my target students, I could have a clear vision that pronunciation can stop being the Cinderella to gain the importance and relevance it deserves. It is a matter of attitude and commitment to incorporate what is missing or ignored. Teachers, schools, textbook publishers and government need to work together to boost both pronunciation teaching and practice in our classrooms.

Methodologies need to be revised for necessary adjustments and considerations to meet the needs of our students. Both textbooks and teachers should give both segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation a balanced and integrated participation in our classrooms. Intelligibility has been in the language teaching scenario for quite some time already. In the last years, though, Jennifer Jenkins has given it some extra prominence with her LFC research and its benefits, even though it is currently a guide and not an approach to pronunciation. Still, I agree with Jenkins’ vision, her idea of intelligibility as prime objective and essential component of communicative competence among non-native speakers of English in an international context.

Being aware of the difficulties that I observed during my practicum, I made my best effort in trying to introduce part of the basics of English pronunciation in live contrast with Spanish sounds at a very low level, of course, since I was

dealing with 1º ESO students. I used innovative resources available at the school to let them experience and practice live in the classroom with the chosen target English sounds. The activities I planned proved to be something new to them. They liked them considerably. They wished their teachers could implement them in future classes. The tongue twister game activity also provided a time of fun and joyful interaction as they were actively recognizing and producing the target minimal pairs. My only regret was not being able to actually implement further integrated oral activities like the ones that I mentioned in the suggested strategies on chapter 9 and others. Time was not on my side.

As teachers, we should frequently research for any new alternatives to our current pronunciation teaching scenarios, methodologies, resources and tools. That is what innovation in language teaching should be about. We should remember that we teachers work with students, with teenagers, with very active teenagers who need to have a good meaningful reason to feel motivated to go to school and then walk into our classrooms and learn a new language. Hopefully, they will eventually walk out of their classrooms mastering an intelligible pronunciation, good enough to let them communicate effectively with both native and non-native speakers of English.

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12. APPENDIXES

12.1. Questionnaire



1º ESO-A *Luci Martín*
1º ESO-D *Eduardo García*

CUESTIONARIO PARA EL ESTUDIANTE DESPUÉS DE REALIZADA LA ACTIVIDAD DE PRONUNCIACIÓN

Este cuestionario es anónimo. No es necesario que escribas tu nombre. Gracias.

1) ¿Cómo te pareció la calidad de la presentación y la exposición de Eduardo?

Excelente <input type="checkbox"/>	Buena <input type="checkbox"/>	Regular <input type="checkbox"/>	Mala <input type="checkbox"/>	Muy mala <input type="checkbox"/>
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2) ¿Qué fue lo que más te gustó de la presentación? (Puedes seleccionar más de una opción)

La participación y explicación de Eduardo <input type="checkbox"/>	La calidad y el contenido del Power Point <input type="checkbox"/>	Los vídeos de YouTube que Eduardo mostró <input type="checkbox"/>	Hubo cosas que me gustaron y otras que no <input type="checkbox"/>	No me gustó nada de lo que vi <input type="checkbox"/>
--	--	---	--	--

3) ¿Te ha servido de algo la presentación de Eduardo? ¿Crees que ahora podrás mejorar tu pronunciación del inglés?

Muy de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	De acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Regular <input type="checkbox"/>	En desacuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Nada de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>
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4) ¿Crees que enseñar la pronunciación en el aula como lo ha hecho Eduardo (o de alguna otra manera similar) te ayudaría a mejorar tu propia pronunciación y a comunicarte mejor en inglés?

