

## Pronunciation Instruction and Students' Practice to Develop Their Confidence in EFL Oral Skills

La instrucción de la pronunciación y la práctica de los estudiantes para el desarrollo de la confianza en habilidades orales en inglés como lengua extranjera

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The aim of this article is to inform on research intended to find out how pronunciation instruction of English as a foreign language was handled in the language classroom with elementary students and also understand if pronunciation instruction had an impact on students' confidence when using it. In order to do this, a qualitative case study was carried out with learners of elementary English as a foreign language at the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico. Class observation, a written text, and semi-structured interviews comprised the data collection instruments. The findings showed that not only teacher pronunciation instruction is necessary when learning English as a foreign language but that a lot of student practice is key to developing and enhancing learners' pronunciation as well.

*Key words:* English as a foreign language, EFL pronunciation instruction, students' confidence.

El objetivo de este artículo es informar acerca de una investigación que pretendió explorar cómo se impartía la enseñanza de la pronunciación a estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel elemental en la Facultad de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana, México. También se buscó entender si la enseñanza de la pronunciación tuvo un impacto en la confianza de los estudiantes al aplicarla. En este estudio de caso de corte cualitativo, las observaciones de clases, un texto escrito y las entrevistas semiestructuradas fueron los instrumentos utilizados para recabar los datos. Los resultados mostraron que no solo se necesita la instrucción del maestro, sino que es necesario que los estudiantes practiquen autónomamente para desarrollar y mejorar la pronunciación de la lengua meta.

*Palabras clave:* confianza de los estudiantes, inglés como lengua extranjera, pronunciación.

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## Introduction

The teaching and learning of a second or foreign language are complex processes for both teachers and students alike. However, every teacher has his/her own way of teaching based on the teaching methodology s/he decides to adopt. Moreover, professors of the BA programme at *Universidad Veracruzana*, where the present study was conducted, may adopt more than one approach in their teaching due to the *libertad de cátedra* (academic freedom) that they enjoy at the university. That is, that some of them may choose to emphasize or focus more on specific aspects of the target language (TL) rather than on others. As a result of this choice, they may be neglecting the teaching of certain language skills or aspects of the TL that some students deemed more necessary. Learning a new language requires the understanding of many aspects of the target language that happen at the same time. Students have to acquire new words, new structures, and new grammar rules and even cultural aspects of the peoples where the target language is spoken. The ultimate goal of learners studying for the BA in English is to be able to produce it with proficiency in both the written and spoken modes. We all want to become competent users of the foreign or second language in order to be able to interact and be understood by native speakers and proficient users of that foreign (FL) or second language (SL). In order to be understood, not only grammar rules and appropriate lexis come into play but, more importantly, pronunciation is of the utmost importance. To ignore or neglect the explicit teaching of pronunciation would be to ignore the basis for language acquisition (Pennington, 1996). Furthermore, students who have serious pronunciation errors without treating them from the very start will face problems of intelligibility which will not allow them to achieve the main goal of language learning: to use it for communica-

tion purposes in real contexts. This is the rationale behind the present research.

## Background

The English language classes at *Universidad Veracruzana* are mainly based on a series of textbooks that teachers follow. However, teachers are free to choose complementary materials to focus on or help students develop and/or improve specific linguistic skills, grammar or lexis. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that textbooks are the most important teaching tool that teachers use since evaluations are totally based on textbooks contents. Students do not have specific courses that focus on pronunciation of the FL until the third term when they have to take a course called *Linguistic System* which is not about phonetics or phonology but these are part of the contents. The English textbooks that students follow, from the first term, contain brief explanations and exercises on different aspects of pronunciation (see Appendix A). However, not all units have an activity focusing on pronunciation. For this reason, the importance of how FL teachers deal with pronunciation and how this pronunciation instruction affects students' performance in their oral communication deserves careful attention as all errors, if not taken care of at some point, are very likely to become fossilized and thus very difficult to eradicate (Littlewood, 1984). Furthermore, it is vital for students to acquire solid knowledge about pronunciation because outside the classroom they are going to face real situations where an intelligible speech is vital to be able to establish communication with other people.

## Literature Review

In this section key concepts related to pronunciation will be reviewed as these guided the current investigation: pronunciation, the teaching of pro-

nunciation, pronunciation problems, and teachers' and students' perspectives about pronunciation.

### Pronunciation

Although it can be said that pronunciation is not *the* most important aspect of FL learning it needs to be acknowledged that without adequate or intelligible pronunciation we would not be able to get our messages across when interacting with others in the FL.

Pronunciation is the action of producing sounds of speech to communicate a message (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). For this reason, possessing a good pronunciation of the FL is vital in oral communication. In addition, it is important to recognize that foreign language students must aim at developing a good pronunciation but this does not mean that they have to sound exactly like a native speaker. Rather, FL speakers need to be understood in the target language (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Therefore, the focus on pronunciation needs to be considered as a crucial aspect in FL programs since, as research has shown, some errors will probably never disappear entirely. Littlewood (1984) has asserted that "such errors are often described as fossilized, meaning that they become permanent features of the learner's speech" (p. 34).

