

**TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:
Challenges and possible solutions**

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation has often been presented as a skill of little to no interest owing to general ignorance. Teachers tend to ignore it largely due to their lack of confidence in said area. This study aims to ascertain the reasons behind the meagre treatment of English pronunciation in high school lessons. At the same time, it attempts to offer various alternative approaches to tackle the hurdles of pronunciation teaching while significantly reducing the common apprehension to this area of English language teaching displayed by teachers and students alike. In order to address this problem, a questionnaire was distributed among the members of a high school English department, whose results led to an exercise proposal. The results of the analysis of the questionnaire indicated that teachers rarely receive any instruction in pronunciation teaching, further exacerbating their already present insecurities. The outcome of the exercise proposal was mildly favourable, inviting to further discussion on more effective strategies for introducing pronunciation in the classroom. This study suggests that the use of music-driven lessons could ease the acquisition of pronunciation in English. Further studies are still needed to place pronunciation in the same light as the other renowned skills.

Key words: English pronunciation, Music-driven lessons, Teaching strategies.

RESUMEN

La pronunciación a menudo se ha presentado como una habilidad de poco o ningún interés debido a la ignorancia general. El profesorado en general tiende a ignorarlo en gran parte debido a su falta de confianza en dicha área. Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar las razones detrás del paupérrimo tratamiento de la pronunciación del inglés en las clases de secundaria. Al mismo tiempo, intenta ofrecer varios enfoques alternativos para abordar los obstáculos de la enseñanza de la pronunciación, reduciendo significativamente la aprehensión común a esta área de la enseñanza del idioma inglés mostrada por profesores y estudiantes por igual. Para abordar este problema, se distribuyó un cuestionario entre los miembros del departamento de inglés de una escuela secundaria, cuyos resultados llevaron a una propuesta de ejercicio. Los resultados del análisis del cuestionario indicaron que los docentes rara vez reciben instrucción en la enseñanza de la pronunciación, lo que agrava aún más sus inseguridades ya presentes. El resultado de la propuesta de ejercicio fue ligeramente favorable, invitando a un mayor debate sobre estrategias más eficaces para introducir la pronunciación en el aula. Este estudio sugiere que el uso de lecciones basadas en la música podría facilitar la adquisición de la pronunciación en inglés y que todavía se necesitan más estudios para colocar la pronunciación en el mismo nivel de importancia que las otras destrezas de renombre.

Palabras clave: Pronunciación del inglés, Lecciones basadas en música, Estrategias de enseñanza.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are majorly differentiated from the rest of mammals by their inherent abilities to produce sounds. Such sounds in turn become complex, forming words, words, sentences and ultimately, reaching words. Through this seemingly simple, yet intricate process, several elements come together as cogs of a machine that we refer to as a language. Ever since the dawn of humanity, attempts at communicating have been crucial in securing its survival throughout the ages, constantly evolving to suit the everchanging needs of this species. Over time, the understanding of this aforementioned process was grasped in more insightful ways by linguists, who managed to decode the structures underlying this means of communicating, giving rise to devising strategies aimed at comprehending and acquiring languages as accurately as possible.

When it comes to the tedious, even onerous task of learning a language, we tend to think of a basic set of skills which is needed in order to master it to near perfection. Such skills are writing, listening, reading, and speaking. Each of them has its own characteristics and requirements to attain proficiency. Speaking, for instance, centres on the ability of a student to produce oral texts, be it monologues or dialogues of considerable length, covering a myriad of topics, either suggested by the teacher or found within given resources.

Notwithstanding, while it is of paramount importance that students manage an extensive stock of vocabulary and sufficient grammatical knowledge to perform competently in tasks related to speaking, pronunciation appears to be missing. In point of fact, multiple studies (e.g. Gilbert, 2008; Underhill, 2010) have attested to the fact that pronunciation as a subject matter has been constantly relegated to the sidelines of textbooks. As if that was not denigrating enough, such examples consist of anecdotal tidbits of information that are largely forgotten about in the long run. This overtly neglectful treatment of pronunciation has reached such an extent that Underhill (2010) has humorously dubbed it “the Cinderella” of language teaching, stressing the precarious situation it has been facing for years on end. A large number of reasons exist to explain this growing reluctance to teach pronunciation in a long-winded and more profound way.

For illustrative purposes, another mention to Gilbert (2008) is due, for she argues that by and large, teachers find that they lack enough time in class to devote to this particular aspect of English instruction. Besides, when they do find time, as scant as it might be, it is utilised for presenting sounds to which students may not be accustomed in a humdrum, repetitive way through incessant drillings. These exercises are often prone to bearing disappointing results, as students become increasingly frustrated at their initial inability to reproduce sounds alien to them, losing any motivation they could retain for advancing further into this aspect. In addition, Turner (2021) highlights some obstacles that may discourage teachers from ever attempting to dabble with pronunciation assessments. Among these, we may mention insecurity as a key deterrent. It should be acknowledged that most teachers lack confidence as they may not possess the adequate level of formal instruction required for teaching phonology in a precise way. Moreover, there is another detail to take into consideration, that being the growing number of teachers whose first language is not English. This phenomenon, however, does not come without its fair share of drawbacks. For example, these teachers may present several shortcomings owing to the self-consciousness that they develop toward their own accents. Furthermore, they could also entirely avoid sections of pronunciation regarded as too daunting, such as speech patterns, intonation, or cadence. It is because of this neglect that we felt compelled to investigate further on this preoccupying issue.

The main aim of this study was to gain more insight into the ways pronunciation is taught in a secondary school. For that matter, we focused chiefly on getting to know the generally differing perceptions of both teachers

and students concerning this aspect of English teaching. Following that, we suggested a set of activities to tackle the most recurring pronunciation mistakes, assessing their effectiveness by the end of each session.

This dissertation is divided into two clearly differentiated parts. Firstly, there is a purely theoretical section which concentrates on features that constitute the backbone of this study. It begins by mentioning the sundry approaches and methods concerning the pronunciation of English as an L2. Following this, it promptly transitions to the concept of Global English and its numerous implications, after which it delves into the commonest of difficulties that native speakers of Spanish contend with on a daily basis. This section ends by highlighting the teaching of pronunciation as conceived both in the Common European Framework of Reference and the high school curriculum, along with a brief analysis of the affective variables that may stifle the acquisition of an intelligible pronunciation.

With respect to the second section, it dovetails into the previous one featuring a more practical scope. This one starts by paying special heed to the methodology. Within this part, the investigation-action approach is discussed alongside an observation of the most common pronunciation mistakes made by students, the implementation of a questionnaire on the perceptions of pronunciation, the design of some activities and their final assessment. Then, it swiftly moves into the results and discussion, paving the way to the design of a pronunciation activity based on such results to improve them. This section ends with some proposals of alternative strategies to master pronunciation, followed by a conclusion.

2. DIFFERENT METHODS AND APPROACHES CONCERNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AS L2

As it has been pointed out in the previous section, pronunciation as a discipline has been in a cline, from remaining virtually ignored and glossed over in some methods and approaches to constituting the touchstones of others. This sole occurrence leads us to propound a question that seems quite banal on the outside, given the aims of this dissertation: Can pronunciation even be taught in the first place?

While the most conspicuous answer to this query may majorly consist of a resounding yes, some arguments have been proposed against the idea of teaching pronunciation in a more explicit way. Jones (1997) writes that such arguments rely on two basic assumptions about the acquisition of second language phonology. The first argument is profoundly rooted in the critical period hypothesis, claiming that it is virtually impossible for adults to acquire native-like pronunciation in a foreign language. This hypothesis will be further discussed throughout the following sections. Concerning the second argument, backed mainly by the studies of Krashen (1982, as cited in Jones 1997), it affirms that pronunciation is an acquired skill, making attempts at focused instruction completely futile and even detrimental to language students.

Considering such potential hindrances, another question springs to mind concerning these students. It revolves around whether or not there is a specific age at which language learners may avail themselves of more of the numerous benefits that come with constant brain development. Seemingly, Ozfidan et al. (2019) after sifting through a heap of literature on the importance of the age factor in language acquisition, conclude that age is indeed crucial and that the most favourable period for learning all aspects of language is that of adolescence.

These findings are at first glance surprising. Adolescence as a transitional phase can be particularly convoluted and hard to navigate due to the multiplicity of shifts that characterise it. Not only does vulnerability become more prevalent as adolescents struggle to find who they are, but also their outlooks are unstable at best and extremely bleak at worst. Yet despite this, the ongoing rewiring within their brains may bestow upon them the capability to process and adapt the new pieces of information that they may encounter through all areas of life, either academic, social or personal. This would be highly beneficial in a high school setting, where students are normally required to invest a lot of effort into reaching their potential. However, pronunciation learning may take longer stretches of time, as it depends on the approach chosen by every professional.

Celce-Murcia, (1996, as cited in Hismanoglu et al. 2010) asserts that there are three main approaches to pronunciation instruction. Namely, the intuitive-imitative approach, the analytic-linguistic approach, and the integrative approach. These three approaches, as claimed by Hismanoglu et al. (2010), manage to integrate traditional methods with modern techniques. Following this brief explanation, the three aforementioned approaches will be touched upon one by one to provide some clarification on their main features.

In the intuitive imitative approach, as highlighted in Sharma (2020), there is a high reliance on “the learner’s ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information.” (p.7). Lee (2008) notes that particular technologies are used presently for this specific method such as audio tapes, videos, computer-based programmes, and websites. However, some studies put this method into question as for its effectiveness when teaching the very basics of pronunciation. As an example, Murphy (2003) points out that there is a serious caveat concerning this approach which he pertains to as “first orientation” (p.113). The issue in question concerns the capability of students to discern the sounds of a new

language, as they tend to hear such sounds through the filter of their native tongue. As it should be crystal clear, not all students possess the same abilities to process sound systems as rapidly as schools and high schools would expect and desire. Thus, he concludes that at least there should be some training in how the sound system of English and that of their native language may differ.

In contrast to this, as exposed in Hashemian et al. (2011), in the analytic-linguistic approach, L2 learners are provided with explicit information on pronunciation. This is given alongside a trove of resources, such as the phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, and vocal charts. As Murphy (2003) stresses, this method, also named “second orientation” (p.113) relies majorly upon learners’ mental abilities to comprehend complex descriptions of sounds. He even states, “Instruction appeals to learners’ analytic abilities to learn about speech sounds, compare features of the sound system of English with features of their native languages, and practice new sounds intensively.” (pp. 113 – 114), which considerably eases the transition between the native language and English, building a phonetic bridge to connect them. This objective can be attained by making use of that trove of resources, as teachers can introduce diagrams, videos relating to the diverse places of articulation, and even charts that may serve as visual aids.

Nevertheless, there is yet another step in the evolution of pronunciation teaching, wherein its perspective shifts entirely. This current stage is referred to as the integrative approach. As its name implies, this approach no longer separates pronunciation from communication. Lee (2008) emphasises this by remarking that pronunciation is “viewed as an integral component of communication, rather than an isolated drill and practice sub-skill.” (p.1) She then proceeds to expound on the most noticeable features of this approach, such as the use of listening activities aimed at the acquisition of pronunciation, and especially the rise to prominence of suprasegmentals, these being intonation, stress, and rhythm. Morley (1994) examines this approach further by alluding to a dual-focus oral communication program that tends to the micro and macro levels of instruction. Whereas the micro level concentrates on the enhancement of linguistic competence through the practice of segmentals and suprasegmentals, the macro level is concerned with more global aspects of communicability, displaying a clear intent on honing strategic competence, discourse, and sociolinguistics by using language for communicative purposes.

These three aforementioned approaches may seem to be the only ones available to us. Nonetheless, that could not be farther from the truth. As a matter of fact, pronunciation has been subjected to countless studies for a considerable amount of time. This is better illustrated by Celce-Murcia (1996) who provides a string of pronunciation learning approaches covering the whole window of time since studies on language teaching began to be conducted. These approaches are presented in Table 1, loosely based on the variants proposed by Hismanoglu et al. (2010) and Lee (2008).

Table 1: Main approaches to the teaching of pronunciation

Years	Approach		Definition
In the late 1800s and early 1900s	Direct method		Teachers provided students with a model for native-like speech. By listening and then imitating the modeller, students improved their pronunciation
1940s – 1950s	Audiolingual method		Pronunciation was taught explicitly from the start. Learners imitated or repeated after their teacher or a recording model. Teachers used a visual transcription system or articulation chart. Technique: minimal pair drill
1960s	Cognitive approach		This de-emphasized pronunciation in favour of grammar and vocabulary because (a) it was assumed that native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved and (b) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words
1970s	Silent way		The learners focused on the sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet or explicit linguistic information. Attention was on the accuracy of sounds and structure of the target language from the very beginning. Tools: sound-color chart, the Fidel charts, word charts, and colour rods.
	Community language learning		The pronunciation syllabus was primarily student-initiated and designed. Students decided what they wanted to practice and used the teacher as a resource. The approach was intuitive and imitative.
Mid 1970s, 1980s, present day	Communicative approach		The ultimate goal was communication. Teaching pronunciation was urgent and intelligible pronunciation was seen as necessary in oral communication. The techniques used to teach pronunciation were: listening and imitating, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids, tongue twisters, developmental approximation drills, the practice of vowel shifts, and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, recordings of learners. Production
20th century more recent	Grammar translation and reading-based approaches		Oral communication was not the primary goal of language instruction. Therefore, little attention was given to speaking, and almost none to pronunciation
	Naturalistic methods	Total physical response	Students would begin to speak when they were ready. They were expected to make errors in the initial stage and teachers were tolerant of them
		Natural Approach	The initial focus on listening without pressure to speak allowed the learners to internalize the target sound system.
Today	New Directions		New thoughts from other fields, such as drama, psychology, and speech pathology. Techniques: the use of fluency-building activities, accuracy-oriented exercises, appeals to multisensory modes of learning, adaptation of authentic materials, and use of instructional technology in the teaching of pronunciation.

So far, this section has only covered the three most relevant approaches to pronunciation teaching. Owing to its title, an overview of some methods will be promptly provided.

As a first mention, there is the Direct Method. Product of the 19th century, it centred around a natural way of acquiring languages. Richards et al. (1986) acknowledge Sauveur, who back then attempted to apply natural principles to language lessons. He would do so by using intensive oral interaction in the target language, asking questions with the clear goal of encouraging students to produce language. His method would be known as the Natural Method. Sauveur, along with other proponents of this method, claimed that foreign languages could be taught without needing to translate or resort to the native languages of the students, instead conveying meanings through action. Drawing on Franke (1884 as cited in Richards et al 1986), a language could best be taught by using it in the classroom. This stood in direct opposition to analytic methods such as Grammar translation since a more inductive approach would encourage teachers to employ the foreign language in a spontaneous way, inciting students to discover grammar rules on their own. This method would find acceptance first in France and Germany, being later exported to the United States through the establishment of language schools by Sauveur and Maximilian Berlitz. Berlitz himself would rename this method with his surname, proposing some principles that are still followed in Berlitz language schools at present.

These principles highlighted by Titone (1968:100-1 as cited in Richards et al, 1986) revolve around adaptability to students, as the focus of this method is spontaneity over predetermined strict rules. In essence, teachers are encouraged to take on a more active role by means of constantly spurring students to discover new knowledge by themselves. This is achieved by emphasizing demonstration over mere translation, actions, such as questions, in lieu of long-winded explanations, an adherence to a lesson plan instead of a textbook, and the progress of students over following an exceedingly demanding and limiting lesson programme. The teachers who follow this method are also invited to keep a natural pace of speaking, not attempting to alter it at any moment, as the ensuing results would be quite underwhelming.

Notwithstanding, this method is not safe from detractors. It has come under fire on the basis of certain limitations, the most glaring of them being the fact that it leans too much onto the expertise of native speakers. As it is indicated in the previous paragraph, using a book is majorly frowned upon in favour of devising personal lesson plans. The major flaw of this vision then resides in taking language proficiency for granted, despite not all teachers complying with such a requirement. In addition, most of them would suffer an ordeal to explain even the simplest concepts because of the enforced prohibition to use their native languages at all times, making this method counterproductive to students, as they would not possess any form of scaffolding to secure the knowledge that they might gain.

The second method to be worthy of mention is the Audiolingual Method, which in some ways came to succeed the direct one. Being conceived amidst the tensions of the Cold War, Richards et al. (1986) claim that a single event, namely the launching of the first Russian satellite in 1957, was responsible for prompting a radical change in the USA towards increasing the effectivity of language teaching (p.53). The term audiolingualism was coined by Professor Nelson Brooks in 1964. As a method, it was founded following the tenets of two theories. To be more specific, these were the behaviour theory formulated by Skinner in his book *The Behaviour of Organisms* (1938), and the structuralism theory based mainly on the postulates of Ferdinand de Saussure. For

descriptive purposes, we will proceed to display the principles of both theories separately. They have been taken from Saussure (1959) and Watson (1913) respectively.

Structuralism Theory:

- 1) Spoken language takes precedence over written language.
- 2) The structure and form of language hold greater importance than its meaning.
- 3) Language elements are generated according to rules or structures.
- 4) Language samples can be fully described at any structural level.
- 5) Language is organized hierarchically, akin to a pyramid structure.
- 6) Each language possesses its own unique system.