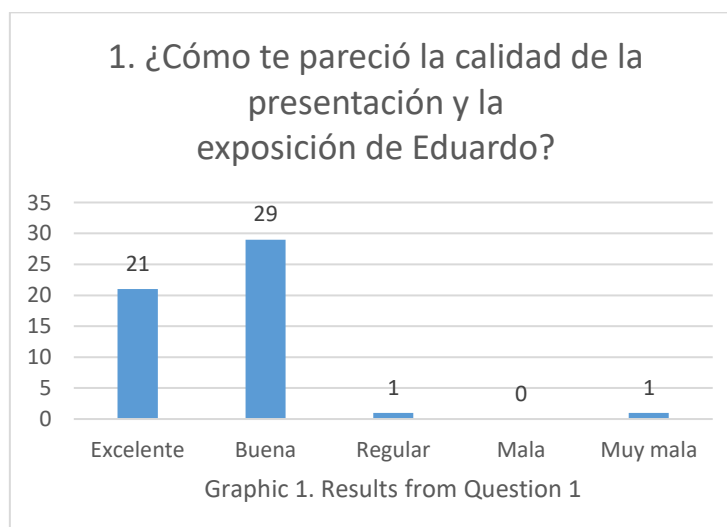
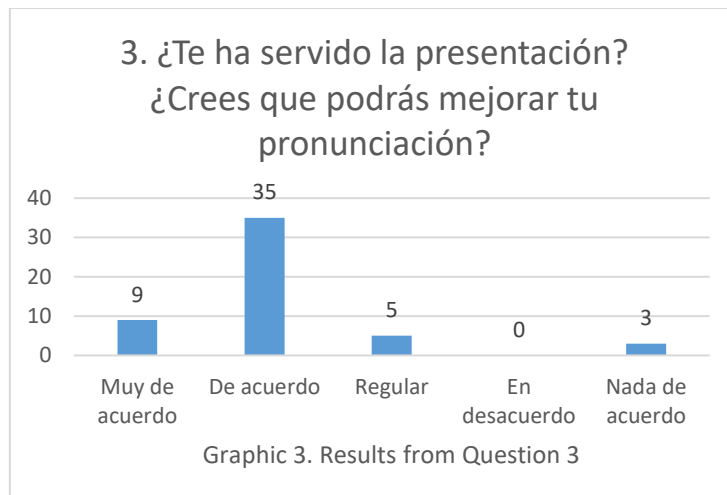
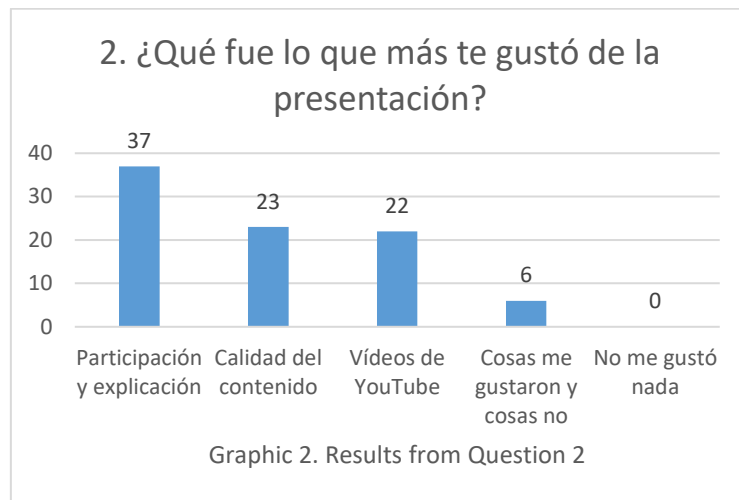
Muy de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	De acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Regular <input type="checkbox"/>	En desacuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Nada de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>
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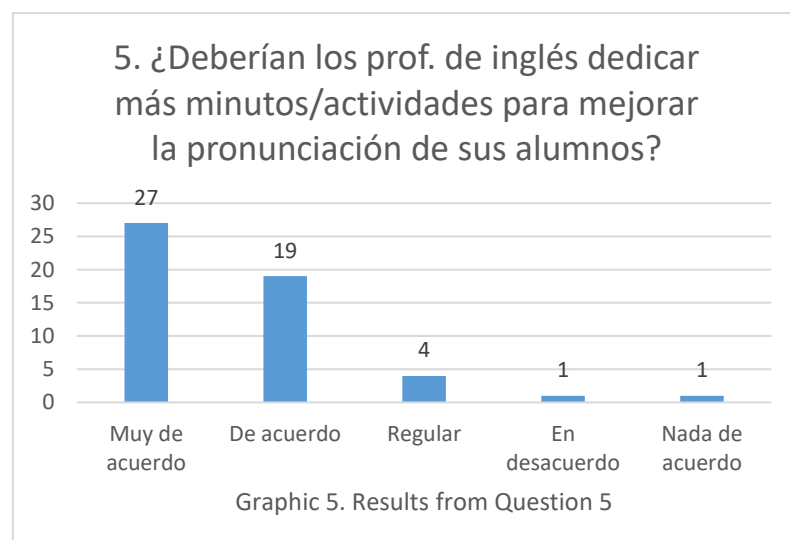
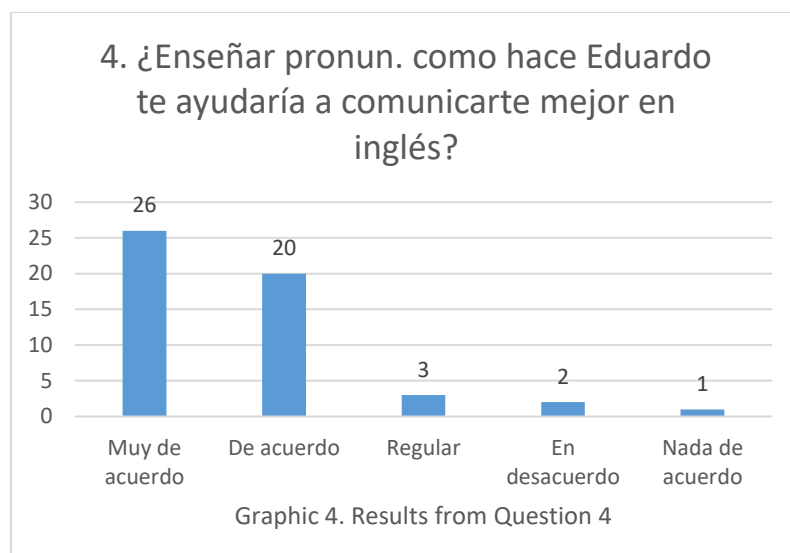
5) ¿Deberían los profesores de inglés dedicar más minutos/más actividades para mejorar la pronunciación de sus alumnos?