### The Teaching of Pronunciation

Consciously or unconsciously, teachers are always teaching pronunciation somehow (Pennington, 1996). There are five different levels at which teachers can handle pronunciation in the language classrooms (Pennington, 1996, p. 225): *mechanical* (e.g., repetition of minimal pairs); *contextualized* (e.g., repetition of key words in a listening passage); *meaningful* (e.g., choice of correct word in a sentence or reading passage); *realistic* (e.g., a role-play of a situation similar to one that one may face in real life); and *real* (e.g., discussion of the students'

real-life situation or concerns). However, in FL classrooms, explanations on aspects of pronunciation are through error-correction and seldom are explicit and detailed explanations provided (Griffiths, 2011) to students.

Whether teachers are aware or not, they are always teaching pronunciation by being themselves one of the main sources of input of the FL in the classroom. For a long time teachers have used drilling as a way to teach and practice pronunciation (Tice, 2004). Although the overuse of drilling is not acceptable nowadays, this technique remains a useful activity in the classroom if it is applied appropriately. For example, drills can help students to gain confidence because they practice pronunciation as a group and there is no opportunity for others to make fun of somebody if s/he mispronounces a word.

Tice (2004) has mentioned that "for drills to be meaningful, learners need to understand what they are being asked to say. Monotonous chanting of decontextualized language is not useful to anyone" ("When We Should Drill," para. 1) The task of the teacher when drilling is to provide students with a model of a certain structure or just to repeat a word they have already seen and get them pronouncing in unison. This strategy helps students to build confidence and focus on pronunciation problems so that they can try to overcome them. It should be noted, however, that drilling should not be used too much because it can be boring and then it is unlikely to be useful at all (Tice, 2004).

Students may acquire pronunciation habits from different places and from different people. However, it is the FL classroom where most of them may encounter the first FL input to adopt, adapt, or imitate taking their FL teachers and classmates as sources of examples of what to do or not to do. This is especially useful for those students who do not have the opportunity to live an FL immersion

experience. Consequently, teachers need to have a very good knowledge of what pronunciation entails so that they can help their students with their pronunciation problems (Kelly, 2000). Besides, it is in the foreign language classroom that students start establishing pronunciation habits (Krashen & Terrell, 1996). Listening exercises that include reading help to develop productive skills and should be taken advantage of to teach pronunciation (Pennington, 1996). While working on listening, teachers can work on individual sounds which, apart from increasing students' intelligibility, will enable teachers to get students to realize the presence of speech properties such as rhythm, stress, and intonation (Liangguang, 2010). On the other hand, if students are assigned reading aloud in reading sections they will have the opportunity to work on pronunciation. Contrary to this point of view is that students' native language spelling system can interfere with a successful pronunciation while they read in the FL (Millrood, 2001). Other techniques to introduce students to the matter of pronunciation are tongue-twisters and explicit explanations.

### Pronunciation Problems

Teachers should focus on the needs of their learners rather than generalize the teaching of pronunciation, especially when they are teaching groups of speakers of a given language as in this particular research context where all the students are native speakers of Spanish. Consequently, these students are very likely to share most of the common pronunciation problems. Then, FL teachers need to be aware of this and integrate this knowledge in their classes. Underhill (2005) and Griffiths (2011) have pointed out that teaching pronunciation has been neglected by teachers. They concur that when pronunciation is studied or focused on in the classroom it tends to deal with specific pronunciation problems that happen in the precise moment

of student performance. For this reason it is of vital importance for teachers to have well-developed plans to address pronunciation problems in the best possible way.

An outstanding problem of teaching pronunciation is what to teach about it. There are important pronunciation aspects that FL teachers should take into account. Firstly, they should be aware that they will find as many different pronunciation problems as they have students. Secondly, teachers have to be aware of the first language phonetic system interference and thirdly, that they are supposed to have a satisfactory knowledge about variations and differences as well as possess proper theoretical pronunciation knowledge (Kelly, 2000). Once teachers have seen the reality of these pronunciation aspects they will be able to incorporate pronunciation explanations in their lesson plans and by doing so will assist their students in achieving satisfactory pronunciation for real and successful communication (Griffiths, 2011). Furthermore, teachers will "enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from the ability to communicate" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 8).

In the first levels of English, students should be taught phonetics and phonology, which are the two fields of pronunciation study (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Kelly, 2000). Phonetics refers to the study of sounds while phonology "is concerned with how sounds function in relation to each other in language" (Forel & Puskás, 2005, p. 3). A sound knowledge of both will provide students with the ability to hear and correct mistakes on their own while learning pronunciation.

### Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on Pronunciation

A starting point of language acquisition is that the learner has to think in that language, to deal with new grammar and vocabulary and, of course, he or

she has to be willing to sound differently (Pennington, 1996). So, it is crucial to keep in mind what the position of learners is in pronunciation. During the process of FL learning, students are constantly adding words to their linguistic repertoire so they have to learn how to produce the new sounds that are in those new words. When pronouncing a word students are likely to make mistakes. It is very common to note that when a student makes mistakes, their peers are very likely to laugh at them. In turn, this makes most students feel a lack of confidence at the moment of speaking or using the TL. On the other hand, there are students who like to be corrected every single time they commit mistakes and there are teachers who consider doing so unacceptable. Nowadays, FL teachers are likely to focus more on fluency than on accuracy. So, here is a potential conflict regarding teachers' and students' perceptions as to how acquiring pronunciation should be handled.

On the other hand, teachers would say that learning pronunciation is the most difficult work in foreign language acquisition because it may cause inhibition, embarrassment, and fear of losing face (Hedge, 2000). There are FL teachers who would admit their lack of thorough pronunciation knowledge. Moreover, they may need to improve this skill themselves so that they can teach it (Da Silva, 2012). Teachers should realize to what extent their learners are motivated to make all the necessary efforts to learn and practice pronunciation. Nevertheless, although learners are the ones who are acquiring a new language and their perspective of the importance of all aspects of the language is still not formed, teachers should encourage them to do it because, although both teachers and learners are interested in pronunciation, it has for the most part been neglected in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms (Kelly, 2000).

To sum up, as learners of a second or foreign language we need to be aware of what pronuncia-

tion entails so that we can work on those areas that may be problematic due to our native language background. With this in mind, we decided this research should answer the following questions:

### **Research Question**

- Do students receive pronunciation instruction in their classroom?
- Do students who are trained in pronunciation possess confidence when producing in the EFL?

### **Method**

A qualitative approach was deemed to be the best way to answer the research questions. This was decided on two main grounds: (a) the study is to explore the context where the previous question emerged and (b) the fact that this investigation was not concerned with numbers, ages, gender or other statistical aspects but rather to explore patterns, feelings, and the meaning of a given situation (Davies, 2007; Silverman, 1997, 2005).

### **Qualitative Case Study**

We considered the best way to understand the situation under study was to adopt a qualitative case study approach to research. Qualitative case study is used to gain understanding of an event or phenomenon which is influenced by the current situation, time, and environment. A case study can only be studied where it exists. It locates the observer in the environment that needs to be understood. Also, its particularity is that the researcher has no control over the events (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). A case study involves different methods to collect data since it needs a lot of evidence. Qualitative case study research usually involves interviewing, observing, and analysing documents. However, Merriam (2001) has pointed out that seldom are these three strategies used equally. All the evidence collected is of a high value as it can

be contrasted between what researchers observe, what people observe, think, and what they really do (Gillham, 2000). Hence, as this study seeks to gain understanding of how teachers handle or teach pronunciation in elementary levels of the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana, it was thought that this goal could only be achieved by giving the participants the opportunity to express their own perceptions of the phenomenon under study together with observations of what was happening in the language classrooms. In the next section the site where the study was carried out and the participants who agreed to cooperate are described.

### Research Site and Participants

Two elementary English language groups of the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, were observed and labeled as Group A and Group B for research purposes. Although there were 18 students in Group A and 11 in Group B, only eight students—four from

each group—were chosen to be interviewed later on (see Table 1). Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. Two male teachers of elementary English classes agreed to cooperate with this. One of them has been teaching EFL for over 30 years and the other one has a ten-year experience as an EFL teacher. The reason behind choosing these participants was that by being students of the lowest English level, they were very likely to have many pronunciation problems and their teachers were also very likely to have to deal with these. Therefore, this represented a great opportunity to observe how teachers in the BA in English language program at Universidad Veracruzana dealt with pronunciation and the important role they play as one of the main input sources for students to acquire pronunciation habits.

It must be noted that although the student participants expressed that they did not care whether or not their real names were used, it was decided to use pseudonyms to comply with ethics in qualitative research.

**Table 1.** Research Participants

Student Participant	Observations
Veronica Laura	They were the ones who attended <i>all the classes</i> observed. They were chosen to be interviewed; they could listen to all the explanations of some pronunciation aspects that were mentioned in the clas.
Monica Jesus	They attended <i>most of the classes</i> observed. They sometimes had doubts about how to pronounce certain words in reading sections and they were explicitly taught about some pronunciation aspects in the classroom.
Javier Erika Naomi Francisco	They were the students that attended <i>most of the classes</i> in Group A. Another aspect taken into consideration in choosing them was that Javier and Erika had already taken classes with the same professor whereas Naomi and Francisco had not.
Teacher Participants	Arnold has been teaching EFL at Universidad Veracruzana for over 30 years. He has a BA in English and he studied courses for an MA in Education. Frank has been an EFL teacher for 10 years approximately. He studied for an MA in Hispanic Studies in an American University.



## Data Collection

In order to collect data, it was decided to use three different types of instruments: class observation sheets, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, and recordings of students reading aloud from a written text chosen for this purpose.