Behaviourism Theory:

- 1) Language acquisition mirrors the learning of other habits through conditioning.
- 2) Repetition enhances habit formation and facilitates learning.
- 3) Acquisition of a second language should resemble that of the native language.
- 4) Native language habits may hinder the learning of a second language.
- 5) Language and culture are inseparable, reflecting the behavior of its speakers.
- 6) Language learning follows a stimulus-response-reinforcement pattern.
- 7) Positive reinforcement fosters the development of correct language habits.
- 8) Errors should be minimized to prevent the formation of incorrect habits.
- 9) Analogical reasoning aids language acquisition more than analytical approaches.

As it can be deduced from these principles, the main objective of this method consists of making students acquainted with the speech-related characteristics of English, ultimately enabling them to comprehend messages and communicate among themselves with the fluency akin to that of a native speaker. It is no surprise then that instruction involves a continual use of drills by the teacher to help students become familiar with accurate grammatical structures. Repetition is the main means to achieve fluency in accordance with this method. Yet, it was this excessive dependence on constant drillings that caused the audiolingual method to falter in later years. Chomsky (1959) would symbolically signal its death knells by famously criticizing the behaviourist theory, discrediting the idea that external conditioning could account for all language learning. Nevertheless, despite facing constant criticism, the audiolingual method can still be applied to a classroom in several ways. An article on Sanako Blog (2023) exemplifies that by advising several practices, among which an emphasis on pronunciation alongside the uses of authentic materials and active listening are included.

3. “GLOBAL ENGLISH” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

The English language, whether we like it or not, has become an integral part of our lives. In fact, we can find it in any sort of iteration, be it written in street advertisements, on social media or even in professional settings. Studies have been devoted to finding out the reasons behind this undeniable ubiquity. Crystal (2003) for example suggests that a language becomes international and achieves global status when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country. He goes on to describe two ways in which this goal can be attained. Firstly, there is the possibility of conferring an official status to such a language, entailing its introduction in the media and subsequent compulsory instruction. English, as it has been proven throughout its whole history, clearly belongs in this category. Its ongoing expansion dates back to the heyday of the British Empire and even before. Philipson (2013) states “The expansion of English from its territorial base in England began with its imposition throughout the British Isles” (p.3). Such an imposition came at the expense of coexisting languages at the time such as Irish. The ambivalent legacy of the powerhouse that the British Empire became has persisted in part due to the impact it generated through the adoption of its main language as a sign of prestige. As it was to be expected, each country would develop distinct variations of this language, bearing some degree of influence from other local tongues. With regard to the study of English Varieties, a term has become quite popular to describe them, that being World Englishes. As stressed in Meshthrie et al. (2008), English no longer has one single base of authority, prestige, and normativity, hence why Englishes is in the plural, as it must serve as an umbrella term for all extant varieties. They expand on this notion by providing a fairly extensive list of subtypes. Out of that list, it was the element pertaining to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) that we deemed more suitable for the purposes of this dissertation. The definition provided by Meshthrie et al (2008) reads as follows:

This category typically refers to the English used in countries in which its influence has been external, rather than via a body of ‘settlers’. For EFL speakers, English plays a role for mainly international rather than intranational purposes. Whereas ESL countries produce literature in English (and other languages), EFL countries typically do not use English in creative writing. The trend towards globalisation in economics, communication and culture has made EFL prominent in places like China, Europe, Brazil, etc. (p.5)

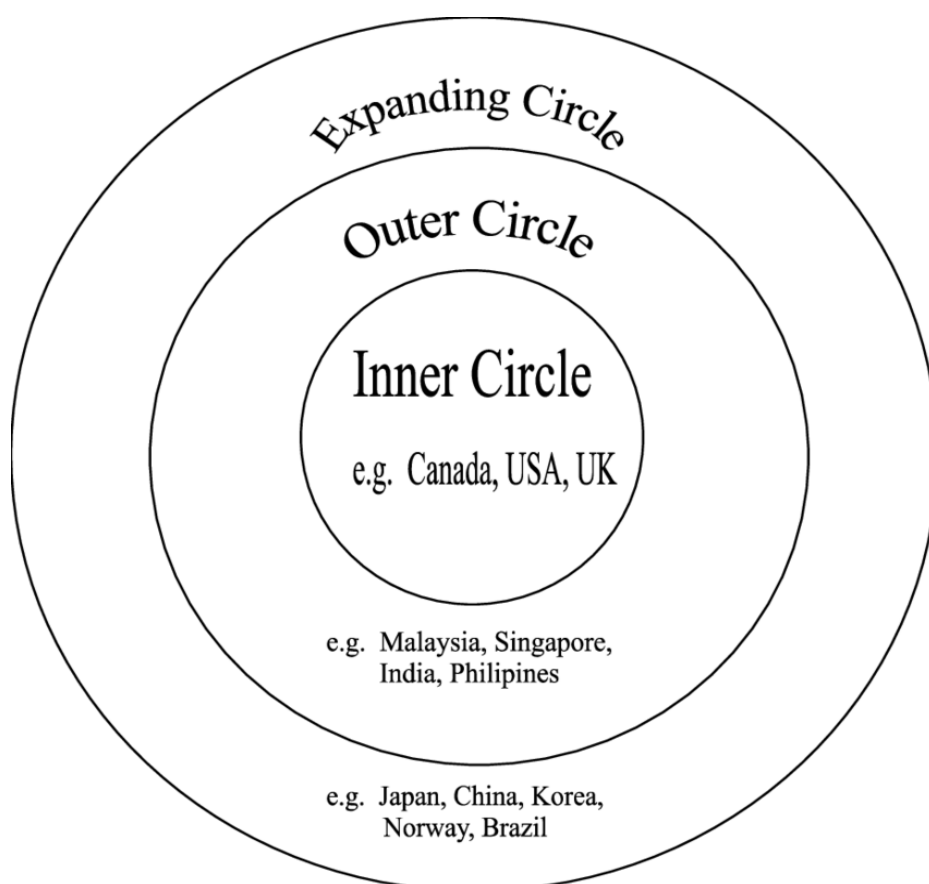
A key word in this paragraph appears to be self-evident, that being globalisation. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines globalisation in one of its entries as the development of closer economic, cultural, and political relations among all the countries of the world as a result of travel and communication becoming easy. In this sense, EFL functions as a tool for facilitating the development of amiable relationships among all countries on earth. However, this poses an interesting query with respect to pronunciation: Is RP even practical in the endeavour to achieve intelligibility?

RP, which stands for Received Pronunciation, is the most common accent to be taught in schools, seldom alongside its overseas counterpart, namely GA, otherwise known as General American. Such a case is an odd occurrence, mostly found in textbooks designed specifically for schools of languages such as the Keynote bundle. Disregarding this rarity, the vast majority of textbooks abide by the RP conventions. This follows several reasons. Trudgill et al. (2017) attribute the popularity of this accent to some strategic advantages. For one, he asserts that RP is a “genuinely regionless accent within England” (p.14), which means that nobody will be able

to ascertain the origins of speakers who employ this accent, in turn sparing them any prejudiced views that their addressees may hold. Furthermore, this variety also stands as the one utilised by all communication media in the UK, including the BBC. Given the crucial role that this accent occupies in the daily lives of most English learners, it is therefore unsurprising to witness how RP has forged a reputation based on a sense of prestige. Nevertheless, Trudgill et al. (2017) also point to some drawbacks. These are concerned with three points, namely the scarcity of RP native speakers amounting to only “3-5 per cent of the population of England” (p.14), the social connotations of this accent owing to its high-class origins, and the sheer difficulty for foreigners to pronounce some of its characteristic sounds. Trudgill et al. (2017) reckon that “the RP accent is probably rather more difficult for many foreigners to acquire than, say, a Scottish accent since RP has a large number of diphthongs and a not particularly close relationship to English orthography” (p.14).

This difficulty may stem from the aforementioned origins of RP. As an accent native to the UK, it could be placed within the inner circle of English-speaking countries following the model proposed by Kachru (1985). This model is displayed in Figure 1, alongside a summary of what it contains.

Figure 1: The three circles of English.



The three concentric circles relate to diverse types of English speakers. For instance, the inner circle is comprised of all the countries traditionally regarded as the headquarters of the language. As such, their speakers create and distribute the norms to other circles. Some of the countries that partake in this circle are the UK, the

USA, Australia, and Canada. Secondly, there is the Outer Circle, made up of countries that adopted English as a result of their colonial history. Their role mainly involves defying the established norms by developing them further. One of the prime examples of a country that has adopted English as a Second Language is India, followed by Egypt and Nigeria. Finally, the Expanding Circle is made up of these countries whose population does not speak English on a daily basis. These speakers must then accept and follow these rules created by the Inner Circle and later revamped and contested by the Outer Circle. EFL, due to its target population, would be located within the latter one, as these speakers must internalise already existent norms.

Taking this into consideration, it is then crucial to choose a proper model of English adequate enough for the teaching endeavour. Kirkpatrick (2006) presents three options that can be chosen. The first one, named the native-speaker model, appears to remain the most coveted one by the ELT [English Language Teaching] community as a whole. The reasons behind this overt preference are numerous, stemming primarily from the fact that the speech of native speakers has been largely studied, thus giving rise to dictionaries and specialised resources to rely on. Further factors such as the aforementioned sense of prestige and the “historical authority” (p.72) contribute greatly to its positioning as the main choice for teaching English. Holliday (2006) attempts to address this perceivable bias by referencing Native-speakerism, an ever-growing trend among English-speaking countries which adheres to the preconceived idea that native speakers, by virtue of their origins, should be the only ones who are allowed to dictate how English is to be written and spoken. This trend toward favouring native speakers over non-native ones has left an indelible print on the mindset of Westerners, who may openly display their preference for speakers whom they might deem more capable based solely on their primary language. Take for example an employer who desperately needs to hire more personnel. Chances are native speakers stand more chances to obtain these vacant job positions, reaffirming their linguistic and social privileges. Such privileges reach as far as the Internet itself, with language learning applications serving as proof of the favouritism towards speakers hailing either from the UK or the USA, entirely dismissing the second and third circles respectively. In this concern, Holliday (2006) takes notice of an effect that appears to characterise this ideology, which is commonly described as othering. In a fashion reminiscent of imperialism, speakers outside the UK and the West are classified according to prevailing stereotypes based on cultural and religious differences. This is further emphasized when students and teachers from the East fail to grasp or implement teaching and learning methods that are espoused by Western countries. He continues by labelling this perception as eminently native-speakerist, since it categorises the cultures of non-native speakers as dependent, subordinate, and passive, effectively falling into the orientalist precepts denounced by Said (1978).

In opposition to these nefarious effects, Kirkpatrick (2006) also argues that the number of learners whose main objective consists of conversing with native speakers is pretty scarce. He goes on to affirm that the vast majority of students are learning English to communicate with fellow non-native speakers. It is then that he comes up with the idea of utilising nativized models, significantly diminishing the authority of native speakers in favour of local teachers. In this case, nonetheless, he swiftly discards this alternative since a strong cultural attachment would be prevalent in following this approach. Finally, he decides that a Lingua Franca model would be much more suitable to learners in the Expanding Circle, as it may free them from the cultural constraints associated with any variety. This liberation would effectively brand the English language as a property of anyone, incentivising its acquisition to even the most reluctant learners.

Were this to be an ideal world, the discussion would meet its full stop at this point. The adoption of a Lingua Franca model might bypass the issues related to intelligibility, except for a minor detail. While the concept of a global or standard variety of English is often deemed plausible on paper, Gupta (2006) notes that such an idea becomes extremely frail when transposed into its spoken form. Surely, there is a standard pronunciation. She exemplifies this by asserting that the pronunciation of the starting ch in the set of words chaos, chutzpah, and church using the /tʃ/ phoneme would sound incorrect to anyone. Yet, there is no standard accent. We in point of fact concur with her views on Standard English as a written performative, for she states “All of us find it easier to understand familiar accents than unfamiliar ones. This gives rise to problems of intelligibility or comprehension between people from different places. The more localized the accent, the more likely it is to present problems to hearers from elsewhere” (p.97). This view, nonetheless, is contested by Tomlinson (2006), who opines that a lack of mutual intelligibility between different regional varieties of English may not be a hassle as world users of English would develop two varieties, namely the local and the global ones. In doing this, speakers would be able to switch between both varieties depending on the specific context and need to communicate. His claims seemingly are in line with the beliefs that Crystal (1997 as cited in Tomlinson 2006) states:

I believe in the fundamental value of multilingualism, as an amazing world resource which presents us with different perspectives and insights. I believe in the fundamental value of a common language, as an amazing world resource which presents us with unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding... (p.132)

Tomlinson (2016) expands on these statements, advocating for a use of the English language that includes features shared by all varieties instead of simply considering the ones regarded as more prestigious. Jenkins (2000) embarks on a mission precisely to assist these students who aim for a pronunciation that diverges from both RP and GA. From her attempts, she designs the Lingua Franca Core, LFC for short, which arguably provides more realistic pronunciation objectives than merely sounding like a native speaker. Drawing on Jenkins (2000 as cited in Dauer 2005), the LFC is divided into three different areas:

1) Consonants

- All consonants (except θ and ð), which can be replaced by (f, v)
- Rhoticity (pronunciation of final /r/ like in American English)
- Medial /t/ sound as in British English (do not voice it in matter nor delete it in winter as in American English)
- Phonemic distinctions must be maintained.
- Aspiration of word-initial voiceless stops (/p,t,k/) (as with the words pin, tin, and kin)
- No omission of consonants in word-initial clusters (promise, string)
- Omission in medial and final clusters only according to Inner Circle English rules (facts = fax, bands = bans)
- Addition (vowel epenthesis) is preferable to omission (angst as [æŋəst], not [æŋəs]). A special remark should be made here, as Jenkins (2000) suggests an example (product [pər`adʌkʊtə], not [`pʌdʌk]), which we deem too contrived, if not far-fetched. While we

understand the aim of LFC for simplicity, pronouncing the word product with the dissolution of all its consonant clusters would render it even more confusing in fast speech.

2) Vowels

- Contrast between so-called long and short vowels (seat, sit /i:-ɪ/) or (cooed, could /u:-ʊ/)
- No substitutions for the vowel in bird /ɜ:/; e.g., heard distinct from hard, but other nonnative regional varieties are acceptable as long as they are consistent.
- Vowels shortened before voiceless consonants and lengthened before voiced consonants (sat, sad /sæt,sæ:d/, pick, pig /pɪk, pɪ:g/)

3) Prosody

- Correct placement and production (lengthening) of nuclear stress and contrastive stress (You deserve to be SACKED vs you deSERVE to be sacked)
- Division of the speech stream into word groups

As it can be inferred from this outline, the LFC ushers in a shift, wherein segmentals, namely consonants and vowels, gain much more prominence than suprasegmentals (rhythm, word stress, and intonation). However, while Dauer (2005) agrees with the goal of this approach, that is, demanding that students approximate sounds from British and American English using native-speaker-influenced features, she finds that some of its details are not made easier to teach and learn. For instance, she questions the effectiveness of replacing the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with /f/ and /v/ since as she punctuates, the /v/ sound is already challenging for English learners, often leading to confusion with /w/ and /b/. She also acknowledges the sheer difficulty of teaching vowel length, aspiration, and stress without any previous contact with basic notions of phonetics. All in all, Dauer (2005) concludes that foreign accents should not be frowned upon but rather reconsidered as regional accent variations. She also raises some debate on the usefulness of this focus on prosody, as that might not be the main priority of all EFL students.

This section would not be completely over without mentioning the elephant in the room that represents intelligibility. As such, it is one of the aspects that any language learner should strive to attain, given the importance of being properly understood. In spite of this, the sole definition of intelligibility is troublesome enough at times. Dauer (2005) claims that despite the ultimate goal of pronunciation instruction being intelligibility, it is difficult to define and measure. In addition, she denounces the fact that most research seems to couple intelligibility with fluency. McKay (2002) also addresses the complexity of this concept by splitting it into three different areas. These are intelligibility (recognising an expression), comprehensibility (knowing the meaning of the expression) and interpretability (knowing what the expression signifies in a particular sociocultural context). Relying on her example, if a listener recognizes that the word *salt* is an English word rather than a Spanish word, English is then intelligible to him or her. If additionally, the listener knows the meaning of that word, it is comprehensible. If he or she even understands that the phrase “Do you have any salt?” is intended to be a request for salt, then he or she is said to be able to interpret the language (p.52). This distinction being made, we agree with McKay (2002) on the fact that intelligibility accounts for these three areas at the same time, with special emphasis on interpretability as the most cumbersome one. Due to EFL being employed chiefly

as a lingua franca, it is susceptible to constant exchanges between differing cultures, signifying that both matters of cultural awareness and context must be considered.

4. MAIN DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION DETECTED IN NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS

Having tackled the multiple proposals concerning pronunciation paradigms, it is time to address the difficulties faced by Spanish native speakers during the English learning process. As it is well-known, English phonology is not precisely forgiving, especially with languages that feature a phonetic, entirely transparent orthography such as Spanish. In this case, those who acquire it as a mother tongue are told that they should speak as they write, due to the undeniable one-on-one correspondence between the written and the spoken word. In English, on the other hand, such correspondence is virtually nonexistent since its orthography became crystallized during the Early Modern English period. Because of this, Spanish speakers often make errors on the incorrect assumption that English should be equally phonetic.