Muy de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	De acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Regular <input type="checkbox"/>	En desacuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>	Nada de acuerdo <input type="checkbox"/>
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6) (OPCIONAL): Escribe brevemente algún comentario/opinión/crítica de la actividad realizada por Eduardo.

12.2. Questionnaire graphics





12.3. Jennifer Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core

JENNIFER JENKINS' LINGUA FRANCA CORE (LFC)	
Core features	
Aspiration after word-initial /p/, /t/ and /k/	'pen' /p ^h en/ not /ben/
Vowel length distinctions	'beans' /bi:nz/ not /bɪnz/
RP (not GA) pronunciation of the intervocalic '-nt-' when it occurs before an unstressed syllable	'winter' /wɪntə(r)/ not /wɪnə(r)/
Full articulation of consonants in word initial clusters	'strong' /strɒŋ/ not /srɒŋ/
Epenthesis (i.e. insertion of a sound into a word in consonant clusters) is preferable to consonant deletion	'street' /sætə'ri: t/ not /'sri: t/
Nuclear (tonic) stress production and placement within tone units	
Adoption of the rhotic variant /r/	'here' pronounced /hi: r/ not /hɪə/
The non-core features	
Substitutions of 'th'	'think' /θɪŋk/ resulting in 'tink', 'sink' or 'fink', and 'this' /ðɪs/ resulting in 'dis', 'zis' or 'vis'
Pitch movement on the nuclear syllable	
Weak forms	'to' pronounced /tu:/ not /tə/
Vowel quality	'cake' /keɪk/ pronounced /kaɪk/
Word stress	'perfectionist' /perfectionist/ pronounced /PERfectionist/
Features of connected speech such as elision and assimilation	'facts' /fæks/ pronounced /fækts/ (elision) 'good girl' /gʊd gɜ:l/ pronounced /gʊd gɜ:l/ (assimilation)