### Class Observation Sheets

At the beginning of the class observations, Ana Cristina used an observation sheet including general aspects about how she expected pronunciation would be handled in the classroom. She did class observations for five weeks. During the first week she realized that the two teacher participants dealt with pronunciation issues in different ways. So, it was necessary to design a different observation sheet, (see Appendix B) based on the characteristics noticed in each group and thus be able to collect much richer data.

### Reading Aloud Recordings

The text chosen for this reading exercise was "Master of Horror" (see Appendix C). Although it is of an advanced language level, it was chosen because its length was considered suitable to give each student the opportunity to read it aloud in one session. A further important consideration was that this text featured a lot of regular verbs in the past and past participle. Thus, asking the students to read it aloud and record them while doing this activity would allow us to be able to detect what pronunciation problems they had and what pronunciation knowledge, received in classes, they had been able to incorporate.

### Interviews

Semi-structure interview guides were designed for both teachers and students (see Appendix D). The interviews were carried out following the

guides designed but in a flexible way. That is, giving the participants the freedom to express what they wanted to share and also how they wanted to be interviewed. For example, all students were interviewed in Spanish not only because of their English level but because they mentioned they felt less nervous speaking in Spanish when being recorded. On the other hand, the teachers preferred to be interviewed in English.

### Ethical Issues

The closest interaction between researcher and participants happens during the process of data collection. Oliver (2003) has noted that "such interactions inevitably generate situations involving ethical issues" (p. 45). Therefore, as Merriam (2001) states, "ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to data collection and in the dissemination of the findings" (p. 29).

Another important ethical consideration when collecting the data for this research was that in our regional and national educational contexts, asking research participants for their written consent is not always compulsory in the institutions where these researchers are affiliated. It has already been highlighted that in the area of TESOL/ELT in Mexico, few researchers seem to be worrying about asking their participants for written consent as is customary in other parts of the world. They argue that Mexico is said to have more of an oral culture; "in fact, from our first-hand experience, asking for consent in writing often puts the participants in our context on the defensive" (Basurto Santos & Busseniers, 2012, p. 97). From the experience gained in Basurto Santos' (2010) research, it seems that, rather than ask participants to fill out a written consent form, what is crucial during the collection of the data is to be sensitive to the local norms and expectations. Finally, following Silverman

(2005), the participants were explained what the research was about and their role in this study so that they could decide freely whether they wanted to participate or not.

## Findings and Discussion

After a careful analysis of all the data gathered by using the three instruments mentioned, which helped us in the process of triangulation, three main categories emerged: Pronunciation Instruction in the EFL Classroom, Teachers as Instructors of Pronunciation, and Pronunciation and Students' Confidence. Due to space limitations we chose to present the most salient themes that threw light on answering the research questions.

### Pronunciation Instruction in the EFL Classroom

According to the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered through class observation and student interviews, the question concerning whether or not the students had pronunciation instruction in their EFL classrooms could be answered. The findings of this study are in line with what has been found in previous studies. The instruction of pronunciation, at least with elementary students, is mainly of two types: drilling and "on-the-spot" correction of students' mistakes (Pennington, 1996; Tice, 2004). Besides, the time devoted to the instruction of EFL pronunciation inside the classrooms was very limited and it was used, most of the time, to do the textbook pronunciation activities. That is, in both groups there was not a specific time allocated to the teaching of pronunciation on a regular basis. Nor was there an emphasis on the importance of acquiring good pronunciation habits from the outset concerning the students in the BA in EFL program. Both teachers concurred that

there is not enough time to do all the extra pronunciation activities I would like to since I have to cover the textbook. We [all EFL teachers] have to do this because the students are assessed on the contents of the textbook so." (Arnold, Interview)

Whereas Arnold mostly used drills, a pronunciation technique which has been perceived as useful to teach pronunciation (Tice, 2004), Frank sometimes gave explanations about certain words that students showed difficulties with when pronouncing them (Griffiths, 2011).

One example from notes on class observations serves to illustrate a common technique employed by one of the teachers as part of the pronunciation instruction:

Veronica: Largest /'aɪ.s.lənd/

Frank: /'aɪ.lənd/ la "s" se acuerdan que no suena, [the "s" does not sound, remember?] largest /'aɪ.lənd/,

Veronica: largest /'aɪ.lənd/,

Frank: Good!

(Class observation)

The "repeat after me" technique was also very prominent in the data. It was a technique employed by both professors. Here is a typical example of what was found in the class observation data:

Laura: /Hot/

Frank: /hɑ:t/, No /hot/ ... /hɑ:t/

Laura: /hɑ:t/ ... /hɑ:t/, /sunny/, /warm/

Frank: /'sʌn.i/

Laura: /'sʌn.i/, /warm/, /drai/

Frank: /wɔ:rm/, No /warm/ ... /wɔ:rm/

Laura: /wɔ:rm/

(Class observation)

Analyzing the data gathered through class observation, we saw that the transcript of the reading aloud activity together with the notes taken during this activity resulted in the following two categories:



ries: Teachers as Instructors of Pronunciation and Students' Practice of Pronunciation.