Brunori (2016) considers that there are two main sources of mistakes. The first one consists of the disparity of sounds in relation to letters. In other words, whereas Spanish contains a relatively simple five-vowel inventory with immediate corresponding sounds (a, e, i, o, u), English produces twelve different sounds with the same number of letters. To illustrate this, we may take the word Australia and attempt to pronounce it in both languages. While Spanish attributes the same /a/ sound to these three vowels, things change radically when we try to say it out loud in English. As the IPA transcription /ɒ'streɪli:ə/ reveals, these vowels, albeit resembling each other in their written form, make completely unrelated and therefore misleading sounds. To the dismay of Spanish speakers, however, this sound mismatch does not limit itself to vowels since consonants also tend to vary slightly. As an example, let us compare the /t/ sound with a single word in both languages: temple and its translation, *templo*. The initial t promptly makes a difference based on its place of articulation. To be more specific, this initial t in English is produced by placing the tip of the tongue below the upper teeth, while its counterpart is made in the back of the upper teeth, resulting in a completely distinct outcome.

The second one is more concerned with the fact that there is a lack of consistency between the letters and the sounds they can make. As it was stated above, the Spanish vowel inventory is quite straightforward. Due to this, it is not uncommon to witness learners being taken aback by the numerous times in which English breaks their expectations. Brunori (2016) comments on some instances, such as the comparison of vowel sounds in the wonder/wander pair, as well as words like bird and journal sharing the eleventh vowel sound (/ɜ:/) despite their differences in spelling. Nevertheless, there are plenty of pronunciation errors that can occur owing to the phonological gaps found between both languages.

The following list of errors usually made by native Spanish speakers when attempting to pronounce English includes some considerations by Shemesh (2022). One of the most common errors that Spanish native speakers are especially prone to make involves the automatic addition of a vowel sound right at the beginning of a consonant cluster. This error can be explained by the lack of consonant clusters occupying that specific position in Spanish. Thus, they naturally insert a vowel to compensate for the initial difficulty that they may experience. In this way, these speakers pronounce street as “estreet” or Spain as “Espain”.

The second error that we want to highlight is concerned, once more, with the placement of consonant clusters, yet not at the beginning, but at the end of words. This affects Spanish native speakers as their nouns or verbs never end in consonant clusters, making their pronunciation in English painstakingly complicated. Thus, they resort by mere inertia to dropping final consonants, managing to obtain a simplified pronunciation akin to that of their native language. This phenomenon is observed to occur with Past Simple tense verbs in English, wherein learners subconsciously skip the characteristic -ed ending. Examples of this include the pronunciation of worked as /wɜ:k/ instead of /wɜ:kt/ and played pronounced as /pleɪ/, rather than /pleɪd/.

Next on our list of everyday blunders, there is a special and equally vexatious consonant for Spanish speakers to master. This one is the letter h. Its challenging nature derives from the distinctive treatment it receives in both languages. Should a Spanish native speaker learn the General American pronunciation, this letter will pose no threat to him or her, as it is essentially mute. Notwithstanding, that is not the case with the still normative RP variety that is employed in high schools. One of RP's hallmarks is its whispering, breathing h sound, present in terms as hot or hospital. These students who contend with RP on a day-to-day basis try their best to evade this daunting pronunciation either by muting it entirely or by substituting it with a velar fricative, approximating it to a more familiar /j/ sound as in *jamón*. It should be noted, however, that this difficulty is not consistent throughout the Spanish speaking community, since some varieties naturally utilise a pronunciation of the breathing /h/ seemingly equivalent to that featured in RP. This is due to the nonexistence of the aforementioned velar sound /j/ in certain dialectal variations. Such is the case with Canarian Spanish, along with some varieties spoken in Latin America.

The following error to this also concerns the letter j but in another sense. Spanish speakers tend to swap letters y and j due to their similar sounds. On this occasion, the letter j is pronounced as a voiced, alveo-palatal, affricate consonant (/dʒ/). This is notably confounding to Spanish native speakers as it resembles their /j/ sound. Resulting of that coincidence, they tend to pronounce the word yes as /dʒes/ instead of the softer /jes/. This trend also works in reverse, as they may utter some words starting with /j/ (just, job) as /jʌst/ and /jɔp/ rather than the correct /dʒʌst/ and /dʒɔp/ respectively.

As a final, yet equally crucial mention, vowel number 12, also known as Schwa, stands as the bane of all Spanish native speakers who set their hearts on perfecting Received Pronunciation. Coe (1987) observes that there is no equivalent of either the long schwa /ɜ:/ or its shorter counterpart /ə/ in Spanish. In order to account for the absence of that pair of sounds, learners replace them in two separate ways. The short schwa is often replaced by a stronger pronunciation of the written vowels. Following the example provided by Coe (1987), the word "about" ends up being pronounced as /abaut/, emphasizing the vowel a. The long schwa sound /ɜ:/ conversely is replaced by /i/ or /e/ followed by a flapped r as in /bɪrt/ for bird or /bɛrt/ for Bert (p.91).

These difficulties outlined; we adhere to the first conclusion reached by Brunori (2006) in which he proposes that phonemic symbols should be more used than simple letters to work with sounds in a more accurate way. Stanton (2002) also supports the use of these phonemic symbols for several reasons. He gives five reasons to adopt the IPA which are quite compelling. Firstly, he affirms that students would be enabled to use dictionaries in a more precise way, given that the second element featured in a dictionary entry is the transcription of that entry in IPA. Transcriptions themselves would provide students with valuable hints for them to get the best out of their pronunciation learning journeys. His second reason correlates with the first one, as once students grasp these symbols, they will be capable of learning the correct pronunciation of a term on their own accord, without the help of a teacher. This would significantly hasten their learning processes as these students would be less

likely to succumb to the temptation of using Spanish sound values out of ignorance. As a third argument in favour of utilising the IPA, he claims that phonemic symbols serve as visual aids, helping students to learn why a noun must be pronounced differently from similarly written ones or vice versa. He exemplifies this by mentioning that the homophones *son* and *sun* must be pronounced the same way as they display the same symbols. In such cases, the IPA should be used with some caution, as its intriguing letters may leave low-level learners quite bewildered, thus inviting unwanted feelings of despair. Students then use their eyes in order to guide their diction and hearing, involving three senses in the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. His fourth and fifth arguments can be conflated in the fact that, as students possess countless resources for learning grammar, vocabulary, and even the five skills, specific materials aimed at honing pronunciation should be designed. Only then will students acquire a deeper insight into English phonetics. They will also have a clear set of goals to follow concerning the several difficulties that they shall surmount to master this area of English learning.

Then, there is the age-old lingering question which concerns the aforementioned schwa sound. As the commonest sound in the English language, it ought to have a special status in pronunciation lessons. Morley (2009) in this respect states: “In stress-timed languages such as English, stresses occur at regular intervals. The words which are most important for the communication of the message, that is, nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, are normally stressed in connected speech. Grammar words such as auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, linkers, and prepositions are not usually stressed, and are reduced to keep the stress pattern regular.” (Paragraph 2). From this description, it becomes clear why this vowel sound is tricky for Spanish speakers. Usually pertained to as the lazy vowel due to its singular manner of articulation, it is not present in syllable-timed languages such as Italian or Spanish, hence why it is highly notorious while teaching connected speech. The origins of this unique sound already denote its most salient feature. Coming from the Hebrew term *shva*, which literally means devoid of sound, or emptiness, its function in English is instrumental as it separates the unstressed parts of a sentence from the stressed ones. This function serves Morley (2009) to justify the teaching of this vowel, as students would become more familiar with the notion of unstress. That would in turn help them avoid the accidental omission of weaker parts in a sentence such as auxiliaries. She then proceeds to outline some simple, yet practical ideas for helping students perfect this problematic sound. Among these, fast dictation stands out as a pretext to introduce schwa in a given context. This vowel, nevertheless, is not the only obstacle that Spanish native speakers may encounter. Managing sentence stress is likewise challenging. Kenworthy (1987) addresses this concern by mentioning that many meanings usually conveyed through sentence stress in English are rendered into Spanish through some specific words. Drawing on her example, in English the sentence I have some books transmits the idea that these books are the most important part of the sentence, whereas in the sentence I have some books, the main focus shifts to the number of owned books. Spanish conversely would differentiate these two sentences by writing the roughly equivalent words “unos” for the first sentence and “algunos” for the second one. Such difference would lie in the ambiguity resulting from the statement “tengo algunos libros” as the number of them remains undisclosed in contrast to “tengo unos libros” where that number is clearly fixed.

Kenworthy (1987) also tackles some areas concerned with intonation that require special scrutiny. The first area covers the pitch range. What she notes with regard to the use of pitch is that the range available to Spanish speakers is fairly limited, whereas English speakers may start a sentence in a high pitch, lowering it until reaching the end of that sentence. Secondly, she pays heed to the final falling pitch movement (as in the last element in a list preceding a full stop) which in her words may not sound “low enough” (p.155) since the Spanish language rarely uses that feature of rising before the final pitch, thus making native Spanish speakers sound flatter

in comparison. Finally, she recognises the difficulty of the rise-fall feature. This is mostly prominent in single syllables, such as the unmistakably British interjection (Oh!) and in short phrases such as “wonderful idea.” Ultimately, the ones making such errors would be regarded by native speakers of English as uninterested in maintaining conversations, since a wide pitch range, coupled with constant risings and fallings tend to indicate interest while participating in conversations.

In conclusion to this section, the challenges faced by native Spanish speakers cover multiple facets. From inconsistencies in pronunciation and spelling to discrepancies between letters and their sounds, Spanish speakers encounter several hurdles throughout their English learning journeys. However, these obstacles can be overcome to some extent with the help from the IPA, whose symbols may facilitate the attainment of accurate pronunciation. Alongside this, focusing on intonation patterns, the schwa, and sentence stress can help students further improve spoken proficiency. Thus, teachers can encourage Spanish speakers to advance forward in their learning processes by tackling these traditionally contentious, yet unique characteristics.

5. PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN THE CEFR AND IN THE CANARIAN CURRICULUM

The CEFR acronym is immediately recognisable by language professionals and students alike. For decades, it has been shaping the widely held conceptions of language learning and teaching. Such is its success, that even countries outside Europe measure the language abilities of their students through utilizing the well-known A1 to C2 scale. Nevertheless, its general acceptance shall not be confused with absolute perfection, for there are a few continually neglected areas that still struggle for attention to this very day. However, before tackling some of these concerns, we will provide a brief explanation of how and why the CEFR was inceptioned. Trim (2007) chronicles this whole process in quite a detailed and profound way. Nevertheless, for the main purposes of this section, we will jump into 1990, for that year witnessed the first steps of a project that would later engender the CEFR. This project, named “Language Learning for European Citizenship” functioned as an umbrella term, encompassing a series of measures aimed at addressing the volatile state of affairs that would characterize that ensuing decade. Early versions of the CEFR would appear throughout the 1990s for clarification and revision until its most recognized iteration was published in 2001. Ever since its release, it has been both lauded for its efforts at developing the concept of multilingualism and reviled for its numerous shortcomings. Pronunciation has proven to be one of the CEFR's most complex obstacles to overcome, as its sole rating remains a contentious issue. Harding (2017) acknowledges the following: “Pronunciation presents an area of judgement where a rater might rely heavily on his or her own conceptualization of the construct when a scale becomes difficult to use.” (p.12) He goes on to specify the reasons behind the overall daunting nature of developing rating scales. These can be summed up in two, namely knowing what information is to be included in the descriptors pertaining to every level and ensuring the correct and consistent interpretation of the scale by all raters. To the first end, Harding (2017) suggests utilizing a set of methods that relies both on the available resources and on the expertise of the scale designers. He borrows the nomenclature employed by Fulcher (2003), denominating these two scale approaches as “intuitive” and “empirical”. The first approach considers procedures such as counting on committees to develop criteria, at times drawing from previous scales. The second one, however, includes methods such as scaling descriptors (these are used for the creation of the CEFR), among others. To the second

end, studies on the correct interpretation of scales have been extensively conducted, giving rise to the burgeoning discipline of rater cognition. Nevertheless, as Harding (2017) affirms, most investigations on that topic may agree on the fact that scales are quite limited concerning ensuring valid interpretation and consistency. Due to these already intimidating prospects, it is not uncommon to encounter critics that decry the overall absence of pronunciation in the CEFR such as Galaczi (2011), who indicates that “only skeletal descriptors can be found in the Phonological Control scale” (p.67). From now on, we will be analysing that phonological scale in order to find both its assets and defects.

C2	As C1
C1	Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning.
B2	Has acquired a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation.
B1	Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur.
A2	Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable foreign accent, but conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time.
A1	Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases can be understood with some effort by native speakers used to dealing with speakers of his/her language group.

At first glance, nothing seems to be out of the ordinary with the aspects that are being assessed in this chart. Nevertheless, as it is mentioned in Piccardo & North (2017), for the wide range of opportunities that the description of phonology in the CEFR offers, this chart apparently fails to cover such possibilities. Instead, it provides us with a fumbling proposal that crams together fairly diverse aspects within pronunciation such as intonation, and management of sentence stress, as the so-called intelligibility. However, in placing it under scrutiny, we can notice a perplexing take on tackling this latter aspect. Within the threshold separating the B1 and B2 levels, it seems that the loss of a foreign accent determines whether students climb onto the next step or not. Nonetheless, we reckon that a goal of such magnitude is surreal, and even ludicrous given the enormous leap that the transition between these two levels represents. Following Kenworthy (1987), while speaking with an accent akin to these displayed by native speakers may grant some level of praise and admiration, foreign accents should not be considered an obstacle in attaining fluency as long as they can be clearly understandable. Another concern can be spotted when checking the descriptor for the C2, which practically mirrors the previous level, ultimately implying mastery and full control over all aspects related to pronunciation. This could be one of the numerous cases in which the final level of the CEFR is equated to native speaker-like proficiency, despite that regard being quite misleading, for slips and confusion may occur even to the most proficient speakers of English. Having discussed some of the major woes concerning pronunciation found in the CEFR, it is now time to determine the ways in which these flaws translate into a curriculum. For that purpose, we are choosing the Secondary Education curriculum of the Canary Islands, as that is the main setting of our observations. As the structure of this curriculum might be slightly complicated to grasp, we will offer some appraisals of the sections in which pronunciation may be most relevant, rather than providing a long-winded description. First and foremost, we are introduced to the key competencies, of which only the first two ones, namely the linguistic competence and the multilingual competence, may involve pronunciation as a matter of study. Based on their descriptions alone, it could be inferred that pronunciation might play a significant role in their development. For instance, the multilingual competence states that its main objective consists of utilising diverse languages in an

oral or written way so as to respond to the communicative necessities of speakers adequately. Likewise, the aforementioned linguistic competence expects students to manage to communicate in an oral or written way taking into consideration different environments and contexts. While pronunciation is not explicitly addressed by any of these descriptions, it still could be present in a more implicit manner. A similar situation can be observed in the section devoted to the specific competencies. In this case, the second and third competencies may also welcome the addition of pronunciation notions, given their respective focus on oral communication and spoken interaction. However, the third competence, which is the one that could avail itself more of such notions, instead appears to rely on making students acquainted with the pragmatic aspects of the language, such as cues, turn-taking, and a set of basic communicative strategies. As a final point to consider, there is the area comprising basic knowledge, which does seldom vary with the supposed increase in difficulty of educational levels. This bundle is classified into four areas that are devoted to communication, multilingualism, interculturality, and inter/intrapersonal realms. It is the first area that concerns us, as it could allow some pretext for pronunciation to fit there. Nonetheless, aside from the typical instruction of vocabulary and elemental conversational structures, all matters concerning phonology and phonetics appear to be quite feeble, if not blatantly glossed over. In fact, it looks as if all these crucial contents have been simplified to the point of only demanding that students learn to identify the sounds of English along with its patterns, such as the one displayed when asking questions or when emphasizing certain pieces of information. The seventh point within the communication basic knowledge reads as follows: "Recognition and reproduction of sound, accent, rhythmic and basic intonation patterns, and of general communicative meanings and intentions associated with these patterns.". Thus, we could assert that pronunciation is reduced to the very bare minimum in terms of curricular importance. This might shed light on the generally meagre performance of students in terms of pronouncing correctly, as the curriculum happens to be more inclined toward teaching them how to recognize sounds instead of helping in their independent production.

6. INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION IN THE CLASSROOM: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MOST COMMON AFFECTIVE VARIABLES

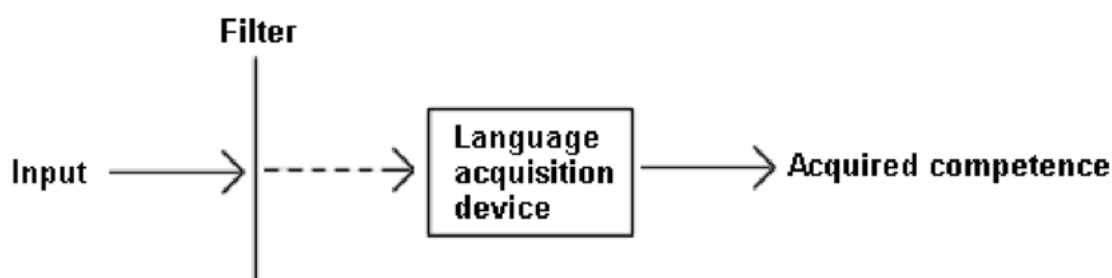
Language learning as a whole requires and even demands a consented immersion into a culture and values that may seem foreign to beginners. In assuming these values, students are often faced with deeply personal choices. For example, as we have previously discussed in section three, the RP accent tends to be deemed posh. Its belonging to a historically resented social class does not help increase its reputation as a user-friendly option, along with its fairly complicated sound inventory. The choice of an accent ultimately represents a pivotal step in acquiring a language, for it allows students to build the foundations of a new identity around it. Based on this premise, Dulay et al. (1977) propose the existence of an affective delimitation of input. Upon identifying this occurrence, they primarily delimit it to the fondness that some speakers have for a language model over others. This is due to an adherence to the mostly coveted sense of belonging in a community. Let us exemplify this by picturing a three-year-old child who was born in the Philippines. Initially, that child will acquire and feel comfortable with features common to their English variety, despite them being non-standard and thus salient. Due to this bond between community and language, this child may grow wary of listening to other varieties on account of their novelty and striking differences. Nevertheless, Dulay et al. (1977) later reckon that

the various effects of affective delimitation cannot be explained by simply exposing the input alone. Rather, said input must include the forces that operate within it as well as the conditions in which they are triggered. Krashen (1982) refers to this affective delimitation as an “affective filter”. He arranges a set of affective variables that may lead to a successful language acquisition into three groups:

- (1) Motivation. Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition (usually, but not always, "integrative")
- (2) Self-confidence. Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition.
- (3) Anxiety. Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety. (p.31)

The “affective filter” seems to act as a barrier that prevents new input from reaching the area of the brain responsible for its acquisition and competent use. Because of this, not all learners react the same way in their attempt to acquire a language. As a matter of fact, while some of them are naturally predisposed to welcoming new languages into their repertoires, others reduce their amount of new input to a bare minimum. The latter ones are more likely to exhibit a high affective filter as it is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Influence of the Affective Filter on language acquisition.