### Teachers as Instructors of Pronunciation

Choral repetition was the most prominent technique that appeared in the data gathered in Group A. Arnold had their students pronouncing chorally and when it was opportune to emphasize any aspect of pronunciation he used to mention the *MarkAnthony* effect, meaning, according to him, that it was the action of putting the words together by pronouncing them as one to make a reliable speech:

Arnold: Like a night in the forest

Students: Like a night in the forest

Arnold: Like a

Students: Like a

Arnold: Like a

Students: Like a

Arnold: MarkAnthony

Students: MarkAnthony (laughing)

Arnold: Like a, Like a

(Class observation)

There was also evidence of explicit pronunciation explanations. For example, Frank asked some of his students to remember that he had previously given them a list of regular verbs together with the rules to pronounce their past and past participle forms. As he had some new students in his group he offered a brief review of this topic. In the following extract here is an example to illustrate this:

Student: Relaxed

Frank: Relaxed

Everyone: Relaxed

Frank: We can, *apliquen la regla que ya saben* [put into practice the rule that you already know]

Student: Aaaah

Frank: *No es /t/ /i/ /d/ entonces no metemos la otra sílaba, sólo que sea /t/ /d/ aumentamos una /i/, aquí como no es sordo relax, relax, relax entonces es una /t/ /rɪ'lækst/ /rɪ'lækst/* [No, it is not /tid/ then we do not have an extra syllable, unless we have a /t/ or /d/ then we add /i/. Here as we have relax, relax, relax then the ending sound is /t/]

(Class observation)

Finally, in addition to these common ways of how pronunciation is dealt with in the classroom, EFL teachers also provided their students with some pieces of advice about pronunciation. This help can be seen in the following extract:

Arnold: Wow! That's amazing!

Very good! Excellent! Remember intonation is very important, very, very important. It makes your English more intelligible when speaking with native speakers . . . If you listen to the radio in English, half an hour every day, this will make a difference in your life, then half an hour on internet in English, if you do this, I'll give you 5 Mexican pesos, yes? 5 pesos for half an hour (laughter) . . . it will help you to improve your pronunciation, you will focus on pronunciation, little by little you'll be improving both: pronunciation and comprehension. And reading aloud . . . we sometimes do this in Spanish, ok? Do it!

Students: (laughter) Yes, teacher, yes . . . (laughter).

(Class observation)

### Pronunciation and Students' Confidence

With regard to the second research question posed in this study, the analysis of the evidence collected from class observations and the reading aloud activity helped to find out if students, who had received some pronunciation instruction in their EFL classes, developed confidence when producing or pronouncing words and sentences in English.

<sup>1</sup> This is a translation into English. The original quote was in Spanish.

Due to the fact that participants of the reading aloud exercise had somehow been taught the pronunciation of some words included in the text, it was expected that they show confidence when facing those words again. The results of the transcriptions of the reading aloud activity showed the following:

His most famous work, the /istori/ tells of a mad brother who entombs his sister /a larv/? in a /bault/ in the family /costum/.  
Poe's /macabra/? /estail/ is best seen, however, in another classic short /istori/. (Reading exercise)

This sample clearly shows how Javier had not yet assimilated some of the instructions he had been taught (see Appendix E). Besides, we could also perceive his lack of confidence when he read with an interrogative tone and, at the same time, looked for approval. Furthermore, the same occurred with students from Group B:

Master of horror. Born 200 years ago this year, the brilliant but tragic American writer Edgar Allan Poe, who /die/ /age/ /for/ /for/..., is the /cridai/ /wit/ writing the /beri/ first detective story, being the of the modern short story and /birtually/ /inbenting/ the horror genre.

It became apparent, in the analysis of data collected through class observations and the notes taken, that when students were asked to read a list of words, one per student, they always used a rising intonation at the end of the word when they were not sure about their pronunciation. The used this strategy to implicitly ask their EFL teachers for feedback or help. It proved to be a good student strategy as they immediately got what they were looking for: either their teacher's approval or the error correction:

Jesus: Stormy?  
Frank: /'stɔ:r-/ Well done!  
Veronica: Rainy  
Raul: Windy  
(Class observation)

All student participants attributed their lack of confidence when pronouncing some words to their lack of practice. This perception was shared by Frank, one of the EFL teachers who participated in this study. Javier, Francisco, Laura, Jesus, and Monica also said they still used to get nervous and forget to apply the rules when doing oral activities in their EFL classroom.

Finally, all participants showed awareness as to how important the existence of a pronunciation course could be and that teachers give more instructions to their students during the class. It is also worth mentioning that Erika expressed that pronunciation instruction and practice should be mandatory "since we, as future teachers, will have to support others as well."

### Limitations

An important number of limitations need to be considered. The main limitation was the number of participants, both students and EFL teachers. No generalizations can be made from this study nor were they expected as this is a qualitative study. Another limitation was the time to carry out this research. The topic and the number of instruments to collect the data deserved much more time so that more conclusions could have been drawn. Finally, when students were asked to read the text aloud, they were afraid of being tested on their pronunciation because they had the idea that the researcher was there to evaluate or criticize them. This may have altered their reading aloud a bit. For this reason, the initial idea was to have all of them doing the reading exercise at the same time but due to the researcher's and their timetables it was impossible.

### Conclusions

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the main objective of this study was to find out how teachers handled pronunciation instruction in the

first levels of English in the BA of EFL program at the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico, and if or how this handling influences in students' confidence. It can be concluded that not enough time is devoted to working on pronunciation. Moreover, the time allocated to students' work on pronunciation is used in having the students do drills or focusing on the textbook activities most of the time. This should be complemented with other types of pronunciation exercises if EFL teachers want to avoid the fossilization of both pronunciation errors and students' views on pronunciation as something that does not require much importance. Concerning the students' lack of confidence, it can be said that the students seem to need more time to practice and develop their oral skills so that they can assimilate the knowledge and thus be able to put it into practice when using the FL. Both teachers and students need to be aware of how important it is to develop appropriate pronunciation habits from the outset. Students will need all this in real communication situations and as future EFL teachers. Finally, there is a contradiction between what the participants think about pronunciation and their treatment of it. They say that pronunciation is vital but their actions do not show evidence of this. Pronunciation instruction and practice with elementary FL learners seem to have been neglected for the most part. It would be very useful if communication in real contexts is the main aim of FL learning, that is, to have specific courses or parts of a course aimed at helping students develop and improve all aspects of pronunciation.

### Further Research

Due to the importance of all aspects of pronunciation in acquiring an FL language, much more research in EFL classrooms is needed. For example, it would be interesting to find out how students in third term who are already taking the *Linguistic*

*System* class do or do not integrate this knowledge into their speaking and reading activities. It would also be useful to study to what extent and how students' pronunciation problems affect their intelligibility in EFL. Finally, more research is needed to find out if students are failing their listening and oral tests due to their failure to recognize certain sounds and pronunciation patterns. This would be very relevant since it is known that these two areas are where students at the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana have the most problems.

### Ana's Reflection

At the beginning of my research project I strongly thought that the pronunciation of students was affected only by what they were taught in the classroom. However, by carrying out this study I was able to visualize all the work that needs to be done to develop and improve the pronunciation process. The sources that I had to consult gave me a better understanding of the difficulties that students are very likely to face when acquiring new sounds which are very different from the sounds they are used to producing in their mother tongue. I gained a lot of understanding not only about the pronunciation problems that students face but, most importantly, I realized this research threw light on my own process as a learner of foreign languages. Now I am aware that as a foreign language learner there is a lot of learning that has to be done independently and outside the language classroom. That is, it has led me to reflect on how I should work on my own foreign language learning process and redefine my process of pronunciation. But what I treasure most is the opportunity that this study gave me to understand that all language learning processes constitute a joint venture and effort between teachers and students. Finally, I now clearly see that the progress in any area of acquiring a new language is a simultaneous work between what you are learning

inside the classroom and the outside practice you have to do or arrange on your own.

### Nora's Reflections

As a supervisor of research projects with students whose first experience is a study like the one on which this article is based, I can say that it has always been gratifying to work with students who decide to research an aspect or topic of their choice rather than being given a topic to be researched or to incorporate in our own research projects. In my own experience, when students themselves decide what to research, they always choose something they relate to or something that is very meaningful to them as it has been something they have gone through or have always wondered about during their EFL learning process. My very personal experience about supervising students who follow their own curiosities, doubts, or who are interested in finding out about something that relates to their personal learning process are more likely to carry out their projects with more enthusiasm and in a more systematic and serious way. Their topics may appear to be simple but at the end of their research, albeit *small and simple*, they always show a greater capacity of reflection. For me, this is a very important beginning for a good future researcher.

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### Appendix A: Contents Focusing on Pronunciation in Textbook

Unit	Content
1	<b>Pronunciation (word stress)</b> 5. Listen and underline the stressed syllables. Listen again and repeat. – bank clerk – waiter – lawyer – bus driver – security guard – shop assistant – writer – hairdresser – bodyguard – mechanic – nurse – journalist – pilot – secretary – receptionist – firefighter – graphic designer – teacher
2	<b>Pronunciation (“e” pronounced or silent)</b> 8. Listen and underline the words where the letter “e” is pronounced. Listen and repeat. Liked, wanted, hated, walked, looked, moved
3	No pronunciation content in this unit.
4	<b>Pronunciation (homophones)</b> 9. Listen and mark if the words in each pair sound the same or slightly different. Listen again and repeat. (1) weather, whether (2) warm, arm (3) see, sea (4) wear, where
5	<b>Pronunciation /ʌ/</b> 8. Listen and repeat. Blood, flood, love, brother, mother, other, enough, rough, tough, money, some
6	No pronunciation content in this unit.
7	<b>Pronunciation (/I/ /I:/ /tʃ/ /s/)</b> 6. Listen and number the words in the order you hear them. Listen again and repeat. eats – each – it’s, peach – peas – piece, cheese – she’s – sees, juice – choose – shoes
8	<b>Pronunciation (stressed syllables)</b> 9. Listen and underline the stressed syllable. Listen again and repeat. (1) dra-ma = dra-ma-tic (2) co-me-dy = co-me-dian (3) his-to-ry = his-tor-ical (4) ar-tist = ar-tis-tic
9	No pronunciation content in this unit.
10	<b>Pronunciation (/h/)</b> 6. Listen and circle the words where /h/ is pronounced. Listen again and repeat. Hurt, heart, hour, honest, ghost, exhaust, whole, perhaps, exhibition