As Krashen (1982) asserts, the Affective Filter hypothesis expands the scope of teachers as, rather than just providing a constant supply of input, they are also required to create environments that maintain a low affective filter. In other words, it behoves the education staff to design safe spaces for students to discover and exploit their long untapped potential. This is done in such a way so that they can enhance their academic prospects, successful language acquisition for this matter, in a seamless manner. In this regard, pronunciation tends to be one of the leading causes of high affective filters among students, as they struggle to replicate the sounds of English. This in turn causes growing discomfort, demotivation, simmering frustration, and overall fear of either being ridiculed by fellow peers or reprimanded by particularly strict teachers.

Considering the significance of the three previously mentioned affective variables, it could be useful to examine them in depth to discover how the affective filter might function on average students. According to the first entry in the Cambridge dictionary concerning motivation, it signifies enthusiasm for doing something. That enthusiasm can derive from two specific sources, namely:

- 1) Intrinsic motivation: This type of motivation places the process in itself as a rewarding experience to pursue, instead of external factors usually involving positive stimuli in the form of rewards. Gottfried

et al. (2001) illustrate this in the following sentence: “Academic intrinsic motivation concerns enjoyment of school learning” (p.3). Adding to such a revealing statement, Deci et al. (1985) conclude that this kind of motivation might be fuelled by the internal need to be competent and self-determining (p.5). This motivation, in short, may be related to individual development and growth, unlike the egotistical gratification that derives from its immediate counterpart.

- 2) Extrinsic motivation: This type of motivation underlies behaviours performed to obtain separable rewards or avoid negative outcomes (Deci et al. 2003).

Contrary to the previous one, extrinsic motivations reside solely in a possible prize entirely dependent on coercion and purely materialistic goals rather than on genuine interest by students. This factor is quite complex to control due to its unstable nature. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation require to exist in a perpetual balance with one another in order not to disrupt the performance of our pupils. Moreover, each student tends to have individual interests that could fall under any of these two categories mentioned above (e.g. not failing a course, receiving much-desired items, boosting social life, expanding on previous knowledge out of curiosity...). Should any of these motivations fall, our students will be more prone to disengagement and apathy, in turn demotivating our teachers as their increasing efforts could overwhelm them. This could make them deem their struggles completely futile over the many years their profession may span. However, demotivation could be treatable concerning pronunciation teaching. As an example, we believe that extrinsic motivation can be addressed by highlighting the needs of students to be valued and acknowledged. This objective may be fulfilled by proposing a series of pronunciation exercises that rely on positive feedback, celebrating each success while promoting failure as a ground for improvement. Creating games could be a useful strategy, considering the intrinsic competitive nature of our students. We reckon that they may be much more active and engaged if they are presented with immediate objectives. Some ideas for the use of games will be explored later in this dissertation, as they may improve the currently unfavourable position of pronunciation in the language teaching area.

Likewise, intrinsic motivation could also be assessed in pronunciation lessons. For instance, we may suggest implementing small pronunciation tests at the beginning of our lessons. These tests may gradually increase in difficulty by adding words that have been reviewed in previous lessons. In doing this, we would be helping our students retain learnt information while at the same time, they may become aware of their learning progress.

Self-confidence as the following affective variable is inextricably linked to motivation. The more motivated our students are, the more confident will they be regarding their acquired knowledge. The perception of the self is not static, but dynamic. This means that even minor events may cause changes in self-perception. As highlighted earlier in section one, adolescence is one of the most convulsive periods in our lives, as the brain readapts and rewires itself to accept and understand a completely new reality. Throughout that process, adolescents may look down upon themselves due to either physical flaws, mental shifts, or emotional instability, affecting their lives in all aspects including the academic one. Issues in self-confidence could be manifested in a constant avoidance of participation during lessons.

Taking this into consideration, pronunciation teaching could be a source of low self-confidence, as students with low self-esteem could be much more wary of making errors than their peers. This might also allude to the previously referenced importance of pronunciation as an identity marker. It must not be forgotten that by the time we receive our teenage students, they are still struggling to find their own identities. Thus, attempting to imitate and eventually learn an accent in a foreign language may contribute to that endeavour by allowing our students to bolster their sense of self and even to take on new aspects of their personalities by associating such foreign language, in this case English, with individuals that they may admire.

Regarding the third factor, namely anxiety, its effects are well-known within classrooms. Characterised by periods of rather intense distress and constant dread, anxiety bears the unwanted ability to paralyse people who suffer from it in the spot, rendering them immobile and stagnant. This issue is further exacerbated in schools of languages and high schools on account of the fears that entail exposure to novel grammatical concepts and sounds. However, anxiety is an overarching concept encompassing several variants that are distinguished by the environments in which they are more prone to occur. Howitz et al. (1986) delve further into this factor, dividing it into three types of performance anxiety. These are the following:

- 1) Communication apprehension: A reluctance to communicate with people due largely to self-awareness. It can be displayed through fear of speaking in groups, and stage fright, or fear of speaking in public. This becomes detrimental to speakers as they could be hindered from expressing their ideas on the basis of insecurity and subsequent frustration. For instance, if some students do not know how to pronounce a specific term correctly, they may either replace it on the fly with a more familiar one or remain silent, fearing the consequences of mispronouncing that word.
- 2) Test anxiety: This type can be defined as a fear of failing. The students who suffer from this kind of anxiety are characterized by setting surreal objectives and demanding too much of themselves. According to Howitz et al. (1986), oral tests can provoke both test and oral communication anxiety at the same time in especially susceptible students (p.128)
- 3) Fear of negative evaluation: This type consists of the fear of being evaluated by someone else. Adding to the general dread associated with making mistakes, some students may not stand being corrected by their teachers due to negative feelings associated with that specific situation. Similarly, peer correction could pose a threat to these students as unwanted comparisons would likely ensue.

The ubiquitous presence of fear or anxiety is to be expected anytime foreign language teaching is at stake. As it was stated above, learning a language involves taking a new identity and exploring it thoroughly. Guiora et al. (1972) claim that pronunciation is the most critical feature of language behaviour to master, for it seems to represent the final step before the full acquisition of an identity in a foreign language. In order to overcome this critical stage, they propose that empathic capacity may not only impact the attainment of pronunciation but also it may contribute quite positively to the development of language learning abilities on the whole. Nonetheless, there is another perhaps more divisive approach to language acquisition that happens to favour the presence of stress as an asset for the language learning environment. Gkonou (2011) attempts to paint anxiety in a more positive light since her findings suggest that its application boosts the performance of some learners. Spielmann et al. (2001) provide an explanation of this positive use of anxiety by renaming it as tension

and expounding on its defining features. In their study involving pupils from a fully immersive school of languages, they manage to classify tension in two variables, these being dysphoric (the counterproductive effects that are often synonymous with anxiety) and euphoric (a burst of energy propitiated by pressure that appears to help students be more productive). That pair of variables can be applied to cognitive settings (relating to knowledge or lack of it) and affective ones (relating to emotions). By the end of their study, Spielmann et al. (2001) concluded that “less emphasis should be placed on neutralizing or counteracting supposedly stressful events or situations, and more energy devoted to fostering euphoric tension instead.” (p.273.) in their understanding that the instances of tension are the product of the expectations of students inevitably clashing with reality. Later, they made an even more intriguing discovery by observing that apparently, students reacted more positively to the tension that they had experienced regardless of its variation when they deemed it productive, that is, when they valued its overall significance and impact within a system that they recognised as appropriate.

We also concur with the suggestion of Spielmann et al. (2001) concerning the over-emphasis on eschewing stressful situations, for they are essential in the development of students as fully-fledged individuals and future professionals. The study of tension therefore should be expanded further to include its effects on ordinary high school students, and whether this use of anxiety is apt for teaching all aspects of language instruction, including pronunciation.

7. THE ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

The act of teaching in and of itself demands the acquisition of a vast number of skills. Professionals in this field must grapple with multiple challenging situations. Case in point, they must ensure the well-being of their students while nourishing them with tons of valuable knowledge. Moreover, they are also required to dabble in the tedious paperwork of bureaucracy and assume duties that are considered less fancy than the traditional ones related to passing knowledge. Nonetheless, throughout the history of education, and more recently in the 20th century, a series of attempts at reconsidering the role of teachers gave rise to newer outcomes for education devotees. No longer would their aspirations be bound to a routine within four walls. Instead, they would be given a chance to expand their horizons by becoming active researchers. Notwithstanding, every significant breakthrough has a decisive trigger. Kuhn (1970) in fact ventures to confirm the crucial role of crises as moving forces for science, lamenting the loss of potential colleagues who succumbed to their incompetence for withstanding such periods of tension. He proceeds to refer to this phenomenon as “essential tension” (p 79) before asserting that “Once a first paradigm through which to view nature has been found, there is no such thing as research in the absence of any paradigm” (p 79). This in short signifies that whenever a paradigm is nullified by disproving evidence, there must be a newer and more acceptable one right around the corner. Else, there would not be any science at all.

This concept of essential tension would be applied to the previously uncontested celebrations of positivism as incepted by Comte in his 1830’s seminal collection of texts named *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (later reproduced in 2019). Nonetheless, that status of blissful content and virtual invulnerability would not last long. Cohen et al. (2000) attribute the massive uprising against positivistic visions of the world to the excessively

narrow scope that science applies to nature, routinely dismissing crucial philosophical and ethical matters such as individuality and freedom to choose beyond the asphyxiating rigidity that hard sciences often exact upon their practitioners. Further, Carr and Kemmis (1986) would state, “There is no standard higher than the ascent of the relevant community. And if there is any truth in this then knowledge is not, as positivism suggests, the objective, universal and value-neutral product of the ‘disinterested’ researcher. Rather, it is subjective, context-bound, normative and, in an important sense, always political.” (p.73). They later reckon that despite values and attitudes not blatantly permeating the ideas and outcomes that result from extensive research work, they indeed condition their ways of thinking and ultimately, their theorizing processes. Thus, we completely agree with their claim that such theories are always social products, as they are notably influenced by the stances, beliefs, and morals of the research community. Concerning the importance of research communities, as Smith (1995) acknowledges, “Research is inquiry marked by dilemmas” (p.7). These woes must be treated according to the objectives set for such an endeavour. As an example, he stresses how sharing individual work can have an impact on the performance of those involved. Then, he affirms that should the goal of research consist of achieving results to be shared, investigators must suggest arguments that can back every single choice that they make. By this point, it is crystal clear that the existence of two equal studies would be very unlikely, as they would require that diverse questions be asked in order to reach conclusions and construct brand-new hypotheses. It is due to the infinite topics susceptible to being scrutinized that Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) attempt to reunite all the strands of Action Research into a broad definition that goes as follows:

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out...The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realise that action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, pp. 5-6).

Following this general definition, Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) proceed to distinguish Action Research proper from the acts in which teachers often partake:

- It is not the usual thinking teachers do when they think about their teaching. Action research is more systematic and collaborative in collecting evidence on which to base rigorous group reflection.
- It is not simply problem-solving. Action research involves problem-posing, not just problem-solving. It does not start from a view of 'problems' as pathologies. It is motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made.
- It is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others...
- Action research is not 'the scientific method' applied to teaching. There is not just one view of 'the scientific method'; there are many.

The pertinent distinctions being made, now we will analyse the most common procedures for Action Research.

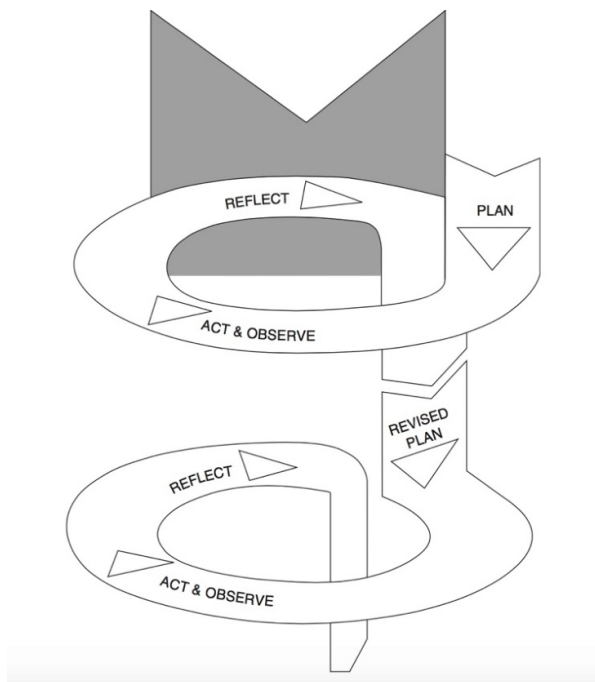
Blum (National Education Association of the United States, 1959 as cited in Cohen et al., 2000) divides Action Research into two differentiated stages, namely a diagnostic stage wherein hypotheses are developed through the analysis of detected issues, and an ensuing therapeutic stage, in which such hypotheses are tested by an intervention or an experiment. Lewin (1948) expounds further on the Action Research process by displaying it as four stages, these being planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Essentially, he proposes that the Action Research process shall begin by presenting a general idea and gathering data concerning its present state. Then, if this procedure is successful, its outcome is utilised in order to produce a plan of action to establish a general objective, alongside a decision on the first steps to be taken. These steps later amount to a clearer set of procedures for implementing said plan. By the end of the Action Research project, the aforementioned procedures are set to be monitored and finally assessed for future use or necessary improvements.

The influence of Lewin on Kemmis and McTaggart is undeniable, majorly while they attempt to expound on their vision of Action Research. It goes as follows:

In practice, the process begins with a general idea that some kind of improvement or change is desirable. In deciding just where to begin in making improvements, one decides on a field of action... where the battle (not the whole war) should be fought. It is a decision on where it is possible to have an impact. The general idea prompts a 'reconnaissance' of the circumstances of the field, and fact-finding about them. Having decided on the field and made a preliminary reconnaissance, the action researcher decides on a general plan of action. Breaking the general plan down into achievable steps, the action researcher settles on the first action step. Before taking this first step the action researcher becomes more circumspect and devises a way of monitoring the effects of the first action step. When it is possible to maintain fact-finding by monitoring the action, the first step is taken. As the step is implemented, new data starts coming in and the effect of the action can be described and evaluated. The general plan is then revised in light of the new information about the field of action and the second action step can be planned along with appropriate monitoring procedures. The second step is then implemented, monitored, and evaluated; and the spiral of action, monitoring, evaluation and replanning continues. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981, p.2).

We cannot help but note the similarities between this complex process and a spiral through which all its elements recur in a loop, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Action Research Spiral by Kemmis and McTaggart (1981, p. 278).



Nonetheless, this interpretation of Action Research is certainly far from being the only extant and validated approach. As an example, Carr and Kemmis (1986) admit that over the last forty years, action research has experienced a sudden surge in popularity due to its fresh novelty, followed by a period of stagnation and decline, later returning to the limelight through a revival. During all this time, unsurprisingly, hordes of amateur researchers began to take hold of this newly created investigation tool, which is comprehensible considering its recent proposal and implementation, in turn inspiring teachers to become trailblazers in this future trade. However, this is not the only source of trouble for action research, as it both challenges the authority of researchers in academia and seemingly undermines the control of bureaucratic organs over education systems. These two factors according to Carr and Kemmis (1986) contribute to an ever-growing sentiment of reluctance to accept non-practitioner, practically new-coming groups into the teaching profession, effectively ceding the control of education to them. These authors continue by exposing some of their concerns, the most direct of them being the loss of critical sense in an attempt to satisfy the increasing need for brand-new generations of professionals to fill vacant posts. In essence, they fear that, enamoured by the ins and outs of the profession, contemporary teachers discard their critical skills in favour of amassing more control. Ultimately this stance would be extremely detrimental to schools, since as Carr and Kemmis (1986) claim: “It is, therefore, increasingly important to see that educational action research projects involve students, administrators, parents and others in all aspects of the research process in order to guard against the appropriation of action research as a prerogative of the profession.” (p. 210).

Educational action research thus arises as a critical science whose main area of query resides in the control of education by communities that are self-critical of their actions. They must be comprised of all aspects of school personnel, not only accounting for teachers but also for students, families, administrators, and many others. All in all, educational action research seeks to provide its practitioners with the necessary elements to collaborate seamlessly, sharing a proportionate number of responsibilities in contrast to the conception of

teachers as all-encompassing individuals who would not require the assistance of anyone. Aside from this example, there is a bevy of action research approaches that cover diverse needs. In order to tackle these alternatives, we will outline some of them following a summarised list proposed by Kemmis et al. (2014).

Industrial action research: Industrial action research has a long trajectory, tracing back to the post-Lewinian influence in the mid-20th century. This influence emerged from organisational psychology and development efforts at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in Britain and the Research Centre for Group Dynamics in the United States. Typically, this type of research is consultant-driven, strongly advocating for constant collaboration between the different levels of an organisation and social scientists. Despite being historically framed within the democratisation of the workplace, more recent approaches have shifted their focus to democratising the research act itself, influenced by proponents of the participatory research movement. In this modern iteration, Industrial action research differentiates itself from Action Science and its emphasis on cognition by taking a focus on reflection for broader organisational and social change. Despite some practitioners aspiring for more participatory forms of work and evaluation through the use of critical theory, the more traditional style tends to focus on humanistic and individualistic needs rather than critical ones. Common research topics are employee relations and improving organisational effectiveness.

Action science: Action science emphasises the study of practice in organisational settings to provide new understandings and improved practice. This specific field builds a relationship between academic organisational psychology and practical problems as they occur in organisations, effectively fusing theoretical backgrounds and practical applications. These are identified as formal knowledge, which all members of the profession are expected to share, and the professional knowledge derived from the effective interpretation and application of such knowledge respectively. Another distinction is made between the professional's espoused theory and the theories in use, for the gaps between them are crucial in assisting the professional in detecting the cover-ups that are put in place whenever participants are feeling threatened and acting upon them. This approach aims for the development of the "reflective practitioner" (Argyris 1990 as cited in Kemmis et al., 2014).

Action learning: This approach originated from the work of advocate Reg Revans, who deemed traditional approaches to management enquiry unhelpful when it came to solving the problems of organisations. The main principle behind Action learning is bringing people together so that they can learn from others' experiences, sharing and indirectly teaching their peers in this manner. A high emphasis is placed on studying one's own situation with regard to the needs of the enterprise so as to remove potential obstacles. Action learning aspires to achieve organisation efficacy and efficiency.

Participatory research: Also referred to as PR, participatory research is an alternative philosophy of social research often woven into social transformation in Third World countries. Its core beliefs are based on liberation theory and neo-Marxist approaches to community development especially in Latin America yet placing more emphasis on human rights activism in Asia.

Finally, we will pertain to the approach that is to be featured throughout the remainder of our study, which is classroom action research.

Classroom action research involves the use of qualitative, interpretive methods for inquiry and data collection by teachers, often relying on the help of fellow academic collaborators to assess and hone their own teaching practices. Notwithstanding this approach boasts a long-standing tradition, its popularity has waxed and waned over the years mostly due to the rapid expiration of its theoretical foundations. In other words, classroom action research seemed to lag behind the educational movements that would give life to it. The focus of this approach is on teachers' decision-making and self-reflection, being eminently practical as it emphasizes the actions of both teachers and students in real classroom settings.

8. METHODOLOGY

For this study, we needed to hedge our bets for about a month before deciding on a group of pupils that would suit our needs. We found it following some deliberations in a class composed of approximately 25 eighth-grade or 2nd ESO students. During this period, we conducted preliminary assessments and observations to ensure that the selected group met the specific criteria essential for our research objectives. This included evaluating the student's academic performance, behaviour, and overall classroom dynamics. We also consulted with their teachers to gain insights into the student's learning styles and any potential challenges that might impact the study.

Throughout our previous stay in their lessons, we observed that they clearly struggled with the pronunciation of regular verb endings, as their grasp of the Past Simple tense was still developing. Besides that, most of them displayed that typical error consisting of pronouncing an initial vowel so as to ease the voiceless alveolar sibilant sound, otherwise represented as /s/. In the end, we decided to design and implement an activity that would effectively tackle and assist students in overcoming these two crucial hurdles.

Prior to the implementation of said activity, we made and distributed a medium-length questionnaire on the importance of pronunciation among the teachers that comprised the English department (see Appendix 1) in order that we could obtain some valuable feedback to apply during our proposal of a pronunciation-focused exercise. The questionnaire was designed to elicit detailed responses on various aspects of pronunciation teaching, including the perceived challenges students face, effective strategies currently in use, and the teachers' attitudes towards prioritizing pronunciation in their curriculum. We ensured that the questions covered both theoretical and practical dimensions, allowing us to gather a comprehensive understanding of the existing practices and beliefs within the department. The feedback that we received was instrumental in shaping our approach; it highlighted common difficulties such as limited class time for pronunciation practice, a lack of resources, and varying levels of teacher confidence in teaching phonetics. Furthermore, the responses underscored the importance of integrating pronunciation exercises with other language skills, rather than treating them as isolated activities. This insight prompted us to design our pronunciation-focused exercise to be both engaging and seamlessly integrated into the broader language learning objectives, ensuring it addressed the specific needs and preferences identified by the teachers.

As a primary guide for the creation of our exercise, we utilised the Burlington Options textbook catered to eighth-year students, placing special emphasis on these activities with pronunciation as the main focus. This textbook provided a structured framework and a variety of exercises designed to improve students' pronunciation

skills. We carefully reviewed the pronunciation activities included in the textbook, selecting those that targeted the specific phonetic challenges we had previously identified among our students.

Additionally, we aligned our exercise with the curriculum standards and learning objectives outlined in the Burlington Options textbook, ensuring that it complemented and reinforced the broader educational goals. By doing so, we aimed to create a seamless integration of pronunciation practice within the existing language learning framework, making it an integral part of the student's overall language development process. Later in this dissertation, we will assess their overall usefulness and quantity so as to determine whether this specific textbook complies with the required academic standards and effectively meets the educational needs of the target audience. The information that we retrieved from this textbook would be of paramount importance in the development of our aforementioned activity,

After determining the issues that we needed to tackle, we began to think about some ideas for pronunciation activities that could be feasible for students of 2 ESO. Since we were able to witness some of their lessons beforehand, and we observed that they favoured games over master classes, it was decided that we would attempt to propose a majorly interactive activity that would address the difficulty of pronouncing the past endings of regular verbs. At first, we pondered over the possibility of employing apps specifically designed for gamification purposes which was immediately discarded out of fear that students might exhibit potentially disruptive behaviours in the middle of our session.

Then, we considered implementing a more traditional approach which would revolve around the idea of using flashcards in order for students to differentiate the three types of regular past endings that they might encounter. However, that plan was ultimately dropped as we did not know how our students would behave with these flashcards.

Finally, we found that a blend of both traditional and technological approaches could be more suitable for our objectives. We would use the digital whiteboard to project a document featuring both the instructions and the following activity which we will describe in more detail later in this dissertation. The idea of considering these three ending pronunciations was inspired by a section of the Options textbook which is displayed in Figure 4.

Listen and repeat. Pay attention to the pronunciation of the verb endings, /d/, /t/ and /ɪd/.

1. admired /d/ 2. walked /t/ 3. started /ɪd/

Figure 4: Pronunciation exercise featuring regular verb endings.

Finally, the results of this exercise were thoroughly evaluated by means of a short oral questionnaire both at the beginning and at the end of the exercise. The initial one served to gather some feedback on the background knowledge that students possessed by that point in the trimester. Such a strategy would assist us in calculating the amount of leeway of which we could take significant advantage. The second and final questionnaire assessed their understanding of the concept that we tried to teach them and ensured that students would not forget it in the long run.

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

9.1. The analysis of the teacher's method used in class

It is clear that every single teacher utilises diverse methods so as to render learning processes useful to their students. In our case, the teacher whose lessons we decided to analyse displayed a hands-on approach given the age range of her students. Following an article by Gill (2013), we may assert that her method would fall into the category of demonstrator, or coach style which is better explained by its following definition:

The demonstrator retains the formal authority role by showing students what they need to know.

The demonstrator is a lot like the lecturer, but their lessons include multimedia presentations, activities, and demonstrations (Gill, 2013, paragr. 7)

She would carry out pronunciation exercises punctually in multiple ways. For instance, during reading activities, she would prompt students to read aloud so as to detect pronunciation errors. Upon noticing, she would correct them on the spot, allowing these students to self-correct and in turn promoting mistakes as valuable tools for learning new vocabulary or grammar concepts. A similar strategy would be employed with exercises focused on improving listening comprehension, as students would be required to listen and repeat some words deemed challenging by the teacher. It is crucial to highlight that her corrections would often be accompanied by comments offering basic theoretical notions of phonetics. Students would be allowed some time to grasp these new pieces of information before applying them in the following reading activities.

Alongside reading and listening, her students would also be offered a chance to practice pronunciation by partaking in short speaking exercises based majorly on their life experiences, either in monologue or dialogue form and adapted to their current level of proficiency. By discussing familiar topics, students could pay more heed to their pronunciation than to generating input out of nervousness, allowing for more effective practice sessions. The inclusion of dialogues provided an additional layer of learning, as students were allowed to practise coveted conversational skills along with intonation, and the natural rhythms of speech. This holistic approach to pronunciation teaching ensured that students could communicate more confidently and effectively.

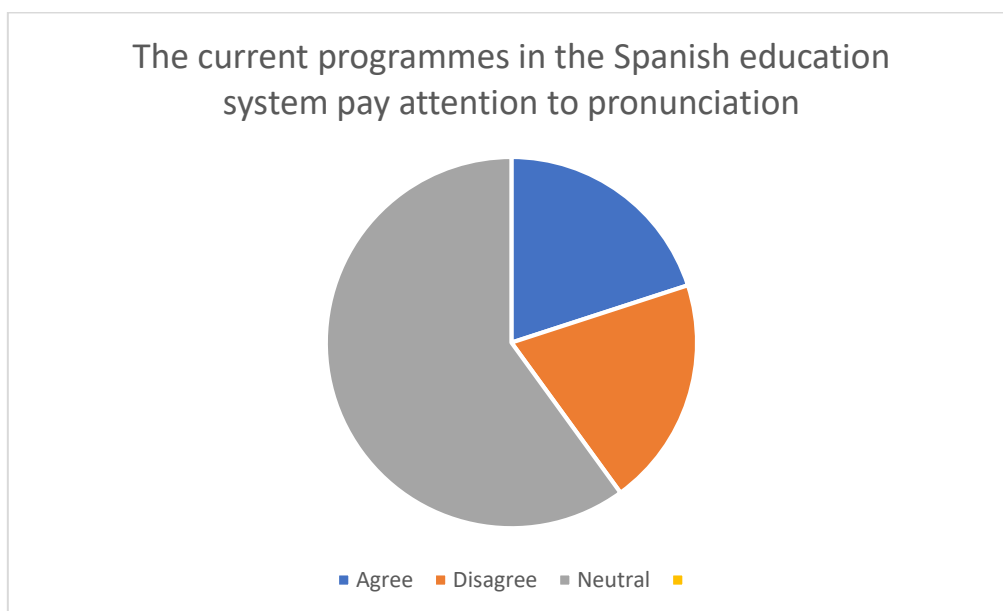
As we exposed previously, these students would face some issues concerning the pronunciation of regular verb endings, resorting to an omission of final consonants and thus rendering their speech unintelligible whenever they had to use the past simple tense. Moreover, students would repeatedly fail to replicate sibilant letters properly such as the /s/ sound, compensating it by means of employing vowel epenthesis. In line with such premises, we decided to design an activity that would cover both necessities. The activity in question will be explained further in the following section.

9.2. The analysis of the questionnaire implemented to the teachers

By this point, we would like to devote this subsection to the analysis of the questionnaire that we had distributed prior to the creation of our aforementioned activity. The questions designed for this questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1. In order for our explanation to be as clear as possible, we have established key metrics. These also helped us determine which elements of said questionnaire would be more relevant and susceptible to deeper scrutiny. Our key metrics are the following:

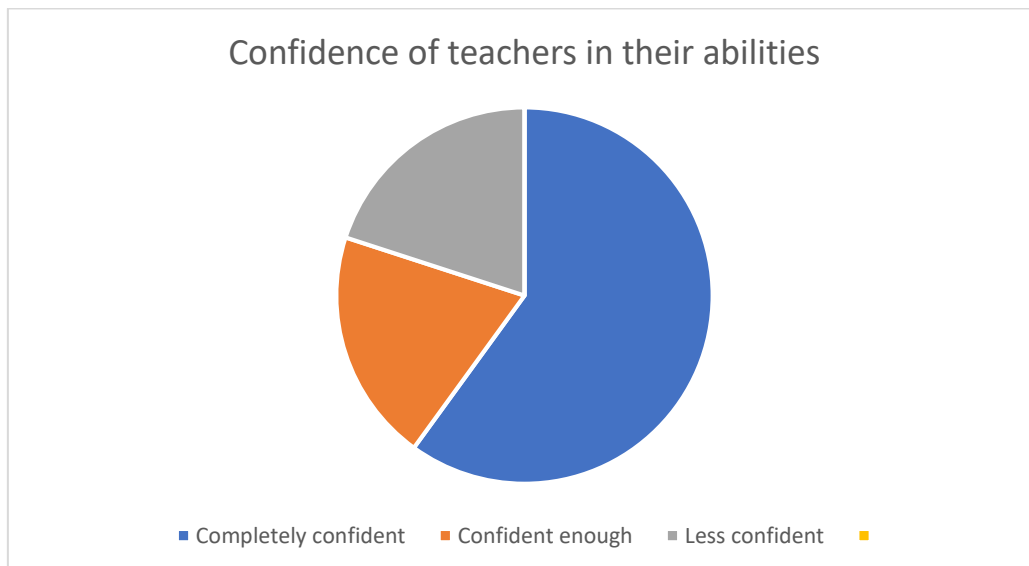
1. General considerations concerning the treatment of pronunciation by the Spanish educational system.
2. Confidence in pronunciation teaching.
3. Leniency regarding the use of diverse varieties.
4. Importance of pronunciation teaching compared to other areas.
5. How often they interact with their students in English and their feedback.
6. Use of diverse methodologies to teach pronunciation.
7. Most common pronunciation errors detected by the teachers.
8. Teachers' thoughts on the quantity and quality of pronunciation exercises offered by textbooks.

Starting with the first variable, as seen in Graph 1, 60% of the surveyed opted to stay neutral, while 20% completely disagreed with the statement that the current programmes in the Spanish education system pay attention to pronunciation. The remaining 20% agreed with said statement.



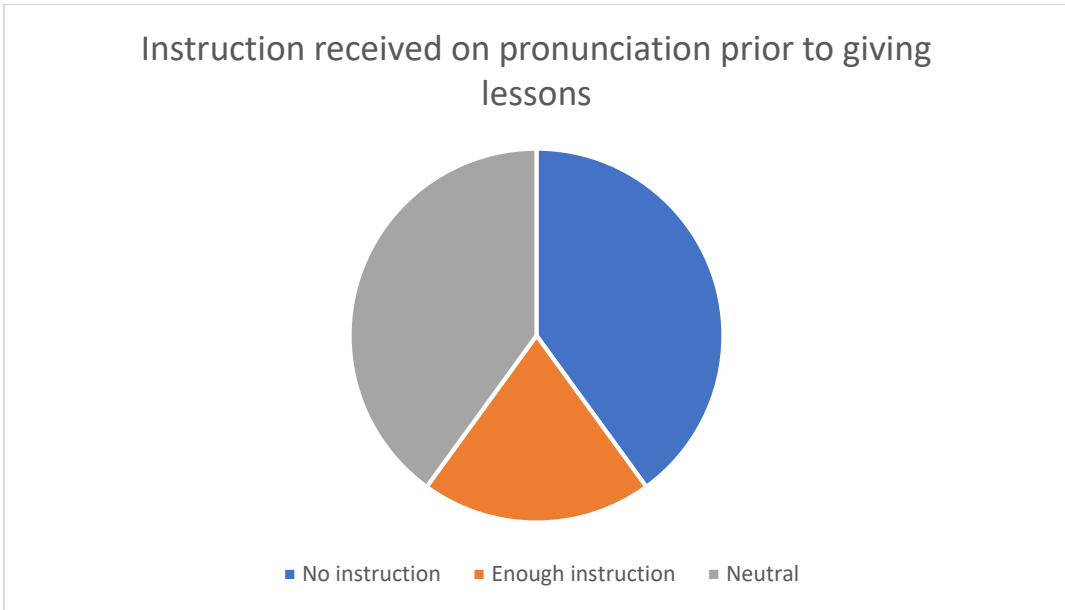
Graph 1. Answers to the first variable

The second variable bore some revealing results as seen in Graph 2. Similar to the previous query, 60% affirmed to be completely confident in their abilities to teach pronunciation, whereas 20% claimed to be slightly less positive and the remaining 20% displayed some minor insecurities with regards to their proficiency for teaching this area of English.