**Appendix B: Observation Sheet**

Group: \_\_\_\_\_ No. of Ss: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class time: \_\_\_\_\_

Aspects	Yes	No	Observations
Students are exposed to reading aloud.			
The participation in reading and speaking activities is voluntary.			

Aspects	Show Confidence	Lack of Confidence	Observations
Reaction of students when they face words that they do not know how to pronounce.			
How the teacher handles the previous situation.			

Students practice speaking English through:

Participation in			
	Yes	No	Observation
Giving comments/asking doubts.			
Reading one exercise.			
Reading section.			
Reading a set of sentences chorally.			
Reading a writing of their own.			
Speaking activities.			
Telling about the news they heard on the radio as homework.			

**Teaching pronunciation**

What triggers the explanation of pronunciation?

Student oral errors.

Pronunciation errors while  
reading.

Teacher initiative.

What aspects of pronunciation does teacher explain?

**General observations:**

### **Appendix C: Sample of the Text for the Reading Aloud Activity**

#### **Edgar Allan Poe, Master of Horror**

Born 200 years ago this year, the brilliant but tragic American writer Edgar Allan Poe, who died aged 40, is credited with writing the very first detective story, being the “architect” of the modern short story and virtually inventing the horror genre. His macabre horror stories, such as “The Pit and The Pendulum” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” are now considered masterpieces of gothic terror.

Poe achieved all this while suffering from alcoholism; fighting against poverty and seeing many of his loved ones die terrible deaths around him. America's first international writer, Poe's influence has been enormous, as one can see from the worldwide activities celebrating the bicentennial of his birth, stretching from the USA through France to Russia.

Taken from: Gleeson, C. (2009). “Edgar Allan Poe, master of horror.” *Speak Up*, 24(286), 40-42.

## Appendix D: Interviews

### Student Interview Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think pronunciation is important? Why?
2. Where or how do you learn pronunciation?
3. Have you already taken pronunciation courses in the BA program?
4. Do you consider that your professors teach you pronunciation? How?
5. During the time I observed your English class I realized the professor always advised you on how to pronounce the endings of regular verbs. Do you already integrate this knowledge when reading or speaking? Why?

### Teacher Interview Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you think pronunciation is important?
2. Do you teach pronunciation in your class?
3. **For professor of Group A:** I realized you work pronunciation by drilling your students. How do you determine whether or not they pronounce correctly if they do this activity as a group?
4. **For professor of Group B:** I realized you sometimes advise your students on the pronunciation of some words. Why do you think they still do not integrate that knowledge when pronouncing those words again?

### Appendix E: Comparison Between Students' Pronunciation

Comparison between students' pronunciation while reading the text "Master of Horror" aloud with the pronunciation in the Cambridge Dictionaries Online (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>). The table below shows the aspects of pronunciation that had been taught in classes that were observed.