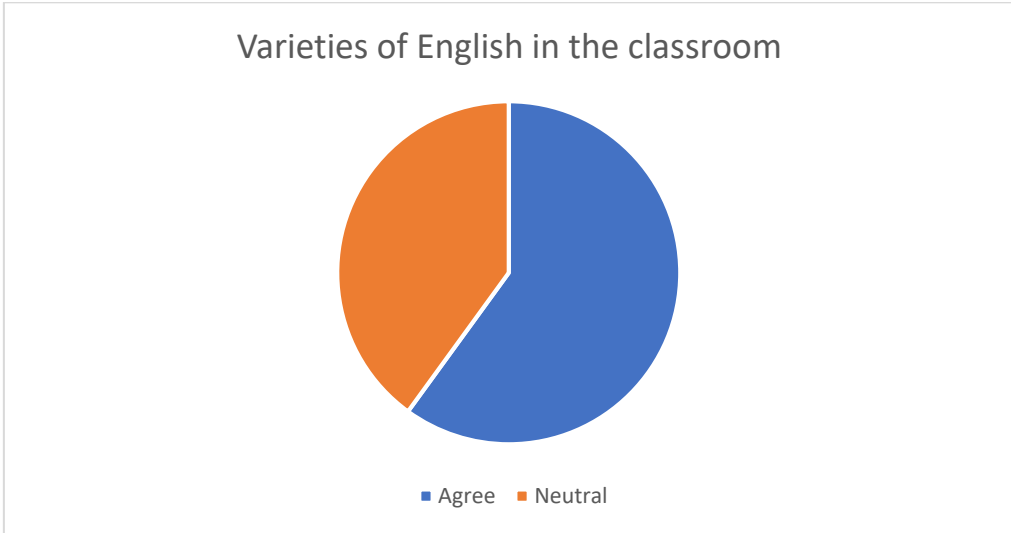
Graph 2. Answers to the second variable

These results seemed baffling at first taking into consideration that this question was immediately followed by another one whose objective was to ascertain whether these teachers had received previous instruction on pronunciation. That item was particularly enlightening since it uncovered a devastating truth, as displayed in Graph 3. 40% of the surveyed claimed not to have received any instruction in pronunciation whatsoever, not even as a separate module. Another 40% preferred to stay neutral, and only 20% had received enough training to give specialized lessons. Notwithstanding, despite that lack of theoretical background, 40% of them felt completely capable of solving the doubts of their students, while another 40% showed relative confidence. By contrast, only 20% chose neutrality.



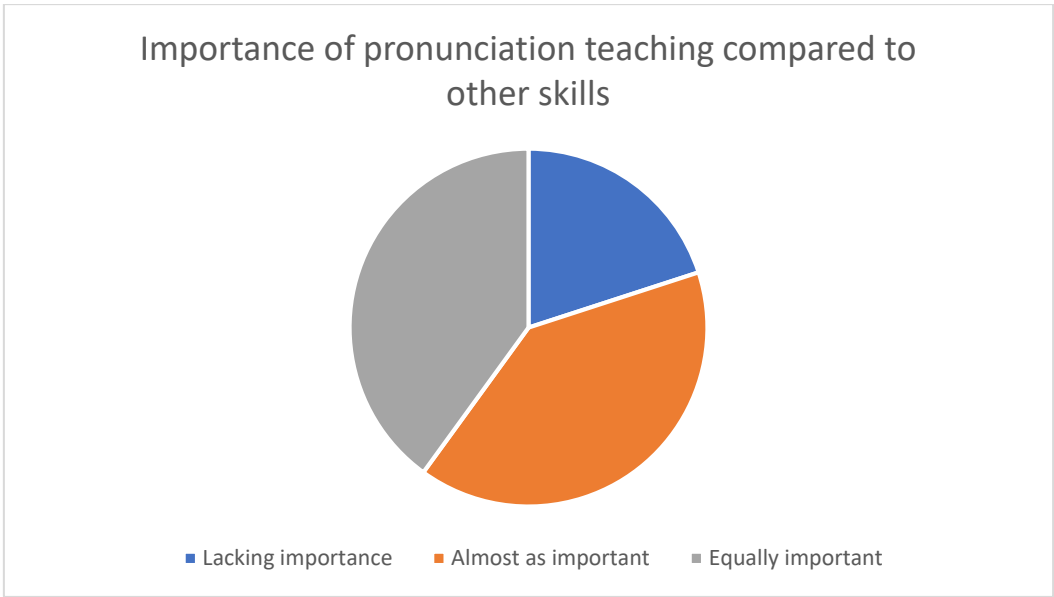
Graph 3. Answers to the second variable

The third variable was proposed to test the tolerance of these teachers concerning the coexistence of several varieties of English contrasting with the almost uncontested hegemony of RP English. Surprisingly, as seen in Figure 4, the results of this question reflected a growing shift in the mentality of contemporary ESL teachers. 60% stated that they allow their students to adopt an accent other than the so-called standard while 40% were not for nor against permitting diverse accents in their classrooms.



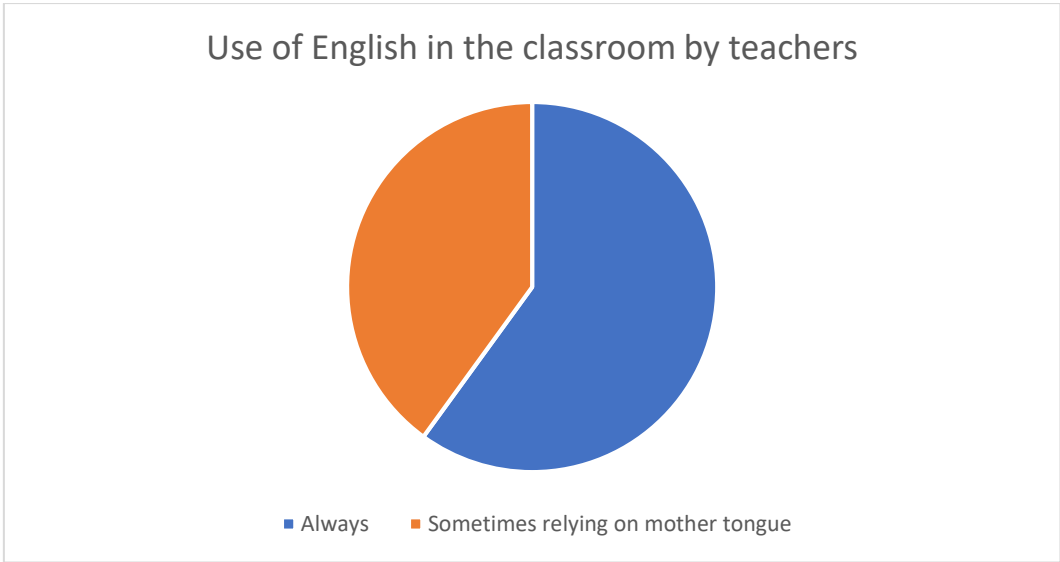
Graph 4. Answers to the third variable

The fourth variable intended to measure the importance of pronunciation teaching against the other well-known skills. Through the results, as seen in Graph 5, we found that only 20% believed that pronunciation lacked importance when compared to the rest of the skills, especially listening, and speaking. 40% were slightly more optimistic about pronunciation standing on the same level as listening, while the other 40% regarded it almost as equally important as listening and speaking.



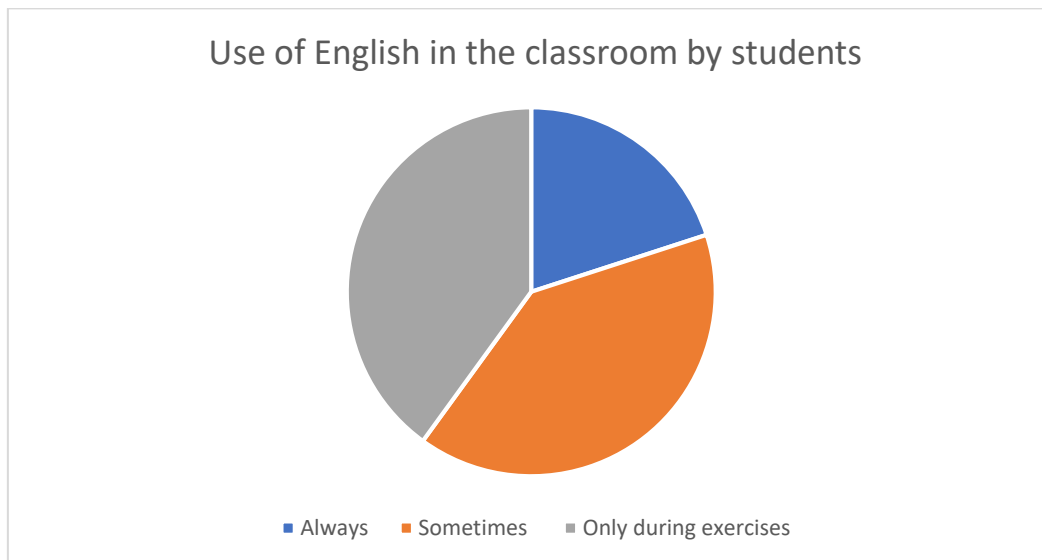
Graph 5. Answers to the fourth variable

The fifth variable involved analysing the interactions between teachers and their students in the classroom. In this respect, we decided to highlight the overall use of English as an effective means of communication during lessons. Out of the five surveyed teachers, as seen in Graph 6, 60% attempted to speak English all the time thus creating an artificial immersive experience. The remaining 40% would utilise English often with some help from Spanish especially for important explanations or for the introduction of new grammatical structures.



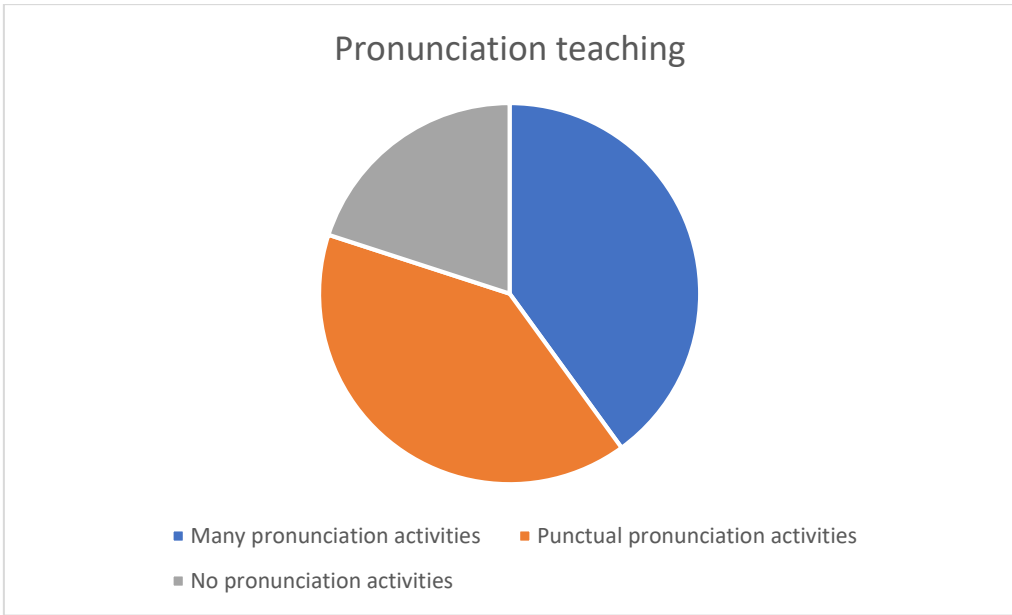
Graph 6. Answers to the fifth variable

The feedback from students, as displayed in Graph 7, proved to differ significantly since only 20% of the surveyed teachers claimed that their students would speak English all the time, whereas 40% were slightly less convinced about the success of imposing it as a common language. The remaining 40% would admit that their students majorly speak Spanish to communicate, switching to English for participating in tasks or exercises.



Graph 7. Answers to the fifth variable

The sixth variable was concerned with the vast array of methodologies employed to teach pronunciation. An initial, more general question was posed to know whether teachers would conduct pronunciation activities or not. As seen in Graph 8, the responses to it were quite diverse, as 20% admitted that they did not carry out any sort of activities concerning this skill. By contrast, 40% would always try to implement pronunciation in their lessons. The remaining 40% would attempt to introduce exercises for sporadically honing certain aspects of pronunciation.



Graph 8. Answers to the sixth variable

Concerning the numerous approaches to pronunciation teaching, we will include the most recurrent ones in the following chart, serving as a more concise example.

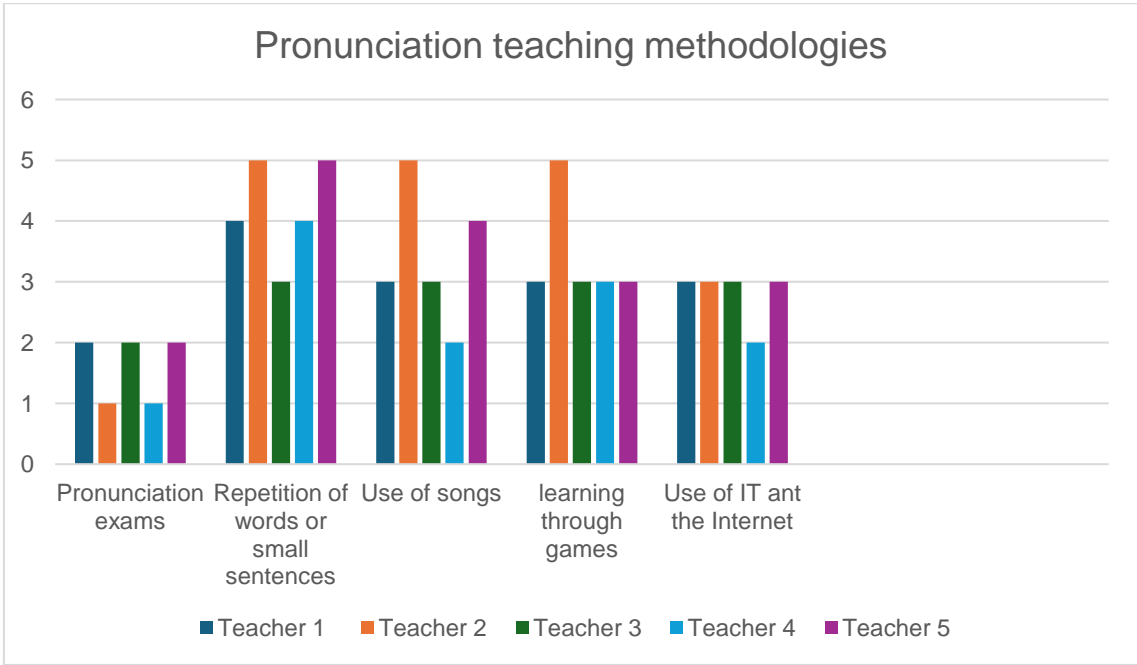


Figure 5. Chart on pronunciation teaching methodologies.

As we may observe in this chart, the most popular methodology among the five teachers to hone pronunciation consists of listening exercises in which students are required to repeat the pieces of information that they hear, be they words in isolation or short sentences. On the very opposite side, it seems that the least favoured methodology consists of measuring pronunciation knowledge through exams. We reckon that such an idea might as well be reasonably feasible with more advanced groups, e.g. second year of *Bachillerato*, so as to make them become acquainted with the IPA alphabet.

We would also like to analyse the other results, since they may contain even more revealing data concerning new courses of action for pronunciation teaching. It was pretty surprising to witness that 40% of the teachers who were surveyed for this study agreed on the use of music as a pedagogical tool. Yet, we understand the intrinsic emotional power that music yields, being capable of connecting people from all walks of life. Toscano-Fuentes (2016) stands as one of the primary examples of active learning with music as the main vehicle. She conducted a training programme aimed towards honing the musical intelligence of her students since she knew that there was a deep connection between music, rhythm, and language acquisition. Her trials were backed by Skehan (1998) who claims that the key factor for distinguishing competent language learners from the ones that struggle more is the learner's language aptitude, composed of three interrelated parameters: auditory ability, linguistic ability and memory ability. He goes on to assert that these parameters are of equal importance, which signifies that students would experience serious difficulties with language acquisition if any of them failed or became underdeveloped. Toscano-Fuentes (2016) acknowledged auditory ability as a determinant factor in language learning due to the glaring fact that if students do not manage to identify and interpret the sounds that they hear, they will not be able to keep them in order to retrieve them anytime they could be required.

Among the many benefits that music possesses, it is known for having appeasing effects and reducing aggressive behaviours quite significantly (Hallam & Price, 1998). Likewise, it is revered for helping students gain a longer attention span for the preparation of exams (McConnell & Shore, 2011) and for increasing their concentration (Rothbart et al., 2011). Music thus represents a critical factor in the acquisition of foreign languages, due to which we consider that it should gain more prominence, complementing curricular requirements and contents.

Gamification as a strategy has been gaining traction in recent years due to its implications. By transforming tasks into games, students may find the process of acquiring new languages more appealing. Some websites such as Kahoot avail themselves of this mentality, being often utilised as instruments that benefit students by offering them a more interactive way of reviewing content. In fact, we attempted to imitate a similar strategy to that of Kahoot in hopes that our proposal could be more engaging. We would like to highlight the characteristics of this application that we decided to apply in our activity:

- The possibility of assembling teams of three or more individuals
- The choice of a spokesperson within every team
- Timing is used as a crucial factor in determining the outcome of the activity
- The addition of five rounds after which the points that each team attain are tallied.

The seventh variable examined the most common errors that the surveyed teachers would detect in their students. Alongside the already mentioned vowel epenthesis and the difficulty in pronouncing the past forms of

regular verbs, they noted that their students would be extremely reluctant to partake in pronunciation exercises product of their self-awareness. Furthermore, they would also struggle when they were exposed to some varieties of English different from RP or General American, owing to the culturally diverse environment of each classroom.