GROUP A			
Aspects of pronunciation taught	/k/ /θ/ /p/ /v/ The endings in regular verbs in the past /t/ /d/ /id/. /l/ don't pronounce the "l" in words like calm, palm, balm. /e/ it is not pronounced "e" in words with "s" as initial consonant. MarkAnthony effect (put the words together). Some specific words such as since, parade, Belgium, month, chord, echo, ache, choir, chorus, chemistry, jewelry people, Avon, vacuuming, calm.		
Participants	Words they see in the paragraph	How they pronounced them	How the real pronunciation is
Erika	Stories, edited, devastating, Southern, married, Virginia, three, dismissed, important, considered	/'stɔː.ris/ /'ed.ɪtɪd/ /'deb.ə.steɪ.tɪŋ/ /'sʌt.ən/ /'mæɪr.id/ /bɪrɡɪni.ə/ /tri/ /dɪ'smɪsɪd/ /ɪm'pɔː.tənt/ /kən'sɪdər/	/'stɔː.ris/ /'ed.ɪtɪd/ /'dev.ə.steɪ.tɪŋ/ /'sʌð.ən/ /'mæɪr.id/ /və'dʒɪn.jə/ /θriː/ /dɪ'smɪst/ /ɪm'pɔː.tənt/ /kən'sɪd.əd/
Javier	Published, story, vault, style, published, death,	/'pʌb.lɪft/ /ɪstɔː.ri/ /bɒlt/ /estail/ /'pʌb.lɪft/ /deθ/	/Po/ /'pʌb.lɪft/ /'stɔː.ri/ /vɒlt/ /stail/ /deθ/
Francisco	Palpable, story, satisfied, extended, ever, stories, featured, solve	/'pæl.pə.bəl/ /'estɔː.ri/ /'sæt.ɪs.fɑɪd/ /ɪk'sten.dɪd/ /eb.ər/ /'stɔː.ris/ /'fiː.tʃər/ /sɒl/	/'pæl.pə.bəl/ /'stɔː.ri/ /'sæt.ɪs.fɑɪd/ /ɪk'sten.dɪd/ /'ev.ər/ /'stɔː.ris/ /'fiː.tʃəd/ /sɒlv/
Naomi	Stories, followed, received, public, both, based, death, worried, health, published, poem, considered, ever	/'estɔː.ris/ /'fɒl.əʊ/ /rɪsaɪvd/ /'pʌb.lɪk/ /bəʊt/ /-beɪsɪd/ /ded/ /'wʌɪr.id/ /helθ/ /'pʌb.lɪf/ /'pəʊ.ɪm/ /kən'sɪd.ə/ /eber/	/'stɔː.ris/ /'fɒl.əʊd/ /rɪ'siːvd/ /'pʌb.lɪk/ /bəʊθ/ /-beɪst/ /deθ/ /'wʌɪr.id/ /helθ/ /'pʌb.lɪft/ /'pəʊ.ɪm/ /kən'sɪd.əd/ /'ev.ər/

GROUP B			
Aspects of pronunciation taught	/dʒ/ /v/ /t/ /j/ /ə/ /p/ Difference between “can” and “can’t”. The endings in regular verbs in the past /t/ /d/ /id/. Difference between /b/ and /v/. Advice about stress and intonation. Some specific words such as early, said, could, convenient, share, yet, river, Russia , comfortable, chocolate, timetable, people, great, magic, mind, really, though, attractive, dining.		
Participants	Words they see in the paragraph	How they pronounced them	How the real pronunciation is
Laura	died, aged, credited, very, story, stories, pendulum, considered, achieved, poverty, loved, death	/dai/ /eidʒ/ /crɪdai/ /berɪ/ /ˈstɔːri/ /ˈstɔːris/ /ˈPondulum/ /kənˈsɪd.əd/ /əˈtʃiːvd/ /ˈpɒvər/ /lʌv/ /dɪts/	/dɑːt/ /eɪdʒd/ /ˈkred.ɪtɪd/ /ˈver.i/ /ˈstɔːri/ /ˈstɔːris/ /ˈpen.dʒu.ləm/ /kənˈsɪd.əd/ /əˈtʃiːvd/ /ˈpɒv.ə.ti/ /lʌvd/ /deθ/
Jesus	Russia, poor, impoverished, abandoned, died, named, educated, Scotland, entered	/ˈrʌʃ.ə/ /pɔːr/ /ɪmˈpɒb.əɪr.ted/ /əˈbæn.dənɪn/ /daɪ/ /neɪmi/ /ˈed.ju.keɪ.tɪd/ /Eskɒt.lənd/ /ˈen.tər/	/ˈrʌʃ.ə/ /pɔːr/ /ɪmˈpɒv.ər.ɪft/ /əˈbæn.dənd/ /daɪt/ /neɪmd/ /ˈed.ju.keɪ.tɪd/ /ˈskɒt.lənd/ /ˈen.tərd/
Veronica	penniless, published, poems, Virginia, beloved, died, entered, disowned	/ˈpenniəls/ /ˈpʌb.lɪʃes/ /ˈpəʊ.ɪms/ /Bəˈdʒɪn.jə/ /-----/ /daɪ/ /ˈen.tər/ /dɪˈsəʊnd/	/ˈpen.i.ləs/ /ˈpʌb.lɪft/ /ˈpəʊ.ɪms/ /vəˈdʒɪn.jə/ /bɪˈlʌv.ɪd/ /dɑːt/ /ˈen.tərd/ /dɪˈsəʊnd/
Monica	poem, earned, Virginia, died, warmed, buried, attributed, unmarked, even	/ˈpəʊ.ɪm/ /ˈzːned/ /Bəˈdʒɪn.jə/ /daɪ/ /ˈwɔːrmɪd/ /burɪd/ /ˈæt.rɪ.bjuːt/ /ʌnˈmɑːked/ /iː.bən/	/ˈpəʊ.ɪm/ /ˈzːnd/ /vəˈdʒɪn.jə/ /dɑːt/ /ˈwɔːrmd/ /ber.ɪd/ /ˈæt.rɪ.bjuːtɪd/ /ʌnˈmɑːkt/ /ˈveə.rɪ.əs.li/ /iː.vən/