Several studies have been conducted over the years so as to bridge the standard and non-standard varieties for a better understanding of students. Davydova et al. (2013), for instance, attempted to address the issue of accessibility for individuals who possess minimal linguistic knowledge by designing a prototype of teaching resources. These materials were promptly tested with nine teachers and 200 students. The results of their implementation show that upper-intermediate and advanced EFL learners can distinguish native and non-native accents of English with ease. However, these learners display more difficulties with the differentiation of regional dialects. Curiously enough, these hurdles reside in the comprehension and use of non-standard grammatical features. Their most outstanding finding, however, is the fact that tense and aspect are especially problematic to students who attempt to understand diverse dialectal varieties. They speculate that these issues could stem from the speaking-for-thinking mechanism propounded by Slobin (1996), wherein he argues that second-language learners are ruled and guided by first-language thinking whenever they are required to speak the desired second language. In doing so, they attempt to grasp reality by following the conceptions that they acquired through their native language instead of trying to acquire other viewpoints. These conceptions eventually become so ingrained in the minds of students that it is nearly impossible to break their already established models of thought. The resulting teaching resources with the aim to facilitate the teaching and learning of English varieties were named *The Amazing World of Englishes, a practical introduction*. Davydova et al. (2013) describe the target audience as follows:

The textbook caters to the needs of all advanced students of English – including EFL and ESL learners of English interested in the topic of English diversity and global Englishes. More specifically, it is intended as a reference guide to varieties of English for undergraduate B.A. university students. It can further be employed as an integral part of the curriculum for prospective teachers of English in order to heighten their awareness of the increasing heterogeneity of the English language. While placing a clear emphasis on various linguistic aspects of English diversity, the textbook also introduces students to the culture, literature, and history of the regions in which English has become established as a means of communication and can therefore be used as part of a general introductory course into the field of English studies.

Aside from its structure, consisting of an introduction, several chapters on the three circles proposed by Kachru, and a conclusion, Davydova et al. (2013) list down some of its seemingly unique features in this manner:

- The strong didactic outlook and focus on an inductive approach to varieties and their characteristics.
- The use of authentic audio, video, and text samples from different varieties covering a large number of genres including pop songs, recipes, literary texts, interviews, scientific texts, movies, etc. and illustrating the multitude of contexts and situations in which features of linguistic variation and varieties of English can be observed;
- The continuous and repeated testing and revision of the materials both in university and secondary school contexts;
- The strong emphasis on the variability and diversity of the materials that is reflected not only in the selection of different media, text types, and the varying levels of difficulty of the accompanying exercises but also in the

overall modular conception of the textbook, enabling the respective lecturer or teacher to select and discuss individual chapters or topics without having to discuss the book as a whole;

– A detailed survey of eight varieties from five different continents illustrating the treasure trove of World Englishes as well as a brief survey of several EFL varieties highlighting the growing international importance of English.

Based on the number of aspects that this textbook seems to cover, we might consider utilising it in the near future in order to solve any doubts related to varieties of English, for it is full to the brim with extremely valuable information on the matter.

The final variable that we decided to analyse was more concerned with the opinion of these five teachers on the quantity and quality of the resources for teaching pronunciation that they are given. By and large, they are content with the number and variety of exercises that are offered by their respective textbooks, ranging from the differentiation of stress patterns to past tense regular verb endings, which is the main focus of this study. Notwithstanding, they would also admit yearning for the inclusion of more innovative proposals beyond the range of exercises that are offered time and time again. Due to that, we will proceed to analyse thoroughly the pronunciation exercises that are presented in the Options textbook for the second year of ESO.

9.3. The analysis of the textbook used in class

Upon first glance, this textbook presents us with an accessible layout. Its contents are distributed through six differentiated modules covering a wide range of topics. Each module contains three sections dubbed after the letters A, B and C, with the first two ones introducing new grammar concepts while the third one serves as a general review of said unit. This is displayed in Figure 6.

		SKILLS									
		Sections	Vocabulary	Grammar	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Project	Reading Options	Key Competences*
INTRODUCTION			Places around town The home Weather Clothes and accessories Food and tableware	Possessives Saxon genitive to be / now got Present Simple Present Continuous			Greetings and introductions Classroom language	Structure of a paragraph Check your writing			
1 The Things We Do Page 11 CLASS POLL	A	At Home	Everyday items	There is / There are Articles and quantifiers How much / How many	App Review by Teens and for Teens: Hobbies An app review → VIDEO	A tour of a house	Before and after	A description of a home	PROJECT A photo journal or a video about your favourite things → VIDEO	Surfing Apps → VIDEO	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	B	Always Learning	School items	Present Simple / Present Continuous	Net Teens Forum Forum posts → VIDEO	A conversation about schoolwork	A school trip -ing endings	A social media post			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	C	Activate Your English	Activities			A conversation about a city	Talk about likes and dislikes → VIDEO (to, to, to)	A photo description Word order: adverbs of frequency and time expressions			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
2 That's Extraordinary Page 27 SLIDESHOW	A	Overcoming Obstacles	Adjectives	Past Simple	Hard Work and Determination Proverbs → FACT FILE	A conversation about a horse's award	Who is your 'hero'? -ly, -ly, -ly	A nomination form for a heroes award	PROJECT A poster or a video about important events during a period in the past → VIDEO	Women in the Olympics → VIDEO	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	B	Changing History	Jobs	There was / There were used to /	Women of Work in the UK A timeline → VIDEO	A quiz about jobs in history	-jobs in the past	Picture captions			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	C	Activate Your English	Verbs and verb phrases			A talk about a fashion	Talk about an extraordinary day → VIDEO Weak / Strong forms	A profile of a person Word order with adjectives and adverbs			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
REVIEW 1		Page 43	Vocabulary Review	Grammar Review	Competences Assessment			Literature: The Incredible Journey			
3 Relationships Page 47 VIDEO	A	Friendship	Adjectives	Use of adjectives: Comparative adjectives, Superlative adjectives, too / as not ... /enough	Five Friendship Facts A fact sheet → QUESTIONNAIRE	A protest about an important friendship	What's your 'friend like'?	A description of your ideal friend	PROJECT A culture page or a video about relationships and life in another country → VIDEO	A Building or a Home? → VIDEO	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	B	Family	Family	Modals: can, could, must, should	Families Around the World A report → VIDEO	Asking for permission	Can I...? Contracted	A message to a family member			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
	C	Activate Your English	Life events			A presentation	Ask for and give advice → VIDEO (to, to)	A report about a teen issue / your organisation			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Figure 6. Contents page.

Regarding the pronunciation resources that can be found within this textbook, they tend to be scattered throughout all the units, usually coupled with the listening skill. These exercises are prone to appear in both sections A and B, which we will present in order to illustrate this explanation better.

8 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to the pronunciation of **was** and **were**.

- There **was** a marathon yesterday.
/wɒz/ (weak form)
- Were** there many people there?
/wɜː/ (strong form)
- Yes, there **were**. /wɜː/ (strong form)

→ Pronunciation Appendix, Exercise 2, page 161

Exercise 6.

8 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to the pronunciation of **this**, **it** and **it**.

- this** • that /ɪ/
- to** • time /ɪ/
- do** • Sunday /d/

→ Pronunciation Appendix, Exercises 2-2, page 162

19 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to the pronunciation of the contractions in bold.

- cannot** - can't
- could not** - couldn't
- should not** - shouldn't
- must not** - mustn't

→ Pronunciation Appendix, Exercises 3-2, page 161

8 Watch the video and check your answers.

9 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to the pronunciation of **it** and **it**.

- get
- ago
- attraction
- tell

→ Pronunciation Appendix, Exercises 2-2, page 162

Figure 7. Pronunciation exercises

However, there is yet another area of this textbook that happens to be solely dedicated to pronunciation known as the pronunciation appendix. Placed almost at the end, it contains extremely useful materials such as the IPA chart together with some abridged versions of the aforementioned activities, that function as reinforcement of the previously acquired knowledge. They are occasionally accompanied by text boxes that further cement these notions by condensing them into smaller tidbits of information, as in Figure 8.

Module 2
Weak / Strong forms • /d/, /t/, /ɪd/

1 Listen to the endings of the verbs. Which pairs of verbs have got the same ending sound?

1. watched - discovered
2. decided - competed
3. worked - asked
4. wanted - helped
5. exercised - joined

2 Listen and repeat. Then copy the chart and listen again. Write the words in the correct columns.

looked • participated • admired • invented • stopped
baked • used • ended • saved

/d/	/t/	/ɪd/

! The -ed verb ending has got an /ɪd/ sound when it comes after the sounds /d/ or /t/.

3 Listen and repeat. Are the words in bold weak forms (/wəz/, /wə/) or strong forms (/wɒz/, /wɔː/)?

1. **Were** there many nurses at the hospital?
2. There **was** a competition yesterday.
3. Yes, there **was**.
4. There **were** some trendy clothes.
5. **Was** there a photographer at the party?

! Was and were have usually got strong forms in Yes / No questions and short answers. In other sentences, they have usually got weak forms.

Figure 8: Exercises with explanation boxes below.

Nevertheless, we detected a minor flaw in the proposal of these activities, since they appear to be quite isolated from the rest of the unit. Furthermore, the idea of listening to sounds and repeating them out loud could be deemed pretty tiresome and repetitive by students. Taking their age into consideration, we consider that they would retain more attention span, and thus benefit immensely from these valuable resources if there were activities that placed pronunciation in context. Having said that, the exercises, albeit not entirely adequate and suitable to that level of ESO, are sufficient. We would just suggest expanding on some of them. However, we will discuss these ways of enhancing pronunciation activities later in the dissertation.

9. THE PROPOSAL OF A PRONUNCIATION ACTIVITY

Having analysed the exercises in the textbook, we will proceed to present our idea for an activity, which was partly inspired by some of the examples featured above.

Our activity was primarily designed to help students with the aforementioned difficulties, namely vowel epenthesis, and the pronunciation of past regular verb endings. In turn, it would aim to foster teamwork and healthy competition. Our chosen methodology was gamification since we thought that students would learn in a more significant way by playing rather than just sitting through a whole hour.

The name of this activity was the pronunciation relay contest. As its name implies, it relied on the ability of students to successfully replicate the sounds that they detected. However, in order not to turn it into the typical pronunciation drilling exercise, we decided to first divide the class into two balanced teams, appropriately dubbed red, and blue teams respectively.

The dynamic was fairly simple: Each team had to choose a representative who would approach the whiteboard. On it, a list consisting of 24 regular verbs would be displayed (see Appendix 2). The goal was twofold, as these representatives were asked to guess the past form of the verb that they chose and, right afterwards, they were requested to pronounce it without any flaws. Were both requirements to be met by the fastest representative, a point would be awarded to the winning team. Otherwise, if that representative failed to pronounce their assigned verb right, no sanctions would be applied other than passing the turn to the opposing team. It should be remarked by this point that the chosen verbs' endings could be pronounced either as /d/, /t/, or /ɪd/, adding to the already challenging nature of this exercise. In case both teams reached a draw, they would enter a final round in which the fastest representative would result victorious.

The implementation of this activity took place over a single hour. We proceeded to divide the class accordingly despite some minor inconveniences related to the number of students. Once a balance within both groups was struck, the activity commenced without hiccups. We received some help from a reliable student whom we appointed to tally the points earned by the respective teams. The activity followed its desired course until the final ten minutes when a draw was reached. At that moment, we resolved to write an additional row. Students then were informed about their situation, as they entered a sudden death phase in which the quickest representative would win the contest for their respective team. The winner was announced shortly afterwards.

Regarding the results of this activity, they were mildly positive. Before the beginning, we conducted an oral test consisting of two questions. The first one was concerned with the background knowledge that these students had of the past tense in English. Their answers would be primarily negative, as they did not manage to retain enough valuable information from previous years. This was followed by another more specific query about their grasp on regular past verbs and their differing pronunciations. Following a second outpour of negative responses, we improvised a learning pill in which we helped them understand the basics of that tense alongside some useful verbs that they could commit to memory for future years. Right after the end of our activity and with only ten minutes left, we gathered some valuable feedback from students by asking two final questions. These consisted of eliciting responses from them regarding what they had learnt, as well as what they would remember from this exercise for future instances.

In pondering over our performance during this activity, we consider that some self-criticism on our end is necessary for our further teaching endeavours. Firstly, we should have organized our activity for two sessions rather than one, as that would have provided us with a wider range of opportunities. For instance, we might have dedicated the first lesson to a deep recapitulation of the contents required for the ensuing activity, and the second one would have been devoted to the game proper. Secondly, we could have designed a proper ending to the game by determining the course of actions followed for draws beforehand. We realised that some students were dazzled at the sudden inclusion of another row of verbs, which could place the success of the whole experience in jeopardy. Finally, we acknowledge that we should have distributed a written questionnaire at least a week prior to the activity in question so as to have more tangible information. We made a mistake by relying too much on oral responses, as they lacked the accuracy that we required to analyse this experience in its entirety.

We will take these mistakes into consideration for the following attempts at conducting this activity since it is brimming with untapped potential. In the near future, we might reconsider revisiting this proposed activity so that we hone its weakest points, availing ourselves of its most glaring strengths in the process. We might possibly create a clearer schedule in which we can implement this aforementioned activity not in isolation, but rather as a component of a learning situation exclusively built around pronunciation improvement. In such a case, we could place it at the beginning of a learning situation so that it fulfils the role of diagnosis assessment and review for our students to check the knowledge that they already possess on the past simple tense.

Furthermore, a brief introduction to the international phonetic alphabet would be of help, as it might introduce our pupils to the vowel system of English, in turn allowing them to pronounce without the looming influence of their mother tongue. These are just burgeoning ideas that we could apply provided that we have a chance to repeat this activity in more professional environments.

10. OTHER RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE PRONUNCIATION OF STUDENTS

Having analysed the assets and drawbacks of our pronunciation activity, we may also explore the extensive array of options available to teachers who intend to include some notions of pronunciation in their lessons. Previously, we stressed that pronunciation could be used much better when combined with real-life elements than in isolation or simply serving as a companion to drill listening activities. Thus, in the following paragraphs, we will outline and expound on some of the most popular and feasible alternatives for working with pronunciation in a more interactive and entertaining way.

Information technology at present has become virtually synonymous with innovation, providing all types of fields with breathtaking advancements. The teaching profession also enjoys its fair share of assistance from modern inventions such as the Internet. In point of fact, that vast network already contains a limitless source of opportunities for practising and honing not only pronunciation, but also reading, writing, and the other well-known skills that are usually coveted by students of foreign languages. Notwithstanding, contrary to popular assumptions, innovation does not always need to be ushered in by bleeding-edge technology. Sometimes, resorting to more traditional resources such as table games or photocopies may better ensure the internalisation

of complex contents by students on account of their inherent intuitiveness and their lower possibility of failing suddenly due to unscheduled blackouts or unexpected technical difficulties. Counting on these factors, we will suggest ideas for exercises that can be conducted either analogically or with the help of new technologies.

As a first option, we would like to suggest a website named Lyrics Training. As its name indicates, it is an app specially catered to these learners who need to train their listening skills. However, what separates it from other methods of teaching to listen in a foreign language is that it takes advantage of the highly emotional impact that music tends to provoke. Let us admit this. Most of us have had songs that struck us, be it for their exceptional lyricism or their rather infectious melodies. More often than not, these songs remain with us for long periods, even working as subconscious motivators for learning the languages that originated them. Since the English language comes in diverse shapes and flavours product of its ubiquity around the world and its subsequent varieties, music can be an essential factor in its acquisition.

Lyrics training essentially covers the most well-known varieties of English, ranging from RP and Cockney to Irish and Canadian. Its exercises normally involve working with the lyrics of popular songs employing filling in blanks that are strategically placed for students to guess the right word. A crucial feature to be taken into consideration is the ability to choose already uploaded lyrics and adjust them to adhere to the needs of different groups of students.

This in itself could become a potential boon for teaching pronunciation, as we would be allowed to modify not only the positioning of gaps but their recurrence as well. For instance, if we are demanded by the curriculum to introduce some new vocabulary, we would find a specific song that displays it, modify the gaps, and our exercise could be ready in a matter of minutes. Similarly, if we focused more on teaching sibilant sounds such as /s/ or even vowels, we would find a song that matches our criteria, remove the words containing such characteristics and let students guess them while paying heed to the sound that we are trying to help them assimilate.

It is also important to highlight that these songs are classified into four levels: basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert, as Figure 9 illustrates.

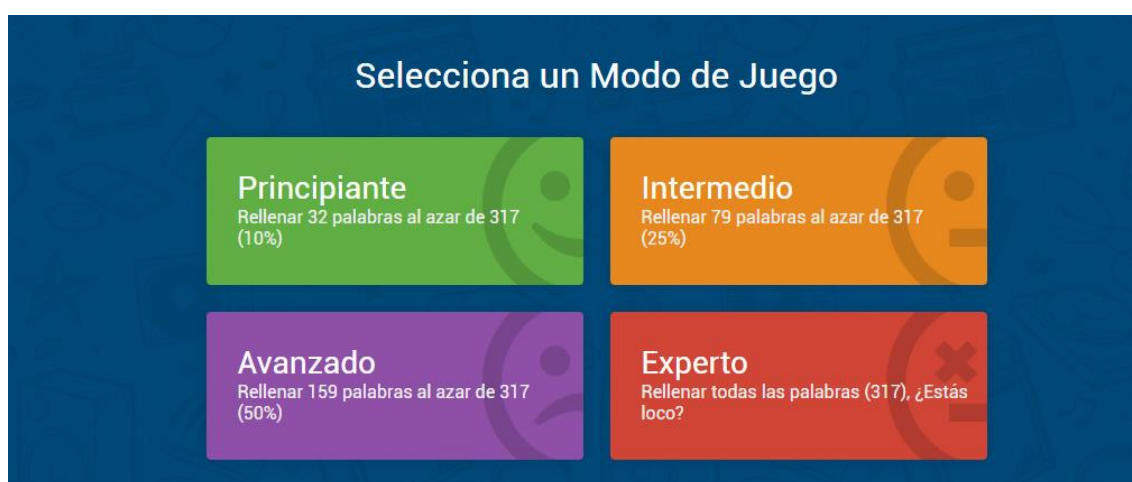


Figure 9. Difficulty selection screen taken from the Lyrics training website

Thus, this tool can be applied regardless of the proficiency level that our students may possess. Alongside that, there is even a karaoke mode which we might utilise to let students follow the lyrics and engage with songs in a more relaxed and playful way. This mode in itself is open to endless possibilities, as the lyrics of songs are completely visible unlike in the main gap-filling mode.

Counting on this karaoke feature, we would like to suggest a model for an activity that would avail itself of its strengths. We may divide the class into four teams preferably made of four members each. We would distribute some photocopies with a set of exercises that would incite students to find certain pronunciation elements to pass this game with flying colours. The questions would revolve around finding a verb whose past ending could be pronounced as /ɪd/, guessing words without any visual help, looking for synonyms of either verbs or nouns and so on. It would end with a correction phase wherein students earn points based on their number of correct answers. This activity composed of minor exercises would force students to employ both sight and hearing, turning it into a truly holistic approach. This mode could be perfect for the last fifteen minutes of a session, as their attention spans would be already depleted by that moment. In this manner, our students might strengthen their pronunciation abilities while relishing their time in the classroom.

The immediate connection between the arduous task of acquiring an accent in a target language and the gratifying experience of finally understanding certain lyrics while relating to their peers may leave an indelible mark on them. Hence, we deem Lyrics training an adequate tool for dealing with potential bumps that could undermine their motivation and will to learn English.

Our second idea is closer to conventional communication media and thus leans towards the already discussed RP variety. There is a specific section on the BBC website adequately entitled Tim's Pronunciation Workshop. In it, this individual provides clear explanations of certain phonetic phenomena that occur in everyday speech. We may employ these relatively short but concise videos as a theoretical background to which we could later add summaries and even a series of written exercises on photocopies with common words that contain such phenomena. In short, we consider that these videos may be instrumental in planting a seed of curiosity in the minds of our students, for the explanations given by Tim are quite engaging. Below, we will exemplify the kind of audiovisual materials that we would use if we attempted to implement this suggestion.

Pronunciation LEVEL

Tim's Pronunciation Workshop

Do you want to improve your English pronunciation? Well, you've come to the right place. Tim's Pronunciation Workshop shows you how English is really spoken. It'll help you become a better listener and a more fluent speaker.

The Sounds of English

Scroll down to the bottom of this page for The Sounds of English, our video guide to all the consonant and vowel sounds in the English language. Watch, listen and repeat. It's as simple as that!

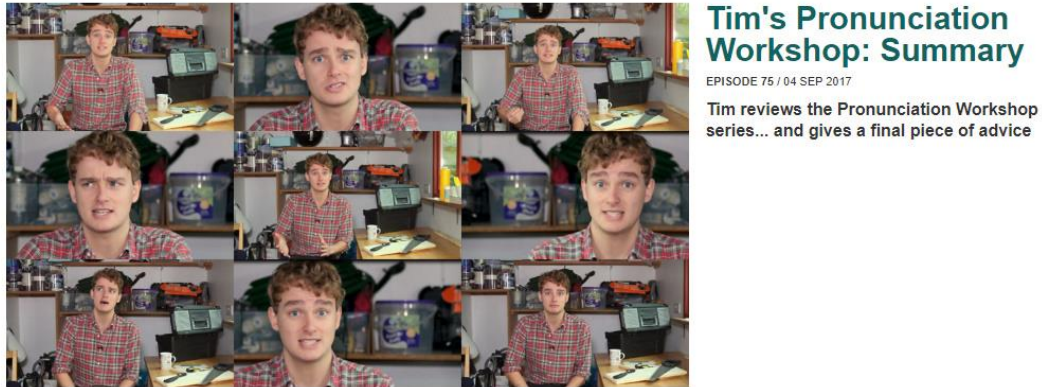


Figure 10. Main page of the BBC learning English pronunciation section.

Upon closer examination of this website, we found that there is even a series of videos entitled The Sounds of English, which is devoted to analysing all the 12 vowels in English alongside consonantal sounds. They could come in handy for punctual pronunciation reviews of specific phonetic elements. In summary, this website acts as an accessible hub for finding resources related to English learning, even for honing pronunciation.

As a third idea, we would like to propose an exercise with a rather simple premise. Its name is Odd One Out. This exercise could be useful for practising the pronunciation of minimal pairs. What is more, unlike our previous suggestions, it depends way less on technology. Before proceeding any further with the development of this exercise, we would like to acknowledge an article written by Wickham (2023) which supplied us with a constant barrage of designs for innovative activities.

We would write a column of three words that share some similarities, both orthographically and phonetically speaking, yet with an interesting twist. One of these words would contain a different, albeit quite similar sound as we illustrate below:

Bolt, bold, bulk.

Meet, seat, sit.

Plays, place, space

Haul, hall, hail.

This serves learners of English to differentiate vowels, as well as consonantal sounds. Our students must very carefully cherry-pick the word that seems funny to them. Throughout this process, they would have to

read and simultaneously pronounce every word as carefully as possible. Then, they would circle or underline that odd term.

We would probably implement it following a one-to-one approach since our role would be that of correcting the pronunciation errors of our students on the fly, immediately preventing them from becoming fossilized. This activity would be geared towards assisting our students with memorisation and internalisation. This would ultimately help them achieve fluency at a more rapid pace, as they would be equipped with enough tools to immediately recognise and assimilate new terms through their enhanced listening skills, as a byproduct of this activity proposal.

As a fourth idea, we would love to mention Hancock (1998) whose catalogue of games specifically catered to diverse areas of pronunciation teaching provided us with a lot of inspiration. Due to that, we will proceed to choose the game that could suit our objectives better. The game in question is named Four-sided Dominoes. It centres around the differentiation of vowel sounds, suiting the needs of pre-intermediate levels. We would host this game as follows:

Firstly, we would cut a set of cards for every group of three students. Then, we would write words on the board that contain eight of the vowel sounds in English. For example, these could be:

- 1 sing /ɪ/
- 2 men /e/
- 3 rice /aɪ/
- 4 sun /ʌ/
- 5 rain /eɪ/
- 6 eat /i:/
- 7 go/əʊ/
- 8 had /æ/

Then, we would display the instructions as they were incepted by Hancock (1998):

1. Play this game in pairs or groups of three. Make one player responsible for keeping the score. Deal the same number of cards to each player. If you are playing in a group of three, place one card in the middle as a starter and put the other card to one side.

2. Take turns to place cards on the table and build a track. You must place one of your cards so that it touches one of the sides of the last card that was placed on the table. The words on the sides that are next to each other must contain the same vowel sound.

3. After each turn, the scorekeeper writes the score. You score:

1 point for placing a card correctly.

1 point for saying which vowel sound is the same in the words that are touching,

0 points for placing a card incorrectly. You must then take your card back and miss a turn.

4. A player who is unable to place a card when it is his or her turn, misses that turn.
5. When one player has placed all his or her cards, the scorekeeper adds up everyone's total score, and the player with the most points is the winner.

During the development of this game, we would move around the class helping our students in case arguments erupted. If there was less time available, we would directly give the answer key to them in order to help them work more independently.

Upon examining these rules, we realized that this game might be a perfect warm-up in the days prior to working with the Past Simple tense, as our students can become familiar with the different vowel sounds that exist in the English language. Moreover, as it may last 30 minutes, we reckon it could be ideal as a whole session with some help from multimedia materials throughout said activity.

This section aimed to explore and assess multiple ideas to approach English pronunciation in more innovative ways than the already repetitive and commonplace drilling exercises. Out of these four strategies, we consider Lyrics training as the best one for it allows students to view pronunciation in a more positive light by placing it in a relatable context. The other three alternatives may also be considered considering differences between students and their intelligences.

11. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation, we attempted to unravel the causes for pronunciation in English being such an infamous aspect to tackle. It is indeed unsurprising to witness linguists such as Underhill (2010) refer to it as the “Cinderella” of language teaching, given the sheer number of obstacles that it entails. Pronunciation often receives the least attention compared to other language skills, despite its crucial role in effective communication. Our investigation thus delved into these challenges aiming to understand why pronunciation remains a persistent difficulty for both students and teachers.

As our questionnaire reveals, rarely do teachers receive any formal instruction in the theoretical background and practical applications of pronunciation teaching, hence why they feel quite insecure about their capabilities as professionals. This lack of training leaves many teachers poorly equipped to address pronunciation issues, thereby perpetuating the neglect of this vital skill in language education. The absence of a solid theoretical background in pronunciation teaching represents a significant barrier, contributing to the well-known reluctance of teachers to treat it as a priority in their curriculum.

Fear is one of the most crucial factors behind the squandering of the brilliant potential that pronunciation possesses. In point of fact, these feelings of unease and uncertainty are so powerful and permeating that they can seep into the minds of students, making them become self-aware of their limitations and in turn allowing them to develop an apprehension for making unconscious errors.

This situation is often bound to escalate to the point that some students erect almost impenetrable walls, transforming language learning into a herculean task. In other words, the fear of making mistakes can inhibit the willingness of students to practise and experiment freely with new sounds, stifling their progress and diminishing their overall language learning experience.

Out of the several questions that ignited this research the most important one, despite not being openly disclosed, was whether pronunciation teaching could be eased in order to significantly reduce the possibility of fear stunning our future students. As a matter of fact, the previous section was entirely devoted to finding a perfect resource for seamlessly teaching pronunciation.

While a batch of options was initially conceived to answer this dilemma, we finally settled for Lyrics training, a website specially designed for honing listening comprehension that could easily be adapted to pronunciation training by experimenting with some of its functions. Notwithstanding, our choice does not immediately invalidate the other three ideas that we had propounded.

The BBC pronunciation section would serve as a tool for mostly intermediate students to become acquainted with some characteristics of pronunciation, while the two games, namely Odd One Out, and Four-sided Dominoes respectively, would function better with elementary students. Each of these resources offers unique advantages, catering to different proficiency levels and learning styles.

Having appraised some models of pronunciation exercises, we should admit that the activity that we managed to conduct in a real classroom was quite far from our former prospects and expectations. Our previous discussion led us to consider the whole experience a mild success partly due to the lack of proper time to develop it.

We would like to reiterate our expected outcome as we had aimed to create an interactive and competitive activity that would serve as a classroom diagnosis. Had we had more time on our hands, we would have been able to include a basic review to cement all the concepts underlying the Past Simple tense. This additional review would have reinforced the understanding and application of this grammatical structure, enhancing the effectiveness of our activity.

Despite our numerous hiccups, however, the exercise was able to teach them how to avoid pronunciation mistakes while using regular verbs in the past. All in all, the main objective was successfully met. However, we may attempt to hone its weakest points in the future to present it as one of many alternatives for assisting students with pronunciation difficulties.

Apart from the results of our activity, there was an area that caught our attention, that being the teaching of varieties of English alongside pronunciation. Given the leniency of the five teachers that we surveyed for this study towards the choice of an English accent, we might as well take them into consideration for future investigation endeavours.

Further studies should be conducted for pronunciation to be regarded in the same light as the rest of the English language skills. Continued research and experimentation are essential to develop more effective strategies and resources for pronunciation teaching. Only through sustained efforts can pronunciation gain the recognition and emphasis that it deserves in language education, ultimately helping learners to communicate more effectively.

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APPENDIX 1: The questionnaire that we designed for the teachers

My name is Rubén Schuster Postiglione. I am conducting my master’s dissertation on identifying the key pronunciation mistakes that students can make as well as the importance of this aspect of English instruction in your lesson plans. I would be very grateful if you answered these following questions regarding both topics. Most of these questions follow a multiple-choice or Likert scale model.

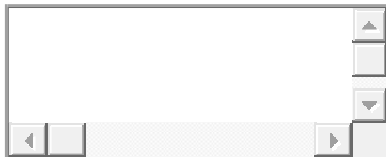
Should you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact me through this address: alu0101227726@ull.edu.es.

***Compulsory**

1. What courses are you currently teaching? *

- First year ESO
- Second year ESO
- Third year ESO
- Fourth year ESO
- First year Bachillerato
- Second year Bachillerato
- EOI: basic level 1
- EOI: basic level 2
- EOI: intermediate level 1
- EOI: intermediate level 2
- EOI: advanced level 1
- EOI: advanced level 2

2. What centre do you teach at? *



3. How long have you been teaching English? *

4. Learning to pronounce correctly in English is important. *

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

5. **English pronunciation is challenging. ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

6. **Pronunciation has an important role in my lessons on average.**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

7. **Teachers should be proficient at pronouncing English in order to teach it.**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

8. **English teachers should strive to obtain a perfect RP pronunciation from their pupils.**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

9. **EFL teachers should always stick to the RP variety. ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

10. **No other accents than RP are allowed in my lessons regardless of being intelligible.**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

11. **Someone can be fluent in English and still struggle with pronunciation. ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

12. **One can have a superb pronunciation despite not being fluent.**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

13. **Knowing English will be important for my students in the future ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

14. **The current programmes in the Spanish educational system pay attention to pronunciation**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

15. **My training as a teacher of English included a module on the teaching of pronunciation**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

16. **As a teacher, I feel confident when teaching pronunciation ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

17. **As a teacher, I know how to deal with the problems my students have with pronunciation ***

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

18. **The same degree of importance is given to the skills of speaking and listening than to pronunciation**

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I completely agree
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------------------

19. **I speak in English to my students ***

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

20. My students speak in English in the classroom *

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

21. My students feel shy to speak in English in class

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

22. We carry out pronunciation activities in class

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

23. I give pronunciation exams

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

24. To practise pronunciation, I make my students listen to and repeat words or small sentences

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

25. I use songs in class to practise pronunciation

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

26. I use games in class to practise pronunciation

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

27. I use computer programs and the Internet in class to practise pronunciation

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

28. I teach pronunciation integrated with other skills

- Yes
- No

29. If your answer in the previous question was YES, please mark the skills you integrate pronunciation with

- Speaking
- Writing
- Listening
- Reading
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

30. I correct my students' pronunciation mistakes *

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

31. My students like to be corrected *

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

32. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I make them listen to and repeat the correct pronunciation

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

33. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I write the phonetic transcription on the blackboard *

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

34. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I tell my students to make lists with the words they pronounce incorrectly

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

35. I correct their pronunciation mistakes using another method

36. How often do you believe your students practise English outside the classroom? *

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

37. What kind of activities do you think they carry out outside the classroom? You can mark more than one answer *

- Watching films in English
- Listening to music in English
- Talking to their friends in English
- Talking to native English-speaking people in English
- Reading in English
- Writing letters, emails, novels, etc in English
- Using the computer and the Internet
- Other

38. What main problems do your students have with English pronunciation? *

39. What type of activities do you believe your students prefer for learning and practising English pronunciation? *

- Listening and repeating words or sentences
- Games
- Listening to the textbook CD
- Listening to or singing songs
- Phonetic transcriptions
- Role-plays and dialogues
- Reading aloud tasks
- Oral productions
- Written productions
- Identification tasks (ones in which students have to discriminate sounds or patterns within a group of words or sentences)
- Computer programs and the Internet

40. Which of the above techniques and activities do you carry out in the classroom to teach pronunciation? *

- Listening and repeating words or sentences
- Games
- Listening to the textbook CD
- Listening to or singing songs
- Phonetic transcriptions
- Role-plays and dialogues
- Reading aloud tasks
- Oral productions
- Written productions
- Identifications
- Computer programs and the Internet
- Others

Name of EFL textbook/s you use in class *

41. Textbooks addressed to my students should include pronunciation activities on:

- Short versus long vowels
- Schwa
- Diphthongs
- Past tense verb endings (ed/t)
- Consonants
- Stress
- Intonation
- Connected speech processes
- Weak versus strong forms
- Varieties of English
- Other

42. The textbook/s we use in class (or general EFL textbooks used in Spain) include pronunciation activities on:

- Short vs long vowels
- Schwa
- Diphthongs
- Past tense verb endings (ed/t)
- Consonants
- Stress

43. The textbook/s you use in class (or general EFL textbooks) include pronunciation activities*

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, quite a lot
- Yes, enough
- No, hardly any
- No, none
- I do not know

44. Those activities help my students improve their pronunciation

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never
- I do not know

45. I would like the textbook to have other types of pronunciation activities

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- I do not know

46. Do you use any other materials to teach pronunciation? If so, please indicate them below

Thank you so much for filling out this questionnaire. Finally, if you have any questions, doubts or suggestions, please use the space provided below

APPENDIX 2: The activity that we implemented.

Chosen exercise: Verb pronunciation relay.

Explanation: The class will be divided into teams. Below, you will see a list of regular verbs. This game goes as follows: you must represent your team by reading one of the verbs aloud, guessing, and pronouncing its past tense correctly. Then, you must choose the following classmate. The team that earns more points will win.

Here's the list. Good luck!

- 1) To work
- 2) to try
- 3) to need
- 4) to travel
- 5) to stop
- 6) to dance
- 7) to watch
- 8) to decide
- 9) to close
- 10) to wash
- 11) to visit
- 12) to save
- 13) to ask
- 14) to help
- 15) to miss
- 16) to cook
- 17) To paint - (Extra one: to invent)